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ASBURY PARK AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee: Karen Lee Schwarz

**Interviewers: Jennifer Souder
Charles Trott
Yvonne Clayton**

Date: February 15, 2019

Time: 12:30 pm

Place: Asbury Park, NJ

Jennifer Souder: Okay. So, can you just please tell us your name, where and when you were born, and a few memories of your early childhood.

Karen: Okay, my name is Karen Lee Schwarz. I like to go professionally as Karen Lee cause that was my- what my mother named me. Um, I've had a few name changes, so my legal name and my school teacher name is Ms. Schwarz. I was born in North New Jersey, first place I lived. I lived there for a very short time before my family got separated, and I ended up in South Orange, New Jersey on Valley Street, where I spent most of my childhood, K through 12. There were stepsisters, stepbrothers, and I had two biological sisters that I didn't have any contact with until I was a teenager.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: So that was kind of an interesting detour in my childhood. Um, my neigh- my early neighborhood was right by the South Orange Train Station , on Valley Street right in the hub of town. It was a very small house, one bathroom, with eight people living in it, and my family ran a newspaper delivery business, and

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we were all involved. From age ten I worked seven day a week, starting at age ten, and that continued until I moved out at 17. (laughs).

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: Now I only work six days a week.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs) relaxing- relaxing now, right? (laughs)

Karen: Yes. (laughs) Uh, memories with- of my early childhood?

Jennifer Souder: Uh, uh, yes. Well, music...

Karen: Music.

Jennifer Souder: ... and- and sort of your where music got started for you? How you got started in music?

Karen: Okay. This- I think this is an interesting story. Um, I remember very clearly my older sister Snookie, the original Snookie, ...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... came home with a recorder of, we called flutophones back then, the white plastic flutophone, and I was intrigued. And she showed me how to hold it, and I very clearly remember at five years old playing Twinkle Little Star on the recorder, so I had an interest in music at a very early age. Fast forward to elementary school, we were all allowed to play instruments, my family, even though we were economically very challenged, they somehow managed to eek out private lessons and instruments for my older brothers and sisters. But when they all got to middle school, they all quit, and so when it was my turn, my parents didn't want to spend the money.

Karen: I played French horn in elementary school for three years. When I got to South Orange Middle school, they had a policy, and I'll never forget this. So, I practiced diligently. I remember having this little book my mother had to sign. I was relegated to the basement for practicing the French horn uh, fourth, fifth and sixth grade. When I got to middle school, they had- it was a- a wealthy school actually. My elementary school was not, it was blue collar. South Orange Junior

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High was actually quite affluent, and they had a policy that you either had to rent and /or own an instrument and they would provide the lessons, or take private lessons, and they would give you an instrument.

Karen: Well, after my parents , wasted money on three older siblings, they said no more, and nobody knew that I was going to end up the musician in the family. I'm the only musician in my family out of seven siblings, and so my career was delayed. I didn't play in middle. I did not play an instrument in high school.

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: I was not in the band. I was only in the choruses, so I've always felt pretty certain that I may be the only high school band director that did not play in high school band. I did not touch an instrument again until I was 19, ...

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: ... out of high school. I had dabbled a little bit with the flute. One of the guys delivering newspapers had a flute that he let me borrow, and I picked it up and I remember learning the solo from Color My World by ear and the John Barleycorn Must Die by Traffic.

Jennifer Souder: [inaudible 00:04:12]

Karen: I learned the flute solo to Freedom Rider by playing the vinyl record and playing along. Then, I had to give that flute back and I didn't get my own flute until I was 19 and I went at it like gang busters. By- at that point, I was already out of the house, I had moved out of my parents. I was working full time, and I remember quitting a job and moving into a \$85 a month room in East Orange um, a block away from Rahsaan Rold Kirk, and practicing the flute for eight hours a day...

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: ... so that I could catch up, so I was a very, very late bloomer.

Jennifer Souder: Wow, that's good.

Karen: So, that's my early memories of music. It's a lot more (laughs)

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Jennifer Souder: I actually played the French horn too at the same that you did.

Karen: Really?

Jennifer Souder: Yes, and um, the- and it's interesting because the stories of how people got access to instruments and the timing, so it's amazing that you started that age, and this became such a big part of your life.

Karen: Yeah.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: Well, I knew I had to work hard to catch up. It wasn't until I was married and divorced and at age 24 entered Montclair State as a music education major. But I practiced a lot, and I decided... I was actually attending Newark Community School of the Arts with Gabe Nevola and playing the violin actually, and that he was such a great music teacher that I decided I wanted to be a music teacher. So, I enrolled at Montclair State and began my training. It took me seven years to get my degree because I was a single parent...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... and I had to work, but I went full time and I never looked back -took a lot of extra credits that I really didn't need, but they were all music, so while I was in college, I was studying violin, voice, flute, and saxophone, and along the way learned how to play, you know, I had to learn the brass family and the percussion family. It was a pretty comprehensive program at Montclair State, so **I really did- well severely**, by the time I graduated, I was very prepared to teach anything in my certification. I don't even know if they have this anymore, but it says, "K through 12 comprehensive music education."

Jennifer Souder: Oh, interesting.

Karen: **So a lot of the- technically** able to teach every level in- in the 31 years I've been teaching. I have taught every level of music from kindergarten through high school.

Jennifer Souder: Oh, and when did you come to Asbury Park?

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Karen: I moved to Asbury Park in 2003. It was kind of on a whim. It had nothing to do with music. It- it was post 9-11. I was living on Bloomfield Avenue, and we had a very short honeymoon of after 9-11 of everyone like, "No, no, you take that parking space. No, go ahead."

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: Yeah, everyone was really nice to each other. That- that didn't last that long, and Essex- I had lived in Essex County my entire life, ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... and it was time for a change, and I was very frustrated because I... uh, summers I would have a lot of time and no money, and I couldn't afford to go... I love the beach, and my family did take trips down to the beach, so they were usually day trips, so it was hours in the car, packing, you know, I would spend more time getting to and from the beach than actually on the beach. So, one day I just out of the blue I said, "I'm moving.", and I got out a map and I- I was working in Elizabeth and I said, "Where can I live that I can afford and still get to work without traveling more than 45 minutes?" So- and I said, "Asbury Park, I can afford." That was 2003.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: Asbury Park was still pretty, you know, struggling quite a bit, ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... and I found a beautiful apartment three blocks from the beach. I lived across... I lived at 400 Asbury Avenue, third floor, across from the Metropolitan Hotel, and you didn't even have to have a beach badge. Beach badges were \$20. There were days when I would go to the beach and be the only one there. So, I moved here in 2003, not for the music scene or anything, and I was still commuting to Elizabeth...

Jennifer Souder: Oh.

Karen: ... and that proved to be too much. It was like white knuckle driving...

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Jennifer Souder: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Karen: ... on the turnpike. By the time I got to work, I was like prying my fingers...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... off the steering wheel, and then sitting on the parkway, and I'm like, "Wait a minute. Is this 3:00 o'clock to 5:00 o'clock thing, that's- that was supposed to be beach time. (laughs)

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: Not parkway time, so I- it was a... This is a crazy story; it has to do with the library. I'm looking in the paper for months, you know, from the end of the school year to is now May. I've made this decision, cause once I make a decision to do something, I usually... it may take me a while to do, but I will do it, and I said, "I have to move. I have to find a music job in Asbury Park." I called the board of ed, nothing was open, so every Sunday I was on a mission to get that Star Ledger. In fact, that's how I found my apartment was uh, through- actually through the Asbury Park Press, but I had to have the Star Ledger because it had more comprehensive listings and you couldn't find the Star Ledger anywhere. It was the- this is an Asbury Park Press town. So, I would drive around looking for vending machines, trying to find a Sunday paper.

Karen: Well, one Sunday, it must have been late June or maybe, yeah, it was probably June, I couldn't get a paper, and this was before everything was really online, jobs and everything. I said, "I know there's a job in this week's paper." And I couldn't find a paper and I went into the library on a Tuesday, and I said, "Can I see your classified listings, 2003." And sure enough, as God as my witness, there was a music teacher listing for Bradley School.

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: For a music teacher in Asbury Park, and I'm like, "I can't believe this, like I cannot believe this."

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

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Karen: And I went to the interview. I still remember the interview. Sharon Harris was there, and I came in like gang busters. I had all the instruments I play, ...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... well at least one from each family.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: I had a saxophone, a trumpet, a violin, a keyboard, ...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... and I play all these instruments, I teach all these instruments, and Sharon Harris asked me , "Do you know Lift Every Voice and Sing?" Do I know Lift Every Voice and Sing?

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: And I sat there and I sang all three verses from memory, which...

Jennifer Souder: Oh my god. Nice.

Karen: ... as we know, not everybody can do that.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah. (laughs)

Karen: And I knew- and I think that landed me the job. She's like, we want her, so I ended up at the Bradley School. Um, as soon as I was here, I met Mr. Reynoso, who was the principal of the high school. I met him out playing gigs. I was playing at Harry's Roadhouse. I was, you know, on the saxophone, going to as many jam sessions as I could. His music teacher quit in November or something happened with that. I um, ironically, answered a listing for basketball coach. A lot of people don't know this about me, but I coached basketball for four years in Elizabeth and my first season we were undefeated.

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

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Karen: We went 13 and 0...

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: ... and it's all because of Earth, Wind, and Fire. I made the kids run around the gym to Earth, Wind, and Fire.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Charles Trott: (laughs)

Karen: And- and we did yoga and we ran around the gym to Magic Mind, and I don't know, it worked.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: We won every game. So, I saw this listing for basketball coach for the high school assistant and I said, "Oh, I could use the extra money and I love basketball. I have some..." So I go to the interview for that and he's read- reading my resume, and he's got no band director and there's no music teacher. Fall of 2003, there was no high school band director, he left. And I'm at the Bradley school and he's reading my resume, and I'm like, he goes, "I don't need you for basketball." He said, "I need a band director." And he had already seen me play. He goes, "I'm going to get you." I said, "No, I don't- I don't want to move, I just relocated. I just moved." Well, it turned out at that time, I was on a cart, I was going room to room, I liked it, but I didn't like it. I didn't like doing little kid songs.

Jennifer Souder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Karen: At the time, I was composing and writing, and I'm like, "I don't want to go home singing "Here We Go Loop-De-Loo." I'm trying to write music, you know, so eventually by... And this is like fun. This is so strange actually. It's almost the same timing, about two thirds through the school year in my first year 2003-4, I put in for the transfer. I knew they had no band director. What happened was um, Mr. Reynoso was good friends with Jon Bon Jovi. Jon Bon Jovi purchased an interest in the Philadelphia Soul indoor football team. They wanted a high school band, who had no band director, to take the kids to Philadelphia on February sixth, something like that, 2004. February fourth maybe. The middle school band

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teacher wasn't available to do it or wasn't able to do it. He said, "Can you take the kids on this trip? I need a band director." I knew nothing about marching band. I had never been in a marching band. One semester at college and it was kind of a joke. It wasn't the real deal. I never wanted to be a marching band director. I was a single mom. Every time I saw an ad for this, I can't do that, I don't know enough about it. Music belongs in a controlled environment standing still or- and not running around the field.

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: So, low and behold, they needed me to take the kids to Philadelphia, and so I was asked to come in. I was running back and forth to- from Bradley to the high school on my lunch to get the kids ready. The kids knew more about it than me. They were highly motivated. Aikeem Taylor, Ms. Taylor's son was in the band at the time, and I had a great bunch of kids that really wanted to play. The movie Drumline had just come out, so they were all hyped up. They wanted to be that, so they needed me and I needed them. I was on the field with them. We didn't even have uniforms yet. This was before Bruce Springsteen donated this huge amount of money to buy the kids uniforms. We had band sweat suits. We went to Philadelphia with bandanas and gray sweat suits.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: It was 25 kids in the band. We did a Bon Jovi song that I arranged. We did a Sam and Dave song because Sam... One of them is passed, I'm sorry. I don't remember which of Sam and Dave.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah, it's perfectly fine.

Karen: So what- but one of them was going to be there and they were there, and I brought the kids down and we performed in front of 40,000 people. I was terrified, but we got on that field and we- and we did these three songs in front of this huge crowd.

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: And I kind of got bit by the marching band bug. I saw these kids really like this, this is kind of cool, so I was already doing both. It's kind of like that reverse of how my career started at 2003 elementary, then I asked to go to high school.

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Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: Re- Fast forward 14 years, now I'm in high school. Now I get placed in elementary without any notice. Decide that it, in my sixties now, I want to be surrounded by little kids that come running up to me hugging me everyday. So, the exact opposite happened when I asked, okay, now I want to... because at the high school going back to 2003, the- the band room had been totally neglected. The instruments were all broken. I have video of it actually. It was so bad that I made a video of what the band room looked like. A pile of music stands broken. A room- the uniform closet was broken instruments. The band director's office, you opened, it was just full of stuff everywhere. It was a mess. And I said, "I'm going to fix this, but no one's going to believe what it looked like before, so I'm document it."

Jennifer Souder: Makes sense. (laughs)

Karen: And no one's actually seen that video.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: It's sitting on a shelf somewhere, but I did slowly but surely get all the instruments fixed. I took them all home over the summer. I took the entire inventory to my house and at the time I was living on the third floor.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: And brought all the instruments home, cleaned them, matched up the cases with the serial numbers. This clarinet had 20034 this clarinet- the bottom was a different number. It was a disaster. The cases were old. I had to tape up the cases with black duct tape, and I put the serial numbers of all the instrument, it's still like that today. You can go look and see all those instruments. There was no inventory. I was just handed a mess, here you go. And I remember one day I said, "God, what- why did you put me here? What... "

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

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Karen: And I actually stopped going to church. I'm not ashamed of it. I- Asbury Park High School became my church because I was working six days a week, and even God rests on Sunday. So I said I'm going to rest on Sunday.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: And I said, "God, why did you put me here?" And the voice I heard said, "I'm giving you some soil and I'm giving you some seeds and I want you to make something grow." And that became my mission to bring back that program. And so, Dorian Parreott, that poor man. I called him every day. (laughs)

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: I- Well, when I first came down here, and I don't know if you- how much of this you want to follow the track or if you want me to just talk and edit.

Jennifer Souder: Oh no, you're fine. It's great.

Karen: So, I first moved down here and I became the high school band director, which I really didn't know that much about doing. I read as much as I could and got the new uniforms and it- it was great. We had a really great time, but it was a struggle. I was at school a lot of nights 'til 11:00 o'clock when the custodians would leave. Ms. Schwarz, go home. What are you doing?

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: Don't you have a life? Nope.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: (laughs) This is my life right now. I- I can, you know there's not enough hours in the day to do this. Marching band goes 'til 5:00 6:00 o'clock, and I've got to- I've got to fix this mess. It's- I can't leave this to somewhere else, and when I leave, I don't want anyone else to walk into what I walked into. Cataloging all the music, alphabetizing it, ...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

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Karen: ... playing it in full. It was just a mess, and I pretty much fixed it as much as I could. Restored- turned the offices that were for... There was two rooms in there that are now technology rooms I believe. They were offices for the band director and the assistant band director. I pulled everything out of there and turned them into practice studios for the kids, so there was a guitar room, there was a, you know, a room where a kid could go and practice by themselves, there was a drum room, and then there was the uniform closet, which there hadn't been... There were no uniforms when I got there. The last band director was really Dorian Parreott.

Jennifer Souder: Oh.

Karen: He left in 1990, and then it was a revolving door. There- I was the first teacher in, what is that, 15 years to get tenured as a band director.

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: Everyone else was there a couple years, gone, couple years, gone. I'm not sure-Mr. Harrel . He may have been there long enough to be tenured, but nobody stayed. I heard one teacher stayed a morning.

Jennifer Souder: Oh my god.

Karen: She came in one morning (laughs) and left.

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: So, I was tasked with this , and this is the interesting connection. Carol Myers was our media person, and she was very close to Dorian Parreott, and we became very friendly. Her sister, Janet Derisi was in the office, and uh, I said, "Carol, Where's the jazz? I'm looking... " Every Friday, I would buy the Asbury Park Press just for the Jersey Alive section. To- where's the music- where's the jazz around. I can't find any, you know, I moved down here for the beach, but I need some jazz, so...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

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Karen: ... she said you need to call Dorian Parreott. I said, "Okay.", and she gave me his number, ...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... and it- he led me to uh, if we want to talk about places I've played...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... was uh, El Lobo

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... the art gallery. That's where I kind of found my musical community.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: There was a jam session there. I think it was every week. I used to run a jam session. I ran a jam session in Montclair for ten years at Park Street Studio, and I had the likes of Reggie Workman, who played with John Coltrane and Duke Ellington, people coming through my studio. And so, when I moved down here, I continued the jam session, um, but it got to be too much. I had to let it go. Traveling up there on a Wednesday night, you know, and getting home at 1:00 in the morning, and then teaching little kids, so I had to let it go. Um, but...

Jennifer Souder: I have technical um, question if- is...

Karen: Sure.

Jennifer Souder: ... is that going to- to... Should I have her not- probably not.

Melissa Keeling: I don't know if it'll pick it up or not.

Jennifer Souder: Oh.

Karen: I'm not sure.

Jennifer Souder: Excuse me, excuse me camera. Morgan.

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Karen: Yeah?

Jennifer Souder: I need you to close your bedroom... Where are you?

Karen: I like the flute playing in the background.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs) [inaudible 00:20:35] Yeah, if you close the door it'll be a more faint flute in the background. Okay?

Karen: I want to uh, I might forget to tell this story, but while my family was still doing the music instrument thing where ... I was in fourth grade. My oldest sister was in sixth grade, and she was a really good trumpet player. And my other sister was a really good clarinet player. They were awesome. They had private lessons. They were really good. I still remember songs they played. And I wanted to play the flute, and the band teacher knew that I had a really good ear. He knew my sister; he was her teacher. She was playing trumpet and he wanted me on French horn. French horn is actually the most difficult, especially for an elementary school kid. It's the most difficult wind instrument, and he put me, I wanted to play the flute, but he put me on the French horn. And I fell in love with the French horn. I'm like, "Okay." I didn't care, I wanted to play. But that only lasted three years, and then I never touched it again...

Jennifer Souder: Oh, gotcha.

Karen: ... until I, you know, became a band director and needed to learn how to play it to some degree.

Jennifer Souder: It's interesting that you mention El Lobo because uh, the um, this weekend- last weekend I went to the museum, to the Asbury Museum again and was talking to J- is it John?

Charles Trott: John.

Jennifer Souder: John. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then, um, ...

Karen: John Brown?

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Jennifer Souder: Yes. And we were- I was saying that several times in our interviews um, it's come up as just like, as you describe, like a community place that people really like a special...

Karen: It was really an awesome vibe because it wasn't bar or restaurant, it served music. That's all it served was music.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: Yeah, you could get tea, maybe there was carrot cake, but nobody talked. It wasn't a place where you came and talked over the music. It was specifically for music, and it was the uh, classic setup where you had a featured group, and then a jam session.

Yvonne Clayton: Where was it? [crosstalk 00:22:24]

Karen: Right on Bangs Avenue I think.

Charles Trott: Right, it was um, what was it?

Karen: What is it now? Is it one of the pet- is that the pet store?

Charles Trott: I don't know where it is, but um, ...

Karen: Right in that block.

Charles Trott: ... it- it was a gallery most days, and then they featured music.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah, and it was ten years, right? You said it was 19... you uh, I was just thinking it was open ten years...

Charles Trott: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jennifer Souder: ... because I know I just missed it I think when I moved here, but I- people- the sign was there for years.

Charles Trott: Okay.

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Jennifer Souder: The sign was still up after the case and after it closed.

Charles Trott: Yeah, it's- it's- it's- it was on Bangs...

Jennifer Souder: [00:22:58]

Charles Trott: ... Emory and Grand.

Karen: Okay.

Jennifer Souder: Right.

Charles Trott: You know, [crosstalk 00:23:03]

Karen: Okay.

Jennifer Souder: On the west side- on the north side of the street.

Yvonne Clayton: Oh, I did see the sign, okay.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: Yeah, and that'd be- that was the place where I met a lot of musicians that, you know, I, you know, became friends with and it was a place to go hear jazz and to go play. And there- I was even able to bring in my own group and be the featured artist there. I have some of this on video tape. Um, so they would give you a time slot, and you would, you know, get to play your music, and then at the end people were welcome to come up and- and um, and play. There was a conga player John Froelich.

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: I believe he's still around. He was also an artist, and I- I have a wonderful drawing that he did of me playing the saxophone that I someday hope to use as an album cover or something, but uh, ...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

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Karen: ... he would sit there and draw the artists. I believe he's still around, but I'm not 100% sure. Unfortunately, I had lost- lost touch with him. Um, and another artist that was there a lot was Poncho Donato , rest in peace. Poncho passed uh, two years ago on my birthday.

Jennifer Souder: Oh.

Karen: I had um, we played together at the fundraiser for Gladstone...

Charles Trott: Yeah.

Karen: ... March of 2017.

Charles Trott: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: It was March 24th, 2017, and all these musicians came together. It was a wonderful event. People would be able to be featured and, you know, it was 300 or more people in the room, ...

Jennifer Souder: That's a lot of people, yeah.

Karen: ... and Poncho was there. We reconnected after not seeing each other for a while. Um, I volunteered to um, well not completely volunteer, but I offered my musical services to Ms. Taylor for her son, Aikeem, the band- the band student that made the whole Bon Jovi thing happen 'cause he was awesome. He was like my assistant band director. I probably learned as much from him as he learned from me.

Jennifer Souder: That's good.

Karen: And he's come, you know, gone on to do some great things himself. But um, he was having- she was having a graduation party for him getting his master's degree.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: And I told her, I said, "I can bring you a jazz trio for a very small amount of money..."

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- Jennifer Souder: Hm.
- Karen: ... to play at Aikeem's party. And if Aikeem wants to play with us, he can, and Poncho was supposed to play on that date and I talked to him on April 23rd, confirming the gig, ...
- Charles Trott: Hm.
- Karen: ... and then on April 24th, my 60th birthday, I get a message saying that he had gone on to the Big M an in the Sky, so rest in peace, Poncho. But he was a regular at the whole local scene and was very dedicated to getting young kids to play. I ended up with one of his drum sets. I bought his drum set from his beautiful widow who is now Debbie Donato who passed on as well.
- Charles Trott: Oh, she did?
- Karen: Debbie passed on a few months ago, yeah, and um, she was battling cancer... she used to say everyone thought she was going to go before Poncho, but... So, I inherited his, CD collection, his Buddy Rich video collection, and a ton of drumsticks, and I give those to the kids Obama School to play and we're keeping Poncho alive through music, and I- I speak about him as much as I can because I believe in that. I believe in, well I believe more in honoring people while they're here. I don't think we do that enough. We wait till they pass and then we all run out and buy their records in- instead of supporting them when they were alive and they could really use it more. So that's partly why I also share your interest in Dee Holland...
- Jennifer Souder: Hm, yeah.
- Karen: ... who is still very much alive at 95.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: Um, but anyway, so that really was the meeting place for me to meet all these other musicians.
- Jennifer Souder: Oh, that's great to- that's so interesting. Um, because one thing that we're interested is sort of uh, uh, you know, Springwood Avenue Music and then music

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over time. And then, after there were no more venues to plan on Springwood Avenue, where were things happening? And different places have been talked about over the- these interviews, but that one, we have not talked a lot... it's come up, but we haven't really focused on it, and uh, it does sound like it was a really special place. Um, so let's talk about D and how you met Delores Holland and...

Karen: This is so- such a beautiful story too. I was lucky enough to meet Danny Walsh, who is from the area, he lives in New York City now. Danny Walsh is a saxophone phenomenon, and he went to Asbury Park High School. I don't... Does anybody here know the name? Because it's...

Jennifer Souder: I don't know.

Karen: ... kind of sad.

Charles Trott: [inaudible 00:27:46]

Karen: Danny Walsh was very well known as a teenager for blowing the roof off of the jam sessions at Jason's. He's still performing quite a bit in New York City. He played... there was a spot on Thursdays and Saturdays that he plays at regularly. He was recently featured at the Long Branch Jazz Festival. He's a great... I don't throw the word great around. I don't think I'm great. I think I'm very good at ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... at playing saxophone. Other people have called me great; I don't accept it. Um, he's truly a great horn player, and I had gotten his name through the, you know, we met each other out on the scene or in some jams, and I needed a piano- I had a gig. Woohoo, not too many of those around, but I had a gig.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: And I needed a piano player and I'm going through my list and I called Danny. Danny, I need a keyboard player. Let's... Call Dee Holland. And I called Dee Holland. I don't know anything about her, but if Danny said she's good, she's good, so I make an appointment with her, she's going to come over to my house on the third floor of 400 Asbury Avenue. She shows up in her car. She's still driving. This was- had to be 2000, sometime between 2003 and 2008 'cause

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that's as long as I lived there, so I want to say around 2005-6. I could probably find dates somewhere. Um, I look out my window and there's this 80-year-old woman walking up the sidewalk, carrying a keyboard and a stand.

Jennifer Souder: Wow. (laughs)

Karen: She's- I'm like, "Oh my God, is she even going to be able to come up my stairs?" She's carrying her equipment to the rehearsal at my house, and I'm like, "Wow!" And that's how we met, and we started playing around together. She had a wicked left hand...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... bass.

Jennifer Souder: [crosstalk 00:29:31]

Karen: Wicked, and to this day, I mean, when she plays a Christmas carol, it's... Her biggest influence, she's always told me was Art Tatum. And I'm telling you, this woman has forgotten more about jazz than most people ever know, and that's uh, just a little expression because she hasn't forgotten anything when it comes to playing the piano. And so, we started doing little restaurants together that only had room and money for two people. We played at Market in the Middle several times.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: We played at Giamano's, rest in peace Rhonda. Um, we played there, we played at Synaxis, which was the Greek restaurant, which is now...

Jennifer Souder: Taka, right?

Karen: Taka. So, we played there as a duo or- or as a trio, uh, there was a few times we played there. I believe the last time uh, we played... We also played a few churches when they were doing events for Black History Month in honor of Dee.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

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Karen: Um, so those were events that included Dorian and other local musicians. I believe the last professional place Dee Holland played was with me...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: ... at restaurant Plan B...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... on New Year's Eve.

Jennifer Souder: Oh, wow.

Karen: We did a little duo thing there. We were paid very nicely. The tail end of when musicians actually could get \$300 for playing on New Year's Eve, and that was that was considered low by industry standards.

Jennifer Souder: Hm. A...

Karen: If you were a musician, you didn't leave your house for under \$400 on New Year's Eve, you just didn't. It was considered disrespect. Now, you're happy to get a \$50 to \$100 gig somewhere because everybody is playing for free. All everyone wants to play, and everyone's playing for free, so restaurants are like why should we pay these old people when we can get these young people to come and play for nothing or for...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... \$50 on a Saturday night and the bus boy is going home with \$75. (laughs)

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: So, that's where...

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: ... where did all the gigs go?

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Jennifer Souder: And around what year was that do you think that we've played...

Karen: I can actually find that...

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: ... because I keep everything.

Jennifer Souder: [inaudible 00:31:49] (laughs)

Karen: I- even though I moved- I've moved twice since I lived on Asbury Avenue, but I do um, have a big house now just for all my stuff. And uh, I have no money, but I have a really nice house.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: (laughs) That's where all the money goes, but I have the fliers.

Jennifer Souder: Ah.

Karen: I have it all.

Jennifer Souder: Great.

Karen: I have every picture, every, you know, which is good because at the time I didn't know I was going to start becoming a historian, which I'm not-I haven't followed through on that all the way yet-but I'm trying! But I do- I do believe in keeping set lists, the date, because as a jazz historian as a- a student. I'm on a little bit of a leave right now from Rutgers. When you go to look up things, you need a date, you need -Where did this take place? Who was on the gig? And you even need to verify 'cause sometimes things are wrong. Even an album cover can be wrong.

Charles Trott: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jennifer Souder: That's true.

Karen: They can list a musician as on that album that is not on that album.

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Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: And that's the first thing we're taught in Jazz Historiography class is to question everything, get three sources. Just cause it says it's somewhere doesn't mean it's true, so, you know, that was an important part, but uh, ...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: Yeah, I don't know the exact year of that, but that was New Year's Eve. It was um, quite a bit... We had a... Whatever year we had that huge storm for a whole week.

Jennifer Souder: Oh, okay.

Karen: You couldn't go anywhere.

Jennifer Souder: That was probably 2010, is that too late? Or 11?

Karen: It could be? It could be.

Jennifer Souder: Because uh, I- I remember that storm very clearly.

Karen: It's 2019, it could be, where things were shut down for a whole week.

Jennifer Souder: Yes.

Karen: I couldn't get off my street.

Jennifer Souder: The road- the roads, you just couldn't go down the roads.

Karen: You know what? That does sound right because I lived... I didn't buy the house I live in now until 2009, ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... so yeah, I think you're right on that.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

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- Karen: We had a storm the day after Christmas...
- Jennifer Souder: Yeah, and it just...
- Karen: ... and we were snowed in- I was literally snowed in my street. I live on a dirt road, and I- and it was New Year's- coming on New Year's Eve and I was calling the town like I need to be able to leave. I have a gig. I have a performance, and I can't get off my street.
- Jennifer Souder: That's [inaudible 00:33:57].
- Karen: So that sounds about right, 2010, and I think that's the last time Dee played out professionally 'cause she had a minor stroke. She had two of those. She still plays, but she wasn't as much able to commit to performances.
- Jennifer Souder: Which makes sense.
- Karen: So, I'm very honored to actually have been probably the last person to work with her on a professional level because she is just an amazing person, amazing musician. Her musical memory, she doesn't really read music. I mean, she can read a chord chart, but if she knows a song, she knows it, and if you say, "Well, can we do that in E flat instead of G?"
- Jennifer Souder: Sure.
- Karen: She just moves it and um, she's just phenomenal, and her knowledge, her mastery of the... She's not just playing chords, she's really playing some very advanced harmonies that only a trained musician would really understand, you know, that all, you know, these fingers are doing serious work. I'm well, for- I'm a music teacher and I play the piano, so yeah, you want a G minor chord, you're going to need to get a...
- Jennifer Souder: [inaudible 00:35:08].
- Karen: ... yeah, I'll throw in some sharp fives and, you know, this and that, but she's doing all this note by note, like every beat is a different nuance to the chord.
- Jennifer Souder: Wow.

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Karen: She's not just blocking out a chord, I mean, she... Her piano playing just by itself, she doesn't need a band. All the music that you need to hear as a jazz listener is all in her two hands. Anything added to that is extra. She's not really accompanying...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: You know, there are some people that specialize in accompanying, like Norman Simmons whose another great artist whose in this area now, and I don't want to go off on too much of a tangent, but he is in Lakewood, and he is 88, and he is still on the scene. And he is now, you know, a Jersey Shore musician 'cause I think Lakewood is considered the Jersey shore area. He played with Carmen McCray. I always wanted to get the two of them in a room together and she moved to Texas recently, so I don't think that's going to happen, but he's known for accompanying singers; Carmen McRae, Betty Carter, ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... Joe Williams-he was with all those arts for many, many years, so it's a different style of playing. But when Dee plays the piano, all the inner voicings, all the advanced harmony is in her playing, and I saw this uh, recently when she was attending the senior center.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: She was going to the senior center. Her daughter was bringing her over there and she would get picked up, and we did a Christmas party. She was already there, so she says, "Let me come and we'll do some Christmas songs." And even when she played Silent Night it was like what is she playing? (laughs)

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: It's Silent Night, it's just three chords, and she would take any song and make it sound like, you know, a jazz great playing treatment...

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: ... of that- of that song.

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- Karen: Do you have any recordings that...
- Karen: I do. I do have um... Well, her daughter has a recording that you want to talk to the security guard at the middle school. Wayne Huley- Husley, Wayne... I'll get the name. [NOTE: the name is Hughley]
- Jennifer Souder: All right.
- Karen: He had- he has a recording of D. There's not very... That's just kind of a sad thing about the story. She's not really recorded. I have video of us playing together. Her, and every time I would go... One of my missions in life became , to keep D playing because she wasn't out playing.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: And to go to her house and encourage her to play to the point where I even donated a piano. She had her own setup, but it became very complicated with the speaker wires and the organ setup, and it got to be a little too much for her at her advanced age, so- and it was up in the bedroom and the, you know, a lot of times she was down on the first floor...
- Jennifer Souder: Hm.
- Karen: ... 'cause that's where the day's activities were and that's why they moved to a one level ranch...
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative), uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: ... in- in San Antonio, Texas. But I would actually bring- I brought a '88 key-portable keyboard that was mine and just put it in her living room so that if, you know, she was developing Alzheimer's and becoming forgetful, and the music was the one thing that would keep her interested in just being alive, having a purpose. So- but I would call Paulette and say, "Is Dee playing?" No, she hasn't been playing uh, Dee hasn't been playing, so it was kind of on me to come over, to... Come on, do you wanna, and I have to tell you every time I ever asked her that she want to play, she said yes.
- Jennifer Souder: Hm.

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- Karen: She always, okay, let's go play, and so we would go, we'd get her at the piano, and then the phones would come out. So, there's a lot of footage of her. I do have some footage...
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: ... I have showed you something on my phone.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: They did a- a Black History event at the Berkeley Carteret, all this stuff can be found. We can go back and find the years on this where they did an event and they did... It was right when they first started making the- Where Music Lives, that whole thing.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: That- when that whole uh, slogan came about- Where Music Lives. And Glen Bertnik wrote the song and my high school kids sang background on it, um, and they had a whole segment on D Holland. And, you know, her daughter was there- happy that she was finally getting some of the recognition that she deserved. And after the event, we came through the lobby, and the piano was sitting there in the lobby, and I'm- I'm very naughty like that. I love to play, and if I see a piano (laughs)....
- Jennifer Souder: (laughs)
- Karen: .. I just love to play. I'll sit there for hours. I play some piano too. Not like Dee Holland, but I said, "Dee, let's go over.", and we just went over and I busted out my flute. (laughs)
- Jennifer Souder: (laughs)
- Karen: She started playing and, of course, Paulette and I got the phones out and um, we recorded that, so every time we could record. So there was some footage of Dee even recently since she's moved to Texas.
- Jennifer Souder: Okay.

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Karen: See, the first thing, it's a beautiful picture I have Paulette sent me. They moved to Texas, and before the- the moving van was even there with all their belongings, Paulette bought her a baby grand.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah, that's what she said.

Karen: So, there's this big empty room with no furniture in it and a beautiful baby grand, and the love that daughter and mother have for each other is just so inspiring. I mean, I- Paulette pretty much sacrificed... She's only, well she's around my age, ...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: ... maybe 60 now, but I knew her through our 50s, and she spent every waking moment caring for her mother. No movies, no restaurant, no nothing.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: It was mom, mom, mom, and it just- just beautiful to see that kind of care and love. And that's, you know, her whole life has been devoted to making her comfortable. They got tired of the noisy activity in the summer on Summerfield Avenue, Summerfield and Prospect, its pretty lively...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: ... to say the least. And then, cold and being trapped in the house and not really feeling safe to walk the dog and stuff like that, so they said she was going to move and she did so.

Karen: Yeah.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs) That's great. Um, the effort...

Karen: So anyway, what else?

Jennifer Souder: Um, so, well we covered a lot of these things uh... Is there anyone else- any other questions that anyone's coming to mind that we may not have covered?

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- Karen: Well, you had asked about um, other musicians um, that I performed... When-when I talked to- I actually talked to Dorian today because I'm not actually from Asbury Park.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: I'm a relative newcomer. Now it's about, what, 15 years. I'm going on my 16-year anniversary will be next month. I moved here in March of uh, 2003, so I wasn't really aware of Springwood until many years later and there's a lot being written about it, but as far as musicians that I've been able to connect with from that that time period, it's pretty much limited, as far as I know, to Dorian Parreott, who was extremely important in this whole story, uh, Jimmy Givens, his drummer, who will actually be performing this Saturday at the Asbury Park Music Foundation space.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: They're doing an event. Clifford Johnson, ...
- Jennifer Souder: Yes.
- Karen: ... who was a very good friend of Dolores's and was honored at that same event last year, so I had the chance to perform with him at a few events. Those are more the events at the churches where they were honoring day and recognizing local musicians from the Springwood area. Tommy Labella probably...
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: ... caught the tail end of the Springwood scene. Um, and Desi Norman.
- Jennifer Souder: (laughs)
- Karen: Yeah.
- Karen: Desi, who was very good friends with Dolores also. If you wanted to speak to someone about Dolores, he would be a good...
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative), uh-huh (affirmative)

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Karen: ... person to speak to as well because he spent a lot of time, and it was a personal family friend...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... at the house and that kind of thing. So, that would be pretty much the extent of ...

Jennifer Souder: So knowing what you know now after years here and working um, with a lot of students in town and knowing a lot of people um, a lot of the music scene in town, what is something that you would like someone walking down Springwood Avenue today to know about the history of Springwood Avenue?

Karen: Well, as I said, I'm not- I'm not one that knows as much...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... about the history, although I- that one building, I talked to Dorian, what used to be the Turf Club is still there.

Karen: Yeah

Karen: And I- I fantasize to this day that I would get the winning lottery ticket and I would buy that place and turn it... That's always been a dream of mine to because there's so few places to play, to just have my own place and say, "Okay, here's, you know, Lee's Lounge or something."

Jennifer Souder: Oh. (laughs)

Karen: But uh, you know, their history has already been recorded. I'm more interested in creating the next generation by me being that music teacher planted in that neighborhood. I now have the opportunity to foster an interest in that music, to teach those kids about...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

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Karen: ... that- that history, that rich culture that's right outside their doorstep, and encourage them to play. And that's kind of what I'm doing now, getting involved with the Asbury's Got Talent event...

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: ... and uh, that whole performing area there, you know.

Jennifer Souder: Right.

Karen: So, I mean, as far as the history, tell them to read, Madonna Carter Jackson's books. She's written several really good books on that. And also Charles Horner and his wife

Jennifer Souder: Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: Pam, they've done extensive work on that, so everything that needs to be said about that, I think they've pretty- covered pretty uh, pretty vigorously, and I'm thankful for all the work they did 'cause there's a lot of things I didn't know. I was very happy to see that Jack McDuff used to play right here on Springwood Avenue.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah, hm.

Karen: I wish there were more details about that, and that's part of my own research. I was very happy to find out that the Asbury Park Press finally put all uh, all the newspapers on- online now, so you can really look that kind of stuff up, but as a student at Rutgers, Jazz History...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... Research Program, I get a little frustrated when I hear people say, "Oh, Ella Fitzgerald sang there." Oh, really? When?

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative)

Karen: Prove it.

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Karen: There's no documentation.

Karen: What's that?

Karen: There's no documentation regularly.

Karen: There's not documentation around some of that stuff, so it's not necessarily true or false, but that's why it's so important to preserve...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... and, you know, people put out fliers all the time, they don't put the year. Put the year.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah, a lot of things don't have the year.

Karen: Put the year. Put the date, you know, so that someone looking it up later can find it and...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... look it up, so..

Karen: Did you- did you ever play at Jason's?

Karen: I did not. I came- I- I may have when I first moved down here because I don't really remember. I think it closed shortly after I moved down here. I did have some connection with Mel Hood, but that was more through places around Asbury Park.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: But, Jason's is not really a part of my experience here. What I was able to do since there were so few. I mean, when Chico's opened, I was thrilled, ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... and I was in there...

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Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... all the time, jam sessions. Tommy LaBella, I have to say uh, in addition to being a great horn player was also just a really nice person. It also made me feel- he always made me feel like I was his equal on the band stand, even though I didn't feel like I was quite his equal as a horn player. I thought he was a little- a few notches above me, but he never made me feel like that. He was great in that respect, but uh, the Asbury Park Jazz Festival, I don't... It's undergone a lot of changes.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: And it's something I'd like to see brought back. Um, I had my student ensembles play there several times. I was featured there several times. One of my favorite pictures of me playing was at the uh... Oops, that's the wrong one. Is it in this one? Yeah, this little magazine called Zest.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: I don't know if you know about Zest, ...

Karen: Yeah.

Karen: ... but they did a little writeup on me, uh, 2010, June 2010 uh, I played at the jazz festival and I kind of like that picture. (laughs)

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: Thank you Vanessa for this nice writeup.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: And there's also me playing in Cuba 2017.

Charles Trott: Hm.

Karen: But uh...

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Charles Trott: You were at [inaudible 00:48:16].

Karen: What's that?

Charles Trott: You were at [inaudible 00:48:16]. That picture, this one here, that's [inaudible 00:48:20].

Karen: Uh, no.

Charles Trott: No?

Karen: That is um, uh, I- it- I can't remember the name.

Charles Trott: It's a street.

Karen: Oh, the street name.

Charles Trott: Law street. No, it's not the street. The eerie you were in, that picture, comes from [inaudible 00:48:37].

Karen: Okay, yeah, but that's not the name of the venue.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: That might be the name- that is the name of the street I believe.

Charles Trott: But, you, no- no...

Jennifer Souder: Maybe.

Charles Trott: ... that's the whole venue is that.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Charles Trott: It's the- they have- they have art studio.

Jennifer Souder: The actor.

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Charles Trott: They have all this murals and sculptures all around. They have an eatery there. And of course [inaudible 00:48:57].

Karen: We were only there for four days, so it was a whirlwind tour.

Charles Trott: Was there- was there- was there a little uh, stage area that had like a canopy over it that you played at?

Karen: Um, we were out in the- in the open air with the trees.

Charles Trott: It's out in the eerie, it's outside.

Karen: That's probably it, that sounds about right then. Like I said, we got whisked from venue to venue, so all- all this detail of each...

Jennifer Souder: [inaudible 00:49:20].

Karen: ... venue is not 100% clear in my mind, but Asbury Park ran several jazz festivals.

Jennifer Souder: Yes.

Karen: Some were under the direction of Chico Rouse, some were under the direction of Ruth Anne Harrison.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: That picture is from when Ruth Anne ran the jazz festival. Then, under the direction of the city, under Jackie, Jackie Pappas

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: She had me there with Norman Simmons and Gary Mazzaroppi and Lou Petto and we played a couple years ago. And that was the last year there was a jazz festival.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative), yeah.

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Karen: So, that's something that we maybe need to bring back, and a lot of people were actually upset that it moved from Sunset Park to the middle of town, because when it was at Sunset Park. It was more user friendly. Lawn chairs, you know, you could have the tents and the vendors and the African clothing and jewelry and all that, so that was a very important part of the Asbury jazz scene that's not here right now.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: And it's something to do with money, but I'm not good at... that's my worst subject, money.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: I sort of know how to make it. I know how to spend it.

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: That' about it.

Jennifer Souder: [inaudible 00:50:32]

Karen: That's where my expertise lies. Um, but yeah.

Jennifer Souder: Is there anything else that you would like to share that you feel like you haven't, and if you something comes to mind later, we're not going anywhere, so...

Karen: That's okay.

Jennifer Souder: ... and it's not like your last chance.

Karen: Um, well I did want to mention about Dee Holland and the whole connection with Dee and Dorian and the high school. There was a time early in my tenure at Asbury Park High School where Dorian had some funding for jazz in our school's month, which is April, and he asked me could he bring in a performing group and also work with my students. And so, we did that. I could look that up. It had to be somewhere between... Aikeem Taylor was still at the school, so it would've been around 2006, and so he had brought in his own group and I also

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prepared some of my students, and then we played together. And I- I also had Dee come in and play at that event.

Jennifer Souder: Hm. Hm.

Karen: She came and played, so Dee did perform at Asbury Park High School, and um, as far as my students at the high school, I involve them as much as I could. We played every year at the teen arts festival.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: At Brookdale Community College, they would do a festival. Some days would have concert band and dance and what not, so I always prepared the students for jazz band performances, and we grew from a very small group to the kids getting more and more advanced, so. And I also had them featured at the jazz festivals on several occasions, and the Blues and Jazz Festival, so that was something I, you know, feel proud of that I was able to do with the kids. I didn't know at first if they were going to like jazz, but after my first year there, January, February, Mar- after marching band was done and Christmas tree lighting services were done, we would spend the next three months playing. And they really liked it a lot, and it was a great opportunity to bring them out into the community. There was one year when the band played, probably the peak of my tenure there when I was dragging them out all over town (laughs)...

Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

Karen: and we played, including the 12 football games, we played 30 times...

Jennifer Souder: Wow.

Karen: ... in one school year. I- 'cause I do keep everything and write it down. It's like every month, every couple of weeks, we were going somewhere and playing in front of a store or playing for Cinco De Mayo or playing for the Negro Business Women's Luncheon. Wherever I could highlight the students, I would do that, and so now my hope is to do that with the younger kids because I'm finding out that little kids can play music at a much higher level than people realize if you just get the time with them and get the right situation where you're not dealing with behavior issues and you can just focus on a couple of kids, they- they can play. Fifth graders can jam, they can play, so now that that's my new assignment,

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um, to try to redirect my energies to not just teaching them, but to putting them out into the community where people can see that this is time and money...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... well invested in the little kids 'cause if we can get them early, we can keep them off the streets and give them other options...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative), right.

Karen: ... going into middle school, so.

Jennifer Souder: That's great. Well you've done- you've done a lot in this town.

Karen: Yeah.

Jennifer Souder: I love hearing the connections because it's a lot of the interviews that we've had, it's been different um, generation sort of, and the one part that I think I mention maybe the other night when I saw you that the we really have wanted to have youth involved, you know, and the connections between the different generations. That's a big goal of the project, so we've had some opportunity to work with Kula Youth and a few other things um, now that we're um, hopefully working with the district, so then we'll be seeing more of you. (laughs)

Karen: Okay.

Jennifer Souder: Um, but those type... because that's sort of a- that connection that when you hear all these different um, stories and being able to connect the history to what's happening today. Um, and that just music is a- is a part of this community all the way through. It's not something that happened way back when or it's some- something that's all connected, so.

Karen: Right.

Karen: Well, that- that is very close to my heart too because sometimes even though I feel a little frustrated as a musician, it's very hard to manage a dual teaching and performing career. Very few have successfully done it. Most music teachers that I've known in my 31 years of teaching, they no longer play. They haven't played professionally since they took up teaching. The professional part of it kind of

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goes by the wayside. Um, I know one, Jerry Romano, the band director at Monmouth Regional. He's one of the few that has been able to keep a performing career alive because it just takes up so much of your time.

Karen: Uh-huh (affirmative), yeah.

Karen: But I do get a lot of satisfaction out of seeing little kids play, so when- and, you know, and that's part of the whole Little Kids Rock thing, simplifying it that, you know, you make it easier and you use chord diagrams, and you know, find that common denominator of, you know, just a couple of chords with my students that a performance of Turn the Beat Around for our Hispanic heritage fest- thing at Obama school.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: That's a song I did with my high school band. Right when I got back from Cuba we did Afro Blue, which I performed in Cuba and Turned the Beat Around because that was my Cuba connection. I'm doing this with high school kids, and then, two years later, I'm find... I can do this with elementary school kids too, and I- I had kids playing violin and recorder and ukuleles and drum set and bass and piano.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: They can do it. They can do it, and if we put more energy into summer programs, ...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... after school programs...

Jennifer Souder: Hm.

Karen: ... to get kids playing music. It's not all sports. We have to stop making...

Karen: Right.

Karen: They have to have other choices besides sport, you know, sports, ...

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Jennifer Souder: Agreed.

Karen: ... cheerleading, or being in a gang. And music is the perfect solution to that, and if we get them young and we get them excited young, we can make sure we have a middle school and a high school band program that are staying alive. That it's up to us to sync energy into those kids and utilize that facility at Springwood uh, outdoor jam sessions. I've got all the bucket drums now. I'm decorating all my bucket drums for Black History Month. They're all covered in Kente cloth, and we're having a big program Thursday.

Jennifer Souder: Yeah.

Karen: Please come to our program at 1:00 o'clock if you want to see the kids perform.

Karen: 1:00 o'clock this Thursday. We're doing a 9:00 o'clock for the littler kids. 1:00 o'clock is the older kids, and Officer Barry Ellenwood is helping me out with the African drumming.

Jennifer Souder: At- at Obama?

Karen: At Obama school. The- the 1:00 o'clock performance is probably the better one to come to, although if you want to see first graders doing sign language to Bob Marley's Three Little Birds.

Jennifer Souder: Awe.

Charles Trott: [inaudible 00:57:35]

Karen: It's so adorable. Um, but the big emphasis for me on... When- when someone says Black History to me, I think Africa and jazz, and I don't think we pay enough attention to that connection. There's obviously a lot more to the story, but that's really important to me that kids see themselves as part of African culture. That that's where it all started, so.

Yvonne Clayton: So Karen, would you be willing to share with us some of your documentation that we could put on the website, and we would give you credit for whatever information you give?

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- Karen: Sure, you mean like the fliers or anything that- or the video...
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative), uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: Absolutely. It's all meant to be shared. When I am doing my research, I need people to share...
- Jennifer Souder: Okay.
- Karen: ... what they've done, so anything that I have, you know, regarding Dee or even dates or things about the high school band. Unfortunately, one of the problems that we don't get enough uh, video footage, and I brought this up at a meeting actually with the superintendant that all the sporting events are always taped, but the music events are not. Every concert at every school...
- Jennifer Souder: It should be, yeah.
- Karen: ... there should be someone there who's- who's not just a parent who's...
- Jennifer Souder: Right, right, right.
- Karen: ... zooming in on their kid.
- Jennifer Souder: Right.
- Karen: I can't work with that. I need someone who's there 100% to document these great things that these kids are doing, so they can see not just pictures, but the video.
- Yvonne Clayton: Well- well, why don't you let us know because APTV would really love to do... They're looking to do different kinds of video that we can show to the community, so that would be an excellent opportunity.
- Karen: My- and I'm all for that, and APTV has been at some things. My only thing is that with, and I think they do great work, but as the teacher, I want the video. I want the raw footage. If you're going to come into my school and video my kids, I want you to hand me a copy...

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- Karen: Okay.
- Karen: ... so I can- so I can use it because one of the national standards of...
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: ... teachers is critique.
- Karen: Critique.
- Karen: Critique, critique, critique. How do... The football team looks at footage of their game. They've got eight DVD players to- to give all the coaches so they can study the game so they can win the next game. I want to win the next concert. I want my kids to see how they perform and see how they did and see what they can do better, and that should really be considered a priority that the- that even if everybody can't attend the performances 'cause your performance going on at all these different school that they be well documented.
- Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Karen: This- you've got phenomenal music teachers in all your schools, and I put- at the elementary level, all three of us are doing different, but amazing things with these kids, and if we want the kids to feel recognized, what better way than to put them on the YouTube channel and show and say, "Look. Look what I did. It was really great. It was great enough for someone to put on TV." So, that's another way to foster interest and keep this music alive and keep these kids interested and performing. Give them places to perform and document it.
- Karen: [01:00:45]
- Jennifer Souder: Sounds good. Anything else? (laughs) Thank you so much for taking so much time with us.
- Karen: Thank you for listening to me go on and on...
- Jennifer Souder: (laughs)

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Karen: ... about all the things I love, which is music and kids and, you know, connecting... That is the title of my thesis, Jazz at the Jersey Shore; Past, Present, and Future, and the kids are the future, so we have to make sure there is a future...

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Karen: ... for them in music.

Jennifer Souder: Uh-huh (affirmative). Absolutely.

Yvonne Clayton: Thank you Karen.

Karen: You're welcome.

Jennifer Souder: Thank you.

Karen: Thank you.

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