

**Sherry Kilgore Interviewed by Barry Goldenberg
May 21, 2017, at Panera Bread, in Glendale, MD**

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Barry Goldenberg: So, I am here with Sherry Kilgore. She's going to be interviewing about Harlem Prep and her experiences, and we're here - are we still in Maryland?

Sherry Kilgore: Yes, Glendale, Maryland.

BG: Glendale, Maryland. So, if you can, to start, tell me a little bit about yourself and where you grew up and your educational experiences, and kind of how your educational experiences linked to Harlem Prep, how you got there.

SK: Okay. Well, I grew up right across the street from Central Park West, 107th Street in Manhattan, and did the traditional route. I was a very good student for many years [light laughter], but I got pregnant at 16 and had a child, and back in those days, you were not allowed to go to school if you were pregnant.

BG: Oh, wow.

SK: So, I had my son in March, so I think like after October - whenever I started showing, they yanked me out of school.

BG: Wow.

SK: So, that was like 40 plus years ago, and so they didn't have any home schooling or any of that, so I really lost a lot for those two or three years that I wasn't in school, and ended up having a friend that lived directly across the street from me that had the same name I had. Her name is Sherry, and at that time - it's Aissatou [Bey-Grecia] now - and her mother's name was Billie, my son's name was Billy, so we kind of...[we were] around the same age, and she had been going to [High School of] Music and Art, and then she - I don't know if she

transferred into [Harlem] Prep or what, but anyway, she knew I wasn't in school, and she would always tell me about Harlem Prep, this really fantastic school, and blah, blah, blah, and I'm like, "Yeah, whatever."
[light laughter]

BG: Yeah, I can imagine.

SK: But, one day she invited me to the school, and I saw that it was not a traditional school - it was an open school, the set-up was good, the students were older, more mature, a lot of them had kids, and so, it just felt different than Brandeis with Mod Squad in the hallway [light laughter]. Back in those days, it was just wild.

BG: And you left around tenth grade or so, somewhere around there, at Brandeis?

SK: Yeah, tenth or eleventh, I can't remember.

BG: You were one of the younger students probably, right, at Harlem Prep?

SK: Nuh-uh, because I didn't go to school for a couple of years.

BG: Okay, so you were out for a few of years.

SK: So, I graduated at 19, and so, maybe I was one of the younger [students], I don't know.

BG: Yeah, that should be about the average age there.

SK: Yeah, because my cousins around my age graduated at 17 and 18, so I thought I was way behind, but in actuality, it evened out. So, after going to the school and realizing that my uncle was the headmaster of the school - because I didn't know any of this. So, when I went home, I told my mother and my father about it, and so my dad, in some kind of way, talked to my uncle, because they really wanted to be back in school. I guess I applied - I don't know, I don't even remember how I ended up in the school. I do remember that September - I guess it was the following September I ended up going to the Prep, and fell in love

with it, just the caring-ness of the teachers and the administration, and the way the students looked out for each other, and becoming conscious of what was going on in the world that time, especially in the U.S. at that time. I had never really been political before that, but that school made you very political - you couldn't help it. So, and it also - like even though I missed a lot of school [laughter], they allowed you to do independent study, which was really cool, because when you have a young child and don't have that affordability to put him in childcare and all that, you have to work it out. So, being able to take him to school with me sometimes, and not being, I guess, reprimanded for missing a lot of days because I had to be home with my son, it helped out, because I could still study at home and stuff, so that helped a lot.

BG: So, they were really flexible and supportive in terms of – so what was that like, bringing your child to school?

SK: Yeah, it was like whoever wasn't in class watched the kid [light laughter].

BG: And everyone was cool with that? It was really...

SK: It was – everybody was kind of cool with that. And also, the fact that there were so many older people who had been out working and surviving, and giving you advice and stuff, and really, you saw just how important education was at that point. When you're 16 and have lots of responsibilities and stuff, you're worried about feeding your kid, and doing those kinds of things, but they really stressed the importance of education and higher learning. So, I think in that respect, it always made me eager to learn, and made me really be proactive for my kids, as far as getting that education and stuff, so I think it saved so many people in that neighborhood. I mean, people were transferring in from other boroughs and stuff, just trying to get into the Prep. I know there were kids that went to [High School for]

Music and Art that were like, “We want to come down the hill,” because our school got that reputation, and so to be a part of all that...and it was still pretty much in the beginning.

BG: Yeah, when did you start?

SK: I started in '70, I graduated in '71.

BG: Yeah.

SK: So, that was still pretty much...

BG: Yeah. Some students whom I have spoken with have thought in some ways that was sort of the height of Harlem Prep.

SK: I think it was.

BG: I think Peter [Hopson], he was...

SK: I think up until '73, kind of.

BG: With...there was funding issues, and they didn't do as many activities, and it was a much more stressful time because there was no money coming in, they were worried if the school was going to be able to stay opened. I've been able to find a lot of documents from Ed Carpenter writing to the board of Harlem Prep about how they're not sure they're going to open in the fall.

SK: Right. Money was always an issue.

BG: Yeah. Were you aware of that? Like, were students aware, or everybody did a good job keeping it under wraps?

SK: Well, we knew that Ford Foundation and ESSO - Standard Oil - they were contributing to the school. We knew they were making the film, and, I don't know if the film was meant to be a fundraiser or not, but I kind of thought it was.

BG: Sure. I'm sure that it was definitely [created] to bring awareness in some way, that...yeah, but that must have been...especially...I can't

imagine, but an amazing experience - like you said, a saving experience, with your child, coming in, being accepted in that way.

SK: Yeah, and it was a family. It wasn't so much a school, you felt more like you were part of a big family, and so like any family [light laughter], you have your ups and your downs, especially when you have a lot of hormones exploding and stuff [laughter].

BG: Right, yeah [light laughter].

SK: So, you had the hills and valleys. And because our teachers were so young, for the most part – some of them were probably like three or four years older than us – so then, you had that whole dynamic, too. So, it was like the best of times, and you think when you leave here, everybody's going to be as supportive, and then you go to university, and it's like, this was an unreal situation. Take it for what it was worth, but you're not going to have this experience out here, at another school like you had here. Now, excuse me, I didn't go to HBCU, and the people I know who went to HBCU said they did get that same kind of encouragement and nurturing and stuff.

BG: Sure.

SK: But, when I left there, I went to Marymount for a year. It just wasn't a good fit. Then, I went to Queens College for a year, and then I ended up at Columbia, and then my mother died, so once my mother died, I inherited some more kids, and just said, "I've got to get out of here." New York was too much to try to raise four kids, and I was like 23 years old, so we moved down here.

BG: That makes sense.

SK: Yep, moved here [to Maryland] in '77.

BG: Okay.

SK: And been here ever since. And, it was easier raising my kids here, and I went to...I took classes every now and then whenever I could, but when you've got four kids, it's just...

BG: You're busy [light laughter].

SK: But, I wouldn't trade it. I mean, I would trade my mother not dying, but just being able to put them in a house here, get them through school, and not have all of that temptation you have in New York. They had an opportunity to be children a lot longer, and I was able to stay home with them, and they did very well in school. My son didn't miss a day of school for 12 years.

BG: Wow, that's some kind of record.

SK: He would just freak out if you told him he couldn't go to school, because he had always been in a learning environment, and I think just starting with Prep and all of that stuff.

BG: Yeah, from the very beginning he was going to school with you. How old was he? He was probably very young.

SK: He was like two, three, something like that.

BG: Those are moldable events, I guess. Maybe you don't remember those memories when you're two or three, but you definitely soak it up.

SK: It's in your DNA.

BG: Yeah, it's in your DNA, it becomes a part of your soul, right?

SK: I can remember because I always kept a map on the wall of the world, and I made the kids read the newspaper every day. I took my kids to Disney World, and this old Jewish guy came over, and he said, "Miss, that young man says that he's your son and that he's seven years old," and I said, "He is." He said, "Well, I've been sitting down talking to him about sports, current events," and he said, "I don't believe he's seven years old." I said, "He's seven years old, but he reads the

newspaper.” He started reading very young. And, he said, “This is just amazing that this kid knows what’s going on in the world like this.” I said, “Well, he can show you on a map exactly where that is, too.” So, I think education has just always been important, and I credit Harlem Prep, because like I said before, the Prep was really interested in taking it to the next level and all of that. It really laid - to me, the Prep really laid the foundation. Before that, it was just kind of going through the motions. Once we got to the Prep, it laid the foundation, it exposed you to everything that was going on in this country, in the world at that time - which was in turmoil, with Vietnam and civil rights and all of that. So, we were out there protesting and stuff [laughter].

BG: Right. I was going to ask you, what was it like going to school in Harlem at the time? How involved were Harlem Prep students in current events? I’m guessing that was a huge part of every class discussion.

SK: It was a huge part.

BG: Do you remember any classes specifically that...?

SK: Dr. Ben. Mr. Simmons. We were at the U.N. protesting.

BG: Okay.

SK: We had Louis Farrakhan as our keynote speaker, so it was engrained in us, different political stuff, a lot of Pan-Africanism. We were an experiment. I really, truly believe that - we were an experiment to see if this could work, and it worked.

BG: Overwhelmingly, I think, right?

SK: It worked for many, many years, and I think if we got the funding, it’d still be around.

BG: I agree. We need a Harlem Prep today.

SK: We really do. We do. And, I think it was just the forefront of all of these open schools that you have now.

BG: Yeah.

SK: A lot of the charter schools. But, I think the difference is, because I don't know what the percentage of us was that had dropped out of school and come back - I think when you do something like that, then there's an urgency, and you're there because you want to be there.

BG: That seemed to be the pattern. Everyone who was there wanted to be there.

SK: Yeah, yeah. It wasn't like if you didn't go to school, the officer was going to pick you up, and blah, blah, blah. It was just a whole different vibe in the school, which I loved.

BG: Yeah, no, I can't imagine how liberating that must have been, compared to your prior experience.

SK: Oh yeah. I did not do well at Brandeis.

BG: Yeah.

SK: And, I remember back then, it was a lot...I guess the closest I can equate it to, is did you see the movie, "Lean on Me"?

BG: Yeah.

SK: A lot of that kind of stuff. It was kind of out of control. So, I didn't see the sense in going there, because you couldn't really get a good education, there was too much going on. We had the Mod Squad patrolling the hallways. So, I just kind of said, "Later."

BG: None of that at Harlem Prep. It was the open space, the openness. What was Ed like? Any memories?

SK: He was a taskmaster, but he was approachable. He would make time. And, because he was my uncle, I never really wanted to let people know. Very few people knew - Aissatou knew, but very few people

knew he was my uncle, because I just didn't want that. I kind of didn't approach him a lot, but if I needed something, he was always approachable, and funny, just about his business. He was so smart. I think he was one of those mathematical geniuses.

BG: He'd do everything in his head.

SK: Yeah, he was so smart, and just wanted all of us to succeed by any means necessary - that was the goal, that you be successful, and it wasn't about him, it was about you getting to the next level so that you could become a productive member of society. So, that's what I really remember about him, but I remember him dancing and laughing, and just being Carp, and I know he loved Aissatou, because she was very...

BG: —affable and—

SK: Yeah, she has a big personality and stuff, and I was the opposite when I was in school. I didn't...I just kind of wanted to disappear and do what I do.

BG: Yeah, put your head down and go to work.

SK: Yeah.

BG: Plus, you were busy with your child.

SK: Yeah, but it was just...and then I had some teachers that just really helped me along with the way. Like, I will never forget Ray Keith. He was one of those teachers that...he opened the door for me when it came to math. I was never...and haven't been since, but that year, his style of teaching just...you couldn't help but understand the logic of everything that was going on. Sandy [Campbell] was tough.

BG: Was he really?

SK: Sandy was tough.

BG: Yeah, because I always laugh at that. He was tough, huh?

SK: He was tough. Sandy was tough. Mike, not so much, Mike Gold. You could do something for extra credit, and he was...but Sandy was tough.

BG: Yeah. But even though it was [an] open space, open atmosphere, things could be more laissez faire in terms of policies, but it was still academically rigorous?

SK: Yes.

BG: Everyone I spoke to said they felt like they got a really good education as well.

SK: And, I think the thing is, you could be sitting in a class, and if somebody over in science or in sociology was teaching something that sparked your interest, you could sit in on that class. You didn't have to get a permission slip.

BG: Just go over.

SK: You'd just go over and sit in. If you didn't have an assignment or something you had to work on, you could just sit in on any class, and to me, the creative aspect of that was really good, because when you talk about theatre and dance and all of this stuff, you can feel like, "Oh no, this is my domain, you can't come in." Everybody was always open. They wanted you to learn all these different things, and you don't find that in a public school, because I know in public school, I wanted to go into commercial classes because I wanted to learn how to type and all of that stuff, but because my grades were so high at that point, I had to go into academic, which I didn't want. I said, "I want to learn how to type," so I taught myself how to type and everything, but I wanted to learn shorthand and all of that, because I said, "That way, I can always get a job," but they went basically on your grades, not that you might have an aptitude for something else. Maybe in the long-run

it was best, but back then, I didn't see it as such. I was just so pissed off I couldn't get into the commercial classes.

BG: That's funny.

SK: Yeah, I wanted Home Ec[onomics], I wanted all that stuff. They threw me into everything but.

BG: Algebra, all that kind of stuff.

SK: Yeah.

BG: Yeah.

[unrelated crosstalk, while eating]

SK: Are you going to do an oral history and combine all of these interviews?

BG: So, part of what I've...so, each one is its own interview in a sense, so I have a transcript of each interview. What I'd like to do, depending on – there's one question on the permission form - I think if folks are interested, in terms of having a [web]page where everyone's oral histories are there, and it's kind of a collection of everyone's memories. I think about it as preserving history. So, obviously, you talking with me, and learning about [your story] is super helpful for my research on Harlem Prep, but I also just think these stories need to be preserved [from my perspective] as a historian, especially about Harlem Prep. So, to have your story and people's stories and all these stories combined, we can have 30, 40, whoever...and I'm willing to put that work in to kind of have a collection database of oral histories of everyone's story.

SK: I think that's great.

BG: That's powerful for future generations to learn about and hear about.

SK: And, I think the friendships that were made at Harlem Prep have lasted me a lifetime. I mean...

BG: It's amazing how engaged everyone still is.

SK: Oh yeah. Aissatou and I have known each other since we were 15. Gloria and I since we were 17. Sophilia and I since we were like 18, 19. Renee and I - my first godchild, her mother I met at Harlem Prep, and we're still close. We didn't see each other for 20 years, and then through social media, we found each other, and then it's like it was yesterday that we didn't see...

BG: That bond is so strong.

SK: So strong. Her sister - I found her mom, and then older people, if you call, might be kind of leery, so I saw her sister's name and I called her sister, and I said, "You probably won't remember me," she's like, "Girl, I know who you are," I hadn't seen her in 30 years, so.

BG: That's when you know it was something special, when you still have that type of bond as time passes.

SK: Right, exactly, exactly. And so, Sophilia might have kept in touch with Ajuba [Grinage-Bartley] and this one and that one, she said she kept in touch with Atillah and this one and that one, but when you put us all together, we had that big circle. Like when we did the reunion, that was just so...

BG: That was what your doing, right? You were the catalyst of that, I hear.

SK: You know why? Because in this era, class reunions are so important, and you always hear on the radio, "Class of 1970 this and '80 this," and my son was always involved in his class reunions, and I was like, "We never had a class reunion!" And so, it took a couple years, but started reaching out to different people, and different people reached out, and we made it happen, and I was so overwhelmed, and then I think Sandy brought the film...I don't remember who brought the film. When you look at the film, it's like a snapshot in time - you see all those faces that you remember. You may not remember the names, but

when you see all those faces, all those memories just start flooding back. It was like, “Oh my God, this was so important to our lives.” So, that was great. That’s why I really hope we can get this one off.

BG: I hope so too. I mean, part of what...and Sandy and I, we’re going to meet sometime soon kind of about a strategy to kind of collect [contact information]...because everyone knows a few people.

SK: Exactly, exactly.

BG: If we can just find a way to collect all the contact information together and make up like a list of...

SK: Right.

BG: So, I’ve been trying to do that a little bit.

SK: Well, I must admit, I didn’t get a chance to send out the request.

BG: No problem, no problem. I’ve been busy, I know you’ve been busy.

SK: Yeah, this is...after July, my schedule will really calm down a lot, but I’ll do a little bit at a time.

BG: No, no, I’m doing this full-time right now, and for you and everyone else, it’s an addition to their own normal lives. So, I’m very grateful. No worries at all.

SK: But, I have talked to other students like Alessandra and Gloria, and they’re interested. One’s in Georgia, one’s in Virginia, one’s in North Carolina, another brother, he’s in Oklahoma, so we’re all over the country, and probably the world, we don’t really know. But, I was glad that we did set up...now, I have a Harlem Prep class reunion page too - not class reunion, Classmates.

BG: Okay, yeah, yeah.

SK: Classmates.com.

- BG:** Yeah, there's some people on Classmates.com, but I haven't received responses, generally. I mean, I'm not a classmate, so it's like, "Who is Barry Goldenberg?" [light laughter] "I don't remember him being there."
- SK:** Because that's where I started, Classmates.com, and then I did the webpage for the reunion. I think that would be a good way.
- BG:** Yeah.
- SK:** And just ask each person, "Do you know three former members of the Prep? Send me their information. I'll do a blast."
- BG:** Okay, thank you so much. No rush. This is an ongoing project, obviously.
- SK:** When are you planning on finishing up [your degree and the project]?
- BG:** So, I'm hoping by the end of the summer I kind of have everything collected. And, I'll be continuing to speak with folks throughout, but I'm hoping to have done most of the interviews or most of all the document collection by the next few months, and then really start all next year, write my dissertation, this thesis on Harlem Prep, so I'm hoping a year, a year and a half.
- SK:** Okay.
- BG:** If I'm lucky, I can finish next spring, but it'll probably be in the fall, so fall 2018, maybe.
- SK:** Okay.
- BG:** But, that's the goal. It depends. But, I want it to be done right, so.
- SK:** Well, I think one of the ways is for people to respond is let them know you have access to school records, and I think that's the biggest carrot you can give them right now.
- BG:** Yeah, right? So, I was really happy to go be able to do that. I was excited when I knew they were there, and the gentleman - it was a

public high school and you just saw these boxes around there, they're semi-organized, and he was like, "No problem..."

SK: I thought they should be in a safer place.

BG: Yeah, I know, right? Literally, there was one storage cabinet I could not get opened. It would not open. He said N, letter N, people with N, lost. So, I'm glad your last name isn't...

SK: Right, it was a G back then, right.

BG: So, it's really kind of a crapshoot of what's there. It's basically a parent representative who kind of does transcript requests and helps out. So, he said, "Yeah, feel free to..." It's kind of a long story of how I was able to find they were there. He said, "Go. Go ahead. If you can find it, let me know, I'll make copies of it."

SK: Unbelievable.

BG: So, I was down there trying to find it, but yeah, I didn't know...I looked for Aissatou's and I couldn't find her record.

SK: Sherry's not there?

BG: I couldn't find it - not to say they're not there, but maybe next time I go [I will look further]. I spent 30, 45 minutes trying to go through all the S's, I didn't see her name there.

SK: Yeah, well, I wonder if there's a way - because I know, even from the class reunion, we've lost a few students. So...I wonder if there's a way to find out who's still above ground [light laughter].

BG: Yeah.

SK: For the men, it might be easier than the women, because women change their last names, because there's some classmates, I wonder, "Are they still here?" John Perry - we were engaged after Harlem Prep. Didn't get married, thank God, but I wonder, "Are you still above

ground? Are you still in New York?” Yeah, because everyone’s not on social media.

BG: Yeah, no.

SK: So, if everybody...that would be so easy, but...

BG: Yeah. Do you remember being part of any clubs, or any activities you were involved in? I’m always interested to hear what folks were involved in, if they were.

SK: I went to dance group.

BG: Okay. Was that part of Aissatou’s dance group?

SK: Mhm.

BG: Okay, okay.

SK: And, I was in the theatre - some kind of theatre group.

BG: Okay.

SK: I don’t really remember anything about that, but...and, I know that...I’m trying to think, there’s something else, but I can’t. Honey, it’s been 40-something years.

BG: I know. It’s always...I can’t remember what I had for breakfast yesterday [light laughter], so you’re doing great.

SK: I don’t know. But, I know I was very much with theatre back then, and I ended up working in the theatre for 15 years.

BG: Oh.

SK: I was behind the scenes - I was front of house box office and sales manager, and it’s a little theatre right down the street from here, so it’s like a little jewel in Prince George’s county, so I went into production, and I performed a little bit, but not that much. But I could do poetry shows, jazz shows, and things like that.

BG: That’s pretty cool.

- SK:** Yeah, we did some college tours and stuff, so.
- BG:** That's after the Prep?
- SK:** Oh yeah, yeah. This was like in the 90s, the early 2000s. And, we had a couple of newspaper articles and stuff, did community centers, locally and stuff.
- BG:** That's awesome.
- SK:** I always loved theatre. In fact, when I was at Prep, I worked at Shakespeare in the Park.
- BG:** Oh, nice.
- SK:** Yeah, I was an usher down there.
- BG:** That's great.
- SK:** And then, I worked in the music industry for a while, while I was in New York, and then I moved here, and this was such a government town. But now, it's changed so much. You have all the culture coming back. But, in the '70s and '80s, it was Monday through Friday, shut it down, open back up on Monday.
- BG:** Yeah, that's funny. That's funny.
- SK:** But, you've seen the change just by touring around.
- BG:** Oh yeah, absolutely. It's pretty mind boggling. I'm trying to think...I'm always interested when in my interviews, I talk with folks and they just mention something I've never heard of before, and I think when we met before, you mentioned - this is a minor thing, but it's kind of cool - the school dances they had at Harlem Prep? What were those like? Were they at the Prep?
- SK:** They were at the Prep, downstairs in the basement.
- BG:** Was it a prom type of thing or homecoming type of thing, or it was it just the Prep's thing?

- SK:** Nah, it was just the Prep.
- BG:** Was it in the evening?
- SK:** Yep. Like down in the cafeteria, and the nurse's office [laughter], and we would just have a little...
- BG:** A formal dance, or...?
- SK:** Nothing was formal back then, no. They just hooked up some music and we just partied. Yep, I remember being there 10 o'clock at night, 11 o'clock at night.
- BG:** I know Sandy always mentioned, outside the dances, that students always stayed after school late. Do you remember ever staying after school?
- SK:** Oh yeah. Many, many, many...yes, oh yeah. I'm telling you, they had to kick us out. I think once people really got into the rhythm of the school, and said, "Oh, this is just not like three o'clock, bell rings, go home." Once you got into the rhythm of it, then you wanted to be there. I moved from Manhattan to Brooklyn, so it was a real struggle getting to school, but it was just...people were just in one corner and that corner, maybe helping you with papers, or just talking about life or the political stuff that was going on. So, it was always something going on. We had the drummers over here working on stuff, the dancers over here.
- BG:** Yeah, all that.
- SK:** Because most of that rehearsing took place after school, so. And then, you had teachers that really - they didn't have a problem staying with us, because they liked us. It wasn't like, "Can't wait to get away from these kids and get home and chill." We hung out with some of the teachers, it wasn't like...it was like an open secret. I'm trying to think...there was one teacher that left Prep and went to Marymount, because he was there the first year I was at Marymount, but I can't

remember his name. I remember he was real muscle-bound. I've got to ask Aissatou that. I cannot remember his name, but he was there. So, I guess teachers started branching out too...

BG: Yeah, sure, and perhaps in later years as well, when they found out the school was probably not going to continue in the same capacity.

SK: Right.

BG: Some of the other challenges were, once the [New York City] Board of Education did take the school over, there were issues of credentials, because some of the folks just weren't credentialed and the board of education wouldn't allow that.

SK: Oh, I didn't know that.

BG: Yeah, so most teachers at Harlem Prep didn't have teaching credentials.

SK: What?

BG: I know, right? The secret's out now.

SK: Are our diplomas good? [light laughter]

BG: Harlem Prep definitely was chartered, and they had a state charter, that was official, but the teachers at Harlem Prep, most of them didn't have teaching credentials, like Sandy didn't have a teaching credential at all.

SK: Oh my God, I didn't know that.

BG: I know, right? [light laughter].

SK: That's funny.

BG: His story is pretty - while you're eating, his story is pretty funny. I don't know if he's ever told you, but I remember when I spoke with him, his father was a contractor for Harlem Prep.

SK: Yes, I remember that.

- BG:** And Sandy didn't know...I forgot what Sandy said he wanted to do [vocation-wise], but his father said, "Oh, you should..." – I think Sandy was looking for work – and his father said, "Oh, you should become a teacher. I can get you an interview with Ed Carpenter, who's the headmaster [at a school called Harlem Prep]," and Sandy's like, "I don't know anything about teaching."
- SK:** Right, right, right.
- BG:** "But my father said to do it, so I went there, and a few weeks later, I started as a teacher, and that was that."
- SK:** A big afro.
- BG:** Yeah, exactly, I've seen the pictures of him.
- SK:** He had so much hair [light laughter]. And a bowtie.
- BG:** He had a bowtie? Oh, that's great.
- SK:** Sandy was always clean as the board of health, always.
- BG:** I can see that. I could see him being meticulous in that way.
- SK:** I'm telling you, he was immaculate every day.
- BG:** Yeah.
- SK:** Oh, okay, I never knew that.
- BG:** Yeah, a couple [had credentials], but most of them weren't, and so when the board of education took over the school, they were like, "We can't have non-credential teachers," the union didn't like that, that kind of stuff. But that was one of many issues. I don't think Ed Carpenter had a principal's license, either.
- SK:** I'm sure he didn't [laughter]. I'm sure he didn't.
- BG:** But, that's part of what made the school so unique. Everyone wanted to be there because they wanted to be there, right?
- SK:** Right. But, Dr. Ben, he was a scholar.

BG: He was one of the exceptions, yeah.

SK: He was a scholar.

BG: Do you remember having class with Dr. Ben?

SK: I didn't actually have him as a teacher, but I sat in on many classes with him.

BG: Yeah. You were saying how - sorry, I interrupted you.

SK: Go ahead.

BG: I've heard how students—they would hear Dr. Ben or George Simmonds or someone starting a lecture and they would just all go to that.

SK: Exactly. I had Mr. Simmonds.

BG: Okay.

SK: He gave me a good grade, too. Yeah, I had him, but there was something about Dr. Ben, because he was so scholarly.

BG: Prolific.

SK: Yeah. But, have you been able to get in touch with Naledi?

BG: I haven't. I think...

SK: Her name has probably changed.

BG: Okay.

SK: I'm trying to think...what about Bari Haskins?

BG: I recently have just...Sandy gave me her email, I just emailed her today, and she just responded back, so hopefully we're going to set up a chat on the phone pretty soon.

SK: Oh, good.

BG: Yeah.

SK: She's in Atlanta, right?

BG: Yeah, she's in Atlanta. I think...

SK: And Martin [Nur, formerly Martin White]?

BG: And Martin as well. I did email, I haven't heard back from him yet.

SK: Okay.

BG: So, hopefully he's going to get back to me and we can chat over the phone as well. It's always tough, I know, "Who's this person wanting to hear my story?"

SK: Right, right.

BG: I understand completely.

SK: But, they were at the reunion, so.

BG: Okay, so they're interested.

SK: Yeah.

BG: I think folks aren't always good on email, I don't blame them. Slowly but surely, I've been speaking with more people, hearing more stories.

SK: I think that's wonderful.

BG: I mean, my story of Harlem Prep, really - I think I told you this, I was in the Schomburg Center and I found the film.

SK: Yes.

BG: And I went home thinking, "There has to be so much written about this school," and literally, I could not find anything.

SK: Even through the *Amsterdam News*? Nothing?

BG: Yeah, so, I did...there's tons of articles in the *Amsterdam News*, you're right, but in terms of any books or any articles, nothing...I had to do kind of the historical digging, but you think about all the histories and books that are written and all the stories about education and this and that, even in the '60s and '70s...even my professor who's

a historian of Harlem in the '60s and '70s had never heard of Harlem Prep.

SK: That's unbelievable.

BG: Yeah, it's unbelievable, and so I feel like the story of Harlem Prep needs to be told. I think we can learn so much from it today, and it's just an inspiring story.

SK: Because I know when I posted the picture you found, so many people tagged me and said, "I haven't heard that name of that school in years and years. Is it still around?" and blah, blah, blah. "I remember Harlem Prep." So, the Harlem community kind of supported us.

BG: That was kind of a question I had. How big was it? It seemed to be "the" thing in Harlem, like everybody knew of Harlem Prep. Is that true?

SK: Everybody knew Harlem Prep, and if you told someone you went to Harlem Prep, it was like, "You go to Harlem Prep? Wow. What's it like?" So, it was...especially with other schools, "How do I get into it?" It's like, "Well, I was a dropout, that's how I got in it. I don't know how you would get in it."

BG: And you did mention...so, you heard about it through someone else?

SK: Yes.

BG: Did you take a test or interview?

SK: I don't remember. I think my father and my uncle hooked me up, to be honest.

BG: Yeah, you had the "in." But, you were talking about other folks.

SK: But, I think...I don't know how many transfer students they had, but they did have some. Was Peter a transfer student? I know Aissatou was.

BG: Peter?

- SK:** And, I think Atillah was, too.
- BG:** I haven't spoken with her yet, one-on-one yet, I'm not sure.
- SK:** She went to the Prep - I mean, [High School for] Music and Art, so I think she was a transfer student.
- BG:** Okay.
- SK:** But, I know Gloria was - Gloria Simmons, because I think she went to Taft, and in fact, I think Renee had graduated from high school and then come back to Prep.
- BG:** Yeah. There were some students who had general diplomas, but weren't able to go to college, I guess, with general diplomas.
- SK:** So maybe that's what it was.
- BG:** They had to come back and get college courses - or credit for college.
- SK:** Because I remember seeing Renee's picture with her cap and gown, and we didn't wear cap and gowns, so I know she graduated from high school, but she graduated with me also. So, maybe that's what it was. It's possible.
- BG:** Yeah.
- SK:** Because she had a baby too, so.
- BG:** Okay.
- SK:** Maybe that's what it was, because I think Gloria transferred in.
- BG:** Were there...I know there weren't a lot, but you weren't the only student who had a child?
- SK:** Oh, heck no.
- BG:** There were a decent amount of students?
- SK:** Yeah. No, I definitely was not the only one. That's why it was not an issue, and there was a certain comfort level, because a lot of people had been through similar stories and stuff.

- BG:** I'm sure the children were part of the Harlem Prep family, like mini-Preppers there.
- SK:** And, they didn't come every day, but [when] you had to bring them, you had to bring them. That was it.
- BG:** Yeah. What an awesome place. In some of the schools today, it would never fly, right?
- SK:** Probably not.
- BG:** Yeah, which is...
- SK:** Like I said, I think we were an experiment that worked, and so, if it wasn't broke, don't fix it.
- BG:** Yeah.
- SK:** Kids didn't break it. But, Ann was very instrumental. Ann to me was like the point person. Carp had the vision.
- BG:** Yeah, but she ran the show?
- SK:** She kind of ran the show.
- BG:** Did she teach as well? Or...I know she was involved with the curriculum, and I've read she was involved with some of the...
- SK:** Yeah, I don't know if Ann taught. I don't remember her being a teacher.
- BG:** Okay.
- SK:** I just remember her being in the administration.
- BG:** She was very involved as well.
- SK:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. I think he just was able to be the fundraiser, be the person with the whole vision, and she implemented his vision, which was good. And, there was another...like, I was trying to remember who the women were in that picture [that Barry shared prior to this meeting], and I think the one on the right side of the...I think she

worked at the school, but I don't remember the other lady, because she looked very familiar to me. But, that other woman, I don't know who she was. They look like they were giving us a check.

BG: Yeah, yeah, some kind of fundraiser. A lot of those pictures were about fundraising money.

BG: Yeah.

SK: But, I'm glad that you took on this project.

BG: I feel, honestly, very humbled and grateful.

SK: It's an important story.

BG: I've been honored to be able to tell the story. I feel very lucky, honestly. I've worked with young people, and they...when I worked with - I ran an afterschool program. I didn't do it this year because I was focusing on the Prep for my degree, but it was called Youth Historians, they learned to do history through the history of their community, and they came to Columbia so we could work together to do historical research.

SK: Oh, wow. So, you have a lot of history on the different neighborhoods of New York?

BG: A little bit, yeah. I'm much more [focused on] Harlem, Manhattan, but more or less.

SK: Oh, I need to come and see your research, because I mean, I do tours of New York all the time, so any time...

BG: I've been focusing on Harlem for the last couple of years.

SK: Yeah.

BG: But, it was fun, because when I was working with these high school students, they were all 11th to 12th graders, and they were learning about Harlem Prep with me.

- SK:** Really? Oh good, good.
- BG:** Yeah, they were like, “This is the coolest thing I’ve ever seen!” and they watched the film, and they actually interviewed Peter and Sandy, we did it together.
- SK:** Wow, okay, okay.
- BG:** And, they read *Amsterdam News* articles. But, my point is, they just thought Harlem Prep was the most amazing - they wished Harlem Prep existed, like, “I want to go to Harlem Prep,” and they were all...they’re such bright kids, but their school is letting them down in so many ways.
- SK:** Yeah. Well, have you heard about Baltimore County schools?
- BG:** I haven’t.
- SK:** I mean, Baltimore City schools.
- BG:** Not so much.
- SK:** Not one child passed the proficiency test, in one school.
- BG:** Oh my God, how do we let that stand as a country?
- SK:** Exactly. It’s horrible.
- BG:** It’s appalling.
- SK:** Horrible, they have failed those kids so badly.
- BG:** Yeah. I can’t tell you...all the students, they were all at public schools in Harlem, and I had worked with them for three years and I’m still in touch with many of them. They’re so bright, but their reading and writing levels were so below average. It wasn’t their fault at all, I mean, and they’re just like... “We wish we had a Harlem Prep.”
- SK:** A lot of them that pass are just pushed through.
- BG:** Pretty much.
- SK:** They age out of the class or something...horrible.

BG: Yeah. Anyway, I hope that eventually when there's a book on Harlem Prep that teachers, administrators, and parents can read it and think, "Wow, this is something we should do today, or can learn from."

SK: Exactly.

BG: I know it's a different time, and different [context], but I think there's a lot people can learn about students and the potential of Harlem Prep, so.

SK: Oh definitely, definitely. We have to get pictures to you from the first reunion.

BG: Okay, I'll look through those.

SK: I have some of them online, but I'll go through and see what I have. In fact, that same day that we had the reunion, the *New York Times* did an interview with Aisstou...

BG: Oh, really?

SK: Yeah, and this lady about Morningside Park.

BG: Okay.

SK: So, you could put both of their names in *New York Times* and it'll come up.

BG: Okay, I'll check that out.

SK: And that was right before we went up to the reunion, so that was pretty cool. And, I think the fact that once we went to college, a lot of us had done independent studies, so we were not the traditional college students either, and that had its ups and downs, too, because we were very...you got a voice at Harlem Prep, so we became very outspoken, and so that didn't always fly. I remember being at Marymount and taking an African History class, and we never even got to the boat, and I'm like, "We're a couple of weeks away from ending this class, and we haven't even got to the boat?" So, we would kind of press them on

things like that, and it just made you want to explore and not just take things at face value because [just] someone said it, it's not necessarily so, especially with like the political arena and stuff. The question, I mean, truth to power and all of that stuff, so that was kind of engrained in us at the Prep, truth to power, don't just accept whatever they're dishing out.

BG: Yeah, question everything.

SK: Question everything. And, when it comes to math - math, I don't know if you saw the movie, "Hidden Figures"?

BG: Yeah, we just saw that last weekend.

SK: Yeah, wasn't that an excellent movie?

BG: Oh, we love it, it was so great.

SK: Math doesn't lie [light laughter]. Numbers will tell the truth.

BG: Yeah.

SK: So, when people start manipulating numbers and statistics and all of that stuff. In fact, one of the students, Gloria, she ended up being the chief statistician at Harlem Hospital for about 20-something years.

BG: Really? Oh wow.

SK: Yeah, she's in Atlanta now.

BG: Wow.

SK: Yeah. I mean, I think when you look at the overall picture of students who left there, I think you're going to get a high percentage that were productive members of society. Of course you're going to have some that fell by the wayside.

BG: Of course, of course.

SK: And, that's with anything, but I think that...I don't know it to be true, but I just feel in my heart that there was a high percentage of us that

really went on in various careers, businesses, what have you, and succeeded. And, I think that's a good commentary on what Edward Carpenter started, and his crew built up underneath him, and I just think that it needs to be recreated.

BG: It does.

SK: That if you have something that worked so successfully, why discontinue it? I would have loved for my kids to have experienced that. Even kids now that are dropping out of school and feel like even alternative schools aren't answering the questions and stuff, giving them what they need, because I tell you, D.C. and P.G. and Baltimore County - I mean City - there's some real issues. There's some real, real issues in the school system. And New York...wherever you...every major city, really, when you look at the resources they don't have, because I have friends that are teachers, and they have to buy supplies for their classrooms.

BG: It's a crime. They're already not being compensated for what they should be in the first place.

SK: Exactly. You're paying a sports hero \$35 million dollars.

BG: And a teacher is making \$35,000.

SK: Exactly.

BG: And have to buy their own crayons.

SK: Right.

BG: It's an awful thing. Anyway, going on my soapbox.

SK: I know, me too. So, you guys are going to go back to the museums, right?

[side conversation about Barry traveling back to Washington, D.C.]

SK: Is this it?

BG: Yeah, so any final thoughts or things—I know you said a lot!

SK: Looking forward to the 50th reunion, hope we can reach as many former “Preppies” or their families, and I will continue to try and put people in contact with you.

BG: Thank you so much for being willing to speak with me, and for sharing your story about Harlem Prep.

SK: Oh, no problem.

[END OF RECORDED AUDIO]