

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: DOROTHY McNEIL

INTERVIEWERS: HOLLY METZ & ROBERT FOSTER

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1

HM: So your family name is Richardson?

DM: Yes. My family name is Richardson.

HM: Okay.

DM: My mother was Gladys Elizabeth Richardson, and she came to Hoboken in 1954. I'm sorry, 1934. We were one of the first modern, I would say -- we were talking about slavery before -- I would say post-slavery families in Hoboken. We were one of the earlier families in Hoboken. There used to be an argument whether we were first or second, but after doing some research for our African-American firsts, I found that we were neither. But the family came here from Harlem in 1934. My mother

came from Alabama, and my father's family came to Haverstraw, New York from North Carolina.

HM: Your father's name?

DM: David Blackwell.

HM: You said North Carolina?

DM: North Carolina.

HM: Now why did they come here from Harlem?

DM: Well, Hoboken -- Jersey was cheaper to live, even then. Harlem was getting expensive. The renaissance was going on, and it was getting a little bit expensive where they were living, and there were job opportunities over here. So they relocated to Hoboken.

HM: Now the jobs were in Hoboken?

DM: My father worked for Erie-Lackawanna in some kind of way. I believe that was in Hoboken. That was the first one.

HM: And what did he do?

DM: I have no idea. I don't know. But I remember him working for -- I remember going to the train station, to pick him up sometimes; to meet him. He did lots of different things. I'm sure it was labor, some sort of labor, because he was not a professional person.

RF: And did he stay in that yard and work, or did he go on the city?

DM: He stayed in Hoboken. He worked in Hoboken.

RF: He was in Hoboken at the end of the day.

DM: Yes, at the end of the day.

HM: Do you know the address they moved to in 1934?

DM: I can tell you several addresses where we lived, but which one at which time, I can't. I know we lived at 71 Adams Street, which is no longer there. I know we lived at 209 Willow Avenue. We lived over Leo's. I grew up over Leo's Grandez Vous at Second and Grand Street. I had Italian food every other night. 72 Garden Street. We also lived at, probably, 68 Park Avenue. We were all over the city.

HM: So, always renting?

DM: Always renting. Always renting.

RF: Some of those buildings had fires, didn't they?

DM: Yes. I'm remembering the ones that I lived -- When I was six weeks old, there was a fire on the Adams Street property. We lived on the fifth floor, and I was actually thrown out of the window -- caught by a homeless person. It was interesting. I used to be embarrassed, when I was a young child, because he claimed me as his own -- and rightfully so -- but he would always give me dimes. He walked around with dimes, a pocketful of

dimes, and he would give me dimes to play the shuffleboard machines, wherever there was a shuffleboard machine, in one of the different clubs. He would take me to that club, and I would play shuffleboard.

HM: Do you remember his name?

DM: I only had a nickname, and it was -- I called him Mr. Buddy.

HM: And how many children did your parents have?

DM: My mother had seven children, from two marriages. I'm the middle child. I have two brothers and two sisters older, and two sisters younger than I am.

(William Richardson, Lonnie Richardson, Gladys R. Richardson, Marilyn "Susie" Richardson. Rosa Blackwell and Lora Hill)

HM: Your family wasn't too unusual then.

DM: No, we had lots of big families around, when I was growing up.

HM: Were you born in Hoboken?

DM: I was actually born in Jersey City; but, yes, Hoboken. I was born in Margaret Hague. I attended the Hoboken public school system. I graduated in '71 from Hoboken High. I started going to college in '71, with Dennis McMullen, when he started Hudson County Community College. I was in the first semester of classes. He did classes everywhere. When I do my résumé, I write my résumé, "I attended classes at Stevens, at St. Peter's, at N.J.C.U., at N.Y.C.U." -- because we took classes everywhere. But I didn't finish then. I stayed there for, I guess, two semesters. I went back and graduated in '87, from Hudson County. Now I'm at N.J.C.U. It seems like I can't do it except in twenty-year increments.

RF: It's never too late.

DM: No. I don't think so.

HM: So did your mom -- was she a homemaker?

DM: Yes, my mom was a homemaker. She also worked -- That's her picture next to my husband's picture. My mom worked as a cook for much of her life, and she started working in daycare, when they started Daycare 100 in Hoboken. She and Dana (I don't remember Dana's last name), but Dana was the director of this center, and they wanted to start this daycare, but -- They were very close friends, and she wouldn't start it. She talked to my mother about it. I remember sitting on the floor, while she talked to my mother, and my mother kept telling her, "You can do it. You can do it." And she said, "Well, I'm not going to do it without you." And my mother said, "But I don't have the education to do this." And Dana said, "Yes, but in whatever capacity -- I need you there with me." So from day one, she worked as a cook there, but when she was in her late fifties, she also went back to school and graduated from Bank Street College. She became a social worker there. She worked for a while as interim director, and she retired when she was sixty-five. She didn't like being retired, so she went back to cooking at H.O.P.E.S. Head Start, at the Head Start daycare, until she got sick.

HM: So where was Daycare 100?

DM: Daycare 100 originally was on Hudson Street. The first one was on Hudson Street. I don't know, but they're still in existence, so that record is easily obtained. The same Daycare 100 at 124 Grand Street. They started someplace else; then, when they built the H.O.P.E.S. building they were able to get space, and they moved to 124 Grand Street. They were also working out of the recreation center on Jefferson Street for a while, before they moved to Grand Street.

HM: And what time period was that? The first?

DM: I can probably give you exact dates on that, but I can't do it right now. I would say in the early '70s. Actually, probably late '60s.

RF: Was it under Model Cities?

DM: Yes. It was under the Model Cities program.

HM: So tell me a little bit about your thoughts and recollections of growing up in Hoboken. I know that's a big subject, but --

DM: No, I love Hoboken. I've always loved Hoboken. The memories I have of Hoboken are of a community that -- You have to understand, I was a teenager in the '60s, and I did not know racism as a child, in Hoboken. It happened all around me, but the people we associated with, you didn't experience it. Like with the cheerleaders -- It was there because it was always institutionalized, but the cheerleaders -- I taught the cheers, but I couldn't be on the cheerleader's squad. I always thought it was because I was tall and thin, but looking back over the history of it, I'm not so sure. I'm really not so sure. But my best memory of Hoboken is Halloween. I loved Halloween. Being a mile-square city, we would go trick-or-treating from one end of Hoboken to the other. We would go trick-or-treating with pillow cases, because plastic bags broke -- sorry. We didn't have plastic bags. Paper bags broke. So we would have pillow cases, and you would load two or three pillow cases into one pillow case, and by the time you got back you had three or four pillow cases full of candy -- or whatever.

It was such a different time. It was safe. I remember always having friends all over town. There was no place in Hoboken that I could not go. Right now, I don't feel so safe with my daughter. I can't. She likes to hang down at this end of town, but I'm very leery, because there are so many things that can happen now. There was always safety there. I thought it was the safest place in town. [Long pause] Well, there a reason it was safe, I think. I also remember the police department was different. I remember (and I'm sure I'm going to get somebody in trouble, but they're retired now, so it doesn't matter, but) the police department -- we would be able to call up the police. I used to hang out in Jersey City as a young teenager, seventeen, eighteen years old, and I remember calling the police station, to whoever was on the desk, and tell them to call the Jersey City police department, so the Jersey City police department would give us a ride to the Hoboken line, and the Hoboken police would pick us up and take us home.

So that's the difference in the relationships we had then. Now it's still a small town, but it's too big. You don't even know your neighbors. We knew everybody, everybody knew everybody. Kids would get into things, and before you got home your family knew about it.

I remember having those kinds of relationships from one end of town to the other.

RF: Is that what you meant when you said it was safe? Or -- no? Do you want to talk about that?

HM: I know.

DM: No, it was safe.

I remember school -- the only really horrible memory of have -- I have two horrible memories of Hoboken. Both of them happened in school. I remember being in kindergarten -- this is actually the earliest memory I have. I remember being in kindergarten, and the teacher's name (and she can get published, because I still haven't forgiven her) was "Miss de Palma." We were drawing, we were doing cutouts of windmills. I drew it and I was ready to cut it, and she had said, "Don't cut it out until everybody is finished." But an assistant came to me and told me to go ahead, that I could cut, "You're finished, everything's perfect." I cut it out, and the woman slapped me in my face. I will never forget that, as long as I live.

HM: Was it common for kids to be hit?

DM: I had never been hit in my life. That was the first time I had ever been hit -- that I can recall. I had never been hit.

HM: But some schools did that.

RF: Not for cutting out a windmill.

HM: I'm just thinking about -- when we were kids we moved to England, and it was really common. Teachers actually had paddles. I had heard that there was a time period -- I don't know when that was -- maybe not in Hoboken.

DM: I think -- what do they call it? Corporeal punishment? -- was there, but I had never experienced anything like that.

HM: That's extreme for what you did.

RF: It was usually directed at boys, who were doing stuff that was really out of line.

DM: Right. But that was a horrible memory.

RF: Did you tell your parents?

DM: Well, I went and got my daddy, and my daddy came back and slapped her on her face. I got kicked out of school in kindergarten.

HM: Good for him, though, for standing up for you.

DM: At that time, he was there. Our family didn't stay together. I think he left when I was about seven or so, seven or nine or something like that. But another time -- the other bad memory, also in school -- I don't know what I did. I probably did something to Mr. Gallagher. I don't know what I did to him, but he pulled my hair. I thought he would have learned from Miss DePalma not to do that, but he didn't. I didn't tell my mother or my father that time. That time I told my big brother, and my big brother came to school and threw him through the blackboard.

RF: But the other time you were actually removed from school?

DM: I was removed from school in kindergarten, and I was removed from the Hoboken school system completely after the second incident. I left, and I went to Lincoln. I went to Lincoln in 1968.

RF: In Jersey City.

DM: Yes.

RF: That's sort of unusual.

DM: Well, I don't know if that was a political thing going on at the time, because, like you say, that was 1968, and there was a lot happening in Hoboken at that time. My mother was very protective, and I think it was a safety thing for me. She was concerned about my safety at that point, and she took me out of the school and sent me to Lincoln. I went to stay with my father for a year. I did a year at Lincoln, then it was over. I was back at Hoboken High.

RF: So was it your sense that your parents removed you from those situations? Or was it --

DM: No, I was suspended from Rue, David A. Rue, in kindergarten. I remember that. I was suspended -- they took me out of school. Yes. I don't know how long I stayed out. I don't know what happened to my father. I know my brother was arrested. This was seventh or eighth grade. I think it was eighth grade. But I can't remember how long he stayed in jail, or anything like that. I know he was arrested for Mr. Gallagher.

RF: Then what did your parents do? They must have heard about it.

DM: Well, Sonny had already handled it. I don't know. I don't remember. You know how you have certain, distinct memories. I can see that. As I'm talking to you, I can see that. I see him pulling my hair, and it was over a math problem, too. I'm looking at that board now. It was over a math problem, and I see him pulling my hair because I didn't answer that fast enough, and he thought I should know the answer.

My brother was an interesting person, in and of himself, but he was very protective of me. He was the kind of person who, if I called him, he was coming, and he's going to hit you first and ask questions later. I just told him that this man pulled my hair. I didn't go to my parents, I went directly to his house and got him. What they did after that, I don't know. The next thing I know, I was out of Demarest and in Lincoln. I don't remember being upset about it. The only thing about it is it cheated out of a graduation.

HM: And that's sad, because you'd known all these people growing up.

DM: But we got back together when we got to high school.

HM: Were your parents politically involved at all?

DM: My mother was extremely active. The interesting thing about that is, women back then were behind the scenes.

If you talk to many old-time Hobokeners, like Tom [Olivieri], when he signed my sister's book, "I'll always remember and love your mother." They did a lot of work together. She worked very much with Joanne Jackson and Leo Smith in the NAACP. She was very involved in Model Cities. At that time Mt. Olive Church was very involved in civic responsibility.

RF: Mt. Olive.

DM: Mt. Olive, yes. Mt. Olive Baptist Church. She was a tireless advocate, she really was. She was involved in everything. She was involved in education in a big way, especially early childhood education. She was a strong proponent of that.

RF: And were those energies directed more toward the plight of African-Americans in Hoboken?

DM: Yes. Yes. She was involved in it, and the civil rights movement, a lot. She worked a lot with city officials. They were very involved. It bothers me, because, as a child, it wasn't important to me. I was just living my life. She protected us from everything. We didn't

care. We just went to school and played. But when I look back on it, I know -- I remember sitting down at NAACP meetings, on the floor, while they were going over different strategies. Also, in the Model Cities offices, when they were down on First Street. Both offices were on First Street, with her and Miss Jackson and several other ladies -- Mamie Franklin and Sarah Smith. Of course, the husbands, especially Leo -- he was very vocal and very prominent in the NAACP, so he would do all the speaking, and the ladies would do all the behind-the-scenes work.

So it's not documented. Sometimes it's very sad for me when I see them talking -- well, not them, but anybody -- talking about certain events in Hoboken, and they forget to mention my mother's name. And I think, "Well, she was there, too. She did this and that."

HM: Now her married --

DM: Her married name was Richardson.

HM: The second marriage.

DM: The first marriage was Richardson. She was not married to my father.

HM: You know, I'm going to look. Maybe she's on file. The Jersey City Public Library has a pretty good index of *The Jersey Journal*, people mentioned in it. I go there every week for this other project. I'll look, and see if she's in there. Because if she's in there --

DM: She might be.

HM: You never know.

DM: I do know it was published when she graduated from Bank Street. I know that was published somewhere. Right now, with my own project that I was working on -- when my mom totally retired, she moved to Florida with my niece, and took all her documents with her. My niece has these documents. I'm waiting for her to send them to me.

HM: Now Bank Street has a reputation as a very progressive place.

DM: It was very progressive.

RF: How did she find that school? Do you know?

DM: Dana. Through Daycare 100. She went through the school.

HM: Bank Street came out of a whole -- social work schools have a range of how they approach society, and it was considered one of the most progressive.

DM: It changed the way she did a lot of things. My mom was very meek. You could not hear her voice. You would never know if she was angry. She was very soft-spoken. But she was made of steel inside.

HM: How did she know Tom? Or how did he know her?

DM: Well, Tom is a rent advocate -- rent control?

HM: Yes.

DM: So probably through rent control.

Probably Applied Housing or something like that, back then. They worked together. I wanted to sit down and talk to him, but I didn't want to take his moment at that time. But I'm sure he has a lot -- because they worked together on a lot of different things, a lot of things.

HM: We could do another interview with him, to find out some more stuff.

DM: Right. Yes.

HM: That's the great thing, as you talk to people who have been in Hoboken a long time. All these names start to pop up over and over, and we're learning a lot from that.

Should we go to the Café Zanzibar, or should we stay --

RF: I was going to ask you a little bit about the church. The church has been there -- Before they were on Washington Street, where were they located?

DM: The church has also been in several locations in Hoboken. I certainly didn't bring church documents, but that's documented. They were in several different locations, but it started at 900 Clinton Street. It was an Episcopal church.

RF: Is it still there? Near the high school?

DM: It's the one near the high school. But whatever the name of that church -- it's not the same name. Whatever the name of that church was then, I can definitely document that for you, because --

HM: It's the evangelical church now isn't it?

RF: Norwegian or --

DM: -- Swedish, or something like that.

RF: On the corner.

DM: But black people in Hoboken used to worship at that church, and at a certain time, in 1909, we decided we wanted to have our own church. The First Baptist Church of Hoboken was what it was called, and we were the First Baptist Church of Hoboken -- I don't know whether they put "colored" -- but the name -- people kept getting confused between the two names of the two churches. It caused some confusion, so at that time we changed our name to Mt. Olive Baptist Church of Hoboken.

RF: So where were you after that?

DM: We left Clinton Street and went to -- I don't want to give you the exact name, because I can give you a piece of paper with that on it. I have exactly -- to me, when they read the church history, it's --

RF: I know. You gloss over it.

DM: Yes, I gloss over it until we get to the part where I was born.

HM: Of course.

DM: So we were actually at 460 Adams Street; we were at Clinton Street; then 67 Jefferson Street and back again. But we bought our first building, the first property, at 67-69 Jefferson Street. That was purchased, I believe, in the '30s. I do have the deeds to that, so I could provide that. We stayed at 67 Jefferson Street until it became a little too small. Then we bought 721 Washington Street -- 719, not 721 -- Washington Street, in 1968.

RF: And there had been a fire there, previously?

DM: The fire was in 1979.

RF: So it was under your watch, the fire.

DM: Under my family's watch. I wasn't -- actually I was -- I don't know where I was in '79.

RF: I somehow thought it was the previous congregation.

DM: No. Same congregation.

HM: Actually, there's a lot of documentation of that fire, visually.

DM: Visually, yes. Yes, I guess. We had to fight to rebuild it. They didn't want to let us rebuild it.

RF: They wanted to demolish that.

HM: I'm sure.

DM: They probably still do, but --

RF: How much of a congregation is there?

DM: Right now we have only about 100 people. To me, I feel it's like a new church, almost, because all of our people (and I guess this is just a sign of progress) moved away, or they're so much older, and the young people, my generation -- One of the reasons I'm sitting here doing this with you, and all of the things I do with the church, is that I feel my generation dropped the ball. I left there, I guess, right after high school. I would only come in when my mother called me to come. She had "days." I do the same thing now, with my cousins and

family who don't go to church. "You gotta come to church today. I've got to have this amount of money." But she would call me (I moved to Cherry Hill) and say, "I need X amount of dollars" for whatever program was going on. And, "Oh, by the way. You have to bring it in person." So those were the days that I was there.

But now, when I came back to Hoboken -- I came back to north Jersey. I was living in south Jersey in 1996. I came into Hoboken -- I hadn't been in Hoboken in years -- and I was appalled at what I saw. I just realized that part of it was my fault, because I left. Instead of staying here to do what I was taught to do, I walked away. It was depressing. If you could leave, you left. Now it's so hard, because it's unbelievable. The whole African-American community here is devastating to me. Ninety-percent of it is. It's very difficult.

HM: When you talk about you were appalled -
- ?

DM: To have the whole community in one section of town blew my mind. I couldn't understand that. I remember when we -- the church, the history is so intertwined, and I'm rambling and I don't want to do it --

HM: No, you're not rambling at all.

DM: -- but it's all mixed. Because when the church moved to 69 Jefferson Street, we had the church and what would have been the rectory next door, but we moved into that building, to that house. That's where I spent my teenage years, in that house. Even though it was rented, it was like having your own house. But when I was eighteen years old, after I graduated from high school, the Hoboken Housing Authority didn't have -- if there were five black families there, I would be surprised. I may be wrong, because this is not scientific research I'm doing right now, but there were very few. I remember when I moved into an apartment there, I was excited to be there. I remember that when my son was born -- my son was born when I was eighteen, I was eighteen or nineteen when he was born. I don't know -- but I remember he couldn't sleep inside. He just did not like -- he would not go to sleep in the house. I would take him outside, to the front of the house. The house used to have flowers, at 540 Marshall Drive. The house was flowers all around the front of the house, and benches were out there. I literally would go outside, in pajamas, and have my son, rocking the carriage, until he

went to sleep. Sometimes that took two or three hours. But that was where he wanted to sleep, out in the air, especially in the summertime. Now, the thought of even -- I get in my car. I live in housing. I get out of my car, I go to my house, I get into my car, and I go wherever I'm going, I don't -- It's very difficult for me to see how they do that now. It's unbelievable.

But getting back to the church -- I'm sorry --

HM: No, no, no.

DM: In 1968, the church moved to Washington Street. We stayed there until '79 -- as I said, until the fire. The rebuilding -- we were back in the church in 1981. It took about a year and a half. But to show you the commitment of the community, even at that time, while officially they fought us every which way (we literally had to go to court to get a permit, to rebuild our church), the community, especially the Catholic community, was very supportive. You have our history -- we have the documents in the church history, what's left of it -- of where the different churches did fundraisers and everything, to help us rebuild it.

RF: Did insurance help with a lot of it?

DM: Insurance helped with it but not a lot of it, because, unfortunately, it was underinsured. We had to take out a mortgage on the property. As a matter of fact, we took out several mortgages on the property. It was a thirty-year mortgage and we paid it off in 2003, so we paid it off in approximately twenty years, I think. Something like that. So we were able to pay it off. And it was a lot of money.

RF: It would be a lot more now.

DM: Now it's properly insured, trust me. It's properly insured now. We wouldn't have to do that right now.

RF: So let's say there is a 100-people congregation. Do half live in Hoboken? I get the sense that a lot of the people don' live in Hoboken.

DM: That's true. Would I say half? Yes, I would say about half of them are Hoboken residents.

HM: Do you feel that some of it is -- I always feel that even though the town is so small, people really lock down into their neighborhood, this really small little piece of turf. I wonder, because the church is on Washington Street --

DM: No.

HM: -- African-Americans have been pushed over, that it just seems so far?

DM: No.

HM: Or is it a disconnect from the church?

DM: I think that -- well, if I had the answer to that one, as I told you before, I would be able to fix it.

There is never one answer to a situation. That would be part of it, but I don't really think that's all of it. I think religion, in and of itself, is in crisis. Again, like I said, my generation dropped the ball. With my son, I told my son, "Well, you can -- " I taught

him every religion under the sun, "and you can choose the one that you want," which is not the right way to do things. You can choose when you get to be an adult, but you need to have a strong foundation. I thank God every day for my foundation, because it works when you need it to work.

I think that's part of it. I think, definitely, the space between the church and the community -- but not really, because we have two vans. We have vans to pick you up and take you home, everywhere. I really do think it's upwardly mobile people leaving. My biggest fear is that so many more people, even the people who come from out of town -- I have people come in from Pennsylvania to church every Sunday. My pastor comes from Englewood. I'm concerned about that. It's that kind of thing. I think younger people view religion a little bit differently than older people. One of the struggles we have in the church is trying to connect the old ways with the new. I think that's part of the problem. Another part of the problem is -- that fire scared a lot of people. It really, truly did. From that time on there has been a decline.

Even now I run into -- because, again, I'm quite vocal, and I'm quite an activist at heart, and when I see things that are wrong, I'm going to say that they're wrong. I have some members of my church who really are

afraid when I speak out on certain issues. That fear is there, and Hoboken, unfortunately -- I did a youth forum after that accident in the river, and I thought I was dealing with the anger of children. My purpose was to calm children down; to let them know that things are happening. You don't see them happening, but this is just not being accepted. Things are going done behind the scenes, and you just have to protect yourself. Also, to let them know how you have to deal with the police. There's a certain way you have to do this. You just can't be yellin' and screamin' at police. They're already in a stressful situation, regardless of what happened. This is a stressful situation, so you can't be confronting police.

This was my goal. There was a point in there when I was listening to people with my mouth wide open. I couldn't say a word. I was standing in the front of the church with my mouth wide open, because the level of fear was -- I don't understand it. I've never seen that. I've never experienced it. Like I told you, my early relationship, the way I grew up -- Even now, that boggles my mind. I call the Hoboken police department with homework questions. I'm a criminal justice major. I call up there and have somebody give me the answer if I don't know it. I don't understand that fear.

But more than anything in the community is fear. A lot of people don't want to come out of the projects. They won't. And one of the reasons I do everything I do, I do it in my church, because it's like this is our city. This is not our projects, this is our city. Sometimes you really just have to force people.

HM: They feel threatened.

DM: They feel very threatened. Yes. They feel very threatened. And some of it is really justified, I have to say, when you have kids -- When we were children, you had groups of kids going everywhere. We were mobs. We went twenty deep. The only difference is, when I was a kid there was no race divide. My favorite friends were out there when -- The building, when I was eleven-twelve, early teens, was what is now the Frank Sinatra Museum. I lived in that house when it burned down. But we went all over, the group of kids I hung out with. Nobody bothered us. We would fight each other. We had fights. Not that we would fight each other, we'd fight other groups, but you weren't called a gang. You didn't have to worry about being arrested. And even if you got picked up by the police, you were gonna get either disciplined by the police, or sent home, because the

police, they were close to your family, like they were to mine, and "there were cops that could whip me." They didn't, of course, they never did --

RF: They'd call your parents.

DM: Yes. Probably my mother. They would call. Captain Keily was wonderful. He would call for whatever. It was different. Now the kids, if they go to the park, automatically the police are being called, "There's a bunch of kids here." If they get into a fight, "they're making terroristic threats." It's all kinds of -- there's too many laws.

RF: They've ratcheted it up.

DM: Yes. They've ratcheted it up so that behavior that was normal for teenagers -- joyriding -- not something I did, but it's one of my favorites to talk about. Because joyriding is now carjacking. It's much more dangerous, and I'm not saying it's not dangerous, but a lot of times it's the same thing that it was, but depending on where you are and who you are, the charge is going to be different.

HM: Do you think it's now all the money that came into town; that that's part of it, too? The changes?

DM: I don't put it on money. I put it on different cultures. You know, young people -- I don't knock money at all. Make it if you can, I don't care who you are. I don't mind that. But I think they come from a different culture. You know, everybody who comes to Hoboken loves Hoboken -- "Hoboken is clean, Hoboken is this, Hoboken is that" -- and the first thing they want to do is change it. My daughter goes to Elysian Charter School, and we just went through a situation with the school where the head teacher -- the woman who founded the school is no longer the head teacher, and one of the problems was the new parents -- the older parents -- my daughter was there from the second year of the school starting -- the older parents don't -- the new parents don't understand the Elysian way.

RF: Which isn't that old, either.

DM: Right. It's not even that old. This is a new structure. But they're not that old, either, but it's

the alternative. They get very nervous. They loved what they found when they came here, but all of a sudden -- I remember we used to have (and again, this is not that long ago), at every affair or function the school had, parents would contribute a dish. Elysian functions, even if it was just a breakfast for the kids in the morning, would have food stretched from one end of this conference table to the other, and you could have anything you wanted. You could have cooked food -- bacon and eggs -- anything, pastries. Now it's fruit and pastries and things like that. Oh, no peanut butter. We have one child in our school -- and I love him. I love him dearly, and he's always been protected. He's never gotten sick in all the years that I've known him -- but just the fact that he is allergic to peanuts. They ask us not to bring anything containing peanuts to school functions.

HM: They're worried about a lawsuit.

DM: No, it's not the school. It's the parents. It's the parents on health food. "This is not healthy. That is not healthy. Why are you giving them -- " At Halloween, we couldn't give out candy.

HM: Oh, please.

RF: I thought they wanted parent involvement.

DM: Involvement, right. But now you have -- the original concept was one way -- Now my daughter's class is the last class from the original concept, so I'm actually looking forward to graduation next year. I don't know, but it's that concept. The new people, newcomers, don't think in terms of community. They say they want community, they say they come to Hoboken because Hoboken is such a diverse city, but they are actually afraid of diversity.

RF: So it's not that they don't want to put the time in? You think it's more fear?

DM: I think it's fear. I really do. There was another study that --

RF: Fear of what? Fear of what?

DM: Difference. Cultural differences.

HM: I think it's the consumerist model; that it's about you enter a situation so you can get the maximum for yourself and your kids. In fact, it's not a contributing ethic, it's a consumer ethic.

DM: Right.

HM: That's the problem I have with --

DM: -- Hoboken.

HM: Well, it is, because I think you join a community, you don't keep asking it to give you things. You contribute. That's the difference. I'm not sure whether it was like that when I came or not, but that's where I separate from people who come in and make demands.

DM: Well, you know, that's true. I can say we keep going in circles, but take the church, for instance. We used to do this thing called the Chinese Auction. All the churches in Hoboken were involved in this -- St. Peter & Paul, St. Matthew's, St. Ann's, St. Francis -- we would all get together, and we would have an

international smorgasbord, to go along with the Chinese Auction. We all came together as a community. We would go to the stores (and at the time it was only Washington Street and First Street, basically all Washington Street), and we would go to the stores. All the stores knew when you were coming, and all the stores contributed to whatever it was. It didn't make any difference what it was, because if you know what a Chinese Auction is, it's like you get tickets when you come in the door. You might pay \$2.00 for twenty tickets, then you put your little ticket in the basket. We would just switch stuff. We would take stuff out of our houses, everybody -- we'd be switching stuff around, and whatever was new, the stores all up and down the avenue would donate. Now all the stores up and down the avenue have on them "No Soliciting" signs. So that's a difference. I think the biggest thing I see is that people are not very friendly at all, and very, very rude. As a driver (I'm not a walker), as a driver I have never seen people who have so much faith in another person's brakes in my life. Everything is "all about me." They say that the '70s was the me-generation, but I think --

HM: These are people who were brought up under Ronald Reagan. You should realize that. You can't get me started.

DM: That's the attitude. Yes. I was in the bank the other day and this kid -- he had to be about twenty years old, twenty-one, twenty-two years old -- and he was closing out one CD and opening up another CD, moving "money" this way and that way. I'm looking at this kid and I'm thinking, "Well, Jesus, whose money are you spending? Is it yours?"

We have New York right here, and New York is so expensive. I don't know. Money could be it. But I'm not one who looks at money as the root of all evil.

HM: I don't mean it that way. I just sort of meant that some people use it to separate them from other people.

DM: Hoboken is unique in this way. It doesn't work unless the other person allows it to work. For instance, don't tell me there's anyplace in Hoboken that I can't go. It's not happening. This is Hoboken. You do have to do things in a certain way, like normally I would never

eat outside. But whenever I eat at one of the restaurants on Washington Street, I sit outside, weather permitting, so you know there's black people here. You make little adjustments like this. Every now and then I have to fight with whoever's in City Hall (lately it's been Mr. Roberts, but we're friends again now). But you have to say it. To me, Hoboken tends to ignore its black community because it's not going to get that money otherwise. So it's trying to pull the money in, and in doing so, you're changing the face of the community. And we need the money, because nobody wants to pay taxes, higher taxes. What's going to be interesting is if we "lose the Abbott money." That's what I'm watching for. Then you'll see how valuable the other half of your community is to you.

HM: That's true.

Shall we talk about ^{club}~~Cafe~~ Zanzibar?

DM: Okay. Zanzibar was purchased in 1961 by James Smith and Charles McNeil. James Smith (we called him Zimp, and I'm going to say this many times, so it's going to be Zimp), he already owned the club at 460 Newark Street, which, if I'm not mistaken, was called Zimp's at the time. Most of his bars were called Zimp's, over the

years. He and Charles were good friends, and as partners, bought the Zanzibar. They stayed together in business, I think, until 1963. I have that documentation, and I can look it up for you. But Charles bought Zimp out, and the name became Zanzibar, Club Zanzibar.

HM: Was it called Zimp's when they were together?

DM: I think when they started, it started out as Zimp's. I don't think it opened as the Zanzibar.

HM: And the location?

DM: Then again, I'm not sure. It was always at 601 First Street, and I'm really not sure. Because when I look at the first pictures --

HM: -- it doesn't say Zimp's?

DM: No. It says Zanzibar. I think they might have opened it as the Zanzibar. But I know we later had that name. We tried to -- he thought he was having that name -- that was the first site.

HM: How did they pick that name? Do you know?

DM: Well, its connection to Africa. He liked that name. My husband liked that name, Zanzibar. Also, they probably had the movie out at the time. Does something with Bob Hope sound good? I don't know. That's a guess.

HM: Did Charles -- had he operated any kind of club before?

DM: No.

HM: So James -- Zimp -- had done it. Did he call himself Zimp?

DM: We called him Zimp. Everybody called him Zimp.

HM: Where was that from?

DM: I have no idea. He's alive. I'll ask him.

HM: Okay. I always wonder about the origin of nicknames -- and Hoboken's famous for them, I must say.

DM: Oh, yes. We have quite a few.

HM: And did Charles have a nickname?

DM: Everybody always called him Charlie McNeil. Charlie McNeil, or Charles McNeil. They always used both names.

HM: And what did he do before he owned the club?

DM: He was a truck driver.

HM: Did he keep driving trucks?

DM: No. That's another one of those stories where life intervenes. He actually was an owner-operator for a while. He was the first (which is a very interesting

story), he was the first African-American driver for a company that was called Cooper Jarrett. Cooper Jarrett, at the time (and I would really have to look at the records, to give you the exact date, but), it was the biggest trucking company in this area. How he got the job was he was working in the union hall -- they call it "shaping" the halls? --

HM: Uh huh.

DM: -- and he had had an argument with one of the guys, the bosses there. I feel so bad that I don't remember his name. He smoked a big cigar. I remember that story. (Charles told me all these stories.) He and the guy had a fight, and the guy told him not to come back. But when he told him, he didn't look him in his eye, so Charles knew he was really scared. So he came back the next day and the man told him he couldn't work, that he'd have to go see the union boss. So he did. He was sitting in the office.

But before I say that, I have to step back a bit. When he was driving, he used to drive with a good friend of his. They used to meet, wherever they would drop loads together -- they would have lunch together. One would bring the sardines and the other one would bring pork-and-

beans, and they would sit down and have sardines and pork-and-beans together, and tell stories. And the guy told him, "One day I'm gonna be president of this union." Charles used to say, "Yeah, and one day I'm gonna be president of the United States." So when he walked into that office that day, he saw this gentleman there, and he said, "What're you doin' here? Are you in trouble, too?" And he said, "No. I'm the president of this union. What's goin' on? What's happenin'."

He told him what was happening. He said, "Well, what do you want to do?" He said, "I want to work, but I don't want to work for --" It was Red Star then, which was not a good company, with broken-down trucks, etc. He said, "I want to work for Cooper Jarrett." He said, "Okay. You got it." The guy's name was Tony Pro.

HM: Oh, whoa. Whoa. Whoa.

DM: He sent him over to Cooper Jarrett, and they wouldn't let him work the first day he went there. They said, "You go in the room, we'll get you a truck in a little while." But they didn't have black drivers, so he sat there. He sat there all day long, and they said, "Okay. You can go home now." The next day it was the same thing.

The third day Charles went back and told Tony, Tony picked up the phone --

RF: They hadn't gotten the message.

DM: They hadn't gotten the message. They put him in the truck. His first load they sent him to New York. He was getting ready to go through the Holland Tunnel, the Port Authority police stopped him -- because they thought he had stolen the truck, because they knew that no black drivers drove for Cooper Jarrett. Now that's a true story.

RF: That's a good one.

HM: So that's prior to 1963?

DM: Prior to 1963. He drove a truck from -- well, he drove truck for nine years and six months. I can tell you that for a fact. And Cooper Jarrett was in the middle there, someplace -- probably '56 or '58. I'm not sure.

HM: Is he Hoboken born?

DM: Actually, no. He was born in Atmore, Alabama.

HM: And when did he come?

DM: He didn't come to Hoboken. He came to Jersey City. He came to Hoboken with the Zanzibar. He'd never lived here.

HM: And why did he want to do that? Do you know?

DM: I think he always liked entertainers. He really did like entertainers. He liked entertainers and entertainment.

HM: And did he model it after a separate idea, or did he model it after other clubs?

DM: Well, at the time most clubs, they were generally the same thing. You had a bar in the front, and you had a hall in the back. That was just a general -- when

we moved into -- the location was 601 First Street, so the location was already there.

RF: It had been a club previously.

DM: Yes. Speaking of clubs previously -- that's where Frankie used to sing.

RF: Do you remember the name of the other club?

DM: It started with an "S." Well, you know, that's in the [Sinatra] museum. They have that. They tell that story all the time -- that was the club that Frank Sinatra used to sing in, on stage.

HM: How did they go about getting people to sing there? It wasn't just singers.

DM: It was all kinds of entertainment, all different -- singers, dancers, comedians. Whoever worked in the Apollo -- Charles was a friend of Jimmy Evans. They were business associates and friends. Jimmy Evans was a promoter at the time, and he had lots of acts. Promoters

are always looking to put their acts in more than one location. The Zanzibar was unique to the African-American community for two reasons at the time. One, in the surrounding areas -- Jersey City, Union City -- bars closed at 2:00. Hoboken bars closed at 3:00, so you had an extra hour. Two, women were not allowed, especially in Jersey City. They were not allowed to sit at a bar, but they could go to the hall. In most bars in Jersey City, there were some -- of course, we're not interested in Jersey City history right now, but there were several that did have nightclubs, also, but they closed at 2:00. So they would leave the Jersey City clubs and come to Hoboken. At that time there was the Zanzibar, the "88" Club, and Zimp's Bar. There was no hall in Zimp's. The shows at the Apollo would end by -- well, you would usually have two shows at the Apollo, but the latest show was over at 1:00. So the first night of that act at the Apollo, they would leave the Apollo and come to the Zanzibar, or we'd book them the following week. We had some of everybody there.

I'm sure you've heard of the time the Chitlin circuit -- well, the Zanzibar was one of the last stops on the Chitlin circuit. You left the Zanzibar, and you headed back wherever you came from.

RF: Right. And the club ran until --

DM: We closed in 1981. It was almost exactly twenty years. The entertainment -- the business died. Drugs played a part. Again, everything has more than one cause, but drugs -- people stopped coming to bars and started taking drugs. The bars changed their hours in Jersey City from 2:00 to 3:00, and they allowed women in the bar, so that hurt our business. It was kind of slow after that.

Again, another one of those horror stories. We wound up having to sue the city because they locked our doors. But that's okay.

HM: Why did they --

DM: Because they wanted the property.

RF: Did they find violations?

DM: No, no. Actually, again -- On the one hand, when I say I love Hoboken, it's really hard to tell the truth about Hoboken, because you don't want to -- you really don't want to --

These are public records, really, if you look at it. But it's like I don't always want to be the one fighting or saying negative things about Hoboken. But the fact remains that when gentrification first started, we were a victim of that first wave of gentrification. Charles used to have lots of friends in City Hall, and they would tell him things. One of the things they would tell him was that, "Why are you paying taxes on this building, when you can rent this building from the city?" And as smart as he was, he was so honest. He just didn't understand life. He just didn't -- he told the truth, and he expected everybody else to tell the truth. And he let that building go, for taxes.

Now when he did that -- this was about '76 or '77, maybe even earlier. I'm sure I have those records, too. Maybe even earlier than that -- but he paid rent to the city for all that time. Then, when we had a discussion -- I actually remember having this discussion with him. We were not married at that time, he was married to somebody else. But I remember having a discussion, and telling him, "You know, you really need to get this building back, because Hoboken is changing." He said, "No, I talked to this one and I talked to that one" -- still very popular people here in Hoboken -- "and they said, 'Don't worry

about it.' I don't have to worry. I have years before I have to worry about that." And, of course, when the tax sale happened, the amount of money was so high we couldn't afford the property. He continued to rent for a while, but they didn't want the bar there. This was when they moved bars out of Hoboken, and we were fighting that. One day they just came and put the lock on the door. The only thing was, they didn't do it legally, so we end up suing the city and they had to pay. So it wasn't all bad.

HM: Good.

DM: Which is why, when I say some of us could just get up and leave, we were able to just leave.

RF: So you got this address, the city seizes the property for taxes, but he continues to stay there, renting from the city --

HM: -- the city. The city had become a property owner.

DM: Right. Exactly.

RF: It's a little unusual to rent --

HM: What a game, though.

DM: That was a big game. It still is a big game.

RF: There's a lien on it, and when the tax sale happened --

DM: It wasn't that it was so much money. It was only, if I remember correctly -- again, we're talking about in the '70s -- but if I remember correctly it was not out -- they sold it in lots. They wouldn't sell --

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DM: --the Zanzibar. They sold 601 and 603 First Street. They wouldn't split it, and let him buy 601. They wanted it. There were things happening at that time.

RF: Right. And what happened to the property afterwards?

DM: It became condos. "OSC" Electronics moved in.

RF: Okay. That early, '81?

DM: Yes. Well, yes. Almost immediately.

HM: So let's get back to the life of the club. When we were walking to the museum and we were inside, I said, "Boy, I would love to recreate it." Can you tell me what it was like inside?

DM: Well, I can show you some of -- The thing is, I can't show you the back hall, because, like I said, we were taking pictures of people.

HM: Well, actually, if you want to just go on to the pictures, we'll get at this --

DM: That's even in the later years. Let's start with some of the earlier ones. Our famous, our most famous was -- Well, she's not the most famous, but she started her career in the Zanzibar, Millie Jackson. In the black community everybody knows who she is. She's an

entertainer, and we saw her, not at the Apollo but at a club in Brooklyn --

HM: [looking at photos] This is so cool.

DM: I've been working out of two files.
This is Millie, later, today.

HM: When did you get involved with the Zanzibar?

DM: I got involved with the Zanzibar -- My sister used to hang out there. Even as a child, it was always there. You know, you weren't allowed to go in there, but they sold food, so you could in to buy food. So when I was about fifteen or sixteen years old, I would go into the Zanzibar to buy whatever dinners they were selling, and before -- the hall is here, the front bar is there. You would go in a side door here, and the kitchen is right here, so you're standing there, but every time the back door opens, you're watching whatever show's going on, and you see acts coming and going. That's my first memory of it. I was about fifteen or sixteen years old. I didn't meet my husband until, I guess, about '71 or '72. I was always

coming from school with my sister, who was coming from work. Her name is Marilyn Richardson, and she worked at the employment agency in Jersey City. I was at H.C.C, one of the campuses over there, so we would come back together to Hoboken, and she was stopping in the Zanzibar every day. Later on, I would go in there, and it was always fascinating to me.

When I was right out of high school, I used to work for the coat company, the Alorna Coat Company, and they used to have us modeling coats. They would take us to New York to do -- well, not all of us, but I was tall and thin at the time -- so they would take me to New York to the show room, and I would model coats over there. I did a fashion show there, and it was really exciting and really fascinating to me. But, it was also scary. I knew it was too exciting. It was just too much excitement for me. I couldn't take it at the time (I probably still couldn't take it), but it was definitely too much at the time, but I knew then that I could not model. But when I was in the Zanzibar with my sister, and I would watch the barmaids, or the bartenders, going up and down that bar, it was like modeling without the pressure of modeling. So I wanted to work at the bar, and I did. That's how I got involved in it. I started working as a waitress in the back. And, of

course, the law changed. It used to be twenty-one, and at first I couldn't work outside. They would let me work, supposedly serving food, but I was serving everything. But I was serving food. Then when the law changed, I started serving whiskey.

[looking at photos] Now, I don't know -- That's Millie, that's me. I don't know these names. This is just some of the pictures. Those are some of the acts. I have tons of different pictures, but the names would not be familiar. I just brought that one because I can't remember who he is either. The way he's doing it, I thought it was a cute picture with the drummer, so I brought them.

HM: I'm just trying to think -- now these performers, would they go on to, let's say, Newark or Atlantic City? After Hoboken?

DM: Newark, they would go, because once you left New York, you headed back all over the country. Atlantic City. Yes. They were everywhere. These guys were all over.

HM: I'm thinking of getting names. The Newark library has an incredible archive. We could match some of these people.

DM: Oh. Okay. Some of them went on to become quite famous, some didn't.

HM: They've got a very good archive of African-American musicians in New Jersey, especially Newark. [looking at photos] Now is this the mural you were talking about?

DM: The only picture I have of that mural, or piece of that mural. There was a cocktail sip going on there one day.

HM: Who did that? Do you know?

DM: Actually, I believe her name was -- I believe Joan Butler did this, her group was sponsoring the event. I really do think she did it. I might be wrong, but I think Joan -- that's a picture of part of the mural.

HM: Oh, wow. Now who did the mural? Do you know?

DM: I don't know his name. He was out of Jersey City.

It went all the way around the room. The room was huge. It held 220 people. Here's another side. It gives you another idea. It was all African, a jungle motif. And the newer ones -- these are after the remodeling, the front pictures. This is an old one. This is the little door. I told you, the kitchen was right there. Charles would sit there, Charles with his first wife, "Ollie."

HM: It's fancy. Was there a dress code?

DM: O-o-o-h, yes.

HM: Because you see people --

DM: Well, people got dressed. You got dressed to go to the Zanzibar. That's one of the things that, when the clubs changed, we tried to switch from a nightclub to a more community-based clubs, and that was one of the things that hurt us; because they thought we were

snobs. We weren't, but we thought we were snobs. Not only was there a dress code, but there was a certain mode of behavior that was "automatic." That's the first one --

HM: Well, you tried to create an atmosphere.

DM: Atmosphere. But it was set up -- I'm trying to -- bits and pieces. [Looking at photos] That's why I brought it. This is the before the remodeling. We had eleven bar stools down the front of that bar, and another one behind it.

RF: Most of your patrons would be African-Americans?

DM: Yes -- except for Marty and his crew.

RF: Oh, really?

DM: Yes. We were very close. The community -- when I talk about Hoboken like that, I can tell you that the three bars were always -- we had the Casellas -- Marty's -- on one corner. It's called "The Den" now, but --

RF: From Casella's, where were you?

DM: On the next corner.

RF: One block over, or --

DM: First and Monroe, one block down.

HM: Was there any kind of association among
bar owners?

DM: We had all kinds of interaction with each other, yes. In the black bars, we used to do what was called round-robins, which means that this week I'm at your spot, and I have to spend X-amount of dollars. Next week -- we'd go to different spots. So each bar owner or his representative -- say if there were ten members in the association, and the fee was \$100, you knew that night you were going to make \$1,000, so that was automatic. To stay in the association, you never spent less than that \$100. You quite frequently spent much more, because the bar owners were all -- you know, they were bar owners, so they'd want to outdo each other.

RF: Sure, sure. Were the others black bars?

DM: In Hoboken it was Zimp's and the Zanzibar.
Woody's -- the bar is still there. Woody's is still there.
Actually, Stephanie King, who owns that bar now, has the
Zanzibar sign that I was telling you about. I haven't
spoken to her yet, but I'm going to speak to her, and I'm
hoping beyond hope that she will loan it to you.

RF: How big is it?

DM: Three feet by four feet. White
background with black script.

RF: Would that have been the exterior sign?

DM: Yes. It was the exterior sign. It was
glass.

RF: Like here?

DM: This was a glass sign. It was about
this wide, but it says the same thing -- Zanzibar. This

just says Zanzibar, and that said Club Zanzibar, 601 First Street.

HM: When I look at the pictures, I really get this feeling of a place where adults hung out. It doesn't have this kid feeling.

DM: No, no kids.

HM: It's mature people, enjoying --

DM: I was the youngest person in there.

HM: Yes. Settled, mature people who enjoy each other's company.

DM: Working people.

HM: Yes.

DM: Actually, you can see that from the pictures. I'm literally the youngest person there.

HM: You're just a kid.

DM: With the flowered wallpaper, that was before it was remodeled.

HM: So there's food. There's obviously a table for people to eat. There's a kitchen, a bar. How big would the dance --

DM: It was 220 people, but it was huge. If you pass by now, you can see how big it was, because there is the house structure, then an add-on in the back. If you pass by there, that add-on was the whole back room.

RF: Probably twenty-five by fifty.

DM: At least. At least. And it was that whole room. There was another bar back there. We had a platformed area for seating, and that area held, I guess, about twenty-four tables.

HM: A big place.

DM: Right -- in that section. Then you had, of course, the bar. Then you stepped down from that

platform, there, and you had the dance floor and tables around the dance floor. You had another small platform, which was just -- I think I have a picture of that someplace.

RF: This could just be a publicity shot, but do you think this was taken there, inside the club?

DM: No. That picture doesn't look like my spot. No.

Now I want to tell you something. My stage is very similar to that. I know it wasn't the Zanzibar simply from the background, and from where this stuff is. We didn't have that. And we didn't have a railing around the stage. This was open. But the stage set over in the corner like that, and it came out that way, and it was about that high.

HM: Now would people perform -- would they have a week's engagement --

DM: They would.

HM: -- or would they just come for an evening?

DM: It depends on the act. If it was a really, really big act, and they were doing lots of -- If Jimmy was trying to book them all over town, then we were lucky to get them one night. When I say all over town, I mean New York. They would leave Hoboken and go to Newark, too, but they couldn't play in Jersey City (that was our thing), and they couldn't play Newark until after they'd played the Zanzibar. That was definite. But they would leave us and go to Newark. We didn't want them in Jersey City at all.

But the shows would be Wednesday night. We had a Wednesday night show, sometimes a Thursday night but not really, but there would definitely be a Wednesday night show, Friday night, two shows Saturday night, and a Sunday matinee. So they would usually be there a week. But if it was, like, say, Wilson Pickett -- if Wilson was there, Wilson didn't work on a Wednesday. It wasn't happening. He'd leave the Apollo and work Friday night, Saturday night, and maybe Sunday, in the afternoon. But lots of acts. There were nights when whatever happened at the Apollo happened at the Zanzibar. And, of course we also

booked other acts, like talent like The Manhattans and Kool and the Gang.

RF: What would be some of the biggest acts?

DM: Well, Wilson. We've had the Drifters; the Coasters --

RF: The originals.

DM: Yes, the originals. All the originals. All those original acts. Well, the "Motor Town" Review did not come. Their contract wasn't with Jimmy. I'm looking at people and can't recall their names. If you look at the acts that came from the South as opposed to the West, all of those are -- not Arista. Columbia records? We had a lot of RCA record people, and Columbia would come from there. We had the really soulful, soulful acts, more than the R&B acts. We would have Rufus Thomas. He's got several records out there -- The Drifters, the Coasters, Limelights. They were really big back then. One of the ladies in the African-American display at the church, Eloise Little, her group, the Ad Libs recorded "The Boy From New York City." That was a big hit for them, and, again, the Manhattan

Transfer. Gladys Knight did not make it. The night that Gladys was supposed to show, we got a telegram from the hospital. She was pregnant. She was coming, but she actually went into labor with her daughter, Kenya, on the night she was to appear at the Zanzibar. And I had that up until the storage loss. I had the telegram, I had the billboards. I used to have all kinds of billboards. But all of that was lost.

HM: In terms of advertising --

DM: It was poster advertising, advanced ticket sales. Jimmy Evans, as a promoter, would advertise.

HM: In newspapers, or -- I'm just wondering if I could find ads anyplace.

DM: I doubt seriously whether it was much in newspaper. Because, again, the Apollo -- then you would have a problem with the Apollo.

HM: But people knew, right? Everybody knew, so if you "wanted to hear more" -- And fliers locally, or not?

DM: We didn't do fliers.

RF: You might do poster boards, right? Or
not?

DM: Well, poster boards -- they were all in
storage. All of them were in storage. The only thing I have
left is actual files. I have licenses that fit in a box,
that travel with me every time now. You would think I would
learn, because they're in storage right now. It's just
there for memory's sake now.

HM: I'm just getting the closing day -- it
was 1981.

DM: It was October.

HM: And just because the business had
changed.

DM: Charles was also a professional
gambler, so it wasn't like he had to stay in Hoboken with a

slow business. He was in Atlantic City a lot. So when it got slow, he was gone.

HM: Did he do well?

DM: Extremely well.

HM: That's a whole fascinating thing, too. Because you have to really know people well. Was he a poker player?

DM: He was a craps player.

RF: Atlantic City is the place to be. Lots of fun.

DM: He was kicked out of Vegas. They didn't like his "bet." He invented a "bet" that they wouldn't let him play out there.

RF: What was the bet?

DM: It was -- do you understand dice at all? The crap game at all?

RF: Not really.

DM: Then that would take a little bit too long to explain. But it's a "don't-come" bet that, when the dice first roll, you're betting on a seven all the time, basically. You can play it in Atlantic City, but you can't play it in Vegas.

RF: Well, you know, we're doing two things here -- a big project that's the oral history project, and an exhibit. In this exhibit, we've broken down sections -- 1930s, '40s and '50s -- and we'd love to have something we could fit into the '60s and '70s. It's really probably going to just be one photo or caption.

DM: Okay. I understand that.

RF: I'd love to select from here a photo we could use, that represents the club.

DM: Okay. I think the picture of -- Well, you can select it, but I was thinking, I have that one. That's on my computer. I could straighten that out, or make

that bigger, whatever you want done with it. The picture of him -- I was running late. I was in my own crisis. So an exact picture -- I can give you that one. That wasn't taken, of course, at the bar, that was taken in Atlantic City. I would have to copy that. I could get that back to you. That's Bobby Bland's brother.

HM: I used to go see him constantly.

RF: Is this the Zanzibar?

DM: Yes. That's the other section. See, that's below -- If you look at this --

RF: I don't know if it's in the Zanzibar.

DM: That's one I don't know. That one I'm not sure. This is sitting down on the actual dance floor, and the other table is -- the platform is up here and back. There's the iron railing.

HM: You know, Hoboken's sort of famous for its bars.

DM: Yes.

HM: And they were considered kind of raucous. Was the Zanzibar more --

DM: Less, because we were a nightclub. So we didn't have too many problems. When the ruckus was goin' on, we were a nightclub. When we became a neighborhood bar, the people still had the tendency to treat us differently. They came from work, but they tried to clean up before they got here. Also, we entertained, just like the rest of Hoboken. The ships -- we loved it when the sailors came to town. That was a wonderful experience. Charles was interesting in that he cashed, for every trucking company -- having been a truck driver -- he would cash all the checks for the truck drivers. He would cash all the checks for the post office, black or white. It didn't make any difference. Everybody came there to get their checks cashed. Of course, whatever was going on -- Maxwell House, all those people. Pay day was Thursday -- every week. One Thursday was truckers, the next Thursday was the post office.

HM: You forget about that; that people, their relationships with banks was really different.

DM: It was different. Most people at that time (especially black people) did not have a relationship with the banks. He got stopped on the highway one time, and the troopers couldn't understand it, because he had thousands of dollars in deposit slips. Because what he would do was, he knew how many checks he was going to cash. So he would go to the [bank] and transfer the money from the savings account into his checking account, withdraw the cash (to cash the checks), then deposit the checks back in the savings account. But all the troopers saw was cash transactions; they didn't understand it. It was straightened out in the end, but we were talking -- Even in the early '70s, we were talking \$30-40,000 deposits every week, and they couldn't understand it.

HM: That's a lot of people.

DM: Yes. Think about it. Because what were they making?

HM: Exactly.

DM: What were they making? And this was the time -- I'm talking every trucking company -- all the trucking companies would come to the Zanzibar on Thursdays. I have literally poured \$1,000 worth of liquor at a dollar a shot, in a given night, easily.

RF: In a night.

DM: In a night. In a night.

HM: That's quite amazing.

DM: And I didn't start to work until 6 p.m.

RF: They went there to get their checks cashed.

DM: You're not gonna get your check cashed if you're not havin' a drink!

HM: Exactly. That's not fair.

DM: He didn't charge. They were going to be drinking, and --

RF: -- related selling.

HM: I wanted to ask you -- when the sailors came. What was that like?

DM: Hectic. That was extremely hectic. The interesting thing about the sailors -- The sailors were, of course, sailors coming off the ships, and the sailors were looking for ladies all the time. So we would have to let everybody in town know, or all the surrounding town, "There's a ship in town." You used to really have to get all your friends and everybody to come and hang out. "It's not gonna cost you a dime. Just come and hang out tonight." That's what it was like with the ships. They were there all the time. They never wanted to leave. They didn't want us to close at night.

HM: A little bit of freedom.

Now when we were talking to Tom, and he was talking about tensions between the Puerto Rican community and the city, in 1971, when they had that little uprising

on First Street -- did that affect the Zanzibar, just because of the location?

DM: It didn't affect the Zanzibar one bit, because A, everybody knew who Charles McNeil was, and they were not going to hurt the Zanzibar. And, B, he was also very giving. He bought school clothes for every poor family. Well, I shouldn't say he bought them. He would loan them the money, and never pressure them when to give it back. So in September -- like he had the money ready for those pay checks? He would have the money ready for school clothes. Christmas, toys, and Easter. On those three occasions, you knew you didn't have to worry about having the money you needed for your children. It wasn't a gift, it was a loan -- and everybody always paid that money back, because they knew they could always come and get it again. He didn't ask questions, he didn't belittle anybody. They just knew they could get it, and he didn't talk about it. Nobody knew what was happening.

I remember even in my own case, my son was three years old (it's one of the reasons why I ended up marrying the man), but my son was three years old, and toys cost me \$98.00. This was a week's pay.

RF: That's a lot of toys.

DM: Not really. It was a red fire truck. I remember that. I'll never forget it. A red fire truck, a red wagon -- well, those are the two that I remember, but lots of other things in there. I bought them in Journal Square -- "McKinley" Square -- but I wasn't satisfied. I had to go to another store. My girlfriend Renee Goodwin was driving the station wagon, and we left the stuff in the back of the wagon. This was on Christmas Eve, and everything in the car got stolen. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew my baby had to have toys on Christmas morning. I picked up the phone and I called him, and I told him what happened (I was working at the club at the time). I told him what happened, and he told me to go back to Rogerts and stay there. He came and replaced every single thing I had bought. That's the kind of person he was. He was really a great guy.

HM: You always remember the stuff that gets lost. That really sticks in your mind. Like the next Christmas you might have bought stuff, but do you remember it? Because the pain of that moment, when you opened the car door --

DM: That was horrible. That was horrible.

HM: He was there.

DM: He was there. And he was there for everybody.

HM: So people must have really seen him as one of the -- I don't want to say the center of the community, but he was somebody you could rely on.

DM: Well, see, again, he wasn't a community -- it wasn't like a community thing, because, if anything, he was never an activist. Charles would pay -- whoever came to that door for money got it. If it was a Democrat (we never had Republicans in Hoboken) -- but whatever side was running, whoever was running -- back then it was DePascale. If Cappiello's people came, they got the same amount of money. He would tell them straight up, "You know I don't put signs on my door, or on my window. There's no signs going on anything," but everybody got equal -- He wasn't political. He didn't like politics at all. The only people he knew were the people who came through the doors of the

Zanzibar, because he wasn't in and around Hoboken a lot. But if you look at those pictures, that's half the community. That represents so many of the families in Hoboken, that are actually here, still, now.

HM: We don't have to do it now, but what we should probably do is duplicate them and go through them, for who the people are, so we know. Because the booklet we put together, this is a good thing to have in there -- I think, if you're okay with that.

DM: I am. I'm just concerned about some of the people -- you have to make sure. I doubt it, but, I mean, they were taken in a bar.

HM: I guess, if they're still here --

DM: There's lots of them that are still here.

HM: We'll ask: "Are you okay with this?" But I think once they see the whole context of it --

DM: Right. Once they see the whole context. But you know, the thing about it is, even myself -- now my association is really amazing, but my first association was with the Zanzibar and my second association was with the church. I'm like, "O-kay." I'm lookin' at these pictures, and some of these other ladies... I'm not like that. I don't care. I'm not ashamed of myself.

HM: It's important to ask people, because they have their right to privacy, if they feel uncomfortable. And that's the last thing we want to do. For me, I think it's wonderful that they're part of this. But if they feel uncomfortable, that's not good.

DM: [looking at pictures of Charles McNeil]
I have, like I say, other great pictures of him, but they're just pictures of him.

HM: It would be nice to have a really good picture of him.

DM: I have good pictures of him.

HM: When Tom gave us family pictures, they were ones that meant a lot to him, the people looked the way he remembered them. So we want the picture that you think is the best, of him.

DM: Well, the picture that I thought was the best is the one at the church. I don't know if you want that one or another one. There's the one that had him and Ollie, for the period of time when the bar opened -- I call her my "sister-wife." She was the wife before me.

HM: She's beautiful, too.

DM: Yes, she is. She's also a wonderful woman, too.

HM: It's good, because that's the time period. But do we keep her in -- ?

DM: Yes, I love her. But the only thing about it is, if she gets in a picture, then I get in a picture. You've got to use all of them.

HM: No, no, no. You started the story.

DM: That's the only thing about that. I have no problem. As you see, there are lots of pictures of her there. This was her life, also. She was there when the club opened.

HM: When did he pass on?

DM: Ninety-six, October 24th.

[RF selects out a photograph of DM and puts aside another one where she is dressed in red.] But let me ask you a question. See, that's a vain question here on tape. You didn't like the red picture better? Or you like this one best, behind the bar? That was New Year's.[The one where she's wearing red.] Oh, you like this one.

RF: It's just larger, is the main thing. You're definitely saying this one. Okay. Okay.

DM: She was so young.

RF: I hadn't seen that one.

DM: She was so young -- twenty-six.

HM: This is a nice shot, too.

HM: Now how do you want to stop for a while? -- because I think it would be good to scan a bunch of them, and identify as many people as we can, then make sure people are okay with it.

RF: Could I suggest that we kind of -- we're also going to be talking to your sister, to get some family history, so we're not going to get it all done today. What I'd love to do is sort of retain these pictures today. The question I have is, do you want us to make copies of these and put them in the exhibit? Or is it okay to frame these up, and put them, actually, in the exhibit?

DM: Well, I'd like to make this one better for you.

RF: Which one?

DM: The copy. You can frame it, or you can do it --

RF: We can reposition it. It's not a problem.

DM: All right. All right.

RF: And we'll be cutting a mat, so there will be like a window, so it won't look crooked.

DM: That's fine.

RF: Then the others I'd like to scan, but I don't think we should take them now, because we're kind of in the middle of --

HM: Are you sure?

RF: -- the exhibit. I'm positive. I'm positive. We really can't scan these now. Maybe in a couple weeks or something we can scan these, if we could borrow them for a couple days.

DM: Sure.

RF: I'll scan them and get them back to you.

DM: Okay. Now I have -- you're talking about the people pictures, or the club pictures, or both? Because I do have -- I did not bring others, but there are some great ones.

HM: You get so much information from photographs; how people were together; who performed there; what the place looked like. So I would like to see as many pictures as I could see, and pick out the best ones. Make sure people feel comfortable having it reproduced, because we're going to make 1,200 copies of this book.

RF: And the sign?

DM: Yes, well, with the sign up, for my personal items, I know I don't have it. I'm going to try to reach out to Zimp. He's kind of old now. I don't know how he's doing, actually. I feel bad about that. But I know Ollie doesn't have it, because we divided this collection when we copied it. But I know most of it was lost in

storage. So much stuff was lost. We even had the bar. We were able to remove --

RF: -- the physical bar.

DM: The back one. Not the blue one, but the wood bar. It was like the one on Fourteenth and Washington. One of those really --

HM: The Madison?

DM: Yes, I think like the Madison -- a great big --

HM: -- wrap-around.

DM: It was beautiful, with the stained glass. But -- life intervened.

HM: Sure. That's what I'm figuring. We can do that.

Oh, I meant to ask you -- Did you know "April Seidenzahl and her family?

DM: April Seidenzahl.

HM: Yes. She's April Harris now. But she grew up in the projects. How old is she? She's your age. She's fifty. Her mother was one of the first people to move into the projects.

DM: This is a question I don't really like to ask, but is this a black woman?

HM: This is a white woman.

DM: Okay.

HM: Her mother. Betty. Betty Jane, lived there for years and years.

DM: I'm almost 100% sure if she's fifty, I know her. Yes.

RF: April has an organization, "In Jesus' Name," where she dispenses clothing and food. She works out of OLG parking lot, that little old power house building on Willow. Why are you bringing her up?

HM: Just because, when Dorothy was talking about growing up and later moving into the projects --

DM: I was eighteen when I went there, and by that time -- I'm a New Yorker. I've lived in Hoboken all my life, but I'm a New Yorker. The only reason I don't live in New York is because I don't think it's worth the money. But for real, I did not spend a lot of time, once I turned eighteen I was gone.

RF: But April said the same type of thing. She felt really privileged to move in --

HM: I thought of her. That's why I brought it up. Because she said she same, exact thing -- that it was an honor.

DM: You had to have connections to get in there.

RF: I remember meeting a couple of Italian families, and they were saying, "We thought we were on top of the world."

DM: Because, believe it or not, Italian families had a hard time moving into that place, too. You know, when I was watching the [film *Delivered Vacant?*] -- and even reading the journal [published for the sesquicentennial] -- I was really surprised there was less influence, from the Italian community, in early years. That surprised me. Because when I grew up, I grew up in Italian Hoboken. To me, it was like if my friends were black, they were Italian. When I grew up, there were very few Hispanic or Latino people here. So for us, it was just us and the Italians. I didn't come into contact with -- we were all over town and we saw people, but I didn't know other cultures, what they were. I didn't know a person that -- we weren't raised like that. You weren't German, or Italian was Italian -- you know, Italian food -- so that was the only way that you knew to say Italian. But other races of people, other ethnic groups, we didn't identify like that, so I didn't know -- maybe I'm calling somebody Irish Italian, I don't know. It's a possibility. But my best friends on Monroe Street were the Addio boys, Ricky and -- well, Ricky Addio was a good friend. We were all the same age. We went to high school together. And Laura -- I can't

remember Laura's family name. But we were all there on the same block. That was one group of friends.

Like I said, I lived all over town, all over the city, so that group of friends was each given a section of town. In every neighborhood we had a different section of friends.

HM: Well, Hoboken became -- for us, when we do research -- Italians came in in big numbers, but they were completely oppressed by the Irish. Then when they took power, they held on. It became an Italian city, and they're still holding on. [Interruption]

DM: The Rose of Sharon church is still there, but --

RF: If you look, the facade is there, but everything is blown out. There's no back, there's no roof.

DM: In the church?

RF: Yes. We walked by the other day.

DM: Wait a minute. Across the street from Frank Sinatra's house?

RF: No, the block before, the 300 block.
Oh, I'm sorry.

DM: Oh. Okay. They are the same people.

RF: Oh, really?

DM: The people who are in Rose of Sharon now, I'm 75% sure they left that building, which was the second or third house in from the corner of Third Street.

RF: [Inaudible]

DM: Right. The laundry man on the corner, and the church. Right. I think when they left there it became a Spanish church, I think, a Pentecostal church or something. Then they moved down to --

RF: Okay.

DM: Yes. Yes. You scared me.

RF: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. But it's the same group.

DM: I believe it's the same group of people, yes. And that's an old church, too, because I was speaking to a woman about that church and she said she'd "been going for forty years," and I was surprised. I didn't know it was that old.

RF: I forgot about going directly through.

DM: Right. But Monroe Street was interesting. We had the run of everybody's yards. You know, everybody had a yard back then --

RF: -- and they didn't have fences.

DM: Well, they did have fences, but they didn't really matter. They had little ways for you to go in or out, so we would be all up and down the yards, on the Sinatra side of the street.

HM: Did people talk about Sinatra, or not really?

DM: No.

HM: Well, he'd been gone for so long.

DM: Only if you were talking to somebody from out of town.

HM: [Looking at the photographs of DM] You look like a kid!

DM: Well, actually, the top one is just any day at the Zanzibar, and the bottom one is New Year's Eve.

HM: Well, I think the longer one lives in Hoboken, the more you get this thing where you really love it, but you feel sad about things.

DM: I've never felt as isolated in Hoboken as I do now. I really -- I don't feel -- well, except to the extent that I won't let it happen. Like I said, I like that. But, really, it's very isolated. It's very isolated.

HM: There's this anonymity. It's more like New York City.

DM: Well, like you said, it's a big city in a little town.

RF: Well, so many people you grew up with are no longer here.

DM: In my graduating class -- half of them died. I don't even have -- my whole graduation -- my whole class, so many -- we're talking 1971. There were very -- a lot of Vietnam losses-- We lost a lot. We lost a lot to drugs-- and a lot to the war. And if they didn't die in Vietnam, they died shortly after they got back.

RF: And a lot never came back to Hoboken.

DM: Right. Exactly. Actually, I remember, even with the class -- they didn't graduate. It was like a lot of them did not make it -- people you grow up with all your life, by the time you got to the twelfth grade, they're there in September, but in June, it was like every

time you turned around somebody else was dying, somebody else was shipped off to Vietnam. That was a strange year.

You know, I'm committed to Mt. Olive, and as long as that church is standing there, I'll be in Hoboken. The day that that church is no longer standing there, I'm probably sure I'm gone. But as long as the church is there, I'll be there. And I intend to make sure it stays there. I want my daughter, my granddaughters, my grandsons to be married there. So I think I'll be here a while.

RF: And your daughter, will she go to the high school? Or what's your decision there?

DM: No.

RF: You'll have to make a decision in the fall, right?

DM: I do. I do have to make a decision. If I have my way, she's going to St. Aloysius. It's Jersey City. St. Al's Academy. I'm not ready to send a child to Hoboken High yet. As I said, I graduated from Hoboken High. The Hoboken High that's in Hoboken now and the Hoboken High that I graduated from are two different schools. I have

spoken with those in charge of Hoboken High, and they've assured me that everything would be fine. But the way I see it, one of the benefits to newcomers to Hoboken is that in ten or fifteen years, that will be a good school. Unfortunately, my daughter's got to go there in two.

See, I may -- if, for whatever reason, St. Al's doesn't work out, if it doesn't -- I'm going to move hell and high water to make it happen, but if it doesn't happen -- I like the staff at Hoboken Charter. I would stay with the charter school system. Unfortunately, I'm a proponent of charter schools. I'm very uncomfortable in the public school setting.

HM: Well, there are a lot of problems.

DM: And I have to fight for all that.

HM: I wish they could make it so the teachers had to live in the community. I think that would change a lot of things. They're connected to it more. It wouldn't just be a job.

DM: It's all right if it's a job, if you do
it. That's the thing. You've got to do the job.