

Oral History Interview, DSNY Oral History Archive

March 17, 2011, Staten Island, NY

Interviewer: Margaret Fraser (MF)

Interviewee: Hansine Bowe (HB)

[00:00:00]

MF: So this interview is being conducted on March 17, 2011 with Hansine Bowe. The interviewer is Margaret Fraser and the interview is taking place on Staten Island in New York. So if I could just ask you to introduce yourself in whichever way you would like.

HB: Yes. I'm Hansine Bowe. I was born and raised on Staten Island and my parents \owned a couple of acres on what was "The Dump," which is now Fresh Kills, but to me it will always be "The Dump."

MF: Great. When were you born and where?

HB: I was born January 29, 1943 Staten Island Hospital on Castleton Avenue, they've moved it and the new one is right down the street.

MF: And what are the names of your parents?

HB: My father's name was Raymond Pavelec. That's P-A-V-E-L-E-C. And my mother's name, marriage name of course, was Marie Pavelec. Do you need her maiden Name?

MF: Sure.

HB: She was Marie Linane. L-I-N-A-N-E.

MF: Where did they grow up?

HB: My parents? My father grew up on Vedder Avenue on Staten Island. His parents came from Poland. And my mother grew up in Tottenville, which is on Staten Island, and her parents, my grandmother, came from Copenhagen, Denmark and my grandfather came from Ireland, County Cork.

MF: I have Danish family as well.

HB: That's where Hansine comes from. That's a Danish name. Hans and Sine.

MF: And where did your parents work?

HB: My father had his own demolition business and he would knock buildings down and my mother basically was a housewife and when my father passed away she worked at Willowbrook State School for a while. But that was a little tough to take and then she basically was a secretary and she worked several jobs including St. Vincent's Hospital here on Staten Island. She was Executive Secretary to doctor Howard, who was head of the lab at that time.

MF: Great. And did you have brothers or sisters?

HB: I have a brother and a sister. My sister¹ is a twin but my brother passed away at birth. My sister, she lives in Texas now and she worked at St. Vincent's also, started out

¹ Margaret

as an aid on the floors and then she worked in the OR at St. Vincent's. And my brother², he worked at different jobs and he was in the service during Vietnam and then when he came back he worked for a realtor type of company where they built Shop Rites and stuff like that. And he's now retired and he lives in Florida.

MF: So do you have any family memories that you want to share? Like vacations or traditions that you had?

HB: Well we were close with my mother's side of the family, but more so with my father's side and we used to go there for holidays and also to my grandparents for Christmas Eve. That was always the tradition especially being Danish they always celebrated Christmas Eve and then Christmas day, you know you had dinner but it was more relaxed type of thing. Vacations, in those days, we more or less would get a place down at the beach³ and stay for a week but it's not like it is today, money was quite there so we did little vacations not cruises or anything like that.

MF: For the day...

HB: We went to South Beach, they used to have rides.

MF: What kind of rides did they have?

HB: Similar to, not quite as big as, Coney Island. But they had rides and stuff down there. And we would go there and go to the beach and go to the park and have picnics, go to Staten Island Zoo, local stuff.

MF: And where did you go to school?

HB: When we lived on Richmond Ave, I went to PS-42, which is in Eltingville. They didn't have school bus that came out to me, I don't even know if they had school buses then to tell you the truth. I would take the city bus and get off at the school and then coming home do it in the opposite direction. And then after I went to PS-42 from Kindergarten to 5th grade and then we moved, that's when the city condemned the property, and we moved over to St. George Gardens and we went to St. Peters grammar school, 6th through freshman year of high school. Grammar school and one year of high school, St. Peter's Girls High School. But to tell you the truth I didn't really like it so I went to Curtis and I graduated Curtis High School in 1961.

MF: Ok. Great. So now we'll start talking about the house on Richmond Avenue If you could describe it, anything you remember about...

HB: OK. Well it seemed like it was a very large house but in essence it was a very small house. When you're little everything seems so much bigger. In front of our house were two weeping willow trees. In the picture you see that they're very small but they became very large.

MF: And that picture is from before you lived there?

HB: Yeah, that was before. But basically everything was really the same even when we lived there not too much changed.

² Raymond

³ In New Jersey

MF: Yeah.

HB: The house was a small house. You went into a porch that was enclosed, living room, two bedrooms, kitchen and a basement. My father kept his equipment on the property, trucks and stuff. And it was very quiet because at that time Richmond Ave, you didn't have the traffic volume, let's put it that way, it was more rural. Across the street was an airport; it was called McCormick Airport and that had been there for years. We had the drive-in movie theatre which was across the street, down where Kmart is today and our parents used to take us to the drive-in movie theatre, which was fun. We had a large backyard but our house was kind of up on a hill, not a hill but more of an incline, a plateau. And then down was more swampland and we would see wild turkeys, which unfortunately we still have on Staten Island, and there were muskrats, we'd see them. And we had punks that we'd grow from the swamp and I remember my parents, my father, would light them, and they would keep the mosquitoes away in the summer time. I don't even know if they have any punks anymore, you know.

HB: It was quiet. You know. On Sunday, everything was closed down so you couldn't get anything on Sunday at all. The supermarkets were closed, because it was kind of a day of rest. So basically everybody would hop into the car and we would take Richmond Ave to Drumgoole Blvd, which is now a part of the expressway. And make a turn at the end, come back and always stopped at Al Deppy's, which was where you got a root beer soda and foot long hot dogs. So that was like the big Sunday thing.

[0:10:28]

HB: Across the street from our house on Richmond Ave, it was in front of the airport, was an auction, and everybody in Staten Island on Saturday went to the auction. They had a big building and they had all kinds of vendors. We always got fresh produce from the farmers and everything and that was like the big thing on Saturday for us in our age bracket. And they also had pony rides. We'd take the pony rides and it was fun. It was a more relaxed type of an atmosphere. You didn't have to worry as much. We had a little bit more freedom than kids today. Unfortunately, kids today, you have to watch them all the time. And it was nice. In our age group, it was quiet. I remember the TV we had was small and to make it color our parents would put a plastic thing over it so you had different colors in it and that was our color TV.

MF: That's so fun.

HB: It was funny.

HB: And we always had the milkman that came. We had Holtermann's Bakery that came, which is still on Staten Island. And the man would come from the truck with his little basket and we would pick what we want and my mother would pay. And as I said before, the milkman, and we would get eggs and butter. And the milk came in a glass bottle and it was not like the milk today. On the top was cream and you'd have to shake it. I used to love to do it. We have margarine sticks now, but when I was growing up and little it was called Olio and it came in a plastic bag with a little red thing in the center that you kind of broke and you had to squish it around to make it yellow. It was fun. And that's margarine, but in our day it was called Olio. And my parents never had a garden that I was aware of. But we had plenty of room to run around and play. We had a swing set in the back. And it was nice.

MF: So when did your parents first move there?

HB: I don't know the exact date. I would say probably when I was about three.

MF: Mid-1940s?

HB: Yeah. And I started Kindergarten at PS-42 and I was there through the 5th grade. The big thing, we would take a bus to Port Richmond, which was like the big Metropolis.

MF: How long did it take to get there?

HB: By bus? Not long because there was really no traffic. It really didn't take long, not like today. And they had all the little stores—like mom and pop stores—which I miss. You know the mall is nice, but it's too big, there's no personalization.

MF: Yeah.

HB: And you had Pappy's- a place that you go and eat and they had Steckman's, which you went and got ice cream sodas. They made homemade ice cream as I remember. At Easter-time they have all kinds of candy around. My aunt worked in Lobels, which is where we got our coats and clothes and stuff. And it was all more mom and pop and after a while sometimes they got to know you from coming to purchase items and that. But as I said it was a quieter lifestyle than it is today. You didn't have cell phones and all of that. The phone really never rang and usually you had a party line so people would listen in on other people's conversations. Or the phone didn't work, you know. So it was a lot different.

MF: So what was the neighborhood called when you lived on Richmond Avenue?

HB: I think, now I'm not sure, I think it was called Graniteville, I think.

MF: Graniteville.

HB: I think.

MF: And then now is it just sort of the FreshKills...

HB: I don't really know what they call it.

MF: Yeah.

HB: To tell you the truth.

MF: Do you know how it got the name Graniteville?

HB: No, that I don't know.

MF: Yeah. So we were talking a little bit about some of the businesses and stuff that were there. Could you sort of describe what it looked like maybe when you walked down the street?

HB: Well you couldn't walk in the street because there were no sidewalks...

MF: It was just a road?

HB: Yeah. I mean you could walk because there were trees and you could walk in the street but we were too young so you would have to go by car. Up the street from our house was a little restaurant if I'm not mistaken called Janet's. You could go there for breakfast and sandwiches and hot dogs of course. Beyond that was a great big white house with columns, as I remember. And it looked like a big mansion to us, I don't know

who lived in the house. Going towards the Fresh Kills, the bridge, was a little restaurant, a little white, if I remember it was small and it was white on the outside and I know they specialized in duck for dinner and I would not eat any duck. But they had other stuff too. And on our side where we lived there was a small airport where they would keep Piper Cubs, Stinsons, which were small types of planes. And the runway went down toward our house and that's where my father would taxi his planes and he also had, let me just get this. I asked my brother because he knows a little bit more. He had a military twin-engine parachute plane, that's what during the war the troops would drop out of with the parachutes, and he bought that at auction. And I remember going up in a military which my father also had and my uncle was in the back with me, holding me and when we got up, looking down, everybody looked like little ants running around. It was interesting. My father was kind of a flamboyant person.

HB: Oh and then later on, in front of our house, they put, I thought it was a Carvel, my brother said it was a Tastee Freez and my sister said it was a Carvel, so it was an ice cream store, similar to Carvel or Tastee Freez that was built in front of our house later on and that it was there for a little while, I don't know exactly how long. I guess when the property was condemned, they had to leave. On the other side of the street, as I said was the airport, later on came the auction. A few years down the road there was a smaller auction on our side too. And basically it was more farmland. After the drive-in movie theatre I don't remember anything except for woods. Al Deppys was the big place where everybody went to on Sunday because there was nothing else to do, everything was closed. You couldn't go shopping, food shopping, you went to church and it was just with family. Today, everybody's schedules, everybody works 24 hours a day it's a little bit difficult.

MF: Yeah

HB: And that was you know, it was good.

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MF: So there was a lot of farmland and woods around?

HB: Woods. And on our property, in the back, as you went further back, was swampland. And that's what they filled most of it in, and I think there were some creeks and stuff like that. Everybody would go hunting for rabbit and pheasant, muskrats—that was the big thing. And I'm sure there's other stuff but that's all that I remember.

MF: Did you explore a lot or walk around on the property?

HB: A little bit. We were kind of young so my mother would kind of keep us in tow. My father did of course. And my brother as he got a little bit older. He was always adventurous, you know up in a tree or something. But as I said I left there when I was in the 5th grade and my brother is the youngest and my sister is about two years apart, a year and a half between us. But basically that whole area was, not the airport, but up further, was all farmland. Now they have houses, tons of houses were built on it. But that Richmond Ave, that whole area, Drumgoole, there's basically nothing there, maybe a house or two I don't even remember it was mostly all wooded area and that.

MF: So, did you guys go to Manhattan very often?

HB: We would go to Manhattan at Christmas time. I remember taking the ferry to Manhattan and that was a big thing even though we had Port Richmond and Stapleton for shopping, you would go to Manhattan and go to Corvettes and Klein's, and Macy's, that was big. We didn't have Macy's on Staten Island to go Christmas shopping and everybody would come on the ferry with tons of boxes and that's where you got better deals, so to speak, in Manhattan, but we really didn't go in too often to Manhattan. We were a little too young to do that. I don't even remember going to Jersey all that much. I do remember going to Brooklyn a few times with my parents and we had to wait on the line to get the 69th Street ferry and wait on the line to come across on the 69th street ferry. But that's about all I remember with that, you know, because I was littler.

MF: Can you tell me more about your dad and his planes? He had three?

HB: Three. Three plans.⁴ He had, as I said, a Stinson, a Piper Cub and the Military, he bought at auction. And he liked to fly. But unfortunately he had his license taken away because he flew under the Brooklyn Bridge and that's a no-no.

MF: Uh-oh.

HB: I don't know if I should say that, but you know that's what he did.

MF: Yeah.

HB: But he enjoyed flying. That was his thing, instead of playing golf. I don't think they even had golf courses then on Staten Island. And he went flying with my uncles. His brothers, he had twin brothers⁵, twins run in our family. Twin brothers and my Aunt Wanda, and she always, being Polish, whenever you went she always had a big pot of soup going or Kolbasi, you know so on so forth. When his brothers came back from the war, WWII (they were twins) and they were shot. They did an article in the *Advance* but I don't have the article, they were shot in different parts of the war at the same time and they both knew that they were shot, because twins have a sense. My sister is a twin, as I said my brother passed away at birth or shortly thereafter, and my cousin⁶ has twin boys, it runs on my father's side of the family.

MF: Yeah. So what happened when...tell me about when they moved the house and condemned it and...

HB: Well I don't remember too much about that. I know we had to. My mother was upset. As I said my father died at 32 from heart. They didn't have the means that they have today for heart surgery. That was unheard of. And after the house, after we moved. I'm assuming the city sold the house for a nominal fee, a couple of dollars, I'm really not sure

MF: Yeah

HB: And the people who purchased it had the house moved and actually my sister told me where it was moved to. Let me just find out. Its still there although I have never gone.

⁴ It was later confirmed that Raymond Pavelec had four planes: a Stinson, a Piper Cub and two Military planes.

⁵ Alfred and Adolph

⁶ Cindy

Its in Eltingville on Stroud Avenue It's a block before PS-42. The house was moved there.

MF: Is it still there?

HB: As far as I know. My sister said yes, its still there. I guess I should go by and look but I never did. And I don't remember but I think those pictures were also in the *Advance*, you may be able to get information on that. They just, like you see houses moved, they gradually build it up on wood pilings and get it on the truck base I guess and of course in those days you didn't have as much wire, telephone wires. And it slowly moved down Richmond Avenue I didn't see it but there were pictures my mother had of it. Down Richmond Avenue until Eltingville, its still on Richmond Avenue Now how they made that turn to the corner to go into the street, I'm assuming there were no other houses around. But it was a little house, I mean as I said, it was a big house to me, but in actuality it's a small house. Now whether or not the people who have added anything onto it, that I have no idea.

MF: Do you remember, did they tell you why they were moving the house or why you had to move?

HB: All I remember my mother saying was that the city condemned the property and...

MF: This was in '49?

HB: In or around that area. The dates I'm not really sure. They were condemning the property and they were going to put a park on it. And as I told you before, I'm 67 and we're still waiting for the park. Actually my father had planned, he wanted to put a racetrack there. But of course that never came to be.

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MF: So were they going to put a park there, before the landfill?

HB: Well that's the pretense that they told. They said they were going to do. Which I guess since it was mostly swampland and that, I would assume that they knew that the Dump was coming. I don't know how long it took from the time that they took the property from my parents, they paid them. I think my mother said they got \$25,000. I don't know exactly how many acres they had. But it took, as usual with the city everything was slow moving, so now hopefully we'll get the park.

MF: I hope so too.

HB: I don't know if it will be in my lifetime but eventually we'll get it.

MF: So do you remember when you first heard that it was going to be a landfill or that is was a landfill.

HB: That part I don't remember, but if the wind blew, when it became The Dump, in certain areas of Staten Island you could smell it all over.

MF: Where did you move to?

HB: I moved to the St. George Gardens on St. Marks Place, you can walk to the South Ferry. Its still there but I think most of it is closed. It was an apartment building; it was nice because it has a courtyard that we could all play out and all the parents could watch us form the windows. So it was fun.

MF: And you could smell it from there?

HB: You could smell it, if the wind was coming in the right direction, yes. If you got closer to Richmond Avenue on a bad day, you definitely could smell it. For years you could smell it because it was raw garbage going in there and I guess until they had it capped it took years and years and years, you know, for it to fill up. And to my knowledge, I'm assuming we took garbage from Brooklyn, you know everything came here. I think now the garbage is going to Kentucky. My husband's from Kentucky.

MF: So, did you, all the other homes and the restaurants and the movie theatre that you talked about, did those all move too?

HB: Yes. Yes. Everything was taken. The city purchased the property. The airport was gone, in back of our house. The little restaurant by the Fresh Kills bridge, that's no longer there, that's gone. The airport, naturally its gone because now we have the Staten Island Mall, they took that property over. Where the drive-in movie theatre was is now Kmart. Kmart is there, and other stores. And most of the farmland was there for a long period of time but then housing developers came and built homes all over the place.

MF: They built homes right next to Fresh Kills?

HB: No, up further on Richmond Avenue

MF: OK.

HB: There are houses that were built, not on Fresh Kills, but the outside area there are homes there. They've been built there for years. You know the developers came and they just built houses all over the place and they didn't use any planning. And those poor people who lived close to the Dump, up until recently, on a bad day, they had to close their windows that's how gross it was.

MF: So do you remember did your family have any reactions, brothers and sisters when you were growing up after you moved about the landfill, the Dump?

HB: Well we missed it of course. You know, you're going from a house with property to well as I said my father passed away, to a three-room apartment or a four-room apartment so that's big difference, but we were of course younger so you really didn't think about that.

MF: Yeah. And did you live in St. George Gardens for...

HB: I lived in St. George Gardens. I went to St. Peters, as I said, from the 6th grade. I started there in 6th grade, 7th, and 8th. And my brother and sisters went to St. Peters also. And I think my mother paid \$8 a month for us. \$8 for the first one and less for my sister and brother. But it was nice.

MF: Do you think that the creation of the Dump changed how you felt about Staten Island?

HB: As I got older, yes. And people hate to say you're an Original Staten Islander. But you know I was born and raised here on Staten Island—it changed all of Staten Island. And of course the Verrazano Bridge definitely changed. Before that, we were, which we still are, the forgotten borough of the city. But it was more, as I said, farmlands. They were gradually developing housing and stuff but we were harder to get to. You didn't have a highway. We only had, at that time, the outer bridge, the Goethals Bridge and the

Bayonne bridge which isn't really used as much and you had the Staten Island ferry and you had the 69th Street ferry, so we were really kind of isolated in a way. So we really didn't have as much going on as the other boroughs. It was quiet, quiet living. That's why everybody started coming here from Brooklyn and Queens. Everything changed and then of course we had the bridge, and then when they built the highway from across the island, then you have all the traffic and congestion and accidents, you know so on so forth. But it was more of a rural type of an area.

MF: Than it is now.

HB: And everybody kind of knew each other. If you lived say in Rose bank, the people in Rosebank stayed in Rosebank. And South Beach, they were I guess like Brooklyn used to be where everybody knew everybody, that's how it was.

MF: Did people talk about the Dump a lot?

HB: Oh definitely. Definitely. Because you know a lot of people their homes were taken away from them. They really didn't have a choice. Of course most of that area was all uninhabited land. But when they built the bridge and the Staten Island Expressway, a lot of people's homes were taken away from them. Alright they paid for them, but they had no choice. What do they call that today? Eminent Domain. So there was a lot of anger, you know, why is Staten Island getting the Dump? You had the smells. You didn't know if there was any toxic stuff coming out. I think, now I don't know for a fact, but I think they've done studies where the cancer rate on Staten Island is higher than in some other areas. Whether or not the Dump has anything to do with it, that I don't know. It changed, it definitely changed, it changed everything. And a lot of people whose homes were no longer, they weren't able to live in the area, they have to move someplace else, naturally there'd be anger. I mean that's like coming and taking your kid away from you or something. I would say on a scale of one to ten, it was a ten. People were angry. And hopefully, because I've been on a tour of Fresh Kills and hopefully it will develop into something worth it. As I said probably not in my lifetime because they're going at a snail's pace, but hopefully.

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MF: Can you talk about how the landscape changed at Fresh Kills, because you talked about how when you grew up there it was very flat...

HB: It was basically all flat and there were a lot of streams and a lot of the streams are no longer there and when we went on the bus tour its mostly hills and dales and mounds and that, which is nice.

MF: Did you see it changing as the landfill...

HB: Yes. You went on Richmond Ave, you could see...

MF: You could see...

HB: You could see the change. Before they put the mounds kind of built up to Richmond Avenue, you could look at it and see it getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And also from Travis you could also see it. Because there were thousands and thousands of tons of garbage coming.

MF: Could you see the garbage too?

HB: Oh yes. At one time before they started capping it, it used to fly on a wind storm, not where we lived, but you would go along Richmond Ave and you would see paper and stuff all over the place.

MF: How did your life change when you moved away from...

HB: Well I guess it was more getting into more city life, I guess. But, St. George was a close knit community also, as I said we lived in St. George Gardens so everybody kind of got to know everybody and we were able to play out in the courtyards in the summer because in those days we didn't have air conditioning, we had a fan and that was it. We didn't have pools in the backyard and in the summertime a group of us, we would all walk from the St. George Gardens to Tomkinsville pool, which is still there today, and that was our summer, we would swim. And then nobody drove us, we walked from the St. George Gardens to Tompkinsville Pool, which is a pretty good distance, and then we would walk back. And if we were lucky enough to have money, stop and get a little hot dog on the way home. And that's the way it was.

MF: So, March 22 is the ten-year anniversary of the closing of Fresh Kills. How was the park and the Dump been talked about in the last ten years since it closed?

HB: Well I think everybody's glad that it's closed. I think we took enough garbage. I mean the garbage has to go someplace, we know that. Now they're recycling more, which is fine, the paper and the cans and all of that, I'm sure they could do a lot more. I know in California they recycle everything. But there's always the money factor, involved. But I think the general consensus is that they're glad that its closed and hopefully something nice will come out of it.

MF: Yeah. Do you think that the creation of the Dump and the fact that it lasted for 50 years changed the relationship that Staten Island had with the rest of the city?

HB: I think so. I mean as I said, Staten Islanders always felt that we're the forgotten borough. The only time that you really hear from most of the politicians is when they want to get elected. Then you see, then they come. Although Mayor Bloomberg, he's on Staten Island a little bit more, but as far as a lot of bus service, they're cutting some of it, of course we have Staten Island Rapid Transit. We did have a railroad on the North Shore as well, years and years ago and they did away with that. Now they're trying to do these feasibility studies to see if it's worth it to put it back. I think some of the structure is still there but naturally they're old and they have to be re-done. But they spend so much money in the thinking process, millions of dollars, just get it done. You know, just get it done.

MF: Yeah. How do your children feel about Fresh Kills?

HB: Well. My daughter, I only have one, my daughter...

MF: Oh. OK.

HB: The smell. They bought a first house in Travis on Alberta Ave and she was there for I guess 3 years. It was brand new, semi-house and even at that time on certain days you would get the smell from the garbage, so naturally she wasn't too happy about that. But she really wasn't that involved with the process of the Dump because it took me 14 years before I became pregnant so she wasn't that involved. But the mall was there so she was happy the mall was there. But she never really went to a drive-in movie theatre, although

once when we went to Kentucky they still have one or two down in Kentucky where my husband lived and we went. But from the perspective of her being a homeowner in Travis from the end of her street, you could see part of the Fresh Kills and she's glad that it's going to be a park because I guess the people that still live there, it will add value to their house. Because at least you're close to the park and the Hilton and so on and so forth.

MF: Did you ever tell her about how you group up on Richmond Avenue?

HB: Oh I told her. But most kids you know, that's foreign. They're not used to, today most kids grow up and they have a lot more than we had. As I said my mother was a widow and she had three kids to raise on her own so if you wanted something you kind of had to work for it. And I remember in the summer as I got older I would get babysitting jobs and I liked to iron, I'm one of those half a Martha Stewart, and I like to iron so some people would bring their clothes and I would iron them. But you always had a job. It's not as though you didn't have anything to do. They didn't have Burger Kings and all of that so you had to find other things to do. Help people out. Going to the store, they need something from the store. I know I used to, a few people in St. George Gardens I would do errands for them. I would go and clean and dust for them. You did what you had to do since money wasn't that readily available, especially my mother being a widow. And you didn't get paid as much as you get today. So you had to do what you had to do. And being the oldest, I really didn't have too much time to go and get in trouble afterschool because I had to get home to my brother and sister because of course my mother worked and I learned to cook at a young age and to start dinner. I don't think it hurt me in any way, I mean at the time I guess I was somewhat resentful because I was the oldest and I kind of had to watch over them but in the long run I have to say none of us turned out bad. Everybody, my brother is doing fine, my sister is doing fine. We all worked so we didn't have time to get in trouble. Nothing was handed to us. Which was fine. I don't have any regrets about that. It was what it was and you didn't know any different. So it was fine.

MF: So you've been back to the park, right, recently?

HB: Yes the AARP went on a tour.

MF: Can you tell me about what that was like to see it, you know, 50 years...

HB: It was interesting. I enjoyed it.

MF: Yeah.

HB: I really did. It was nice to see that we were able to go onto the Dump. And the progress that it's made through the years. And it was exciting. It really was exciting. Hopefully everything that they say they're going to do, they will do. Because I think it will be a nice place for families to go, you know. And some of the hills or mounds would be perfect for skiing, maybe, horseback riding. So it's a lot. Hopefully it doesn't go to waste, for bureaucratic whatever. Just finish it. And get it done. And stop procrastinating. That's the way I feel about it.

MF: Could you imagine the way it used to be when you were visiting or is it just so different now?

[0:50:43]

HB: It's really, its different, because basically growing up most of it was all flat. So from our house from Richmond Ave, you could, on a clear day, you could look across to Travis. But now, you'd have to be on top of the mountains or the hills whatever they call it. I would say there's no comparison. And as I said, if they do what they say they're going to do, it will be a nice thing. If they start it and leave it, then I don't think its going to be a nice thing.

MF: And they say its going to be three times the size of central park.

HB: Right, and that's what they said. And with landscaping and hopefully they have a restaurant there. Of course, you're always going to have people who shouldn't be there, in the park, so they have to have some sort of security issues and that. But I think it'd be an asset, it's better than having the Dump.

MF: Do you think it'll sort of always be the Dump, like 50 years from now, people at the Park?

HB: For Staten Islander's, older Staten Islander's, I can't speak for them, but I would think its always going to be the Dump. The younger generation, it's Fresh Kills Park, if they complete it. So, I mean, to me, it's always going to be the Dump.

MF: Yeah.

HB: You know, its going to take a long time to kind of change that feeling. I mean Freshkills Park, hopefully it will be done the right way and open so people can enjoy it.

MF: Yeah.

HB: But they won't know what it was before, in comparison to what hopefully it's going to be.

MF: So. Do you remember...so you have these two pictures and they're both of your Uncle?

HB: My Uncle John, he was a police officer. That's him in his teenage years. That was the marsh, this is all marshland, and I think that was like a little stream or a creek or something like that. And he wasn't the only one, a lot of people would go.

MF: He has those boots too.

HB: Has those boots on and the hat. And then this is the back of our house. So you can see that there's nothing around.

MF: Yeah it's completely flat.

HB: And it's a little house. And as I said, it seemed like it was so big in our day.

MF: Did you uncle come visit a lot?

HB: Yes. He's my mother's younger brother. He came.

MF: What do you think he's doing in this picture?

HB: I think muskrat hunting. Or rabbits, looking for rabbits.

MF: Yeah. And then this one's in the winter and this one's in the summer.

HB: The summer, yeah, probably at a family gathering, come for lunch or something. By bus. He didn't have a car then I don't think. I don't know what that is there it's hard to

say. But it was more open, we were up here and then in the back it went down the hill. Because we didn't have garbage pick up out there.

MF: So funny.

HB: So the garbage, you were able to burn your garbage. Of course you can't do that now. But we would burn the garbage and then put the ashes and stuff like over the hill.

MF: It's just so different now.

HB: Completely. Oh yeah, It's like night and day. But that's progress, you know, you can't stand still that's for sure And the house, as I said, these trees were two weeping willow tress in the front, of course that's not my parents car. And this went down and around there was a one-car garage under the house.

MF: Oh.

HB: So it kind of slopped down. And if you see here that's Travis, that's on the other side.

MF: And where were the planes?

HB: My father's planes would be in the back yard here. You can't see them.

MF: And is that where he would fly them?

HB: Yeah. He would take off and land there. Actually a friend of his, which I didn't even realize there were a few airplanes that crashed in the back, actually one of my fathers friends, his plane crashed there and he unfortunately died.

MF: And this was an article in the Advance.

HB: *Staten Island Advance*, that was October 1, 1995.

MF: And did you know it was coming out?

HB: No, no.

MF: So you just saw it?

HB: I saw it in the paper.

MF: And you're like "that's my house!"

HB: That's our house, yeah. And this is Richmond Ave and of course, this was taken before my parents owned the house because their cars a little bit more modern, but the evergreen tree was still there. And as I said, the weeping willow trees and I love weeping willow trees, they kind of relax you out.

MF: Was this fence here?

HB: The fence was there. But when I was growing up there was no fence there. My father would keep his heavy equipment—trucks, bulldozers and stuff—in our backyard here. And this was Richmond Avenue And as I said it didn't have the traffic we have today.

MF: Yeah.

HB: There just wasn't that much traffic, except on Saturday when the auction was open and that was the big thing, everybody went to the auction. And they actually had

auctioneers on the back of the truck and he'd be auctioning off socks. And it was an interesting experience.

MF: Did you ever get anything?

HB: Yes. Actually I have two scatter pins upstairs that I still have.

MF: Just from back then, that's great.

HB: From the auction. But it was interesting.

MF: Do you remember sounds or smells from that time?

HB: Well you would hear the airplanes and of course from Newark Airport they would fly over, you would hear the planes at night. The smells, sometimes the swamp water would smell. And of course you had the big mosquitoes, which we still have on Staten Island. Oh and crickets, I remember the crickets. At night, crickets, they made a lot of racket.

MF: Really loud.

HB: Really loud. And I guess that as it. Then traffic wise it was few and far between. And it was as I said it was a more relaxed time, growing up, not the hustle and bustle as it is today. But the house had an attic upstairs. I remember I went up to the attic and my mother had stored some Christmas gifts up there and there was a Toni Doll that you could give it a permanent and I cut the hair, ruined the whole doll. She had a fit; it was a Christmas gift. I got in big trouble for that. But other than that, it was nice. We got what we had to get and that was it. Doctor's made house calls, every time they came the pot of water went on the stove, for what reason I have no idea. So it was nice. It was rural. And as I said my husband's from Kentucky, his was even more rural.

[0:59:55]

MF: So is there anything else that you want to talk about that I didn't ask?

HB: No, I think you kind of covered everything. I mean outside of the development of Staten Island, you know, it went crazy for a long period of time and now its kind of slowing up with the economy. Some areas were done nice, other areas they just, you know, the contractor's just came, builders, and just built. And they didn't really care if people get a fire engine up the street, they really didn't, it was all money. And I think maybe they could have used better planning. And, as I said, Staten Island, it's changed, from growing up here in comparison to today it's a whole different ball game. I mean Hylan Blvd is like being on 86th Street in Brooklyn, I mean its bumper to bumper especially at when schools et out at three and then you have the traffic form the city, you know people coming home, so I mean it changed. You have more, in comparison to when I was growing up, you really have to watch kids and grandkids. I feel bad for the younger generation today because they don't know what it is to play outside and we didn't really have any worries playing outside. I mean, my parents watched us, but here in today's world you have to watch. It's not an easy situation. And also we didn't have as much as the kids today. And I think today the younger generation, they're so used to getting everything. Not all, but a lot don't expect to work for anything. It's just, you know, the parents give them everything that they want, which is good, but in the long run its not good. I know at the AARP, they have a thing for the winter where the high school kids or

school kids are able to sign up for snow shoveling and I think they said, and I'm not sure, they had like maybe 700 people on Staten Island to sign up and I think they only got 300 kids to do it. So that in itself tells you. So you know it's a whole different world out there.

MF: Has the area around the Dump changed a lot in the last ten years since it closed?

HB: Yes. Well I mean, the mall was there. There's more building, its more congestion. Because it's mostly, because you have the Staten Island Mall, you have a lot of the strip malls, now you have Costco, which is a good thing. You have the bus depot moved out there so you have all of the buses. And there are more homes that have been built. So there's a lot more, a lot more congestion and traffic and everybody's impatient and they think they're going to get someplace in five minutes but on Staten Island you don't do that anymore. Everybody knows every side street to take. Years ago there were certain streets you could take that nobody knew and today, they know every side street so no matter where you go, at certain times, even to get over Todt Hill, it could take you 45 minutes to get over the hill with the traffic, between Staten Island Hospital, 7:00-3:00 people getting out, the school kids getting out, the teachers leaving to go home, so it's different, it's all congestion and no patience, road rage.

MF: I can't get over the pictures of you know this flat land and just like you know imagining people skiing there now, its just so...

HB: I mean hopefully, they didn't mention the skiing.

MF: I mean these hills, its just so different.

HB: And you know horseback riding, it would be perfect for horseback riding. And I think they were going to have some soccer fields there for the kids and I think they were going to put in some row boating or canoeing which would be very nice there. But I also think that they should get input from the people of Staten Island. I know at the AARP when they had a group of people come, which I attended, they asked us if we had ideas. I think that they should get ideas from Staten Islanders, because after all, we're paying the taxes for it and mostly we're going to be using it. I don't know if people from other boroughs will brave all the traffic to come to Staten Island, that part I don't know. Input is important, whether they use all of it or not, at least they get insight.

MF: How was it going with your AARP group, most of you probably know it as the Dump, and maybe and some of you probably before the Dump, was it going with a group of people...

HB: Everybody was really enthusiastic about it that hopefully, well now that most of the smell is gone although I think that still if you're down wind sometimes you're going to get a certain amount. Everybody, I know the people that went on the tour, everybody seemed very interested in it and it was nice to get out and walk, fortunately it was a nice day. So it was nice to be up and kind of look around and see and in comparison for me knowing that it was all flat and we lived there. I was looking to see if the two weeping willow trees were still there but you know I couldn't see them.

MF: That would be amazing.

HB: It would be amazing. But hopefully they landscape it nice and they put thought into it and not start half of it and then just leave it idle. I think that would be a travesty to Staten Islanders since you know we put up with the Dump for so many years, at least, as I

said not my generation, but for the younger generation they have something to show for it.

MF: Have you seen the pictures of the plans for it?

HB: Yes, I think they had them at one of the AARP meetings, because they came twice, the gentleman from the city.

MF: Was it Raj?

HB: I don't remember. I know I sent him the picture of my house because he was surprised I guess that somebody was alive that lived there and I told him, "no, I have a picture, our house was there," and he asked me to send it to him and so that's what I did so I think that's how your teacher... I know the president from our AARP Norma Piel from our AARP said my name came up, so that's how one thing lead to the other and she asked if I would mind being interviewed and I said no not at all.

MF: I'm so glad. This was wonderful.

HB: Good. I'm glad

MF: To hear about it...

HB: Well it's nice when you hear what it was and how it is.

MF: And you know, just remembering, now that this park is going to be there, that it's so different from what, being able to imagine and describe what it was like before that landfill is, I think, really important to remember.

HB: But it did change Staten Island completely. I mean we became more, as I said, once the bridge came, the Verrazano bridge, even though we had the other bridges, the Verrazano Bridge seemed to really change it because Staten Island became a cut-through for all your big trucks and everything to Brooklyn. Right from New Jersey to Brooklyn. And most people, a lot of people from Brooklyn actually came to Staten Island and Staten Island moved to Jersey or Pennsylvania but on Sunday or actually everyday you go on the Expressway, its bumper to bumper, during peak hours. And on a Holiday, I remember when my brother moved to New Jersey, Middletown, we were going there for Thanksgiving and it took us two and a half hours to get there through the traffic. Sometimes the Expressway, I don't take the Expressway, usually when we go to my daughters in Freehold we come over the outer bridge. Coming home, I get off at the Korean Parkway and go the back way because at least the car is moving. When you get off, you can't see the traffic on the Expressway, so then you're stuck until you can get to an exit to get off. And of course there are a lot of accidents. But that is something you have all over. But it kind of took the ruralness away from Staten Island, although I guess my parents and people who are a lot older than I am, nothing stays the same. Everything progresses as time goes on. You know, otherwise we would be with no electricity. Although I think another thing they had discussed was to put the windmills on the Dump and there was some controversy with that because, I don't know, I think that it would be a good thing to generate electricity, but somebody had said that they also are extremely noisy, so you don't want to have a bunch of noise either. So we'll see what happens. See what our politicians are going to do.