

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: EVELYN SMITH

INTERVIEWERS: HOLLY METZ & ROBERT FOSTER

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SIDE ONE

HM: I guess we'll start with -- can you  
tell me where your parents were born?

ES: Sure. My mother was born in  
Hallsboro, North Carolina.

HM: And when was that?

ES: Oh, my gosh -- 1910.

HM: Okay. And your mother's name?

ES: Sarah Lee (maiden name George) Smith.

HM: And your father was born --

ES: Boardman, North Carolina, in 1912.

HM: Did they know each other before they came to Hoboken?

ES: Oh, yes. They met and they married in North Carolina, in 1934.

HM: And when did they come to Hoboken?

ES: Well, when they left North Carolina, first they went to New York City.

HM: And that was when?

ES: That was probably in the late '40s.

HM: And why did they come to New York City?

ES: Well, I guess, basically, my father for employment opportunities.



HM: Was there a certain kind of work that he was looking for?

ES: Yes. My father was a painter in North Carolina, as his father also was. When he came to New York, he began working as a painter in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

HM: Had he always worked in shipyards?

ES: No, no. Prior to that, he was working in painting -- houses and things of that nature -- in North Carolina.

HM: Was he a member of the union, in the Navy Yard?

ES: Probably. I'm not absolutely sure about the very beginning. But not too long afterwards, I'm sure he became involved with the union.

HM: And was your mother a homemaker, or did she work outside of the home?

ES: In North Carolina, my mother was a schoolteacher. She taught in a number of cities. One particular school I happened to find out the name of from one of my cousins, who's doing a lot of research and historical documentation, in Chadbourn, North Carolina. She told me my mother had taught at a school called the Spring Hill [Elementary] School, in Whiteville, North Carolina. It was a Rosenwald school, three rooms -- primer to the seventh grade.

HM: I think *Preservation Magazine* did something about that school. I'll have to look online.

ES: They're in the process of declaring the remaining Rosenwald schools as historic landmarks, and trying to bring them back to life, setting them up as community centers and things of that nature.

HM: Exactly. Now did she talk to you about that?

ES: No. [Laughter] Not at all. I knew she taught school. In fact, when we went down to a family reunion, I believe in 2001, one of her former students --

who was like sixty-eight at the time -- came to visit her down there. She told me a lot about how -- she felt like she was a prize student, because she would get to go home and spend the night with my mother. Then they would come in early in the morning, put the wood in the pot-belly stove, and get everything ready for the students.

But my mother just said, "Yeah, I was a teacher."

HM: Did she teach when she came here?

ES: No, no. By the time she got to New York, shortly after that my brother was born, so she was a homemaker for a while. Both my brother and I were born in Harlem, where we lived.

HM: Were you born at home?

ES: No.

HM: You were born in a hospital.

ES: Yes. In a hospital -- Harlem Women's Hospital, I believe, was the name of it then. At some

point, after leaving the Brooklyn Navy Yard, my father began working for Emerson Radio and Television Corporation in New York. The company then moved to Jersey City and many of its employees relocated to New Jersey. By that time he was in the union. He was hired as a painter. He was the first black tradesman to be hired by that company. Since he was working in Jersey City, he was looking for someplace closer to his place of employment, and that's how we got into Hoboken, in about 1953.

HM: So the family never lived in Jersey City?

ES: No.

HM: Okay. You went from Harlem to Hoboken.

ES: To Hoboken.

HM: You said he was the first black tradesman. Was that part of a hiring practice, or he just broke the color line?

ES: It was a matter of breaking the color line, at that time, for that particular corporation.

HM: And how was that for him? Did he talk about it? No.

ES: No, I was three years old. I really didn't -- I did more reading about it than --

HM: You learned about it later.

ES: -- talking about it. Yes.

HM: So in 1953 you came to Hoboken. And how old were you?

ES: About three years old.

HM: Three years old. So you went to Hoboken schools, too.

ES: Yes, exclusively. My brother [Leo Harrington Smith, Jr.], as well. My brother's two years older than me.

HM: So he's the oldest. Is there anyone younger than you?

ES: No.

HM: And what's your brother's name?

ES: Leo Harrington Smith, Jr., named after his daddy.

HM: So your dad was working at Emerson. How long did he work there?

ES: Oh, until the company relocated to -- I think they went to Japan.

HM: And that would be around --

ES: -- maybe the early '70s.

HM: Did he work someplace else after that? Or was he ready to retire?

ES: No. After being at Emerson for a few years, I think the first position he held in the union was treasurer. Then maybe a year or two after he first became treasurer (I'd have to check documents to get the accurate years), he became president of the labor union. Even though most of the operations of the company did move overseas, he remained the president of the labor union until his death in 1976.

HM: So what did that mean? What did he do as president of the labor union?

ES: Bargaining -- collective bargaining with the management for wages, and things of that nature, for the employees -- better conditions. He organized and conducted social and recreational activities for the employees of the union. They did some fundraising for charitable efforts. One I remember very vividly was a young girl named Marie -- gosh -- I think it was Marie Antoinette Minutello or something like that. She lived in Hoboken, and she had some type of a medical problem that required surgery. I think it had something to do with her kidney or something. That was one of the many projects that Local #480 raised funds for.

HM: Do you know how many people he was bargaining on behalf of? Like, how big was the membership?

ES: It was one of the larger unions in the Hudson County area. I'd have to check some documents. I think I do have some articles that might say what the membership was.

HM: So they had a lot of trust in him.

ES: Yes.

HM: Just describe -- I know you're biased -- but describe your dad; how people would perceive him.

ES: Well, I think a lot of people might have been fearful, initially, because he was a very big man, about 6'4". I don't know what his weight was, but I know he was a heavy guy with like huge hands. Very big hands. But he was a very kind man, with a very big heart.

HM: Did he have a good, strong voice?



ES: Yes, he had a good, strong voice, a very commanding presence. Yes.

HM: Did he still have his southern accent? Or did he lose it over time?

ES: I never heard it, that I can remember.

HM: Was your mom tall, too? Or petite?

ES: No, my mom was little, about 5'5", 5'6". Isn't that always the way with big guys? Big guys marry the little women, and all the little men want to talk to me.

HM: Was she diminutive in her personality, too, or did she also have a commanding presence?

ES: No, I would think she was more diminutive, but she was effective in getting done what she had to get done.

HM: And what did she have to get done?

ES: Well, you know -- first she had to raise me and my brother. At one point that became kind of daunting, because we were both bigger than her. But we still were fearful, because she was the one who was going to deal out the corporeal punishment. We knew that. That wasn't my father's job, that was her job. So she handled us quite well.

But, you know, once she came to Hoboken, and we got to be a certain age, then she began to work in Hoboken. Her first position was as a school-crossing guard, and she was posted on the corner of Second and Monroe.

HM: And where was that in relation to where you lived?

ES: About two and a half blocks away.

HM: So she was your crossing-guard.

ES: Exactly. [Laughs] We couldn't get away with anything, right?

HM: I was just going to say -- what was that like?

ES: You know, I don't remember it being a bad thing. I was a good little girl. I didn't get in any trouble. I was a good little girl.

HM: But she would have to -- did she yell at other kids, and they'd say, "Your mom's yelling at me?" Or it wasn't that kind of thing?

ES: No, I don't remember having - I don't know if it's selective memory, but I don't remember anybody ever saying, "Evelyn, what's the matter with your mother? She keeps --" I don't ever remember that.

RF: That was Connors School?

ES: Yes. That was Connors School. Yes, that was. Then after that she became, I guess, a recreation aide, I think it's called, for the city, what

is now known as the Boys' and Girls' Club. The Jerry Malloy Center used to be called Recreation Center #1, and we kids used to go there. There were so many activities. We did flower-making, clay-sculpting, and the painting of plaster molds. There used to be a choir that practiced, and sang every year at Christmas, over the PA system at City Hall, and throughout the city. Those were the kinds of activities we did there, and she worked there for many years. I don't know exactly how many. Then, after that, when H.O.P.E.S. was established, she was one of the original employees. She was one of the original caseworkers. After being a caseworker for a number of years, she eventually became the director of Center #1, down on Grand Street, and she retired from there.

HM: Wow.

What was working at H.O.P.E.S. like for her?

ES: Well, I don't think it was much of a departure from what she was doing on her own, in affiliation with the church, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, of which she was a member. Everybody in my family was a

member. At that time we were located at 69 Jefferson Street, which was right around the corner from my house. In the duties that she assumed at the church there, both there and when we moved up to Mt. Olive, she was always helping people. My father and she were always helping people -- helping them with employment needs; clothing; housing; money; bailing folks out of jail. It got to the point that anytime anybody of color got into trouble in Hoboken -- at 12:00 at night, somebody's knocking on your door.

HM: Wow. And what time period was this?  
This was like '60s-'70s?

ES: Yes, yes. Uh huh.

HM: Describe for me a little bit -- When Mt. Olive was at Jefferson Street, what was that -- 69 Jefferson Street. I'm trying to picture -- what was that building like? Do you remember what it looked like, 69 Jefferson Street?

ES: Well, actually, it was two buildings and a lot. The church was -- it looked like a

little church. It was only twenty-five feet wide, one story but tall. It came up to a point.

HM: Was it built by the congregation, or inherited from another congregation?

ES: No, at some point in time they purchased it. I know originally, from the church history that Dorothy McNeil and I tried to get together for the tour, during the Sesquicentennial, we found some information about how the church had been in a number of different locations in the city, but that was the first location that the congregation purchased.

RF: And there's probably something else there now.

HM: That's what I'm trying to figure out.

ES: Yes. There is a developer who -- gosh, what was the name of that company? I think it was called the Manhattan --

RF: Hoboken Brownstone?

ES: Yes, maybe it was the Hoboken  
Brownstone.

RF: Danny Gans and George Vallone --  
Hoboken Brownstone.

ES: It's Danny Gans's residence.

RF: That's right. He lives there.

HM: Oh, really?

ES: Yes. He lives on the lot of the  
church.

RF: It's on the east side of the street.

ES: Yes. Absolutely correct.

RF: Not too far from Domino's Pizza on  
the corner, on Newark.

ES: Right. Right.

HM: So your parents were helping people. Did they see it as -- was it spiritually motivated, or politically motivated? Or a combination of all those things?

ES: Well, I don't think it was politically motivated. It's just that my mother was the kind of individual who had a very kind heart, and if anybody needed help, she would try to help them. And my father, with his connections at Emerson Radio and Television, was always in a position to help people get placed in jobs. He made a conscientious effort to get people of color placed in positions.

HM: Now tell me more about that. Was there resistance, in his trying to get people of color positions?

ES: I don't know. I never heard much about if there was a problem. But due to the fact that a number of our relatives who, as they got out of school, came up from North Carolina to stay with us in New Jersey, he always managed to get them a position. There



was no problem. And there were other people who came, other people in the city, who came, looking for employment -- in the city of Hoboken, who came looking for employment, and he was able to help them. So I really don't think it was a problem.

HM: And this is prior to operations moving out to Japan.

ES: Yes. I'm talking about like in the late '50s-early '60s. So many of my cousins, when they graduated from school, they would come up here and "Uncle Leo" would get them a job. They would live with us for a little while, and then they were out on their own, doing other ventures.

HM: And the cousins were mostly from North Carolina?

ES: Yes.

HM: Bob had mentioned something about you guys talking about your dad being involved --

RF: Oh, yes. Didn't your dad play  
baseball?

ES: Oh, yes! I skipped that whole part.  
Yes, yes. He was in the Negro Leagues. I know he ended  
his career playing for the New York Black Yankees. Again,  
I have some literature that lists the other teams. I know  
he played for the Brooklyn (I think) Royal Giants, and  
for some team in Virginia.

RF: So this would have been prior to him  
coming to work as a painter in the Navy Yard? Earlier?

ES: Yes. He was working as a painter at  
the time, in the South, but it was prior to his moving to  
New Jersey.

RF: Right.

HM: And did he tell you much about that?

ES: No. No. In fact, I only have one copy  
of a photo of him in a uniform. But I also have a few  
articles that were written about him and his baseball

career, posthumously. My godfather, who was a very good friend of his, and who attended many games, and who is still alive, would tell me about how, when it was time for a game, they would just close down all the shops in town, and everybody would go --

ES: -- to the baseball games.

RF: This was down in North Carolina.

ES: Whiteville, North Carolina, yes.

RF: But people in Hoboken seem to know your dad's reputation as a baseball player, too, I think.

ES: Really? I wasn't aware of that.

RF: Yes. I was talking to Billy Bergen, who's a retired fireman and runs the Firemen's Museum on Bloomfield Street. I remember having a conversation with him. And another fellow -- Jack O'Brien -- people who were aware of sports, and kind of knew about -- they may have had some affiliation with the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, on Jefferson. So there's some connection there.

ES: Well, it might also be because Bobby Cheeks, who was fire captain. He also played in the Negro Leagues, too.

RF: So maybe I'm actually confusing --

ES: -- the people?

RF: I might be. I might be.

ES: But he did play in the Negro Leagues.

HM: So there was more than one Negro League player in Hoboken.

RF: That's right.

HM: Now did your dad -- and probably your mom, too -- get really involved with the NAACP in Hoboken?

ES: Most definitely. Yes.

HM: So you'll have to tell me something about that.

ES: I guess you could consider them both to be founding members of the organization.

HM: Which would be when?

ES: Oh, goodness.

HM: About.

ES: I wouldn't want to give you an inaccurate date. When Dorothy did that article on Eddie Johnson -- he was the first president --

HM: I have that.

ES: She and I got together, and kind of put all the facts together. It's probably there. It's more accurate than anything I could tell you.

HM: Okay. And tell me about the work they did.

ES: Oh, gosh. You know, being a kid, the type of things I remember is what they did for the children, more than anything else --

HM: Okay. Well, tell me about that.

ES: -- because I remember they had a boys' basketball team, they also had cheerleaders, and I can vividly remember being in my kitchen, with my mother and some other people, dyeing crew socks gold -- because the colors were blue and gold -- dyeing crew socks for the cheerleaders, and things of that nature. With my father, he was very active in the civil rights movement. I can remember walking picket lines in front of the Woolworth's here in New Jersey, over in Jersey City, with him when there were a lot of boycotts against Woolworth's, because they wouldn't serve blacks at the luncheon counters in the South. My father was always going away on trips, participating in marches.

HM: Tell me more about being on this picket line in Jersey City. Did you carry a sign?

ES: Oh, yes. I was right there. I'm Daddy's little girl. You know how girls are with their daddies. Anywhere he went I wanted to go, so I can remember walking with my daddy, carrying my picket sign.

HM: Do you remember what the sign said?

ES: No.

HM: And how many people were on the picket line? Was it a big line of people?

ES: Yes. I would say maybe about fifty people.

HM: That's a lot.

ES: It was a lot for a kid, at the time.

RF: So the Woolworths in this area weren't segregated like that? But since they were a part of the corporate chain, they were sending a message north that you didn't approve of it, of that kind of thing in the South.

ES: Exactly. And you know something? I guess it's not unique to me, but it's unique to some black youth -- During the summers, I did go to the South. I spent the summers in the South for many years, and segregation still existed. So I was used to being brought up in an integrated society; but when I went down to North Carolina, everything was different, and I had to adjust, and act accordingly -- which kind of ticked me off!

RF: Sure.

ES: You know? Actually, they were my cousins, but because they were so much older than me I called them my aunt and my uncle -- they owned a grill. And I couldn't understand why, if I went to the soda fountain in the [white] pharmacy, I had to stand at the end of the counter and wait for somebody to come over and wait on me, while white people would come into my uncle's grill, and sit anywhere they wanted to. That took a little bit of adjusting.

RF: How old were you, around that time?



ES: Oh, like, I went down there every year, probably, from the time I was maybe five until fifteen, sixteen. So I did see the change, where I was able to go in.

One thing I haven't been able to do, that I keep on saying I'm going to do when I go back down there and I just never find the time, is to go to the theatre. Because the last time I went to the theatre in North Carolina, it was segregated. The black folks had to enter at the side, and go directly up to the balcony. If you wanted snacks from the concession counter, you had to come back down the stairway, and there was a little window cut in the wall (the counter was on the other side of the room) that you could look into, and you had to wait for somebody to come over, find out what you wanted, take your money, go back, and bring it to you.

So one of these days I'm going to take the time and actually go see a movie -- downstairs -- in that theatre.

HM: So how did people explain it to you? You say it took you a while to adjust to it. What did they say?

RF: And who told you? Was it your --

ES: My parents. Because it was "for your own protection." They taught you, "Okay, this is how it has to be down here," as well as my cousins, who were a little older than me, whom I hung around with. They let me know you're not supposed to do that. You just can't. There was no specific explanation; it was just, "This is how it is down here."

HM: They wanted you to be careful.

ES: Yes, yes.

RF: You were going to another country.

[Laughter]

HM: Then, when the change happened -- you said you had gone long enough to experience the change -- you must have noticed it.

ES: Well, I guess it didn't seem that monumental, because it was what I was used to for nine

months of the year. So I guess it seemed more normal to me now, but it was a change that was a long time coming. I guess it probably had a more profound effect on my cousins, who lived like that twelve months a year, for all those years.

RF: It's hard to remember, but do you remember kind of seeing the change? Or did it just --

ES: Looking back -- no.

RF: You might see television reports on the news about the marches and things like that, down there, and think, "Wow. That's what this is all about." Because most people who lived in the North wouldn't have had that experience --

ES: -- to think about it. Yes.

HM: Now did people -- when your dad went to go to demonstrations, I'm assuming he went to D.C. But he also went to other places.

ES: Yes. He was in Alabama, he was in Mississippi, he was in jail!

HM: When was he in jail, and where was he in jail?

ES: I'd have to go back and get the specific details. As a matter of fact, at the end of his career, when he was working with the Human Resources Development Agency, which was a part of the union, he would have to give speeches. I have a speech of him on tape, where he's making reference to where he was jailed, and some of the things he went through.

RF: And you mentioned the number of the union.

ES: It was Local #480.

RF: And this must have been more than painters. This was all trades?

ES: It was IUE (the International Union of Electrical Workers); AFL (American Federation of

Labor); CIO (Congress of -- I don't know) -- but IUE, AFL, CIO. I think it just started out as IUE; then it grew.

RF: And electrical. So were there other trades in that union, do you think?

ES: I would imagine. I would imagine.

RF: Because his background wasn't electrical.

ES: No, but he represented the workers at Emerson Radio & Television --

RF: Oh, I see. Right.

ES: -- which did radio, television, air-conditioners -- which, of course, we always had the benefit of having a lot of. [Laughter]

RF: And they were working!

ES: Yes. That was one good thing about him being where he worked. We had plenty of TVs and air-conditioning. Oh, yes.

HM: So you must have been the only family who had an air-conditioner.

ES: I don't know, but probably one of the first in the neighborhood. [Laughs]

HM: Wow.

RF: And did your dad own his own home?

ES: Oh, yes. When we moved from New York to Hoboken, my mother and father purchased 77 Madison Street.

HM: Which is your home, today.

ES: Which is where I still am.

RF: That was a very wise decision, right?  
[Laughs]

ES: It's changed a lot, but it's still home.

HM: So tell me about the changes a little bit -- how it was. You don't have to tell me how it is, but how it was.

ES: Okay. Hoboken, way back in the day. I can remember on our block we had the LeCounts and the Basilicatos. Then we had a German couple, Freinch (pronounced "French"). He was a plumber and she was a homemaker. She taught me how to knit and crochet. They owned a house on Madison Street and lived on the first floor, in back of the shop. They had tenants above the store.

Other people on the block were the Bates family, the Gilyard family, the Mongan family--all of whom have relatives in Hoboken to this day.

We had Mrs. McCloud and Miss Cambridge -- the first black property-owners on that block. They were there when we arrived already.

HM: Say their names again.

ES: McCloud -- Emma McCloud and her daughter, Emily Cambridge. Then one of my very good friends was a little red-headed, freckled Italian girl named Amy LeCount, and her brother Jimmy. They lived like two doors away from us. We were always over at each other's houses.

HM: And they went to the Connor School, probably, too.

ES: Yes. Yes. We got our little yearly pictures of us. But it was a racially mixed group of families and kids. Everybody played together, and everybody went over to everybody's house. And if you were doing something you weren't supposed to do, Mrs. LeCount was going to get on you, and when you got home your mother was going to get on you, too. It was like that for all the kids. Everybody was everybody's keeper; everybody's mother was the keeper of all the children.

You know, both my mother and my father had an affinity for children. A lot of kids in the neighborhood, and even outside the neighborhood, kind of adopted them as parents. Over the years, my father became



close to a Hispanic boy named Willie Ramos, and my father took him to get his driver's license; let him practice in his own car; to take his driver's test. My brother was a Boy Scout, and we have, for Hoboken standards, a pretty big back yard, so his Boy Scout troop would camp in my backyard. So that brought in kids from all over the city, who belonged to the troop, which used to be centered in public housing in Hoboken. Back then, you know -- the population of public housing, then, was more white than black or Hispanic. So it was really a diverse group.

And the same thing with my mother. There were always -- If she was doing something, there was always somebody's kid in the car with her. One thing she did was establish an educational fund in Mt. Olive, and in order to raise money for the educational fund, she and a couple of the kids in the church would go around and collect newspapers. This was before recycling was the thing. They would collect them, and every Saturday they would have certain people who would save them for them. She would go around, with young volunteers from the church, and collect them. They'd go over and sell them, take the money, and put it in the bank. Then every time a student who was away at college came home to church, they'd have money to give them -- like \$25 or \$50, to give them.

RF: So did you attend the Mt. Olive church, when it was on Jefferson Street?

ES: Yes. Yes, I was baptized in the Mt. Olive Baptist Church; went to Sunday School; went to church service; was a member of the Young People's Choir. And my mother, with Sister Lavalley, who was the wife of the minister of another church, held Vacation Bible School for a couple of weeks at Mt. Olive every year. So we would all go to the Vacation Bible School.

RF: This was when it was still at Jefferson Street?

ES: Still on Jefferson Street. And we moved from Jefferson Street up to Washington Street. As I became older -- well, my mother became director of the Young People's Choir; I became the pianist for the Young People's Choir; my father was the treasurer of the church. He became a deacon, my mother became a deaconess. My mother was in so many auxiliaries -- the Pastor's Aid; the Nurses' Unit; the Usher Board; the Senior Choir. Both of my parents were over-achievers. They make it hard for a kid. My brother always says, "It's really hard to live

up to the name Leo Smith," because he's a junior. "It's really hard." But they were over-achievers, as far as I'm concerned. [Laughter]

HM: I know that you are an animal person. Did you grow up with a lot of animals?

ES: [Laughs] Yes. I've always been an animal lover. It started out with one dog named Blackie, a black-and-white Labrador Retriever. It's really very funny, because my mother passed away in 2003, and when we had her funeral -- there's always a portion now where people are allowed to come up and speak, and people would get up and speak about my mother, but the kids that I grew up with, in addition to speaking about my mother, they would talk about that dog! They were afraid of Blackie. That was so funny. That struck me so funny.

HM: Why were they afraid of Blackie?

ES: I guess because he was a big dog. I don't think he was aggressive. I don't believe he bit anyone. I guess he barked to protect his turf. But that

was funny. But a lot of people -- at least three different people remembered Blackie.

HM: Now was Blackie your mom's dog, or your dog?

ES: My dog and my brother's dog. At one point I begged my father for a cat. Blackie was not our first dog. We had other dogs (I've got a scar to prove it), one that didn't remain. Anyway, I begged my father for a cat. My mother didn't want him to get a cat, but my father brought a cat home from the plant, and that started a long succession of me having a lot of cats. All of a sudden I became the depository for cats that people didn't want.

I'm still an animal lover to this day, and I'm still working to help animal sanctuaries and deliver food. In fact, Thursday, when I thought I was going to Pennsylvania, we had made arrangements to pick up some dog food, and I was supposed to be delivering to Liberty Shelter, the Assisi Shelter, the Bergen County Shelter, and the Secaucus Shelter. But that'll happen next week. Because there is a pet-food packaging company that cannot package things that the label is falling off of, or if

there's a dent in it. So they were looking for worthy organizations to contribute it to.

HM: Somebody has to pick it up. It's the connection that falls apart, so you're doing -- I think I'm connecting it.

ES: Yes. And a friend of mine.

RF: And that's why you have a big van.

ES: Oh, no. No. She rents -- she's the one who supplies the money, I supply the manpower. She rents a truck, a fifteen-foot truck from Penske, and I drive it out to Pennsylvania, and we come on back.

HM: I have to ask you about Big Head.

ES: [Laughs] Oh, lord!

HM: You have to tell the Big Head story.

ES: Oh, my god. There are so many more interesting things than Big Head.

HM: Just a little bit.

ES: Anyway, Big Head was -- I belong to an organization called Animals Need You, and a member of Animals Need You had rescued Big Head. I don't know what the situation was that he was rescued from, but she was unable to keep him -- because, I think, maybe there was a conflict with another pet that she had.

HM: What kind of a dog was he?

ES: He was part pit bull and part boxer, which just made him look like an extremely big pit bull.

HM: And was he still a puppy?

ES: No, he was an adult. He was an adult dog when I took him in.

HM: Did you have other dogs then?

ES: Oh, probably. I'm sure. I'm sure.

Because I've always -- It was very rare that I just had one pet -- which didn't thrill my parents too much, but they kind of gave in. By the time Big Head came around, I had really reduced my pets in number.

So, to make a long story short, I was letting Big Head run free in a lot that I had let him run free in for a number of years -- which was directly in back of my house -- and a woman came walking down the street, approaching the area. She was some distance from me, and she raised her voice to say, "Can he get out?" At that point, he was all the way at the back of the lot, like 100 feet from the fence. When he heard her voice, he turned, he looked, and started running toward the fence. At that point, I blocked the opening in the gate -- the main posts of the gate were bent out a little bit -- so I blocked it so he could not get out. But then he ran down the fence, and he found an area that I was unaware existed, an area where the fence had obviously been opened up (I'm sure it had been opened up for someone to come in and do a soil test for an impending project that was going to be done) and they had just secured it back with a wire clothes hanger. So he managed to push through the fence; by this time the woman was within three feet

of me, and he jumped up and grabbed her hand. She fell to the ground, I told him to let go, and he let go immediately. But, you know, when you have that many pounds of pressure in your jaw, and you grab onto something that delicate, there was serious damage.

HM: So after that -- she tried to get it so he would be destroyed, right?

ES: Oh, right, right. [Laughs]

HM: This is the interesting part of the story.

ES: It is?

HM: Well, because of what you did. You went very far to save his life.

ES: Well, it was an unfortunate incident. I did not know the dog to be vicious. It was more my fault than the dog's fault. Because if I had had him on a leash, and walked him up and down the street, instead of letting him run free in an area that was big -- it was



like seventy-five feet; it was like three consecutive lots; there was grass. It was bigger than my yard, and I had been doing it for years, without any incident.

Anyway, the city decided that they were going to try to get him destroyed, bringing him up on charges -- or, me up on charges -- under the Vicious Dog Statute of the State. I'm trying to edit, because I could go on forever about this.

RF: It went on for a long time, didn't it?

ES: Oh, yes.

RF: What year was this around, do you think?

ES: Oh, gosh. Maybe it was 1990--?

RF: Early '90s?

ES: Yes, maybe it was -- I think it was like '93.

RF: Who was mayor?

ES: I don't even know.

RF: Ross London was the judge, right?

HM: Was it Pasculli? Because it wasn't Cappiello, anymore. It was probably Pasculli.

RF: Ross London was judge, I remember that. It could have been at the end of Vezzetti's time, or Pasculli. Right around there.

ES: I don't think it was Pasculli.

HM: Vezzetti died in '88?

RF: It's '88 and '91 --

ES: I've got about that many newspaper clippings, so we can get the date. Lord knows we can get the date.

RF: And what was that like for you, at the time?

ES: Oh, it was terrible. It was really very terrible, because, you know, I was just -- The first thing I was very upset about -- the woman and the injury she sustained -- and I even sent her flowers in the hospital. And I tried to see her in the hospital, because it was an accident! I don't know if you want to write this or not, but her family -- well, her husband -- was just so vicious toward me, as if I intentionally did this. When it happened, I immediately took my dog home, and I went up to the hospital. I sat in the hospital right next to her husband, because I was very much concerned about her, because I knew the damage that a dog that big could do.

That night at the hospital -- he was civil to me then, but after that I was a pariah. That was the most upsetting part about it, because I was prepared to fight for my dog, and if Christie Whitman, who was governor at the time, could pardon a dog, my dog wasn't going to die.

It was just a stressful time, and I had a lot of sleepless nights, worrying about what was going to

happen to Mrs. Petrozelli, what was going to happen with her hand. After a certain amount of time and a lot of prayer, I finally felt some relief that she was going to be all right and I could sleep. Then I had to fight the battle to save my dog.

HM: And when the battle to save your dog happened, was she no longer involved?

ES: She was most definitely involved. Once the City gave me the option of, "Okay, we'll put the dog down and it will be all over," I went to the library, I got the Vicious Dog Statute, I studied it, I got a lawyer, and I said, "Well, no, there are other things we can do. My dog doesn't have to die because I made a mistake, which allowed him to make a mistake." So I found an attorney, and we began having meetings with the appropriate city officials. Part of the Vicious Dog Statute allowed for a settlement to be made, so it wouldn't even have to go to court. We made a settlement. Then my attorney told me, "Okay, well, we have to go to court," and I'm like, "What do we have to go to court for? We've already made the

settlement." And my attorney informed me that, "Well, I guess they just want to get it on the record."

Well, when we got to court, there was an ambush. [Laughs] You know who was mayor? Russo was mayor.

RF: It must have been the first term, in the beginning.

ES: Russo was mayor. Yeah. So I thought we were going to court to put it on the record, and it really turned out to be an ambush. There was no one there, on my side of the table, except myself and my attorney. Gosh, what -- Mongiello. Michael Mongiello was the prosecutor for the City. He had all these witnesses lined up, who came and testified about this and that, and I was thoroughly confused, because I thought we were just putting the settlement on the record.

At that point in time, Judge London said that he could not accept a settlement, but he thought something short of killing the dog should be able to be worked out, so he was going to send it to trial -- which he had no authority to do.

RF: I remember that.

ES: There were some problems, then,  
between Russo and London --

RF: That's right.

ES: -- Russo busting into London's  
chambers and things like that.

RF: A separate issue. There were  
personalities --

ES: And at this time Kimberly Glatt was  
in the process of being appointed. So it started out  
under London. That was one of the problems--when he left  
Hoboken, and it was the end of his term, that was one of  
the problems he left for the city to deal with --

HM: Nice.

ES: -- and it came to Kimberly Glatt.

RF: This went on for a couple years? A  
year?

ES: No, I think it was maybe a year, or a little bit more than a year.

RF: So that must have been a really hard time for you. Obviously.

ES: And my doggie had to be "imprisoned."

HM: Was he in a cage? Did they make him live in a cage?

ES: Sure. Well, they could take him and put him in a shelter, or I could put him someplace private, and that's what I did. I put him in a kennel. I put him in a kennel in Montvale. He was incarcerated.

RF: This was during the period that this was being settled.

ES: Yes. During the period of the trial, as well as through the appeal.

RF: And, ultimately, what happens to Big Head?

ES: Well, ultimately, the death sentence that the court issued was thrown out (I forget the judge's name), but the judge's ruling on it -- he had his ruling published -- so Biggie had to go through behavioral training, and once the behavioral training was done, Biggie had to leave the city.

HM: And is he still alive?

ES: No, no. He's dead now.

HM: Where did he move to?

ES: We can't talk about that. But he stayed in the kennel a long -- even after that, he stayed up in the kennel a long time, and I would go up to the kennel to visit him. But the thing that was so funny was -- I'm trying to think -- on the day that he was sentenced to death, the media got up to the kennel before I did. But there were some very good people at the kennel, and they didn't let the media in.



RF: So when it went to court, it was on the county level, or the state level? Of Hoboken?

ES: The Superior Court, I believe, which is the county.

RF: So the Jersey City courthouse.

ES: Yes. And I started the process of appealing it before that, because I felt that since the Hoboken Health Department held an informal hearing, which was not a part of the statute -- I'm a lay person. I could understand the statute -- but Hoboken has always had a reputation for doing what Hoboken wants to do, or what people will let Hoboken get away with. So Hoboken did it, so I did what I felt I had to do to fight it.

I've lost my train of thought -- where I was going when I interjected that.

RF: I was just asking whether it was a State court.

ES: Oh. Yes. I felt dissatisfied with the judge's decision of enforcing the settlement. I felt that since the city had no authority to even put me in that situation -- because I had agreed to ridiculous things under that settlement, to avoid going to court -- and I still had to go to court! I felt that they should have thrown out the settlement, because by the time this thing was over I had set up such a secure system of fences in my yard, that my dog could have stayed back there until he died, and never had to even come within twenty feet of the public -- fifty feet of the public.

I got real extreme. I called up -- what is that zoo in West Orange, where they had cougars or something like that. What zoo is that?

RF: I'm not sure.

ES: Is it Turtle Back? Doesn't Turtle Back have some cats?

RF: I'm not that familiar with it.

ES: Anyway, I called them up and I said, "How do you protect the public from the cats you have

there?" and they told me about this multi-fence system. So I had a situation where I put additional fencing up in my yard, so when my dog would be out in the backyard, he would be behind three fences -- one up at the property line, another one at the back of the house, and then the further one was in like the back twenty-five feet of the lot.

HM: But that wasn't going to be enough for them, because once --

ES: Oh, no. That wasn't secure enough. That's why the settlement -- but, anyway.

HM: Now the behavioral trainer -- that wasn't Vicki Hearne, was it?

ES: No. This guy's name was Borchelt, Dr. Borchelt.

HM: Because didn't she get involved, too?

ES: Vicki Hearne?

HM: Isn't that her name? Isn't she like a dog trainer? I thought she wrote about Big Head.

ES: I don't know. That name doesn't sound at all familiar.

RF: And here, we're talking about an incident, but it hit all sorts of media outlets.

ES: Yes. [Laughs] Yes is an understatement. But yes.

HM: And what was that like for you? You had the concern about the woman. You had the concern about your dog. And then you had these people, probably, chasing you.

ES: Well, no, I wasn't really confronted with that until the courtroom -- going into the courtroom and going out of the courtroom -- and I mean, there was one, I think one television network -- I don't remember which one it was -- but they were trying to force this trial to be televised. They went to court in order to try to get it -- which held us up in court. Like, I've got

this expert that I'm paying \$100 an hour to testify and stuff, and we're all standing around waiting, to find out what a higher court is going to decide relative to televising in the courtroom.

RF: The media circus.

ES: Yes. And then, really, it was so funny. I had a group of supporters standing around me one day, in City Hall, because there was a camera man from some network, who thought he was surreptitiously taping me -- like he's casually holding the camera -- and he's trying to tape some of my friends, surrounding me. I had a lot of support from different animal groups, coming to court and coming to the trial.

But, you know, there are much more important things, I think, about the Smith family relative to Hoboken, than the unfortunate incident of Big Head.

HM: Yes, but it happened, so --

ES: Yes, it made a lot of press. He has clippings. I mean, he made the *Times*, and, of course, the

*Jersey Journal*, and so many editions of the *Hoboken Reporter*. But, I'll tell you, what really surprised me was when the *Hoboken Reporter* did its year-end stories -- like the top stories of the year -- and I think Big Head came in above some story with the mayor. [Laughter]

HM: Big Head for Mayor.

Now speaking of mayor --

ES: Oh, goodness. I thought we would be talking about my parents. That's all the stuff I brought. I think my parents are much more significant than --

HM: You don't want to talk about running for mayor?

ES: No. Not at this point.

HM: All right. We'll get to that.

RF: How did your mom take the whole Big Head thing?

ES: Well, you know, at that point in her life my mom was starting to -- I guess she was at the beginning of Alzheimer's. She finally did get Alzheimer's, so she basically -- I had to bring her with me to court, and she basically just sat there. It's not that she expressed some type of opinion for or against what I was doing.

HM: Would you like to pause for a minute, and take out some stuff we can go through?

ES: Sure.

HM: Because then I'll get a better sense of --

ES: Nothing's in any kind of order.

HM: That's okay. Just because you told us a little bit --

ES: I don't know what you want to see or don't want to see, but here is a good place to start. At one point my mom -- she was thoroughly into Alzheimer's, and she got to the point where she stopped eating. She got very debilitated, she had to have a feeding tube installed, and then she went into a nursing home to recuperate, and they asked me to put together a book -- because, you know, they lose their short-term memory, but their long-term memory is good. So this is what I started to put together, so they could go with her and have her look through it.

HM: So this was the tennis racquets.  
Where are you?

ES: Oh, probably someplace upstate New York. A lot of times the union used to go on different trips and outings and things like that, and this is probably one of those, that we went on. It's too bad I didn't keep it up, huh? But, you know, I still follow tennis. I love tennis.



RF: I can see your dad's a big guy.

ES: That's my daddy, and that's me --  
little round-headed thing.

HM: That's nice. You've got both of them  
over the years, and maybe the same time period. So, now,  
this is - Wow, your mom has such gorgeous white hair...

RF: -- Mayor DePascale.

HM: And was he Mayor then, or was he a  
Councilman?

RF: Oh, could be. Right.

ES: Chairman of the City Council.

HM: So what's happening in this picture?

ES: Being sworn in as the first black  
Housing Authority [and Redevelopment Agency] Commissioner  
of the City of Hoboken.

HM: Okay. So that you didn't talk about.

ES: No. I told you. They were overachievers. There was so much --

HM: So tell me about that.

ES: Well, I don't know -- You know, he was a labor man, and John J. Grogan was a labor man, so they kind had an affinity there. Maybe that's how he wound up getting that post, because they were on the Hudson County Central Labor Union Council together.

HM: And do you know what this position -- is that basically that he was head of the board for the Housing Authority?

ES: No, he was one of the commissioners. The same system they have today, like they have a chairman of the housing board, and they have a number of commissioners who act as representatives, and vote on issues that have to do with housing.

HM: And those commissioners aren't  
required to live --

ES: -- in public housing? No.

HM: I didn't know that.

ES: Never.

RF: Kind of like the governing board of  
the Housing Authority.

HM: I guess, in a way, you would not want  
them to be, because then -- but they're representative of  
the tenants, too.

RF: I think they could live there.

ES: There's no reason why they couldn't,  
but it wasn't a requirement.

HM: I can't imagine how your parents had  
time to -- that's a lot of groups that are very demanding  
groups.

ES: Well, I told you -- overachievers,  
big time.

HM: Wow. Now what's this. It says, "Leo  
Smith, attending labor-union convention; First Lady  
Eleanor Roosevelt at podium."

SIDE TWO

ES: -- your father having a high position  
in a union.

HM: You got to stay in hotels.

ES: Yes. We got to go to all these nice,  
dress-up affairs, with gowns and stuff -- even myself, as  
a child -- and there always used to be an annual  
convention down in Atlantic City. That was a definite  
perk, of being a union president's daughter. And a perk  
of being a Housing Authority commissioner's daughter was  
when I was in high school, I got a part-time job working  
in the office of the Housing Authority!

RF: This was in the Union Club?

ES: Yes. Once I find the plaque that was presented to him that day, I'll know the exact date. But this was a testimonial dinner, given in his honor, and I have some other pictures that you'll see. Mayor Grogan was there, as well.

HM: Was this on retirement, or just -- ?

ES: No, just a testimonial dinner, during his career.

HM: Wow.

ES: Like I said, when I find the plaque, I'll be able to give you the precise date.

HM: These pictures are really great.

I know who that is.

ES: And, all because of his union affiliations, he came into contact with a lot of politicians.

RF: Governor Byrne.

ES: Yes. I've got pictures of my dad with Harry Truman; Adam Clayton Powell; A. Philip Randolph; Bobby Kennedy; Teddy Kennedy; Lyndon Johnson. You'll see them. Hubert Humphrey.

HM: But these aren't snapshots; these are commercial-quality photographs.

ES: Yes.

HM: So is the union who sent the photographer? Who's taking the pictures?

ES: You got me. I have no idea.

HM: The quality is so high.

There he is. Robert Kennedy. And who's that?

ES: That's another union official. My father's secretary is still alive. I'm going to have to check with her, because he's in a lot of pictures. So

he's another important union official. He may be a national union official. I'm not sure.

HM: These pictures are amazing.

"National Labor Conference, with President Lyndon Johnson." Wow. A. Philip Randolph. Steve Cappiello.

ES: Yes. And this was something I had to put together for Whiteville, North Carolina -- I think it was 2001 -- for their Black History Month Exhibit. I just happened to find this. I thought that was funny -- an old tax bill. Both of these were on display at the 2001 Black History Exhibit at the North Carolina Museum of Forestry, I think. That's a family picture there, and on another table these two pages you see here.

HM: This is great, too --

ES: -- a little biography.

HM: -- to use this for background stuff.

Yes, there he is, Harry Truman.

"International Union of Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers."

ES: Yes. It went through a number of changes, with affiliations with different groups.

HM: So, as a daughter of a union activist

--

ES: Yes?! That's me, too.

HM: -- do you have strong feelings about unions?

ES: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I think it's really a shame how unions haven't the power and the strength that unions once had -- how they've declined -- and I believe it started with the dissolution of the air-traffic controllers under Reagan.

The unions have just lost their power; and, as a result, this day in age, people are making \$7.50 an hour. They're not making a decent wage.



HM: Were you able to get a union position when you started working?

ES: No. I didn't try. I was just busy doing my job, teaching reading at Essex County College, in Newark, once I got out of school. But I've always been very pro-union. I couldn't help it, also, from whence I came.

HM: And still pro-union.

So this is you, as the first black majorette at Hoboken High School. That's a pretty great picture, I have to say. [Laughter] "This is Evelyn's first dance recital." So that's even younger. [Laughter] Did you enjoy dancing? Or was it something that you had to do?

ES: Oh, no, no, it was fun. I still remember that little outfit. It was hot pink, with notes all over it. [Laughter]

RF: And was that a recital at the Connor School?

ES: No, this was just -- I don't know where this took place. I really don't.

RF: It looks like a bigger stage. Would you have done stuff at the Fabian, or one of the theatres?

ES: No, I don't think so. This might have even been in New York. I'm not sure. It was like a private school, where your parents sent you for dance lessons.

RF: I say. You say you took piano lessons, too.

ES: I took piano lessons, as well.

HM: And the school was in New York, or it was --

ES: I don't think it was in Hoboken, but I don't really recall.

RF: And when you were a majorette, were you aware that you were the first African-American majorette? Was that pointed out to you? Or was it just something you were doing?

ES: No. It was something that I was doing, something that I wanted to do, and I found out about it afterwards. But it almost didn't happen, because, as you can see, I've never been small. Before I was a majorette, I was one of the letter carriers that used to carry H-O-B-O-K-E-N -- myself and a very good friend of mine, Noreen -- her last name was Rashitnick. Both Noreen and I were letter carriers and we both tried out and made majorette. Then when the uniform issue arose, Ms. Hattie Clay, a seamstress and member of Mt. Olive saved the day and gladdened our hearts when she was able to alter the uniforms so Noreen and I could be on the squad.

So I could twirl my baton. And we won a championship one year. We won a county championship. I still have my tattered little jacket with the chenille "H" on it --

HM: Oh, I love it.

ES: -- and "Majorette" on the back of it.

[Laughs]

That's my godfather. That's some of the stuff that's in here. This is the gentleman I was telling you about, who could tell you more about my father's professional baseball career than anybody else. Yes, I'll be seeing him --

RF: Yes, ask him about it.

ES: I'll be seeing him in a few weeks. I might even tape him --

RF: That would be great.

ES: -- because I do have to supply some information to the Negro League Baseball Museum, so they can document my father's time there. They're very interested in not just his baseball time, but about his whole life. So maybe I can just send them a copy of a chapbook -- if this becomes a chapbook --

HM: It will become a chapbook. I guarantee you.

So this is "Sarah and Leo Smith, at Celestial Ball, to benefit the Hudson County Ballet Society" --

RF: -- which I've never heard of.

HM: I never heard of it either. In 1970. I never knew there was a ballet society. I wonder if this is the county ballet society. Wow. That's pretty cool. Well, 1970 -- I don't know anything about it.

ES: Well, I just got these pictures maybe two years ago. I didn't know they existed. I got these from my father's sister, my Aunt Mable, who is the only living sibling. That's a blowup, but that's Adam Clayton

Powell, and that's Bob Wagner. This sketch was done -- there was an artist at the recreation center down there, on Jefferson Street. This is a Xerox copy of a charcoal pastel.

HM: It came out good, as a color copy.

ES: Yes. So I guess I was eight years old, because it says, "Betty, '58."

HM: This is a school picture?

ES: Yes, from Connor's. Schools Days, '55-'56.

HM: And this was taken where?

ES: Oh, I don't know. Some restaurant, somewhere. That's a school picture. I think that's a junior-high picture. And that was just at a wedding, an informal wedding of some friends of mine.

HM: And when they showed these to your mom, did they do the trick? Did she start to remember?

ES: Yes, she would look -- because they're old memories. She would remember. Then I just continued filling it up with other things.

Oh, yes, that's my godfather again, and some of his goddaughters. Not all of them, some of them. I don't know how many he's got.

HM: And where was this taken?

ES: This was when he retired. This was in Washington, D.C. He was a Pullman porter on the Metro, and this was his retirement party.

HM: Now this says, "Our World Picture Magazine."

ES: This is a defunct black magazine. I can't remember who the publisher of it was, but he did donate his papers to the Schomberg. I can't think of his name.

HM: And you have this here because --

ES: -- because they did an article on Emerson's Mr. Smith.

HM: Oh, my god! That is so cool! Well, it's so great because it shows him at work --

ES: -- and at play, in the backyard, playing basketball --

HM: -- shooting pool. This is great. And it talks about him as an ex-ballplayer.

RF: And do you know where this was, Holly? This Emerson plant?

ES: It's still there.

RF: Yes. We drive by it, heading up the ramp on the #9 local, to go up to the boulevard --

HM: Yes!



RF: -- on the right-hand side. The smokestack is still there. It says Emerson. It's Jersey City.

HM: Wow.

ES: It's got a lottery billboard up on it, I think.

RF: Yes.

HM: And then -- in the home. "Along with regular electrical appliances, the house has a big air-conditioner." [Laughter] You see how tall?

ES: That was something back then, huh?

HM: Yes. Oh, man. This is a huge piece. It has a factory. This is really, really good. Wow. Very cool.

ES: Some of those same photos are in this book. But the folks that are in this book are amazing --

to see pictures of them so young -- Mary McCloud Bethune, but Thurgood Marshall -- there are so many folks in here.

Just some of the -- not a whole bunch of story, but just some of the pictures from that particular article are in here.

HM: Very cool.

ES: And this is "American's Tenth Man," and the contribution of black folks.

HM: And that was published when?

ES: Was it in the '60s?

RF: The early '60s [ ? ] --

HM: Nineteen-fifty-six.

ES: Yes, '56.

HM: Very cool.

RF: I wondered why that bag was so heavy.

ES: Oh, I've got so many newspaper articles. These are some other relatives who lived in Hoboken, and these are some of the church auxiliaries. That's probably the Pastor's Aide. Yes. There's my mom. This is the usher's. She got an usher badge. There she is, there.

HM: So this is already on Washington Street.

ES: Yes.

HM: Now have you noticed -- was the church congregation bigger?

ES: Yes. There has been a slow decline of the church members over the years. A lot of the older members have retired and moved back to North Carolina, and they're not being replaced as rapidly by newer, younger members. It's a much smaller congregation now

than even when we were at 69 Jefferson Street, which was a much smaller building.

RF: And you keep mentioning North Carolina. Would you say that most of the people who went to Mt. Olive were from North Carolina, originally?

ES: A large percentage of them, yes, but not necessarily from the same area. There was a period in our history when a lot of people -- there was a mass exodus up to the north -- better wages, better living conditions, things of that nature.

RF: Sure. That's interesting.

HM: But then people going back -- leaving, and going --

ES: Yes. They would come up here, attain property and worked; then they wanted to retire, and go back someplace where it's a slower, calmer lifestyle.

RF: And they usually still had family in North Carolina, when they go back? Or not really?

ES: I don't know. I can't speak for them.  
But all my family is in North Carolina except my aunt and  
three cousins. Oh. I forgot my nephew.

HM: But that's a real loss.

ES: Even the ones who came up to work in  
New Jersey, after they got out of college, who are maybe  
ten years older than me -- they've come and they've  
worked, they've retired, and gone back home and built  
some fabulous houses! [Laughs]

RW: It's cheaper to live, and not as hard  
to --

ES: They're very happy, you know?

And in our home we had tenants. Let's see.  
These are the children of the tenants that we had.

HM: And they lived upstairs or  
downstairs?

ES: They lived on the third floor. We occupied the first and second floors. That's Niecey and Darrell Allen. This is Niecey when she was older. Unfortunately, they're both deceased now. And that's my Aunt Mable, a member of the Honey Bees.

HM: What are the Honey Bees?

ES: I think they were called the Honey Bees and the Honey Bears -- African-American Senior Citizen Synchronized Swimmers. She's been on PBS a few times with her troupe, doing their thing in the pool.  
[Laughs]

HM: Wow. And is she in North Carolina?

ES: No. No, she's in the Bronx. She's my father's only remaining sister. The only other relative up here are cousins; like, her daughter is with her in the Bronx, and then I have another cousin out, I think, on the island.

HM: So how come there's no picture of her doing synchronized swimming?

ES: Because you don't have the right album. I've got pictures, I've got videotape. [Laughter]

HM: I can hardly swim. So the idea of doing all this other stuff is too much for me.

ES: That's an NAACP dinner, Jersey City branch NAACP dinner. There's Eddie Johnson, who was the first president of the Hoboken branch of the NAACP.

RF: So your father probably knew him well.

ES: Oh, yes. And the family, we still do. His wife is still here in Hoboken -- his wife and one of his sons are still here in Hoboken, his daughter is in Jersey City. She's married to a minister. And this is Deacon Curtis Mills. At one point he was the head of the Deacon Board at Mt. Olive Baptist Church. This is Deacon and Deaconess George Smith, and they're still active at Mt. Olive Baptist Church. My mom, Deacon Johnson -- myself, my father, this is a friend of my father's -- Charlie Green, who was also in the union, and this is one

of my father's union officers, Bill Melvin (he's deceased) and his wife. She's still living. I don't remember this woman's name. She might be Marie Drumwright. She was very active in the union. This is my father's secretary, Geraldine Chase, who was just honored a couple of weeks [ago] by her church, at a luncheon, for being a fifty-year member.

HM: So it sounds like you really keep up with a lot of the people your parents knew.

ES: Yes. Yes, that's true.

When I got this from North Carolina, this kind of surprised me, because my father died twenty years earlier, and they did a story on him. It talks a little bit about his baseball career, a little bit about Hoboken. Some other photos, from another IUE convention.

HM: You said that you have a tape of your dad speaking --

ES: -- practicing a speech.



HM: Just to hear him -- to see him in all these different situations -- I need to hear his voice.

ES: Now do you remember Vertis Watson? She was in the photos of --

HM: Yes, I do. She was the tallest woman in the --

RF: -- in Dorothy's pictures?

ES: She worked with my mother. She was one of the case workers at HOPES when my mother was director and she is still working at HOPES today. She is also the head of the Trustee Board at Mt. Olive.

HM: Yes.

RW: I see your mom. Very dressed up. Nice mink coat!

ES: They were going to some union function. And this...

HM: You probably can't read upside down, but it says, "Attending President Lyndon Johnson's Inaugural Ball."

ES: Yes. That was at some hotel in D.C. Those long gloves. I know.

That's Morgan, my half-brother. My father had a child before he was married. His name is Morgan Cornell Smith.

HM: And where does he live?

ES: He retired, and moved back to Whiteville, North Carolina. But when he was a teenager, he came up here to New Jersey, and he lived with us here, in Hoboken. I don't think I have anything on her, but he has a daughter and two granddaughters, and a great-grandson, who live in public housing in Hoboken. That's his daughter, and those are her two daughters, and those are the great-grandchildren.

RF: I guess the census would tell us, but do you get a sense of -- has the African-American population been pretty much the same for the period you've been in Hoboken, or do you think it's less, or greater, or -- ?

ES: I think it's less, because -- I was here when there was nothing on the lower parts of Bloomfield Garden but tenements, so I think it's definitely less.

RW: Less.

ES: That's the Young People's Choir.

HM: Now would people in the church sew for people?

ES: Oh, yes. I made many of those dresses. Every year there was an anniversary, and every year everybody got dresses. Some people had to sew dresses, and I got to sew quite a few of them.

HM: Who designed what they looked like?

ES: It was just a matter of picking out a pattern. A few people in the choir would get together, and they would go pick out a pattern, decide on the color, and then say, "Okay, this is what we're going to wear this year. Everybody get busy on their sewing machines." And it was a different dress. That particular outfit was a dark-green, white, and like a mint-green. There may be some color pictures of it around. But every year it was something.

HM: I don't see how people have time to do everything.

ES: That's one of my friends there.  
[Laughs] That's me and one of my cats.

RF: So are you still riding a motorcycle.

ES: No, but I still have this one. I put it on E-bay a few days ago, because I'm thinking about getting a new one. Because once my mother got ill, I really had to change a lot of things about my lifestyle, and my method of transportation. So there were a lot of

things I put down; now I'm thinking about trying to -- If my carpal tunnel syndrome will let me hold a throttle, and if my knees can stand to be bent -- maybe. But we'll see.

Yes, I belonged to an all-female motorcycle club.

HM: Oh, cool!

ES: This is Emma Fulton. She was the president and the founder; I was the vice-president and road captain. So whenever we went on a trip, I had to get the maps out and map the way and lead the crowd.

HM: And where are the women from?

ES: Let's see. She was from Paterson. There was another lady in the club from Montclair, a lady from New York, and then there were other ladies who didn't join the club but they rode with us, from Piscataway, from Plainfield.

HM: Was there a name for the club?

ES: The Cycle Soul Sisters.

RF: And how did you get involved with motor cycles?

ES: Well, you know, when I was a kid, I always used to see people scooting up and down the streets of Hoboken on Vespas.

RF: They're coming back, too.

ES: Oh, yes. And I said, "Wow, that's great. When I get old enough, I'm getting one." And that's what I did, when I got old enough. I'd never even been on the back of a bike. But I went and bought one. I got somebody to bring it home for me.

HM: That's pretty adventurous of you. Because, usually, you get introduced by somebody else who has one.

ES: No, I didn't know anything about it except that I liked it when I saw it.

RF: Was it a Vespa?

ES: No, I bought a 350 Honda, and I thought it was the biggest thing in the world. I thought, "Oh, my god, it's so big!" In two weeks, I'm like, "Oh, no, this will never do. I need another bike. Like, this isn't gonna work." Then maybe a year later I bought a 550, and I said, "Okay, this is better. " But people were leaving me in the dust!

So in '77, I said, "I want the biggest thing out there," and at the time it was this -- 1000cc Kawasaki -- and I've never wanted to go any faster. [Laughs] That's all. Yeah. That was plenty fast enough. And, you know, I've been to North Carolina on the motorcycle; West Virginia, for instance. Every weekend you would go to a different party that was given by a different club. So you might be in Connecticut one night -- I can remember a time when we went to a party in Connecticut on Saturday night; left the party in Connecticut and went to Baltimore on Sunday; then came back home on Monday, because everybody had to go to their jobs. The women who were in this club, and the women who rode with this club -- they were from very diverse professions. Emma, she was a telephone operator for an

answering -- what do they call them? Back in the day, you know, when you used to have the boards where you pushed little knobs -- answering service.

RF: Telephone operator.

ES: Right. My girlfriend Pat, she was a nurse. Sharon was also a nurse. Eileen was a bus driver. Who else? I'm trying to think of -- There was another teacher, too. I believe her name was Sarah. People were from all different kinds of careers, and somehow we all came together. When we would go to a function, and we would see another woman with a bike, of course we had to know who they were. Because back then, that was like -- I think I got my first bike in maybe '71 or '72, and there weren't that many women out there, riding. So we made sure we got to know each other.

RF: Safety in numbers.

ES: We wanted to know.



HM: Well, people think -- if they think of motorcycles -- they think of guys. If they think of women, they think, "Well, they're riding with the guys." They don't think of the women riding on their own.  
[Laughter]

ES: Do not entrust your life to somebody else on a motorcycle. Never. Never. I would never. I guess maybe I'm bossy, or pushy, or too independent.

HM: Well, you might as well be controlling it, right?

ES: Yes.

And then this -- when did they do this? Yes, 2002. I kind of put it together. Because that particular year, the *Jersey Journal* put a different person of color on the bottom right-hand corner of the front page, for Black History Month, and somebody just happened to call me and say, "Evelyn!" I said, "Okay, let me get it."

HM: And there's the picture.

ES: That's the only picture I have in a baseball uniform, and I have no idea what uniform it is. I've been trying to trace down the original, and I haven't been able to find out who had the original. I wanted to be able to get a copy.

HM: There are so few markings, that I guess somebody could determine what might be on the hat. Or if there was a group that just played in that kind of uniform.

RF: This is from a tiny little photo, too. I can tell that.

HM: And then he's kind of lounging.  
Well, it's good to have at least one.

ES: One is better than none.

HM: Shall we do another chunk? Okay.

RF: What's here? This is more union material?

ES: Yes. This is some union stuff. Then I've got a whole bunch of newspaper clippings, too. These are just like the cards that they used --

RF: -- for meeting announcements and things.

ES: No, no, no -- for sending people out on job referrals, saying that the union (which at one time was stationed on Clinton Street in Hoboken) --

RF: Really?

ES: -- was sending --

RF: So the union office was at 231 Clinton Street.

ES: At one point, yes. I can't imagine -- 231 Clinton must have been a house.

RF: There must have been a storefront of some sort, though.

ES: I don't remember it.

HM: I see. These are for a position.

ES: Yes -- trying to send him out on a job. Then the union published their own little newspaper, and they'd have to print it. He had his own little column.

HM: Wow. And this is talking about -- what? About him going down South?

ES: I haven't read it, but I see he's talking about mob lynchings and things of that nature. I'm on the back page, thanking everybody for -- I don't know what that is.

HM: " -- was chosen Miss NAACP of the Hoboken branch, recently. Evelyn once used this method to express her appreciation to all Emersonians, who, by buying her votes, made her victory possible!" [Laughter]

HM: At Demarest High School, she was a straight-A student. "The proud boast is that she never has to take examinations." [Laughter]

ES: That was one good thing. Another good thing about having a father who was the president of a labor union -- I was a Girl Scout, so I got to be a cookie princess, because I would just say, "Here Daddy," and everybody bought the cookies.

HM: But you're Miss NAACP of Hoboken. What does that mean?

ES: Well, the Hoboken branch of the NAACP.

RF: The chapter.

HM: I know, but, what does that entail?

ES: Just raising the most money for the organization, and I got to ride in some parade, sitting on the back of a Cadillac convertible, going [waving hand] -- But it was basically a fundraising event for the

organization, to help them carry out the different projects.

HM: Who was the head of your Girl Scout troop? Do you remember?

ES: No, I don't.

I don't know what this is.

RF: It's like a banquet photo?

ES: Oh. This is some kind of Hudson County CIO meeting, a bi-annual convention.

HM: And where was that? Do you know?

RF: It says Hudson County CIO Council. It says Union Club.

ES: Yes, Union Club.

RF: And there he is, right there, in the position of power. There's a mirror here.

ES: Mayor Grogan. Isn't that John J. Grogan? It looks like him. I may have to get a magnifying glass.

HM: What year is the photo? I'm just sort of documenting?

RF: This is March 24, 1957. And you're right. Here's Grogan, here. Right there. And your dad is a much bigger guy -- and Grogan was big, too.

ES: These are just some of the officials at Emerson. Like I said, I'd have to get his secretary to tell me who was who. That's some of the officials at the company. This is a very young Daddy -- talking about the bus rides, and the picnics, bathing beauty contests, advertising it.

What's this name? This is a good friend of my father's, who worked at Emerson, named Tony. I forget his first name, but his last name is Avezzano, and more than likely he painted these, because he did a lot of painting for signs -- and what not.

And this is where my Pop started out -- painting at Emerson! That's where he started out at Emerson -- painting.

And these are just pictures on some of the picnics, or some of the outings they were going on.

HM: So these are union outings.

ES: Union members, yes. Outings. Other pictures. A diverse group of people. Some workers pondering some things. These are labor union officials. This is the plant manager, Mr. Certo. And they were making the donation to little Marie.

HM: Oh. That's the one you were talking about -- Local #480 CIO.

ES: Here's the original.

Now, recently, like I said, my father's secretary was honored for her fifty years of service to her church, and at that time she presented me with these two photos. Of course, she figured she's getting old, and what's going to happen to them when she dies? Because the copy I had in my book was just a Xerox copy, so she gave



me the original -- with Eleanor -- and then she gave me this one, with this district union official who appears in a lot of pictures.

HM: Oh, and they're all signed.

ES: I think they're just identified. I don't think there are any signatures.

HM: It just says who each one is. Yes.

ES: Yes. Oh, a newspaper article.

RW: So did your mom keep a scrapbook? Was that you?

ES: No, it wasn't me. It must have been my mother, 'cause it wasn't me.

Okay. This doesn't belong here, but I didn't want to put it away. That's the "Mt. Olive" Baptist Church."

HM: I see your dad mentioned.

RW: I'm going to put this one up front -- just because it has the screws in the back of the pictures.

ES: Helping protect this stuff.

HM: So this is all mounted, and this is all the Housing Authority stuff. This is actually --

ES: Well, I didn't know, until I started reading those articles, that Local #480 had anything to do with unionizing housing employees in Jersey City, but apparently they did. I didn't realize that, until I started reading some of these articles. Unfortunately, a lot of them do not have the dates. The dates were cut off. But some of them do. Like here's one with Mayor Grogan, this one coming up.

HM: I wonder -- We can probably assume that some of them are a similar time period. We could hope.

Did your parents get involved in campaigning for people locally?

ES: Oh, yes. My father was very active in campaigning, and especially in getting the vote out.

HM: Did he have people he particularly -- for Grogan?

ES: Oh, yes. Definitely for Grogan, and, I would say, 101% of the time for the Democratic candidate, whoever that may have been. Somewhere I have a picture of him out with Louie Francone. Didn't they just name something after Louie Francone recently? Didn't they dedicate something in his name in the city recently?

RF: I don't know.

HM: I think they did, actually -- a street or something.

ES: Those are Housing Authority people, and the chairman.

HM: Ah -- and Edward DeFazio, because we did one with his brother, Charles, and he talks about him and the Housing Authority.

ES: I remember Mr. DeFazio.

RF: So these are some of the pictures  
that are --

HM: -- color copies --

RF: -- for your mom.

HM: Louie DePascale. And you are in this,  
too.

ES: Sometimes I got in the paper, riding  
on their coattails. [Laughter] The only time I made the  
paper was if I made honor roll or something.

This is Marie Antoinette Minutello. What  
was her medical problem? I think some part of her body  
was outside of her body that should have been inside, or  
something. Exposed bladder was her problem. They raised  
some money. They also did something to help a little boy  
who had some kind of serious congenital heart problem,  
named Barfield, whose mom happened to be a member of Mt.  
Olive at the time.

RF: So another Smith is Morgan Smith.

ES: That's my brother. My half-brother, my father's son. In fact, here's a picture of him.

HM: And Louie Francone.

ES: My mom, my brother, the mayor, and Louie Francone.

RF: It says Morgan was executive secretary of the NAACP.

ES: That's about Grogan and Raymond Brown, who became a very prominent lawyer in Jersey City, and then in Newark. Now his son has a law show on TV.

That's just obituaries that I haven't done anything with -- like my mother's obituary (I think that's my mom), that was printed in North Carolina as well as Hoboken.

One thing that's bad about keeping in touch with where you live and where you're from is that both my mother and my father -- they had two of

everything. They had two wakes, they had two funerals, and that was rough. But my father had it, and my mother always insisted she wanted to do exactly the same thing, so we did exactly the same thing.

RF: I might have missed it -- one for the North and one for the South?

ES: Right. And, you know, when my father died, being a man of his size -- and planes being the size that they were, and his coffin being the size that it was -- it couldn't be flown back home. So the funeral director, who was a very good friend of his, drove up here, got his body, and the State Police escorted his body to the state line.

You made me remember these things. I hadn't thought about these things for a while.

Now we're over my father. Now we're getting into my mother's newspaper clippings. She was a woman of achievement, and that was at a tea. There she is. I always wear her *Jersey Journal* Woman of Achievement medal, and I always wear my father's -- this used to be, this is just the top part -- my father's ring, as a board

member of the Black Athletes Hall of Fame. I just had the bottom of it cut off. So I have these two mementos.

RF: And the Black Athletes Hall of Fame.  
Where is that?

ES: It's nowhere. It kind of started out, and then it just fizzled out.

RF: I was just wondering if there might be records there.

ES: I'm still in touch with the individual who founded it. Charlie Mays. He is a relative (perhaps nephew?) of Willie Mays and a college coach. I have some pictures of Charles and Willie Mays and my father and some Hall of Fame inductees including the first Black All-American Football Player, Fritz Pollard, from Brown University.

[Charlie Mays] probably has more photos of the affairs. Because they had big annual affairs at major hotels in New York City. At one of them, I remember, Bill Cosby was the master of ceremonies, and they had a lot of

well-known athletes on the dais, and things of that nature.

So that's just being an aide at the Recreation Center, working with H.O.P.E.S. --

HM: E. Norman Wilson, Jr. --

ES: Oh, I didn't know he was a junior. Here he is he later on, with the N.A.A.C.P., kicking off a sweepstakes, with Steve Cappiello, as mayor. That's '85. The Vacation Bible School and Sister Lavalley -- I wanted to say her name was Thelma. What is her name? Sister Lavalley's name? They should have her name her. Oh. They used her husband's name -- Ernest Lavalley. Kids doing activities at Vacation Bible School. There's another one of Mr. Wilson.

RF: Mr. Wilson must live right up around here.



HM: Because you see him --

RF: -- all the time.

ES: Oh, really? Every month they would give a birthday celebration for some kid in the neighborhood. Some business would donate the cake. And this is, I think, when H.O.P.E.S. was getting founded. I guess you don't know Mr. Clyons. He used to be principal, or vice-principal, and he was head of H.O.P.E.S.

HM: So H.O.P.E.S. predates Model Cities?

ES: I don't think so.

RF: I think it comes in at the same time.

HM: Did H.O.P.E.S. come out of Model  
Cities?

ES: No, I don't think so.

HM: But around the same time that  
happened.

ES: I think so.

HM: The only reason why I'm wondering -- There was Johnson's "War on Poverty," and part of it was, I think -- H.O.P.E.S. got money for that. Then the other part was this idea of Model Cities, for Hoboken. So they must have happened, probably, just within a few years of each other.

So this really describes your mom as a caseworker -- what she does. This is really a good piece.

ES: That's what she started out as -- a caseworker.

In addition to the Vacation Bible School, a few days a week they had activities after school for the kids, too.

RF: You're talking about art classes in the church -- an after-school program -- at 69 Jefferson.

ES: Yes.

Here are newspaper articles and obituaries of when -- I thought I had another one someplace -- of when my father died.

Other people on the program -- the mayor, councilmen of the city, and a lot of different -- newspaper notices in a lot of different newspapers about my father's death, newspapers in North Carolina and New York. Of course, Hoboken, Jersey City, labor papers. The *Afro-American*. That's a New York paper. *Jersey Journal*, the *News Reporter* in Whiteville, the *Star-Ledger*. And then different tributes and -- what's this? The *Hoboken Pictorial*, and what do they call it, a resolution. Something from the fire department in Jersey City. There are plaques up the ying-yang.

Pictures of my nephews and stuff. Okay. Why do I have this one? Roy Wilkins is sitting on the dais in that one. As you can see, it's from an NAACP dinner in New York.

HM: Is that one of those panoramic shots?

ES: I don't know who this guy is, but I just thought my father looked sharp in this picture, when I found it. [Laughs] I don't know who this is.

RF: He's got the cigar, and a nice smile.

ES: He smoked cigars, and a pipe.

HM: So your parents must have had so many fancy dress clothes, for all these events.

ES: Yeah, yeah, and I'm proud to say I made a couple of gowns for my mom, down the years.

Okay. Why do I have this book? What is the reason I have this one? We've even got tombstones and graveyard stuff in here.

HM: Who's that?

ES: That's one of my father's sisters. That's Evangeline. Oh, and this is my mother's student that she taught at the Spring Hill School -- Spring Hill Elementary School in Whiteville, North Carolina.

HM: So it's Doris Ellis Malone, student. Because that would be nice to get more info on that.

Who's that?

ES: That's my cousin, Sam. Before my parents moved up here, they bought a home in North Carolina. That's their little home, and that's why I'm going down to North Carolina. I've got to get some work done on it. Because it's empty right now.

This is a letter that was written in '48, by a great aunt, sending some money up to the baby in New York. I think it was like, "Here's a dollar for the baby, or something." Something like that.

Younger pictures of my parents and their siblings. Yes, that's the same little house. This is my mother, and that is one of my many cousins. But that's my mother there.

HM: And that's before she came --

ES: Yes, before she came to New Jersey.

That's her sister, there's my brother, Leo. He was so cute when he was a little boy. I constantly ask him what happened. This is my father, Leo, and my father again, with Leo.

HM: So these are all in New York.

ES: Yes. All this is New York. This is Hoboken. Me and my mommy, me and my brother.

HM: Who's this?

ES: That's Cornell, again, my older brother, with Leo.

HM: That's not Hoboken.

ES: No, that's New York. That's New York. That's one of my cousins. All of these are in New York.

HM: Who's that?

ES: That's my cousin, and some of the friends she graduated with, from nursing school. There she is at one of the Emerson picnics, even though she didn't work at Emerson. Here she is again. I was named after her. Her name is Evelyn. I was named after her.

These are my cousins, who still live in New York. That's my mom, in New York, and my father --

Then we get to my father's siblings. This is my Aunt Polly, who lived in Buffalo, New York; that's my Aunt Evangeline, whom you saw in the other picture. That's my Aunt Mable. She's the only one who's still living.

HM: That's a really neat studio shot.

ES: That's my cousin. Then my father in front of one his cars, an old Buick, in Harlem. My Aunt Mable and my Uncle Clyde, my father's only brother. Again, my Aunt Evangeline. Yes, this was when Ra-zhone was born, so here's the oldest member of the family and the youngest. This was when he was months old, and she was ninety-one. That's Cornell, and Leo. I wasn't around yet, but in this picture, I'm in-utero.

HM: Put a little circle around it.

ES: And then Daddy, sleeping with his baby, and Momma sleeping. There's Cornell today, and that's my cousin, Sarah Lee, who's named after my mom. My mom, again; my mom pregnant; my mom and my cousin Evelyn; and my Uncle Dave -- who wasn't really an uncle, but a

tenant. He lived upstairs for like twenty years, he and his wife, until they became Aunt and Uncle.

RF: So no pictures of kitties?

ES: I have two albums full of cats and dogs.

RF: That's what I figured. But you're sticking to the blood relatives.

ES: Right. I'm sticking to the "folks."

Now here's something else I came across that was interesting -- my father's letter of appreciation, with an original signature from Roy Wilkins, for his lifetime membership in the NAACP.

I think these are mostly from the testimonial dinner at the Union Club. And when Mt. Olive moved up to Washington Street. That was the proverbial moving-into-the-church there. This was probably another term being sworn in as a Housing Authority Commissioner, and that's the original of that.

-end-