

Transcribed Interview

Barbara Wilson-Brooks interviewed by Nina Wasserman

December 2, 2014 at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY

Interviewer: I'm Nina Wasserman, here with Barbara Wilson-Brooks at Teachers College, Columbia University on December 2, 2014. Thank you so much...

Barbara Wilson-Brooks: No problem.

I: ...for talking with me and sharing your story.

BWB: Okay.

I: Do I have your permission to record this?

BWB: Yes, you have my permission to record this.

I: Um, just to start off, I was wondering when and where you were born.

BWB: [00:00:22] Oh, I was born in 1961, April 7, 1961 in Georgetown, South Carolina. And my parents came here first. My mom was a nurse, and my father worked for a trucking company, and they brought me up here when I was four years old. Mhmm.

I: Um, and so where did you move to?

BWB: [00:00:40] I moved to Harlem. Um, uh, 2101 Madison Avenue, right in the area of the school that I went into, um, at four years old, and I lived there for all my life, except for when I moved out of state and lived in Colorado Springs, Colorado. And I moved out of New York in 19, uh, I think it was 1983, no about 84-85. My son was about two years old when we moved away. Mhmm.

I: So after you had gone through school here and everything?

BWB: Mhmm, yes.

I: So you grew up in New York?

BWB: Yeah, I grew up in New York.

I: Do you consider yourself a New Yorker then?

BWB: Yeah. [Laughs] Fully, fully. I was born someplace else, I mean this all I knew.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: [00:01:24] Even coming here, four years old, I knew I grew up in South Carolina, but I didn't feel the effects of it, I wasn't really aware that...but when I came to the city, this was where I grew up, this was where I played, this is where most of my family, where all of my family probably came here from the South, and this was how we got together. It was here. I had family that lived in Connecticut and New Jersey, but everybody congregated into our house in New York.

I: So Harlem...

BWB: Oh, yes.

I: ...was always sort of the meeting point?

BWB: Mhmm, for everybody.

I: So what was your childhood like?

BWB: Oh! It was fun, I mean, I had a brother and a sister I grew up with, and I also had an aunt that, uh, lived with us and was eleven years difference.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: She was actually the one that took care of us, um, in reference to our childhood, make sure we were, you know, bathed and fed. She was more like our nanny, but she was my father's sister.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: [00:02:15] And she went to school, she was our childcare because our mother worked as a nurse, um, she worked different shifts, and my aunt was the one that actually, like, helped raise all of us up until I was about fifteen, when I went to junior high school, she had moved back down South. But she was our caretaker. And she graduated, me and her actually went to the same high school, but it was eleven years difference, but she graduated from the high school, and I went to that high school as well.

I: Hmm.

BWB: But when she came here, she was actually, I think she was in high school when she came here. Mhmm, she was in high school. She was our caretaker 'cause my mom was a nurse and she worked different shifts as I said...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...and my father drove the truck, so, but I mean, we did a lot together as a family, but my aunt was the one that take care of us, make sure our homework was done and everything like that.

I: Of course.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: Um, what hospital did your mother work at?

BWB: She worked, actually, for a nursing home. It was Isabella Geriatric Nursing Home...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...uptown, um, in Washington Heights. 181st Street. She worked there for thirty three years.

I: And your father continued as a truck driver?

BWB: Yeah, mhmm.

I: So he was driving all around the country?

BWB: Yes, all around, all around.

I: Oh, wow. What was that like to hear those kinds of stories?

BWB: [00:03:22] I mean, just to hear his stories, and then when he came home, that was exciting, to hear the things and places where he'd been, things that he brought back to show us of where he'd been, and then us, doing trips maybe as a family, just going, you know, other places and stuff like this. When he was home, he'd take us and show us certain places or certain areas that he might have been in, that might have been close to New York. We didn't go, like, far, but it's closest, some of the stories that he got to tell us. And then we'd go to school and tell those stories. [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: Telling, be like, "My father went so and so, or this place," and "he brought back. . ." so show and tell for us was a good thing...

I: Oh wow.

BWB: ...for us to do. Mhmm.

I: Um, and you said you have two siblings?

BWB: [00:04:03] Yeah, I have a sister and a brother, we're all four years apart. So I'm the oldest, my brother's four years younger than me, and my sister's four years younger than him. So I'm fifty three, my brother is, what, forty nine? And my sister just made forty four. Mhmm, yeah.

I: And what do you remember about growing up in the neighborhood or watching it over the years?

BWB: Um, well, growing up in the neighborhood, it was community oriented. I grew up in a building in the projects, Lincoln Projects, um, but it was more family oriented.

I: Mmm.

BWB: [00:04:36] We did everything together. We even, everybody went to school together. You'd see groups of us, they'd come down, everybody knock on each others' door, cause you had groups, and then, they'd continue with that way, like if, I graduated and went to junior high school, the younger ones still took care. My sister and them, the next oldest ones, they all went to school together. My brother and them, they all made sure everybody went to school together. And it was community oriented. You would see the individuals that you went to school with and maybe teachers that live in the area.

I: Yeah.

BWB: Like I said, the vice principal lived in the area. You'd see them, you'd see the dean of my junior high school. He lived in Lenox Terrace, I live in Riverton. I still see him today.

I: Oh, wow! [laughter]

BWB: [00:05:17] Yeah! I see Ms. Petit today. Um, the principal, Mr. Jackson, he passed away, and they had a big, um, honorarium for him at the school recently. They just had that, I think it was in January. So it's still community, people that you grew up with that are in that community. My mother-in-law, my husband's mother was the first person that I saw when I went to kindergarten. I can remember her telling my mom, "It's okay, leave her." And I ended up marrying her son and have her grandson.

I: Did she work at the school?

BWB: Yeah, she was a paraprofessional.

I: Wow.

BWB: [00:05:47] Yeah. And then I have girlfriends that I grew up with, their mother were either community activists, but they also participated in school. Our parents participated in the school. I can remember things that we did as families. We took trips together. Our parents went to the opera together. We had an opera teacher, um, my third grade teacher was an opera singer, so she was very arts oriented. She got the parents together. We went to the opera during the day. She had an event for the parents to go through the night, so that everybody knew and was on the same page. All of the kids worked well together, that was Ms. George. Our second grade teacher was Ms. Burrell. Her husband sold our family our first set of encyclopedias, um, so I remember all of that. We had those in the home. He came and he worked, you know, and showed the kids how to use the encyclopedias and stuff like this. Um, and a lot of the teachers lived in the area. You'd see those teachers. My art teacher, Ms. Walker, we'd see them, um, Ms. Chandler, we'd see them, Mr. Click, our music teacher, they all lived in the area. Mhmm.

I: So was school a big part of your life growing up?

BWB: [00:06:52] Yes it was. We had afterschool. Um, and the afterschool, we, the paraprofessionals and everything, and the family workers, they would actually go to the homes, meet with the parents and explain what was going on to them in the school, make sure that the parents came out for parents' teachers night.

I: Mmm.

BWB: That was important. Um, and then just made sure, if a family was having problems, maybe somebody might have been, you know, might have had drugs or the kids weren't well taken care of, or just certain things. Like, we had a building across the street. I can remember, one of my friends, her family was in the paper because the building that they lived in was at that time, they were fighting for housing for individuals to have good housing...

I: Uhuh.

BWB: [00:07:35] And, uh, the landlords weren't taking care of the building. I remember one of my friends in elementary school, they showed a picture of her, it was in the daily news, of the ceiling falling in on her family's head. And I can remember, um, a lot of community activists, they fought for the, you know, for your housing and better housing for those families that attended our school. So we can remember stuff like this. I can remember in my area, walking just to, it was just like one block you had to get passed, it was on Madison Avenue, we used to call it Junkie's Paradise because your parents warned you, "Don't touch anything, don't take anything from anybody you see there." The dope fiends would be outside, and it was like you had to get past that one block just to get to our school, but we,

that's another reason why we traveled in groups together.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Um, they did an exhibition, that's what I was telling my, um, girlfriend, and I was like, "Do you remember the exhibition they did at the police station?" This is how community oriented it was. Everything was connected. They, because it was, um, uh, a place where you were seeing a lot of drug addiction, um, in the area that was being served, they set up, um, it was like a, um, how can I call it? Um, an exhibit.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: [00:08:48] Where we went to the precinct. I remember we were younger. I was like in the second or third grade, but it did an exhibit on how an individual may have gotten into, connected with drugs. What happened to them. We seen a film, um, we had an exhibit of somebody with the needle in their arm, so it was like a scared straight at that time for us to know to stay away from drugs, so that's what they did. I remember, um, I don't know if it was Apple Bank or, I know it was a savings bank, would come to our school to start, uh, to show us how to save money. So they did, they showed us finance, for example, so we had that. Um, so that was a bank that was in, I know Chase was in our area. I don't know if it was Apple Bank or some other bank that might have been in the area, but they came in to show us how to save. Um, what else did we have? We had, it was a lot of things that were connected to the community that they came in the school and did.

I: That's nice.

BWB: Mhmm. And the afterschool program, I remember, they would actually take us home, so that if a parent couldn't pick you up, there would be family workers at that time to think about it that would escort, you know, the students back home.

I: Right.

BWB: To make sure that they were home. That's what they go and explain to the parents what it was, why it was important for them to have the afterschool, they would help us with our homework and everything, but they would also make sure that we got back home if it was a working parent.

I: Caring for the whole child.

BWB: Mhmm, yup, mhmm.

I: Um, and so before we jump too far to schooling, um, well actually...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: You said you first lived in the Lincoln...

BWB: Yeah, Lincoln Projects.

I: And if we're looking at our map right here,

BWB: It would be 132nd and... Lincoln Projects went from Park Avenue over to 5th Avenue.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: [00:10:22] It started on 132nd and, um, Madison and Park, and then it was also 132nd and 5th. And it went from 5th all the way to, a hundred and, you could say that's 135th [pointing at map]. So it went from 132nd to 135th and 5th, Madison, and Park Avenue.

I: Uhuh, so you moved after that?

BWB: Well I moved when I got older when I came back. Because I moved from New York and when I came back, I moved into the Riverton, which is just on the opposite side.

I: Where you are now.

BWB: [00:10:48] Yeah, where I'm at now. It's just on the opposite side of when you get to 132nd and Madison, you cross the street, and I'm just. It's still on Madison, and actually, I live here [pointing at map] 137th, 138th and Madison. I didn't move out of my community at all.

I: How's that?

BWB: It's good! Because I'm still in my community. I can remember my son saying to me, "Mommy, I love Harlem."

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And we do. We grew up here, this is what I know. And I love it, I feel safe here. The, um, place, the areas are getting better because more individuals of other, um, uh, diversity. It's becoming diverse. I like it. We have more services, the hospitals are getting better, um, the services are getting better, more police, and I like it. I'm not going anywhere unless I can buy something [laughter]. But I like where I'm at.

I: I know what you mean.

BWB: Mhmm, mhmm.

I: And, um, you've already started to mention some of the schools.

BWB: Mmm.

I: Would you mind just giving us a rundown of the schools you attended and the years.

BWB: Okay, okay. I think, I went to school in, I know I was five years old, so that had to be 1966, and I started off at 133, and I went there from 1966 to, I graduated in 5th grade. So that would be '66, '67, '68, '69, '70, '71.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: Um, and then I went to, um, instead of going straight to junior high school because I was scared for some reason, you hearin' the rumors...

I: [laughter]

BWB: ...of "Oh, 201 is a bad school, this and that." I was. Then I went to a school that was, um, it was called, our schools at that time were called PS's, public schools.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: [00:12:21] There was a new Public School that was built. It was Public Schools 30 and 31. Um, and 31 was where I went for sixth grade for one year. Uhuh. And then I ended up at 201, um, uh. I graduated from there 6th grade, so that was in '72, and then I went to 201 for, um, what was it? '72 to '75 I think. I know I went from 7th grade to, uh, 8th grade because it only went up to 8th grade.

I: So those two years.

BWB: Yes, those two years. Mhmm.

I: And then for high school?

BWB: And then I went to Julia Richman High School on 67th street and York Avenue, York and First.

I: Thank you.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: Um, so thinking about your first experience in school, at elementary school, you've already talked very fondly of some of your teachers and some of the experiences you had there, are there any, any things that really stand out for you?

BWB: [00:13:14] Yeah! I mean that school really stood out for me because it was... I hear people talk about their elementary school days, but we learned. And I was actually, that's where we blossomed. Everybody cared about us. Like I said, my, I can remember from my kindergarten teacher, Ms. Stevens, the care they took, the teachers, to teach us to learn, to read, to write. So each time we progressed, it was like each teacher knew one another, knew what was expected, so that when we go to the next grade or the next class, it was already set up. Uhuh.

I: It was a very close knit...

BWB: Yes, a very close knit school. They could tell what our potentials were and where we were going to go for that next grade. And we, uh, they way that they taught us, it ended up that my whole school year, basically what I can remember from first to fifth, everybody was in the same class with me...

I: Mmmm

BWB: ...because we were at that same potential. They made sure that we strived to be the best. We kept getting better and better and better. They, um, made sure that we were mannerable, we learned what we can learn, and then we also peer tutored one another.

I: Oh, nice.

BWB: That's another thing, yeah I can remember that. Sitting at a desk where if you were good at math and somebody else might have been good in reading or somebody might have been good at science, it was a peer. Your peer worked with you.

I: Mmm.

BWB: And your teacher knew what your ability was.

I: So who were your peers?

BWB: Ooo! I had a lot. I mean my sister-in-law was my peer. I have a sister-in-law, Teri, me and her were in the same class.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Uh, Tanya, um, Felicia, oh God, I can remember Sabrina, oh God, Diane. Um, the boys, Bernard, and Walter, and, oh God, David. Haha. I can remember all of them. All of us were

there. And the boys were good in math and the girls were good in reading, and we yeah, you know, we'd like, have, um, sometimes we'd set up and compete, like, as to who would be good in what, math...But one that I was, I was a talker.

I: [laughter]

BWB: [laughter] So I would get in trouble. At the time that we went, corporal punishment was something that was still being implemented.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: They could, they could, you know, hit you with rulers. And I remember sometimes we was getting hit with rulers because we were talking and stuff like this, but it was more to keep you on point and make sure you were paying attention and you didn't disrupt your classmates.

I: Right.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: And so mostly people from the neighborhood, students all came from the neighborhood.

BWB: Uhuh, yes.

I: Just as you were saying, walking down through your apartment building.

BWB: Uhuh, everybody was from the same neighborhood. We grew up together, we played together in the yard. I mean, we had, even in other buildings, if they weren't growing up in the project, they were growing up in building on the opposite side. They were tenements on the opposite side. And then the tenements that were across from the school. Some people came...

I: The opposite side?

BWB: Yeah, the opposite side of the school. The school sat on 131st and 5th, so on the opposite side of 131st there were buildings on that side, so...

I: Uhuh.

BWB: ...kids would come from there. Then from, um, where I grew up on 132nd and Madison, remember I told you the building went from Madison to Park. There were two buildings. There 2101 and there was 1960, and across the street from us, on the opposite side before you get to Park Avenue, there were tenements there too. So,...

I: Right.

BWB: ...so kids came from those buildings and the buildings that might have, it was like one buildings, that might have been around the corner on Park Avenue. So those kids came and went from there. You had kids from 129th Street. There was also a Catholic school, I can never remember the name of the Catholic school. Um, they just closed it. Oh Lord, I can't think of the name, the Catholic school, but the Catholic school sat at a diagonal from 133.

I: Hmm.

BWB: So when we would get out, the Catholic schools would be getting out.

I: [laughter]

BWB: And they'd be like, "Oh no, they can't come over here... [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: "...Yeah, they can't come over here." We can't remember the name of the Catholic school, but, but they actually just closed it. Um, maybe about a year or two ago. Oh, I can't think of the name. Keep thinking of it. I can't think of it, but there's a Catholic school there as well.

I: That's fine.

BWB: [00:17:18] Yeah, so all these blocks, from, from 132nd, from 5th, to Mad., to Park Avenue, the kids went to 133 and coming across. So you would have kids from 132nd, 131st, 130th, 129th, 128th. Mhmm.

I: And earlier you had mentioned that some that some students, though, even if they were from the neighborhood, decided to go to another...

BWB: [00:17:40] Yeah, they decided to go, in my building actually, 2101, you were supposed to go, your designated school would have been on that side, being that you lived on that side of Madison and Park, your designated school for District 5 would have been 133. But Bunny and Robin, I know they went, and then, um, Janette. I'm trying to think of who went. Janette and Valerie and Missy from my building, so it was about five kids I know that went to 197. Now the reason why they probably went to 197: Janette, Valerie, and, um, Missy's mother worked at Harlem Hospital, so that's right there [pointing at map], so I know she was able to finagle that [laughter] to get them in.

I: [laughter]

BWB: Um, the Kellys that I grew up with, Ryan, Karen, their mother worked at 197, and that's what I'm saying, a lot of individuals lived in the community and worked in the schools. Either as paras, para...

I: Mmm.

BWB: [00:18:34]...paraprofessionals, stu., what would they call them? Student aides or either were actually teachers or teachers' aides. They lived in the community. They lived in the projects or they lived in Lenox Terrace or they lived in Riverton or they may live a little bit outside of the community, but everybody we seeing, they were always there.

I: Right.

BWB: You could walk home and see, "Hi, Ms. So and So!" or "Little Ms. Petit!" [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: She'd be, "You behaving yourself? The same way you act in school is the same way I want you to act on the street." So there was always someone there to keep you...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...in line. You could see them on the street, and they be like, "If you messing up in the street, I'm gonna get you when you get to school."

I: They see everything.

BWB: Yes, and I could see...you know they shop in the same supermarkets that our parents shopped in.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: So they knew them. They know, like when I, um, uh, when I met my son's...because the husband that I'm married to now is my youngest son's father.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: When we started dating, and I went to his house and his mother, she opened up the door and she looked, "Ah, Barbara Wilson!"

I: [laughter]

BWB: She knew exactly who I was.

I: Wow.

BWB: It was just amazing. Yeah because she remembered me from when I was little from all that time. All our kids. We did everything together. We went on trips together. The only time that we may not have been together, but you still see people in the community is if you went away for the summer or you went to summer camps...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...or, or maybe you traveled for the summer or something like that. Might have went down South to see family or this, that, or other, but when you got back, you'd still see those people because we were like blocks away from each other in the community.

I: Right.

BWB: They lived on 131st Street and then moved to 128th Street, but we all were still together. And then the school that I went to on 128th, uh, PS 31, that was right across from my mother-in-law's house.

I: Wow.

BWB: Because they lived on 128th Street, so it was all community oriented. And then I got to know people on that side that I ended up, some went to high school with us. One of my girlfriends, she went to Hunter, I went to Richman, but a lot of the people on that side went to my high school cause I had to take that way to go to the train. Take the 4, the 5, or the 6...

I: Right.

BWB: To get to 67th Street, York, and that was...

I: Your travel.

BWB: ...yeah, the travel with them. Mhmm.

I: You have a lot of respect for your teachers.

BWB: Yeah, I better have! [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: If I see Ms. Burrell or Ms. George...I went back, um, cause I walked by the school often, and I was like, "Oh, I wonder." I mean, even to the janitor, that the, the janitor was

someone that was still there after all that time. One day, I see the music teacher. I can't remember his name either, and he remembered me. He remembered my face. Say, "How's your brother? How's your little sister?" 'Cause we called my sister Booboo, so they knew...

I: [laughter]

BWB: ...the three of us. How, you know, that's what I'm saying, all these people lived in the community, neighborhood, and remembered us.

I: Hmm.

BWB: And, "You're doing well? You look good. You know, I'm happy to see you." So, you know, and it's not a lot of people that you might have went to school with made it, but a lot of my friends did.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: Were there any teachers from outside of the community at all?

BWB: Yeah, because Ms. Chandler. Okay, my first grade teacher, Ms. Stevens. I'm not quite sure if she lived there. I was little, too little to know.

I: Right.

BWB: But Ms. Burrell, I know she didn't live in the area, but she functioned with a lot of people in the area.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Ms. George didn't live in the area, but she functioned with a lot of people in the area. Um, my fourth grade teacher was Ms. Scalione. Now Ms. Scalione didn't live in the area and she got fired because Ms. Scalione took us to the park one day. We did well in school, and she said she was going to treat us. She took us to a park, which is called Marcus Garvey Park.

I: Uhuh, yeah.

BWB: It was Mount Morris Park, and she got robbed.

I: No!

BWB: Yeah, yeah, she got robbed [laughed] and what happened was, she was so scared. We were running after the person that took her bag. These guys went running after them. They got the bag back and how they knew, how she got fired is because the guy seen us running after the guy that took her bag and they ran after the guy. They brought the bag back to the school and that's how they found out that she took us to the park. And the next day, we didn't see her.

I: Oh no!

BWB: [00:22:23] Yes, the next we didn't see her, and they came and they told us, "She wasn't supposed to take you guys to the park because it was not a planned trip. We didn't have any signed notes, but she wanted to say, "Okay, we gonna get out. We're doing so well, we're testing good. Um, I want you guys to have some play time." Why didn't you take us to the park in the back? She took us to Mount Morris Park.

I: Right. Were, um...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: ...many of the teachers...what were their backgrounds? Or..

BWB: Um, uh, a lot of them, like, the, uh, we didn't, uh, and then, that's another thing about the school. We had a lot, we had diversity, but a lot of the teachers looked like us—African-American.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Um, so that was good too 'cause we seen people of color that were doing something and setting an example for us and they wanted to, wanted us to strive to do that. Um, at the time, something that I learned when I worked for the New York City Department of Ed, there was, uh, teachers that actually, um, would interview incoming teachers for the Teachers Fellow program and they told of us how you became a teacher, was an older teacher that told us. They didn't have all these days that teachers have off—the holidays and stuff like this. They didn't, um, they worked through the summer sometimes to, to supplement their salaries because they didn't make a lot of money. Um, and they also, one teacher told me, I think she said they would go before a board to become, to get your license.

I: Mmm.

BWB: You didn't just take tests and things of that nature. It was something else that you had to do. You had to be proficient in what you did. To see a teacher, Ms. Chandler, we knew all of them were college graduates. She always told us that. "I'm a college graduate. This is what I want for you guys." That was her background. Um, and she was the younger

of some of the teachers. The other teachers were Ms. George and Ms. Burrell, they were older, older ladies. Ms. Steinberg, that was my first, first grade teacher. I loved the way she smelled [laughter].

I: [laughter]

BWB: She used to always hug us. She, we were her babies. She made sure we go to the libraries. And then, that's another thing, teachers stayed with us, like when we go places, they didn't leave us. Like, they come in, they may have administrative duties, but if it was something that she wanted us to do, she would stay with us to give the librarian assistance and instruction on what it was that she wanted us to do. Um, and I remember getting read stories at...Ms. Steinberg was our first grade teacher, so I can remember her reading, um, she used to like to read to us, and she read Greek mythology, and that's how I fell in love with, um, Greek mythology.

I: Oh, really? Wow.

BWB: From her. Yeah, reading that to us, so that's something I remember about my first grade teacher. My second grade teacher, Ms. Burrell, she was strict!

I: [laughter]

BWB: [00:25:09] Oh, Ms. Burrell was strict! Ms. Burrell walked around with a ruler. Everybody left out of her class reading, learning, knowing how to read and doing math. That was her thing. She was a strict learner. Um, she was adamant about making sure that you knew what you knew. You'd have to stand up and if there was something that you didn't know, somebody else was going to tell you what you knew. She [laughter] made sure that everybody knew, um, and she, I was one of the ones [laughter] that talked in her class. So when my mother would come in, she's be like, "That child cannot be quiet." But I knew my work.

I: Yes.

BWB: Ms. George. Oh, that's one of my favorite teachers too! She was the opera singer.

I: Mmm!

BWB: [sighs] She made an impression on us. We would listen to opera, so when we went to Lincoln Center to see an opera...

I: Uhuh.

BWB:...we knew the arias. This is third grade.

I: Wow.

BWB: We impressed people. We knew when to clap, we knew when to stand up...

I: That's wonderful.

BWB: ...we knew how to say, you know how they say, when they tell you to say, um, when you want them to sing something again.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: She was so connected to the opera that we were able to go backstage and we met Leontyne Price. Leontyne Price also came to our school to sing for us.

I: I think I actually saw a newspaper article...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: When she came to visit [laughs].

BWB: Um, so that was exciting. My fourth grade teacher, that's what I told you. We had two actually. Ms. Scalione, but she made it to the end, but it was, it was like May when, when they let her go. But, I remember her because she taught us Italian.

I: Hmm.

BWB: She spoke to us in Italian. I never knew what she was saying, but she spoke to us in Italian. Um, and my fifth grade teacher, that was the one that impressed us. That was the last before I graduated. That was Ms. Chandler. And, um, she was strict. She was a new, one of the newest teachers to come in, so you could see she depended on the other teachers to help her...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...a lot to get to where she need to be, but by that next year, I'm, I'm...she was so, um, about her job, this wassomething that she was dedicated to that I'm quite sure she was splendid. And she was the first teacher we seen wear pants [laughter].

I: [laughter]

BWB: So we were like, and she always dressin' ...we had a word we called 'fly', meaning that she was very, mmm, well dressed.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Very, very well, probably the first time we seen her wear pants! We were like, "Ah, Ms. Chandler! She got on pants, she got on pants!" So it was something. But all of my teachers made an impression on me. As well as my sister's and brother's teachers because they followed me in the same way.

I: Right.

BWB: But what that school had a lot of, it had a lot of what schools don't have today.

I: Mmhm.

BWB: We had music. My art teacher, and I mean, I mean, we had music, we had art. My brother played in a band. When I said a band, full band with drums and horns...

I: Wow.

BWB: [00:27:55] They were introduced to jazz by Mr. Mann. They played a whole aria. When we had an assembly, somebody, everybody did something. Um, there was a lady that lived in my building. Her name was Ms. Talafaro. Her sons were basketball players as well. Um, her husband worked for the department of sanitation, and that's what we had a lot of in the community at that time. We had a lot of African-Americans that worked for city government.

I: Mmhm.

BWB: My friend's, uh, father, I had several friends' fathers that worked for the MTA at that time in the '60s. Um, Mr. Talafaro worked for sanitation, um, uh, I had friends whose fathers were ambulance drivers, and, uh, NYPD cops.

I: Mmm

BWB: So everybody, it was well, um, diversified. We seen individuals that worked. They set examples for us and they treated us with respect and we did as well with them.

I: Right.

BWB: But back to the school, our art class, I remember doing art for the Studio Museum of Harlem when it was in where the National Black Theater was.

I: Wow.

BWB: And had a portfolio. Yeah, um, and that portfolio I took with me to junior high school and my art teacher still worked with me on it, so when I, um, took the test for the specialized high schools,

I: Mmhm.

BWB: She tried hard to get me in to the high school of art and design.

I: Hmmm.

BWB: Um, that wasn't what I wanted to do though [laughter]. Um, but she, that's the impressions that they made on us. So before the Studio Museum of Harlem was where it's at, it was where the National Black Theater was, and that's where we went as kids. We did work on, um, copper. I wish I had the stuff that I worked on.

I: Oh, wow, you still have it!

BWB: Yes, I wish I did. On copper and we learned how to draw, we learned how to paint, and it was all by individuals who actually, um uh, I would say implemented Studio Museum of Harlem before it was there.

I: Wow.

BWB: Mmhmm.

I: So you, it seems like your teachers gave you a really good sense of their expectations and...

BWB: Yes.

I: What about your family? What did they want from your schooling?

BWB: Oh, my mother and my father, we didn't play. My father [laughter], I mean, my father, the first time my father ever spanked me, it was in, and when I say spanked me, it was like a spanking, like, "Why are you spanking me?" I was supposed to do a project for one of my teachers, science teachers, this was when I was in junior high school and didn't do it, and she called the house. I never had a teacher call the house before.

I: Wow.

BWB: But I'm following my friends and didn't do it. The next day I had my project in there. My parents didn't play. Education was very important.

I: Mmm.

BWB: You had to get your education.

I: Right.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: Wow. You remember a lot from elementary school.

BWB: Mhmm, yes.

I: Do you remember at all in 1968, any news of teachers' strikes or things going on maybe with your school?

BWB: [00:30:46] Well, what I remember is, that's something I thought of. What I remember is, I can remember, I think it was the fourth grade when they actually first put 32 kids in a class.

I: Hmmm.

BWB: So that had to be around that time when they were striking. That might have been one of the issues.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Overcrowding of class. Because in, when we went to school we had a paraprofessional in the class. Now, a para and maybe a special para for a child that might have a 501 or, or a disability.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: But we had paras in the classrooms, maybe one or two along with the teacher. So the teacher could teach and with the paras could also help at that time.

I: Hmm.

BWB: And I think it was in the 4th grade, when, when it might have been that time, when they implemented 32 kids in a course, in a class. I remember when they did it, and I was only in 4th grade. Mhmm.

I: And I wasn't sure on this one, but I know with all the different strikes and political activity among teachers...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: I thought I had read that maybe PS 133 that the students and the teachers still wanted to go to school.

BWB: We did!

I: Do you remember that?

BWB: Yeah, because we didn't, if I could just see it, we didn't have any time, I don't remember time off. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

I: Mmmm.

BWB: Our school was active. It was so active that even if that happened and that's what I'm trying to tell you. If it happened, we were in school.

I: Right.

BWB: Cause they had parent, the parents that I know, like I said, my mother-in-law was one of those parents that would have showed up because she worked there. Paraprofessional.

I: Right.

BWB: Umm, Ms. Shay Johnson's mother. We called her Partner, but her name is Ms. Johnson, she was there, and then she became a district leader. She was one of the community activists.

I: Wow.

BWB: It might have all meshed together, but like I said, I was in fourth grade.

I: Right

BWB: Might have not known what was going on.

I: Mmmm.

BWB: But this might have been going on around us and we didn't, you see right now, I have no, no effect of it.

I: Right.

BWB: Or that it was going on because we were in school. I can't tell you that I missed any school.

I: Yeah. Well you were going to school...

BWB: Mhmm

I: ...in a whole string of or district...

BWB: Mhmm

I: ...with a lot of activism

BWB: Yes.

I: What are your, well, you started to share some stories. What are your [memories]?

BWB: [00:33:02] Well, I can remember reading about 201, and I was reading one night, and I was telling my husband, "Do you remember this occurring?" He was like, "No." I was like, "I know that they were fighting." At one point, someone had said to us that 201, that was, might have been one of the reasons I didn't want to go to 201.... [light laughter]

I: Huh.

BWB: ...because of that activity. But you know as it filtered down and it gets to the kids

I: Mhmm.

BWB: It might not be actually what was going on then.

I: Right.

BWB: We're just hearing it bits and pieces of it and then how the kids filter it out, it may not be exactly what was going on.

I: Right.

BWB: But I know it was something going on why I didn't want to go to 201, and it may have been within that era of things. Because I remember clippings of seeing protesting and about that school now. My understanding of it was that that school was built...because 201 had no windows.

I: Right!

BWB: Alright, so! The school was built because, when at that point they were busing students into areas, certain areas, and they said that 201 was being bused, I mean was being built to bus white students in.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And it had no windows because they thought that this is an African-American community and you're bringing white students in here.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: They're not gonna want them there. That school was supposed to be there for our children.

I: Right.

BWB: Why you gonna build a new school to bring...

I: Other.

BWB: ...other children outside...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...of the community in? Why isn't it good enough to have our children go there?

I: Right.

BWB: And we did go there. I graduated from there, and then that was another school that was dynamic when I got in there. One of my math teachers, Mr. Duckett was a good friend of Gil Noble.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And we...

I: Who's Gil Noble?

BWB: He did, um [knocks on table], uh, Lord, it's called, here and, Like It Is.

I: Okay.

BWB: On Channel 7. So he came in and featured us.

I: Yes!

BWB: When Mr. Duckett...

I: Okay.

BWB: ...when teaching us math. I was learning geometry in junior high school.

I: Wow.

BWB: Yeah, I had some bad teachers, you hear me, that were from the community, and cared about the kids. Our deans, we used to call him Forehead Brown, but his name was Mr. Brown. He had a twin brother, well they, I don't know if they were twin brothers or one of his brothers was younger. They were both educators, and they were the deans of our school. We had, um, a good science teacher that, to this day, wanted me and my friend, Annabelle, she was an impression on us, Annabelle, more so Annabelle. She, uh, mandated that we did what we were supposed to do...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...to get into good high schools. And me and Annabelle went on to go to Julia Richman, but we were College Bound students...

I: Right.

BWB: Yeah, we were College Bound Students.

I: So you seem to have fond memories of IS 201.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: But at first you wanted, you did not want anything to do with...

BWB: No, I did not want to go there because of the uprising that was going on, and you know they not gonna tell you everything as a child to scare you so it may be all that uprising once, like I said, it filtered down to the kids it might have just been, "Oh, there's so much going on with that school. It's too bad! I don't want you to go in there." And I might have heard from my mother, "There's a lot going on. I don't want you to go there and get hurt." So she opted to have me go to another school, just on the east side...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Further on the east side until everything quelled down, and by the time it quelled down, I was going there for seventh grade.

I: Right. And when you talk about bad schools, and I know this is a specific, did you ever have the sense, when you were going through your schools, like, this building, maybe could be...Do you know, did you ever have an impression of anything bad in any sense of it.

BWB: No! Especially not in my elementary school.

I: Mmm.

BWB: I thought that was the best. That was the, the best thing since sliced bread. That, we did everything in that school that if I could give that to some kids that are going through school right now...

I: Yeah.

BWB: ...gift that school to somebody, with all the things that I was... I mean, even um, oh God, Richard Roundtree, the people that were connected to certain people, and knowing the people that we knew, that knew stars and brought people to the school, and when we grew up, when we had talent shows, we had talent shows.

I: Mmm.

BWB: When we had, uh, I can remember being taken out of my class, I had a lisp [laughter] because I used to suck my thumb, by a speech teacher that would work with me and bring me back to the course and then I'd go right back in to doing something else. Um, in 1966, I learned, or I read this, we learned these programs with the rods, it was called cuisenaire...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: [00:37:16] Um, and I, that's, uh, how we learned, I know, I think it was fourth grade we got...because we went to ABC, the news station, and they taped us, the, um, the individual that introduced us to it was Dr. Catano. I don't know if he was German or he was Swedish, but we learned how to do, uh, math with the rods that were in the box...

I: Uhuh.

BWB: They were called cuisenaires.

I: Oh, okay.

BWB: And we also learned how to read our vowels and everything with these charts.

I: Mmm.

BWB: And then they, I remember they took us to Channel 7, they taped us, they did a documentary on us, and by the time when that we were in fourth grade, I can remember getting our scores back for reading and math. And I remember on the report card, they would put, uh, reading level and math level, and it be 12.1, so we asked the teacher, "What does that mean?" She said you're reading at a twelfth grade level in the fourth grade.

I: Wow.

BWB: 12 years in one month.

I: Wow.

BWB: Yeah.

I: Um, but eventually you did make it to 201.

BWB: Yeah. Um, I did make it to 201. I went to PS 31 for one year, and I made it to 201 after graduating sixth grade, but that school was good too because we learned how to, um, they were, uh, instrumental in my learning how to play the violin and also, uh, what did they have? Flute. They had a lot of music...

I: Those are wonderful opportunities.

BWB: Yeah, a lot of schools had art and, and music, and it was just something that was regular.

I: Right.

BWB: We had at 31, that was another one that was focused, I don't know if it was just the math teacher, but we had races. For exercise, but it wasn't just for exercise...

I: Oh!

BWB: ...we were straight up running...

I: Hmm.

BWB: ...like training us to be thinking we were going to the Olympics.

I: [laughter]

BWB: We had friends that did that that were very good runners. Um field and track, that was something else. I remember at the time, I think when I was in that school, um,the Kardashians' mom who she's married to now, I remember....

I: Oh, right! He was in the Olympics!

BWB: ...that was such a big deal and also I can remember they made a big deal...I don't know if I was in 133 or I was in 31, when um, the flight to the, to the moon!

I: Right, in '69?

BWB: Yes, at those times, so that was a lot of things that we studied.

I: Hmmm.

BWB: We had a lot of things that we studied. We had a lot of stuff that was going on that was very interesting to learn, so you did more than just learn what you had to learn in school, it was about the world. They really had us thinking about the world.

I: Wow.

BWB: So that's that in that school. That's what I did. And then when I got to 201, it was more junior high school days. Um, getting acclimated to, 'cause I couldn't do a lot of things. My parents didn't allow me to be outside late or...

I: Mmm.

BWB: [00:40:13]...just be, so it was a point for me to learn some of the things that kids were already doing. And I came in from the seventh grade 'cause a lot of them were already in the sixth grade, so I came in with that childlike mentality, being exposed to..."Oh my God, you changing classes!"

I: Right

BWB: And you know, you have, um, specifically, language, we had Spanish and French. You had gym, you had math. Like I said, we were learning, um, algebra and geometry. Mr. Duckett started teaching us that. We had history, we had science. And when I said science, I mean real lab science, where they had the...and that's the thing about the school, the way that they built it. They didn't think that they built it for African-American kids...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...because a lot of stuff in there was brand new. Uh, we had the books, we never...and that's another thing, we never seen kids not have enough books, things like that we had.

I: Hmm.

BWB: I can remember even in elementary school, people say they didn't learn African-American studies. We did!

I: Wow.

BWB: In elementary school.

I: So did you have...who were your classmates then?

BWB: Oh God, um, elementary school? Everybody that practically lived in my building with that I could name.

I: So the same students.

BWB: Yeah, same people, students.

I: Mostly from the neighborhood?

BWB: Yeah, but some of them went there for sixth grade.

I: I see.

BWB: I didn't go. They graduated, and they went on. Um, my sister-in-law and my, Tanya. The two buddies that I was with, they went to IS 10. Another friend that I was close to, which was Felicia, I think they moved, so I don't know which school Felicia went to, but the majority of people went to 201.

I: Were there any white students?

BWB: Nnnno.

I: Or any who were not African-American?

BWB: We had Puerto Rican. Puerto Rican and Dominican.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: We had like one Puerto Rican family in our building, and I, when they moved

in...yeah, they went to 133 with us! Yeah, 133. Papo and his sister, yeah.

I: And they were coming from the neighborhood, more or less? Or East Harlem?

BWB: No, they lived in the projects with us. Yeah. Mhmm, they lived in the projects with us.

I: And could you talk a little bit more about IS 201? I know with the no windows...

BWB: Yeah well, being exposed to it with no windows, it really didn't...I mean because you changed courses. Um, it went, we had classes from the...the science classes. What else was down? It was down in the basement. The lunchroom was down in the basement, the sciences classes were down in the lab, the labs were down in the basement. Um, was the gym down in there? I can't remember if the gym was down in the basement or was it up on the upper floor. But then your home rooms. The first floor is where the windows were.

I: Hmm.

BWB: That's the only windows that you seen.

I: Right.

BWB: And that's where the administrative offices were.

I: And it's sort of raised up, that point from the outside.

BWB: [00:43:04] Yes, and they raised up 'cause under the first floor was where we went for lab. 'Cause my homeroom was actually down there 'cause science was downstairs. And then the main floor was the administrative offices. That's where you walk in and that's where the offices were.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: And then the regular class was up on the upper levels.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Um, so, I mean basically, it was just junior high school stuff.

I: [laughter]

BWB: That didn't make any impression. Once I got there and being scared of what I thought it was...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: It really didn't make a real big impression on me. I mean, it was just like preparing me for high school. I got to change classes...

I: Right.

BWB: ...I had more courses. I had science, Spanish (that's your language), I had math, um, uh, we had English, you had your history, well, the history course...Let me see. You had the history course. The teachers that made the impression on me was my math teacher, my science teacher, and my language teacher. And I can't really tell you who the principal was of that school.

I: Hmm.

BWB: I can't really tell you that.

I: I know that, um, huh...were those your favorite subjects?

BWB: Um, the science became my favorite subject because Ms. Smith did not play.

I: [laughter]

BWB: And you had the same, those teachers, for the seventh and eighth grade.

I: Mmm.

BWB: Um, uh, I had another, I had another older teacher. I can't remember her name. That was the one that called my father on me. She was the older lady, the older teacher. We had her for homeroom and we had her for something else. I think another science course. And then, um, Mr. Duckett I loved 'cause that was my math teacher, but he did not play with us at all. If anybody act up, you go to your classes with your full class, but you change courses.

I: Hmm.

BWB: If a teacher couldn't handle us, they would go get Mr. Duckett for us.

I: Wow.

BWB: But we were always smart kids

I: Right.

BWB: So if we played around, we were playing around because we were getting bored.

I: Right

BWB: Either the person couldn't keep our attention or we thought we knew what she was trying to teach, or he, and the majority of those teachers that were there that I had were, Mr. Duckett, that I can remember, the rest of my teachers were women teachers. That was kind of, I wouldn't say it's like a blur, but it really didn't...well, I can't say that that school made an impression on me...

I: Hmm.

BWB: ...like my other schools that I went.

I: Right.

BWB: Like 133. 201 wasn't a blur, I was just there for two years, and I did what I had to do to graduate...

I: Right.

BWB: ...and go on to high school.

I: Do you...by the time you were there, were there any traces of protests or community activism?

BWB: Um, well, at that time when we got there, you seeing a lot of teachers were into, like, Africa, African-American...You know wearing dashikis...

I: Right.

BWB: Yeah, they were into...we learned Swahili 'cause like I said people lived in our community. So say like Mr. Brown and his brother, they might have hung with this, uh, gentleman that we knew who taught us Swahili while we might have been out in the summer, right?

I: Hmm.

BWB: [00:46:27] And all of them might have hung together, so when we got in school, we knew that they were activists, Black activists and stuff like this. That they would deal with certain things that, you know, were in the community they had to deal with, but it really wasn't on my mind to even ask them what it was.

I: Right.

BWB: [00:46:42] But, they taught us about, um, Black Power, and we knew CORE was there, um, they knew, we knew what was expected of us as African-American children, that we had to make it, that we had to try hard and we had to always come back. One thing a lot of our teachers said that, "Always come back to your community in some way. Find a way to come back and serve your community."

I: Right.

BWB: So that's something that they taught us, but traces of what might have been going on, I couldn't tell you unless I read the clippings. It's only how I knew that they were out there protesting as hard as they were protesting.

I: Right.

BWB: They were really protesting about that school, and I really have to go back to read to see what it was about.

I: Well that's fine.

BWB: But, um, basically, there were no traces...and then when I graduated, I know we wore, uh, these, they gave us, uh, these ankhs, uh necklaces, uh, and it was, like, about our heritage, letting us know about our African-American culture...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...as well as being, um, being geared towards, uh, that we were Africans and we came from another place...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...that there were individuals who strived for us to be here. Came here as slaves and why we had to what we had to do.

I: Right.

BWB: So that's basically it. I mean, except for us trying to sneak out...

I: [laughter]

BWB: ...trying to sneak out to go to the store, 128th Street, but it really, I wouldn't say that it was a blur, but it wasn't like how my elementary school left an impression on me.

I: I understand that.

BWB: Yeah, and we had a home economics teacher. I remember that. Taught us how to sew and, um, how to cook, so that was something interesting. And, oh! One teacher did, and I can't remember her name, but I can see her, um, about writing.

I: Hmm.

BWB: She, we had a poetry class and being able to express yourself. She really made an impression on us.

I: Hmm.

BWB: I can remember her.

I: What did she tell you about expressing yourself?

BWB: Being, being able to stand up, look somebody in the eye and, and mean what you say and say what you mean. And telling people about your feelings.

I: Mmm.

BWB: Um, being able to stand for something. I remember always telling us, this is something you hear, "If you don't stand for something, you're gonna fall for anything." So be strong.

I: Right.

BWB: If you feel impressionable and you see that something's wrong with, somebody's doing something to somebody else ...that's one thing that we stuck together, I know, in junior high school. You couldn't just do one, something to anybody that was in our group. We all stuck together.

I: And what did you know about CORE when you were a seventh, eighth grader?

BWB: Oh, when I was a seventh and eighth grader! I just knew, well, at that time, 'cause CORE was more on 132nd Street, at the time of Roy Innis. I really didn't know what it was. All I knew was that it was these buttons 'cause we had the UBA Club...

I: The UBA Club?

BWB: Yeah, United Black Association.

I: Okay.

BWB: [00:49:31] And those, they were, at the time that I was being able to get out and go see what they were doing, it was like, those two. CORE was moving over to, I think they moved over to, 'cause I was discussing it with a gentleman that was at my house, I think they were moving out of that area, from off 132nd Street and Park Avenue, over to the wherever their offices were. I think 135th Street somewhere. And I just knew that these were individuals who fought for housing, along with Ms. Kornegay and Ms. Shay Johnson's mother. Um, and a lot of people fought for us to have good housing, um, 'cause tenements and the landlords that maintain those buildings, the buildings were raggedy. There were tenements in those areas and people were paying rent, and, and living in broken down houses with no water, you know, ceilings falling in on children, and uh, kids, you hear stories about kids being bit by rats and stuff like this. And we lived in the projects, and they lived in the tenements, and it was like, "Oo, I wouldn't want to live in there. Why do people have to live that way?"

I: Right.

BWB: So that was, that was all I know. They might have been the ones that was a part of all of the, you know, the activism, strikes, in the, you know, with the teachers, but I would have to go back and read about that.

I: Right, no that's fine. You were surrounded by a lot of activists.

BWB: Mhmmm. A lot. 'Cause the...I look at the neighborhood now, remember going into those buildings with some of my friends in the community, and I worked for a housing agency, HPD, and was in, um, the early '90s and, um, seeing what they were doing to the buildings and doing, renovating them and me living in those communities. I was glad to be a part of that...

I: Wow.

BWB: ...as well.

I: So by the time you were leaving IS 201,..

BWB: Uhuh.

I: ...you, did you, it sounded like you received some help from teachers in thinking about where you would end up for high school.

BWB: [51:31]Yeah, uh, one was the science teacher, um, and I like I said, my art teacher even from elementary school, she was, you know, she kept us going to the Studio Museum

of Harlem. I would go after school or on the weekends, so I kept up my portfolio.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Um, I interviewed with Music and Art, and Art and Design, but I really wasn't into it, it's just that she was gearing me towards that.

I: Mmm.

BWB: But I ended up going to Julia Richman and that was just on the choice because we went, we'd take the high school test, I even had a chance where I could have went to Brooklyn Tech! Passed the test, but I would have to go to summer school, and I did not want to....mmm mmm. I was scared. [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: I was afraid!

I: Of what?

BWB: I was, I was a...I don't want to say I was a scaredy cat, but I was. I was quiet...

I: Mmm.

BWB: And, you know, well-nurtured, and I was, you know, wanting to be around my parents....

I: Right.

BWB: And you know, they nurtured us and stuff like this...

I: It's far.

BWB: So yeah, to go, even when I had to go to high school, to get to Julia Richman, I can remember, it was people that lived in my...I chose that school because I could travel with people.

I: Right.

BWB: I had never traveled anywhere by myself other than with my parents.

I: Mmm.

BWB: So my friend, I had a friend that was in the tenth grade, and then my friend that I graduated with, Annabelle...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Other people, so I had people to walk to the train station with and also to get off the train with. I had friends.

I: Right.

BWB: That's the reason why I chose the school. [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: But in the same interim, I was, I did so well that I was, uh, even in ninth grade, I was in classes with tenth graders. And then when I was in tenth grade, I was in classes with twelfth graders.

I: Wow.

BWB: I took some electives...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...because I was doing so well.

I: Right.

BWB: Uhuh.

I: So what were your other choices?

BWB: [00:53:20] Um, like I said, I took the test for Music and Art and Design. I also took the test for Brooklyn Tech and Stuyvesant. Brooklyn Tech I got into, but I had to go to summer school, and I didn't want to do that.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And Julia Richman was my choice because of, um, College Bound.

I: Right.

BWB: We had College Bound, and, um, honor courses, so that wasn't bad.

I: Uhuh. So Julia Richman is located, as you said, on East 67th. What was it like going to school outside of Harlem, outside of your neighborhood?

BWB: [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: It was good! Because I traveled with people from my neighborhood.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And then I got to meet other people...

I: Right.

BWB: ...I was exposed to, um, you know, a world outside of my world, and just, you're a teenager now and getting exposed to other things...

I: Right.

BWB: ...and being able, and then I was in a lot of things in high school. I had a lot of friends that were in Talent Unlimited. Um, I was in school, I don't know if you remember that dancer that was in Fame, Gene Anthony Ray.

I: Right!

BWB: That was, yeah, that was my friend!

I: [laughter]

BWB: [laughter] Yup, that was my friend. He was in Talent Unlimited. I remember the year that he came to the school, we were looking at this braid-headed dude like, "What, what?" He was telling us, uh, that he was going for, um, the movie. He was gonna go and then he came back and he told us he got it and we celebrated him. And then Laurence Fishburne, he went to that school too. I remember when he did Cornbread, Earl, and Me, he gave some of our friends tickets to go the movies. He was like, "Barbara, did you go see me?"

I: [laughter]

BWB: And he kept telling us, "I'm going to be in this picture," and nobody would pay him any mind. It was like, "Shut up, sit down."

I: [laughter]

BWB: And I took the picture. We went. It was at The Apollo, they screened it at The Apollo. We went, and he came, when we came back, he was like, "Barbara, did you, I know you would come and see me." And I was like, "Yes, I did," and now, and I told my son this, all these people that came into your mother's life, you know how you never know who you're passing?

I: Right.

BWB: So he went there because Julia Richman also had College Bound, Honors, they had Cross Country, and they had Talent Unlimited.

I: Wow.

BWB: And a nursing program.

I: Wow.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: So what were some of those different programs? I'm not familiar with some of those.

BWB: Okay, the nursing program was gearing individuals who came into high school towards a nursing, like if you wanted to go to college for nursing school.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: One of my friends, she graduated with, um, a nursing diploma as well as her regular diploma. That was Robin, but she didn't go into nursing.

I: Huh.

BWB: So she was in the nursing program. Me and Annabelle, we were in College Bound, so that was gearing us towards, you would, your studies were gearing to make sure that you went to college.

I: Right.

BWB: And you took honor courses. Cross Country, I never knew what that was about. I never really knew what that was about. And then Talent Unlimited was for kids who liked music and art, that's what that part of the program was. So that's what Julia Richman had at that time, they were good. And then just regular...We had the best basketball team—girls

and boys--

I: Really?

BWB: ...during the time that I went from '75 to '79, yup. And, um, [sighs], what was....

I: Do you remember....

BWB: I remember assemblies, talent shows, and we had the best talent shows because we had a lot of people that was from Talent Unlimited.

I: Right.

BWB: [00:56:33] Um, that was just my excitement and being a high school student and traveling on my own and getting to know other people and, um, I remember working for uh, um, we volunteered for, I don't know if it was a state senator that was running in that district area or congressman, we worked for them, and I can't tell you who that person was.

I: [laughter]

BWB: We were involved in that. Oh, um, they also had ROTC 'cause a couple of my friends they were in ROTC.

I: Right.

BWB: Um, what else did they have? We had a SPARK program. That's what we were talking, we were talking about. The SPARK program was a program that was supposed to, um, teach you about staying away from drugs and, uh, I think alcoholism. Because I know that I also participated in a Boys Harbor program against alcoholism.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: We, they took us away for the weekend. Um, so I did a lot of things there that were interesting.

I: Did you get to continue your art classes and your interests?

BWB: No, I didn't, no, not in high school. 'Cause I really wasn't interested in that. That really was the teacher that was gearing me towards it...

I: I see.

BWB: ...and I was probably good at it, but it wasn't something that interested me. That was

just something that the impressionable teacher had and she geared me towards it. I wish I would have done it. My son's a good, my older son is a good artist...

I: So what did you study? Or what was your favorite subject? How about that?

BWB: Oh! I loved psychology, and I loved history, and I loved, um, what else did I love when I got to high school? It was more so history and English. And I had a typing course [laughing] so that was easy for me, and, um, what else? It was history and English that I liked. Those were the two favorite courses in high school.

I: And what about your classmates? Where were they coming from?

BWB: Oh, they were coming from all over. I met a lot of people from the east side and the west side. 'Cause normally what you find a whole lot of people that live, like, in the projects like you do...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...choose to go to a high school like you do...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...and, um, so I met a lot of people from different areas, like say, more so on the east side of going downtown. A lot of individuals from that area.

I: So farther south in Manhattan?

BWB: Yeah, farther south in Manhattan, but like, 117th, 116th, 115th. My cousins lived on 114th, in the Johnson Projects, so I ended up knowing a lot of people from down, like, in that area...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...going to high school.

I: But still...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: ...it sounds like, still a lot of students from Harlem?

BWB: Yes, that's still, yeah the, um, what you would call the El Barrio, you found a whole lot of...

I: Right.

BWB: ...and then it started to get more Puerto Rican, I felt, met more of my Puerto Rican friends that way. Mhmm, yeah.

I: Were there any students from other boroughs or maybe from other neighborhoods?

BWB: [00:59:27] Yeah, they might have come, but they weren't in our...oh, Jamice! I had one friend, yes. Um, uh, that, Jamice lived in Queens. Um, and then this was something that we didn't know all this time: Jamice had some brothers and sisters, but her mother and her father split up. Her father drove a cab, and, um, he was taking care of her and her brother, but it came time when he couldn't take care of them and he put them in foster home.

I: Mmm.

BWB: Um, and, and I remember going with her to Queens. Jamice, we used to laugh because we'd go to a party and they, you know, ask, they'd say, "Brooklyn!" and she'd raise her hand for Brooklyn...

I: [laughter]

BWB: ... "Queens!" and she'd raise her hand for Queens. "Bronx!" [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB:...she'd raise her hand for Bronx. She lived in, like, all five boroughs, but um, it ended up that she only went into foster care for a year because she was turning, she was about to turn, this was when were graduating...

I: Eighteen. I see.

BWB: Yes. They couldn't keep her, but she went because her brother was there, her baby brother.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And the lady allowed her to be there, she just wanted to make sure that she was with her brother, that she didn't leave him.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And I found that out when were about to graduate, and she, you know, I came, we

went out somewhere, and I ended up spending the night over at her house, and she had asked the lady, can I...no, she spent the night at my house and then we went back, and then that's when she told me that she was in foster care and I didn't know. We just started crying and...

I: Right.

BWB: But she, with all the odds against her, she made it.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And the next time when I seen her and she was like, "Promise me, promise me, you're not going to let anything happen to you. You have both of your parents, you do what you're supposed to do."

I: Mhmm.

BWB: And the next time I seen her, I was, that's when I was moving to Colorado. She was like, "I know you're going to make it."

I: Hmm.

BWB: "I know you're gonna make it." Mhmm.

I: So what was time outside of school like?

BWB: Um...

I: You talked about socializing...

BWB: I did, socializing just with my friends. We, we, who I grew up with...I had strict parents, so there was only so much that I could do. And when I did turn eighteen, my mother was so strict on me that summer, I caught myself running away [laughter] and I went to stay with one of my girlfriends and her mom, and then, you know, she let me stay there for the summer. I had got a job, I was working at McDonald's, I remember that.

I: Mhmm. In Harlem still?

BWB: Mhmm, the first McDonald's on 116th and um, and, uh, what was that? 3rd Avenue I think that was. Um, and my girlfriend worked there and my cousin worked there, so my aunt was in the area. My aunt, I would go to my aunt's house or either stay with my girlfriend.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: So my mom let me chill out for the summer, and then they told her, "She's responsible. . .

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...she's not a child that..." 'cause you know, a lot of the new drugs that had came out then was like, you, um, people were smoking....what's that? Angel dust..

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...or then the crack era was coming in. I didn't get caught up in any of those things...

I: Right

BWB: ...and they told my mother, "You're lucky," because that's what a lot of kids were doing and experimenting with, so.

I: Did you have a sense of that going around you when you were...?

BWB: Yeah, and I was always, my mother and father were...they put fear in me...

I: Right.

BWB: [01:02:40]...so the fear that they put in us, like having kids or messing with drugs or not doing what you were supposed to do, that was not something that we were gearing towards because my...we had Southern parents and they put the fear of God into me so that at that time, I feared what my mom and my dad would do to me more than being out, you know, in the street...

I: Right.

BWB: ...so doing what we had to do. I had to take care of my sister and brother. Like I said, our aunt was our caretaker, but she left when I was about fifteen...

I: Right.

BWB: ...and that kind of, like, broke me 'cause, uh, I didn't have her. That's somebody that I depended on, that I could tell all my secrets to...

I: Mmm.

BWB: I didn't have anybody, I didn't have to talk to my parents 'cause I had my aunt if anything was going on, you know, she would relay it to my mother and my father, and, uh, so when she left it was kind of hard on me, and I took on having to take care of my sister and brother, so I couldn't have gotten the, into anything. My mother depended [phone rings?], oh wow, my mother depended on me. Mhmm, yeah so.

I: And..

BWB: Uhuh.

I: So, um, so what was the overall atmosphere like at Richman, especially with all the high school....?

BWB: Wow! It was drugs, it was cutting...

I: Really?

BWB: ...it was people running through the school. Um, when I first, when I first got there and seen it, we had cops, at that time, they had police in schools.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: When I went it was overwhelming for me...

I: Right.

BWB: ...'cause like I said, I'm like a newbie on everything and to see it, I stuck close to my friends. When they got out, I was like, "I get out at 2:20 or you get out at 3:20," I might have had an extra course...

I: Right.

BWB: ...so, but I got used to the agenda of being able to come home, but there was no, um...I mean kids running through the schools. You would find cutting, and you'd hear, it was my math teacher, his name was Saldinger. So they'd have, teachers'd have hall duty...

I: Right.

BWB: ...and Saldinger didn't play with you, you weren't going to hang out, you were going to go to class...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...so you could hear them screaming, "Saldinger's coming! Saldinger's coming!" and he'd be chasing them. We had, I don't know if it was the first, ninth grade and tenth grade, police were in the school. I remember that they were in the school, and it wasn't schools safety officers. They were real NYPD cops.

I: Mmm.

BWB: Um, and there was an element of drugs being sold outside the school.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Um, you had older guys that would come from other schools, um, you know, fraternizing with the young girls because we newbies and we don't know any better.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Um, but we stayed, I stayed geared to where, where I was supposed to go. I didn't stray from what I did. I had a lot of friends that we all stayed on point. We all knew that education was the key and we had to get ours. And at the time that we were going to school, you could get a job coming out of high school.

I: Right.

BWB: [01:05:39] You didn't have to go to college. 'Cause I went to work for a corporation, um, before I moved to Colorado Springs, I went to work for a corporation, E.F. Hutton, out of high school.

I: Mhmm, I want to hear more about that in a minute...

BWB: Yeah, okay.

I: ...but, um, what was that like for you, aside from maybe being scared from what was happening in the high school, you had such a warm, nurturing environment in your elementary and middle schools, then to go to Richman?

BWB: To go to Richman was, it was a new world, but like I said, um, I was in College Bound, so I went to my classes in the same way that I went to my classes with class...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: [01:06:18]...that's how they had us grouped. Yeah, so it wasn't so bad in classes because you went to class with people. There were tenth graders in the homeroom with us.

We had a ninth grade and a tenth grade, but, um, the majority of those 9th graders, we went to class together. We had those same classes. We had English honors together, we had history honors together, we had our math course together, so we did everything...and if you missed a class like one time. My health class, I wasn't in it, I was in the SPARK room. I'm playing cards because people go there to play cards, so the teachers knows that all of us are supposed to be together, so she asked, "Where's Barbara?" So it's either they're going to say she's not feeling well today, she's out or they gonna tell her where she...She came and got me out of the SPARK room, "You know this is not your thing. You know your group that you supposed to be with."

I: Right.

BWB: You're here. There's no reason for you to be out. I remember going to school, I was sick as a dog because I used to get cramps real bad, but I had to be there to go. My mother was like, "Oh, I can sign you a note." No! 'Cause at the time, we took Regents and we also took, um, Citywides.

I: Okay.

BWB: So if you failed the Regents and you passed the Citywide, you passed the class.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: So, but then, ultimately, now it's just the Regents in class. You gotta pass the Regents...

I: Right.

BWB: ...so we had a safety net, and I was like, "No, no, no." And she was like "Well, you can take the Citywide." "No, Ma, I can't. I'm in honors. I gotta go take my Regents." So...

I: So, it sounds like expectations were very high.

BWB: Yes, Mhmm, I was sick as a dog and went to take it, called my mother when I got out of class, and I remember I had to throw up, and yes, I had to...you don't know. 'Cause the teacher was like, "See, you see, she came to class. Sit." And my mother came and picked me up from school. She was like, "I couldn't make her, she didn't want to stay home. I tried to make her stay home." 'Cause I would get cramps real bad, but I didn't want to stay home because that was the expectations of doing what you had to do and passing your courses. 'Cause I didn't want to be looking like I'm left behind and my friends are passing, you know going...

I: Right.

BWB: Yeah, and then I had friends like Annabelle, and everything like that, if I did something, she would! We hung together so tight that my mother could ask her, "She do so and so today?"

I: [laughter]

BWB: Or she, you have homework or whatever. She come to my house, stay up, we stay up all night doing homework, my aunt all of us, we supposed to be doing homework, we doing everything else but homework. And she lived right across the street from me, but we did everything together, so my mother knew if I was acting up or didn't do what I was supposed to do.

I: Right. So what were your overall impressions of your school experience?

BWB: Overall, it was good. Um, if I could, like I said, if I could give that to some kids that are going to school now. Um, and at that time, you might have had, you might have had social problems. I had friends, even in elementary school I could think about it, that had a mother that might have been a dope fiend or whatever, but she brought him to school.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: [01:09:08] I can remember seeing the lady, and it's not funny, standing there, might be nodding, but she was there, her kids were at school. She made sure that those kids were in school, she knew that that was something that was important. And with the crack era and all that era, it seems like all of that stuff fell to the wayside and nobody knew, or wanted to know, that education was the key, that the kids should strive for that other than them seeing somebody that might have been in their household and went to school or went to college, they didn't, it didn't seem like it was important for kids. So if that was something that I could give to kids, I would want to give them my experience, the experience that I had with teachers who cared about them, it wasn't about a paycheck, who wanted to teach kids. That was something that they really did want to do.

I: Around the time, in the '60s and maybe even before then, there were some complaints...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: ...from families in the area, even some activists...

BWB: Mmm.

I: ...that maybe schools, not all students had the wonderful experience you did...

BWB: No, mhmm.

I: ...there were complaints of overcrowded classes or teachers who weren't as good...

BWB: I told you it was in the fourth grade...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...that I noticed they were putting thirty two children in a class, and I was in fourth grade. And I realized it.

I: Right.

BWB: So, yeah, there was something, 'cause if we got the experience that we got without thirty two children in the class...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...imagine what it was to pile that on in a teacher who was dedicated to her students and you had good parents participation and stuff and they came and they met when you asked those parents to come to school. And then you're telling these parents that now they're going to put thirty two kids in a course, I don't know how I'm going to, you know, work this out.

I: Right.

BWB: You may take a para from me, and wha, all these, you know, these, whatever the guidelines that they were establishing, how am I going to do it?

I: Mhmm.

BWB: Something is going to be, you know, be lacking. If, you may have a student that may be good in math, but not maybe so good in reading, the teacher could take that extra time because she has a para in the class...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...or she has a school aide in the class, somebody to help her. And if you gonna put more students on top of that and take out the aide that she has, how can she teach?

I: Right.

BWB: And then at the time that we were in school, we weren't being taught to test.

I: Right.

BWB: We were being taught. You learned the things that, we called them the three Rs, or arithmetic, math, or whatever...

I: Right.

BWB: ...reading, writing, and you know. We learned those things, that was mandated. But now it's, the kids are being taught to test. They're not learning anything.

I: Yes.

BWB: Mhmm.

I: So, are there any other stories you wanted to share about especially elementary, middle, high school that we didn't have a chance to talk about?

BWB: I think we covered them all, I mean....

I: You remembered a lot!

BWB: Yes, I remember a lot. I wish I could remember more. I wish I could just, like, go back to that time actually and just experience it again. It was a good feeling. It was a sense of community and everybody cared about you. The school community consisted of the teachers, the administrators, the parents, and then just other intersections. Like I said, police, um, uh, just other parts of city government, and they cared about, I don't know if it was just our school or a feeling that I got, but even when I seen individuals went back for Mr. Jackson's honorarium, that feeling was still there.

I: Did you see a lot of your old classmates?

BWB: Yes, and a lot of people, if you go, we have a Facebook page for PS 133...

I: Oh wow.

BWB: ...you'll hear, the people have put up pictures and they talk about the favorite teachers. And this is going up to the '90s.

I: Mmm.

BWB: [01:12:46] From when we went from the '60s, people ask questions, "Who was your favorite teacher?" or "Who was your favorite principal?" and they're still expressing what that school meant to them, and how the feeling that they got, how they learned, and it wasn't just about, um, learning the test. It was about learning.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: I don't know what went on in 197, but we learned in 133, yes [laughter]

I: [laughter]

BWB: In 133, we learned, and I, and I always felt that they, it was competitive that 197 was supposed to be smarter than 133...not at all, not at all.

I: No way.

BWB: Nope.

I: So if we hit fast forward a little bit...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: ...what did you end up doing when you graduated from Richman?

BWB: Oh, when I graduated from high school, I told you, I went to work for E.F. Hutton.

I: Mhmm, and what did you do there?

BWB: Which merged with Shearson Lehman. Um, I worked there until I was twenty two years old, and then I moved away to Colorado 'cause my older son, my first marriage, he was in the military...

I: Okay.

BWB: I transferred my job down there to work for a branch down there. Um, we lived there from, my son was born in 1983, um moved there in '85, and we came back here in '90.

I: Okay.

BWB: Um, and then I came, I worked for manufac, manufactures here in _____. And from there, for city government. Went to work for the Department of Finance, the New York City Department of Finance, and um, that was, I worked in the office that took the properties when you didn't pay your taxes.

I: Mmm.

BWB: Um, and then I went to work for Housing Preservation and Development...

I: Wow.

BWB: ...with the Deputy Commissioner, which actually gave back the properties...

I: [laughter]

BWB: ...helped tenants regain the properties. I worked for housing management and sales. I worked for the Deputy Commissioner there and the Commissioner's name was Deborah Wright. She was put in that position by Giuliani, and then she left to go work for the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, which was the Clinton initiative funded...

I: Okay.

BWB: ...and I went to work for her there.

I: Wow.

BWB: Yeah, after I went there and how I got into education, she, um, used to participate with the principal program, how you get a principal for a day...

I: Right.

BWB: ...so she used to always to go and participate with the school on 113th and, um, called the Family Academy, PS 241. She would go there. And a couple of my friends that worked with me there, some of my colleagues went to work there and then she, Debby left, she went to become the President, CEO for Carbon Bank...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...but I stayed on at the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, but I didn't get the feeling of it anymore. Um, so, uh, one of my friends told me about the school, and I met the principal and his wife, David Liben, and then I went to work for them there.

I: Mmm.

BWB: But through, the Family Academy had its own corporation that funded the school...

I: Okay.

BWB: ...so they paid for, um, the afterschool...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...they funded anything that they needed administratively, books and all of that stuff, and they were teaching their own curriculum.

I: Mhmm

BWB: [01:15:45] I worked there with them for two years, um, and then what happened was when the new Chancellor came in, he was stating that schools couldn't teach their own curriculum, everybody had to go...remember that's when they started to say everybody had to teach the same curriculum that they...

I: Right.

BWB: Okay.

I: So are you talking around 2000 now?

BWB: 2002.

I: 2002.

BWB: 2002. I got laid off there because the corporation said we can't be here if that was the reason why we were here, if we want to implement our own thing. So they went, and they just started teaching their curriculum to other teachers, and um, other schools that wanted it. They kind of made it where they were selling the actual curriculum. I don't know, um, how it worked out so far, but I ended up going to work for the New York City Department of Ed itself in teacher recruitment. Mhmm.

I: And where was Family School?

BWB: Family Academy...

I: Family Academy.

BWB: ...was PS 241 on 113th Street between, what was that Morningside and, um, oh Lord...

I: Not too far from here.

BWB: No, not too far from here. Actually, if you walk through the park and walk towards 113th it's the old Wadleigh School.

I: Okay!

BWB: That's the school.

I: Yup.

BWB: And they took, PS 241 took over it and the Family Academy took it over. I was there for two years and that's where I got my lesson about aaaa, about seeing what really goes on in a school and how the administration has to work through it and what the teachers go through.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: The social problems that they have to deal with as well as trying to teach and stuff like that.

I: What was that like thinking of like, you know, going to school, not the same neighborhood...

BWB: Yeah.

I: ...but one not too far away...

BWB: Right.

I: ...and then seeing it from a whole other perspective?

BWB: It was exciting...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...because I got to be with kids, and now to make an impression on them, tell them about why school is important, why education is important...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...why you have to do the things that you have to do, why your parents send you here and how lucky you are to be here because they would send these kids...they funded the summer program, they would send them for a winter trip...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...they would send them for a summer trip and you're in a special place to be in this place [tapping on table] because other schools don't have where they could come, some

teachers, like my son's girlfriend is a teacher.

I: Uhuh.

BWB: Um, in a school in Brooklyn, you know, just to be able to copy stuff she gotta buy her own paper...

I: Wow.

BWB: ...she has to, you know, so she's doing everything in her power to make sure that her students are learning.

I: Right.

BWB: [01:18:18] Alright, and I, I was at a school where we was just, "Oh, you need this?" The corporation would get it. "Oh, you need this?" The corporation would get it, anything. They paid the teachers on top of them getting paid for afterschool. They funded the rest of the afterschool, so if, um, say, um, we gotta a, um, funding through Twenty-First Century or either the TASC, T-A-S-C, I forgot what it stood for...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...but, if they didn't get enough money, the corporation would pick up the balance, and for afterschool, teachers made \$33 and change for just afterschool an hour!

I: Right.

BWB: So they would fund the rest of that, so to see the sacrifice that was actually being made by individuals who were raising funds to do this for African-American students in a neighborhood that was, um, underserved and the teachers were dedicated.

I: Mmm.

BWB: All teachers, administrators, everybody.

I: You still saw that dedication.

BWB: We, yes! "Our students," we used to always say, "our students were our customers..."

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...and we're going to serve our customers with the best of customer service, whatever they need, and if, if they would have stayed, they were going to implement health

services where the kids didn't have to go to the doctor, they were going to have that, they were connecting with Columbia University, the hospital...

I: Right.

BWB: ...dental program, they could get their immunization there. It would have been so fantastic if it was able to follow through, but some things don't get to follow through. But they did a lot of fundraising and they raised a lot of money. It was a lot of people that was dedicated to it. Mhmm.

I: Did you ever think you'd be working in education when you were younger?

BWB: Mmmm...no! But then when I got to see Mr. Brown, and I told him I was working in a school, he was like, "What?!...."

I: [laughter]

BWB: ...I'm so proud of you!" when I see him 'cause he lives in the community.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: I was like, "I work in PS 241!" I was just the executive assistant to the principal...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...but I did whatever he needed me to do administratively and that was a good lesson 'cause I learned a lot about how the school system works, the bureaucracy that's in the school system, and how if you could take a lot of it out, the customers that we had to serve would be better served.

I: Mmm.

BWB: And then when I got to the Department of Ed, and just see what they did in reference to teacher recruitment and... it was eye opening...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...eye opening.

I: Any lesson in particular?

BWB: [01:20:37] Mmmmm, what we had to go through to get the teachers that they wanted, um, the best of teachers, the best of people and ideas to come, and then you'd want

to try...I've seen through the AmeriCorps program, something that was implemented, they, we had, the individuals that had got maybe a, not a full, um, voucher, okay, 'cause they would get vouchers. The AmeriCorps program funded their education. They would pay for it, at one point, they would get it free, they deducted no money from the teacher's salary, they would get a paid, um, Masters...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...but you were obligated to teach at least two years...

I: Right.

BWB: ...but before they implemented that it wasn't mandated that they had to teach two years, so if you got a teacher who said, "Okay, this is gonna be too hard for me, I can't do it," they got a free Masters and walked away.

I: Mmm.

BWB: So then they implemented when you had to teach at least two years to make you stay, they started to deduct the money out of your check and then you got the AmeriCorps money as a replacement.

I: I see.

BWB: So they had to stay, but we got some individuals that were dedicated to the cause...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...and really meant, meant for themselves to be the best teacher that they could be and one of the, um, one teacher did a project because they had to do a project for AmeriCorps...

I: Mhmm.

BWB: ...'cause we'd have to present it to keep the program running. She implemented a library in the laundromat. She lived in that community...

I: Oh wow.

BWB: ...she thought of something that she saw a lot of kids come to the laundromat with their parents and she said, "What could we do with this, this idle time that these kids have?" So she implemented a community library in the, uh, laundromat.

I: That's smart.

BWB: Yeah.

I: And this was at the DOE in Brooklyn?

BWB: Mhmm.

I: So you eventually went down there? [laughter]

BWB: [laughter] Uhuh. Yup, so I got to go down there, and I worked and that was admirable too because I felt that I was doing, that it was for a just cause of getting good teachers...

I: Mmm.

BWB: [01:22:49]...and to, I seen that if you had good teachers that, that, that the good job that they could do and the impression that they could make on kids and make they want to do better and become better, so that's something with me coming into that program and seeing it implemented in deep and once again working with people that were dedicated to the cause.

I: Right.

BWB: [01:23:10] They were really dedicated. I worked with some good people there. Um, Tracy Brisson, she went on to actually implement her own not-for-profit. She has a book that she writes about hiring and recruiting teachers and how you can be the best teacher that you can be. She lives in Atlanta now.

I: Hmm.

BWB: So yeah, I'm still hanging in there. Mhmm.

I: We've covered a lot of ground..

BWB: Oh wow.

I: ...what did I not ask you? Is there anything you'd like to tell us?

BWB: Just about me being here, sometimes God puts you in places where he wants his job to get done and...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...I just want to be of service to the kids that we're gonna serve in city and public schools. And then my big thing, the reason why I do it is because my youngest son did not go to public schools.

I: Where did he go?

BWB: [01:23:57] He went to Catholic school. I put my son in private school, and my mom was an advocate for public school. "There's nothing wrong with public schools that can't be fixed if parents and community and teachers work together," that's what she always believed in because that's what she did.

I: Hmm.

BWB: But I just couldn't put my son in a public school, I was so scared. The way that it's become...

I: Right.

BWB: ...to see the things that break down in the institutions and teachers work so hard, but if you don't have that full community support...

I: Mmm.

BWB: ...of that community—the teachers, the parents, administrators working together--- it, it's not gonna work.

I: Do you think of your mother as an activist based on how you just described?

BWB: Well she was before she died. I know she activated us to do the things that we need to do...

I: Uhuh!

BWB: [01:24:39] She did! She participated. She was at every parent-teachers meeting, she instructed us to go to every parent-teachers meeting, she participated in anything, I know on the elementary school level that was required of us, and she didn't just show up for graduation, she showed up...

I: All the time.

BWB: Yeah, all the time.

I: And so, and to sum up, maybe what you said before also, you think of education as not

just in the schools, it takes part on the whole community?

BWB: The whole community, yes.

I: And the city too.

BWB: You can walk any place in your community, and it can be a learning experience. I still do it. I live in an area where my Assemblyman lives, I live where my Congressman lives. My son, as a matter of fact, for his ECG course, they're going to Washington to, he's studying about poverty and how it affects our world globally.

I: Mhmm.

BWB: So they're going to talk with their Congressman, which his Congressman, he comes into his, where he lives and he can walk over to where his Congressman lives, Congressman Rangel, his Assembly lives where he lives, Keith Wright, and he can discuss these issues with them, so they're going. He was like, "I don't need to go to Washington to discuss it." I said, "No you do need to go to Washington 'cause your mother votes. You haven't started to vote, which you should vote, but you haven't been home, but you need to go and discuss it with him."

I: Right.

BWB: Let him know that I'm away at college, I'm studying about poverty, and our [taps on table] areas are still being affected.

I: Mmm

BWB: [01:26:06] It is. Harlem is still being affected. I mean you have so many people out of work and on pantry lines. The Catholic school that he went to in our community is, um, uh, St. Mark's, it's one of the oldest African-American Catholic elementary schools...

I: Oh wow.

BWB: ...in Harlem, and you went there, you seeing that there's pantries, you guys used to, that was one of your community projects that you used to do.

I: Right.

BWB: So and he went to All Hollows, so you know, once again in The Bronx, Grand Concourse...

I: Right.

BWB: ...and The Bronx now is really an underserved community, so you went to these schools...

I: Uhuh.

BWB: ...so you gotta speak to your Congressman about these things, you know what's going on, you come from this community.

I: Well, I'll give you the floor...

BWB: [sighs]

I: ...one last time before we close...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: ...if there's any other thing you'd like to share.

BWB: [01:26:56] No, just that knowledge is power and education is the key, and, um, individuals such as yourself that are going into that field, I appreciate you. Anything that I can do for you or any others that you know, you just let me know, and I'm just trying to do my part...

I: Well, thank you.

BWB: ...to support you guys and individuals who are going into that field 'cause you guys spend more time with people's children. I don't understand, I don't know if people understand that, than we would ever. And we count on you. I know I do.

I: Well, I app...I thank you for your work...

BWB: Mhmm.

I: ...and really for sharing your story...

BWB: Thank you!

I: ...tonight as well.

BWB: That's nothing...

I: [laughter]

BWB: ...it was good for me to share it. Posterity. I never know, it may come back around again. [laughter]

I: Well, that's the hope! Who knows?

BWB: Yes.

[End of Interview, 1:27:42]