

Harry Smith Interviewed by Barry Goldenberg
March 7, 2017, via phone, about Harlem Prep

[beginning of recording]

Barry Goldenberg: Tell me a little bit about yourself, where you were born, where you grew up, and your kind of school experiences up to and maybe leading up to Harlem Prep. Yeah, I guess we can start there if you're cool with that.

Harry Smith: So, I was born in Clinton in New Jersey.

BG: Okay.

HS: My father and my grandmother, they lived in the projects in Trenton, and so my dad's father left when he was very young, and so he...and my grandmother worked as a maid. At a very young age, he went off to the air force, and he was in the Korean War. He went to the air force because, basically, every other branch of the service was cooks, or dishwashers, or maids or whatever, and he went and he signed up with the air force and became an electronic specialist for jets in the air force. So, he was like...rose to rank real fast, and when he got out, he went to school at a community college. Couldn't make enough money - by that time me and my sister were born, and he would do one more semester of college and was selling door to door stuff, goods, and then his colonel, the colonel from where he worked got all of the electronic things. The first CEO of IBM was an air force colonel, and then so he got all of his best people, and they wrote the first computer language. So, during that time, he was sent to...the opened up the first IBM, or one of the first IBM plants, and it was located in Maine, New Brunswick, and my mother and my sister...and by that time I think my second oldest sister was born and...but they left me in Trenton, and they moved up to Maine. So, you know, I was left there with my grandmother. I went to...the first school I ever went to was a Catholic school.

BG: Really?

HS: Yeah, and there was just habits. There were habits. We spent all day reading the bible and stuff, and I was able to memorize a lot of what was read, because that's all we did, and they were really strict. They didn't allow you to really...you had to be straight as an arrow, but I didn't mind.

BG: No messing around. [Light laughter]

HS: Yeah, yeah. But, as a result of that, and then my grandmother, she was just really...I would go to her houses where she worked at sometimes, she cleaned, and do all that. It'd be...she had a family she worked with and raised their children and that sort of stuff, and I would get sent in the kitchen and stuff, and so, you know, she didn't drive or anything, we would catch buses, I guess that's how we got around. She would take me to the movies on a Saturday, and pull me up, it was pretty nice, you know. It was a pretty nice time. I didn't miss my family at all - I was perfectly happy. Part of...she was really a religious woman, which I didn't mind either, and she was a Catholic, or a Roman Catholic, and she was really dedicated to church. Anyway, so about a year after that, my family came to pick me up, right, and so, I just remember that as being really hard for me to leave her. I was really upset, because, you know, I was perfectly happy. I didn't want to leave, I didn't want to go to Maine, I wanted to stay with her. That's the way it was. So, one of the things...so, they took me up to Maine, and so when I got up there, I went to school, so this could have been the second grade, I think, and I remember because I went to a catholic school, I guess what they said was, "They didn't teach you any math," or something like that, and "We're putting you back." Man, I was crushed, and I just remember sitting in the desk and saying, "I'm too big for this desk," and I'm not a big guy, but it just hit me like that, and I just remember being really, really upset about that, that they put

me back, and now I'm in the grade of my sister - my sister Yvonne is one year under me.

BG: Yeah.

HS: So, I was upset about that. So, I guess I just kind of got...early on, I got a negative feeling about...a negative experience about school.

BG: Sure, that makes sense.

HS: And that was the first negative kind of thing that happened. So, Maine was good. Me and my old man did a lot of fishing there, and we had this little red little boat, we would go out, and we would go out in the ocean. I would be baling, we would go way out into the ocean, and I really liked it and all was good, and then I think we moved from Maine - we stayed there for five years, and we moved to upstate New York. It was sort of...I think it was Kingston, around that area, and so at that time, that was elementary school, around elementary. Where we were at...in Maine, they had never seen black people before, and so there weren't many in upstate New York at the time. So, I remember one thing about being in that school - it was Beacon, New York, I think, Beacon or...we were talking, me and my human services guy, we were talking about...I think it was Beacon. So, I remember the principal there, and in this school, I would cut some time, me and this other guy. But, I just remember, this one day...so, they took a classmate of mine, they said, "You've got to go to the principal's office," and I remember...and I don't know if this was to scare us, or to scare me, because I was supposed to go in next, but all of the sudden, you hear this guy, all of this noise and this kid screaming, like he was getting beat with a ruler, or I think this guy had a paddle up in his office, and I think, now that I look back on it, that he must have been hitting the radiator, because I was supposed to go next, and I remember being terrified. So, the bell rang, and I was able to slip out, but it was really kind of terrifying.

BG: Sure. Yeah, I bet.

HS: I think he was hitting the radiator.

BG: This was middle school-ish?

HS: No, this wasn't even middle school.

BG: This was still grade school, elementary school.

HS: Right, right. Yeah, yeah. This is still elementary. So, because my father was in IBM, we moved around a lot, and we moved to East Fishkill, New York.

BG: Okay.

HS: And, I think that's where I did Middle School, yeah. And, there was this...we had a neighbor, and his name was Ernie, Ernest, and he was a bad dude. And I guess I...well, I don't guess. I hung with him a little bit. I hung with him a lot, actually. I had other friends, but he was a neighbor, and the guy was really basically trouble. We found out later he had a brain tumor. He died pretty young. So, his behavior was basically a result of this brain tumor. So, but, you know, I really won't go into all of that, it's really not even relevant, but I remember being kind of fearful back then. My father had started drinking a lot, and I was kind of fearful with him, and at that time, I started developing a stuttering habit that was pretty bad. But, you know, I thought I was...I thought I was okay, but other people didn't think so. And, so, a couple of things happened around that time. They got this person, I can only say this school must have thought I needed counseling, which I probably did, I guess. I don't remember anything...I remember nothing, I was pretty happy-go-lucky. So, they got this guy, and he...from the school, I think the school got him, and he took me bowling. I thought it was really strange they would have some guy take me bowling when I was...when I had a father that could take me bowling. But, you know, so, that's what happened. With this guy

Ernie, so he ran away, and we didn't really run away...I was with him, but I didn't run away. He was running away from home. So, we just ran to the back of my house, in some woods, right next to the school, and he decided to make a fire to cook hot dogs or something, and he started the whole woods on fire in the back of the school, and he almost burned down the school, and I was running and looked back and he was putting out this fire, and the flames were shooting up like clouds. But, I'm just going to move along here.

BG: Sure, sure.

HS: To junior high school - this is where I kind of remember a lot of stuff sort of happening for me. So, when we got into the school, my sisters and I - my sister Yvonne and I think maybe Debbie too. So, we were about the only African American family, I think there was one more. At this time, this gang started, that's when my sister and myself - they would go to the locker and pull out all of the books and stuff. So, I went to my father and really asked him for help. So, you've got to understand my father was this...because he had to take care of my grandmother, help pay the bills for my grandmother his whole life, started shooting pool, hustling, stuff like that. So, he was like one of those guys, just go handle, pointed to a tree, we had a two-and-a-half-acre property, or one-and-a-half-acre, horse stables on it and stuff like that, I was on it sometimes. Our neighbor had a horse and I would take care of it. But, anyway, he said, "You see one of those trees? You need to cut yourself something and go in there and handle it." And I'm like this little kid, and I'm like, "What are you talking about?" So, but, I did that, and so the next time they started messing with us, I had made this club, and when they started doing that, I went to my locker and I pulled this thing out. I didn't hit anybody, but I had to back them off, like six or seven of them. So, I ended up getting three or four guys, we were sort of outcasts, and we formed our own little gang. So, I just got to say that my speech problem got worse, and I got laughed at, and I

was pretty angry, and at the same time, I was fighting off these guys. So, school for me was just about getting through it, you know what I mean?

BG: Survival, yeah. I'm assuming it became the same way through high school?

HS: Well, high school was different.

BG: Oh, okay.

HS: So, about this time, I wanted to play a musical instrument, so I saw the Beatles, and I wanted to play the guitar. So, I picked that up, and I learned how to play a little bit. There was one instrument...so, I got to the point where I carried a knife in school, a K55, and so I was coming into school one morning, right, and not the principal, it could have been the assistant principal, or one of these teachers, I was coming in off of the bus, and there was a lot of kids in the hall, and this guy comes up behind me - this was a grown man - grabs me by the back of the neck, and he shoved my head into a brick wall. So, they found this knife on me. So, really, it was like that. Yeah, so, we moved to New Jersey, and so...I got to tell you, this was the first time I was really exposed to a lot of African Americans, so I really didn't know where I fit in, because I was really weary of white people in a way, but I was comfortable, but I was scared of black people, really, because I didn't know where I belonged. So, me playing the guitar, and kind of...so, I moved into this kind of hippie phase where I was associated with guys who were playing music and had long hair.

BG: [Light laughter] You weren't the only one.

HS: Right. So, but, when I moved into this group, they were into...well, I guess most of them were into smoking weed, LSD, and drinking and stuff. Now, I didn't really use anything - this is the ninth grade - but I was exposed to it, and so I experimented, and so in the ninth grade...I

was a virgin to a lot of these drugs, where they were doing these things I didn't know anything about. So, I was basically...the ninth grade was okay, but then tenth grade was a wash. I really got deeper into experimenting with drugs and hanging out. I think around this time, the tenth grade, I also started going to New York and selling Black Panther newspapers.

BG: '60s, early '70s?

HS: '69, yeah. Early '70s. So, at the time, it was illegal to sell Black Panther newspapers. They had to have...I guess it was the Supreme Court freedom of speech. But, if you were caught, they were going to lock you up, and I'm like 15, and I got with the Panthers, and they were like a lot older. So, I would catch the bus over, and I would go into Port Authority and I would meet up. So, I was exposed to...and I also had a good friend, Booker, and he was turning me onto all of these books, like Franz Fanon, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson's *Soul on Ice*, so I was an avid reader, and I was reading a lot of political books of the day, revolutionary stuff.

BG: Sure, of course.

HS: Right. So, we were selling newspapers, and I sold them for a while, and the cops would come and we would run and hide the newspapers, and the FBI would be taking pictures and all sorts of stuff. Later on, my sister would tell me she became the New Jersey state public defender, and she had access to the FBI files, and she said, "You know, you've got a FBI file." [Light laughter] The only thing I could think of was that. So, one day we were selling papers, it was on a Friday night or a Saturday night, and we come out of the Port Authority, and we go into this restaurant. I'm the youngest person there. The rest of the people are like in their early...I mean, late teens, early 20s, there's seven of us, maybe eight of us. So, we go into this restaurant, we have a meal, we're coming out, and they're saying

somebody didn't pay. They're all said, "We paid, we paid," and I'm just kind of there, you know. I'm just watching everything go down, man. Then, somehow, the cops are called...this is New York, 42nd street, on a Friday night - hundreds of people out there. This is when they had all of the clubs and stuff, all of the movies, and the prostitutes, it was a lot, a Saturday night lot. So, all of the sudden, these cops come, and they're coming from everywhere. The Panthers, they're out there preaching, "These pigs, fuck these pigs, we're being oppressed," and all of the sudden, damn horses start coming, riding up, and they've got all these riot gear on stuff, and I'm like, "Oh, shit," and then a cop comes up, right, and they start pushing, and the Panthers start pushing back, and then the crowd starts pushing, and I'm like, "Oh shit, I'm not with these people," [Light laughter] right? Just get me out of here. So, a cop comes up and grabs me and he handcuffs me, so I start crying [Light laughter]. I say, "I'm not doing anything," so he uncuffs me, says, "Get out of here," and I get up on the bus, and I'm like man...I never went back. The revolution could go on without me [Light laughter]. You know what I mean. So, I'm in the tenth grade, and I'm not doing anything man, I'm just going to school. So, I think I ran away from home, I'm living with my friend Booker, so I'm really not doing well at all.

BG: Yeah. Did you have a problem at school?

HS: Yes, in high school. So, I failed the tenth grade. So, I was smoking weed, doing a lot of drugs, not anything heavy, mostly LSD, tripping, smoking weed, and drinking. I think by that time, my father had left home, divorced my mother, or was going to get divorced. I was 15, and I thought I was the cause of that. That's what I asked him - I asked him that. So, my mom's family was from North Carolina. They're from a small town called Scotland on the south side of the Rocky Mountain. So, my mother didn't think she could handle me, because I wasn't doing anything. I was hanging out, kind of giving her a hard

time, and she had...by that time I had three sisters and one brother. Yvonne, Debbie, Deidre, and Tony. And so, she sent me down south to Scotland, North Carolina. So, when I got there, now the town had one main street. It had one main street, and that's it. You could walk in and out of town in five minutes, from one end to the other. But, I had a lot of cousins down there. A lot of cousins, I had aunts and uncles. Half of the town was us, because my grandmother has...let's see...four boys and five girls, there were nine of them, and they were all down there, except for my aunt, one of my aunts. And, by that time, just one thing - when they shot Martin Luther King, and the north riots, my cousins, my other cousins, lived up on Orange Street, and they were there for that, when those riots broke out when Martin Luther King...and they rioted up in Montclair too. I mean, it wasn't a big one, but that riot was...so, I do remember that. I remember what I was doing. I was sitting in a classroom when John F. Kennedy died, and was assassinated, and I just remember sitting in a class and it coming over the loudspeaker. That was something. So, what I got from moving down to North Carolina and being in...when I got down there, got back into playing sports, playing baseball, really exercising a lot and running a lot, and I stopped doing those drugs down there. Then, I found...the most important thing, I think I found my connection with my culture, because everybody...well, not everybody in the town was black, but the school, there was a couple of white guys, but I had a lot of family down there. The one thing that happened down there was...so, I went to...I just remember, I think this happened when I was in my junior year, this is probably right before I went to Harlem Prep. So, there was a movie theater down there, so we went to the movies, me and my cousins, and they went up to the upper level, right, to what do you call that...there's the lower level and the upper level.

BG: Yeah.

HS: Yeah, so balcony level.

BG: Yeah, balcony.

HS: Yeah, okay, so I'm up there. I go down to get some popcorn or something. So, I go into the lower level. I'm just walking to just look around, you know, and the owner comes up to me, and he says, "What are you doing down here?" and I say, "What do you mean, what am I doing down here?" and he hauls off and slaps me in the face.

BG: Oh my god.

HS: Slaps the shit out of me. I didn't know that the movie theater was segregated. So, he slapped me because I went into the white section. I didn't never have nobody slap me like that. It shocked me more than anything, but it...so, I started crying, but I was crying not because he hurt me, because I was mad. That's what it was, because now, you did the ultimate thing to me. So, what I did, I left, I ran and got my aunts. So, my cousins were up in the balcony, they don't know what happened to me. So, when I got my aunts, we came back. This guy's name was James Boyd, and he owned half...he owned the utilities, he owned some of the other stuff, he was one of the big guys in this town, a white guy. Everybody knew him. So, I got back with my aunts, and they're saying, "Why...how come you slapped our nephew?" and by this time, my cousins started coming down. I don't know if he had been drinking, but he's talking, and then he either pushed one of my aunts or got ready to do something, and that's when we all started to converge with him. Now, nobody messed with him. I remember going out front, and you remember I was telling you about the 42nd street night?

BG: Yeah.

HS: Well, a crowd started to gather up in front of the movie theater, so I started with the revolutionary bits. So, soon there's people coming in and out and making a crowd, and now they want to lynch Boyd. So, and then the cops come, and people had hurt about it, and I think that

ended it. So, after that, my mother heard about it, and my grandmother who had raised a family, a white family, she was an indentured servant, as a little girl, and her sisters were split up and they went to places like Massachusetts and Michigan. She never saw them again until she was in her 70s. But, as a little girl, she was like an indentured servant, but she raised this family, and the family, one of the boys she raised turned out to be - he grew up to be an attorney, so my mother and my grandmother got him and we pressed charges against this guy and it went to court. We won, he was charged with first degree assault, and they desegregated the movie theater. The white folks in town were so agitated for doing that and to losing this court thing, that he lost his power, the power that he had, you know what I mean. He tried to get back by raising the utilities on my family and stuff like that. But, when he lost the court case, the townspeople, or his people, got to say, "I think you crossed the line, it's time for you to step down. We're going to start taking stuff from you. You won't control anything anymore." But, just to...so, I started working in school, started getting really good grades. At the end of the school year, I had As and Bs, and they found out that I had failed the tenth grade, and they said, "Okay, you failed, but we're going to pass you through, because your grades are real good." So, I went with some guys who went to Virginia Beach that summer, and we were working, and at the end of the summer, my mother's friend and our friend of the family, I called her "Aunt Dot," her name was Dottie Taylor. Now, Dottie Taylor was affiliated with Harlem Prep, so Dottie Taylor said...everybody called me Tyrone. My first name is Harry, but my middle name is Tyrone. So, my aunt, who we had known our whole lives, said, "Hey, why don't you have Tyrone take the test for Harlem Prep and see if he can get in?"

BG: And I'm assuming she was talking...

HS: Dottie Taylor was affiliated with Harlem Prep.

BG: Yeah, and she was talking to them so you could come and that kind of thing?

HS: Well, she worked with Harlem Prep, Dottie Taylor. She was not my real aunt, but an adopted aunt. So, I had never heard of Harlem Prep, but it was my mom's friend, or my Aunt Dottie, who said, "Hey, there is a school called Harlem Prep. They have a real good success rate. Why don't you see if he can take the exam and see if he can get in?" See, Harlem Prep was a New York City School, and I was from Montclair, that's where we lived then. So, at that time I lived on 75 Harrison Avenue in Montclair. So, for me to get there, I would catch the...

BG: Train.

HS: No, at that time I don't think the train was running there. It was just New Jersey Transit. Maybe it was, but I took the bus from Montclair, right in front of my house every morning, I would ride over to Port Authority, hope on the A train to 125th, catch the double A, local, to 135th and St. Nicholas Avenue. I would walk down from that subway stop, passed that school, there was a school up on the left-hand side, and I'd walk down a block or two, make a left into Harlem Prep.

BG: And so, you...yeah, go ahead.

HS: So, it must have been 1971.

BG: Okay, so you took the test and you got in?

HS: Yeah, yeah.

BG: Do you know what the test was? I haven't figured out what that test was yet. I mean, that's really specific - I don't even remember what happened a year ago [laughter].

HS: I don't even know if it was a test. I think it was a test. Or, maybe she said it was...but I know nobody else...no one else was coming from New Jersey, I think I was the only guy from New Jersey.

BG: Okay.

HS: But, I came...I'm almost sure, as I remember, I had to take a test. Maybe I didn't, though. I thought I had to take a test.

BG: But either way, you got in.

HS: Yeah, I did, and I probably did have a test. It was probably to test my skills, maybe that's what it was. Yeah, hold on for a second.

BG: Yeah, no problem.

HS: So, it was cool. I had never seen a school like that, you know, and there was a lot happening as far as teachers go - they made it really interesting. It was sort of interactive, everybody was kind of in these classrooms that really were partitioned off, you know, and one of my favorite courses was an urban planning course taught by this...I think he must have been a doctor. I wish I could remember this guy's name. But, he told us, back then he said Harlem was one of the most valuable places in New York City, because everything had to pass through Harlem, all of the goods and services, all of the trucks and everything, all of the goods coming off of the docks or whatever, had to pass through Harlem. He said they were going to red line Harlem, he said that one day, they're going to red line it, and it's going to become valuable [light laughter], and he said black folks weren't going to be in Harlem like they were, and damn if that didn't come true. All of those milestones.

BG: Starbucks and all of that, they're going up.

HS: Right. So, I became...so, at that time, I switched it up, and I started playing bass, and the thing about...all these cats were coming in who were really, really good players, and we had a Harlem Prep jazz band. So, Arnold Jones, you hear from him yet?

BG: I haven't, no.

- HS:** Yeah, he was a music instructor, and he played...yeah, and he was good. And he's still alive and teaching somewhere.
- BG:** Is he really?
- HS:** I think in upstate New York.
- BG:** I have to find him.
- HS:** Yeah, if you...it's hard to...but, he's playing with a band called Zebras, and this cat was really nice. Then, there was another teacher there, and I'll never forget the story he told us. He was playing with Barbara McNair at one point, and he was telling me, told us that he was driving somewhere with her, I think it was California somewhere, and she told him to stop the car, and she got out of the car and was running towards this cliff or something, and he had to go and like catch her, like he was afraid she was going to jump off. Anyway, so Arnold Jones taught music theory. So, in the music room, which was on the lower level, we had a music room, and we would all play. At the time, I was kind of really stretching out on bass, you know, I was weaving the typical bass line and more improvisation, and most people weren't doing that, but I remember playing with a young lady, her name was Alma Martin, and could she play.
- BG:** And she was also a student at the school, at Harlem Prep?
- HS:** Yeah.
- BG:** And did you guys play, like was it after school?
- HS:** We played whenever we had a chance. So, yeah, we would jam, me and Alma, and this was at the time when Earth, Wind, and Fire was still coming out. So, I got a reputation of being a really good bass player, but there were a lot of people who were really good. There were some horn players, some guitar players, and there was another bass player there too, and I've just got to say he had the bass chair, basically. So, the only disappointment about that is I didn't get to play

at the show at the Garden. So, Arnold Jones was pretty well known around the music scene up in New York, so we went to the Village Gate, the whole jazz band one day, and we walk into the Village Gate and we go downstairs, and Dizzy Gillespie was there, Charlie Mingus, Max Roach, and Don Cherry, and all getting ready for this show at Carnegie Hall. So, we're sitting in there, it's just us, maybe six or seven, eight of us, everybody in the jazz band, and so Dizzy was just playing, you know, talking, playing, talking, playing, and Mingus was - he wasn't playing bass, he was just playing piano. He was like really, really, like he wasn't saying nothing. He would get up every 20 minutes and go into the bathroom, he's a heroin addict, you know, and Max Roach, he was really nice, nice guy, and Don Cherry. So, at one point, somebody from News Magazine came in, and so he tried to ask Mingus some questions and Mingus just basically said, "Don't even talk to me man," and Dizzy was laughing and shit, he wasn't paying no mind. I just remember that, and then the show, see, every year - well, at that time, now they were doing fundraisers, right, so the show at the Garden was...so, I got a chance to meet...so, this is the line-up they had at the Garden that year.

BG: So, Dizzy was...go ahead, yeah.

HS: Yeah, yeah, so we were there, and it's like Dizzy was saying, we're supposed to be rehearsing, but we don't really rehearse, we just play, because we've been playing for so long, we just call out a tune and then we just do it. So, that was real good, meeting him, and a few years later, maybe five years later, it was a while later, he was playing up in D.C. at the Upper Blues Alley, and I called up Blues Alley, and I said, "You remember me? This is Harry from Harlem Prep," or whatever. I said, "I want to come up." He said, "No problem, just come up to the door, and you're in."

BG: Wow, that's awesome.

HS: Yeah, he was a really nice guy, man. So, at the show - I'm just going a little bit ahead now, I just want to tell you who was at the show and what happened.

BG: Yeah, yeah.

HS: Which was Bill Cosby, Herbie Mann, Sunny Friedman, Bill Cosby played drums. I think Dizzy was there. This guy...Jimmy Castor was there from the Jimmy Castor Bunch, he had a hit, a couple of hits, Troglodyte. Yeah, so, Lionel Hampton, which at that year, he played at the Graduation. The graduation that year was up on 125th, they closed it off.

BG: Yeah, and this was a fundraiser for Harlem Prep, specifically?

HS: Huh?

BG: This was a fundraiser for Harlem Prep, right?

HS: Right, right. Yeah, see, at that time, Harlem Prep was funded by a lot of donations and charity and different African American stars would come out and they would show up and they would do a show for Harlem Prep at Madison Square Garden, that's where we had the shows.

BG: That's amazing.

HS: Yeah, it was nice. So, I get back to school, where I forget a lot of names now.

BG: Yeah, it's tough.

HS: Because it wasn't like...there was...the Ten Percenters were there.

BG: The Five Percenters?

HS: The Five Percenters.

BG: Yeah, other students have spoken about them. Yeah, yeah.

HS: Yeah, so I had a good friend, and he was in that Ten [Five] Percenters. At that time, there was a lot of...in the Muslims, in the Black Muslims, there were a lot of factions that were...you know, up in Jersey, they were even heads up in the park and stuff. But, so the Ten [Five] Percenters, this friend I had, I was curious about what he...what the faith was about, because he called himself God, you know [light laughter]. Yeah, he was God. The Ten [Five] Percenters, whatever, I forget what they were like, but they called themselves God. They were really cool dudes. They were really into the school and went to get their education. They were dedicated, they had that discipline.

BG: Yeah, sure.

HS: But, they called each other God, you know. So, I had a real good friend, and I forget his name, and I forget now exactly everything about his faith, but I just remember them to be really dedicated to his school work, and that discipline they had, it was cool, you know. So, I met this girl - I have to tell you about her. So, her name was Jean Hudson. She was, I guess...I think she was adopted. I'm not sure. But, to me, I thought she was biracial, I'm not sure about that, or she could have been white, because she looked white. She had a red afro though, I think she was biracial. But, her mother was a curator of Schomburg Library, and her name is Jean Hudson. So, I spent time up at Schomburg Library a lot because her mother was there, and so it's not James Baldwin that she was good friends with...who was the other black writer? It wasn't James Baldwin.

BG: Was it a book author?

HS: What was that?

BG: Was it a book author?

HS: Yeah.

BG: Claude Brown or someone like that?

- HS:** No, no, it wasn't Claude Brown. I'll find it in a minute.
- BG:** Okay.
- HS:** So, Schomburg Library was really something. So, there was a lot going on in there as far as artists coming in to play. So, there was a lot of kind of these really free guys, stuff like the last poets, you know what I mean, that was going on, but yeah, so...give me one second.
- BG:** Yeah, no problem. Thank you again so much for speaking with me.
- HS:** Okay, so it's Jean Hudson, she dies at 83, and Jean Blackwell Hudson, who was curator and chief of the Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture. So, what was his name? It wasn't James Baldwin. Who was that other guy?
- BG:** Ralph Ellison?
- HS:** No, it wasn't Ralph Ellison either. But, we're close.
- BG:** Yeah, we're getting there. We're getting there.
- HS:** It wasn't Ralph Ellison. He was even bigger than Ralph Ellison.
- BG:** You're not talking about the other guys, like DuBois...
- HS:** Langston Hughes.
- BG:** Oh, Langston Hughes, okay, okay.
- HS:** Yeah. She was real...she was kind of like...they were really tight. I never met him, but me and Jean, her daughter, that was my girl. Then, I kind of...I didn't know it, but she was using heroin off and on, and I kind of maybe, recently, well, maybe a couple years ago, I was just kind of wondering what happened to her, and she died. I think she died in the '80s or '90s. I just...there was an obituary about her, and it mentioned her.
- BG:** Yeah, no, that's unfortunate, there's a part [of the Schomburg] named after her, the research division.

HS: Yeah, but her daughter, yeah. So, her daughter attended too. That's where I met her at, and I think she dropped out, and I remember...but, I would go up to their house. They lived on...right behind Harlem Hospital. I think it was on 5th Avenue.

BG: Sure, yeah.

HS: But, if I went up to her house, I'd have to go across Lennox, right, and at that time, there were hundreds of addicts, heroin addicts.

BG: Wow.

HS: And they'd be up on 5th avenue. At that time, it was open air. Cops didn't mess around at all. The cops was dirtier than the drug dealers, they were getting paid off - there was no doubt about that, and I know because I had gone up there with my friends, I was along for the ride. I was telling you I was living with this guy named Booker who got me on all these readings, but he was also using heroin at the time.

BG: Yeah.

HS: Yeah, I hadn't seen him use it. But man, I didn't like to see needles and I didn't like to see him use it, I didn't like to see blood coming through a needle or nothing like that. I thought it was crazy.

BG: Were people using it at Harlem Prep? I heard...

HS: Oh no, I never heard anybody using. No, I never heard of anybody using, and I never...the only person I know who was using, and I found out later, that Jean was, she was using dope, she was using heroin, but I didn't know it at the time. She never mentioned it to me, and I really didn't...I wasn't into none of that. But, she never used it around me, but I knew she was using, because sometimes she would call me, and I would be up in Jersey. She would call me up in Jersey at night, it'd be a Friday night. She was like, "Come on down, come on over," you know, and I would hop on a bus, maybe, and I would go over into Harlem, you know, and I would go over her house, and she

would be high and stuff. We would have a good time and fool around and stuff, but I never knew what she was doing, really, and then later, we kind of...she got...she was getting out of control, and we broke up and she dropped out and I didn't see her but, then I read she died in the '80s or '90s, and I was thinking just like my friend, he died of AIDS, she probably died of AIDS, because he didn't...she wasn't old, when, you know. So, but, Lennox Avenue in Harlem at that time, there was a lot of dope and drugs, a lot of heroin. But, I remember when I was at her house, so I would have to pass by Lennox Avenue, and there would be like hundreds of people on Lennox Avenue, and they would be...it was bad. But, right across the street, was Harlem Hospital, so [light laughter], so they stayed on Lennox, in case they overdosed, they could...

BG: That's funny, yeah.

HS: Yeah, yeah. So, getting back to the school activities and everybody's enthusiasm and perseverance and everybody was motivated, because you didn't get into Harlem Prep unless you got accepted into Harlem Prep.

BG: And what year did you start? '70, '71? I'm just trying to put it together...

HS: I did my senior year, so I'm almost thinking it was '71, yeah, '71. And, the teachers worked with everybody, they were just really positive and encouraged everybody, and the "Moja Logo" – everybody kind of was driven to get that letter. That was everybody's goal, and that was the one focus.

BG: To graduate and to get into college, right?

HS: College, right. Yeah. And, so it was funny, you know, towards the end of the school, we applied, and I got to tell you, what's your first name again?

BG: Barry.

HS: Barry, Barry. I've got to tell you, Barry, I think I made an error, and I really made an error. So, my father was visiting because it was spring, and so everybody started applying to schools, and the anticipation was...I think I graduated third in my class, or something like that, so...

BG: At Harlem Prep?

HS: Yeah, yeah. So, I applied to the University of Maryland, and I think it was Tennessee, yeah. I think it was Tennessee, and I got accepted to both schools, and because I had this thing about being accepted by my father, I chose Maryland.

BG: Okay.

HS: But, I should have chose the smaller school, and the school that was more diverse, because Tennessee called me, and they said, "We would like to have you," you know, Maryland never did that. So, when I got to Maryland, I went from that little intimate setting...

BG: At Harlem Prep?

HS: Yeah. To Maryland, where there was no support, and nobody to...and I got lost, and I ended up...I wanted to...now, I majored in urban planning, but I wanted to play music, and they didn't have jazz, they didn't do that. They did classical. You know, what is jazz? That's not music.

BG: That hurts, that hurts.

HS: I got to say, I got really...some things happened there that...I really kind of got off on a bad foot with my roommate. I had a good roommate, and then they switched and put me...saying, "Why don't you switch dorm rooms? You can go with this black guy," and I'm like, "Okay." I didn't know, and this guy was a slob and he was a gambler. He was...it was terrible, and so I kind of slipped back into my old stuff. Well, I saw Cosby a little bit later, I was working up in

D.C. at a place called Ben's near Howard University, him and his wife used to always go there. Anyway, I saw him years later, and he came in, and I had met him a couple of times, and I walked up to him, and I said...and I introduced myself, and he said, "Yeah, yeah, why don't you come and have lunch with me?" So, we had lunch, I don't know what he was doing. I didn't know what he was doing then, anyway [laughter], what he was doing the whole time. But, it was good to talk to him about Harlem Prep.

BG: Yeah, what did he say?

HS: He said to me, "What are you doing working here?" Yeah, so I had left Maryland after one year. So, I'm not going to tell you everything, but I'll just tell you this, unless you want to know, and then I can tell you later. So, I had my issues with alcohol and drugs, right, and so that was really...I went through a really bad period, and I was in the service, went to California, came back, worked for the government, and still trying to...you know, when I was coming up, alcohol, if you've ever seen "Mad Men," right, that's the culture that my father comes from, you know what I mean? It was always alcohol. I had four uncles who died of alcoholism, both of my parents did, and I had one sister who was murdered as a direct result of her cocaine use. So, there was a lot of that, and I was able to stay away, and then in my late 30s I got involved with cocaine. So, I was in rehabs, and so 16 years ago, April...August 27th, was the last time I used anything. So, I went back to school. What I found was...

BG: So, you didn't graduate from...you left Maryland after a year, and then that was it?

HS: Yeah, yeah, and then I went on my kind of journey.

[01:30:00] So, but school was always something that I wanted to do and be successful at. So, 16 years ago, I went back and started from scratch, and I got my associates' degree in counseling and education, and then I

started working in the addictions field. Not then, I mean, I started working in the addictions field, I kind of got everything I needed to start as a trainee. So, I got my associates, and after that, I kind of sat around and said, “What’s next?” so I went back and got my bachelor’s in social work.

BG: Oh, excellent.

HS: And then I said, “What’s next?” so I went back again, and so I’m still in school, working on my master’s, on two master’s, actually. I’m in my third year, so another year and I’ll have both of those, so that’s where I’m at right now.

BG: That’s awesome.

HS: Still going to school.

BG: Yeah, lifelong learner. I mean, I’ve got to ask, how do you feel that Harlem Prep helped or didn’t help you, thinking of your lifelong interest in learning, how was Harlem Prep different? You’ve had so many school experiences, how does Harlem Prep compare?

HS: So, I always will say, I graduated from Harlem Prep, and so they instilled in me that the academic achievement is what you’re trying to seek. You’re trying to seek accomplishment through education, so even now, that whole influence still resides in me now, it never left. It’s just that I just [light laughter] got sidetracked.

BG: It happens.

HS: But, I still learned and I still appreciated everything that they taught us, because Harlem Prep, our whole thing was get those degrees, get that degree from college to better your life, and pass it on, right? So, in my counseling, when I work with clients, I try to instill in them a sense of meaning, a sense of hope that you can do something with your life, no matter what you’ve been through, you can persevere. Get an education, be economically free. You can be free of drugs and be free

in your thinking, you still have got to be free from society's labels and be economically free, and the only way you can be economically free is you've got to learn how to apply yourself, and you never stop growing. You can always achieve your goals, and if you've put the work in...and Harlem Prep said, "Put the work in, and set your aspiration higher," and that's what Harlem Prep was about. The Ten [Five] Percenters, and all of us there, the ones that they thought would never make it, they were making it. We were making it, and I'm still making it happen 50 years later. I've had a lot of challenges, but I'm still out there doing it.

BG: And that's because of Harlem Prep?

HS: Sure, yeah.

BG: That's awesome. I mean, as I talked to different alumni, I mean, yeah, everyone seems to say that even though there were so many different groups of people there, there are stories that...even talking, it's always so interesting and fascinating to hear people's life story and how they ended up at Harlem Prep and what they did after. Everybody seems to have had a unique story of how they entered into Harlem Prep for various different reasons and were involved in different groups, but no matter people's differences, Harlem Prep brought everyone together to focus on that one goal of the education, that seemed to be powerful, no matter what.

HS: Yeah. So, I work southeast of Eastfield, and I've been doing it for 16 years.

BG: What did you say the masters is in you're working on now, in your third year?

HS: Alcohol and Drug Counseling, I'm working on my LTCT, and my LCADC license.

- BG:** Yeah, I mean, I've been in school for a while too, so I'm with you - lifelong learner. I don't want to keep you, I know we've been chatting for a while, I'm just so grateful.
- HS:** Okay.
- BG:** I'm trying to think...any other thoughts about Harlem Prep, or just in general, any other thoughts or stories you can think of from there, just to tie in?
- HS:** I just remember graduation being on 125th street, and our graduation was...they closed off 125th, and Lionel Hampton played, so that was really, really nice. I just remember it being a really, really nice event, you know?
- BG:** Yeah, I've come to find some really, really cool pictures of the outside graduation.
- HS:** Yeah, but everyone was together. That's one thing you can't say about a lot of schools.
- BG:** What did you say?
- HS:** Yeah, everybody was together with a common purpose, where we were all kind of really in it. We had to strive to be really excellent at what we did, and we all looked to get those acceptance letters, which we all got, as far as I know. There aren't many high schools that you can say [light laughter] where your graduation rate is 100 percent.
- BG:** Yeah, right?
- HS:** Just about. The only person...well, I know Jean, she dropped out, but I don't know anybody else who did.
- BG:** Did you feel that...go ahead.
- HS:** I was the first person from Harlem Prep to be accepted up in Maryland. They had never had anybody go there, even people who had applied. I was...had it been...but, I always thought I should have gone

to the other school. I did Maryland because of my dad, but if I hadn't gone there, I would have graduated. There's no doubt about that. Honestly, I lost...it was a shock, really.

BG: Yeah, that's understandable. Alright, well, I could ask you questions for hours, but I won't take up any more of your time.

HS: Well, if you have anything else, just give me a call back some time. Just send me a text or an email if there's anything that you think of that I can answer.

BG: I appreciate that. And, were you able to get my email? I sent a few documents that were attached to the email, a few booklets that I found in the archives that may be interesting.

HS: Did you send me a link?

BG: I sent you a link, and I also...

HS: Okay, maybe I tried to open it on my smartphone, but that wouldn't work. I have to do it from my laptop, or my desktop, rather.

BG: Yeah, I sent a few...there's some promotional booklets and stuff from some of the funders that you may enjoy looking at. But, I'm happy to...and I'll definitely keep you in the loop of how things are going.

HS: Maybe, Barry, if you send it again, maybe I can...yeah, if you have a chance.

BG: Yeah, I'll definitely do that tonight.

HS: Yeah, and I'll look at it this evening.

BG: Yeah, and one last thing, I'm hoping...so, if it's okay, so it was so fascinating to hear your story and it was so helpful, just for my own...you know how schools are with the permission stuff. In order for me to talk about your story, I have to get your permission, so if you would be willing to, I'll send over a document for you to sign that I can use this in publications and book stuff.

HS: So, you want me to sign it and then fax it, or what?

BG: Yeah, you can fax it, you can email it, you can send it regular mail, whatever is easier. I guess if you could sign it...

HS: I can scan it?

BG: Yeah, you can scan it, or sign it, take a picture of it with your phone, send it to me, that's probably potentially the easiest. You can also fax it, or I can send you my address and you can mail it, whatever is better, whatever works for you.

HS: Alright, I can do it.

BG: Okay, well, I really appreciate it. I'll send you an email, and we'll stay in touch, and thanks again. I'm so glad you're still learning and you're still going at it.

HS: Alright, we'll keep in touch then.

BG: Yeah, we definitely will. Thank you again so much, and I do appreciate it, and we'll talk soon.

HS: Okay, well have a good day.

BG: Thank you, you too.

[END OF RECORDED AUDIO]