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Interviewee: Frances Bennett

Interviewers: Jennifer Souder
Yvonne Clayton
Charles Trott
Ruben Bray
Melissa Keeling

Date: March 2, 2021

Time: 7:00pm

Place: Zoom

Jennifer Souder:

Great. Well, thank you everybody for being here, and thank you Ms. Bennett for joining us for an interview today with the Asbury Park African-American Music Project. And, we'd like to-

Frances Bennett:

You're welcome.

Jennifer Souder:

And, we'd love to just go around and do a very quick introduction of ourselves. We've got a good portion of our team here. Um, so, we'll just go around and- and as you know, we're, um, we have been interviewing, um, people from Asbury Park and from Springwood Avenue, musicians, community members, business people, everybody who has a love and a passion for Springwood Avenue history, uh, over the past few years, uh, with a goal of- of sharing these stories of Springwood Avenue, um, making sure that the history of Springwood Avenue and the African-American community and Asbury Park is, you know, central and highlighted to the story of Asbury Park.

I'm Jen Souder. I live here in Asbury Park and, I really enjoyed having the opportunity to speak to so many amazing people about their stories and, um, and I'm happy to be here with you today. And, Yvonne.

Yvonne Clayton:

Hi. Hi, Frances, I'm Yvonne, Clayton. Um.

Frances Bennett:

Hi, Yvonne.

Yvonne Clayton:

(laughs). Resident for a long time and currently serving on the city council and member of different organizations, but, um, this organization has become my passion. And, I'm- I'm so interested and

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dedicated to preserving the Springwood Avenue that I knew and that was such an important part of my life.

Jennifer Souder:

Charles.

Charles Trott:

Yes, this is Charles, Charles Trott. Uh, I'm an advisor, I think, on the Asbury Park African-American Music Project and I'm also the creator of DIA, Diasporic Images of Africa. And, of course, this is a very heartfelt, uh, story that I'm helping to create that we, AP-AMP are creating and, um, that's why I'm here to continue the story of the west side of Asbury.

Jennifer Souder:

Thank you, Charles. And, how about Ruben.

Ruben Bray:

Hello. Ruben Bray. I'm almost a lifetime resident of Asbury Park and grew up around Asbury Park. I'd like to see the reality of it preserved. And, I currently work for the Asbury Park School District and I'm involved in a lot of events that take place in and around Asbury.

Jennifer Souder:

Thank you. And Melissa.

Melissa Keeling:

Hi. I'm Melissa Keeling. I've, uh, lived in Asbury about seven years now, so I know I'm new blood to the town, but it's definitely my favorite place I've ever lived. I am a musician and also a music educator. I teach in the [inaudible 00:03:16]. Um, but I'm so passionate about this project for all the same reasons described by my wonderful colleagues here. So, thank you again for speaking with us today.

Frances Bennett:

Thank you.

Jennifer Souder:

Great. So, we will get started here. Um, and, I would- I'm going to ask somebody to mute, if they can. I think if everyone can mute, um, while we do this just so we're able to get the recording, uh, except for Frances, of course, and then, when you would like to unmute, just hit that and I'll keep going. Um, so, Frances, please just tell us your name and where and when you were born?

Frances Bennett:

Good evening. My name is Frances Hartwell Bennett. I was born in 1949 at Fitkin Hospital, better known as Jersey Shore University Medical Center. When we left the hospital, I was taken to the Asbury Park Village. That's where I spent most of my young years and that's when I was first introduced to the music scene, because you know the Turf Club sits right on the corner of the Asbury Park Village.

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It was very common, especially in the summer, to sit out, lay out on the grass, till wee hours in the morning, even as a child, and listen to, particularly for me that I remember the most, was Jimmy Smith playing Walk on the Wild Side. In this same community, and on this same street, I attended the, uh, Second Baptist Church there, I was baptized there. On the same street, I attended and was a member of the Asbury Park Elks, and across the street from Second Baptist Church, I was a member of the, uh, Reindeer Organization. Those were both paternal organizations, um, that was very influential in my, uh, upbringing here in Asbury Park.

And then, right up the road a little bit was the West Side Community Center where, um, I also studied dance and we also had charm class and probably, when I first saw my first piece of black art, [inaudible 00:05:41] was a, uh, painting of the, uh, shooting of [inaudible 00:05:46]. And, there was other pieces in the West Side Community Center that held my interest and stuck with me my entire life.

I attended the Bangs Avenue School. Later on, I attended Bond Street School and then, onto to Asbury Park High School. I attended my eighth grade there. That was one of the first years they had split sessions, so my eighth grade was spent at Asbury Park High School.

My family, um, I lived with my mother and father, and I had two sisters and two brothers. My older sister was raised in the South and my next oldest sister, Gloria, and my brothers, Anthony and Eugene, was raised here in Asbury Park.

One of the things I remember the most about growing up in Asbury Park as a teen was attending the Motown Reviews at Convention Hall. Yeah. It was the place where I first saw James Brown, Stevie Wonder, The Supremes, Little Richard, Gladys Knight and the Pips, The Temptations, The Four Tops. Even though it was billed as, um, the Motown Review, some of the entertainers, they were not a part of Motown, but they were on the bill also.

And, another happening was every Monday after Easter, there was, um, something called the Easter Monday Ball. That was held inside Convention Hall and usually, it was a live band and, um, two of them that stand out in my mind was, um... Let me see. The group that played Green Onions. I'm trying to think of it. Um, hm. It will come to me in a minute. But, it was- it was happening. Easter Monday Ball-

Ruben Bray:

Booker T.

Frances Bennett:

Booker T and the MGs. Thank you. Yes. Yes. And, um, also, backing up a little bit, while I was attending Asbury Park High School, there was always something called the Student Variety held every year. And, I was, uh, fortunate enough to be part of a group that was called The Shoredettes. This was a group of women who danced- sort of precision like the Rockettes, you know, but we- to popular music. And, this was somewhat of a tradition at Asbury. I don't know how far back. I know my older sister was a part of it. I know some women that was older than her that was a part of it. So, I want to say, maybe from around 1960.

Yvonne Clayton:

I was a part of it.

Frances Bennett:

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Yvonne, you were a part of it?

Yvonne Clayton:

I was a Shoredette. I think I have some pictures around too.

Frances Bennett:

(laughs). Yeah, I have a few too. Oh, okay. My fellow Shoredette.

Yvonne Clayton:

(laughs).

Frances Bennett:

Okay. Let me see. Oh yeah, so, that group we talked about, uh, was Jr. Walker & the All Stars, right? And, they had this song called Shotgun and some of the dances at that time was the jerk, the monkey, of course, the twist and many, many others. Please stop me if you have any questions.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh, don't worry, we'll- we'll jump in. We- we love hearing- we love hearing your stories and we'll jump in.

Charles Trott:

Was it the African twist or just the twist, because remember there was an African twist as well?

Frances Bennett:

Well, just to my knowledge, Chubby Checker. Yeah.

Charles Trott:

Okay. All right.

Frances Bennett:

But, you had asked- you had asked was I a part of a drill team or anything like that? Um, no, but I do remember the Mescaleros. I mean, I went to school with them, grew up with them in the community. They were like a few years behind me. But, uh, so the closest thing I came to the drill team was the Elks had a, um, marching group and we would perform in the, uh, you know, annual Elks parade here in Asbury Park. And, sometimes, we would travel. I remember us going as far as Richmond, Virginia, for a parade. And, those were good times.

And, um, the West Side Community Center, I want to back up to when I lived in the Asbury Park Village. There lived Mr. Clifford Johnson. He was my neighbor. He was a saxophone player-

Jennifer Souder:

Yes.

Frances Bennett:

... and also, um, Mr. Eddie Watt, he lived there, and his son, Robert, the French horn player, was in my class. Uh, we graduated together Asbury Park High School. Um, so, um, let me back up. So, also, Mr. Johnson's mother, she was one of the people who was in charge of the girls in the Elks and the Reindeer. She was also the choir director at Second Baptist when I was attending and she played the piano and the organ. So, I see where Mr. Johnson gets his musical skills. Um, she was great. She was really good. She was a really good choir director and she was good working with youth.

Um, let's see. Something... You asked me about, in your questionnaire about working at the high school. Well, it was an honor to come back to my high school and work. When I attended school, I did not participate as much as, um, I would have. Say, if today, if I was going back to high school, I'd do everything. I'd do everything. I'd play every sport. I would. I would. I realized when I went back there to work and working in the athletic department what I had missed out on.

But, the children were wonderful. I- I just loved supporting them, um, all the way around. I can remember people calling in, other schools, other officials, other ADs, first calling and always knocking Asbury. So, I put that to a stop real quick. And, then, so we get no respect and we went on, I think while I was there, we had at least four football championships. We had one soccer championship and maybe two basketball. So, uh, I really enjoyed that. I loved the kids immensely and I miss them. I miss them but by living here in the community, I still see them, and I'm in touch with them.

And, so, you asked what is something, um, I would like to tell someone when walking down Springwood Avenue today, to know about the music and history of Springwood Avenue? Well, it was just very vibrant. I mean, I was young, so I wasn't able to go into the clubs, um, you know, at the time when most of the jazz musicians where there. So, most of what I was hearing was when I walked past. But, it was live. It was live.

And, um, the stores- the stores, everywhere you stepped, there was a store. I mean, you didn't have to go anywhere. You leave your house and you go maybe 100 feet and there you were, getting everything you needed. Um, it was just very vibrant. It was just very vibrant and it was good to see all the black businesses.

I probably didn't really know too many white people until I got to Bond Street. I mean, then, we became integrated because at the time I was attending, um, Bangs Avenue, it was all black. So, once I went over to, uh, Bond Street in the high school, that's when I first started to mingling, you know, with the other races. But, we had a close knit black family over there and it was like, it was businesses. It was Wall Street. It was really, really nice.

It was really nice. I was sorry to see it all happen. I was not here when the riots happened. I had already graduated and moved to New York and I was like in shock when I turned on the news and saw the burning and the looting going on here in Asbury Park.

Jennifer Souder:

And, when did you come back to Asbury Park?

Frances Bennett:

I came back, let me see, in 1977, yeah. So, I left in '67 and I came back in '77. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer Souder:

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And, did you, um- can you speak a little bit about when you- the difference from when you left and when you came back? Did you notice, you know, just some of your experiences in terms of the feel of the neighborhood, just anything that you observed.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh, yeah. It was- it wasn't much here when I returned, you know. It was a lot of blightness. It was a lot of vacancies, um, housing. There were- the businesses were gone. Um, I'm sure employment was probably an issue right here in the, you know, right here in this immediate area. I mean, everything that you needed or wanted to do, you had to leave Asbury Park and go somewhere else to obtain or to work.

Jennifer Souder:

And, I- I do have a question for you which might seem a little bit off of Springwood Avenue, but I would love to know how you got your garden, or why you got your garden started?

Frances Bennett:

Oh, okay. Gardening, um, well, both my grandmothers always enjoyed gardening, and um, so from a child, I would work with them in their gardens. And then, um, my husband was also a houseplant person, not outdoors, but houseplants. So, when we lived in New York, we had lots of plants and he piqued my interest on that because mostly what my grandmothers- we were doing outdoor gardening and, um. So, when I had my children, I wasn't working, um, it was a great pastime. It was a great pastime. I enjoy doing it and, uh, from there, it just grew and grew and grew, the passion.

Jennifer Souder:

Well, it's beautiful, from what I've seen in pictures. (laughs).

Frances Bennett:

Thank you.

Jennifer Souder:

Does anyone have questions? I have more questions, but does anyone have questions they'd like to ask or to jump in there?

Charles Trott:

Um, I just have a statement. We were talking to the Madisons here recently. We did an interview with, uh, Valmont and Ricardo Washington. And, I was thinking that they were one of the very few... pardon me. I forgot about the Shoredettes. How could I forget the Shoredettes? I was- I'm- I'm- I'm just a little younger. I know I look older, but I'm a little younger than Frances is. (laughing).

But, uh, you know, as a younger fellow, I'll be looking up the... Oh, let me see them legs. You know. (laughing). No, but not only legs, I love, you know, the dance moves. Um, and so, they were another instrumental dance group. It happened here on the West Side. Well, sure, that's of course, you know, they performed- one of the places was at the high school. But, all of this came out of the West Side. So, I just want to clarify what I had said before.

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Frances Bennett:

Okay, that's all right.

Jennifer Souder:

You're on the record now, Charles. Um.

Melissa Keeling:

Could I just ask a follow up question about that?

Jennifer Souder:

Sure.

Melissa Keeling:

Because- because I'm not from Asbury Park, so it sounds like everyone here knows about the Shoredettes, but this is the first I've ever heard about the Shoredettes. Sounds fantastic. Could you just give me a- a description of the Shoredettes for someone that's never seen or heard what that would be like?

Frances Bennett:

Okay. So, um, usually, it numbered maybe about 20, 25 young women. Um, our costumes or our attire would be, um, something very classy, you know, very classy. Um, satin fabric, you know, tailored outfits, um, mesh stockings, uh, dancing shoes, line dancing-

Charles Trott:

Yeah, by request, uh. When I said those legs, I didn't mean anything by it. But, I mean, you know, it was definitely very tasteful. Go ahead, Frances. I'm sorry, I had to say that. (laughs).

Melissa Keeling:

Yeah.

Frances Bennett:

No, that just about- it sums it up. Just about sums it up. I mean, we- like Yvonne said, she thinks she has pictures and I know I have one and, um, I think Madonna had one. Madonna Carter.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah, yeah.

Frances Bennett:

The Asbury Park Press covered it and then, some years, Madonna covered it.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Frances Bennett:

But the Student Variety, that was Asbury Park. Every year, every year, you know, it was a big, big high school.

Yvonne Clayton:

And- and, when we- when, uh, when I was there, we did the kick like the Rockettes. The high kicks and everything was precision.

Frances Bennett:

Yeah, that was the main thing. Your kick. Yeah. Yeah.

Melissa Keeling:

Would this be something... I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Frances Bennett:

No, I was going to just say this was all, uh, pre-Ocean Township, uh, students leaving us. You know, at the time, we probably had, like at least 1,000 kids in the high school or more. (laughs).

Charles Trott:

Yeah, [inaudible 00:19:20] 24, uh, 1,200, I believe. At least, in my class two years later.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. Yes.

Melissa Keeling:

Wow.

Frances Bennett:

It was a good time. (laughs).

Melissa Keeling:

That sounds amazing. I'm going to have to see the pictures.

Frances Bennett:

Yeah.

Charles Trott:

Who was your, um, advisor/choreographer, you know, adult leader for the Shoredettes?

Frances Bennett:

Well, um, for us, with my group, it was Ms. Carrie Wilmax, Sandy Wilmax' mother.

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Charles Trott:

Yeah, yeah.

Frances Bennett:

Yvonne, do you remember who yours was?

Yvonne Clayton:

It was so long ago, I don't have a clue. (laughing). I remember, you know, some- some of the people who were in the group. There were a lot of us.

Frances Bennett:

Yes.

Yvonne Clayton:

But, I don't remember... I- I think it was one of the gym teachers at the school, but-

Frances Bennett:

Okay.

Yvonne Clayton:

... I don't remember.

Frances Bennett:

Yes. Yeah, I know. Like you said, it was a long time- a long time ago.

Yvonne Clayton:

But, it was a great time. It was a great time. And, they used to open the balcony, because, you know, the high school has a balcony and they used to open the balcony and-

Ruben Bray:

Oh.

Yvonne Clayton:

... it was just a good time. (laughs).

Frances Bennett:

Oh, when I was there, did they have it for two nights? We had the Friday night and Saturday night performance.

Yvonne Clayton:

Yes. Yes.

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Frances Bennett:

And- and it was always packed. It was sold out, family, friends, everybody came. It was a really big deal.

Yvonne Clayton:

Yes. Yes. It sure was.

Ruben Bray:

Oh yeah. All that was done by the time I came through. But, let me ask you something. What... this is Ruben. What was... 'Cause I grew up in the Village too, so what was it like back in the '60s, 'cause, by the time I got there, there was like one white family?

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

Was it the same in the '60s or was it still a little bit more mixed in the '60s?

Frances Bennett:

In- in the old Village, it was all black when I liv- grew up there.

Ruben Bray:

Okay. Me too. So, I was wondering-

Frances Bennett:

Yeah, the Washington Village, you know, there were, uh, white families and we started moving in, but much, much later. I'm not even sure the year. I would have to say probably in the '70s was when the first families-

Ruben Bray:

What about- 'cause, what about Bond Street, because by the time I got to Bond Street, it was integrated.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

A mixture of everything on Bond Street.

Frances Bennett:

Yeah, yeah. When I attended, it was integrated. It was integrated. Yeah.

Yvonne Clayton:

My class was the first class of black students to go to Bond Street.

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Frances Bennett:

Oh, okay.

Ruben Bray:

Oh.

Frances Bennett:

And, Bond Street was the original Asbury Park High School.

Charles Trott:

Right.

Ruben Bray:

I didn't know that.

Frances Bennett:

Um.

Charles Trott:

And see, this is all the history of not only Asbury Park, but America.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. Yes. And, it was an interesting year there. Um, I met my friend to this day, um, when I went to Bond Street. She had just moved here from [inaudible 00:22:34]. She was just a child. She didn't speak English or anything. And, uh, her and her family, they lived on Bond Street. Her name was Bonga, Bonga Gycus and, um, to this day, we're still friends.

She just sent me roses the other day for my birthday. Uh, she went into the- she went to FIT. She, um, was a merchandise buyer and she went all- all over the world and she had her own businesses then. When we were a child, I think eighth grade, seventh grade, we were in the garment district in New York, buying fur pelts. You know how they used to wear them on the collars and on the sleeve of the coats and on the cuffs. (laughs). Yes, yes. We had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun. Lots of people from Asbury Park, good people.

Jennifer Souder:

Yes.

Yvonne Clayton:

One of- one of the things that I thought was so interesting is my mother became friends with my- my teacher. Her name was Mrs. Cart- Mrs. Cartwell.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Yvonne Clayton:

And, they remained friends for years and they communicated and dropped notes. And, Ms. Cartwell was a pilot and she even had her own plane and this was back, oh my God, I don't even want to say. (laughs).

Frances Bennett:

That was a great- it was a good time. It was a good time back in those years.

Jennifer Souder:

So much that the young people are missing out on today, these types of relationships.

Ruben Bray:

What was Easter like?

Charles Trott:

(laughs).

Frances Bennett:

Uh, we used to walk the boardwalk. (laughs).

Ruben Bray:

Yeah, I mean, I got to see it the tail end and I tried to explain it to my nephew one day and he looked at me like I was on drugs. And, I was explaining to him, you couldn't see from one end of the boardwalk to the other. And, he was like, why? I said, because of people. He asked me, what does that mean? I mean, people.

Frances Bennett:

Yeah.

Ruben Bray:

Oh, and I'm... Did they use to have the victor- did they used to have a parade or something back in the day? Like an Easter parade or they just- just everybody did the boardwalk?

Frances Bennett:

Yeah, they did the boardwalk and they had the children's, uh, you know, parade, the baby parade, that they had every year. That was going on there still. But, um, yeah. That was the place to be, you know.

Charles Trott:

I think these adolescents, especially on the West Side, had an unofficial Easter Day parade. It wasn't a parade as such but, you know, everyone congregated and showed their best Easter wear, that's all I'm saying.

Frances Bennett:

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Yes, yes. That was going on too.

Yvonne Clayton:

And, we'd- we'd walk to the boardwalk and I'll always remember my first pair of heels, walking to the boardwalk and coming home barefoot. (laughs).

Frances Bennett:

Yes.

Yvonne Clayton:

But, we'd go and ride the rides and the fun house. And, the next day, there would always be in the paper, best dressed man and woman on the- on the beach.

Frances Bennett:

Yes.

Charles Trott:

Yes.

Ruben Bray:

Was that an official thing?

Frances Bennett:

The Easter parade, that was official, Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

I mean, the best dressed, was that official like.

Yvonne Clayton:

Yeah, but, um, [inaudible 00:25:49] for Weston who was the best dressed and their pictures would always appear in the paper. But, everyone got dressed up. You didn't go unless you were fashion fine. (laughs).

Ruben Bray:

Now, did y'all- like, besides going to high- when you were in high school, besides doing like a dance at the school, where else did y'all go?

Frances Bennett:

Uh. We went to the hall-

Ruben Bray:

Yeah.

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Frances Bennett:

The Catholic Church had the hall. That's where the, uh, girls' school is located now.

Ruben Bray:

Oh. [crosstalk 00:26:21].

Yvonne Clayton:

St. Peter's Claver Hall.

Frances Bennett:

St. Peter's Claver Hall, the West Side Community Center.

Charles Trott:

Right.

Frances Bennett:

Uh, yeah. And, um, there were times when they had... I was too young, but they had concerts even at the schools. I think they had Frankie Lymon at Bangs Avenue School, but I didn't attend.

Charles Trott:

Wow.

Yvonne Clayton:

That's right. I remember that.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). There was always something going on, music wise.

Frances Bennett:

And, I can remember working, my first job was, um, down, in the first block of Cookman, 721 Cookman. It was Bonnie White Uniforms and it was right across the street from the Upstage. So, I was in high school and, um, so I saw the musicians going and coming, practicing, playing there practically every day. But, at the time, you know, I guess, um, I was not interested in the music, um.

I was not interested in rock and roll like that. Or, so, I really didn't pay much attention, but I had to see them every day, going and coming up there, you know. I had to see Bruce. But, um, like I said, I was working, but it was facing the Upstage and I still hear them going and coming and I could hear the music blasting.

Ruben Bray:

So, it was like two different worlds of music going on?

Frances Bennett:

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Yes, yes. For me, it was. For me, it was. I was more into jazz, and into rhythm and blues, Latin.

Ruben Bray:

Where'd y'all buy your records from?

Frances Bennett:

Well, on the Avenue there was the House of Hits and there was one other one on the Avenue. My sister worked there and even she couldn't remember the name of the place. But they were located, um, right in front of Boston Way on Springwood Avenue, that block. And, then, there also was... Charles, you mentioned Cindy and-

Charles Trott:

Yes, CJ.

Frances Bennett:

... they were a couple. They had a music store.

Charles Trott:

Cindy and Ferri.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

That's what CJ stood for?

Charles Trott:

Yeah, that's what CJ stood for, yeah.

Ruben Bray:

When I came up... Yeah, it was CJ's Records. I never knew that's what CJ stood for. We just knew it was CJ's Records.

Charles Trott:

Right, right. It- it was either where-

Ruben Bray:

That's funny.

Charles Trott:

... where the ice cream place is today-

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Ruben Bray:

That's it.

Charles Trott:

... or the, uh, vacant lot which is a garden next to Parlor, uh, Parlor Gallery.

Ruben Bray:

I'm- I'm agreeing with you on that because even when I came up, back in the... I believe in the '80s, that was still there and it was one of those two places. I'm going to say the ice cream place, but I could be wrong.

Charles Trott:

Yeah. [crosstalk 00:28:59] area in between. Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

Now, for y'all, going in there and buying new music, was that a big thing, going to buy, because I know the way [inaudible 00:29:09], y'all enjoyed going to the store to buy records. It was a [inaudible 00:29:14] experience.

Frances Bennett:

Yeah, it was. We had to have the latest and greatest. (laughs).

Charles Trott:

The thing back in my day was you could listen to the records, 45 or 33, it didn't matter, you could listen at CJs, you could listen at House of Hits. And, not only that, each of those proprietors had a pretty large history that they could tell you about the artist any way.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

For the time, wasn't records- weren't records kind of expensive for that time?

Charles Trott:

I could afford it and I didn't have no job. (laughing).

Frances Bennett:

[inaudible 00:29:53].

Yvonne Clayton:

Records were reasonable.

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Frances Bennett:

A 45- a 45, you know, was affordable. You gotta think. You wasn't buying the whole album. You was just buying the- the 45.

Ruben Bray:

Yeah, 'cause albums... 'cause when you- 'cause when you were young, albums weren't a big thing, right? It was more about the 45?

Frances Bennett:

Except for in jazz. Jazz it was albums.

Charles Trott:

Yeah. And R&B had albums too, but it would depend on the person that you were as to what you bought. But, everybody pretty much bought the 45s and that was primarily R&B.

Frances Bennett:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

[inaudible 00:30:35].

Frances Bennett:

But, Asbury Park was definitely the place to be. I mean, I lived in New York and I love New York, but just- just something- something about living here at the Shore, you know.

Charles Trott:

Frances, can I ask, in your travels, when you were living in New York or wherever else you lived or traveled, when people ask you where you're from and you would say, Asbury Park. How many of them would say, oh, Asbury. I know that?

Frances Bennett:

Uh, I would say about half and half, you know. Some of the older people- some of the older people that I worked with, um, knew and they had even come down here in the summers, you know, and stayed at some of those hotels that were [inaudible 00:31:20] and the hotels that was located on a Ridge and one was on Merle Avenue.

Charles Trott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Frances Bennett:

A lot of these musicians stayed, when they came here, you know, where I guess, um, you know, musicians that were playing like in the '50s-

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Charles Trott:

Right.

Frances Bennett:

... stayed at these hotels.

Ruben Bray:

Before you left, were the movie theaters still nice?

Frances Bennett:

Uh, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. They were still open. The theaters were all still open. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

[crosstalk 00:32:01].

Charles Trott:

She means they were still standing when she left.

Frances Bennett:

Yes. [inaudible 00:32:05]. Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

I know you said you aren't able to go into a lot of the clubs and things on Springwood Avenue, but how was the Orchid Lounge when you came back?

Frances Bennett:

Um, yeah, the Orchid- the Orchid Lounge was, um, jumping. (laughs) It was, you know, I participated in a fashion show in there but as far as just going out, I didn't go because I had small children. So, all my friends' children were a little older so they were able to go and enjoy themselves. Me, I had to be home (laughs) with my crew. But, um, I know it was happening, you know. I heard. (laughing). I heard.

Jennifer Souder:

Okay, so the fashion show, when was that around?

Frances Bennett:

Uh, I want to say maybe- maybe- maybe 1980. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer Souder:

Okay.

Frances Bennett:

Maybe 1980, yeah. [crosstalk 00:33:17].

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Charles Trott:

I think everyone knows the name Mr. Fashion, especially here in Asbury Park. I don't know who else would agree with me, but of course, his female counterpart is this lady here you're talking to. Ms. Frances Hartwell Bennett.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh really?

Charles Trott:

Well, that was my opinion of you. Okay. Never mind, it was just a side bar. (laughing).

Frances Bennett:

Thank you, Charles. Well, I had a lot of good role models in town. Yvonne Clayton.

Yvonne Clayton:

Oh.

Frances Bennett:

I had a lot of beautiful women to look up to. I mean, I wasn't that far behind them, but they still were like my big sisters. They were my sisters.

Yvonne Clayton:

And- and, your sisters- your sisters.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. It was a beautiful time.

Frances Bennett:

Well, on that note, I can remember, you know, the Vietnam War was going on, and uh, my neighbor and my classmate, we graduated together, he went into the Marines. And, that same year he went in, I can remember I was home, and I still hear the officers and the Marines come up the sidewalk. And, they went in the house and all I could hear was his mother wailing. Oh, such a... I still hear it now. They came to tell... yes, he was, yeah, killed. Actually, they had him down as missing in action. [inaudible 00:34:50] Collins. He was a great person. He was such a... yeah.

They- they do a lot. I think they have, um, an exhibition, not an exhibition, but they have the wall up there in Holmdel too and they have his name and some information, his photo and some information on him. But, um, yeah. That was so sad. That was so sad.

Charles Trott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruben Bray:

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[inaudible 00:35:14] was like one of my big brothers and I remember when he went away. It was myself, him and, I can't remember who it was. I think it was his brother [inaudible 00:35:24]. But, anyway, uh, we had a little going away ceremony. Now, I'm what, two or three years younger than them, but, you know, I was a little guy trying to get in, you know. And, um, when I heard he had been killed, it was traumatic for me.

Frances Bennett:

Yes, yes.

Ruben Bray:

And, I mean, for everybody I'm sure, not just for me.

Check speaker (Jen):

Yes. So sad. And I think we might have had at least five in our generation or in our group who was killed in Vietnam from the town.

Jennifer Souder:

Is there anything else that you'd love to share with us at this moment? We always say this because it's true that, uh, it doesn't end with this evening. Any time that you want to share anything with us, we're-we would love to continue speaking with you, um.

Frances Bennett:

No, not at this time. Thank you, Jennifer and thank you to the committee. Um, thank you. I hope I've been of some help [inaudible 00:36:41] this project along.

Yvonne Clayton:

This was a lovely walk down memory lane.

Frances Bennett:

Oh, I'm glad. I'm glad.

Yvonne Clayton:

Thank you.

Frances Bennett:

I'll try to get some pictures together, um, of the Shoredettes so that this young lady can see- can get a better idea of what Shoredettes was.

Melissa Keeling:

Thank you so much, Frances.

Frances Bennett:

Thank you.

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Melissa Keeling:

[crosstalk 00:37:09].

Jennifer Souder:

Yvonne, don't hang up please.

Yvonne Clayton:

Okay.

Jennifer Souder:

We want to make sure that we, uh, his the stop record, but yes, thank you so much, Frances for sharing your time with us.

Ruben Bray:

Thank you very much.

Frances Bennett:

You're very welcome. Goodnight.

Jennifer Souder:

Goodnight.

Interview ended.

Yvonne Clayton:

[crosstalk 00:37:27].

Jennifer Souder:

Goodnight everybody. Yvonne?

Yvonne Clayton:

I'm here.

Jennifer Souder:

I just wanted to make sure. I- I think it's fine, probably if you don't hit stop record it just stops when you hang up, I imagine.

Yvonne Clayton:

Well. I'm-

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