

**Penny Grinage and Ajuba Grinage-Bartley, Interviewed by Barry Goldenberg  
April 17, 2017, in Brooklyn, New York, NY**

*[BEGINNING OF RECORDING]*

**Barry Goldenberg:** And also, what I would love to do, so where you can start, is I'd love to know a little bit about your life as well. How did you end up...where are you from, and how did you end up at Harlem Prep?

**Ajuba Grinage-Bartley:** Well, what happened was, I was at a school called...first, I was at Sheepshead Bay, and my father had told him that I really didn't like it. I said, "But, I'm definitely going to finish school," so I went to a school called Prospect Heights, and they were just like if you were colored, they say you in the back of the class, didn't answer you if you raised your hand, they just...one time, I was in the hallway, they said, "Go to your class," I said, "Well, I'm just walking out of the class, on my way to the class," and he was talking to me and I said, "You're harassing me. You're being very disrespectful to me," and I was a kid, so I told my father [that] I don't know what I'm going to do, but I don't know if I can take the system. So, I used to be...I come from a family of people who were civil rights workers, they were in Brooklyn Corps. So, there was a man from Brooklyn Corps, he quit the Corps - his name was Vinny Young, and he was a bus driver, and I said, "Vinny, I don't know what I'm going to do, because I want to finish high school, but I just don't like the way they treat me," and he said, "Well, go to the street academy," I said, "What's the street academy?" He said, "It's called Harlem Prep." He told me that, that afternoon I went up to him, and Sonny Carson, who was

part of Brooklyn Corps, he told me about it also, and I went to see Mr. Carpenter. He took me, and the next day I started.

**BG:** Wow, so you didn't end up going to the street academy [other academies beside Harlem Prep].

**AGB:** Yeah, they called it the street academy.

**BG:** Yeah, okay.

**AGB:** Because it was in the supermarket. So, I went there, and I never missed a day of school.

**BG:** Really? And [that] was the fall of '69? Or you said... '68 then.

**AGB:** Yeah, it was '68, and then '69, that next...that's when I moved.

**BG:** Wow, and you just walked in...

**AGB:** Yeah, I went, and I loved it. I loved it because I felt good, and I mean, we used to get dressed up. We used to get dressed up, I had to...and you could wear jeans and things, but it was like you...I always liked dressing, and it was just wonderful socialization, we used to spend the night at the principal's house. They had a dance company, I was part of it, but I was a little shy. I would go through periods where I was shy, I was always real shy.

**BG:** But, you said you were young when you started?

**AGB:** Yeah, I was. The thing about it was I got a lot of nudging because I had teenage parents. Teenage parents, they don't have the same amount of patience that we do, mature parents. But, they were good, they sent us to parochial school, they did whatever they could. So, I liked it. I liked Harlem at the time, because they had something called Two Coffee Shops where we could see all the great poets. You'd see Langston Hughes, you'd see Mary Bowman, you'd see...what's her name? Maya

Angelou. You'd see a lot of them. So, Harlem was really sizzling at that time.

**BG:** Sure, yeah.

**AGB:** And, it was like, we saw the renaissance. So, I had a good time there, and when I wanted to leave, I took my report cards, because I had all As, and I walked over the bridge, and I went to Marymount Manhattan College, and they accepted me right away. She said, "You are eligible for a scholarship," and I got a scholarship, and I went to Hunter College, just because I wanted to challenge myself to see, and Brooklyn College if I got in, and I got in both. Marymount was kind of posh, so I went there, and that was a good experience. You had good experiences there as well. I stayed in the dorm for like two years, and then I went home, and then I did other jobs. I worked at Hunter for a while, I worked at Pratt Institute for a while, and then I got involved with the Department of Education, and that's...I started out as a special education teacher, and then I became a school librarian, and I set up and designed libraries for the Board of Education. So, that's what I did, and of course, my husband and I had our own filming company called Hessie Production, where we were able to cast Bill Cane, we filmed him, we filmed a lot of different...you know.

**BG:** Yeah, that's amazing.

**AGB:** We spent a lot of time in Cuba, I've been there 10 times. I've been going there since '86. So, those are some of the things that I've done, travel, and...

**BG:** Do you feel like Harlem Prep...because you went into education, which is...do you feel like Harlem Prep motivated you?

**AGB:** I felt it was very easy, because I wanted to get back. I wanted to get back,

[00:05:00] because people had done...people like Carpenter and Salmon and the people there was wonderful. We were like a family. It was nice. **And Aissatou [00:05:10]**, she had a lot of strength. She and I were like two of the youngest ones.

**BG:** Okay, yeah, but I know **Aissatou** pretty well, as well.

**AGB:** And she was just...she was in charge of the dance company.

**BG:** Were you a part of the dance troop?

**AGB:** Yeah.

**BG:** Did you perform in school, or did you perform all over Harlem?

**AGB:** All over, and in prisons.

**BG:** And, you mentioned in the email you went to prisons. So, tell me about...I hadn't heard that before.

**AGB:** Yeah, we did a prison, and it was very interesting. There was a guy named Jerry Woolly, he was a lead drummer, and the guys really liked it when the girls came, their midriff was out.

**BG:** Sure, sure.

**AGB:** So, that was a very nice experience.

**BG:** Was that organized by the school?

**AGB:** The school. Yeah, the school. Yeah, it was. We would do benevolent stuff. We were learning. Like I said, we were kids.

**BG:** Yeah, and you were the youngest, there were a lot of older students, in their 20s.

**AGB:** They were in their 20s, some were...

**BG:** So how was that dynamic, being the youngest?

- AGB:** We were just like...well, it was something, because sometimes you didn't understand things because you just weren't sure. You didn't know. But, a lot of them, they were nice, they looked out for us. It was kind of a wonderful experience. They knew we were young, but we thought we were grown up.
- BG:** Yeah, especially at the time, I can imagine.
- AGB:** Yeah, and there was a lot of love.
- BG:** That's what I've...because I've...everyone that I've spoken with has said a similar thing about the love that was there. Even Ed Carpenter wrote about, like in his dissertation, in his writings...
- AGB:** I have a newspaper article from the Amsterdam, I have to look. Have you seen that?
- BG:** I think I have.
- AGB:** Okay.
- BG:** Yeah, he talked about his love, a lot of heart.
- AGB:** And there's one where he mentions me. I'll bring it the next time I see you, I've got to find it, but I saw it recently. So, there's a few things. A few people...what is his name? There's a few people...I don't know. Paul Grayson, have you spoken to Paul Grayson?
- BG:** I haven't.
- AGB:** Because he contacts me sometimes. He's on Facebook.
- BG:** Okay.
- AGB:** Paul Grayson. Last time I saw him he was in Atlantic City, and then he contacts me sometimes, people who in fact have, from your high school, there's a site, so Paul was on - a lot of people are on that, so I'll look for that.

**BG:** Okay, yeah.

**AGB:** Because I haven't done it. I've been kind of to myself.

**BG:** No, you've been busy.

**AGB:** It goes through a phase.

**BG:** Yeah, well, one thing that Sandy and Aissatou have been...and I've been trying to help out with, is pull all the people's contact information together.

**AGB:** I'll see what I can do. I'll go on that site, I have it, and it would be kind of nice, like there's Barbara...it's Barbara something. Wait, I might be able to see on my phone.

**BG:** Sure, sure, take your time.

**AGB:** Yeah, because you said an hour before you would contact us.

**BG:** I did?

**AGB:** Or, she said.

**BG:** Oh, she said?

**AGB:** I guess she said that.

**BG:** Maybe I did, it's possible [light laughter].

**AGB:** I'm here.

**BG:** I'll text her now.

**AGB:** Messenger. It's from her. Harlem Preparatory Meeting, 11:30.

**BG:** Let me give her a text.

*[Side conversation, and then Penny Grinage joins the conversation]*

**Penny Grinage:** So, where am I from? Do you want to start from the beginning?

**BG:** Yeah, start from the beginning. I feel like Harlem Prep is like a story about people.

**PG:** It really is.

**BG:** So, your story is really important, and I would be really keen to hear it.

**PG:** It is about people, it truly is. Okay. Well, I grew up not far from here, actually on Decatur Street, and this was Reed Avenue, then, so I was in town. I grew up in Bed Stuy, and things were starting to change back then in the '60s, and so my parents wanted to move me out. This was post-civil rights era, but issues were still going on, so they wanted to get me into a school where there were white children so that I could benefit, even through osmosis by sitting here. If you didn't teach me directly, I'm there. So, they bust me out, they took me to Crown Heights at that time, and I was able to get in. I used a fictitious address - those were the days.

**AGB:** I remember, that's what you had to do.

**BG:** You weren't the only one.

**PG:** And so, I went there, and [was] always in accelerated programs. Even here at 262, I went to 262 which is down the block, and it was an experimental gifted program for black students. So, I got into that, and then when I went to Crown Heights, I went to Leopard's Junior High School, a gifted student high school.

**AGB:** I know Mother Pointer.

**PG:** Yes, Pointer. Oh, I went to school with Noel, he since has deceased, but...

**AGB:** They used to have a prayer meeting in his house when I first got married, every Monday. It was incredible.

**PG:** Wow. It was a good experience, because it was a very mixed group there. I first went to elementary - I first had to finish sixth grade because we ended in District 16 here in fifth grade,

so I had to go to sixth grade because that was a junior high school, and junior high schools accepted you in seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. They've since changed now. Now, they're sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. But, I went to Leopard's and met some really great people there, who I'm still...now I'm friends with them on Facebook.

**BG:** That's awesome.

**PG:** But, I took a three-year SP, special progress class, a study you could do in two-year, my friends took two-year. Maybe I should have gone with them, I would have done a little better, but I took three-year, and I started then to have my own little growth issues, identity issues. I am biracial, I was born in Japan. My father was military and my mother was a Japanese national - is, because she's still alive, I've met her, and my father, who I've never met, was African-American military, army man. So, I was conceived post-World War II, 1955 I was popped into this world. Yeah, but...so, my parents then, who were stationed there, adopted me and brought me back. So, I started having those issues, of not really...emotional issues, let's say, developmental issues. So, I went to...I thought I wanted to be a fashion designer, right?

**BG:** You mentioned that in your email, yeah.

**PG:** I went to Fashion Industry's High School. Yeah.

**AGB:** Oh, that must have been nice.

**PG:** It was, but it wasn't what I thought. When they took to me to those sweatshops and I saw they weren't glamorous, I said, "Oh, is this what I really want?" and...

**AGB:** You didn't want to exploit people, that was probably the first thing.



**PG:** I don't know if I was that together, to be honest, in terms of thinking of others. I was really self-centered, I think, more so, but what it was was I thought that I had the talent to design clothes, and it didn't fit the fantasy - let's just put it that way. You go into something, I had a fantasy, everyone - yes, that's what I'm saying. When I went behind the scenes and saw what it really was, and it wasn't all glamorous - hard work, and it was sweaty hard work, and I just said, "Well, maybe this isn't for me." So, I started to really lose myself and become adrift. I started hanging out with people, not going to school good [laughter].

**AGB:** I can't blame you.

**BG:** You weren't the only one [laughter]!

**AGB:** We go through stuff.

**PG:** We do, we do. We all go through stuff. Started hanging out in Harlem, because the fashion industry is on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street down on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, and I started going up to 116<sup>th</sup> Street and hanging out in Harlem, and then next thing you know, I was under-credited, and I remember when it was time for report cards, I had a friend that worked [light laughter] in the administrative office, so she got us some blank report cards, and so we went to a little...like I guess a coffee shop, my friends and I, and we started filling out each other's report cards, because now how am I going to take a report card home to my mother that says I was absent so many days and whatever, because we both - my mother's Caribbean, and we have this round...

**AGB:** Bajan.

**PG:** Bajan, yeah. So, my father was from the south and also very big on education, so now, here I'm coming there - this is the kid that went through gifted programs, there's so much promise in her, and I'm going to come home with all these days absent? So, we fixed up each other's report cards signed off, whatever, and then I took - I learned I was really good at forgery. I learned then, I signed off mommy's name and took it back. But, I had a very good guidance counselor, Ms. Gardner. She's African-American, and she called me and then I had to go to her, and she knew I was messing up, and so she asked for a meeting with mommy, because I wasn't going to graduate - I wasn't doing anything. I was hardly at school. I was partying and having a good time. And, told her that I needed to leave. Around that time - so now, I'm a dropout.

**BG:** How old were you? 16, I think?

**PG:** I was...16, 16, yes. I was a dropout, and I had no future. So, I figured, "Well, I'll become an airline stewardess," as flight attendants were called back in the day. "I'll do that. I can get a job." No, you cannot, you have no education. And, back then, all you needed was a high school diploma, truly - you didn't even need college in those days. And, I didn't. I found doors closing, so I thought, "Wait, this isn't working," and finally, I think my parents just had enough of me just drifting, and I don't know how...I think it was my guidance counselor that also told my mother about Harlem Prep, and we had an appointment with Dr. Carpenter. I remember going there. My mom and I went together, and it was an interview, I remember it.

**BG:** And you were interviewed?

- PG:** Yeah, I was interviewed, and I guess he wanted to know what were my intentions, what happened, what did I want out of life, and by that time, I think I wanted to go back to school, I really did.
- BG:** How long had you been out since? I know that's tough.
- PG:** That is tough. I would say at least six months.
- BG:** Okay.
- PG:** At least six months, because I graduated six months later than I should have. I should have graduate in June '73, and I graduated January '74.
- BG:** Yeah, yeah.
- PG:** Okay. So, I think I lost six months there. But, then, Harlem Prep, here I come. It was such a different experience. We were treated like young adults. It was cool, right?
- BG:** Yeah.
- PG:** We could call our teachers by their first names. These are just incidental things, but it speaks about the culture and the acceptance of the place. And, I remember, it was a long ride to go up to - 138<sup>th</sup>, right?
- BG:** 136<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.
- AGB:** We got off on 135<sup>th</sup> Street, and then you walked up the street because there was the park.
- PG:** There was a lot of devastation on the way, I remember.
- BG:** That's right, because you were coming from Brooklyn, right?
- PG:** Yes, I did.
- AGB:** I loved going. I miss it. I loved it.

- PG:** Yeah, I did too. I did. I didn't always like the trip, but once I got there, that was a good thing. And, that was the most important thing - getting there. And, I don't know. I have a funny feeling that if I didn't get in there, Dr. Carpenter or someone was going to call my mom anyway, because I remember going, and...
- BG:** This was September '73 or so, around there?
- PG:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I was there before '73...I think I might have gone in that winter. I may have been there a whole year, sorry.
- BG:** That's okay.
- PG:** January '73 I think.
- BG:** That makes sense.
- PG:** I think so. I don't think I did just six months. But, it was good, and I saw that it was college preparatory work, which was wonderful, and then you always heard who got into what college.
- ABG:** That's right.
- PG:** And that was like motivation when you heard all these students were getting in, and that was sort of shared freely, because it was to motivate us, to know that they did it, and you can do it, too, and they would name all kinds of colleges, the city colleges, out of state colleges, Ivy League colleges - all of the colleges. So, it began to show you that you could do this. I began to get more serious about school again and started doing well academically again, and I remember I was taking physics - wow - and I was selected to go to Bell Labs. Now, that may not be a big deal, but it was a big deal to me - going to Jersey, I think it was Cherry something, Jersey.

**AGB:** Cherry Hill?

**PG:** It may have been Cherry Hill.

**AGB:** You had taken a tour?

**PG:** Yes.

**AGB:** You had Bob? Who was your teacher? Who was your science...?

**PG:** I don't know.

**AGB:** There was a man with sandy brown hair, kind of baldish?

**PG:** Could have been, yes. Yeah, but he said...I was doing well, so he said...I was one of I think two students that went to Cherry Hill, the Bell System at that time.

**BG:** Sure, yeah.

**PG:** Bell was a big name in the science industry, and I remember seeing a laser for the first time, what a laser could do, back in that time, early '70s. It was really amazing.

**BG:** Absolutely.

**PG:** But then, it was time to prepare for graduation. And, I get the feeling also - and I don't know if this is true or not - but I was sort of pushed through a little bit, because it was going to be the last graduating class, and so...

**AGB:** It was just so horrible.

**PG:** It was.

**AGB:** Once the Board of Education got hold of it.

**PG:** I didn't know anything after that. I mean, after that, I went into the SUNY system, because I was accepted into...where was it? NYCCC, a junior college, New York City Community College, and I'm glad I went. I made a mistake - I thought I was going to

City College, up still in Harlem. It was the one on J Street, down here in Brooklyn on J Street, and it was good, because that's where I met my husband eventually. Yeah, but I started there, and I had a friend approach me and ask me did I want to be a teacher assistant, and I said, "Well, I don't know. I don't know what I really want to do." At first, I was enrolled in the medical science program - oh, because I went to Bell Labs and I want to be in medicine, a medical assistant, I think. And then, she told me about this job, and I said, "Hey, well maybe." It was a paraprofessional, and by this time, I was 18 going on 19, or I was 19...I was 18 going on 19. I just remember working as a para at 19, and my mother was devastated, didn't I want to finish college - no faith, no faith. I didn't give her a whole lot to go on. "You're never going to finish," and I said, "Yes, I am." They paid for six credits, so that helped, you worked, you made your money, you were off every summer, you got picked up in September, and it was good. I was working with special needs children, and I found what I was good at. So, that being said, the rest is history. I went on, I got my degree - took six and a half years, but I got my Bachelor's. Yeah, and became a special ed teacher, did that for eight years. By then, I was married to my husband, who was her [Ajuba's] cousin, and we had met, and I still didn't know she...right? We didn't connect...I don't know.

**AGB:** A little before we got married, because we saw them...no, we didn't know that then.

**PG:** No, we didn't.

**AGB:** I saw her...we got together as cousins, I went over the house, I remember what she made - she made a baked potato, broccoli, and steak. I came to your house.

**PG:** Oh, okay.

**AGB:** Yeah, I remember that. And, she was telling me about what she did, but we never talked about...she got married on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1980, and I was married the next week, June 28<sup>th</sup>.

**PG:** That's right.

**BG:** That's funny.

**PG:** She came to my wedding, and I went to her wedding. Just a week apart.

**BG:** That's great.

**PG:** And it was just very, very interesting the way our lives intertwined, and we didn't find out until much later that she went to Harlem Prep and I went to Harlem Prep.

**AGB:** Just a few years ago, basically.

**PG:** Yeah, yeah. I think.

**BG:** That's wild.

**PG:** It really is.

**AGB:** So, we've been married what? 37 or 38?

**PG:** 37 years this June.

**AGB:** It'll be 37 years this June, or 38?

**PG:** Yeah, because we got married in '80. So, this is 2017.

**AGB:** Time is just speeding past [laughter].

**BG:** Yeah. You both look young.

**PG:** Yeah, yeah. So...and, it was good. And, I think I didn't speak of it. This is where...because I was ashamed of that part of my life.

**AGB:** Well, we all have parts that we're ashamed of, Penny.

- PG:** You know, skeletons in the closet. I didn't want to bring that up, I didn't want it brought up. My children still don't know. They're going to know now, but... [light laughter].
- BG:** I can cut anything you want.
- AGB:** But, they won't know about how 116<sup>th</sup> Street was back then.
- PG:** No, no, we weren't going to go - even go there. But, no, I'm just saying, it's not something that I boasted about. Even as a teacher, I didn't tell my students, "Oh, I dropped out." You don't tell those stories. As a matter of fact...
- AGB:** Because you really didn't. You transitioned. And, that's how I felt, because I was still in school through it all, and I really feel like I transitioned, because I always knew I was going to get my education, and you always knew.
- PG:** Well, I wasn't sure at one point, but when I did get back on track, it felt good, and yes, when I graduated from Harlem Prep and went right to college, it was good - I felt then, I was on my way. And, the reaction of my family, of course. Now they're happy, I didn't drop out. I did what I was supposed to do, finally. But, excuse me, I'm so sorry. But, yeah, it was just embarrassing, and as an educator, I didn't want to speak...I don't know if you remember, we had a Chancellor Fernandez, do you remember? He dropped out of school, and he wrote it, and he told everyone, he was a Chancellor. I remember, I was so shocked. I remember saying, "Why?" You remember? Why?
- AGB:** But, he was a nice guy.
- PG:** He was nice, but he was successful and we were successful. We made it. Not every young person that hears that story will make it - that's what got me upset with him. Why would you want to tell young people?



- BG:** You don't want to normalize...
- PG:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's not...the thing is to stay in school, to do the best you can, to do whatever. So, Joseph Fernandez. Joseph Fernandez.
- ABG:** He wasn't in long.
- PG:** No, he wasn't. Anyway, he went somewhere else. I think he went to Florida or somewhere. Anyway, I was very annoyed with him telling that story, I remember, because for myself, it was not...it wasn't what I was raised to do, and it was an embarrassment. And, as a matter of fact, I think my family - people used to whisper it, "Look at her." [Light laughter] I was like the little black sheep in the family. That was a dirty little secret and so forth. And, that also may have propelled me to say, "You know what? I'm going to achieve. I'm going make something out of myself. I'm going to do something." And, so the rest was teaching, assistant principal, principal. I ran a good school, I think.
- ABG:** What's her name? Miss Anderson? One of the teachers? Miss Anderson? Do you know Miss Anderson? Or is it...I don't know...she wore glasses. She was really talented. She was at your school. She worked with me at 270, and then she came to your school. Audrey.
- PG:** Oh, oh, Audrey, Atkinson.
- ABG:** Atkinson. I knew it was a "A."
- PG:** Audrey. She was lovely. She was a teacher.
- ABG:** She was so dedicated.
- PG:** She was. She was one of my best teachers, she was.

**ABG:** She was always saying, “Oh, Miss Anderson,” and one day, she said, “Do you know Miss Grinage?” I said, “That’s my cousin.” She said, “Oh my god.”

**PG:** It was a small world, because people then began to associate...but yeah, it was good. It was a learning experience, but it was good. No regrets there. I think it was meant to be, looking back retrospectively. But, in the moment, it was hard. It was a hard lesson. It was hard.

**ABG:** Okay. What happened with me was I was going to Chesapeake Bay and it was far, and then my father and mother put me in Prospect Heights High School, and I was there and I just found that...I told him all the children of color were sitting in the back of the classroom and the teachers didn’t always answer you, whether it was French or math, and I kind of wanted to learn, and I said, “I don’t know what I’m going to do.” I said, “I’m going to finish school, but there has to be an alternative.” I didn’t know what...I just knew that I needed something else, and we worked with Brooklyn Corps. My parents are like...my mother is saying, but also civil rights, Brooklyn Corps, and up in Harlem, the African Society, and so what happened was, I said, “I have to do something,” and I saw one of the men from Brooklyn Corps on the bus, his name was Vinnie Young, used to work with Paul Robeson. I said, “Vinnie, I don’t know what to do. I have to finish school,” and he said, “Go up to the Street Academy.” That’s what he called Harlem Prep.

**PG:** Street Academy?

**ABG:** Yeah. I went up to Harlem Prep by myself, and I saw Mr. Carpenter. I said, “Listen, I want to finish school, and Vinnie Young...” He said, “Oh, you know Vinnie Young?” I said, “Yes, from Brooklyn Corps,” and I started the next day, and I

went and I loved it. It was socially nurturing, it was culturally nurturing, it was academic, of course.

**BG:** I think you mentioned cultural mecca in your email.

**ABG:** Yeah. And, I thought it was, because some mornings you'd walk in and they'd play music. I remember Carpenter, everybody would dance, and they had a dance company, I was part of – Aissatou was in charge of it, because she was always...we danced, but sometimes I would get shy, because I was kind of shy, and it just made me know, going to Harlem Prep, I was worthy. I wasn't always mature - I was 16, and...but we had a good time. We would go over to Carp's house sometimes and spend a weekend.

**PG:** Oh, see? See, that's cool [laughter].

**BG:** The school seemed, from my...seemed to have changed over the years.

**ABG:** Yeah, I think as they got older.

**BG:** Tell me about...you went over to Carp's house on the weekends?

**ABG:** Yeah, we spent the night. We left Friday after school, and we would stop, by the time he got home, we were all there. He said, "I was going to drag you, but you're always so grown, you took the train."

**BG:** Would he invite you over?

**ABG:** Yeah, and his wife was there, and she cooked and we spent the night. It must have been about 10 of us. We were in the basement, the girls downstairs, the boys upstairs. But, we had a nice time. And then, you had wonderful people like Sandy, who was the language arts teacher, was really funny, and then you had Barry, who was a little more serious. We just had

wonderful teachers. I loved it. I felt at home, and you had John Tyrrell, who became an actor. Have you seen...he was in "The Five Part Beings," and a few other movies.

**PG:** Okay, alright.

**ABG:** Looks like an Indian, kind of straight hair if you see him.

**PG:** I'll Google it.

**ABG:** Anyway, it was just...it was a wonderful experience for me, because you left when you felt you were academically skilled enough. I kind of wanted to leave that June, but it didn't matter because I liked being there, so I went...left in '70. I went there in '69 or '68. Anyway, I left in '70. I was there like a year and a half, and what I did was I had my report card, and I went to Marymount Manhattan College - I walked, and they said they'd accept me, and so I said, "Well, I want to challenge myself," and I went over to Hunter, they accepted me.

**PG:** Good for you.

**ABG:** But, I took Marymount because Marymount was kind of posh - you got a scholarship, you got a dormitory.

**BG:** And the nuns were connected, right?

**ABG:** The nuns were there, the nuns were there, and when I went, there was one guy in the school. They were just starting to make it co-ed, and I stayed in the city for a while, 81<sup>st</sup> between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. I didn't like it. It was beautiful, but it was very sterile, but you know, I used to see so many people, like Leontyne Price, and so I used to go over to Lincoln Center to the library when I wanted to take a day off. But, Marymount was a good experience, and then after I went to Marymount, I worked at a reading lab at Hunter, different schools. And then, somebody told me about the Board of Education, and I went

and got some credits - I got them at Brooklyn College and LIU, and then I got my advanced degree at City College, and then Bank Street my third year and above. The other courses I would just take for fun, because you liked to keep up as you...but that's basically it, darling.

**PG:** So, I guess we both decided we were going to pay it forward. We were going to give back.

**BG:** And Harlem Prep, how did that start...how did the Harlem Prep experience...you both went into education.

**PG:** Yeah, we did. Isn't that something?

**ABG:** And there's usually... [Cross talk between Penny and Ajuba]

**PG:** No, I didn't. I told you, my friend said, "Hey, you want to come?" "Alright, I'll try it." I wasn't sure. I was going to be...a biomedical technician, that's what I was majoring in at New York City Community College, and I liked the sciences, but I now know it would not have fulfilled me, because it wasn't people-oriented, and I'm a people person, which I found out.

**ABG:** You like children.

**PG:** Yeah, I do. They're so innocent. And, I found out I had so much more patience for children, and not a lot for the adults. But, anyway...but, yeah. I think that good experience, the nurturing...I also remember when teaching my students in the tradition of Harlem Prep, I made sure I didn't teach them that Columbus discovered America.

**ABG:** Oh, right?

**PG:** No, I'm so serious. I remember, I was telling them, "How can you discover when people are here?"

**ABG:** So disrespectful.

- PG:** There were indigenous people here, there were Native Americans. And, they looked at me, I said, “Yes, he only discovered it for himself and for Europe. There were people here already, you cannot discover...”
- BG:** And so, you got that knowledge at Harlem Prep, right?
- PG:** Yeah, it came from Harlem Prep.
- ABG:** A lot of that. Oh, Dr. Ben, forget it.
- BG:** George Simmons, was there as one of the teachers. I’m not sure over the years, but...
- ABG:** Oh my god, oh no, yeah, because...did you go to Egypt with Dr. Ben?
- PG:** No, I didn’t. I missed going with him.
- ABG:** And we’d have to go to the Schomburg, and Harlem was just so exciting during that time.
- PG:** Yes, yes, yes.
- ABG:** Just very exciting. So, those were some of the beautiful experiences, and I’m grateful for that. I think it was a gift, now that we look back, because it really...we weren’t bad kids, but it saved us.
- PG:** It did.
- BG:** You mentioned in that email that it saved you, in terms of...
- ABG:** Yeah, it did. It saved me.
- ABG:** That’s right. I couldn’t have gone back. I don’t think I would have been a good night student.
- PG:** And, it’s also what I said - how people of color were seen. Even though New York was not like the deep south, in terms of segregation, but we dealt with it in terms of attitudes,

expectations. My husband went to Thomas Jefferson High School, it's not a trade school - we had trade schools. As a matter of fact, Fashion Industry was a trade school, because you were there to learn a trade, and I probably should have gone to a more academic environment, but anyway, he was in an academic school, and his guidance counselor was pushing him not towards college, but towards becoming a mechanic.

**ABG:** No, no, I'm just saying you're right.

**PG:** And, his whole family was kind of pushing that, and when you talk to a lot of African American people from our era, maybe even Hispanic, but this was the expectation that we were to be doing the jobs that pay a lot of money now [light laughter], but to be a mechanic then, you can name your figure. But we would do that type of labor.

**ABG:** They told my sister to go towards becoming a domestic.

**PG:** And see, this is what we were given, and so while New York was supposedly integrated, it wasn't, and the department of education wasn't, and not in terms...as a matter of fact, how I got into becoming an assistant principal was that at the time, we had our first African American chancellor, Richard Greene.

**ABG:** Oh yeah, he was...didn't he die too early?

**PG:** Oh yeah, he did. He had asthma, and it got out of control, and they just couldn't revive him and bring him back. But, the point is, I was a teacher, I was a special ed teacher, still in that class with my boys - and I had boys, and that was important too. My husband was a police officer, before I got to Richard Greene, that was another thing. My husband was a police officer and so he was also dealing with those issues from his level, and he would tell me things about... "You've got to tell those young

men not to congregate on the corner, because that's where the police will come." So, I would take all that information into my boys and tell them.

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

**PG:** Yeah, but that's what I would give them, from Harlem Prep: how to survive, how to make it. That's what this world is about, and it helped to demystify certain things so that I didn't have to learn with all of the bumps and bruises, the hard way, and so, that was my job, to tell them. I said, "Listen." They said, "Why?" I said, "Because a group of you together is threatening." I said, "also, crowds aren't good to be in," and just a whole explanation, and hearing their anger, and hearing their questioning, but that was a gift my husband gave to me, since I had mostly boys - boys at that time. And, I think if you've done any research in special ed, mostly boys, mostly minority boys, which my thesis was about. I had... it was attitudinal as far as I was concerned, and not understanding cultural nuances, and seeing rambunctiousness as, "Oh, they've got to go into another setting, a specialized setting." So, that's really what...but, Richard Greene, when he went around, as the first African-American Chancellor of New York City, the nation's biggest school system, he started looking at all the children, and then a lot of the Caucasian children were going to more private schools, they would congregate in certain communities, Queens, Bayside, whatever, but when he went around and saw a lot of the children - I remember his statement was, "A lot of the children in the schools are African-American, and I looked at the principals and who's running the schools, they're all white males." So, to counter that, what he did, was he put in a scholarship program for women and minorities to become assistant principals. I wasn't going to take it, I wasn't



interested in it. As a matter of fact, I didn't know about it, but we had someone back in those days, we used to get monitors who used to come - compliance monitors - to make sure the students' needs were being met and so forth. And she came, I was teaching, and she was looking over my lesson plan and so forth, and I was teaching. I took the kids down to lunch, when I came back, she says, "Have you ever thought about going into administration?" I said, "Who, me? I love the classroom. I'm not going anywhere." And then, my role model was this guy who...he wasn't a good administrator, he was...everyone called him a mensch. Are you familiar with that term, a mensch?

**BG:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**PG:** They would call him...he was a good guy, a nice person, but not good for running the school - didn't run a tight ship, that kind of thing. So, and his name was Mr. Frank. He was a really nice guy, I remember. And so, anyway, I said, "Nah, that was my role model. I don't want this." She said, "You really should. It's for women and minorities. Go look it up," and they used to post the jobs on the bulletin board. So, I went down and I looked at it, and then my friend next door, my buddy, because I wasn't going in it alone. I showed it to her and said, "Are you interested in doing this? Do you think we should do this?" She said, "Well, if you do it, I'll do it." Long story short, we went in and interviewed. We represented the district, and really, the Board of Ed paid for me to become an administrator through that program.

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

**PG:** It was excellent, because I worked for five months, and then five months, they hired a sub to cover my class, and then I worked full-time as an assistant principal intern in another

school, and the school that I became an intern in was the school - after the internship was over, I went back to teaching, got hired by the district office - now, I came to the attention of those in district office, and they brought me into work to train teachers, other special ed teachers, but when the principal who I interned with was losing her assistant principle, she said to the superintendent, "I want Penny." So, that's how it worked out. I became her assistant principal for six years, and then when she retired, she said, "Well, are you ready?" and I said, "Nooo, I don't want to be principal," because I saw what it was, and she said, "I think you're ready." So, I thought about it.

**ABG:** How many years did you do it? Principal?

**PG:** Principal? 12 years.

**ABG:** Yeah, because I know one time you said that you were gonna' do it five more years and I'm out.

**PG:** Yeah.

**ABG:** Because Mr. Minkins, that was a friend, and he said, "If you're doing this right, after a while you have to get out or it will kill you."

**PG:** Mhm. Well, when I turned 55, I knew I had to leave. It was time. I survived cancer, I was a cancer survivor.

**ABG:** Bless you.

**PG:** And then when you looked at... I try to look at what causes it, and when I looked, I saw stress.

**ABG:** Smart girl.

**PG:** Stress. I said, "What the heck?" Truth be known, the school was called Sheldon Brookner, he was a beloved principal, he died of cancer. And then, my principal, who called me into the

department, she didn't die of cancer, but she had cancer, so I said, "Maybe this chair is a lucky chair." And then, my children - my daughter was just going into high school, my son was getting ready to go into 12<sup>th</sup> grade, his last year, and it was time. I hadn't been a stay-at-home mother, I hadn't done any...it was time to give them a little piece of...and it was good. My daughter needed me. She would have been another Penny if I hadn't...I said, "I'm serious!"

**ABG:** Yeah?

**PG:** Yeah. Oh man, pushing, she was pushing. I said, "Girl, I been there, done it. You're not doing this. All this. Wait a minute, how come you're late to school? You got out of here on time. What happened to first period? How could you miss a whole period?"

**BG:** That's funny.

**PG:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, so I said, "Uh uh." I didn't tell her my history and I didn't want to, because I was fortunate and I always believed that we're fortunate, and I didn't want her to feel, "Well, mom's okay and she did it." So it was, "Absolutely no." That's why I'll tell them - now I can tell them. They're both getting ready to graduate college.

**ABG:** But that wasn't really a big deal. You were a good kid.

**PG:** No, no, I was a good kid, even though I was the black sheep of the family.

**ABG:** Oh, don't feel bad. I was never anyone's favorite.

**PG:** Oh [light laughter]. And she had sisters, she had a girl later.

**ABG:** Oh, that's right, you were an only child.

- PG:** No, I had a brother, four years younger than me. He looked at what I said, he was a good child - he was an angel. No, my mom and dad, they couldn't have children. They had a lot of miscarriages, so they adopted me, and I tell him, "Look, I paved the way for you," because he's their biological son. He came four years later.
- ABG:** Oh, he came four years later?
- PG:** Yeah, yeah, so I'm four years older than him. But, yeah, I do credit a lot...I didn't have any experiences that she had, I wasn't cool.
- BG:** Yeah, but the thing I'm curious about, yeah, I mean, how did you feel like...obviously you can't compare [to Ajuba's experiences at Harlem Prep], but those last six months or so, what was the mood in the school? Did students know that it was closing?
- PG:** Yeah, they did. It was...yeah, yeah, it wasn't a good feeling.
- ABG:** When I found out, I was devastated, even though I had...
- PG:** Yeah, it wasn't a good feeling, it was just this heaviness.
- ABG:** Yeah, see, and you were there. You were there knowing that.
- BG:** So, there was definitely a heaviness around.
- PG:** It was a heaviness.
- BG:** Because I've been looking at a lot of documents, for a year or two, they weren't even sure it was going to open that September and August.
- PG:** Mhm, you're right. So, I got in and got out, that's right, that's what you're saying.
- BG:** So, the students knew it, and the teachers.

- PG:** Yes, yes, yes. It was. I mean, the teachers gave us everything that they could. They did. They gave us the best of everything. They did it anyway, but I think with that brewing overhead, they even more so, and I just...there was a melancholy, a sense of sadness.
- BG:** This is the end, but an obvious bitterness, really.
- PG:** Yeah. And, everyone was saying, "It's not going to be the same. It's not going to be the same." We all felt that way. As an independent school, we knew, and we knew we got the best. We also knew once the Board of Ed came in, curriculum would change, the honest conversations of how *we* can make it in this world would no longer be the focus.
- BG:** You mentioned how - I mean, obviously, it was this academic operation, but you also mentioned they taught you how to common sense and kind of this identity. I mean, the curriculum seemed to mesh the educational and the personal, right, I mean just to kind of pick apart what you said.
- PG:** Mhm, mhm, yes. How to live. How to navigate this world. And, it's almost like a parental relationship, because that's what your parents were supposed to do. My parents were hardworking, both working, educated in another system, a British system in the Caribbean, my dad was from the south, and they didn't know the student system. They didn't know it. They did the best they could, and Penny was a little slicker, a little smarter, so [laughter]. So, that's why I said with my children, "Oh, *no*, *no*, *no*, I know the game."
- BG:** "I know what you're doing."
- PG:** "I'm the gamer here. *I* know the game. No, you're not doing this, you're going to..." So, yeah, it was...

**BG:** Yeah. The article you sent me talks about [how] the teachers were volunteering the last few months - and the article was saying that's a—

**PG:** Right, right. But, they were passionate. That's all I remember. They gave us everything. They told us the way it was in college, they told us the real deal, and I appreciated that. They were connected, they were friends. It wasn't...how can I say? It wasn't a job, just, for them at that point.

**ABG:** They were family.

**PG:** They were.

**ABG:** Like Hussein, Sandy...

**PG:** Mhm. Well, you'd see Sandy's daughter hanging in here all this time. There you go. When we had...they showed you pictures from the last reunion that we had, right?

**ABG:** It was a Bar-B-Q, right?

**PG:** A Bar-B-Q

**ABG:** Was that in Harlem?

**PG:** Yeah, yeah, beautiful brownstone, too, oh my goodness. They had redone it.

**ABG:** There was a picture in...

**PG:** Yeah. I put them in the Facebook.

**ABG:** Yeah, I saw it and I said, "Wow, I missed that." I don't know what happened.

**PG:** It was nice.

**ABG:** I wasn't here or something.

**PG:** And, I didn't know a lot of people there.

**ABG:** That's okay.

**PG:** But then, “Oh, you’re a Harlem Prep graduate?” “Yeah, yeah.”  
Oh, what’s the name? Killgore.

**BG:** Sherry?

**PG:** Sherry, thank you. I know Silvia Killgore. Did you graduate with her? Sherry?

**ABG:** ’70? I might have...I don’t know. The name doesn’t ring a bell - it rings a bell, but it doesn’t ring a bell.

**PG:** But, I just met her there. I didn’t know her, because we graduated two different times. No one was there for my graduation. I was the only one there.

**ABG:** Because I said, “Penny? Penny graduated?”

**BG:** I haven’t met anyone who graduated in ’74, that final part.

**PG:** That January, ’74, that was it.

**BG:** It must have been...and what was the graduation [like]?  
Because it was in Harlem Hospital, the other ones weren’t.

**PG:** It was beautiful.

**BG:** Most were at the Theresa Tower.

**PG:** It was beautiful, and I’m just fortunate, my parents took pictures. We didn’t have these then.

**ABG:** Well, we walked up to 125<sup>th</sup> Street that they had set up.

**PG:** Oh, yes, yes.

**BG:** I love these pictures [pointing to pictures of her graduation that Penny sent Barry via e-mail], but this is so neat, because I didn’t know that they had - that the last graduation was at Harlem Hospital. It was so nice.

- PG:** It was beautiful. I didn't remember it was the hospital auditorium, but you can see all of - I didn't remember, so you have that bit of information, but yes.
- ABG:** That's nice for you to have.
- PG:** Huh?
- ABG:** That's nice for you to have.
- PG:** Yeah, but my parents had that, and I don't know...one day, you're a teen - I was a young woman, I was putting together my album, and they said, "Well, put together what you know about your high school," because I didn't have what everyone else had, all the other pictures, and that's what they took. So, I just had that in my album.
- ABG:** I'm just glad to get to start to be involved in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and...
- PG:** Can you believe it? But, we're in our 60s, so what the heck.
- ABG:** Can you imagine?
- PG:** I'm telling you [laughter]. So, you're doing this timely, I'm telling you, because we did lose some, I think, Eugene - I met him.
- ABG:** Was that one from your class?
- PG:** No, no, he was at the last reunion.
- ABG:** He's gone?
- PG:** He passed, yeah. He was at the last reunion, and we became Facebook buddies, but he passed.
- ABG:** I've got to look at his page and see his picture.
- PG:** Oh, you've got to get ready and go to...I know.



- BG:** No, no, I'm good, truly, I was just curious. This is honestly the best part of my day, the interview. My head is in Harlem Prep all day.
- ABG:** You have something else, an appointment?
- BG:** Oh, in the afternoon. No, this is the core of my...it doesn't matter. Yeah, well, it does feel that kind of things are bubbling up in terms of Harlem Prep photos, and I was just...I happened to stumble across the film years ago, just by chance, in the Schomburg, just by happenstance, and I'm like, this is amazing, and so I figured there was tons written about the school, and I kept searching and searching online, [but I found] nothing. My professors who were historians education of the '60s and '70s in Harlem, [they knew of] nothing written about Harlem Prep. So, part of my goal is to help change that. I mean, obviously, to create a nice little project, but also, I've been able to...I've searched now dozens and dozens of articles and newspapers and documents, and it's just such an incredible story.
- PG:** Mhm. I think so.
- BG:** I mean, as someone who works with young people myself, it helps me kind of learn.
- PG:** And, to have such a high success rate for that time, because a lot of times when young people did drop out, that was it, and they didn't get found - if they were lucky, maybe later on, but that was the goal of that school, to make sure that we all...and I think one of the conditions for graduation was you had to get accepted to a college.
- ABG:** Right?
- PG:** That's right.
- BG:** And with that graduation rate.

- ABG:** That's what I said, when I wanted to leave, I started looking for a paid job, and when I went and I came back, I said, "They accepted me. I got a scholarship, I'm going to stay at the dorm," and I was so happy, I didn't know what to do.
- PG:** That was. I remember, that was a big deal.
- ABG:** Once you got accepted...
- PG:** That was it.
- ABG:** You were outtie.
- PG:** I didn't know, you didn't know.
- ABG:** And, it was expected of you. You just knew you were going to college. There was no question about it, that was it.
- PG:** Well, that was the goal - that was the goal of the philosophy of it.
- ABG:** And you felt so happy, because sometimes people in your family... "Oh, what is she doing? What is she doing over there?" "I'm going to school in Harlem, yeah, and I'm doing well this time, and I'm going to be in." "Oh, she's in college?" "Yeah." And, when I finished, one of my relatives cried because I finished before her.
- PG:** Oh.
- ABG:** Not for joy, but it was just a blessing.
- PG:** Yes, it was, it was, it was. It was a very good experience.
- ABG:** Excellent.
- PG:** You're making me melancholy now, thinking about it, but it really was. It was really, really was just a good experience, and as I said, that's probably...
- ABG:** Amazing that these people came back for us.

**PG:** Hm?

**ABG:** It's amazing that these people came back to save us.

**PG:** Yes, yes, and it was the vision of Dr. Carpenter that pulled it all together, and just knew - he knew what we needed.

**BG:** Do you have any stories about Carpenter? I know...I hear he's a character.

**ABG:** I avoided...

**PG:** She may have, because she was...

**ABG:** I avoided him. He was a lot of fun, he was nurturing, and he'd call you on your stuff. But, we behaved.

**PG:** Yes, we did.

**ABG:** I know one time I was sitting outside and I was talking to somebody and I lost track of the time, and Hussein said, "You have to come to class now." He came and got me. I said, "Oh, I'm so sorry." He said, "Don't let it happen again."

**PG:** That's right, that's right. That's it. That's who I know.

**ABG:** I was sitting talking to a guy.

**PG:** Oh, probably, yes, but you forgot.

**ABG:** I forgot. Don't let it happen again. It was just a wonderful environment.

**PG:** It was. It really was. That's all I can...

**ABG:** And then, Dr. Ben was a mess.

**PG:** Yeah, I didn't have...

**BG:** He may have left by the late '70s.

**ABG:** Because he went to Cornell, but he was something else.

**BG:** Who else were some of your favorite teachers that you remember?

**ABG:** Oh, Dr. Ben, Professor Simmons, there was Bob, there was an art teacher.

**PG:** I don't remember. I don't remember.

**ABG:** And then there was Sandy.

**PG:** I had Sandy though, for English.

**ABG:** Sandy and Hussein, and in there was a lady named Justine. She was a sociologist. I kind of liked all the teachers, because they were nice and I did well, so it made you feel good.

**PG:** They were. They were approachable.

**ABG:** Don't mess up.

**PG:** No, don't mess up, but you could talk to them, understand?

**ABG:** And, if you had issues...

**PG:** That's what they were there for. They let it be known.

**ABG:** And Anne, Carp's wife.

**PG:** Yes, but I didn't really deal with Ed, and I came late.

**ABG:** You came later, you were probably shy.

**PG:** Yes, I was shy.

**BG:** Why do you think, towards the end, it seemed like there was less going on - less activities, and just trying to get everyone through to...

**PG:** Yes, just trying to...really pushing us through.

**BG:** I think it's the spirit...[Reading from an *Amsterdam News* article] "The class of over eighty young men and women have

worked exceptionally hard since the Fall to complete one year of schooling in a six-month period.”

**ABG:** Isn't it something? That was your year, right?

**PG:** Yes, yes.

**BG:** They were trying to get people to finish.

**PG:** They were, they were.

**BG:** Yeah. What are your thoughts on after? I know there were a lot of reasons, and I actually - in the last two months, I've read the board of education archives.

**PG:** Really?

**BG:** Obviously, the files aren't organized, which is...but, trying to...talking about the integration, the transfer from independent status to part of the system, and Chancellor Anker and the Board of Ed were talking about to [whether to] accept Harlem Prep and it's interesting to see those discussions and conversations. You had advocates who said, "This is great," some who were skeptical.

**PG:** I read something.

**BG:** You didn't really have contact with the school after you graduated pretty much, or once it changed, or...

**ABG:** What, Harlem Prep?

**PG:** Well, I never went back.

**ABG:** I never went back, but I just knew that it wasn't going to work, because it was a different make-up. They probably tried, but it was a different make-up, and it wasn't set up for success, otherwise it would have worked.

- PG:** I believe the same thing happened. That's why everyone was so sad, because we knew the sense of family, the sense of urgency, the sense of just...holding us together and pushing us forward was not going to be there for those people. I think now, if I look at the deal of schools in terms of high schools, I think...I don't...I think they're trying to do something when they have these smaller academies and high schools.
- BG:** Small schools, yeah.
- PG:** Small schools, I think they're trying to approach something like that, where small, personal knowledge, because what happens in these big high schools, 3,000, 5,000 students, they don't know you, you get lost.
- ABG:** The only ones, like I could say honestly, and Penny can testify, Mr. Minkins really did a fantastic job, the boys and girls high.
- PG:** Yes, he did. He knew his students, yes, he did.
- ABG:** Like you said, he knew his students. He would go, drive around to see if they were home, if he knew that they had a problem with the mothers' boyfriend or something, before she got home from work. I mean, these are people, self-dedicated.
- PG:** Well, could have been a Harlem Prep graduate, to be honest, with what he brought back into...and his boys, I mean, I heard he had a closet full of ties if you didn't come in...
- ABG:** Yeah, my husband was there. My husband was there for 25 years, and shirts - he ordered shirts, dress for success.
- BG:** Yeah, I love that.
- PG:** The school went down after he left.
- ABG:** And, he had a teacher, he walked around the school, and one day he saw the teacher - the children were working, but he saw

the teacher reading a *New York Times*, he watched him for a few minutes, and he said, “Listen, bring all your stuff down to the office, and bring a union rep with you.” He didn’t play. He didn’t.

**PG:** So, that was kind of like that whole...

**ABG:** Yeah. When I saw him, when I would visit, he said, “You like my students?” He said, “I fixed the cafeteria so they can have warm lunch, and they can have whatever they want,” and he said, “And, I’ve got a juice bar for the paying kids.” Not a juice bar, but a salad bar.

**PG:** But, he cared, and that what it was.

**ABG:** He cared, and he was accountable. He had people - I don’t know if you know Elsie Richardson, but his mother would say, “What are you doing?” People would come into the schools - there was an accountability piece.

**PG:** But, I think there’s still accountability, but not everyone cares.

**ABG:** No.

**PG:** Not everyone cares. There’s still accountability. Me going to do a review of that school is accountability. That principal cares, God bless her. She cares, and I said, “You’re like me.” But, that’s it. I think that’s one of the ingredients that you can’t replicate, and then after it became independent, it’s funny, none of us really wanted to go back. Who were we going to go back and see, anyway?

**BG:** There were big issues with teacher retention. The Board of Ed wouldn’t accept some of Harlem Prep’s teachers, because teachers didn’t have credential there, so it became a bit of a mess.

- PG:** And, at that time, if I remember correctly - I don't know if the teachers were state certified.
- ABG:** I don't know.
- PG:** No, but you had to have two certifications. You had to have city certification and state certification, and city trumped state certification, because I remember having to take the city tests - you remember the board of examiners and all that.
- BG:** Teachers at Harlem Prep weren't certified, so once...
- ABG:** But they got us through.
- BG:** Once it became part of the Board of Ed, they weren't going to accept the teachers.
- PG:** No, it wouldn't be the same.
- BG:** So, there were issues with it. Ed Carpenter didn't have a proper principal's license, so there were issues with that. I know he remained as principal, or headmaster, for a few years....
- PG:** Yes, yes.
- BG:** ...through the Board of Ed, the board was involved in that. But there were all of those kinds of issues.
- PG:** I couldn't believe it - I read something, someone posted something recently, I just read it over the weekend, maybe a graduate on the group page.
- BG:** Was it Ed?
- PG:** Yes, yes, Ed...
- BG:** That was Ed Randolph. He was a former teacher and a student.
- ABG:** Ed Randolph?
- BG:** Yeah.
- ABG:** Okay, I remember him.



- BG:** And, yeah, I had actually sent that to him a few days ago. If he posted that, that's wonderful.
- PG:** I read it!
- BG:** Because he was like, "Can you find my article?" and I was actually at the Board of Education and I found the original of the article, and he posted it.
- ABG:** Can you send it to me?
- BG:** Absolutely.
- PG:** It's on...yeah, I'm not going to interrupt, but it is...are you a member of the Facebook? You should be! Did you...Tessa may have sent you an invite or something? I'm not going to interfere with that...no, if you didn't accept...
- ABG:** Sometimes you miss stuff, so I would definitely like to see it.
- PG:** They generated it really after the last reunion.
- ABG:** Okay. So, I might have...
- PG:** Yeah, that's when that really grew, and so you would be invited, you just say you want to be a part, and you were invited. But, yes, when I read that, I said, "Wow! Check this out."
- ABG:** Because the name rings a bell.
- PG:** And, he was implying that Ed Carpenter was doing cherry picking, because he...I mean, I wasn't...but, I was a kid.
- BG:** Yeah. What was your thought of the student body? What kind of students did you know? I mean, not [the] student body, but the admissions and...because you interviewed...
- PG:** Yeah, it wasn't a deep...
- BG:** It wasn't like...yeah, that's the thing.

- PG:** I mean, I guess he got a sense of my mom, who she was, got a sense of who I was.
- ABG:** See, hers probably would have been more formal, because I went by myself.
- PG:** Yes.
- ABG:** And, you went with your mom, and she wanted to...
- PG:** And look, I'm a scared kid, I went up to Harlem from Brooklyn. You were braver than me.
- BG:** And, by then, there were so many people who wanted to go to Harlem Prep, they were getting more applications than they were...
- PG:** Oh, I didn't even know that. I didn't even know that piece. I was accepted.
- ABG:** I was just glad to be there, and I knew that I was going to graduate and go to college.
- PG:** But, that was the whole thing. That was the whole thing. We knew we were going to college, because we couldn't graduate unless we did. But, yeah, I knew it wouldn't be the same. It couldn't be the same, and we all knew it wasn't the same, so that was it.
- BG:** Yeah, Al Shanker wrote some terrible, horrible things, and it was just total BS.
- ABG:** Well, he had issues.
- PG:** He did.
- BG:** I should actually find his article. I read his column, and it's just complete...it's junk.

- PG:** Right. Why would you think anything good would come from Harlem, number one?
- BG:** They resented it.
- PG:** There you go. There was that whole mindset, no matter where, if it was Harlem or Bed Stuy, or East New York. Where my husband went to school, it was there.
- ABG:** Where did your husband...?
- PG:** David? He went to Thomas Jefferson High School. They love sports now. It's like, come on, not every kid you're training out there is going to join the NFL or whatever. That's what they pushed a lot. Yeah, we got caught up during the post-civil rights era, where we still weren't given fair, equal access for the dream. The dream was not there for us. So, that's really...our parents had dreams. And, I used to say that to my teachers. I used to say to my teachers, "Look, we're here to help these kids." I said, "Their parents want the best for them, and not every parent knows how to get it for them," and that's what I got from Harlem Prep, because I knew my parents, they used to tell me the stories, my father used to say, "We've got doctors, we've got lawyers, we've got teachers in the South."
- ABG:** Yeah.
- PG:** So, that was to motivate me, right? And, my mom came from Barbados, which had one of the highest literacy rates.
- ABG:** I thought they were both from Barbados, I don't know why.
- PG:** No, just my mom.
- ABG:** What part of the south was your father from?
- PG:** South Carolina.
- ABG:** Oh!

- PG:** Yeah. That's why they talked so well together [since there is a South Carolina-Barbados connection], they could understand each other. Matter of fact, when we went to Barbados with my grandfather who was from Barbados, everybody thought dad was Barbadian, because...
- ABG:** That's how - my mother's from North Carolina, and my father's from Barbados, and that's something, because sometimes, when my father...they'll say from the West Indies, "Johnny Boy," and from the south, "Johnny Bo'." So, we speak in dialect for fun.
- PG:** Yes, yes.
- ABG:** It was the same thing, Barbados and the south.
- PG:** Yes. My mom would go to a PTA meeting, but she was respectful. She wasn't a hell raiser.
- BG:** Sure, sure, yeah.
- PG:** She had squeaky wheels, she wasn't getting any oil, and they didn't know how to navigate the system, basically.
- ABG:** In Barbados, education is king for people, because they're 99% literate like Cuba.
- PG:** They have one of the highest literacy rates in the world. I mean, I was surprised, I don't know how they measure it, whether it's sixth grade education or what.
- ABG:** It's pretty good.
- PG:** No, no, I'm just saying, I don't know the standard for measuring, but it had the highest. I remember, I used to look in the almanac - those old days, we used to look in real almanacs and you'd see the different countries and you'd see the literacy rate, and they did have one of the highest ones. But, that's what

I used to tell my teachers, because I wanted them to understand, when that baby is in that mother's arms, she is not saying, "Oh, I want this baby to grow up to be a bum." They want the best, but they don't know how to bring it, and that's what I think Ed Carpenter understood. He knew that our parents wanted the best, we were going through some rocky times politically, socially in the U.S. at that time, he gave what he knew was the right recipe for getting us there. You know what I'm saying?

**BG:** Absolutely.

**PG:** So, I think that's what we took with us.

**ABG:** He made such a difference in our lives.

**PG:** Yeah, and we made a difference in children's lives. I know that.

**BG:** What's even more powerful is that you both went into education over the years.

**ABG:** And, I've seen a few people that have gone into education that were from the Prep.

**PG:** Mhm. Well, it shows there was a different side of what being a teacher was. So, it really did. And, I didn't seek it, it found me, and I said, "Hey, they're listening to me!" It worked out so well.

**ABG:** God had a plan.

**PG:** He did. See, I believe in that. I do, I do, because what was I supposed to do, then, with all the academic background I had and whatever from previous...where was I? Yeah, I could have been a scientist sitting in a lab, very unhappy. I didn't know.

**BG:** I think both of you are such charismatic...you've got to be with people.

- PG:** Yeah, that's how I felt. I wanted to be around people. And, my husband was supposed to have been a teacher, too.
- ABG:** Yeah, because wasn't he working...
- PG:** He was a paraprofessional like me. But, at the time, Thomas Jefferson was having the issues, and he said he was having so many issues with putting out fights and things like that that I think when the police exam came up, he just took it, and that was it. So, and then we were getting...
- ABG:** Wasn't he some kind of official in the police department, David?
- PG:** No. He was a sergeant. He rose to the ranks of sergeant, but...no, but what I'm saying is he chose a different path. I thought...he was an English major, right, and I knew...we were going to have summers off, we were going to vacation, we were going to do this, that, and the other. No, no such thing. Once he became NYPD, that was it. I had summers off, not him.
- BG:** That was it.
- PG:** So, yeah.
- ABG:** It was great for the kids, their children.
- PG:** Having summers off?
- ABG:** Yeah.
- PG:** I was principal by then. I had summers off only two years, and then the last contract with Giuliani made principals work a yearly schedule, so once we were on a yearly schedule, I worked all year, I got...how many summer vacations? I think I got 15 vacation days in the summer, so that's three weeks...yeah, I'm telling you, I'm telling you. So, I used to space them out so I'd have three-day weekends. That helped a

little, three-day weekends. We had to be at summer school. It was ridiculous. The way the system was, you would have four schools into one school that had air conditioning, and you'd have four principals sitting there looking as we're looking at each other. I could have been at my school, planning, doing things, but I was sitting there. It was all accountability. He wanted to make sure we were all where we needed to be, and if your superintendent stopped by, or if you needed to be where you're supposed to be. And, it was not fun. This is so crazy and we weren't even responsible for summer school. We hired an assistant principal who ran summer school. So, the assistant principal was in charge of summer school. So, we sat up there like this and chit-chatted. This is the level of professionalism. But, this came about after that contract with Giuliani and then with Bloomberg. But, I might have stayed a little longer, in all honesty, but when Bloomberg sort of stole that election, because he just took that third term...

**ABG:** He just took it. It was horrible.

**PG:** I just said no, I'm not going to do it. I've got to go now. I would have taken my chance with a new mayor, but I just didn't want to deal with what was happening.

**ABG:** That's how I felt - you know how she felt? I said, there's nothing left, just teaching to the test, and it was just...there was nothing left.

**PG:** Mhm. You're an educator. You're not just an instructor that teaches rotely and that, you teach the whole...we were taught to teach the whole person.

**ABG:** That's it.

- PG:** You teach the whole person. And, I tell my husband that. My husband now teaches at TCI, he teaches technical careers and security management there, and he'll tell me - he went back to school and got his master's in instructional technology, fine. But, as I said, you are an instructor - we have these little arguments. I said, "I'm an educator. I educate the whole child, it's not just the content. You deal with content only. I deal with everything, the emotions, how are you feeling."
- ABG:** We're like parents.
- PG:** Yeah! And that's it. And, once you...now, if you're the principal, that's your philosophy, it just ripples through. So, that was Ed Carpenter, you understand? There you go. But, I've been in schools where that is not the philosophy. It's just very sad. I feel so badly for the children, and what I've always said to teachers, "You have to ask yourself, would you want your children going to this school? That's the question, and if not, why, and what are you doing to help it become that kind of place?"
- ABG:** I'll never forget. I was in my library, and there was a young man who came - he was a little tattered and his hair wasn't combed, and I heard one of the teachers, science teachers, say, "He's just nothing, isn't he? Just nothing," and I just had a fit within myself. The principal, nobody did anything, they said unless I heard it, but I just...but still, she built her daughter up.
- PG:** That's right. That's what I'm saying.
- ABG:** And, she said, "He's just nothing." I said, "Just because he doesn't have clothes? He's a child."
- PG:** Let me tell you. You just reminded me a story of David's dad. My husband is one of 16 children.



**BG:** Oh my goodness!

**ABG:** I thought it was more.

**PG:** No, it was 16.

**ABG:** And, Irish, she just passed.

**PG:** Yes, she did, my mother-in-law, but strong Belizean family, came here. My husband was supposed to be the American-born son and should have been the last one.

**ABG:** Didn't one pass away? That's including the 16, the one that passed away?

**PG:** Loretta, the girl? Elise?

**ABG:** Yeah, she passed away, yeah. Okay, so that's part of the 16.

**PG:** Yeah. No, she may have been the 17<sup>th</sup>, you're right.

**ABG:** And then, the one that was living in Savannah, Georgia, but now he lives upstate? Which, it wasn't from her, it was from...

**PG:** Oh, I know who you're talking about. That's my father-in-law - that's the chef's son, that's not my mother-in-law's son. They had a few outside. They had one and one outside, but basically, all the others were from the same mother and father, Catholics. You know anything about Catholic birth control. So, anyway [light laughter], I teased her. I said, "Your rhythm was more in sync than out of sync!" because they used the rhythm method, but anyway...but, David's father, I remember David told me this story. One of the teachers said something - because they're all stair steps now. When you get one Grinage, they keep going up through the grades, because they were born right after each other. And one teacher made the mistake - yeah, the year she didn't get pregnant, she skipped a year, she had twins the following year.

- BG:** Oh my god.
- ABG:** She said they used to tell her, “See you next year!”
- PG:** They knew. God bless her. But, said something to one of the siblings, and said, “Oh, you’re garbage!” or something like that. Went home and told his dad, now you know...oh, he came for him.
- ABG:** Because he was very static, conscious.
- PG:** And proud. He wanted...he came to this country to give his children something more. He didn’t expect he was going to get 16, David was supposed to be first American-born, last child, but I think after him came nine more, so yeah. So, anyway, but very proud family, and they took care of their children. But, that’s what I’m saying. So, that negative comment that she just made, those are things - flippantly. How can you make a judgement on someone else, on their child? They come from garbage - who are you to say that? So, from what I heard, my father-in-law went up there and just sort of gave him a look.
- BG:** Yeah, it was deserved. It was justified.
- ABG:** And my father, he helped write a law here, he would have had a fit, because that’s how they were. If you bother one, you bother...
- PG:** Oh yeah, Grinage, you don’t mess with the Grinages in East New York.
- ABG:** I wanted to ask you, how did you deal with having all those brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws?
- PG:** It was interesting, because I’m from a family of two children, but I got it...they were very sweet, very loving.
- ABG:** You got through it.

- PG:** I didn't always call people by the right names or anything, but yeah, very loving family. I wasn't used to the huggy-kissy. They're very huggy-kissy.
- ABG:** When you're at a family reunion, you've got to give everyone a kiss.
- PG:** Yeah, yeah. I wasn't used to that. My family, we love each other, but we aren't as demonstrative. You go there, [kissing noises]. I was like...
- ABG:** I know when I was even at the wake, some of them...and it makes you feel good.
- PG:** Yeah, yeah, so I married into a good family. I did, I did.
- BG:** That's good.
- PG:** So, that also helped. But, yeah, those negative comments - back to what I was saying.
- ABG:** I was devastated. I wanted to beat her up, like a little kid. She said somebody's child was nothing?
- PG:** When I was in the...a teacher in 219, I remember, I never went to the teacher's lounge, and one of the reasons...
- ABG:** I never went either!
- PG:** Right? One of the reasons I didn't go, I didn't want to hear the teachers talk negatively about the children, because they were my children. They looked like me. And, I remember hearing comments like, "They're like animals," come on, you wouldn't call your child an animal.
- ABG:** Children are children.
- PG:** That's it.
- BG:** It's a child...the emotional...

- PG:** Yes, so if you're saying that to your colleagues, what are you projecting in your classroom? So, I didn't tolerate that as a principal.
- ABG:** Oh, no you didn't. Miss Grey, you had to get rid of Miss Grey.
- PG:** I got rid of her. I didn't know what I was getting. I thought I was getting a different type of person.
- ABG:** She came from the school I was at, and I was the assistant principal, so they said, "Oh, you're principal Grinage now." I said, "No, if I wanted to..." They thought...my principal said, "So you're telling people..." and Rita who was the assistant principal. I said, "No, I'm not." So, I just let them carry on for a day. I said, "I have a cousin whose name is Penny Grinage who works in District 19, she's a principal."
- PG:** I fired Linda and got rid of Linda.
- ABG:** She was something. She was horrible when she went back.
- PG:** Anyway, I just had to get rid of her. There's a certain standard I had for myself, and I expected everyone, and you're the assistant principal, you're here to make sure that teachers maintain that standard, and if you can't, then you've got to go. So, she had to go, and I was glad to get rid of her. I mean, that's the job. It takes a lot to do that - and, that was my own union, so it's hard. It's different fighting a different...but she left, and I was happy she left. She had no choice, it was either that or take your license away.
- BG:** Not at my school, yeah.
- PG:** No, not at my school. You have to care. So, I would say that that sense of caring for children and caring about the total child and nurturing them and encouraging them, and having conversations with parents - I used to have so many

conversations to help. I believe it was educating them, and not in a negative way, just parents were...they were never doing their homework, teachers were frustrated and angry, and I would just say, "Well, how about if you let him do his homework while you're cooking? You could check it. But, at least he's doing it." Little things to help it move. "Then, make sure he packs everything back up, and puts it by the door, so in the morning, when he gets up - and gone." So, those are the stories.

**BG:** Yeah, you have to care.

**PG:** Yes. I want them to be successful, which is what Ed wanted for us.

**BG:** Did you know he was a guidance counselor before?

**PG:** That's why! That's where a lot of that nurturing...

**BG:** He was a junior high school guidance counselor for a couple of years.

**PG:** Okay, I didn't know that.

**ABG:** Yeah, I didn't know that. He was the headmaster, as far as I was concerned.

**BG:** Yeah, right?

**ABG:** My mother knew about him, just from the Caribbean. They would make a wacky...they didn't play. They had corporal punishment back then in the Caribbean.

**PG:** Well, when we first started teaching, you could spank the children.

**ABG:** I never touched anyone's child. I'd never.

**PG:** Yeah, but people did.

**ABG:** I know. I know what I had to do when I first started teaching. I was in junior high school, and all the guys were six feet, and I said, I let them know, my mother said, “They want to know that you can manage those children,” because she worked for the department of education, and I stood in the door, and I said, “Nobody’s leaving this room,” and they’d say when we first started, “I’m not doing that,” and I said, “Oh yes, you are.” You get to have a relationship and you do things that they enjoy, and work with them, and I just remember, because some of them were so tall.

**PG:** We’re both short. I always had boys that were held over two or three times because they were in a special needs program, and before they got through, maybe they were held up, but they were always sweet. They were always...it’s how you treat people.

**ABG:** Everyone responds to love.

**PG:** They do. And respect. If they forgot, I said, “Do I speak to you that way? Do I speak to you in that manner? Don’t I speak to you with respect?” “Yes, Miss Grinage.” “Well, if I speak to you with respect, then I expect that you’re going to treat me the same. And, that’s all it is. Those are just little...I don’t know.

**ABG:** It starts with humanity. It’s what you said.

**PG:** Yeah, yeah, and I used to go to their homes when I was a teacher. “I’m going to go to your house.” “Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.” Then, ring the doorbell, and I said, “Where’s mommy? I came to see mommy.” But, they were so sweet after that, and the parents were shocked. I mean, I didn’t want access in. I just wanted to tell them, this is how...I want the best for your child, I just want you to be aware...

**BG:** And, it shows that you care.

**PG:** Can we do this together? Whatever. Boom. And, as principal, I had a boy in special ed who was tearing up my school. He lived across the street. I remembered what I used to do as a teacher - we're going to his house, because I called the parent, he's tearing...

**ABG:** That must have been awful.

**PG:** He was a naughty little...and a follower. That was the other thing, he was a follower. So...but, he took it the next level. He might follow, the others are doing this, but he's...and, I remember, he lived right across the street, and I rang the bell, and his father opened the door, "Miss Grinage?" I said, "Yes, I just want to tell you," and I can't remember the boy's name, but I told him that he's following everyone, he's doing the wrong thing, he's not listening, and he's not doing what you said to do, more importantly. "Oh my goodness," he said, "Miss Grinage. He's going to do better." It was that kind of thing. But, as you said, it shows that you care. You cared enough - even though your school is just across the street, but to walk there and to talk to me and make that contact. So, I think those are the things that we had very special, even though he didn't have to come to my house. There was just a level of respect.

**ABG:** Oh no, thank god he didn't have to come to our homes. It would have been all over.

**PG:** And, I didn't cut - I think I may have left early, but I didn't cut out. I remember leaving early, but that wasn't the usual. That was not a usual, I did not play there. Yeah, and they did push us through. As I said, maybe I should have stayed there [Harlem Prep] longer than I did, but he knew the end was coming in sight, and I guess if the teacher said, "She's doing great,"

boom. And, the proof is that at least those of us - I don't know about others from the '74 class, but I know at least for myself, I got to college and I was able to do college-level work, and the rest was history. So, he probably knew what he was talking about.

**ABG:** He was saying, "Just give them a chance."

**PG:** That's it, that's it.

**ABG:** We had that chance.

**PG:** And, we moved in certain obstacles that were there. That was it. A lot of students got lost on the way.

**BG:** Fall through the cracks, right? Really brilliant kids.

**PG:** Yes, and there was nowhere...

**BG:** And, some kids I work with today. It really breaks my heart.

**PG:** And, with potential. Every child has potential.

**ABG:** They're so gifted. When you went to Leverage, did you have a counselor named Ian? Did you have see a counselor?

**PG:** Oh yeah, I saw a counselor. I was naughty. That was in ninth grade.

**ABG:** I can't think of her name...she was there for a while, and she just knew our family. I was going to say...

**BG:** So, I only have...not any full experience, but I ran afterschool programs for four years, an afterschool program, students learn to do history and do the history of Harlem, their community.

**PG:** That's nice.

**BG:** It was called Youh Historians. And, there was this one great student. One year, we actually researched Harlem Prep



together. So, there's one student - he wasn't able to come today, he's at BMCC now.

**ABG:** Okay, good.

**BG:** But, yeah, sophomore, junior, senior year, we researched Harlem Prep together, with [other] students. Last year, we researched the history of their school. But, yeah, I mean, it's...

**PG:** Well, that's good, and I'm glad, Barry. Different people come into your life for different reasons, I believe that. For whatever reason, you happened upon Harlem Prep, and...

**BG:** I feel very...it's very humbling to meet people like yourself and to come across Harlem Prep.

**PG:** Well, I'm glad you're doing it.

**BG:** I appreciate it.

**PG:** I really am, because it's a story that needs to be told.

**BG:** I agree. I feel like we could learn so much.

**ABG:** Are you eventually going to do a book?

**BG:** Yeah, so that's the plan.

**ABG:** Wonderful.

**BG:** Yeah, something that really just tells people's stories [in the context of Harlem Prep]. Its founding years to its unfortunate decline, the impact that it had on people - and, you're the perfect example, you gave back.

**PG:** I mean, I wouldn't trade anything for my journey, but I always thought of that, that if I was younger, it would have been nice to get together with some people to do just what they had done at Harlem Prep.

- ABG:** Oh, to create your own school and whatever? Well, you could do a charter school now. I don't know if you...I don't know, maybe you could. I won't say no. Yeah, to create your own charter school. Who knew and who cared that teachers were uncertified at Harlem Prep? No one knew, no one cared.
- PG:** They were effective.
- ABG:** They were. They were college-educated. It's not like you just took someone who was a high school student and said, "You could be..." They were college-educated. They knew their content area.
- BG:** And, some documents I have from Carpenter [show] that he was very selective of who he chose. The paper stuff didn't matter as much as who they were and what they cared about. I love the quote in the movie, when he goes, "If I'm interviewing a teacher, and the teacher says, 'I teach math' or 'I teach science' I say, 'Thank you,' and I show them the door. If the teacher says, 'I teach children,' then we have a place where we can start."
- PG:** That's right, that's right. That's who he was. Well, that's who he was.
- BG:** It's powerful. The humanity...and, that's reflected on everyone else I've spoken to.
- PG:** Mmm hmm [nodding in agreement].
- BG:** I have time - I don't want to take up your time. I appreciate everything.
- PG:** That's okay. I don't know...I have time also, I don't know about you, because I know you're dealing with parents.
- BG:** This has been wonderful, and I...

**PG:** But, you have an appointment.

**BG:** I do, a little bit later.

**AGB:** What time is your appointment?

**BG:** 2:30.

**AGB:** Okay, it's just after one.

**BG:** But, I don't want to hold you up, either. We'll be in touch, or we can talk again. I'll stay in contact.

**PG:** Okay, alright, not a problem. But yeah, that's basically...[laughter] you did say "we would talk," [and] I thought, "I would love to see that!"

**BG:** I told you, I told you, right? When I listen, it's...everyone has said, "Oh, I don't have much to say," but once you start... And especially for me to hear the stories and to hear your experiences, and I'm reading a bunch and looking at documents, but to hear the impact it had, and also, the difference of school experiences, the different years, and...

**PG:** And, it was consistent. I mean, she had more fun stuff. I didn't do the fun stuff. I didn't have sleepovers.

**AGB:** But, you know what? You still did it.

**PG:** Yes, I did. He got me out.

**BG:** I think that, from what I've read, I've seen - I have pictures from the Board of Ed, the Carpenters were there. I think he knew there was a lot...he generally knew what was going to happen once so they took over, so I think he wanted to get students out - he knew.

**PG:** Yeah, and he did the right thing, and I'm so glad, because had I gotten caught in that, I don't know if I would've made it out.

**BG:** I think he knew it was just unknown. He wasn't really sure what was going to happen, even with the Board of Ed...then it became one school amongst hundreds, right?

**PG:** That's right, that's right. That is right. So, and personalized learning - that's the new thing today, right? Trending in education - we've got personalized learning.

**BG:** Yeah, everything has returned now, but all of it's not new ideas, right?

**PG:** No, no. We got personalized learning back then.

**BG:** I would love for an educator, administrator to read about Harlem Prep today and think about conceptualizing education. So, that's my goal.

**AGB:** It was just so successful. It was so successful.

**PG:** And, just telling you to graduate you've got to get accepted to college [laughter]!

**AGB:** So, you knew, if you wanted to get out...

**BG:** You better start applying, and you better get accepted.

**PG:** Yes, yes, and remember, it wasn't just him setting the standard for getting out, it was that college looking at the standard and going, "Yeah, we'll accept you." So, it couldn't be just him saying, "You apply and you get out." That college had to accept you.

**AGB:** Was Mother Dowd there when you were there? She was a nun?

**PG:** No.

**AGB:** Well, let me tell you, that June when I first went there, I had gotten accepted to a school in Gannon - Erie, Pennsylvania, and Mother Dowd said, "Oh no, you're not mature enough to go." Oh, I was hot with her.

- PG:** She didn't want you to go away, right?
- AGB:** Yeah, she said, "Don't go away yet." I said...oh, I was so upset with her, because I though...I wonder what would have happened. Carp said, "It was cold there, anyway." But, I'm glad I stayed in the city. I'm glad I went to Marymount. I'm glad I had my experience. But, I always wanted to go to HBCU, but it's okay. I went where I was supposed to - I had divine appointments.
- PG:** I think I didn't want to go away. I was emotionally immature, I really was.
- AGB:** I was immature.
- PG:** But, you wanted to go.
- AGB:** Yeah, I did.
- PG:** I was afraid to go. I was afraid, I said, "Oh, no!" and after I guess having gotten through everything I did, my parents said, "Do you want to go away or do you want to stay?" I said, "I want to stay." Fine with them, and I stayed, and I'm glad. I'm glad I did. I got a good education. You get what you put into it. But, by then, I was ready, and I knew if someone said something to me that would normally turn me away, "No, it's not true. I'm sorry, I'm here to stay."
- AGB:** You were there.
- PG:** You know what I'm saying? I was fortified, that's really what it was - I was fortified by then, and knew how to withstand whatever, anyone's harsh words, or crooked looks. Give me a crooked look like...no, I belong here. So, yeah, that's our gift. That's what we got, right?
- AGB:** That's right. That's our gift.

- PG:** And, we're successful. Look, I think I'm successful.
- BG:** You are. I think it's undoubtedly true...
- PG:** I think so. We're enjoying life. Look, we're reaping the fruits of our labor. We wouldn't have...
- AGB:** I'm so glad you said that, about sometimes people would say "Well..." I'd say, but you don't know how hard I worked—
- PG:** Yes, we did.
- AGB:** ...with the children, and going in every day, and we came from the kinds of families where you were dedicated. You didn't just stop and start. You had to finish and do what we had to do, and sometimes you might have been tired and you didn't want to go in that day, but you went.
- PG:** Oh, you went.
- AGB:** Especially as an administrator.
- PG:** You did. I mean, I took my little mental health days, but...
- AGB:** That's what my mother always said, she took a mental health day.
- PG:** I went, though, because I had to lead by example. If I started taking off all these days, then how could I tell my teachers, "You cannot"? So, that's also part of it - you lead by example. So, I think that's a little Ed, but that's my mother and father also, because they always talked about...
- AGB:** So, not all principals are like her. My niece was at a school, and she said her principal used to say, "Well, listen, I'm going downtown," and she'd go and shop and come back with all these Macy's bags, and come back...it was incredible, and always out. One time she went to China for a month, and I don't know how they paid it, but anyway, that's a whole other

story. So, you just hear and see certain things, so like you said, you have to be committed.

**PG:** You do. When you believe in education, you believe that it's going to open doors.

**AGB:** And consistency with children just makes such a difference.

**PG:** You have to be able to tell a teacher, "I'm sorry, you're not working out, and you have to go on either voluntarily, or I'll have to help you out." That's never pleasant. That caused many sleepless nights, because you don't want to take anyone's livelihood, but you're the one to make the judgement and the determination. What you're doing is assisting 30 of the children. [Phone rings]

**BG:** Thank you again.

*[Side conversation regarding phone]*

**AGB:** It's been a good journey, eh?

**PG:** I think so.

**BG:** It's still going.

**AGB:** Well, my husband's been talking about retirement, he says it's transitioning into another phase or something else.

**PG:** Well, my husband also says that, because we're both working. We both have something to offer. I'm training teachers, I'm helping principals, I'm using my 34 years of experience.

**BG:** And, you're helping graduate students like myself. So, you can add that to the docket!

**PG:** Okay, okay. Yes, you're right. We're still part of the journey, right? You just made us stop and reflect from whence we came.

**AGB:** That's right.

**PG:**

Really, because I haven't had an opportunity to look that far back, and as I said, it wasn't exactly a period of my life where I was very proud, because I had broken off from the expected track, and as I said, I haven't shared with my children. No, I know, but the expected track - that's the word, it was an expectation, and all the repercussions, because you can't hide. You can't hide from your friends, you can't hide from your family, you can't hide. So, I had to deal with it. It was a very humiliating, humbling time for me, but when I graduated, that was it, and then when I got into college, like you said, "She's on her way, she's back on track," and that was it. So, the rest is history.

[END OF RECORDEDING]