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## Nathaniel, James.

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Naison: This is the 33 interview of the Bronx African American history project and we are interviewing Mr. James Nathaniel.

Naison: Mr. Nathaniel How old were you when you first moved to the Bronx?

Nathaniel: fourteen

Naison You were fourteen. Ok and where did your family move to when they came here?

Nathaniel: I was born in **Bedstv.**

Naison: ok

Nathaniel: In Brooklyn and then we lived for eight months in Rockaway prior to moving to the Bronx.

Naison: How did your family find the Bronx?

Nathaniel: New York City housing authority

Naison: OK you moved into which development?

Nathaniel: Eastchester Projects

Naison: Which is located on from what I heard ...

Nathaniel: **Berk** and 80<sup>th</sup> avenue. It was a bit off of Boston Post Rd.

Naison: Right. Now Did you move in when ... Was your family one of the first to move into Eastchester it had to have been open for some time?

Nathaniel: I think it had been opened for sometime. I'm not sure how many years, but there were not many black families in Eastchester when I moved in. But there was some.

Naison: There was some. Now was your family originally from the Caribbean or the south?

Nathaniel: South.

Naison: What states?

Nathaniel: My mother was born in Georgia but she only lived there for about ... very young she came to New York City. She lived in Harlem. My father was born in South Carolina.

Naison: South Carolina.

Nathaniel: South to South Carolina.

Naison: Now what was your feeling when you heard you were going to be moving to the Bronx, were you excited?

Nathaniel: Oh no. I was a bed sty guy and it was a very strong black community I was raised in and very nurturing for me and I had a lot of friends and I was very athletic and I liked sports so I made a lot of friends in Brooklyn and I didn't want to leave.

Naison: And when you arrived there was the neighborhood very different form **Bedford Stuyvesant?**

Nathaniel: Oh yes very very very different, well there were white people living on the some floor. I never lived with white people on the some floor. In fast going to school there was only one white guy in my class.

Naison: And this was in Junior High?

Nathaniel: yeah that's correct.

Naison: So you started Junior High in the Bronx or High School?

Nathaniel: High School.

Naison: so you went right into Evander.

Nathaniel. Right. Right into Evader.

Naison: And so what was it like moving into a multi-racial housing project?

Nathaniel: well I though structurally it was heaven, the grass was mowed, the building looked clean, the streets were cleaned. You had private homes across the street form the project and the halls were very very very clean. I used to live on Gates Ave in Brooklyn which was not considered one of the better neighborhoods in Brooklyn. So therefore, moving there outwardly it looked to be a step up but for me I was not very happy about that move. My parents were very happy because we had more room and they thought that it was a better bet.

Naison: Now how many siblings did you have?

Nathaniel: Oh well there were eight of us.

Naison: Eight children?

Nathaniel: Yes.

Naison: and you were in what order?

Nathaniel: I'm the oldest.

Naison: you're the oldest.

Nathaniel: Right

Naison: OK so were all eight children born by the time you made the move?

Nathaniel: No ummm I think two came after we made the move.

Naison: Right and what sort of work did your father do?

Nathaniel: My father was a stevedore; he worked in the market down there in lower Manhattan on Washington Street.

Naison: right so did he drive to work or take the Subway?

Nathaniel: he took the subway.

Naison: How quickly did you make friends in the new area, neighborhood?

Nathaniel: the first well, since I was an athlete I went to the basketball court. It took me about a week to meet people by playing basketball and the first fellow I met up there was a guy named Jimmy Dudley and I was shoot what we called a 5-2 back then. We used to play 5-2 and I was shooting 5-2 and he says to me ...

Naison: Can you describe 5-2 for us?

Nathaniel: 5-2 was a game where you well at that time we used to shoot set shots and that was around the circle at the top of the circle about fifteen feet away twenty feet. You would take that shot and if you hit that that is five, and where ever the ball bounced you would have to shoot from there and that's two.

Naison: And you went to twenty-one?

Nathaniel: yeah you went to twenty-one. And so that's what we played 5-2. And around the basketball I met Jimmy Dudley. He was the first person that I met up there. So I started playing with him. And then I started meeting other guys through the basketball court

Naison: Right

Nathaniel: And I ended up making, another fellow from Brooklyn moved up a guy named William Lindsey and we became buddies because he was from Brooklyn and he was from Brooklyn. So we felt that we had formed so form of an alliance against these strangers in the Bronx, (laughs) Ok and so we became buddies and we met a fellow named Leroy Durand. He was from the neighborhood already he lived there already. So we formed a little group there.

Naison: So now was this a situation where the black kids tended to gravitate toward one another?

Nathaniel: there was no integration, blacks stayed with blacks, and the white kids stayed with the white kids.

Naison: Yeah

Nathaniel: there was only one black kid that integrated or hung out with the white kids.

Naison: In the Eastchester houses.

Nathaniel: only one

Naison; now what was the sort of the ethnic background of the white families in the Eastchester at that time?

Nathaniel: There were Italians and probably one guy was Russian, but basically they were Italians.

Naison: It was mostly Italians. So the Italian kids stayed in one place and the black kids stayed in another.

Nathaniel: That's correct

Naison: was it relatively peaceful or was there tension?

Nathaniel: It was relatively peaceful. I mean it seemed like it was a society where everybody knew their own. You know I don't cross this line or whatever though the Italian kids would come into the playground sometimes and try to play basketball shoot a little 5-2 or sometimes they would want to play against us. Sometimes they played against themselves but that was about the only contact that we had.

Naison: Did they play different sports than you did?

Nathaniel: no they were more into, they tried to play basketball. In my neighborhood I didn't see them play too many sports.

Naison: So they didn't play handball they didn't play baseball.

Nathaniel: they played handball sometimes. The Irish guys were more playing basketball, there were some Irish guys. They would come in and play basketball with you. Sometimes they would go and play softball. We had the P.S. 21 which was the school located three blocks away and we would go and play some softball.

Naison: Right

Nathaniel: and they would play around at eh handball court, never seriously.

Naison: now were you aware of other black neighborhoods in that part of the Bronx?

Nathaniel: when I first moved up there?

Naison: Yeah

Nathaniel: No

Naison: so the people living in the private houses around you were mostly white?

Nathaniel: No they wasn't mostly white there were some black families that lived directly across the street from us, right along Burk Ave. And they you had the Fish Ave neighborhood, you know as you walk towards Boston Rd. you were on Fish Ave. Wilson Ave. in that neighborhood. That is where you had a large number of black families that owned homes in that particular area.

Naison: Right

Nathaniel: when I first moved up there that is basically as far as I went. They had two theaters up there on Boston Rd. Lowe's and something we used to call I think the Melbas.

Naison: Ok so those were the two movie theatres where you went.

Nathaniel: That's correct. And that was it I did not go beyond that until I met Leroy Durand the fellow I told you about and then we started ummm I went up near 225<sup>th</sup> street right off White Plains Rd. there used to be a park up there so since I was a pretty good basketball player we started traveling around playing basketball and then I realized that there was some black families that lived in that particular area. Ok and then I stered High School and in my class room there was a guy named John Neil and he lived in the Valley.

Naison: Right

Nathaniel: OK and the Valley was, you know Gun Hill Rd. Gun Hill Rd. runs in and around there. And the Valley was like going down, way down like where they have freedom land at one time. And when John lived in the Valley that's ...

Naison: I'm going to be interviewing someone who grew up in the Valley.

Nathaniel: OK and so we were classmates we were in the some homeroom class. So one day he said, 'why don't you come down by my house?' you know so I said "where do you live" he said 'I live in the Valley. I live on' ummm what did he say he lived on 'Guther Ave' so said "OK" so he told me how to get down there and I walked down Gun Hill. And as I was walking down this big street I see this cow cross the street in front of me. (Laughing) and I said what the hell this is. You know I got scared obviously, and then I see a horse right.

Naison: So there were farms up there?

Nathaniel: Yes, there was like farms. Yeah the animals were like roaming around!

Naison: So are you talking about the goats?

Nathaniel: the goats were in the some place. Ok they were there.

Naison: (laughing) and you were saying

Naison and Nathaniel: 'what the hell is this!'

Nathaniel: Yeah

Naison: yeah there is nothing like that in Bedford Stiverstien

Nathaniel: I have never seen anything like this. And then you know where is the fences where did they come from. So that was a joke. And I went down to his house and there were, his family owned a two-family house down there and then on the corner there was another black family they were called the Grays. Author Gray his father was a doctor in Harlem in a hospital way back then and they had the corner house which was a very very very large house. But that's the first time I went down to the Valley and I saw these animals walking around and everything and we used to play basketball, they had a pole, you know a telephone pole that you put up a fake basketball court and I used to go down there and play basketball with John and Duke a lot. Ok because John became a very good friend of mine. And then I started to meet other black guys that had families that had homes down there. Tommy Brown, his father was a detective, the Grays I indicated and there was another guy named Duke; who was a close friend of John.

Naison: Now was your family church going?

Nathaniel: No.

Naison: So they didn't right away associate with the church when they moved up there.

Nathaniel: No

Naison: And you didn't go to church?

Nathaniel: No

Naison: now when you first set foot into Vander; what was that like? You know describe your experience you know your first day in High School.

Nathaniel: Well I guess going from **Bedsty** to High School was a stretch for anyone coming out of **bed sty** because all of the kids were white. And basically I went to school with all black kids up until that point. That was shocking at first, and there was perception that the white kids were a little ahead of us. At least I thought they were ahead of me based upon they way they responded in class, and some things I know I had to catch up on. Ok. If I wanted to compete with them, so that was interesting. And then, the mix there was you had Italian kids some of them were bright but most of them didn't give two hoots about. And then you had the Jewish kids who came from **Monte Furry** area coming down to Evander, they were very aggressive in the class and always trying to perform very very very well. Ummm, my high School experience was interesting we had some black kind that came up from like the Boston Rd. area, that came up to Evander, Evander was considered a good school back then.

Naison: Right

Nathaniel: so a lot of kids were trying to get into Evander so they would come in from outside the location and ...

Naison: so you are saying that there down from Boston Rd. Down in **Maurisania?**

Nathaniel: That's correct.

Naison: so that you have **Estow** as the biggest center of black culture

Nathaniel: and remember there used to be a 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave L

Naison: Right oh yes I used to take that

Nathaniel: and it used to go up to Gun Hill Rd. so they would just form neighborhoods down there they would just hop on the 3rd Ave. L and go up to

Naison: Right so there were some kids down from **Maurisania .**



Nathaniel: That's correct. And basically in school it was basically the same the black kids stayed with the black kids and the white kids stayed with the white kids. And there is another big project up there in the Northeast Bronx, though, there was some kids coming down from **Evenwald**.

Naison: **Evenwald** had opened up when you were had moved there?

Nathaniel: yes there was some kid there.

Naison: now was the racial mix in **Edenwald** pretty similar to Eastchester?

Nathaniel: No it was different. Eastchester was considered in quotes a middle income project.

Naison: ok

Nathaniel: **Edenwald** was low income.

Naison: And there were more blacks.

Nathaniel: There were more blacks

Naison: And were the people poorer and tougher from Edenwald, would you say?

Nathaniel: Our perception was yes. (laughing)

Naison (laughing) And it was more than perception.

Nathaniel: That's correct.

Naison: Did they come in there ready to kick but?

Nathaniel: they came on top I mean they came on top.

Naison: Yeah.

Nathaniel: and then you get to know a few people since there was only x amount of blacks in the school you get to know most of the black kids. And they had some pretty tough guys.

Naison: yeah now where the people from Fish Ave a group apart there or did they pretty much mix in with everybody else?

Nathaniel: They no they were a group apart. Ok they was defiantly stratus of social classes there. The guys that were on the outside that time, if you came from Eastchester you was a homeowner your father was a property owner. So you were there. Ok then you had I call it the

Fish Ave group, they was strivers, and they may socialize. But then you had the guys that fathers owned homes in the Valley or over more toward the 220' s and the other families there and I can't remember all their names, but families who probably were considered other middle class families. They stayed in their own little clicks.

Naison; so the home owners stuck together and the project kids stuck together?

Nathaniel: occasionally some of the homeowner kids would play basketball in the projects. And they would play ball. But they didn't want to socialize too much form the guys from the projects.

Naison: Now is this the thing when Richard was talking about the Lowes and the

Nathaniel: Oh yeah the partly lows. Wybridge and Lowes they were twin brothers whose father were form the middle class. I had a friend who was in love with one of the sisters, and but he was from Eastchester ok so finally he managed to get invited to a part) and we went to the party and it was interesting that we got in. I was surprised that we go in! (laughing)

Naison: So you even said that a lot of times.

Nathaniel: they wouldn't let you in! that right. You couldn't get in , but we got in so I guess he made a impression on the sister and sometimes we used to have these rivalries where we would go play the guy that lived up there in the 220's up where we called upper middle hangout and we would be on this brick, hardwood, hard grass field and we would be trying to kill them and they would be trying to kill us.

Naison: This would be football?

Nathaniel: Football. Yes, but what was interesting is that we all dated the same girls. Ok we all dated the same girls, and out of that separation we decided to create a club out in Eastchester. We used to call ourselves the International, Club International.

Naison: And this was guys and girls or just guys?

Nathaniel: Just guys.

Naison: the Club International from Eastchester. Did you have jackets or anything like that?

Nathaniel: Yes we did we used to have black blazers.

Naison: Do you have any pictures of your self in that?

Nathaniel: I don't know, I might

Naison: We could put in the Bronx Historical Society.

Nathaniel: We used to have black blazers that we used to wear to parties. And we used to have like black action jackets that we used to wear.

Naison: Wow this is interesting because the first person I interviewed Vickey Archorbold grew up in the Patterson houses and they had a little club of their the girls called the Socialettes .

Nathaniel: right ok no we used to call ourselves the club international we were thought we were sophisticated and we used to throw big dances in fact we used to have Joe Cuber, Tido Rodriguez ...

Naison: So you were also in the North Bronx were into Latin Music.

Nathaniel: Yes we had Latin members in our club.

Naison: So there were Latin families in Eastchester too. And they were part of the African American group.

Nathaniel: they were part of the African American group.

Naison: And when you went to dances did you organize your own dances or did you go down to the palladium?

Nathaniel: We did both, we organized our own dances. Ok big dances or we went to the palladium.

Naison: Now where would you hold the dances?

Nathaniel: UMMM there was a place on 43<sup>rd</sup> between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> the town hall they used to call it.

Naison: so you would hold your dances in Manhattan.

Nathaniel: Sometimes, or we would hold them in one-hundred point palace there was the embassy ballroom here.

Naison: This is 161st?

Nathaniel: That's correct. So we would move around

Naison: now this is so even at fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen you were all over the city.

Nathaniel: This was basically sixteen and seventeen years old.

Naison: Ok. But you felt comfortable in a lot of different parts of the city.

Nathaniel: Yes

Naison: you were in Harlem, how important was Harlem as a social cultural center for your cohort, or were you more Mid-town and South Bronx oriented?

Nathaniel: We were more Harlem to me was a very drastic experience because I went down with a buddy for my first time and just walking the streets to become familiar with it, the sidewalks were wide, you know all the things like that. But initially we didn't hangout in Harlem that much we did hit Mount Vernon, New Rochelle ...

Naison: Now there were black communities in you know significant balk communities in the 50's in those places

Nathaniel: That's correct, that's correct.

Naison: with their own clubs ...

Nathaniel: Very shopping districts very upper-middle class communities. They have a lot of houses there. You know that's where you met the nice upper-class girls. Ok

Naison: Now what sort of music. were you listening to when you went to high school?

Nathaniel: Rock'n Roll that music.

Naison: What were some of the Rock'nRoll groups that you particularly remember? Who were your favorites?

Nathaniel: Actually Earth Angel, we used to go out in **Gradamas**. We used to love all the **Gradamas** at first. (Laughing)

Naison: That you dance slowly to.

Nathaniel: That's correct

Naison: Did you ever sing? Did you ever try performing?

Nathaniel: No I knew I couldn't sing. No we wasn't the type if guys who would stand on the comer and try to sing.

Naison: Was there much of that in Eastchester, people in the comer trying to sing?

Nathaniel: Some guys did that.

Naison: Anybody do that successfully?

Nathaniel: No there were no guys that was successful entertainers. We had a lot of successful

guys coming out of Eastchester though. The sad thing about it is that you had a lot of successful guys coming out of Eastchester and you got a lot of guys who got hooked on drugs.

Naison: Right

Nathaniel: ok it all depended on what group you hung out with.

Naison: Now were there gangs in the Bronx when you arrived there, or in that neighborhood that you were aware of?

Nathaniel: There were no black gangs. There might have been Italian gangs. Ok I think he mentioned a incident where there were conflicts between blacks and whites and there was a conflict in the neighborhood between some of us and ... Eastchester was like isolated in a way, and that night about a hundred Italian guys came into the projects and they walked into the middle of the projects and you know the niggers are gonna come outside come on down we want to deal with you. And all the tough guys that we had in the projects at that time ain't nobody went outside, except for this one guy that we used to call Pete Harris, very very devoted strong guy did go outside. Pete always had very very big hands, this is how I remember him and he was the only guy that stood and confronted them regarding this issue. And I guess they must have though he was crazy because they never, never even attacked him. Ok and Pete later became a fire attacker. Ok most of the older guys ... but there was the first Civil Rights Movement in that area at the time when say that there used to be a White Castle.

Naison: White Castle in AUton

Nathaniel: That's right White Castle up there, and the guys from the homes across the street and they guys from Eastchester were the first to picket them regarding not hiring blacks.

Naison: Now was that with CORE?

Nathaniel: N.A.C.P.

Naison: And the N.A.C.P. did it first.

Nathaniel: Right

Naison: Now was this in the 50's

Nathaniel: Yes it was

Naison: Because there was a huge thing with CORE in 1963.

Nathaniel: No this was in the 50's

Naison: The N.A.C.P. was picketing?

Nathaniel: No they did it in the 50"

Naison: in the 50's. Now were your parents involved in the local NACP?

Nathaniel: No my parents were basically working class people who worked, my mother stayed home and took care of all of the kids.

Naison: Right But so this was when you were in High School?

Nathaniel: That's correct and I was not aware that this was happening because the older guys in the project used to talk to us a lot and whatever they told us was this is what they were doing.

Naison: right so there were people in the project who were joining the demonstrations.

Nathaniel: That's correct.

Naison: Now, did the older guys tell you that there were certain places that was not safe for somebody black to go?

Nathaniel: Well you kind of knew. You know I don't know it is something that you just pick up. For example, I would never walk down Burk Ave. toward the train because it was Burk Ave stop after dark. Even though there was a movie there, the Burk Theatre.

Naison: And this was Burk and where was the train?

Nathaniel: it was on Burk Ave. Burk and White Plains.

Naison: So at night you wouldn't walk there, that was something you knew not to do.

Nathaniel: It was something you knew not to do. Ok a couple of black guys ventured down into the movies and they got into fights and they got beat up and that kind of stuff. So you knew that you didn't do that kind of stuff. There were certain neighborhoods that you knew that you didn't go into after a certain time.

Naison: Right Now what about Fordham Rd.?

Nathaniel: Oh Fordham Rd. Fordham Rd baldies (laughing) I only went on Fordham Rd. when I had to shop. In the summer time I went to Theodore Roosevelt High School to take some summer courses, and everybody used to wear the Fordham baldies. But I never had any conflict with them but you know that they were around you just watch you but.

Naison: Now what is this the Specorelli refer to?

Nathaniel: Specorelli. Where I indicated before we had some black guys that used to come from Down-town to go to Evander. And you had some tough kids there. And one day they came up and they beat up some Italian kids in the school. But naturally they beat them up and they ran back to Down-town. Well obviously when something like that happens there were hundreds and hundreds of Italian youth, young men waiting for us to come out of school that day. And I lived Up-town so I didn't have no where to run. The way I had to go home was where they were where they were standing; they stood across the street on the corner. And I saw them and I waited and I said well maybe they will go away, but after two or three hours they was not going a place. They

wanted some revenge, but I said well I have to go home. So I eventually came outside and I walked down the steps and I started walking up Gun Hill Rd. toward Eastchester. I got right across the street and naturally they circled me and I said oh shit this is it. And finally coming through the little group of the crowd was a kid that I used to call Specorelli. I used to shoot 5-2 with him, he was from Eastchester. And Specorelli saw me and said 'hi how are you doing' and I said "fine". And he told them 'leave him alone, he lives up here' and he told me to go and head home. And I never new him I just used to shoot 5-2 with this guy, I never know that this guy had this kind of power, or whatever. So he saved me from getting a beating. So the next time I saw him I had to look at him differently, who is this guy who could tell a hundred guys to leave this man alone? Ok so that's the Specorelli story, here is this kid I used to shoot 5-2 with he was a little short guy and he is telling hundreds of guys to back off. So looking at him differently then I kind of got an idea of who he was. Ok (laughing) But he never carried himself that way when he earn out to play basketball.

Naison: Right interesting.

Nathaniel: he was just a regular guy

Naison: just a regular guy.

Nathaniel: right

Naison: Now what were the teachers like at Evander?

Nathaniel: it was a mix bag, some of them didn't want to work with you, I guess they had some preconceived ideas of what your ideas were. Some of them were very giving and wanted to work with you. But you had a lot of bright black students. So they come from those kind of families where education was important. So I guess in the overall sense if you worked they would work with you.

Naison: now when you entered into the school did you see yourself as going to college?

Nathaniel: No, no in fact when I did the paper I didn't see myself going to college. I sav myself, you want to know the truth, I thought I was going to be a police officer. Something along those lines. I didn't think about a college education.

Naison: Now did you tryout for the basketball team at Evander?

Nathaniel: Yes I did.

Naison: And did you play on it?

Nathaniel: Yes I did.

Naison: what year did you start to play organized basketball?

Nathaniel: 56.

Naison: So it was when you were a junior?

Nathaniel: yes

Naison: so it must have been pretty competitive trying out for the team.

Nathaniel: Yeah it was very competitive. There were only one, two, three, well there was five, well you had twelve guys on the team, six of us was black

Naison: Now did you play organized coached leagues outside of Evande or is it all school yard?

Nathaniel: All school yard.

Naison: so you didn't have coaches that trained you in a community center, its all from the school yard. Now did the basketball contribute to you thinking about college or was it more the academics?

Nathaniel: I think it was more of my friends. The people I met up there up in the North East Bronx. There were a lot, as I mentioned before Leroy, Reggie Smith, guys that I really became good friends of mine. They talked to me about college, and they started me thinking about that.

Naison: now what about Richard mentioned a guidance counselor?

Nathaniel: Well yeah at one time in school I got real real lazy and there were problems at home and I decided that I didn't want to take the reaching courses anymore, and I said oh the hell with this. I don't need this all I can do is take the general courses and just get my diploma and get out. So I went to my Guidance Counselor who was an Irish woman and I told her that I wanted to change courses the academic courses. And I wanted to take the general and whatever and she said, no I won't do that until I speak to your mother. So I said what do you want to speak to my mother for? This is my decision. But anyhow my mother finally came up because I was going to do this and she talked to my mother and she told my mother that I had the ability to do this and that if she were my mother she would not let me do this. So my mother listened to her and she had me take the regents. And it worked out for the best, but you know the woman was interested. She didn't just say yeah ok you can just go ahead.

Naison: So that was very positive.

Nathaniel: Very very positive. She could have warehoused me and just pushed to the general course, but she said no they looked my records over and they said you have the ability to finish academic course and there is no reason why you should do this.

Naison: Now were you ever interested in Jazz when you were growing up, or were you more Rock'n Roll and Latin?

Nathaniel: I was interested in Jazz, a little bit. I was exposed to it I went to jazz concerts.

Naison: Did you ever go down to Bird Land or 55<sup>th</sup>



Nathaniel: I went to Bird Land, Palladium there's places in the Village we used to go to. Ok V **erandas** Ave used to have a annual Jazz festival and I used to go to those. So yeah.

Naison: So it sounded like you were pretty cosmopolitan, sophisticated crowd.

Nathaniel: We tried to be

Naison: Yeah you know I terms of music and being around the city and being aware of a lot of things.

Nathaniel: yes

Naison: And a lot of the people ended up going onto college.

Nathaniel: That's interesting, actually the ones that actually graduated out of the group only four of us out of twelve or thirteen guys.

Naison: Ended up going to college.

Nathaniel: And graduated.

Naison: And graduated.

Nathaniel: That's right. A lot guys started.

Naison: ok now what college did you graduate from?

Nathaniel: I graduated from Pace University.

Naison: Pace University, so you went to school in the city.

Nathaniel: That's correct

Naison: Did any of your friends go to Traditionally Black collges?

Nathaniel: Yes they did.

Naison: Which Schools?

Nathaniel: They went to Howard, Morgan, North Carolina those were the primary ones.

Naison: were the guidance councilors at Evander aware of the traditionally black colleges, or did they find out mostly from their families?

Nathaniel: I think they found out mostly through their families.

Naison: Through their families

Nathaniel: Right

Naison: ok so what made you choose Pace?

Nathaniel: well I didn't have enough money to go full time so I worked. So I started out at New York City Community College.

Naison: Where was that located?

Nathaniel: Brooklyn

Naison: oh the one in Brooklyn

Nathaniel: That's right. So I went there part time and then I ended wanting to go for full time then I went full time. Then I graduated, and then I decided that I wanted to finish and get my bachelors degree, because I got a little taste of it. Pace was cheaper than NYU, I was a business major.

Naison: And this was Pace Down-town.

Nathaniel: Downtown. Right one building they started out with only one building when I went there. And it was cheaper and I took the exam, out of sixty-eight credits they accepted sixty-four and I said fine. III go here, and I have to be honest I went to school, New York City, with this Jewish guy and I saw him in the street and he was always kind of crazy and he asked me are you continuing going to school? I said I hope. He said 'hey look its easy I'm at Pace go to Pace take the exam. They will take all your credits'. That's how I decided to go there.

Naison: Did you have jobs while you were going to high school?

Nathaniel: Yes I worked at A&P when I was in my fifth term in High School.

Naison: And was that common for people for people to be able to find those jobs?

Nathaniel: I was one of the first black guys working at A&P up on Boston Rd. And how I got the job, my mother got the job for me. She went to the owner and said look my son needs a job. (Laughing). And he said 'ok I'll hire him' so that's how I got the job.

Naison: So most of your friends didn't have jobs?

Nathaniel: Not initially no, John got a job at A&P after I got one most of them did not have jobs at the time.

Naison: When did drugs start to hit?

Nathaniel: Drugs hit there in wow, about 59-60

Naison: 59-60 and this is we are talking about heroine.

Nathaniel: I'm talking about heroine.

Naison: And did it hit Eastchester or did it hit Edenwald first?

Nathaniel: I think it hit Eastchester and Edenwald simultaneously. And it was devastating. We lost a lot of guys.

Naison: Really and was this when you were still in High School or is this just after?

Nathaniel: Just after I got out of High School.

Naison: And did it hit your circle or the younger group?

Nathaniel: It hit a younger group, it didn't hit my circle as hard, the younger group.

Naison: How did you explain this when it was going on?

Nathaniel: well it was kind of hard to explain. Some guys came from very good families they materially they had everything that a parent could buy a young man but there was looking for something. Trying to be something that they could not be, and they started hanging out with the wrong guys.

Naison: Now who was selling the drugs?

Nathaniel: Awwwthat's interesting at first, I think most used to go to Harlem to get most of the drugs. You'd get on the Dinky that train.

Naison: Ok now tell me what is the famous Dinky?

Nathaniel: the Dinky when I first moved up to the Bronx the number five train ad the number D train would only go up to 180<sup>th</sup> street. To get to Gun Hill Rd. where we lived we would have to get off the train go down stairs, walk to the extreme end of the station because there was another line there and it used to be a two car train called the Dinky, and you would have to get the Dinky to go to your destination. And the last stop was some place in Mount Vemon. The South-side of Mount Vemon. So we used to call it the Dinky. So there was no train that ran directly through up to part of Gun Hill RD.

Naison: So you take the Dinky to 180<sup>th</sup> street ...

Nathaniel: No you would take the number two or five up to 180<sup>th</sup> street, then you had to get off, walk downstairs, go under the station, and go upstairs again to another track. And that is where the Dinky goes out. You get on the Dinky, two cars, and then that would take you. There's only like a five stop train. And we used to call it the Dinky.

Naison: So they would start off getting their drugs in Harlem, so there was a drug problem in Harlem at that time?

Nathaniel: Yes there was. That's my perception.

Naison: that's your perception.

Nathaniel: But I don't think anybody in the neighborhood was selling heroine.

Naison: Right now was there much of a numbers going on in Eastchester when you moved there?

Nathaniel: When you say numbers what do you mean?

Naison: I mean were people playing the numbers?

Nathaniel: You always have that. I don't know where it was because I wasn't into playing numbers, but there was always a place to play.

Naison: Now were the Italians playing numbers or was this mostly the black families?

Nathaniel: I think that the Italians were playing numbers also. It was part of life in general.

Naison: were you very like aware of the mob as a factor in the Italian section or was that something that sort of came later that concept?

Nathaniel: That concept came later. What was I aware of? That they lived in separate communities, that nobody messed with them, I mean if that's the way to say it. We went to school and there was no intermingling.

Naison: There was not inter-racial dating.

Nathaniel: That's right none of that was going on up there ok and basically if you didn't bother them they didn't bother you. You know everybody stayed to their own.

Naison: you felt like it was a pretty predictable, safe environment.

Nathaniel: It was fine with me. Right I lived up there a long time and I really never had incidents. You know I would go to a movie and nobody would other me. Just mind your business.

Naison: Yeah, now Richard also mentioned going to Riece rater than Orchard. What was that about?

Nathaniel: Well socially at that time, all the blacks in the city, young black people in the city, went to Riece Park because that's where all the kids that were in college would be on the weekends. So that's where we all wanted to be.

Naison: So that was the college scene.

Nathaniel: That was the college scene.

Naison: And what was Orchard known as?

Nathaniel: Orchard was when you wanted to go on a private date and you just want to take somebody out and not be seen too much, you know that type of thing. I know I went to Orchard, or we went to Orchard but if you really wanted to have some fun you went to Riece Park.

Naison: Now when did you begin to notice white flight? A really rapid Change in the neighborhood.

Nathaniel Rapid change in the neighborhood. Around 61 to 62 that's the whites started really getting out.

Naison: And Eastchester changed and the surrounding neighborhood changed. But it Eastchester change faster than the surrounding neighborhood or not necessarily?

Nathaniel: Not necessarily.

Naison: So this began in the early to mid 60's

Nathaniel: That's correct

Naison: And how did people respond, did the drugs make Eastchester less safe, were there brake-ins you know?

Nathaniel: It was less safe. It was, there were robberies, brake-ins, there were more people being attacked physically, it didn't seem secure any longer based upon the fact that everyone was aware that so-and-so did this he might rob you or take something from you.

Naison: And you knew who the people were who were the threats?

Nathaniel: oh yeah we knew who they were.

Naison: Now was there a point at which you were saying to yourself you know I don't want to live here anymore, its time for me, my family to get out?

Nathaniel: My family didn't have that kind of money. We knew that this is where we were. Did many of the black families rotate out of there? Some rotated to Co-op city, those who could afford it moved to Co-op city. Was it a large exodus? There was a turnover yes and new families moved in.

Naison: But your family stayed there for quite awhile.

Nathaniel: we stayed there for quite awhile.

Naison: now when did you start noticing large numbers of Caribbean families moving into the area?

Nathaniel: Well I think I was out of there before the large number of Caribbean families moved in. Probably a large number of black families moved in before the Caribbean families moved in.

Naison: Really?

Nathaniel: But you got more of a larger influx of Latin families.

Naison: Yeah now what year did you leave?

Nathaniel: What year did we leave there? Ummm oh we left around, 64 I think.

Naison: you say we, you got married or this was ...

Nathaniel: no I just went on and got my own place.

Naison: And was it in the Bronx?

Nathaniel: In the Bronx.

Naison: and where did you move to in the Bronx?

Nathaniel: I moved to Carpen Ave. right off 219<sup>th</sup> street.

Naison: so this was East or West?

Nathaniel: No it was west.

Naison: Now did you move into an apartment building?

Nathaniel: I moved into a two family house, my brother and I shared an apartment.

Naison: oh ok. And when you got married were you living in the Bronx or did you move out?

Nathaniel: No when I got married I lived, where was I living, I lived on Ca~ona Park. which is 174<sup>th</sup> street and Westchester Ave.

Naison: And so what year was that?

Nathaniel: I was living in the Bronx.

Naison: And how far was that from Eastchester?

Nathaniel: Form Eastchester, umm by car? Fifteen minutes.

Nathaniel: No it was west

Naison: closer to White Plains Rd.?

Nathaniel: Yes, right off White Plains Rd.

Naison: in the some North Bronx area?

Nathaniel: What year did I get married? Umm 1968.

Naison: And wow so you move there just before all hell broke loose in that area.

Nathaniel: yes

Naison: now did you meet you wife in the Bronx?

Nathaniel: No I met her at work.

Naison ok

Nathaniel: Social Security Administration and she lives in the Bronx. She lives in Melrose Project.

Naison: oh ok sure so now did you buy a house in Crotona Park north?

Nathaniel: No no I had a apartment and we lived, my wife and I when we got married, we lived on 108 Park place which is right off the Concourse right off 169<sup>th</sup> street and the Concourse. Park Place and 169<sup>th</sup> street., and we lived there for about three years and then I moved to Park Chester, and I stayed in Park Chester for twenty-eight years.

Naison: right so you went form Crotona park North to Park Place to Park Chester?

Nathaniel: yes that's correct.

Naison Now when you moved to crotona Park North you didn't have any sense that this neighborhood was at risk?

Nathaniel: No it wasn't that bad

Naison: I knew that area fairly well and by the mid 70s It was a ghost town.

Nathaniel: Probably I went to school I lived there probable around 67, 66, 67.

Naison: Right

Nathaniel because I went to school in 68 and graduated in 70 I didn't go back therein 70 then I moved to Park Place...

Naison: Right so you didn't really see the...Now did you spend much time down in Mauriceania, down by Boston Rd. Prospect Ave.?

Nathaniel: definitely not (laughing) definitely not, only time I was there was when we had to play Maurice High School in basketball and usually after the game you had to run to the bus for your life. Or when we were warming up the girls would pinch you on the leg or something so if you said something you would have to fight outside. You know I didn't hang around.

Naison: so there was a sense that you know that the black kids that lived in that neighborhood looked at you as umm

Nathaniel: when the first parties, they used to call us the uptown guys that I went to was down in the Maurice area. And we were in a church and the guys from up town which was 220 and Fish Ave. we all went to a party from Evander. After one hour in the party a fight started from the guys from down in that area. They have us trapped on the church's steps ok saying we are going to beat you guys up from uptown. We scared thinking how the hell are we going to get out of here? Third Ave, L is over here. They kicked and they stabbed one guy. Ok on the steps we still on the steps. We go back bang on the doors of the church let us in, they was smart they leave us out there. Along came a police man he sees fifty guys there and ten guys on the steps and he takes off. (laughing) leaving us on the steps ok my buddy who is a good friend of mine is out there with them watching out saying I'm still with you all, you gotta get out of here. Finally we here the sirens so I guess the Police officer must have called for help. We here the sirens in the background and that diverted them for a couple of minutes and we take off down 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave, and they chasing us and we were able to make it to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave L.

Naison: so that was the last time you went to a party?

Nathaniel: That's right, that was the last time I was down in Mauriceania. Ok you know there are certain parts of the city, I think you had a group called the sportsmen or something at that time. And I think they covered the Mauriceania area and you didn't want to be ...

Naison: No I was told by somebody that was in a gang down there that they were serious.

Nathaniel: Oh course they were.

Naison: That one group

Nathaniel: Yeah you didn't want to get caught down there. Ok you didn't go and I didn't even date girls in that area.

Naison: Now what was your High School basketball experience like?

Nathaniel: Well I played one year, and I didn't grow to be six feet until my junior year. Ok so when I made the team, tried out and made the team, and the coach had me, I would guess I was number eight or number nine, but before that happened I was on the starting five. Because I was a good shooter, and we had a pretty good team, but you know the big guys like Clinton and Maurice we could just never beat those guys. Because they had a tremendous team there. But it was a great experience. There was fighting after the game, that kind of foolishness, but it was a positive experience.

Naison: Are there any things in me going over this that I have neglected? That are you know particularly ...

Nathaniel: I think one of the interesting things about my experience living in that part of the Bronx was the different types of people, we had different socioeconomic levels, and the dating scene, the dating scene was very very interesting. That's where you really exposed and learned a lot.

Naison: Now In those days it was a formal dating, you would call somebody up and you would have to come to their house and meet their parents. So describe to me a typical date.



Nathaniel: A typical date was, well first you had to work your way up to even asking the young lady out to date. And you usually met her in school or on the project you lived in. And you talked to her for a week or so and then you finally got the nerve up to say can I take you to a movie? Which were the movies up on Boston Rd. or something. And then she'd say, if she likes you she'd say yes but you gotta come by. And when you go by there both of the parents were usually at home. And you sat in the living room and they would come in the living room and they would wonder who you are. And then finally they would recognize you from the neighborhood or something. They would ask you a couple of questions and they think that you could take their daughter out then it was ok but the father would say have her back by such and such a time. So you know you had a time frame so you'd go up to the movie take her in, buy her popcorn or whatever walk back home and at her front door. If you were lucky you would get a kiss. And that was it that was the end of the date; a typical date.

Naison: That was it.

Nathaniel: As you got older you might go out to Randal's for a jazz concert take some one down to the palladium for cheaper dancing or whatever. And by that time you knew the parents ect. ect. ect. And so things were relaxing a little bit, but initially it was not easy, because fathers always want to interview you.

Naison: And this is a community with very strong fathers.

Nathaniel: Very strong families. There was fathers there and you had to deal with them. And it was if you don't deal with me your about to take my daughter back at such and such a time. I want her back at such and such a time. I want my daughter back at such and such a time. And you basically went through a screening process, you know 'are you interested in going to school?' or 'Do you work?' or 'where do you live?' 'What's your last name?' you know that type of thing. And usually if they liked you it was alright. But you had to go through that process it was not meet me out side and I will get you back here at five o'clock and nobody is going to say nothing. I was nothing like that.

Naison: Now what about dances? Did people take dates to dances or were they more like were people came with their groups of girl and guy friends and then met at the dances?

Nathaniel: Basically we had a combination of both, but there was a lot of I'm taking son-so to the dance with me to the dance. There was more couples than offers if that is what you are asking. And having a girlfriend was almost having a status symbol.

Naison: Now if you had a girlfriend did she wear your letter sweater in school?

Nathaniel: No there was nothing like that. There wasn't nothing like that. I had a jacket with the big E, but it wasn't nothing like that. You had to be perceived as usually back then even he girls from Eastchester even, you had to be perceived as someone who was going to go further. There was no dead end involved.

Naison: Right. Now would a girl from Eastchester date somebody from Edenwald?

Nathaniel: No. Very very very rarely.

Naison: Or from Fish Ave or somebody from Edenwald?

Nathaniel: Fish Ave. yes No not form Fish Ave. Maybe one guy would get over from Edenwald, and he was exceedingly handsome or something. But on the whole no.

Naison: But so you saw all these complex gradations after. Now did you see yourself as someone who was going to be able to move in the circle in the more upper crust?

Nathaniel: Definitely not. Definitely not, that's why we created our Club International. Ok we saw ourselves in fact being eliminated from certain types of social events, certain parties.

Naison: Were you aware of Jack and Jill, that whole scene?

Nathaniel: we were aware of it just not part of it. Yes we were aware but a part no. I think the reason we banded together was the fact that we felt that there were certain parties or certain social scenes we couldn't be a part of. So therefore, we felt that we were equal so we would create our own social setting, that's what we did. Because we were feeling that we were just as good or whatever, but we could not break into that set. So we felt that we would create our own.

Naison: Now is there a continuing camaraderie between the people who grew up together in Eastchester? Do you still see people?

Nathaniel: My Club International, no I don't. My group I don't see anymore because a lot of them left the state. Some live in Georgia, some live way out on the island. We all went basically different ways. I even bought a home out in Jersey, I don't live in the Bronx anymore. But that was six or seven years ago. So do I see them, the old group. Now the last guy I used to see in the old group passed away about two years ago.

Naison: Now are there reunions at eh Eastchester houses or anything like that? Like the people from the Patterson houses, they have reunions.

Nathaniel: Not that I know of, I have not participated in nothing.

Naison: does Evander have a alumni association?

Nathaniel: My brothers went to Evander and they say yes they do. And yes they have attended reunions at Evander, but I have never attended a reunion at Evander. My brother has a joke, he always says they always ask about you, everybody always asks about you. So I say well you never let me know what date it is, so that I can come. He says but they always ask 'what happened to your brother' No I never attended.

Naison: Now I assume that this organization is a nonprofit.

Nathaniel: Yes it is.

Naison: Now how did you end up moving from the business world into the nonprofit?

Nathaniel: Actually, I was a governmental official. I used to be a, primarily my career has been in city government. I was the assistant deputy commissioner for program operations for Child

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Development. For about sixteen years, seventeen years. I left city government, I retired in 1995. And I then decided after being three months at home to see employment in the nonprofit world. I came and worked here as a deputy administrator in charge of administrative services for about three years, and I had a slight heart attack, and then I retired again. And then the agency got into some difficulty whatever and they asked me to come back to be on the board of directors. I came back and I sat on the board of directors and they asked me to assume the CEO's roll until they find someone to replace me.

Naison: Oh so you're a in term CEO?

Nathaniel: I'm a in term CEO. You know I've been here now about eight months. So I've been running this organization now about eight months.

Naison: Now at looking back at this; do you feel that those years were a good experience?

Nathaniel: Oh most definitely. I mean I believe that it was a positive experience for me. I don't know how I would have ended up if I was in Brooklyn, if I stayed in **Bedstv.** Maybe, I had good friends there; I had guys that were successful here. But overall it was a tremendous experience for me. I had a tremendously good time, I met tremendously good guys, nice guys, good guys, and was positive.

Naison: I know coming from Brooklyn there is a lot of Brooklyn pride, was there Bronx pride in the same kind of way?

Nathaniel: oh yes. Oh yes definitely Bronx pride. Just by coming form Brooklyn they challenge you. You know because we come with that bravado and that attitude, but they had the attitude up here also. So we would show them in the competition. Oh they was down there to beat your but just because they could.

Naison: Did you ever play teams from Brooklyn in basketball?

Nathaniel: Yes we played teams from Brooklyn and we played teams from Patterson. We played all over we played in New Rochelle, we played in Mount Vernon, we played all over. And there was a group of guys we used to play down right off 174<sup>th</sup> street and Boston Rd. **Cratona** Park. And they used to be a basketball court there.

Naison: yeah there actually still is.

Nathaniel: Yeah there was a guy named Bruce Mooney we were opponents in High School, he used to play for **Mauriceson** and I used to play for Evander. And somehow we always had this competitive thing. Even when we got out of school if we played against each other as we got older we would try to kill each other. (laughing)

Naison: Did you keep playing basketball after school for a while?

Nathaniel: Oh yes. In fact there was a group that developed, we used to play down in the Village,

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right off of west 4<sup>th</sup> street, there's a park department with a pool. There was a group of guys from the north Bronx and we played for about twenty-five years, thirty years; every Friday.

Naison: SO these are the Uptown Boys?

Nathaniel: These are the Uptown Boys. And some uptown guys, we used to come down. It is interesting I was part of a older group, but there was guys that were maybe a year or two behind me from Evander that we got to know, some was from Eastchester, Somer was from the Valley, some for White Plains, we all ended up playing basketball on Friday nights down in the Village. For twenty-five years.

Naison: That's fantastic! This was full court?

Nathaniel: Twenty-five years and yes full court. And out of that developed just another group of social guys that all started in the upper part of the Bronx. And we remained friends for longer. Every year we had our annual Christmas party. We would rent a big hotel room down at the Hilton, and so a city wide party.

Naison: Wow. Now your wife grew up in the Melrose housing. What did she think when she was growing up of the guys from your neighborhood? Where there you know ...

Nathaniel: I never asked her that. (laughing) The only thing I can tell you is hat when I first met her she said, and I saw her with her legs crossed she was sitting on the table, I was dancing with another young lady. And I winked at her, and she couldn't stand me. My wife wouldn't talk to me for about three or four weeks when I would meet her out after work. But I convinced her that I was a nice guy.

Naison: There you go. Ok well do you have any more things to tell? Obviously you are a great story teller. Are there any North Bronx stories that we missed here?

Nathaniel: North Bronx stories, do I have any? There's a guy I, you know there were blacks up in the North Bronx even way before I moved up there. One of my buddies, who now lies in Atlanta Georgia, a guy named Reggie Smith. HE lived up on 222nd on **Bronx Wood** Ave. I'm quite sure that when I tell this episode that he is very knowledgeable, he taught me a lot about the neighborhood.

Naison: So he was sort of the folk law ...

Nathaniel: Yeah he went to public school up there. The only other story that I think is interesting is that in our little world, when I say our little world the blacks in the North East Bronx. There was a party down in the Valley one night and the guys form **Edenwald** come over and like always the guys that you come over with, there was a big fight that started and everybody tries to run away or whatever. And we had a couple of kids that lived in Eastchester, one of the kids we used to call Boodlum, always dressed very nicely, very fancy, nice nice guy. And I remember John my buddy that lived in the Valley coming to get me saying you can come over my house because I think there is going to be a fight that is about to start. So let's get out of here now. So we run onto Gunter Ave. Boodlum is running up the hill and I guess it's not funny but you ever see one man men run up a hill and you see a herd of men just jumping over the top of him and trapping him down. The next day I see Boodlum in the project he asked me 'what happened to

you?' (laughing) So I told him you know "I went to John's house and really didn't see what happened to him". But overall from a more serious aspect, I think that living in the area if you liked at things there was allot of motivation to do better.

Naison: And there was nothing like today where you hear about kids are teasing other kids for doing well in school?

Nathaniel: No

Naison: You supported each other?

Nathaniel: We supported each other; there were guys that, guys were more interested in sports. Then and accomplishing things. There was a charm, if you couldn't play basketball but you ran track. Track for Woodlawn Tech ..

Naison: And he lived all the way up there, and he went all the way to Brooklyn Tech?

Nathaniel: That's correct. He went to Brooklyn Tech, he wanted to be an engineer. He gave it a chance. But guys had more drive. Leroy Durand became a Fire Marshall, and he turned out very well. Some guys became doctors.

Naison: People wanted to excel in something.

Nathaniel: Exactly.

Naison: And it was a group thing and an individual thing.

Nathaniel: And the older guys mentored us.

Naison: So the older guys in the neighborhood encouraged the younger guys to well.

Nathaniel: Exactly

Naison: And these were people who were not your parents they were a couple years older.

Nathaniel: We would sit on the bench in the projects in the evening in the summers and they would talk about their school experiences, talk about what you should avoid, and talk about how you shouldn't let people turn you off from letting you do what you want to do. They were mentoring us.

Naison: Yeah so in addition to your parents you had the older guys in the neighborhood.

Nathaniel: the older guys in the neighborhood. That's who we used to talk to. And they were very progressive guys, and that was very very very helpful. And just like younger guys that came form the project they would say that we always looked at you and saw what you were doing, and modeled our behavior after you. That's why we respect you because you were doing the school and you were doing this.

Naison: And in all the fighting you are taking about there were no guns that you remember. Nobody getting shot.

Nathaniel: No guns, nobody getting shot. People getting cut.

Naison: Yeah people getting cut but nobody getting shot.

Nathaniel: That's correct nobody got shot, you might get beat up but nobody was getting shot.

Naison: So it's a very different world.

Nathaniel: Oh it's a totally different world, but the drugs, the drugs were the thing that brought a lot of that.

Naison: You think the drugs were the thing that brought a lot of that.

Nathaniel: They brought a lot of that. It wasn't gangs it was drugs. And we, you gotta hear this, this is a weird story. The project used to be well maintained and well patrolled by the housing police. We never had a problem until they sent up a guy we used to call Wider, (laughing) this white guy about five foot six. But he just had this demeanor where I'm gonna bust you or whatever. And some guys in the project took this on as a challenge. They didn't like the way he talked to them, they didn't like the way he acted, so the big thing up in Eastchester at one time was staying off the grass. You had to stay off the grass, don't get caught on the grass because your family would get fined, and when your family got fined you got a problem. But they would see this guy and they would purposely would get on the grass; wanting him to say something to them. And Wider would say something to them, here comes Wider, like he was on a horse almost. And then there would be words or whatever, and it built up to one night there was a fight between one of the young men. And they were rolling on the ground with Wider; Well he pulled his weapon and arrested the kid. And Wider arrested all of us, he arrested me. (laughing) My father had to come down and get me. Cause he said I said something to him when he was passing.

Naison: Holy shit!

Nathaniel: But my father came down and he was able to work it out. But Wider was crazy. He used to call Wider. And that is when the project was beginning to change, and there was a lot of drugs. 'Kids that were really dealing in the drugs spent most of their time in Harlem, And they would come back up-town and sit on the bench until three, four o'clock in the morning. Drinking wine and doing their thing, and that's when most of the problems started.

Naison: So when you first got there you didn't see people sitting on a bench drinking wine?

Nathaniel: No wasn't nothing like that. The most we did when I first moved there was play in the hallways. That was the most

Naison: But wouldn't see guys sitting on a bench drinking wine.

Nathaniel: You didn't see guys nodding like they was high.

Naison: And you didn't see guys on the corner strung out?

Nathaniel: No, nobody was strung out. You never saw guys on the corner, it just wasn't allowed. But after about eight years there things started to change.

Naison: This is exactly what the people in the Patterson have said to me. The same thing the early 60's it hit there.

Nathaniel: It hit there. It's crazy man, and it destroyed a lot of families. It destroyed a lot of families a lot of young men died. Died, not sick, died.

Naison: They died of overdoses or of being shot or stabbed?

Nathaniel: Overdoses, spending most of their life in jail when they were younger. Getting stabbed, shot because of some deals gone array. Crazy crazy stuff. A lot of guys got hurt, regarding that type of stuff. Families lost a lot of young men in that process and some older guys if they see you down there said well how did you stay away from that? You know why wasn't you involved? My brother got caught up in that. How did you stay away?

Naison: This is one of your younger brothers?

Nathaniel: I'm the oldest one so he's younger than me.

Naison: Did he come out of it ok?

Nathaniel: He never made it out.

Naison: awww

Nathaniel: He never made it out of that, so I had a close view of that.

Naison: Wow and how much younger was he?

Nathaniel: two years.

Naison: Only two years! And there was no signs that he was heading in that direction?

Nathaniel: There were signs, there were signs, but I guess the family didn't have the strength to deal with it. There was signs and we shared the same room, the same bed room and everything and when I discovered his stuff, because you know I'm going to school

Naison: so this is when you are in college?

Nathaniel: yeah when I was in college. It blew my mind away.

Naison: This is somebody you are sharing a room with.

Nathaniel: That correct. Heavy into it.

Naison: Now was he somebody who was like not doing well in school as you?

Nathaniel: He dropped out of High School. You could tell that that's a sign, because he was a very bright guy. He dropped out of High School. He was very artistic, he had a lot of abilities, but got into that life style. My father demanded that he would go to work, and he went to work. But he didn't work long. He just got into that lifestyle. And that was it.

Naison: And that happened to a lot of families?

Nathaniel: That happened to a lot of families. A lot of guy went that way.

Naison: And that left the women without...

Nathaniel: Well that left the women without young men. It hurt a lot of families.

Naison: And if you think of that happening and then Vietnam, that's a double whammy.

Nathaniel: Well you know back then, most of the young guys if you didn't go to college then you went into the service. That was a good option. You didn't go to college and if you couldn't get a job then you went into the service. So a lot of guys from that North East area spent time in the military; in the Korean conflict and that kind of stuff. I wasn't in the service. But even I had to go to the National Guard during Vietnam. But drugs was a major impact on that community. And if you go up in the White Plains Rd. area now it has taken over the whole area. You go along Boston Post Rd. and there all up in there. You would not believe that twenty years ago that was a different neighborhood. You would not believe it. But the things you see, the things that are done outwardly now are crazy.

Naison: So you go back there sometimes?

Nathaniel: I pass through there, in fact I still have ties, my mother still lives in the Bronx on Caseville Ave. In fact last night my mother-in-law was in Mount Furry Hospital and we had to drop off my sister-in-law off. So we went up Boston Post Rd. and I was about three blocks away from Eastchester, because we were taking her to Parkchester and I saw part of the neighborhood again and everything. And its mind blowing.

Naison: Were there just people out in the street?

Nathaniel: Well you know, I did some consulting work about three years ago, and I was doing some training in a day care center up on White Plains Rd. and 225<sup>th</sup> street, and I used to play ball on 225<sup>th</sup> street in the park over there, but I remember the director saying after the training was done saying 'don't go outside because you might get shot. Shot?, Yeah this is a pretty rough area and you have to be very careful'. Well I went outside anyhow and I looked at my wife who was picking me up, we they were just trading the drug route, buying and selling. That's that if you knew the neighborhood all the hard working people who lived in the area to buy a home and send their kids to school and I don't know why they work just to see that kind of thing. It upsets you. What the hell happened? That's the first thing you say 'what the hell happened here?' you know. What the hell happened to this neighborhood? Eastchester was like that also, I mean if you went back in the late 80's early 90's you didn't recognize the place, because you didn't recognize the



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kids anymore. Wasn't the same they didn't have the same goals. They was strung out, they were dealing drugs. Its crazy totally crazy. So I guess the ancient person like me we just...

Naison: Well you know it is interesting because this is the story I am getting. You know I'm interviewing people between lets say 55 and 80 years old and they talk about this wonderful experience, weather it is in Patterson, Melrose, **Mauriceania**, or the North Bronx and then looking back at what happened it makes you want to cry. I mean you wish kids had a chance to grow up the way you grew up. Or **Vicky Archibald** grew up.

Nathaniel: You don't know what happened.

Naison: I mean and that's part of, we are starting with the optimistic part and we are going to tell that story before we try to figure out what happened. Because a lot of people have fore gotten what it was once like.

Nathaniel: Exactly.

Naison: And that's what we want to, that will be the first book.

Nathaniel: That's good.

Naison: it s going to be called Before the Fires: An Oral History of African American Life in the Bronx from the 1930's through the 60's. that's where we're going. Well this is fantastic! Anything else?

Nathaniel: Well its controversial, but you know I'm comfortable enough to raise it. You know there was color thing with blacks in the Bronx in the North East. Light skinned compared to dark skinned.

Naison: Oh yeah I was going to ask you about that.

Nathaniel: Oh yeah that was definitely there. Sometimes you felt that if you were dark skinned you were being segregated against regarding the lighter people. And socioeconomically there was a separation.

Naison: Oh yeah because I did interviews with the Fish Ave. people who were as a group very light skinned.

Nathaniel: Yeah, and sometimes their families wouldn't let them date darker skinned fellows. It was there.

Naison: And was your circle mixed in terms of skin color?

Nathaniel: Oh yeah most definitely because we had a couple of latin guys, light skin dark skin we didn't care.

Naison: But there was a sense there that a lighter skin girl might be reluctant?

Nathaniel: Yeah that was definitely there. I think guys were more afraid of the socioeconomic

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issue, rather than the color of the skin. There were some families that were doing very well back then, and they were black, afro American black. And they basically was in a certain class, and they didn't want their kids to associate with certain other kids. That's part of life I guess. Guys felt that, we moved there or whatever and we felt that. And maybe that could make you more aggressive about what you was going to do, but it was obvious that it was there.

Naison: So it was both skin color and Class?

Nathaniel: That's right. It was definitely a class thing. And no one can't tell me anything different.

Naison: Some of the families in **Mauriceania** told me the same thing. I don't know if you know Jim Pruitt and the Pruitt family, they all became educators. They grew up on 168<sup>th</sup> street and they mentioned that.

Nathaniel: Yeah it definitely was there. Even though I think some of the kids in Evander that I met when I was in school were trying to get over it to deal with it. You know they were a little more progressive than their families and you could see that they were struggling with it and trying to deal with this is not me.

Naison: Now let me ask you a question. Did you think that it was easier for a lighter skinned family to rent an apartment or buy a house?

Nathaniel: Yes

Naison: And that that also effected things? That is you are talking about moving in

Nathaniel: Yes Yes most definitely. However, you know freedom land, and I think after freedom land they built along Eli Ave. they built some new homes, one family homes. In that area, a couple of blocks they have developed down and they gave an opportunity for a lot of guys that were correction officers and police officers. They were all down in that particular area. Now I think that began changing, the mix a little, because I guess as they came home from World War II they were able to get into the Civil Service and earn money and that type of thing. That began changing neighborhoods too, even along Fish Ave. There were a bunch of old line families and that started changing a little bit. Because I dated a girl from Fish Ave. when I was younger.

Naison: From Evander?

Nathaniel: No she went to Walden or something like that.

Naison: Yeah Walden.

Nathaniel: And I dated her, it was alright. Her mother had problems with me. But it was alright. I was from Eastchester. Nice girl. That's about the only thing that you know, I guess the thing that we are also puzzled at guys that I knew that came up in my group were. How can guys who had everything going for them, their fathers had money, their fathers had positions, they had the home, and whatever and some of these guys just could never make it. They didn't go to college and never built a career and their life just wasted away. And we could never understand that. You had so much starting out seems like you should be way ahead of the game. But some of them

flunked out. Some of my friends married some girls off of Fish Ave. Some of their marriages didn't last long. (laughing) But they ended up marring them. But overall it was a positive experience. I'll tell you another issue, another piece of the Bronx; you had a Jewish population in Hill Side.

Naison: In hill Side houses yeah.

Nathaniel: And we used to play basketball over in Hill Side Houses.

Naison: Because the Jewish kids played basketball.

Nathaniel: That's correct. A kid, in fact I remember his man, Joe Washhall, used to be in my class, he lived over in Hill Side. And I would take a group of guys over and we would play against his guys over there in Hill Side. And they was separated also. Even though they lived right smack off Boston Rd.

Naison: It s interesting because when I did the interview with the people from Fish Ave. there was a Jewish woman from Hill Side who used to hang out with the people form Fish Ave. And they all were part of the some social circle.

Nathaniel: OK yeah I used to play ball there but now that whole housing development has changed.

Naison: Yeah absolutely.

Nathaniel SO that's about it