INTERVIEW OF DR. AMELITA MANDINGO-BURTON

Oral History Project of the WestSiders

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Interview Conducted by: Louis Jones

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Q Thank you for taking the time out to talk to us about growing up on the Old West Side. As a way to begin, where are your parents from?

A My mother was from North Carolina and my father is from Columbus, Georgia. My mother came from a little place called Elkton, North Carolina, and they met at Atlanta University and they got married and came to Detroit.

Q What were they doing in Atlanta University?

A Going to school.

Q What kind of fields were they in?

A Now, I am not really sure. I never really discussed that with them. All I know is that they both went to Atlanta University and they got married. I think they kind of eloped and came to Detroit. At that time, when all blacks came to Detroit, they went to the East Side. So they started out on the East Side of Detroit.

Q Now, what motivated them to come to Detroit?

A I have no idea. I guess because of work. The same reason that many other blacks came here, for opportunities that didn't exist in the South.

Q When did they come to Detroit, do you know?

A Well, I was born in 1927. So, they came probably here in 1926 or so.

Q Did you live on the East Side yourself?

A No. I was born at St. Antoine and Elizabeth. There was a Florence Crittenden Hospital there and that's where I was born. After that I believe they lived on Roosevelt Street. My father had an aunt there that was from Georgia and they stayed with her.

Q Okay. She came up North first?

A Who, the aunt?

Q Yes.

A Oh, the aunt had been here. She had like a boarding house. I think it was on the Lower East Side, but then they bought a home on Roosevelt. Still, she always had borders. This was a pretty rough time back then, around the Depression. So a lot of people did whatever they could to make it at that time. There were a lot of blacks who had borders in their homes. So my mom and dad were borders in my aunt's home.

Q This was on the West Side as well?

A Yes, this was on Roosevelt.

Q Now, they eventually bought their own home or did they move some place to rent?

A Who, my mother and dad?

Q Yes.

A We rented. We moved from Roosevelt to Northfield, and from Northfield to Scotten.

Q What were the years that you moved from one place to another? Do you recall offhand?

A No.

Q This was all during the Depression?

A Yes, all this was back during the Depression time. I remember when we lived on Northfield, things were so bad that there was another couple that lived across the street. They all decided that they would get a flat that came available. The two couples moved in with one another.

I have a brother named Jack and Jack was born about that time.

Q What kind of work did your parents do in Detroit?

A This was back during the Depression when there were no jobs. My father went to work for a furniture company and the man at the furniture company told him “if you can build-up a sales force, you can be like a little manager here.” He did that. He built up a sales force and he sold furniture. I am not quite sure how long that went on, because I was really small at that time. A little later, the furniture company went bust; so he lost that. So my dad got on at Ford and he

was there for a while in the foundry, of course. And then he decided he wanted to do better than that. He went to Ford Trade School and my dad was going to school part of the time when I was growing up. He became, I think, the first black tool and die maker at the Ford Rouge Plant.

Q Did he talk about work in the foundry and what that experience was like?

A No, not really. My dad was very much an advocate of the unions. He used to talk a lot about Henry Ford and Harry Bennett and all of the old famous folks that were at that time. He did not talk about the foundry. He talked a lot about the tool and die room and about the kinds of things that went on there. We were a family that had dinner together and the subject at the dinner table generally was what my dad was dealing with.

Q As one of the first black tool and die guys, what was that experience like for him? What did he say about it?

A A lot of racism among the people not wanting him there, but he hung in there. My dad was very outspoken. But he talked a lot about that. He talked a lot about the union, and the various activities that were going on at Ford at that time.

Q Any specific incidents that he talked about concerning racism?

A There was so much. I mean this was our daily fare at the dinner table. When dad would talk about the management, it seems like the management there was pretty fair. It was the workers that exhibited the racism mostly. Sometimes it was necessary for management to step in or make the decision or whatever. Generally he felt

that the management was fair.

Q You say that he was outspoken?

A Yes.

Q How did that exhibit itself?

A Well, on the job he would tell people where he stood. He would stand-up for himself and was able to articulate to management what the situation was, and how to correct it.

Q And he was, I am guessing, with UAW Local 600?

A Yes, Ford Local 600. He never was an officer or anything with the union. He was extremely supportive of the union. He would talk about the goon squads and the problems they were having unionizing the plant and things like that.

Q What kind of problems would they have?

A Well, people would get into physical confrontations about whether the union should be there or not. The goon squads, of course, were hired by the Ford Motor Company to break up the organizers when they would rally or meet or whatever.

Q Did your mother work?

A No.

Q Why not?

A Because my dad didn't think she needed to work. My mother didn't work until the 1940s. That was after we

moved from the West Side during the war. She took a job as an inspector in a gas mask plant; that is what she did. But then after the war was over and those jobs were over, my mother came right back home. She was always there for us.

Q Was your father comfortable with your mother working when she did go to work?

A Well, I don't know. They never argued in front of us. Whatever they did went on behind closed doors; they felt that the children shouldn't be subjected to their arguments. They came from the old school. My mother came from free people in North Carolina. My grandfather had four hundred acres of land that was surrounded by swamp water. He was well respected in the little town that he had settled in. Elkton, North Carolina is where the Spauldings, of the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, lived. They had the general store at the end of the road. C.C. Spaulding who founded North Carolina Mutual would come down there to do the high school commencement speeches.

But at any rate it was the Spauldings, the Campbells, and the Blanks. My mother was a Blanks. At first, when I was little they raised cotton. I remember going down there and picking cotton. But later on they switched to tobacco. So they were tobacco farmers.

Q What kind of things did the family do together?

A Oh, my dad would take us or we would go to picnics. We visited. We did a lot of visiting in the neighborhood. We would go to other families that they knew. My dad grew up in Columbus, Georgia with Sam Hill. I think they lived over on McGraw. There were always the visits back and

forth among the families. We also grew up with the Prices who were a West Side family. My father grew up with their father, Alvin Price.

So we would go over there and visit and play. So there was a lot of visiting back and forth except for times my mother belonged to a bridge club and they would play bridge. And I remember Ernie Browne who was a Councilman. Well, his mother would host the bridge parties sometimes at their place. So, there were a lot of friends that they had. There was a Burkes family from the West Side that my dad was friendly with. Then there were the Fitzpatricks that they knew over on Roosevelt Street; I used to play with the girls.

At any rate, we did a lot of things. And my dad loved to go to the midnight show. Sometimes he would take us to the midnight show down on Woodward. There were shows down there and all of those theaters turned into girly places.

I never will forget the night we got locked out of the car. It took hours and it was freezing and my brother and I were standing there shivering. At any rate, he finally got somebody with a coat hanger and was able to get in. You know that is when we had the model Ts. My dad was pretty loyal to the Ford Company because he worked there.

Q I hear people talk about the Granada and the Beechwood Theatres, but those were not on Woodward?

A Well, no. They didn't have a midnight show. My brother and I would go on Saturday. We would walk to the Granada Theater, and we would see the movies there and then come home. But, mostly it was like outings, picnics, visiting friends on the West Side. These were the major things that we did as a family.

Q What were some of the routines that you were required or expected to do?

A You mean like chores and things like that?

Q Yes.

A I never really did any chores. See, I am an artist and what I used to do when I would get home from school, I would get my papers and my paints and my water colors, and I would draw for hours. In fact, one time I was so absorbed in doing that, one time the lights went out and I went and got a candle. My mother was in the kitchen cooking. It was in the evening. I went and got this candle and my hair was long. I leaned forward and not thinking while I was drawing, my hair caught on fire. And I ran screaming to the kitchen to my mother. My mother smothered it with her hands and a dish cloth. My whole right side of my hair was on fire.

Q You were in to it.

A I was like that. This is what I did most of the time. My brother and I played with the kids in the neighborhood.

I remember another time back in those days that car advertising was done like there was a string of cars with signs on them. They would go through the streets real slow, maybe 20 miles an hour or whatever. We could go to the end of the walk on this side of the house, and the end of the walk on the other side of the house. This was our boundary line for playing. We were not allowed under any circumstances to cross the street. So we were playing tag one day and to get away from the person that was chasing me, I ran and shot across the street. There was a car that was coming really fast down the street and they caught my

dress tail. You know how you can feel something? Well at any rate, I realized that I was across the street and I turned around and I came running back across and street. Guess what? Right into the path of the same cars that were advertising. I don't know what dealership it was. But there was a dealership around on the boulevard, and we lived a couple of streets over from that. Anyway, this car hit me. I don't know how but I had a big knot on the back of my head. They called the police. Back in that time, the wagon that used to come to take people was called the Black Mariah. I had a fit because I had to ride in that black car and go to be taken to the hospital. At any rate, they found I must have had a really hard head or maybe that is why I am the way I am now, because of that blow. But any way, my head knocked the headlights out of the car. So I remember that time. But mother and dad were real strict about us and where we could go. On Scotten Avenue, we could play behind the house in the alley. We would play ball in the alley. We had those boundary lines, where you could go to the walk on this side of the house and to the end of the walk on the other side of the house; and we did that.

Q So why were your parents so strict?

A I guess they didn't want anything to happen to us. This was the way with a lot of kids that I knew about. Parents didn't allow you to roam the street. You had your boundaries and you stayed within those boundaries. We were obedient children.

Q You mentioned drawing. That is a thing that you are into. What were you drawing?

A What I drew all the time were beautiful gowns and beautiful women with long wavy hair and gowns with jewels

all over them. This was the major thing that I drew.

When I was in kindergarten, I was at Sampson School and I drew a squirrel and the teacher said it was so good that they put it up on the wall. But I was invited to be one of the talented art children for the Art Institute. So I got an opportunity to go there to study and work. This was when I was very small.

Q What was that experience like?

A Oh, that experience, it was a good experience going there and getting an opportunity to have the various media to work with.

Q You talked about how you were at Sampson and then Wingert?

A Yes, Sampson and then Wingert. I think I must have gone to Wingert when I was about 7. See, I went South. My grandmother and my grandfather had not seen me. So my mother wanted me to go down there to visit her parents. So an aunt took me down there to stay with them. I was supposed to be staying for the summer. Well, I wound up staying until I was almost 6. By the time I got back, my brother was three. When I went he was like 2. He didn't know me. So he and I would fight all of the time. He thought that I was a babysitter and he kept asking “when is that girl going home.” He took all of my toys and used my toys and we would fight over the tricycle and other toys. But at any rate, he was my charge. That was what my job was, to look out after little brother. That programmed me to become a caretaker. That is why I am in the business I am in today.

Q You trace it back to that?

A Oh, absolutely. You know, like in our business, many of us believe that by the time you are seven years old, your personality is formed. Your script is written, and you continue with that script.

I can trace back everything that I have done as an adult. I can trace it back to those things that I did when I was a kid. It was through the art I did as a kid that led me to become a fashion designer. I did that for a while. The producing -- that was one of the things that came out of the church. Originally at St. Cyprian's Church, where I studied ballet, then later I became the dance director for the City of Detroit. Then it was when I was older in Bethel A.M.E. Church. The major places where young people had an opportunity to participate in the arts back in those days was through the black church.

Q Were you a member of St. Cyprian's while Malcolm Dade was there?

A Father Dade, yes.

Q I heard so many good things about him, being very nurturing to children?

A He absolutely was. I have produced the Afro-American Music Festival here on Hart Plaza since 1973. I have been the executive producer for my organization. Elaine Ford, another WestSider and I, decided we wanted to produce an operetta and we proceeded to do that. We got the curtains, the old curtains from our parents. We made the costumes and we tore up paper and made the tickets. Father Dade really encouraged that. We wound up producing this operetta that Elaine Ford and I wrote in the St. Cyprian's Church Hall, and the hall was full of people that

came to see our production. This was all because of Father Dade.

Q What was the name of the production?

A ***Juanita***.

Q Was it something that you wrote as well?

A No, we made it up. We stole the music, although we didn't know that we were doing that. But we wrote the story and produced the play.

Q What was it about?

A It was an operetta about a young girl whose name was Juanita. Of course, there was the love story, you know, not a prince, but he was the knight in shining armor, so to speak.

Q Was there an Ernestine Postal there? Do you know that name?

A I know the name.

Q My research revealed that she was involved in youth things at St. Cyprian's.

A Well, I don't remember her. Was she the one that had the handicap?

Q You know, I am not sure about that detail.

A I don't know if that was one of them or not. I wasn't close to them; but I know the name quite well.

Q What other things would you do in church?

A Well, we participated in the drama group and the dance group. At that time, Maryann Clemmons who got married and became Marianne Clemmons Bailer, was married to Kermit Bailer at one time. But at any rate, she was the one that taught the ballet there. She was young. She was like 15 or 16 years old. We learned from her. There were the Clemmons' sisters, of course. I think they moved to the North End, although I am not sure. I knew them later as a teenager.

Q Was the whole family members of St. Cyprian's or was it just you?

A Primarily it was me. My dad went to St. Stephens at that time. He did go to St. Cyprian's there for a while.

Q What kind of man was Father Dade?

A He was a very gentle and loving kind of personality that was concerned about the community. He wanted that church to be a hub for the community where many good things happened. I know it was like my first experience with dance there. Well, my first experience with drama. When I moved to the North End, we went to Bethel A.M.E. Church and I was active there in teaching Sunday school. It was in the drama group there, and other activities that were, you know, young people were involved in.

Q My understanding is that he was very much for the union when some others weren't.

A Oh, yes. I think that was probably one of the reasons why my dad liked him and why my dad attended that church.

Q Concerning Father Dade's union activities, what did he do to let folks know that he was for the union?

A I don't really know. I was so absorbed in the arts that everything was kind of blanked out.

Q Do you remember any speakers that came to the church?

A No, not to Father Dade's church. I don't remember that particularly. I remember Paul Robeson being at Bethel A.M.E. Church. I remember that.

Q Tell us about that?

A Well, he came there to speak. And he sang. It was just a thrill because we had been reading about him and his activities and how outspoken he was.

Q What year was that, about?

A I had to be maybe 15 or 16, somewhere along in there. See, we moved to the North End in 1939. I went to Hutchings Intermediate School, and then to Northern High School. I graduated from Northern High School in 1944. So it happened sometime during that period, between 13 and 17.

Q Do you remember anything that was said?

A That Paul Robeson said? No. I remember mostly about his singing and that was just such a thrill. It gave you goose bumps to hear his voice, which was so powerful.

Q What do you remember about Sampson Elementary School?

A The only thing I remember about Sampson was the drawing of the squirrel and that opportunity to be able to go to the Detroit Institute of Arts, having been selected by the art teacher and recommended to go there.

Q Do you remember it being a nurturing kind of environment?

A The teachers that I had were nice; but we are talking like kindergarten at that time.

Q Okay. What about Wingert?

A At Wingert the teachers were tough disciplinarians; at least the ones that I remember. I remember Miss Burch who had homeroom. She didn't allow anything to happen in her room that she did not deal with. Sometimes she would deal with it in a very, very physical way.

Q What would she do?

A I knew her to throw an eraser to the back. That was one thing that she would do, and she would go and take hold of whoever was the bad actor. She was pretty tough.

Q Were you ever a bad actor?

A Oh, no. I was always an obedient child. See my parents told me that I was wonderful and that I could do and accomplish anything. They were always supportive. So that caused me to always want to be in their favor and continue to get those strokes that I was getting. So I did very little that was not okay.

Q Did they value education?

A Absolutely. You had to go to school, which I did. Their values on education were tremendous even though they had a better education than most blacks at that time and were unable to really get the kind of employment that it warranted. They pushed for us to go to school and that is what I did.

Q Going back to St. Cyprian's for a second. Do you recall a relationship between St. Cyprian's and the Nacirema Club?

A Not really.

Q Okay. You attended events at the Nacirema Club?

A I am trying to remember it. I think I went there once for something. When I was a teenager, we had moved to the North End and the building where I was born -- the Florence Crittendon Hospital -- became the Lucy Thurman YWCA. So I attended many, many things there: parties that were given by different people in the black community.

Q Did it strike you that you were able to attend the Lucy Thurman YWCA and could not attend the YMCA on the West Side, across the street from Northwestern? Do you remember that?

A No, I didn't know that. I never had occasion to want to go there or I didn't know anything about that.

Q Tell me what is Milford Street like on a Saturday morning or afternoon?

A Milford. Well, most that I did was to have to go to the store on the corner. There was a corner store and then I think next to that on Scotten was a barber shop. It was like

a teenie weenie little mall. There was the corner store and then there were some businesses there. See, right behind the Hartford Church, I used to go there too, sometimes; it was catty-cornered from where I lived, because our address was 6333 Scotten. We were in the upstairs flat. The Collins' were in the lower flat. So that was another thing that we did a lot, played with their child. They had an only child: Wilma Collins. I used to play with her a lot.

Q What was the CoEtte Club?

A Well, the CoEtte Club was like a feeder into the AKA Sorority. In other words, the young girls that were in high school and were aspiring to go on to college, were invited to join the CoEtte Club. The parents were involved, because I remember one particular thing when me and my mother used to make my clothes. And I remember this really, really pretty little print dress that my mother made for me to go to a CoEtte Club meeting, where the mothers were invited.

But at any rate, Mary Agnes Miller-Davis was the sponsor of the club. She was the one that helped teach us our manners and all of that. So it was a fun group to belong to. We would have our little affairs, parties, and what have you.

Q Where would they meet?

A At the houses of different people. I am trying to think; the first meeting that I went to with my mother was on King. I don't know whether it was one of the Whitby girl's homes. I believe it was. Mrs. Whitby was like a Social Worker and I think her husband was a Doctor. There were two girls: Denise and Norma Whitby. They were North Enders. I don't know if they had ever lived on the West Side or not. I believe that this meeting was at their house. They would

meet in different homes.

Q What kind of affairs did the group have?

A Like teenage parties for different things. People would come in and talk to us about whatever. It was just a fun thing to be in and a kind of little prestigious thing, too.

Q Can you describe your neighbors on the block you lived on on Scotten?

A Well, next door to us was the first black police detective in the City of Detroit. His name was Dave Marshall and he had a partner. I don't know whether he was exactly the first. There were two. One's name was Peek and the other was Marshall. But the Marshalls lived next door to us. Then a few doors down going in that direction were the Penicks: Mary Agnes, who was the CoEtte supervisor and her sister , Dora, who was a Miller. She married one of the Penicks who lived up the street from us. Now down on towards the corner were the Cleage's. I am sure you know of the Cleage's. They lived in the second house from the corner. Then on the very corner was the James Cohen family. I never saw his parents. I would always see him. He was a paper boy. But he is now Del Rio.

Q James Del Rio?

A Yes. I think he changed his name probably to Del Rio later. But we knew him as James Cohen. We all went to school together. And across Moore Place, it was Paula Rogers, who was a single parent child. Her mother was raising her. But Paula was one of those people who was always immaculately dressed. It was like her mother must have spent hours dealing with her wardrobe because she

was always so perfect with everything. Across the street from us were the Porters. They were like catty-cornered. Margery Porter, Calvin Porter, and the baby, but I can't think of her name right offhand. But she wound up having the theater downtown. That was one of my clients when I was with the State Arts Council.

Q You mentioned before to me that you grew up during the Depression?

A Yes.

Q What was it like to grow up during the Depression?

A Well, it meant that we just didn't have the money to have much of what we wanted. The other thing was that my parents never would go on the welfare. They didn't believe in welfare. They always wanted to be independent and like I was telling you earlier how we pitched in and moved in with another couple in order to share the expenses because it was so tough. The other couple was on the welfare and they used to give us the corned beef hash in the cans, which was really corned beef hash. It was not full of potatoes like the ones that you get in the store today. My brother would ask "what is this?" My mother would make patties; you know how you grind it up and you would make something like a hamburger? She called it guy duck. He said, "I want some more of that guy duck." But at any rate, we were not able to have a lot of the things that we as kids wanted. We seemed to be satisfied with whatever it was that mom and dad told us. We weathered the storm. It got better, much better, of course, given that my dad was in tool and die making. The kind of money which he was making there was much more than the average person was making.

Q Do you recall when he began as a tool and die worker?

A Well, it started when he was going to school, when we were on Scotten. When we were on Scotten he had that sales force that I was telling you about. He was a full fledged tool and die man when we moved to the North End in '39. When he was going to school was probably maybe '36, '35.

Q How did you come to move from the West Side to the North End?

A They decided they didn't want to rent anymore. So they decided to buy a house. So they found a reasonably priced house on the North End. That is when we moved there.

Q Is that why you also went to Northern?

A Yes, because Northern was within walking distance. First, I went to Hutchings Intermediate. We had to catch the streetcar; back then they had streetcars. We caught the streetcar and we got off at Woodrow Wilson, because it was located at Woodrow Wilson and Byron. We would walk from there over to the school.

Q How would you compare the neighborhoods: the North End with the West Side?

A I never gave it any thought. I guess it was about the same. You know, people were trying to have their homes. When I lived on Scotten, there were other single homes. There were two-family flats where people rented. Now, there were also the two-family flats because what we bought was a two-family flat to rent out part of it and have an

income. The street that we moved on was primarily two-family flats. Again, so I guess you could say there was a similarity between where we lived.

The Cole family, of the Cole Funeral Home, lived in the next block, south of Milford. We knew the Coles, but didn't play with them. I remember my mother didn't let us go and ramble through the neighborhood. I believe the Burks lived across the street from us. I didn't know too many of the people who lived on the far end of the street. Then there was Izola Graham who lived in that next block. They lived in that next block. Dr. Young lived down there and that was going further south. I am terrible on directions.

Q That is okay.

A Now you went into the arts in undergraduate school?

A Right.

Q I am wondering how your parents thought about you going into a field like the arts?

A They didn't know. I was the best student in French. I was the best student in Latin and my French teacher wanted me to become a French teacher. My mother thought I was going to become a French teacher. I was discouraged by the art teacher at Northern from taking up art. We were told, “you would never make it in that field because you are black.” Of course, my mother did not like that very much. When I went and got in the registration line at school, I got in behind Cledie Taylor who is now Dr. Cledie Taylor. I said, “oh what are you majoring in?” And she said, “art education.” I said, “art education, what is that?” She told me. And I said, “oh, this is a way for me to be a teacher and an artist, too.” So I registered in art education. When I got

home and my mother looked and she said, “what is this?” I said “oh, well I can be a teacher.” I explained it to her and it was okay. So that is how I got involved with that.

Q You sound like you were determined despite what some teachers might have said?

A Well, I wanted to be a French teacher too. I loved the arts much, much more. When I saw that opportunity, I jumped right on it. I never hesitated once I saw the opportunity.

Q One of the things I hear about the West Side is that it is very clear that a lot of prominent people grew up there during the time you grew up. What was it about the West Side that nurtured that kind of ambition and success in folks?

A I believe it was the parents. I believe the parents were the major force behind the kids succeeding. The parents who would go up to the school, participated in the PTA, and encouraged the children to be the very best that they could. I think that was the major reason. I think the parents had values that you don't find in a lot of places today.

Q You have done a couple of things in your life since leaving the West Side. The Metropolitan Arts Complex comes to mind more than anything else. How did you get from where you grew up into not only the profession, but --

A Well, after I got out of college, I married. I had a couple of dress shops. I had a dress shop on McGraw with another young lady. Then after, I moved to the North End. Well, I had already moved to the North End, but I had that one dress shop. Then we moved from there; I don't remember for what reason. I got a spot on Westminister on

the North End. So I had a dress design shop there. I also did freelance art: posters and business cards, and textile painting. I did a lot of those things. Then I decided to go to work with the City of Detroit. I found out that as a recreation instructor I had to teach dance. So I started to study. So I was working 40 hours a week and I was studying dance 18 hours a week. So when the dance director for the City of Detroit opening came about, I applied. I was really the only one that was qualified that was in the department. So I became the dance director for the City of Detroit and choreographed major local productions of Broadway musicals: *The King And I*, *South Pacific* and things like that. I also designed all of the costumes for the show. So that is where that part of it came in, and I did that for a while.

Then after I injured my knee, I decided I would move into another area. That is when I applied for and became the first woman director of Brewster Center. There, my whole life changed, because I had always been so involved in the arts really to the exclusion of everything else in the real world. The real world opened up for me then. Even being a child of the Depression, I was absorbed in my drawing. But I wasn't really all that aware of the poverty that was going on around us because my mother and father kind of explained it away. I really began to see what struggles people were having when I went to Brewster. So that kind of opened up things for me, because of my art background, I brought a lot of the art into Brewster. I had a lot of the little boys taking piano lessons. I would encourage the dance groups and all of that.

We went on from there. I wrote this proposal and I was elected to the Model Neighborhood governing board. Remember Model Cities back in the 70s? So at any rate, they sent their plan to Chicago and they didn't have a

cultural component. So they asked me if they could use my proposal. And I said “sure as long as you take me with it.” So this guy flew in from Chicago, got the proposal, and he said he thought it was a wonderful idea. He asked me how much money would it take to fund it. And I said, a million dollars. He said, “we don't have a million; would you be content with three quarters of a million?” I said, “I think I can manage with that.” That is how Metro Arts came into being. We had five components: music, dance, drama, the visual arts, and talent development. We had 84 staff people. Twenty-four of the staff people were musicians. All of your major jazz musicians worked at Metro running workshops for a lot of the ones who are good today. In fact, I was at the casino and found there was a group that was playing there. We talked and came to find out the guys in the group had studied at Metro Arts. So I run across that all of the time.

Q From the West Side, how did that prepare you for the kind of fields that you went into?

A Remember, I am a visual artist and performing artist. The visual arts, I think that was nurtured through being one of the talented art children that came out of Sampson School, and going to the Art Institute and being involved in that environment.

Incidentally, when I was in college at Wayne, I worked for the Art Institute as a page going back and forth between the library with the very rare books they would have to go there and doing the plates and the books and things like that. That experience was a very important thing in terms of the visual arts.

I give St. Cyprian’s Church credit because I was able to

begin developing a background in ballet there and was prepared to use those skills when I worked for the recreation department. Anytime there is anything I have to do, I always go to study it first. That is what I did. In the process of studying, I became so good that I was capable of becoming the dance director for the City of Detroit.

Producing that little operetta with Elaine Ford at St. Cyprian's Church helped to prepare me as a choreographer for major Broadway productions that we would produce. We would produce two or three of them a year with the City of Detroit at the Detroit Civic Center. Do you remember the Aqua Theatre on Belle Isle? Well, those productions were there; I was a part of that. They were at the foot of Woodward where Hart Plaza is now; we did *Paint Your Wagon* there. You were probably a little boy. You probably don't remember that. But everything has a tie-in; it ties back. When I was a little kid on the West Side, I loved to nurture animals, and would perform burials. So this caring about human life, I guess you could say that began there, too. And, of course, going into art education and being a teacher, that had its roots when we were little and played. I was the one who had to be the teacher. "Let's play school. Okay, I will be the teacher." But at any rate, it was the encouragement of the parents; I have to go back to that. It is so important. If your parents tell you that you are wonderful, you will strive to live up to that. I always tried to live up to that, sometimes to my regret, because I have a tendency to take on too much and never want to give up and will push it to the 'nth degree.

So we have been producing the Afro-American Music Festival since 1973. This will be the first year that we won't be doing it. Because of my experience with the city, New Detroit and the recreation department came to me and

asked me if I would take it over when the group that originally had it from 1970, stopped having it. So I told them, “oh, I can't do that. I haven't got any money.” They said, “well, how much money do you need?” I just threw something out. I said “oh, about a thousand dollars would be enough.” If I had only known. But at any rate, I took that thousand dollars and never asked anybody else for anything. We went on with that. This would have been our 33rd year of production downtown. But all of that came out of that experience going all the way back to the church, the Bethel Church experience while living on the North End. There, I was involved in the drama group, the choir and other church activities. The black church really did much for so many of us. I have to give them credit for that.

Q Okay. Thank you very much.

A You are welcome.