Penn South Archive Project
Witness: Albert Machlin
Interviewers: Walter Naegle, Rena Zager
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Walter: So thank you for welcoming us into your home. And we're here to talk about the history of Penn South, that project. And so could you introduce yourself?

Al: My name is Albert Machlin and I'm 94 years old.

Walter: Okay.

Al: March 30th. And . . . I've lived here from the beginning. '62. Moved in 1962.

Walter: Mm hmm.

Al: My wife and I moved with a little girl. My daughter was two years old.

Walter: Mm hmm.

Al: And we lived here together until about 12 years ago. We had an automobile accident. My wife didn't survive. So I'm here, and my kids grew up, of course. And they got married. My daughter lives in 7B, has two grand — two sons. Yeah. Like 30 and 35. I have a son in Building Five where the office is. And he married a young woman from India. She's a . . . she's a physician. She's a . . . psychiatrist. And

Rena: One sec. I think you're rubbing. I'm hearing you rub. Maybe what you should do . . . I don't know if you want . . . Okay, that's better. Go ahead. Sorry.

Al: I have another son that lives in Building Five. You have a double building on eighth Avenue?

Walter: Mm hmm.

Al: And his partner is living together about 30 years, comes from Switzerland. She's a musician. Professional. Plays like four instruments. Composer. And some reason they don't want to get married. But they've been together for a long time.

Walter: Mm hmm.

Al: But they're happy. That's good.

Walter: So do you feel

Al: I have my children around me. Well, I'm very happy. I'm very lucky.

Walter: Yeah. That's great. A lot of people don't have that now.

Al: And so I think and I'm a . . . I . . . when I lived on . . . I was born on the Lower East Side, East 4th Street. 162 East 4th Street. Between 1st and A. And . . . I got married at 29 to my wife, Suze . . . Sue Winter. She came . . . Her parents came from Poland. They went to Berlin, and she was born. She and a sister were born there. And then when Hitler came around, her father was smart enough to get out of here, and she was about five and her sister was eight. And so I married her in 50 . . . 55. And so let's see.

Walter: Well, do you remember how you . . . how you first heard about Penn South?

Al: My mother. I just . . told

Walter: But we weren't recording then.

Al: Oh, I'm sorry. My mother was a seamstress, worked for a factory where she belonged to the ILGWU. They had a newspaper. My wife was pregnant with the second child. We were looking around for a larger apartment. And my mother said, Albert, why don't you try the new development on . . . that they're building? I went there. We got . . . We got the apartment. And 7B, 14B, I think of it.

Walter: And how long did you have to wait before you . . . ?

Al: Not very long. I mentioned that the rental situation was very favorable for renters.

Walter: Now, do you know . . . do you know why you . . . Why your mother didn't move to Penn South?

Al: Well what happened is where they lived, they had their own co-op buildings were torn down. And there was a co-op just like this one from . . . I forgot it was from Avenue A to 1st Avenue 6th Street . . . I forget what the lowest street was. They lived on 4th and they were put in an apartment temporarily while it was being built. And then they they got an apartment, a two bedroom apartment.

Walter: Mm hmm. Do you remember what . . . what you thought when you first saw your apartment in Penn South?

Al: Yeah. I thought it was a very nice apartment. Brand new.

Walter: Uh huh.

Al: I was lucky to have it.

Walter: And did you . . . I don't remember at that . . . I wasn't here at that time. Did you have to . . . uh . . . Did you have to buy appliances? Did they come with appliances in the apartment already?

Al: No, no. We had to buy the appliances.

Walter: Okay.

Al: And . . . it was a bare apartment and, you know.

Walter: Mm hmm. And did you have a . . . how did it compare with where you were living before?

Al: In the village?

Walter: Yeah. Just the general . . . The general atmosphere. The number of people you were . . . I assume you weren't in a large building in the . . . in the village.

Al: Well it was a very small apartment, one bedroom, small kitchen, a living room, bedroom, very small. Had an elevator, fifth floor. And we came here, it was much larger, you know, kitchen was larger. This room, well, the apartment we moved in was a much larger living room. Every . . . everything is better.

Walter: Better light?

Al: Absolutely.

Walter: Yeah. And what was the . . . were they still doing construction here when you moved in?

Al: I don't think so. I think they . . . as far as I remember, I think they completed the construction.

Walter: But the grounds . . . the grounds were still pretty rough.

Al: They didn't . . . they didn't have the trees and all that. That was . . . nothing down there.

Walter: Uh huh. Did you . . . um . . . did you come to the . . . the ceremony when President Kennedy was here?

Al: Yes. I saw President Kennedy, David . . . had a union . . .

Walter and Rena: Dubinsky.

Al: Dubinksy, Rockefeller was here.

Walter: Uh huh.

Al: I think Eleanor Roosevelt was here.

Walter: She was here, yeah.

Al: And the mayor was . . . uh . . . He became governor. What's his name again?

Walter: Well, I thought—

Al: Hugh Carey.

Walter: Carey? Oh, was he the mayor then?

Al: Yes. Carey was there.

Walter: Oh. I thought Wagner. Okay. Interesting. So, you were . . . You came to the ceremony with your wife?

Al: Yeah.

Walter: Nice.

Al: It was held where the garage is.

Walter: Oh, okay. Yeah. I've always wondered about that.

Al: They put a stand up.

Walter: It's a little hard to tell with the photographs.

Al: They put a stand up. And we were watching it.

Walter: Uh huh. Did you get . . . get it . . . get very close to the president at all?

Al: Yeah. I was . . . I was pretty close.

Walter: Nice. Nice. So how was it adjusting to life in a big building in a new neighborhood? Did you . . . were you familiar with this neighborhood before you moved in?

Al: Uh . . . no. I wasn't. I was . . . I . . . I was living in Greenwich Village, and I thought it was a big deal to live in the Village. You know, because it was . . you know, artistic and all that. And then I moved here. It was commercial. A lot of Greek people. The Greek people moved into the co-op. They gave them apartments. And there was a lot of Greek restaurants and dance places here across the street. So when I was a bachelor, I used to come here with my friends to the . . . to the place and, uh, but . . . but eventually, Chelsea had became the more desirable than the Village. Yeah, a lot of people moved up here.

Walter: Yeah, it took some time, but eventually. Sure. Were you . . . Did you get to know some of the Greek people who had . . .

Al: Yeah, they were . . . they were living in this building. Yeah, yeah.

Walter: Uh huh.

Al: Yeah. We were friendly with some of the families.

Walter: Uh huh. Do you remember some of the names?

Al: Yeah. There's one family still here. Uh . . . Keglian is one of them. Keglian. And they have cousins in . . . you know, there's cousins in another building. There's . . . a number of relatives here.

Walter: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Al: And then I knew others, but I didn't know their second names.

Walter: Were you here , , , Well, you must have been here, I guess, when the . . . the original . . . the Greek church on 24th Street burned . . . burned in the . . . I think in the late sixties.

Al: I don't remember.

Walter: Oh you don't? Okay. Because the church there now is . . . is quite small in comparison. But I've seen—

Al: The one on 26th?

Walter: 24th.

Al: Oh I didn't know that had burned.

Walter: Yeah. Well, I think it was in the same location because I've seen some postcards with the old structure on it and I read a bit about the fire and somebody else I know who lives in the co-op remembers seeing the fire. He's . . . he's . . . he's about 92 . . . 93 himself. So you moved over to this side of the building about five years after you moved in.

Al: My . . . I had another child in '67, my . . . my other son. And that's when we moved here needed another . . . more space.

Walter: Uh huh, uh huh. What was the process like at that time?

Al: It was pretty straightforward. You know, these . . . these apartments are very difficult to get now, but it was easy because we did the housing thing was not so tight yet.

Walter: Mh hm. So you just had to put a request in to the management office?

Al: Yeah.

Walter: Okay. Gotcha. Do you remember . . .

Al: And also the . . . the costs were still low, I could afford it. Now, my daughter, who has an apartment on the other side, she was living in Nyack, her and her family. I think they paid like over $100,000 and I paid less than $20,000 for a two bedroom.

Walter: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. So did you . . . [Fire truck in the distance] were you involved? you or your wife involved in any of the groups here at the Co-op or . . .

Al: Yeah. My wife was involved more than I was. She . . . she was a journalist. So they had—

Rena: Oh wait one second. I'm sorry. There's a fire truck.

Al: Okay.

Walter: Well, okay. I can start the questioning. I can ask the question again.

Al: Okay?

Rena: Yeah. Wait one second. You still hear it?

Walter: I hear it.

Rena: Sirens.

Rena:. One second. Yeah. Stop for one second. [sirens continue]

Walter: Life in the big city.

Rena: I'm . . . I'm also wondering, do you want to hold the mic? Because it might be better. It keeps rubbing against your . . . Yeah, that might be better.

Trudy: Put it in your pocket maybe or something or other.

Rena: I don't know if that's going to work. I don't know.

Walter: So is this all right?

Rena: Yeah.

Walter: Okay.

Rena: Go ahead.

Al: What was the question again?

Walter: Yeah, you're asking me? [all laugh]

Al: Oh, yeah. My wife was a writer. She wrote poetry. I . . . we published several—two books that she wrote. And Not commercial. It was . . . her books. My daughter is an artist, so she made all the artwork and we printed up the books and we gave it to a lot of friends.

Rena: But didn't you say she was a journalist?

Al: Yeah, but she was a poet, too . . . Poet. Yeah, that . . . she worked . . . She worked on newspapers and magazines for companies. But she . . . but her main interest was poetry.

Walter: But her heart , yeah . . . her heart was in . . . heart was in poetry.

Al: And so anyway she . . . There was a newspaper. Some guy was running a newspaper and every week she would write a column or something for the newspaper. So that's one thing she did. Another thing she did, we had a recycling group. She was very active in that.

Walter: I think I have

Al: Sue Machlin. [papers rustling] She's the one on top.

Walter: Uh huh.

Rena: Yeah.

Al: Yeah. Sue Machlin.

Walter: Yeah. And that . . . was that recycling group part of Penn South or was it part of the Hudson Guild?

Al: Yes. Yes. And there was also a group called "Get the Lead Out." You know, lead coming out of cars.

Walter: Sure.

Al: So the . . . a co-op group also. And that . . . and then they also . . . there was a food fair like the one we have now. She was active in that also. And then she . . . she also volunteered for lunches at the church. So she did a lot.

Walter: A lot of volunteering.

Al: Yeah. A lot.

Walter: Yeah.

Al: So . . . and then . . . and . . . and what I did,

Walter: You traveled.

Al: I . . . I was in a Yoga for Seniors class.

Walter: Oh, all right.

AL: I was in the Spanish for Seniors. I had . . . I had learned Spanish by working and living in Peru and Dominican Republic. So I wanted to keep it up. So I joined . . . there was a Spanish for Seniors. So I think it ran for a couple of years. I was in that club. And then . . . uh . . . so that was two things. There's a music club. My whole family plays instruments, including me.

Walter: I was going to ask you about this photograph.

Al: That . . . yeah that . . That's when they were younger. That's . . . that's me. Because I play the concertina and the guitar. And now,

the last few years, I've been playing the tin whistle British tunes and Scottish.

Walter: Sure.

Al: And my . . . my daughter plays . . . She played the piano, but her instrument is the the fiddle . . . the violin . . . the fiddle. And . . . and . . . and my grandchildren study trumpet. One of them doesn't play anymore. But the other one, the younger one at 30, he's a professional musician. He plays the . . . the fiddle, the . . . the . . . the . . . the guitar. I think he learned the trumpet and he . . . he was active in the music club. You know, one of the people that emceed. And . . . and he also gave concerts there. And he ran . . . he ran concerts at one of the clubs in the village and people would come on Friday night and he would invite folk singers to . . . three or four folk singers.

Walter: Okay.

Al: But we have . . . I'm sorry, I don't have a picture because in front of the music— I used to go to most of those music club events, but two or three times my daughter who played the fiddle, my son, who is a musician, played the guitar, and I played the tin whistle.

Walter: Nice.

Al: We gave concerts in front of the group two or three . . . three times maybe. So I was looking for a photo like this when we were older because of what happened two years ago or something like that.

Walter: Could you . . . uh . . . could you hold that up for the camera?

Al: Sure.

Walter: Yeah. Nice. So that was probably . . . that was taken in 7B or 7A?

Al: This one was probably in 7B.

Walter: Uh huh.

Al: Yeah. Because like I . . . I'm not sure because this is I'm trying to think which I think it's my grandson, it's not my son.

Walter: Ah, okay.

Al: And then my, one of my sons who lives in Five studied the cello, but he dropped it. He played the cello and the piano and he sort of

dropped it and he's . . . working for an insurance company as a manager. The other son lives in Five. He's a musician also. You know, he's married to the Swiss woman. And he played the flute and he . . . and the and the guitar also. And he and I were both taking lessons from a guy on 22nd Street, flamenco guitar. I was very interested in flamenco guitar, but he was better than me because every time I meet the guy, he's in the building. He says "your son was great." He doesn't say I was great. So.

Walter: Were you . . . Were you also a photographer? Did you take these pictures? Were you also a photographer?

Al: No, my wife. Oh, my wife was a photographer. I forgot.

Walter: 'Cause there's . . . .

Al: She was the photographer. I got a bunch of cameras that she left. Mm. This is my . . . My older sister who died. And my mother also passed away. And this is a neighbor of ours.

Walter: You want to turn that around to the camera so we can . . .

Al: Yeah.

Walter: See who you're talking about. And this was over . . . Well, this looks like it was right on 26th Street.

Al: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Walter: Near the co-op.

Al: The one on the left . . . on the right is my mother. She came from Poland. And the one . . . and got me into the co-op and the one on the . . . on the left is my sister who came here with my mother when she was five because I was telling these ladies that my mother was abandoned by her . . . by her husband, and then she met my father and he got a divorce. So.

Rena: Yeah.

Walter: Nice. So what if you . . . if somebody . . .

Al: Wait. I didn't finish?

Walter: Oh, I'm sorry.

Al: So the music. So I was in yoga, I was in Spanish, I was in music. And then my daughter, who's an artist in building Eight, there was a woman that got a live model every Wednesday at 6:00 o'clock. And I

took a lot of art courses. I'm not an artist, but I took a lot of art . . . watercolor and everything like that. So my daughter and I used to go there on Wednesday nights and sketch the model.

Rena: But this is when you . . . after you retired like like 20 years ago.

Al: Two years ago.

Rena: Oh, two years ago?

Al: Yeah, two years ago. For a couple of years.

Rena: So you enjoyed everything after you retired? You got involved—

Al: No. Even when I was . . . Yeah, mostly when I retired.

Walter: Yeah, you were pretty busy and you were traveling when you were working.

Al: Yeah, yeah.

Walter: Yeah.

Al: So . . . and so . . . so I did that too.

Rena: And these were all proper—

Al: I think I made a list.

Rena: Oh, yeah. Gimme . . . gimme this one.

Rena: This is it. Right?

Al: No. Give me the other one.

Rena: Okay.

Walter: These programs at . . .

Al: Can I have that one too?

Rena: Yeah, I'm using it as a pass, but go ahead.

Walter: These were all programs at the senior center?

Al: Yeah, the yoga, the Spanish, the music is for everybody, the art is for . . . I think everybody. And then . . . Oh, I got a medical alert through the senior center, you know the thing.

Walter: Uh huh.

Al: I got a special . . . you know, a little lower cost and then I . . . I shop . . . we . . . we shop at all the shops here.

Walter: Sure.

Al: I've take physical therapy in the . . . the one in the co-op. I use all of the shopping, the cleaner, everything.

Walter: Uh huh.

Al: And the . . .

Walter: Did you study art with Frank? I can't remember his last name. Your art classes. Were they with Frank?

Al: No, there was a woman that ran it.

Walter: Oh, okay.

Al: And . . . and I . . . and I've taken courses I have taken classes. My daughter went to a school where she studied art in college. But I've taken courses at the Art Students League, NYU, you know, watercolor, sketching . . . I like that. I like . . . I like watercolor.

Walter: So do you . . . have you ever thought about what your life might have been like if you hadn't moved to Penn South?

Al: Yeah, yeah. I would probably live maybe on the Upper Upper West Side, I don't know. I remember looking around for an apartment before my mother told me about this place, and I remember we looked at a place which was like a basement apartment, you know, you walked out. And we were paying in the Village . . . like 80 bucks for a one bedroom. And they were charging like 250 and at the time I wasn't making as much, you know.

Walter: Sure.

Al: So it was a lot of money for me at that time, but I would have been living at one of those places uptown.

Walter: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Did you, were you a member of any church or synagogue or anything in the neighborhood?

Al: Yeah. There's a . . there's a synagogue on East 20th called the Brotherhood Synagogue.

Walter: Oh.

Al: And . . . and my wife was involved heavily and I was too. I was once the chairman of the building committee, because I'm an engineer and I got them . . . they had asbestos. I got them . . . I got 'em one of my professors to clean up to do that. He was a he was . . . I was very active in the Civil Engineering Society. I was president of the American Society of Civil Engineers for the Metropolitan Area. And . . . and the guy . . . and one year this guy, who used to be a colonel in the Army, became president. And he quit, you know, retired. And he went to Columbia University, where they paid his rent forever, you know, even after he left. And so I got him to be the engineer for the synagogue. And he used his students, his PhD students who were experienced people, to . . . because the synagogue used to be a stopping place for freedom . . . free slaves.

Walter: This is the synagogue—

Al: In the basement.

Walter: This is the synagogue on Gramercy Park.

Al: 20th between 3rd and 4th. It's the 20th between . . .

Walter: Yeah, between

Al: 2nd and Irving Place.

Walter: It's over there right near Gramercy Park.

Al: Yes, it's right . . . right across.

Walter: 'Cause I know it because I . . . well, I work over in the neighborhood, but it used to be a Quaker meeting house.

Al: That's right.

Walter: Yeah. That's how . . .

Al: What was

Walter: a little big about the history.

Al: It's interesting because they . . . we were living in the Village and they were sharing a . . . a . . . a building with a Presbyterian minister. I forgot what street it was. And the Presbyterian minister . . . our rabbi fought in the Israeli war when he was younger. He was a soldier. Anyway . . . So we used to go there on our . . . you know, we didn't go there every week. We went holidays. And occasionally on Fridays. The Presbyterian minister died, and they got a new minister, and he was anti-Semitic. So what happened was the Jews we had a bunch of real estate people. So the Jews all left that synagogue and they were guests at different synagogues around the Village. But they discovered the. . . . that this Quaker building was not being used. And the Quakers liked the idea that it would be used for a religious purpose. So they arranged a mortgage and we moved there. We've been there ever since.

Walter: Yeah, it's a beautiful building. I walked by there on my way to work.

Al: I used to help them as an engineer, but then younger people picked it up.

Walter: Mm hmm.

Al: And also, my . . . my son who played the cello on Cole Nija, one night . . . one of the nights He played the Cole Nija for the community. I was very proud of him. But he's not too religious now.

[Al and Walter chuckle]

Walter: He's the musician.

Al: Yeah, he's a . . . No. He's a . . . he is a manager of an insurance company. [Al coughs] So I go there . . . now, I hardly go there. I use Zoom now, you know, I When the Yahrzeit for my wife came up, I told them I couldn't go, but they gave me the date and the link and I watched it on zoom.

Walter: Uh huh, yeah . . . yeah.

Rena: That's nice.

Walter: Yeah. We're living in tough times..

Al: Right.

Walter: So if you . . .

Al: But when I was a kid and hang on, let me tell you, on East 4th Street, my family went to a synagogue on 4th Street and Avenue B,

where the women . . . . very orthodox. Women upstairs. Men downstairs.

Walter: Yeah.

Al: And . . . and that's the way it used to be. You know, it still is.

Rena: It still is.

Walter: Yeah, yeah. Well I think even the Quakers did that at one time.

Al: Oh yeah. My daughter went to a quake—she went to high school the Quaker school on 15th.

Walter: Oh, well that's where I work.

Al: Oh, you do? Anyway, I liked it because when I went to the graduation, they didn't have a priest or anything. You just got up and said what you felt like.

Walter: Yeah.

Al: Well, you know, it was interesting. I went . . . I went to Stuyvesant across the street and my . . . my son went there, too. And my other son went to Bronx High School of Science

Walter: Ah, so this is the daughter that lives over in 7B?

Al: Yeah. Yeah.

Walter: Oh I'll have to mention it to her when I see her.

Al: Well they were living here my . . . my son, one son and my daughter were original, too.

Walter: Yeah . . . but yeah, sure.

Al: They were young, they were kids.

Walter: Birthright . . . birthright cooperators.

Al: Yeah. Yeah.

Walter: So what would you what would you talk to . . . if you heard that somebody was going to move into the co-op, a young family or a

couple, What would you say to them about life here? What it was like or what . . .what . . . how . . .

Al: You know what I find ... well maybe . . . I'm not sure if it's the virus or . . . people are more friendly. They say, how are you doing? Have a good night. Used to be a little colder, you know, so . . . and I'm . . . it's probably a combination of the virus and the closeness in the co-op. You know, people see each other in the . . . in the elevator all the time. So you . . . you say "hello," you know, you talk to them.

Walter: Sure.

Al: And . . . so I like the friendliness of it. And . . . and also the maintenance in the co-op is terrific When I call somebody . . . even happened on the weekend, my sink was . . . was clogged, guy came on a Saturday or Sunday, spent an hour or so and he cleaned the drain. That's happened with everything I've done with them. Very . . . The maintenance is very good. So the maintenance is good, the atmosphere is good and it's a nice place to live. The grounds are nice. You can sit around, you know.

Rena: Didn't you mention there was a guy that planted everything that was connected—

Al: There was the guy from . . . the guy from I think from Romania.

Rena: Oh, tell him. Tell him.

Al: I mentioned . . . I mentioned one of the pictures from the balcony shows nothing, no vegetation.

Rena: Right.

Al: That guy put all the trees and everything in there.

Walter: Interesting. Do you know whether he went back to Romania when he was . . .

Al: No, I have no idea.

Walter: Yeah, interesting.

Rena: What about asking . . . do you mind if I?

Walter: No. more about what the neighborhood was like in Chelsea. And, it was also belly dancing, right.

Al: Well, lots of Greek people. Yeah.

Walter: He mentioned that. Yeah.

Rena: But just in general I guess.

Walter: Yeah. Was it . . .

Al: Oh the other thing that happened which I like because the union the . . . the . . . the . . . was most . . . people working there were mostly Italian, Jewish and Irish. So the original people living here were from there.

Walter: Yeah.

Al: But as the years went on, we didn't have any African-Americans or Asians or anything. as the years went on an African-Am—

Walter: Well you had one.

[Walter and Rena chuckle]

Walter: Bayard.

Al: This guy next to me. Henry. Very nice, young, Black guy. And there's two people in the corner. Uh . . . younger people, singles no kids, you know . . . uh . . . Asians. I see a lot of Asians and some Indians. My . . . my daughter's teacher was an Indian from the school here. Uh . . . what else?

Walter: So it's becoming a little more diverse.

Al: It changed. It changed. Oh, yeah, absolutely. That's the other thing I should mentioned.

Walter: Yeah, that's a good—

Al: Very diverse. Very important.

Walter: Were you . . . did you ever have any involvement with the labor movement at all? Were you ever part of a union, yourself?

Al: My . . . my sister, in the '30s, you know, things were bad, you know, economically. My sister, who came with my mother from Poland, she belonged to the Communist Party and that's where she met her husband. He was a communist, too, because they thought that was the answer, you know, economically. Of course, when Stalin made a treaty with Hitler, a lot of them left.

Walter: Yeah.

Al: Yeah. And so . . . but then she her husband died and she married a guy with a business. And I don't think she was a communist anymore. She . . . she lived the . . . life like . . . you know, noncommunist life, I would say. But it's very liberal. We were all union people. Everybody in my family were union, with the union, you know, My father, my . . . My father came from a family of 25. And they were all trained as very good tailors. And when they came here, my father couldn't get a job as a tailor; so he . . . he . . . he got into driving taxis. And we were on relief. We were very poor in the depression. So he was making like $7 a week. And so he was a union . . . certainly a union person. And the union, you know, the unions was . . . was strong with . . . with minorities at that time . . . as you might recall. I don't know. And . . . uh . . . so we . . . and we came from Lower East Side, mostly labor.

Walter: Sure.

Al: You know, mostly people like that.

Walter: Uh huh. Uh huh. So when your wife was working, was she mainly a freelancer or did she have a was she working for a particular magazine or was she part of a union? Was she part of the . . .

Al: I think she was part of the union at the first job she had. She worked for Montgomery . . . . Montgomery Ward. One of those. And then she got a job with the Jewish Theological Semi . . . Cemetery. Sorry

[Rena chuckles]

Walter: Seminary.

Al: Seminary up in the Bronx.

Walter: Sure.

Al: And a guy she working with introduced them to me. And that's how I got to know her. He was on . . . He was a marketer for them. And the rabbi, that she worked for, married us. So, uh, she worked for them. Then she got a job with Marymount Manhattan in the seventies. It was a Catholic college.

Walter: Sure.

Al: And she was . . . the magazine. She did all the magazines. And . . . uh . . . And then she decided to quit. My salary was going up.

Walter: Well, is there anything . . . anything else you'd like to tell us about your life here at the Co-op?

Al: Yeah, well, one thing. Let's see, when I lived in the Village and I . . . and I would tell people and they'd say, "Oh, you live in the Village" now they say, "Where do you live?" I say: I live in Chelsea. "You live in Chelsea!" . . . you know. [all chuckle] And so what happened . . . here's what happened and a good thing happened. Good things. The Village had the highest population of gay people. They . . . they had the shops. They had the . . . some of them had money. The . . . the . . . you know, what do you call it . . . selling good furniture. What do you? What do you call it?

Rena: Antiques?

Al: What? Antique . . . they had antique shops. They moved here and this became that area. And so they sort of made the area grown and better.

Rena: But what was it like before? Before gay men came in and . . . like in the '60s . . .

Al: I didn't notice a difference. I just know it happened.

Rena: Right.

Walter: But it was perhaps, maybe, shall we say, more working class? In the fifties and sixties, at the time that you moved in.

Al: Yes. Yeah. A lot of Greek families. Working class. My family was working class. The people in here were working class. And . . . uh . . . and they moved into the co-op too, you know?

Walter: Yeah.

Al: Some people that are friends of mine are there.

Walter: Yeah. And there were print shops here. There were bookbinding companies.

Al: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah . . . No, the change it was more very . . . what do you call it, more interesting.

Walter: Oh and more diverse and more kind of mixed.

Al: Mixed and interesting. The people . . . more different backgrounds of people.

Rena: Right.

Walter: Uh huh, interesting.

Al: So now I'm in the elevator and one guy is talking . . . he's a truck driver. I'm in the elevator another day and there's a woman there and they say, "What do you do?" "I write plays." [all laugh] And then there was a guy who was an actor in my building, tall, good-looking guy. What else? Yeah. All kinds. Lawyers. You know.

Rena: What about the fact . . . Can you explain what it was like . . . it was easy to get an apartment. It's not like now.

Al: No, because.

Rena: But why is that? But tell him. Tell him.

Al: Okay, because housing is very difficult to get, especially . . . especially affordable housing. That's why we got a lottery. You know, people get on a list for the lottery to get in there hoping to get in. You don't get in right away. You just get, as you know, you get on a list. I think they're starting to use the list, I believe. . . . I believe so. And . . . uh . . .

Rena: Yeah, but in the sixties—

Al: And there's no union like the ILGWU to pay for these developments that's why we don't have enough of them.

Walter: That's true. Yeah, there's been . . .

Al: And here's another interesting thing that happened. I was a bachelor living with my family and there was a co-op up in the Bronx for . . . one of the first. And . . . and my sister said let's go there, you know so they could have got into the co-op and I said hey — here is me as a young bachelor — I think this is an opportunity for me to get my own apartment. So . . . so I said, why don't you guys go there and I'll move out. I'll get . . . And my . . . my parents would never do that. So they didn't . . . they . . . they . . . they didn't take the apartment because they knew I would leave them. So the only time I left them is when I got married.

[Rena chuckles]

Rena: They knew. They kept you—

Al: But they're all . . . they're old school people from the . . . you know.

Walter: Yeah, that's the way it was.

Al: I know. Right.

Walter: You stayed at home until you got married. Yeah.

Rena: There was one other thing when we pre-interviewed, you were describe . . . we were saying that it's very affordable for you as a senior to live here.

Al: Yeah.

Rena: Versus, I think someone that lives in Florida. Where they moved somebody who's a relative of yours, how much money they're paying to live in a community in Florida.

Al: My . . . my sister is married to a guy who doesn't have a high school . . .

Rena: Wait, tell him. Yeah.

Al: My sister . . . my youngest sister is married to a young guy who came from the Lower East Side. He didn't . . . his mother died when he was young. His father had three kids, couldn't handle it, put them all in an orphanage when he was 18, they let him out and he was working for his father at a fruit and vegetables stand. So he didn't want to do that. He joined the police force in Washington. They didn't require a high school diploma. So he . . . he got hurt on a job. So he has a pension from them, joined the Marines, got a pension from them, worked in the the office of the of a Congressional Post Office, got a pension from them, got three pensions. So he's got a very good living, you know, without having a PhD. So they . . . so they saved some money and they bought a development . . . a couple . . . two bedroom thing where they had to pay $165,000 to move there and they pay $4500 a month to get food and just live there. But next to it is an assisted living for the same price if you get sick and next to that is like a nursing home. So they . . . they take care of you until you die.

Walter: Oh yeah. So it's one of those . . . What do they call them . . . sort of aging . . .

Al: That's not affordable, though.

Walter: Multi-tiered. Yeah. But you . . . you know, you never have to worry about being put out. But it's clearly more expensive than . . .

Al: Yeah, of course.

Walter: ...living here. Sure, sure. Well, I don't know. Do we have any other questions? Trudy, Anything?

Trudy: No, I think you really . . .

Rena: I think this is good. We got it.

Walter: Covered the waterfront, so to speak.

Rena: Should we do we just have to get the audio of the room tone so no one talk for . . .

Walter: We have about 30 seconds of silence.

Rena: Just sit here. Okay.

Walter: Like . . . like in a Quaker meeting.

[silence]

Al: Did you get what . . . from me what you wanted?

Trudy: Yeah, because you've talked—

Walter: I think so.