

**Bari Haskins-Jackson Interviewed by Barry Goldenberg**  
**June 6, 2017, via phone, about Harlem Prep**

*[beginning of recording]*

**Barry Goldenberg:** Thank you so much, first of all, for taking the time to do this. I know you're busy and it's this random person calling, so I really appreciate this a lot.

**Bari Haskins-Jackson:** No problem. I have such a warm place in my heart for Harlem Prep that I'm always open to discuss it.

**BG:** Well, I'm glad to hear that, and I've been super humbled the last couple years to have met with alumni, and researching the school, it's just an extraordinary place. And, I won't go into too much of my backstory, but I found out about this school years ago, and I figured there'd be tons written about it, but there really is nothing, and it just seems like a story that should be shared. I'm humbled that I'm able to learn about it and, Sandy, who I know you know well...

**BHJ:** Yeah, he's my brother.

**BG:** [Light laughter] Yeah. He's been...we've developed a friendship and he's been so wonderful in this project, and I just am so humbled to have gotten to know him and others. So, thank you so much for talking about Harlem Prep.

**BHJ:** Okay, and I warned you in advance that that was over 45 years ago, so some of it [laughter]...

**BG:** [Light laughter] I do understand.

**BHJ:** I was a very young woman when I came to Harlem Prep.

**BG:** I forgot what I had for breakfast yesterday, so... [light laughter].

**BHJ:** [Light laughter] Okay.

**BG:** I think everyone usually says that, and you [will] help much more than you think you did!

**BHJ:** [Light laughter] Yeah, okay.

**BG:** So, I mean, usually the way I like to start is just—if it's okay, tell me a little bit about yourself in terms of where you were born, where you grew up, and maybe a little bit about your prior educational experiences before Harlem Prep, and I'll preface it this way: when I'm speaking with alumni - you were a teacher, correct? I'll ask about that.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah. I was an English instructor.

**BG:** And, I haven't spoken with that many teachers, so it's wonderful to get that perspective. So, I'll just say before [we get started]—and I'll stop talking—is that the Harlem Prep seemed to be about the people who went there, who worked there, and so getting the full portrait of people who were there is lovely. So, yeah, I will start there - just tell me a little bit about yourself.

**BHJ:** Okay, I'll tell you a little bit about myself. I was born in New York, I was a native New Yorker, born in Harlem, as a matter of fact, then went from there to an area in Brooklyn, New York, called Canarsie, and at that time, that was an area that had a few projects and some buildings, but I don't know if you ever heard the joke - it used to be, "Oh, go to Canarsie if you got upset with somebody." [Light laughter] It was like going to the end of the world.

**BG:** Oh my.

**BHJ:** Yeah, so that was a very interesting environment to grow up in as a young African American woman, in a pre-dominantly

white Jewish school system at the time. I completed my first year of high school, and then moved to Manhattan, and then lived in Manhattan and the Bronx and so forth after that. When I was a student at - first, I went to Bronx Community College for about two years, got a degree there, an Associate's degree there, and then I went to City College of New York, and I graduated from City College. Well, I was in my final year at City College, I was working in the library, students' work study program.

**BG:** Sure, sure.

**BHJ:** A gentleman came in and was kind of watching me as I was working [light laughter] in the library, and then came back the next day with a friend of his, and they started talking with me, and they started talking to me about the school they worked in, called Harlem Prep, and that's how I first found out about the school.

**BG:** Oh wow, okay.

**BHJ:** And, it sounded fascinating to me, from what they were telling me and what they were saying.

**BG:** Sure.

**BHJ:** And, I also found it interesting because the students who were talking to me were basically the same age as me, these young men. So, I was like, "Oh, okay, this is really something that's interesting," and I had always had mixed feelings about education. I had not been pleased with my own education, I had faced a lot of discrimination from students and teachers while I was going through school, and I just always thought that there was a better way and that there was something that was very wrong with the way we were educating our young people, and I

was especially concerned about the young African American children and what was happening to them. A lot of my contemporaries in high school did not go on to further their education. Many of them did not make it through high school. There were all kinds of things going on - the same type of things that go on nowadays. The gang thing wasn't prevalent then, but there were the drugs and there were alcohol and getting into trouble types of things. Like, I sort of think the only thing that was different is there were gangs, but they weren't gangs like people who are facing the whole gang thing. Like when my son was in school, the gang situation was very different than when I was in school. But, then all that's to say that during that whole time, all these years, I had been thinking about teaching. I did make an English minor in education, I filled all of my credits towards teaching, I had been working in daycare centers while I was in school, and also filling in to do work with preschoolers - but mostly preschoolers I was focused on in that time. Anyhow, to bring you back to Harlem Prep, so these two gentlemen said, "Why don't you come by and visit the school Sunday after you get off from work?" And I said, "Oh, that sounds like a good idea," and that's what we did. They came by, and I went by the school, and I saw this incredible supermarket [light laughter] with no walls, at that time - and this was in 1970.

**BG:** Okay.

**BHJ:** And, I think I was all of 21 years old...

**BG:** Oh, wow.

**BHJ:** ...at the time, and I was just like...I was so excited, because I really didn't feel...I wasn't excited about going into the public school system, and I wasn't sure of the direction I was going to

be moving into when I graduated. Graduation was right upon me, and the public schools at the time, they had so many rules and regulations, and there were so many hoops you had to jump through, and there was very little room for creative thinking, and the public schools, they go in cycles, and secretly, and you start out with, “Oh, we’re going to be doing some type of special learning project,” and then three years later, that’s old news, and they move into something else, and then that’s old news and they move into something else.

**BG:** Sure.

**BHJ:** Now, Harlem Prep, on the other hand, was doing it all, as far as I could see. Just walking in the building, there was a whole other experience than walking into any high school I had ever been in.

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** So, I expressed my interest. I arranged to meet with the headmaster, Ed Carpenter, at the time, and I talked with him and I talked with his wife, Ann Carpenter, and I said that I was interested in their school and it seemed like a place that I might like to work, and I even said I’d be willing to work over the summer, because maybe we could work something out - they could get a feel for me and how I might fit in, and I could get a feel for them. And, they took me up on the offer [light laughter], and then in that September of 1970, I got an offer for a position there as an English instructor.

**BG:** Wow.

**BHJ:** And that’s how my time, even though it was just a two-year period that I was there, but that’s how my time at Harlem Prep started.

- BG:** Wow. That's awesome. Did you have a teaching credential, or...?
- BHJ:** I had my degree.
- BG:** You had your degree.
- BHJ:** When I started, I got my degree that June before I started working there that summer, but I did not have the...by the credentials, I was not certified by the state.
- BG:** Okay.
- BHJ:** I didn't have the certification, but I had all of my coursework for the certification. So, it meant that I could teach at a private school, but I was not certified to teach in a public school when I started there.
- BG:** Sure. I'm always curious, because I know most of [the Harlem Prep teachers] didn't have credentials and...it's cool, whoever was passionate about teaching. I know Sandy had told me his story about how he got involved. So, okay, that's really...that's awesome. So, you were there from 1970 to '72 then?
- BHJ:** Yes, yes.
- BG:** Okay.
- BHJ:** And I taught literature and academic skills development courses.
- BG:** Okay.
- BHJ:** The academic skills development course, as a matter of fact, became a major part of my work down the road as I did other things. 13 years ago when I retired, I retired as a dean of special education from a college in Georgia, and throughout every position that I held prior to that after Harlem Prep, I've always used the basis of the skills and the attitude and the teaching

approaches that came from my time at Harlem Prep. Harlem Prep reinforced so much of my philosophy about teaching and education, and I went on to apply that in every situation that I found myself in. And then, the other thing that was interesting about working at Harlem Prep was that it wasn't just teaching that was involved, it was counseling of students. We actually paired up sometimes with students. So, if there was someone, for example, who was having a particular problem, one of the faculty members might be paired up - by paired up, that would be the student that you would keep a special eye on.

**BG:** Oh, wow.

**BHJ:** And frequently it was done without the student knowing that that had been arranged. So, it was kind of just almost like you were a little guardian angel for them.

**BG:** That's awesome. That's actually the first I've heard of that at Harlem Prep.

**BHJ:** Yeah. Now, I don't know if they asked all of the faculty to do that, but I know I had several students that I kept an eye on - they were special students in that way. And, even if you weren't assigned students, there was such a sense of community there.

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** And, also, there was a lot of stimulation. For example, you knew, as a teacher, that your class had to be interesting and hold students' attention, or they could just turn their chairs around and go to the class that was right behind the divider [light laughter].

**BG:** You had to compete for their engagement.

**BHJ:** Right [light laughter].

**BG:** Yeah. I've heard that students would sometimes - they would go from classroom to classroom, or they would just get up to go to another classroom. That's wild. That's awesome.

**BHJ:** Yeah. So, alright, that's kind of a general overview. Now, you had some more specific questions I could help you with?

**BG:** Yeah, just...that's wonderful. It's always nice to hear. What sticks out from your experience...I have a few questions, but I'm going to follow up on one thing that you said, if you have anything more to add about—it's so interesting about the counseling. What I've learned, the teachers and students had kind of a familial relationship and it was kind of...it was more than just teacher-student. You called it a special relationship with students - what was that relationship with students like?

**BHJ:** Well, you know, there wasn't so much of a distinction of "I'm the teacher and you're the student." There was a very informal...in terms of the way we interacted. Students frequently came to faculty's homes - I'm sure Sandy's talked about that. We would go places together, spend time together. I have friends - students - who were friends from way back when. The man that I lived with, am living with, for almost 20 years now was a former student at Harlem Prep.

**BG:** Oh, wow.

**BHJ:** So, relationships were established and developed, and even though they might not have matured at that time, down the road they matured in some way, facet, or form. I mean, even, I think about Mike, who was a faculty member there who was married to Audrey, who was a student there, and the thing was like, "Oh, wait until she graduates." [Light laughter] And, I guess they've been together all of these years, have four children together.



**BG:** That's beautiful.

**BHJ:** Yeah. I'm using those examples to try to get you to get a sense of how relationships were formed and developed and were long-lasting, and that there wasn't necessarily that heavy divider line. Of course, there were considerations - legalities, you are the teacher, someone who is a student. But, I know for me, it was just...many of the students were older than I was when I came to teach there, so it wasn't even...I couldn't walk around saying, "You have to respect me, I'm much older than you." You didn't have all of those things to hide behind. You just had to do your job, and do it well, and have a love for teaching, and also, you have to have a belief that everyone was capable of achieving, and that is something that I think made the school particularly special. That belief system that we all had to follow, and that along with that you were not doing well for the class, you were not doing well if everyone was not doing well.

*[brief conversation regarding phone disconnection]*

**BHJ:** Okay. I was talking about the concept that as students in the class, you were not doing well if others in the class were not doing well, also. It was a group responsibility in many ways, in that everyone was supposed to help the next one, help the next one.

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** And as a teacher, you couldn't say things - like I've heard teachers say, "You're not understanding. You all aren't paying attention." It was, "What can I do as a teacher to get the understanding." You had to keep trying [light laughter].

**BG:** Yeah, but that anti-deficit language, it's not the students, it's "Can I do better?" I'm working with people, and I definitely understand. That makes sense.

**BHJ:** Yeah, and also, there was creativity in the types of courses developed and taught. I taught an Eastern Literature course, for example, that I absolutely loved, and the students actually enjoyed it very much, too - studying all of the different oriental literature and some of the writers, and there was a poetry analysis class, and a reading and writing short stories and creative writing, along with the basic of developing the writing skills and the academic skills and the college survival skills. So, from an instructional standpoint, I mean, you had a wonderful array of things to develop and choose from for goals - I mean, you had very specific goals in mind, but you didn't have to use that same track to get to it. You used a different way of reaching those goals. But, those were the types of things that were done there. For example, there was one student, I remember, who came to us - usually people came to use with a relatively strong skill base, they weren't lacking in skills totally. But, there was one young man I remember, and he came to us, he really couldn't read at all, and, well, he had a love for photography, and there were two faculty members there, a husband and wife team, who were into photography, and they started out with picture books with him, and he was so excited about it that he just studied and studied everything so that he would be able to understand all this information about photography and take pictures, and sure enough, in the process, he developed the skills - and quite high-level skills - of being able to read and comprehend and not just for photography then, but it could be transferred to other areas as well.

**BG:** That's beautiful, yeah.

**BHJ:** So, that's an example of the types of things. Or the trips to the - one of the math teachers that took the kids to the pool halls, and those types of things. And, again, those weren't the types of things that were going on traditionally. Those were the types of things going on at Harlem Prep.

**BG:** Yeah. No, those are wonderful anecdotes that kind of help to build a fuller picture of what teaching was like, and it's really, really cool. This is great. Since you were talking about - you mentioned briefly classes you taught. You taught an academic skills course. You said Eastern Literature. And, this is sort of a question that...I know this is probably hard to get at, but what - and again you have been kind of talking about this. But any more thoughts about your teaching strategy, your other techniques, or something you remember in teaching your courses?

**BHJ:** Yeah. One of the things that I started thinking about, even when I was in college, and began to really work on at Harlem Prep, and then later when I left Harlem Prep, I went to Brooklyn College and taught there, was this concept of developing critical thinking skills, and it had been a belief system of mine - if you call it a belief system - that one of the biggest obstacles that many learners faced was the lack of critical thinking skills and being able to develop logical processes in their thoughts, and this was something that was making it difficult to be able to write an essay, it was making it difficult to be able to make decisions in terms of life choices, and so forth and so on, and so I began early on then, when I first started developing those academic skills development courses, to put emphasis on the critical thinking - developing critical thinking skills, and that's a theme that I carried on from that day, from those early days at Harlem Prep, all the way through my years and years of

teaching. Actually, later on in my career, I gave presentations at various educational conferences and stuff on the very same concept, because I still believe very strongly - that's one of the things. And, it's one thing to teach you how to take notes. It's one thing to teach you how to...but it's the development of those critical thinking skills is so essential and can make the difference between someone being successful as a college student, because that was one of the things we had to look for at the Prep, too. We were preparing students to go to college, so that we had to also prepare them with skills that they needed to be able to survive in college. And, later on, that became a big thing in education - at collegial level, they called them the "freshmen experience" courses, survival skills, and people wrote all kinds of books on it, and this, that, and the other. But, the critical thinking component is the one that often got overlooked, and that's one that I felt was important, and worked on right away when I had the chance, when I first came to the Prep, and developed my courses. With each course, I always had a component of critical thinking skill development.

**BG:**

No, I'm on your...I'm in the same boat. I agree it's so important, focusing on this big critical development and whatnot, yeah. That's awesome, that's awesome. And, I know you touched on this a little bit as well, but in thinking about...what was the hardest part of being a teacher there? Was it the age difference, or that really wasn't an issue?

**BHJ:**

Uh-uh, no, it wasn't that. I think the hardest part...let me see, the hardest part. The hardest part might have been, for some of the students that were there, it wasn't a long-term experience. Different students were there for different intervals of time, and because there was such variety in terms of courses and what was available, you didn't necessarily have all of the students

that were there in your class. People might be taking classes with Sandy, as an example, and not necessarily taking classes with me. So, you got to know students, but you got to know them in different ways. And, sometimes that was a challenge, because you would establish a relationship, and then that student might be moving on fairly rapidly.

**BG:** That makes sense.

**BHJ:** Yeah. I do think it was a challenge...one of the things that was a challenge, at least initially, was the fact that it was such an open space. Later on, there were more dividers that were put in, which helped to separate some of the areas, but that open space could be a challenge, because you had to learn how to moderate your voice so that you captured your class without disturbing another class going on [laughter], getting things together. It was a competition.

**BG:** That's really funny. No, I just...it's its own skill, right?

**BHJ:** Yeah. And then, I think that the other challenge was...not all, but many of the students who came there had other problems in their lives that were going on, and as much as everyone tried to help out with everything, there was the realization that some of these situations were going to be such that it was going to be very hard to turn it around.

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** And of course, the philosophy was so much that everybody needs to be successful to be successful, you had times when you weren't feeling so [light laughter] good about yourself, even though you might have been doing a great job. And, then the other thing was I never got involved in any of the politics -

I kind of made a choice when I started that I wasn't going to get...because any place has politics.

**BG:** Yeah, that was my next question, actually.

**BHJ:** I kind of made the choice that I was not going to do that, that I was going to focus...I wasn't even going to focus on...like if you were going to ask me things that Sandy would know all about in terms of the administrative structure and who was responsible for this and who did that, I actually did not focus on that part of it. I focused entirely on the teaching and the support types of services that I was expected to provide, and I didn't get caught up in any of the other things that were going on around me. So, I was...unlike Sandy would be able to talk about, "Well, at such and such a time, this person was in charge and this one was doing this," I don't know [light laughter].

**BG:** You avoided it.

**BHJ:** I was not involved in politics [laughter].

**BG:** Not a bad decision. What about the politics at the time? Did you bring in...it was such a...in American history, in terms of Black Power, Vietnam. Were those different class discussions or were they kind of left at the door? I mean, I'm sure they were part of...

**BHJ:** No, no, those types of things...we talked about everything. We talked about just about anything and everything, at least in my classes we did, and I think that people were very much aware and open. We had things...we had the choir group, we had the African dance group, so there were outlets - it wasn't just academics, there were other things that were going on at the school that allowed for this type of expression. And yes, we had to be aware of all of those things that were going on around us,

because there were things that were happening, and they were happening in everyone's lives.

**BG:** Yeah, it's culturally relevant.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah, and that's one of the reasons we had the African classes and other classes that were offered that would provide some type of relevance to the population there.

**BG:** Yeah, that makes sense for sure, and that's what I...especially reading...I was fortunate enough to have read the archives, I found documents and letters and memos, grants from Ed Carpenter talking about cultural relevance of the curriculum, making sure it matched students' lives in terms of that sort of thing. Okay.

**BHJ:** We had different religious groups and religious facets represented at the Prep as well. We had the...they used to call them the Five Percenters, and there was a presence there. We had the Black Muslims there and there was a presence, you had the Christians and the Bahá'ís, so there was quite a mixture there of community, for lack of a better word, in terms of representation of different things, and everybody managed to get along pretty good [light laughter].

**BG:** Yeah, that's how it seems. Despite the really great diversity of ideas and people, that's been the overarching theme as I've spoken with folks: everyone had their differences, but when they were at Harlem Prep, they were family.

**BHJ:** Yeah. You left the differences at the door. That was the basic way, yeah.

**BG:** Yeah, and you said...just a few minor follow-ups, because I'm always trying to get a full picture of the student body as best as I can. In terms of student ability, you said there was a basic

standard for most students in terms of reading and writing levels, correct?

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah, and at one time - like I said, I don't know all of the details, but I know that Martin, who I mentioned earlier, who was a student there, and there were certain tests that you had to take, at one point. Later on, I'm not sure how everybody...I don't know if there was...I don't know. I know sometimes someone would come in and you'd go, "Hmm..." so I don't know how that person actually [light laughter] - what procedure they actually had to go through. But, for most...many of the students were quite capable, quite able, but were not suited for the traditional classes. So, it wasn't...there were some students who could complete their programs of study very quickly, there were other who it took a little longer for, but in general, yes, there was a competency level that students came to assume.

**BG:** Yeah, that's the vibe I got from some of the documents I've uncovered as well. That makes sense. You touched on this just a little bit. Just from your perspective, in terms of Harlem Prep as kind of a community institution, I'm always hearing about - especially being in New York - do you feel when you were there, the teachers at Harlem Prep felt that it was a community school, however you might define that? Was the community involved? Or was it kind of its own thing?

**BHJ:** There were just little things that let you know that you were a part of the community. Nobody who taught at the Prep ever had any problems with anybody, messing with their cars or messing with their stuff, or messing with anything in that kind of way. If it was known that you were from the Prep, that you taught at the Prep, there was a bubble, for lack of a better word [light laughter], that kind of went with them. I had heard - I don't



know how true this all is - that there were times when there was trouble making the payroll, and the community people would step up to make sure that everything was taken care of. Whether that was true or not, I don't know, but that's what I've been told [light laughter]. All of the sources might not have been traditional sources, it might have been the number runner per se [laughter].

**BG:** I've heard that, too.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah [laughter].

**BG:** There has to be some truth to it all.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah.

**BG:** Ed Carpenter had many connections, for good or for ill [laughter].

**BHJ:** Yeah. So, it was that type of feeling, and also because of the people that we were serving - I mean, all of them were not from that immediate community, but many of them were.

**BG:** Yeah, yeah. That's...Sandy always tells people the story about how he walked into a convenience shop or something at two or three in the morning, he had a diamond ring on, or a piece of jewelry, and I think someone said to him, "You know man, you shouldn't wear that around here this late," and the clerk said, "Oh, don't worry, he teaches at Harlem Prep, so no one will bother him." I'm always interested in the relationship between the Harlem community and Harlem Prep, and many people...I didn't know this until I did my research on Harlem, but it was the only high school in central Harlem in existence. There was a high school in east Harlem, Benjamin Franklin, but not in central Harlem, so it was really the only high school in the area, which is hard to believe.

**BHJ:** No, it's not, really, when you think about the provision of education and the communities in that way.

**BG:** Yeah, yeah.

**BHJ:** And then, when we had any type of situation, the fact...I'm just thinking of a situation, a little thing that happened once, where one of the students was going into the train station, and I happened to be going to the train station not too far behind her, and she foolishly jumped over the turnstile as opposed to paying, or showing her pass, and was accosted by a policeman who got very agitated with her because she proceeded to say that she would pay the money and to just take the money and leave her be, type thing, and he wouldn't leave her be. [Light laughter] And, I can see the situation - here I am trying to get onto the tracks so I can help her, and I can this escalating and escalating and escalating, and then of course it's escalating even more, because now she's telling this policeman the only reason why he's stopping her and giving her this problem is because she's black, and here this is a white policeman in the Harlem community in the Harlem Train Station. The next thing I know, he's grabbing her, and I go up to them and he had called someone for back-up at that point in time, and I say, "This is a student of mine. I heard her offer to pay you the money. I will pay you the money, let me handle this and take her back to the school," and he was still not willing to do so, and I said, "Well, I will be going with you to the police station with her, if you're going to be taking her in," and that's what happened - went to the police station, called back into the Prep, and a whole line of people come marching down to the jailhouse from the Prep, and there's Carpenter and there's some other people, and then along the way there's some other people from the community who have joined into this line of people

walking over to the little holding cell where they were keeping her. Well, needless to say, she was released and everything was fine. I still insisted on paying for her [light laughter]. But, I'm saying that that was the type of reaction, that even before I had called the Prep, word had gotten to the Prep that people of the Prep were having a problem, and so that's just an example. I always remember that one.

**BG:** No, that's an awesome story, just how Harlem had your back in that way. Yeah.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah, I mean, it was that kind of back-up. You always felt that someone did have your back in that kind of way. And, it didn't mean that if somebody had done something that was really a grievance or wrong that we would go into saying, "How dare you?" but we were very protective of one another, whether it was on the schoolgrounds or out of the schoolgrounds. It was that kind of situation.

**BG:** Sure. I mean, that makes sense. Well, I won't take up too much of your time...

**BHJ:** Oh no, go ahead if you have any more questions, please.

**BG:** Okay, sure. I'd love to...and moving on, I guess...I know that...so, you left in '72. If I can ask, how come you left, and what did you do after, and...

**BHJ:** Actually, I took the position...when I left, I think I worked for a little while doing a couple little part-time things with something that was called the Community Resource Institute, which was a small, privately funded program that went into inner city schools and helped set up programs that worked with parents to get parents more involved in the school and teachers and students - mostly elementary schools, and I traveled from

different schools and set up these little programs to get...for example, we did breakfasts in the mornings so in the morning the parents and the students and the teachers would come in and all sit around before everybody - before the parents had to go to work and the students had to go to class, and those types of things. I did that for just a little while, and then I took a position at Brooklyn College. I actually started there in '72, and I was there from 1972 until 1978, and I was a reading instructor and writing specialist there.

**BG:** Okay.

**BHJ:** And then, when I left there, I moved to Atlanta. In between, I got another degree at Fordham University before I left. I got - at Fordham University, I got a Master's of Science in Education Administration, and that's when I left New York and I moved to Atlanta, and then I worked for a place called the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students [light laughter], which is a long name, but I was hired on there to work with a special program that was taking high school - recent high school graduates who were going to college, and the program was actually paying for their first two years of college, and we set up a program where we followed them and counseled them and provided tutorial services and back-up and visited them at their schools, the various colleges they were attending, etcetera, etcetera, and again, the same types of things. I did a lot of work then on critical thinking and developing survival skills. And then, when I left there, that's when I went to what was called then DeKalb College in Atlanta, where I became...I started out there as a study skills instructor, and then went onto administrative positions: student coordinator, to dean, to assistant vice president, primarily working the areas of developmental education, and students

who were underprepared to do this and building their successes, so it's the same song.

**BG:** It came full circle. Yeah, it came full circle.

**BHJ:** Yeah. And then, by the time I had retired, I had set up a statewide program for the state of Georgia for the university system schools to address the running needs of underprepared students coming into our colleges.

**BG:** Wow. You definitely had an amazing career in education.

**BHJ:** Yeah, I loved it. I love retirement too, though, so [light laughter] ...

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** That's a ways for you.

**BG:** It sounds like you earned it, so.

**BHJ:** Yeah, I was tired [laughter].

**BG:** Yeah, working with students, teaching, administrating.

**BHJ:** Yeah. But, Harlem Prep - like I said, Harlem Prep lent the seed. I had so many things in my mind already, and for someone like me to find a place like that was just like, "Wow." I mean, it really...I couldn't have had a better start.

**BG:** Yeah. What you learned there and experienced carried through all your years.

**BHJ:** Yes, yes.

**BG:** Yeah, wow. Speaking of success - and I didn't really ask, going back to Harlem Prep, now that you mentioned administration and your work with teachers, what was your relationship like with Ed and Anne Carpenter? Did you interact with them? I know Ed was kind of always around, fundraising.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I didn't have what I would call a very, very close relationship, but there was never any problems in terms of conversations. I talked with Ann, probably, more than I did with Ed.

**BG:** And was her role related to the curriculum, or...?

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah. Anne did a lot of that kind of...if I was talking about a course I was going to be offering, or what did she think about this, that, or the other. I remember one time I got into trouble - well, I got into trouble a couple of times when I was there, but one time I had gotten into trouble because I had assigned a very raunchy book as a reading book for one of my classes. It was Iceberg Slim's - I still remember - "Mama Black Widow," which is a rather raunchy book.

**BG:** Okay.

**BHJ:** I had realized early on in teaching the class that there were several students in the class who had never read a book from cover to cover. That's not unusual to find even at a college level, people who have just never read a book from cover to cover. So, my goal was to get some books on this reading list that I knew that once they picked it up, they would finish it.

**BG:** Wouldn't put it down, yeah.

**BHJ:** Wouldn't put it down. So, that was one that I had chosen. Well, I'd never had too much interference or problems with parents of students at the Prep, but this one student in the class, the parent was particularly offended by the choice of this book, and contacted, I guess, both Ed and Ann. I know Anne, with her dismay [light laughter] [said], "What is the matter with the language in that book? It's awful." I mean, I knew what the language people had heard growing up, because I was living in

it. So, I got called in - this was on one occasion when I got called in about that and had a very nice talk with Ann [light laughter] Carpenter, and Ed had to be involved as well. It was kind of like a little “What were you thinking?” kind of thing, and once I explained what I was thinking, and I said, “Do you know what? Everybody in that class has read that book. Not only did they read it, but they’re excited about it and talking about it and doing all these...” and rather than being reprimanded and told, “Don’t you ever do this again,” I was encouraged to think maybe a little differently about some of the choices, but I wasn’t treated as if I had done something wrong. I was treated as if I had done something to try to encourage young people to move forward. Now, any other situation, that probably wouldn’t have worked - I wouldn’t have even have had the opportunity to be that creative with my thinking.

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** And then, when I went to a reunion several years ago, years later after having that talk, do you know that one of the young men who had been in that class said to me, “I still remember that book - Iceberg Slim.” [Light laughter]. He said, “I read every other book he wrote.” [Laughter]

**BG:** That’s hilarious. That’s awesome, though. I mean, you got him reading.

**BHJ:** Yeah [laughter], so that’s...again, that gives you a feel for how things were done and handled, even when there where what you might call “missteps.”

**BG:** Sure, sure. Was Ann - with her curriculum - pretty hands-off in general, to kind of give latitude to the teachers?

**BHJ:** She seemed to be. You would come, and at least - like I said, again, I can only go by the relationship that she had with me, and then one of my other friends there, Naladi, who came around the same time I did, was a Vassar graduate, as a matter of fact, and was also teaching English, but she was much more conservative in her style. We had all different degrees of expression with the faculty there, and also depending on the type of training that they had had, and the type of learners that they were. Teachers tend to teach the way that they learn, and that's one of the reasons that so much of our education is linear, and so many of our learners are not linear learners, but that's a whole other thesis that we can develop one day [light laughter]. But, I'll just use it as an example to say, she was someone - I'm just using her as an example - she was someone that you could be very hands-off with, because there was not going to be anything too egregious coming out of that, in terms of her way of presenting and doing things.

**BG:** Right, conservative, in a way.

**BHJ:** Yeah, and then there were others who were a little more buoyant and maybe at times had to be told a few things.

**BG:** Yeah, calm them down a bit [light laughter].

**BHJ:** Yeah.

**BG:** But, generally speaking, teachers were given pretty wide latitude.

**BHJ:** Oh yeah.

**BG:** It wasn't strict in terms of...

**BHJ:** No, you had to have a sense of the guidelines, what your objectives were, what were your plans for getting to those objectives, you always felt that you could go and ask for



advice, like for example, I had a student who was insisting that he had turned in papers to me and I knew that he had not, and what was the best way to handle that. I remember going to Ann with that question, because it was getting to be pretty hostile. I said, "I would like to tell him, 'Yes, you might be right. Perhaps I did lose your papers. I would like for you to just sit down with me and talk about it, and I can grade you on that,'" and she felt that that was a good approach. I'm glad that I did go to her, because when he came and I told him to talk about it, and he could not talk about it, he became extremely agitated. But, since I had run it by Ann previously, that this was something that she felt that that was a very acceptable approach, I knew that...so, it was that type of thing. But, most of the time it wasn't that she came to me with anything, it would be I went to her, or the same thing with Ed - it wouldn't be...it wouldn't be them coming to me with something, it would be me going to them to get some type of input.

**BG:** Yeah, that makes sense. And, just briefly about that, you mentioned parents. Did you have interaction with parents, or not so much?

**BHJ:** Next to none.

**BG:** Next to none.

**BHJ:** Yeah.

**BG:** Yeah, yeah.

**BHJ:** Now, there might have been others there who had more interaction, but many of these...some of the students weren't even in family settings anymore.

**BG:** Yeah, and some had families of their own, I hear, children and...

- BHJ:** Yeah, yeah. Oh, definitely, because at one point, we even had a little daycare facility downstairs during the daytime.
- BG:** Really?
- BHJ:** Yeah - well, daycare facility is too strong of an explanation.
- BG:** Sure.
- BHJ:** It was a place downstairs where someone was watching over the children for periods of time throughout the day.
- BG:** Yeah. I interviewed...I met with Sherry Kilgore, do you remember...
- BHJ:** Mhm.
- BG:** I forget when she attended, but she said she had a young child when she was there. But, yeah, students could... [Sherri said:] "I bring my kid to school, and he'd be looked after while I was there." Pretty awesome.
- BHJ:** Yeah, yeah, but like I said, the parents, like I said the only time - I'm trying to think, other than the incident when there was a complaint, I think that was the only time when I really had...unless, at a graduation, you would see...people would come forward, if we had any type of performance, sometimes there would be a parent. But, the parent emphasis, it wasn't there in that way, and I'm thinking about some of the people I know, and I'm going, "Who lived with their parents?" [Light laughter].
- BG:** And many were older, were independent, I guess.
- BHJ:** Yeah.
- BG:** So, I guess that makes sense. Cool, well, I could ask you dozens of questions, but you have been so helpful and insightful, and time flies. It's almost been an hour.

- BHJ:** Oh my goodness.
- BG:** I know, right?
- BHJ:** When you get to talking about Harlem Prep, that's what happens [light laughter].
- BG:** I haven't spoken with too many teachers. Obviously, I've spoken with Sandy, of course, but to get the teacher perspective is so valuable.
- BHJ:** And, the thing is, you're going to get a different perspective from each person, because we all came in at different...with different backgrounds and with different interests and with different future careers afterwards, too.
- BG:** Yeah, yeah.
- BHJ:** So, that's a fascinating project to work on.
- BG:** Yeah, no, it's been so humbling, honestly, just to speak with so many Harlem Prep alumni and teachers, administrators, because everyone has a different story of why they were there and how it impacted their lives all these years later, that we're still talking about it. But, everyone has a different story, students, teachers, and an administrator I spoke with. Okay, any final thoughts or anecdotes or things you'd like to share that I haven't asked about, or...
- BHJ:** No, I think that pretty much covers it, except like I said, some of the things that I guess stand out the most, to sum it up, would be there was always an effort to build a sense of family, a sense of community within community, and a caring for everyone who was in that building was there.
- BG:** Yeah, there seemed to be a lot of love there. Ed would actually talk about in his grant proposals, to letters to Ford Foundation

about this love that was really present, and students and teachers acted on that love, and that's powerful, I think.

**BHJ:** Yeah, well the number of friends - when I think about Sandy all these years later, 45, 46 years later, and we're as close as can be. So, there's just...it went beyond your norm in a lot of ways, because how many places do people establish that much of a connection for a long-term period of time in that kind of way? And now, Ed and Ann are gone, I don't know if you had a chance to talk to either of them - no, because they were both deceased when you started doing your research?

**BG:** I did. I think Ann had just passed.

**BHJ:** Okay.

**BG:** But, I have been in touch with their daughter, Karen, and she's been kind enough to share her recollections of her parents, and the pictures that she had, they left when they passed on, so that's been a wonderful connection. Just from - obviously, of course, I didn't know Ed and Ann, but just from what I've heard from so many folks and from documents and from pictures, she seems to embody a lot of that kind of energy, kind of looks like her dad, I feel like, and so it's cool to see that, it's special.

**BHJ:** Yeah.

**BG:** Any quick thoughts of...I know you left the school, but did you stay in touch with Harlem Prep at all, or any thoughts of why it wasn't able to sustain itself? I know, obviously, funding was the main issue, but...

**BHJ:** Yeah, funding became an issue, and then once it became that it was going to no longer be the school that it was, and it was

going to be taken over by the board of ed[ucation], then that was basically...it was no longer...

**BG:** Yeah, it wasn't Harlem Prep. That's what everyone has said, from my research too, in terms of the school - it wasn't the same once the board of ed[ucation] took it over.

**BHJ:** No, no, it couldn't possibly be.

**BG:** Exactly. They had too many restrictions and bureaucracy and teachers weren't credentialed so they wouldn't let teachers teach, and all those types of things.

**BHJ:** Yeah, yeah, which is craziness, and those were the kinds of things that I had avoided. And, actually, from all of my teaching experience, I never did, aside from coming in as a consultant and helping to set up programs and work with and evaluate student teachers, I've never taught in a public school.

**BG:** Yeah.

**BHJ:** I mean, I insisted on keeping my son in one [light laughter] ...

**BG:** Sure, sure.

**BHJ:** ...because I wanted to support public education.

**BG:** Absolutely.

**BHJ:** But, to actually teach in a public school with those rules and restrictions, I even was involved in battles at the community college level because of some of the rules and regulations and degrees and requirements, and I understood that having a doctorate did not make you a good teacher, necessarily, and we had major battles about that, because I'd pull someone in, say, mathematics - we used to fight especially about mathematics with a teaching degree, and the pure mathematicians didn't see that as being worthy at a certain level, and again, the ones -

many times the ones without the pure math were much, much, much better [able] to perform in the classroom.

**BG:** Being able to communicate concepts and teach it to children, yeah.

**BHJ:** Exactly, exactly. So, that's been a battle cry of mine throughout the years, and Harlem Prep was an example of a place where the credentials - you have to have a certain amount of credentials, but what they were looking for was what you could give from inside of you, as opposed to what your credentials said.

**BG:** I remember in - I'm sure you've seen it, "Step by Step," the film?

**BHJ:** Mhm.

**BG:** Documentary. I love when...Ed Carpenter is narrating the film, but he says, "If a teacher walked in, and they said, 'I teach math and English,' I said, 'Thank you,' and showed them the door. But, if they said, 'I teach students,' then we had a place to start." I love that, and everything that you've described embodies that.

Well, I really, really appreciate you taking the time. This has been really awesome. What I will do on my end, I will transcribe this and type it all out. It's nice to hopefully have your story on paper, and you're more than welcome to read it through, and if there's any additions or clarifications...

**BHJ:** Okay, that would be good.

**BG:** You can change...you can let me know and I can change that and send you the revised copy.

- BHJ:** I'm sure it will be fine, but I'll look over it.
- BG:** But, you also don't have to. I know that you're busy, so don't feel like you have to.
- BHJ:** No, no, I certainly would have no problem looking over anything like that.
- BG:** Okay. I'll get it back to you in a few weeks, and thank you so much.
- BHJ:** Okay, don't forget to email me the address to send the release to.
- BG:** Okay, I will, I will, and feel free, if you have anything I could ever do or you have a thought or want me to look for something for some reason or track someone down, let me know. I have been collecting documents and trying to share as much as I can for people to be part of this project.
- BHJ:** Okay, will do that.
- BG:** Great. Well, we'll be in touch, and thank you so much again. I'll send you an email shortly, and thank you.
- BHJ:** Okay, from one Bari to the other, take care now.
- BG:** Have a great day, and thank you so, so much again.
- BHJ:** You're so welcome.
- BG:** I'm so grateful.

*[END OF RECORDED AUDIO]*