

Penn South Archive Project

Witness: Ira & Trude Glasser

Interviewer: Abby Tannenbaum, John Harris

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Abby: Okay.

John: And . . .

Abby: Okay.

John: And we're rolling.

Abby: Well, welcome. It's really good to see you both. Can you introduce yourselves?

Ira: I'm Ira Glasser.

Trude: I'm Trude Glasser.

Abby: Okay, well, great. And when did you move to Penn South?

Ira: We moved in May of 1962.

Trude: Into Building 10.

Ira: Building 10, right.

Abby: Okay. And . . .

Trude: 21st floor.

Abby: Yeah.

Ira: Yes, we had that fabulous two bedroom apartment with that 46-foot balcony that our kids could ride their tricycles on. Not then they were too . . . They could barely be in the crib then. But . . . But eventually they did. It was a great apartment. And we moved out of it to this one only because we continued to have children and there was not enough places to put them.

Abby: So now you're in 6A, and you've been here since when?

Ira: '68.

Trude: '68.

Abby: Okay. So how many children?

Trude: We have four.

Abby: Four children, okay.

Trude: Four children. And they all were raised here. And they went to the local schools and the Hudson Guild. They spent a lot of time after school there.

Abby: Okay.

Trude: And it was very much communi . . . Community. And a number of them have close friends still.

Abby: That's wonderful. Yeah, let's talk about those early days, even before you moved into Penn South. Trude, you said that you grew up in Chelsea on 15th Street.

Trude: 15th Street . . . I went to PS 41 and . . . and . . . Greenwich House down in the Village. I didn't go to the Hudson Guild, though it was a similar kind—

Abby: Sure, a settlement house.

Trude: And . . . uh . . . yup, I went to 41 and then I went to Southerland Junior High School and then I went to Performing Arts. So I stayed very close to home.

Abby: Yeah. Yeah. And you were . . . You were a Chelsea and Village kid and teenager. So did you know about Penn South before you . . . applied to—

Trude: Yes, I did. Because I had an aunt on 19th Street who lived on 19th Street, and she knew that these buildings were going up. And I also had a friend who . . . who lived on . . . in . . . on 26th Street in the old tenement. And so the neighborhood knew, I wasn't aware of it as a child, but the neighborhood knew that you could apply and neighborhood people could apply and get an apartment here.

Ira: And your mother knew, didn't she?

Trude: My mother knew, too, but she didn't want to . . .

Abby: She didn't want to move.

Ira: She was wedded to her four-story walk-up. It kept her alive, going up and down those stairs.

Abby: So . . . so you mentioned you had a friend on 26th Street. Is that someone who . . . Do you know what happened after the buildings . . . ?

Trude: Oh, well he . . . I . . . I know that I know some of what happened to the family. I know that part of the family stayed in the neighborhood, but not in the co-op. They were not . . . they did not live in these buildings, though, I knew them from the neighborhood. I knew them from school. And I know that they lived on 17th Street or 19th Street. But . . .

Abby: And was there a sense I mean, you have sort of an interesting perspective of knowing the before and . . . and then after we say whether the neighborhood was very upset about the tenements coming down?

Trude: I couldn't tell you. I don't . . . I . . . my feeling . . . my aunt was not upset. They were . . . you know, they . . . they . . . they didn't say one way or the other. They just accepted the fact. Uh . . . we knew that our movie theater was going to be gone.

Abby: Where was that?

Trude: The RKO, 23rd Street. Um . . . we had three movie theaters that we . . . were nearby, so that one was gone. But other than that, no. Not too much discussion about it.

Abby: Okay. And Ira, you also found out about Penn South separately from Trude.

Ira: Yes. Well, we were married at the time, and . . . we were living in North White Plains because she was teaching kindergarten at a school up there. And I was teaching math at Queens College. And one of us . . . there's no sense of both of us commuting, so we decided to live near where she worked, and I commuted. And . . . and my father was in the building trades. He was . . . he was a glazier. That's where our name comes from. And . . . and he . . . so he knew about the buildings going up, and we were . . . we were . . . she was pregnant with our first child, and . . . this was in late '61, I think. And . . . and we were talking about wanting to move into New York.

Trude: We were anxious to get . . . to New York.

Ira: And we did not want to raise our child in the suburbs. We thought that that was not safe. It was . . . we could not . . . we could shield them from what we needed to shield them from in the city. But we could not shield them from what . . . from the . . . from what we regarded as a stifling and . . . and . . . antiseptic and uniform demographic and culture out there. And so . . . but we didn't know how to move into the city and we were not making . . . earning a lot of money. And she was about to stop teaching because she was about to give birth and . . . and so . . . so we . . . we really had no financial means of, you know, and we . . . but we talked about it all the time. And . . . and my father, you know, sort of knew that. And . . . and one day he told us, well, you know, there's this . . . there's this middle-income, co-op building going . . . buildings going up in . . . in . . . in Chelsea. And it's being built by the . . . by the ILGWU, and and so we said, Well, that sounds good, and . . . but there was a long waiting list. And he said, Well, you may still be able to get on the waiting list. And he made some inquiry with people he knew in the unions and . . . and we got on the waiting list. And to this day I don't know if we could have gotten on the waiting list without that little push, but we got on the waiting list.

Trude: And we didn't have a choice. You know, we were just . . . whenever it came, we were willing to take.

Ira: And at some point, all of a sudden, we got this call and there was this apartment on the top floor of Building 10. And it was a two bedroom, and . . . it was just perfect. And so we . . . we arranged we . . . we . . . we went to visit it, and it was . . . visiting it was . . . it was . . . it was still being constructed. I mean, it was walking into a construction site. I remember we looked out at what became the 46 foot balcony and there was nothing there but a ledge, you know, and . . . and the . . . it was very hard to . . . you know, evaluate what the apartment would look like because it wasn't finished. And we got the plans. I still have the plans, the original plans and . . . and the layout. And we were just thrilled with it. And it was . . . it was affordable. The only thing that wasn't affordable was the . . . was the equity payment, which was, you know, very cheap for Manhattan because of the . . . of the tax issues and the . . . you know, the . . . the particular law under which this was built. But it was still \$5,000. And, you know, we at the time never had more than \$100 or \$200 in the bank at any one time. But my father was able to lend us the money for the equity payment, which surprised me because he would . . . didn't have much money either. And . . . but . . . but what I didn't understand then, as a 24 year old, is that by the time you get into your fifties and you've been employed all your life, you could scrape together \$5,000. And to us, it was . . . it was an impossible amount of money, but we . . . he was able to

lend it to us. And the arrangement was is that when we moved out, we . . . when we got it back, we would pay him back. Well, here we are. You know, he . . . he . . . he died in 2002.

Abby: Right.

Ira: And I never . . . I never got to have to pay him back the \$5,000. So we . . . so we . . . we arranged for it. I think the . . . I think the initial carrying charges were \$141 or something for the . . . and this was like a two bedroom apartment with a 46-foot balcony on the top floor, you know, five blocks from Madison Square. I mean, it was . . . it . . . it was an impossible dream. And . . . and we signed up and . . . and we were in and we moved in, in . . . well, we took title. We actually moved in in late May, but we didn't actually get here until the second week or the third week of June, because our son was born on June 3rd and he was born up in North White Plains. All the other kids were born in Manhattan, but he was . . . to his . . . He tries to hide that. He says he's from New York, but I always tell him he was born in North White Plains. And . . . and he became a jazz musician, so it was important for him to be able to say he was born in New York.

Abby: Right.

Ira: But he wasn't. And so he . . . he moved in here when he was a couple weeks old—

Abby: Wow.

Ira: —with us. And . . . and that was . . . that was the beginning. And, you know, and he was . . . he was one of the first infants in the . . . he may have been the youngest . . . of the first residents to be here. I never knew that. There were other little kids, but—

Trude: There was one other baby.

Abby: And . . . there were other families in the building, other families with children?

Trude: As a matter of fact, there was. And I can't figure out why it was, but . . . 20 . . . 21C were the Glassers 21B were the Zachermans. They had one child, a little girl, and the Zwicks were on the other side, so C was a family, and that was it. There were very few children. As a matter of fact, I asked a friend of mine who also had children that grew up at the same . . . with . . . with our kids. I thought she was an original tenant. And she said, No, her parents were tenants. And she . . . they came to visit and they looked out the window and here was a beautiful playground and not a child in it.

And they said to their parents . . . she said to her parents, you know, uh . . . there is a beautiful playground here. Why is there no children in it? And they explained that we didn't have many . . . many families. And apparently the co-op opened up . . . it opened up the list to include people with children, because it was very important that they have families here with young people. So that I thought was an interesting point.

Abby: Yeah.

Trude: I hadn't realized.

Ira: Well, that was the original, you know, that was the original conception. But the fact of the matter was . . . is that . . . the . . . the buildings built, and sponsored, and financed by the ILGWU became a housing resource for its retirees. So . . . so a great many of the original cooperators here were old people. And . . . and also, if you looked at the distribution of the . . . of the size of the apartments, I mean, I didn't realize that until after we were here and . . . and we were . . . we were looking at that. Most of the apartments were . . . were smaller. There were very few three bedrooms. There still are very few . . . they . . . they are what they are. And then there were the two bedrooms, but most of the apartments were one bedroom or . . . or . . . or efficiencies. They were . . . so . . . so . . . so the way it was built, um . . . uh . . . there wasn't that much room for . . . for families with kids, and . . . and if you had, you know, we had an infant, so the two bedroom was perfect for us. But . . . but if you . . . if, you know, if you moved in, if you had three or four children, you know, ranging in age from like 8 to 3 or something, there weren't very many apartments that could accommodate you here and there still isn't. And so. . .

Trude: And you couldn't get a just . . . you couldn't get . . . your first apartment, I don't think could have been a three bedroom apartment.

Abby: Unless you already had, perhaps, two children of different genders.

Trude: Well I think you had to have . . . you could transfer from an apartment that you had to a three bedroom. But I don't know anybody that got directly into a three bedroom.

Ira: No, of course . . . but we didn't know anybody who had that big a family at the time. They were all, you know . . . so . . . so all the three families that . . . that we knew, us and two others, were all on the same floor of Building 10. That was what . . . we . . . we didn't particularly, at the time think that was curious but thinking

back on it now, it . . . it is curious that we were all . . . we were all up there and . . . and . . . and . . . and all three of us had one infant ours was the youngest, but the other two were not much older.

Trude: No . . . was that right . . . ? . . . yeah.

Abby: Well, young children, I just want to go back one moment to talk a little bit about the affordability issue. So you got help from your father, Ira, but you knew people who didn't necessarily have that option?

Ira: Yes.

Abby: I think that's an interesting perspective.

Ira: What we had . . . one of the interesting things is that there was a lot of rhetoric when . . . when the place opened, because of . . . of the values and the politics of the people who . . . who sponsored this and built it about it being an integrated, you know, middle-class community. But the truth is, is that we didn't see anybody here in the beginning. There were no Black families. There were no, you know, . . . and I mean Bayard Ruston lived here, but that was because he had a connection with the . . . with the unions and he was . . . you know. And A. Philip Randolph lived here and people like that. But they were of a different age and different demography. Families . . . And so we had friends at the time who we thought were very much like us. It was a Black couple. They both had master's degrees in social work. So . . . so, you know, our education levels were virtually identical. Our . . . our professional jobs were identical. We were both teachers. They were both social workers. They . . . the two of them earned the same money that we earned almost to the dollar, 'cause all of those salaries were about the same level in those entry-level salaries. So when we found out about this, I called them excitedly because they lived . . . they lived in a not good neighborhood in Manhattan. And were looking to . . . to . . . to . . . for a place like this, too. So I called them up all excited. And said, We just got on this waiting list. You can get on the waiting list, and it was a real awakening for me because I discovered that when they looked into it, they said, Well, they couldn't afford the \$5,000 for an apartment. And I said, Well, I couldn't afford it either. Well, where did you get it? I said, Well, my father lent it to me and they just laughed at me like, you know, I thought being . . . being . . . being white and insulated from from their history that . . . that they were the same as we were because they were both educated, they were both employed, they were both . . . you know, we were demographically indistinguishable, but they were supporting their father who was disabled and . . . and . . . and . . .

. had not . . . You know, instead of him being a resource for their . . . for them, they were a resource for him. So they not only could not get \$5,000 from their father, they . . . their finances were being drained by their father. And it was a . . . it was . . . and they could not get in here for that reason. And they never did. And it was a . . . it was a real education moment for me about what I thought was . . . was . . . was an example of racial equality that was not, because . . . because of the . . . the burdens of . . . of history. And . . . and . . . and . . . You know, my father was employable during the . . . during the Depression because he was a union guy, and you couldn't get a construction job in New York without being a member of the union. And they . . . those were days when Blacks were not allowed in the construction unions and, you know, that was something I didn't know. I mean, I should have known it. I went occasionally as a kid with my father to the union hiring hall, but I didn't notice that there were no Blacks there. I didn't notice that there were no Blacks in my neighborhood in East Flatbush. It was not remarkable because it was so ordinary. And . . . and so what . . . what really happened was, is that the . . . the . . . the politics, and the economics, and the . . . the legacies of of past discrimination burdened people who looked to me like they had achieved equality and had not. And so . . . so . . . so as a result . . . And I think that that was not an A-typical story. As a result, young families like ours that we . . . in . . . who were here, were all white. And it wasn't until much later that you began to see Black families in this place. And it took much longer. It wasn't instantaneous, because as low as the economic threshold was, it wasn't low enough.

Abby: Right. There was still that barrier.

Ira: Yeah.

Abby: I think that's a very interesting story. So in those early days, can . . . can you talk maybe Trude, you can talk more about daily life in Penn South with children and knowing other parents, maybe particularly mothers and kids.

Trude: Was particularly mothers. We grew in . . . we moved into Building 10. There weren't any sidewalks in yet and the street was also not . . . not finished. So I, you know, I went out with the baby carriage and bumped over rocks and gravel, you know, to get to the store. You know, you still had some of the tenements that were adjacent to where the co-op was and across the street, across from Chelsea Park, you had little grocery stores and things like that along with the co-op. But—

Abby: On 9th Avenue?

Trude: On 9th Avenue.

Abby: Right, okay.

Trude: Yeah, ____.

Ira: _____. They delivered. [Trude chuckles] But anyway, What was I going to say? So it was, you know, it was pretty rustic. The halls did not have any tiles in it yet. You know, it was . . . it was really unfinished. But there was a committ— but once the family . . . the families started moving in, it was a very tight knit group. I mean, all the children were the . . . pretty much the same ages. And the playground was filled with mothers. No . . . nobody was working, yet. So it was a real social gathering.

Abby: Is that the playground that's behind Building 8?

Trude: This is—

Abby: Between 26th and . . .

Trude: Yes, between 26th and 28th.

Abby: Okay.

Trude: And . . . uh . . . Yeah, not the round one. I don't know about the round. That was the other end. [Trude chuckles] And it was a real gathering place. And we got to be quite friendly with all of the families in the building and we did a lot of things together. It became a very social part we took.

Abby: What kinds of things?

Trude: Well, we had . . . we . . . we had a food co-op that we that we divided up chores and went to the wholesale market in the Bronx, and down to 14th Street to the meat market that was there at that time, and gathered everything, and then we went to Building 7 and divided everything up, you know? I knew I was going to see if I could find the bill and I forgot. I'll have to look for it.

Abby: And how many families, maybe?

Trude: Oh, there were about 10 families? 12 families?

Abby: And you were one of the main organizers?

Trude: I guess so, yes. And we even made bread for a while. But the problem was—

Ira: She'd bake bread on the floor of the kitchen for the co-op, every week.

Abby: Wow.

Trude: Yeah, it was quite an operation.

Ira: And you used to drive up to Hunts Point also.

Trude: Yes, I did . . . I did do. I did . . . I did . . . and buy . . . I'd make mistakes, like buy boxes of . . . what . . . is it arugala that smells skunky? There's . . . well there's one green vegetable that has a skunky smell and . . . which is how it's supposed to smell. And . . . I threw it all away cause I decided it mustn't be good. But we used to get teas. It was really quite an operation and we used to bring our little children when the older ones were in school. We'd put them on a little mat on the floor and, you know, it was all very casual. But after a while, of course, the people started going back to work, so women started going back to work. So when that happened, I was not one of the ones that was working at the time. So it . . . we . . . we had to let those kinds of things drop.

Abby: Was that the late sixties, the early seventies, mid seventies?

Trude: Well, it—

Abby: Or over that time?

Trude: It had to be the sixties and seventies. I don't know exactly. Our first kid went . . . started school in sixty-. . .

Ira: Seven.

Trude: Seven. So . . .

Abby: And other mothers went back to work when their children went to kindergarten or first grade?

Trude: Yes. I don't know exactly when . . . what time, but pretty much everybody decided to go back to work at the same time. And it it broke up that kind of . . . closeness. But I . . . there was a time also, I guess in the late seventies when the Hudson Guild set up a couple of their . . . nursery school classes in Building 7. I don't know if you knew that.

Abby: No . . . no.

Trude: And I was one of the teachers, but they had a whole operation there with the lunches and everything in those two rooms.

Abby: And that was preschool or . . . or . . . or

Trude: Yeah. Nursery, Head Start, a combination of nursery and Head Start. So I think that was '75 / '76. And before that I had a little group of three-year olds before they went to school. I had a small group also in the Community Rooms, so it was more than just apartment living. It was really . . . it was really a community of people. And . . . it was . . . it was nice.

Abby: Yeah, it's nice to have that, that companionship and that support.

Ira: And also our friends were determined by . . . by the . . . by . . . by the kids, you know, all of our friends were people about our age who had kids, about our kids age and that . . . those were the people you had dinner with. Those are the people you saw. Those are the people who became your friends as . . . as an extension of that community of . . . of basically of mothers and small kids.

Trude: And they stayed for a while. I mean, after a while, people . . . there were people that left, you know, they moved to New Jersey or . . . it was not an easy time in the seventies. It was not easy to live in this city. You know, there was . . . it was . . . it was hard on the kids, especially going to public schools. And so some people fled. But we . . .

Ira: Yeah, the groups . . . the initial groups divided between the people who . . . who fled to the suburbs once their kids became school age and those of us who stayed here in part because we wanted our kids to grow up in this kind of a neighborhood. She wanted that. I wanted that. Others . . . But that was a real divide. And, like, the . . . the . . . the other two families that . . . that lived on the 21st floor in Building 10, were gone by the time their kids were three or four.

Abby: I think that's still a divide for families

Ira: Yes.

Abby: I do want to talk about the schools in a moment. But before we do, Trude, I know you were really emphasizing how much more of a relationship, a close relationship, Penn South and Hudson Guild had. If you could talk a little bit more about that.

Trude: Yes, they did. The Hudson Guild ran after-school programs. They had a wonderful theater program that . . . and they had a little theater there, too, a professional . . . off-Broadway . . . professional theater. I don't know if they still have it, but a lot of people from here after school went . . . went to the Hudson Guild. They had dance classes, they had carpentry classes. They had, you know, they had all . . . and it . . . it . . . it mixed the community. It . . . it was a continuation of the schools in the fact that they had people from the project . . . I mean, everybody . . . the whole neighborhood was . . . was . . .

Abby: Hudson Guild is physically part of the public housing complex.

Trude: Right. Exactly.

Ira: And it achieved for the kids growing up who went to these programs, it achieved the kind of integration of . . . of . . . of their childhood that they didn't get in the co-op for the reasons we were talking about before. That . . . that at that time there were very few black families here. So our kids participated in the theater yeah, it was . . . it was more . . . it was more Latino than it was . . . than it was Black at . . . at Hudson Guild. But still they . . . they . . . that was . . . that was a very different sociological experience for the kids than it would have been just staying here and playing in the black playground. So the Hudson Guild was very. . . a very formative thing . . . and our kids have—

Trude: And they had a nursery school, they had a combination nursery-Head Start program, which, you know, all of the kids that we grew up, most of them went there too. They started in nursery school. So it was . . .

Ira: And you taught there.

Trude: I taught there.

Ira: Therefore . . . before she went back to

Abby: Right, so it was . . . it was both across the street, across 9th Avenue, and . . . and . . . they had some physically located at Penn South . . .

Trude: Yes, for a few years, not for . . . not for very long.

Abby: But it was . . . but it was a much more connected relationship.

Trude: Yes.

Abby: It does not seem to be so today.

Trude: Oh . . . I don't know.

Abby: Right. And . . . and your children all went to PS 33 across the street?

Trude: Yes, 33. And they went to I.S. 70. And then they . . . they went to they . . . they all went to city . . .

Abby: public schools . . .

Trude: Not through college. I was going to say, they have . . . high school, yes. But,

Abby: And . . . and you were talking about the . . . your first child going to school in '67 and I know we talked a little bit previously about the big strike, the UFT strike, and Ira, you had some some anecdotes about that.

Ira: Well, I had grown up in a very strong union family. I mean, I used to joke that somebody would say what religion you were. My religion was that you never cross a picket line. That was my religion and . . . and . . . and . . . my . . . my . . . both grandfathers were early union activists, one in the . . . in the Glaziers Union and my mother's side in the ILGWU and my . . . my . . . my maternal grandfather worked for the ILGWU all his life. And . . . and . . . and my father was a labor union official for most of his life, too. So . . . so I came out of a very strong reflexive union family. So when the strike happened in the schools, a lot of us really regarded the strike as an illegitimate strike that the . . . that the . . . the UFT was involved in trying to oppose what was then an experiment for decentralized . . . decentralization of the schools. And we regarded that as something that was designed and intended to try to enhance equality of educational opportunity for minority kids because the effort to integrate the schools had literally failed and been rebuffed for decades and decades. And . . . and the ethos developed, well, if you're not going to integrate us in, at least let us control our schools in the way that suburban parents control their schools, through elected school boards and stuff. So there was this movement going on and we would go out of the . . . the teacher strike as an effort to kill that movement and therefore, you know, not about wages and hours and working conditions, but really about something political that a lot of us opposed. So for the first time in my life, I found myself opposing a . . . a labor union strike. And when they struck the schools, it was right about the time that our first child was going to school.

Abby: So it was 1968.

Ira: It was . . . it was . . . no, the first . . . yeah, I think it was it was . . . it was '68, and . . . and . . . and . . . and so on his first day at PS 33, there was a picket line outside. And—

Abby: The strike lasted months. It was a long strike.

Ira: Oh, it was a long . . . , you know. Well yeah, it went on for a year actually on . . . it was . . . it was more than one strike. There was . . . but the . . . the dispute went on for several years and was explosive and really, really split. I mean, that was part of the origin of tensions between Blacks and Jews in New York who had always been allied, on civil rights issues before. And it . . . it . . . it split the liberal community, the liberal white community . . . and angrily and bitterly, to this day, people . . . people are, you know, don't talk to other people because . . . And so there was this strike and . . . and . . . and there was this picket line that I . . . was part of my . . . my religion not to cross. And . . . and . . . but I was so opposed to the . . . to the basis for that strike that I and several other people took our kids by the hand and walk them through the picket line on that first day of school. It was a very traumatic, wrenching thing for me to do. But . . . but some of us slept in the school because the custodians had gone out because of supporting the strike of their colleagues. And . . . and it was . . . it was a very bitter, bitter time. And . . . and that's how, you know, that's how our first child began school. And he, of course, did not know what was going on. And it was . . . going to school was such a dramatic thing for kids at five years old anyway on the first day, all of this stuff was sort of probably it was dwarfed by . . . by . . . by that. But . . . but it . . . it . . . it . . . it severely ruptured relationships in the co-op among the residents, many of whom were union activists, many of whom were teachers and . . . and deeply committed to the strike and what they believed to be the justice of the strike. And many others believed the opposite, and it became like a civil war. I mean, it was . . . it was . . . it was a . . . it was a divide so severe and so traumatic, as I say to this day, when I . . . when I went down for the . . . for the . . . the little gathering,

Abby: The anniversary gathering? . . . the anniversary, the 60th anniversary.

Ira: for the 60th anniversary, there was a guy in a wheelchair who I had not . . . who lives in this building, who I had not seen for a long time because he's . . . he's . . . he's in his nineties now and . . . and . . . and . . . and confined to a wheelchair and doesn't get out much. I see his wife all the time but I hadn't seen him in

years. And . . . and I came over to him and, you know, we talked, and we greeted each other and . . . and all I remembered at the time, it was all very affectionate, very, very nice. And we spent a lot of time sitting around on that day, talking about the old days and the . . . but what I remembered was . . . is that he and I used to have these bitter debates. I mean, we . . . we had public meetings here, and and he was an activist member of the Teachers Union. And I was working for the ACLU and was on the other side of the strike. And . . . and . . . and . . . and it was, I reminded him. He didn't remember it. And . . . uh . . . but . . . but it was . . . it was . . . there was literally, for years, there were people, and if you . . . if you ran into them in the elevator, they wouldn't look at you, you wouldn't look at them. And you just, you know, feel and it was a real it, you know, never . . . never came to blows, but there was . . . there was . . . it was a . . . it split the co-op down the middle and Dave Smith, who became, you know, the . . . the legendary President of the Board for decades here and was . . . was a . . . such a prime mover of . . . of . . . of . . . of the co-op, he had been he wasn't on the board at the time, but he was on the board, or maybe the President of the Board of the local school board. And he took a position against the school strike and I didn't know him at the time. And all of a sudden there was a blizzard of leaflets that appeared in front of everybody's door denouncing him in the most virulent terms. And . . . and I . . . I . . . I made the mistake of . . . of . . . of thinking that was so unjust in that . . . that leaflet denouncing him was so inaccurate in so many ways that I wrote a response to it. And I don't remember how I got it to somebody. And it was distributed everywhere. And so all of a sudden I became Dave Smith's friend. We didn't even know each other. And . . . and then he . . . he ran for the co-op board. And every election became a referendum on the different politics of people. It was all derivative of the . . . of the school strike split. And it turned out I was too young to really know this, but it turned out that for a lot of the older people who had come from the ILGWU, there was a similar kind of political divide that had come out of the 1930s between, you know, the Shachtmanites, and the Trotskyites, and the people who were former Communists, and the . . . and the . . . and the . . . and the . . . the . . . all those political divisions of the thirties that . . . that . . . that similarly split people who had a similar set of values, but such different ways of approaching those values, that they . . . and the . . . and the . . . and the . . . the . . . the . . . the fragmented divisions all reflected and . . . and translated into those current ones around the school strike so that there were a whole lot of people here who were older by decades than I, who came out of the thirties, and and those years, for whom the school strike divisions were simply the latest chapter in long standing similar divisions that were ideological. And so . . . so every issue if there was . . . if there was a dispute over whether to have more security in the

co-op, but if there was a dispute over whether to have gates or . . . or . . . they . . . they all became occasions to replay these old political divisions. And for me, it became . . . it became an education of the politics of the thirties that I didn't know anything about 'cause I was in my twenties, you know, and . . . but that . . . that school strike was a lasting I mean, a lot of the friends that I had for decades later, were people who I met in that dispute who were on the same side. And a lot of the people with whom we felt a real, permanent arm's length, if you ever saw each other, were the same . . . the same kind of a thing. And so it was a . . . yeah, it was a . . . it was a litmus test that . . . that . . . that a lot of people living here at that time divided on. And for the families who had kids in the schools, you had to take a position. You had to keep your kid out of the school and out of the strike or you had to walk your kids through the picket line. And everybody was pro-labor. You know, they all grew up, and they were all, you know, New York Democrats and they were [Ira chuckles] so . . . so . . . for the people who cross the picket line, it was no small thing. And for the people who were on the picket line, it was treason, what we did. Yeah , so it was . . . it was very . . . it was very, very angry and very . . . and . . . and it was durable.

Abby: And Trude, did you have that same experience? Again, you were on the play . . . in the playground, on the playground in the afternoons and with the other mothers.

Trude: No, I . . . It was . . . it was pretty much out there that, you know, I had . . . by that time I had . . . was pregnant again, almost . . . almost . . . Sally was . . . almost . . . almost ready to have my fourth child . . . was born in '69, but it was it was lingering certainly because there were, comments by the . . . principal, you know, about . . . I was making trouble and you know, this family. Oh, you know who her father is, you know, that kind of thing. We have to expect . . . we have to expect some kind of confrontation because . . . But other than that, I wasn't really involved in any of it. I was . . . was solely involved . . . I just supplied the children for him to walk over. [all laugh]

Abby: Oh, I think you did a lot more than that. But, yeah, maybe it's good the children were fairly young and were not as cognizant.

Ira: Yeah, well, I made it a practice of not bringing those political conflicts home or . . . or indoctrinating the kids. I always had a negative reaction to people who sort of put headbands on their children when they were two, and took them to political demonstrations. It was . . . always seemed to me to be indoctrination, not . . . not, you know, so . . . so when I came back home from working at the ACLU, I didn't discuss those issues around

the table. So the kids . . . the kids were were sort of intentionally, when they were little, isolated by them. I remember my oldest, when he was about 10 or 11, we were sitting on the beach during the . . . during summer vacation, once. And he suddenly asked me some questions about . . . about the . . . uh . . . the school strike and stuff. And I don't know where he picked up on things, but he was . . . he was then sort of old enough to . . . to be curious. And I remember telling him about some of the history from five years before when he was in kindergarten that . . . but when they were little, I . . . I did not bring that stuff home. And so . . . so they were pretty much insulated from it. And . . . and my recollection of . . . of . . . of the community of . . . of mothers and small kids was that it didn't . . . it didn't translate there. Now that may have been, that may have been because they were all pretty much on the same side, you know, I mean, you know, who you make friends with is often determined by who you share political values with. So it was . . . it was maybe not surprising. But . . . but . . . but that stuff, that stuff was never part of that community of . . . of mothers and children that . . . that Trude was describing.

Trude: No, we were pretty much more all on the same side.

Abby: And you switched from teaching math to working at the ACLU in the late sixties?

Ira: That's too long a story, but . . . but basically, basically, yes. I was . . . I was teaching math at Queen's College in Sarah Lawrence College, from sort of '61 to '64 or 5. And then I began to try to . . . to find a job that more closely followed with the things that I cared more about. This was the middle of the sixties. You know, the civil rights movement was exploding. Women's rights movement was starting. The antiwar, anti-Vietnam-War movement was exploding. And . . . and I found my way from teaching math to . . . to having an editorial job on a . . . on a political affairs magazine. And then that led gradually by different associations and to . . . to the . . . to the NYCLU, the New York Civil Liberties Union job, which I took in the spring of 1967. So . . . so by '67, I was out of math and out of teaching and . . . and into I didn't think at the time it was going to be a lifelong career, but it became so, and . . . and so that, yeah, that happened in the late sixties. And then I . . . that's . . . that's where I was.

Abby: And then you were at the ACLU for decades.

Ira: And then I was, yes. I became Director of the New York Civil Liberties Union in 1970, and I became National ACLU Director in '78 and I retired in 2001. So that . . . that way led on to way.

Abby: And you got rid of your commute to Queens and Westchester.

Ira: Oh, yes. That was . . . that was something that you could . . . you . . . you could only do when you were 24 and foolish and had boundless energy. I was . . . I was driving a million miles a day.

Trude: The car that broke down every two minutes.

Ira: You know, on the Bronx River Parkway and, you know, at the . . . it speeds a little too . . . too fast for that old fashioned highway.

Abby: And was it important . . . I know you wanted to live in Manhattan for many reasons, was it important to live near your office?

Ira: Yeah. Well, you know, when I was . . . when I was in . . . in between the teaching math, so I had an editorial position on a magazine whose offices were on 71st between Lexington and 3rd and . . . and we were thinking at the time we were still in Building 10. We were . . . had just had our third child. And the apartment, the two bedroom apartment was already too small and we were seriously interested in and thinking about moving back to Brooklyn, and what was then a . . . a . . . an up-and-coming neighborhood in Park Slope. And we went looking for brownstones to buy. And I was very excited about, you know, having my kids grow up in Brooklyn the way I did, having a stoop and all that, and playing stoopball And we actually had a deposit on a brownstone in . . . in . . . on East 6th Street . . . 6th Street, a third of a block from Prospect Park. The . . . the . . . the entire brownstone wall, the original woodwork . . . \$26,000 in 1967. And . . . and . . . and we were going to do it. And then I got the job at the Civil Liberties Union, and I realized that working there was like being a fireman, you know. The fire bell went off and you had, you know, that I was never going to be . . . So there we had this big house, you know, and . . . and three little kids and, you know, and . . .

Trude: And a wife who didn't like to do housework.

Ira: And I would never be . . . you know, I would have this . . . this big long commute every day on both ends of the day. And . . . and I couldn't control my hours anymore. You know, when you were teaching, you had controllable hours, when you were in a, you know, editorial position in the magazine, you could work a lot at home, you had controllable hours, but the ACLU job was out of control. And I . . . I suddenly realized you know this just is incompatible with . . . with . . . with having a small family and not being . . . you know, having to travel back and forth. So we decided to abandon the . . . the . . . the . . . the brownstone idea and stay here. And it was at

that time that . . . because I . . . my office at the time was on 20th Street and 5th Avenue. So it was like I could . . . I could run and be here in 10 minutes if I. . . And . . . and . . . so that's when we decided to apply for a three-bedroom apartment instead. And that's . . . and we got this apartment and we moved in here January of '68. I began the Civil Liberties Union job in May of '67, and that's when we abandoned the . . . the . . . the search for a house in Park Slope, applied for a three bedroom, got it a few months later.

Trude: And never regretted it. Worked out well.

Abby: Right. Because a . . . because a house is a house and it's . . . it's a lot of stairs, not just . . .

Ira: Well, we didn't see too—

Trude: Now, I appreciate it.

Ira: We didn't think too much of stairs at the time. But boy, I'm glad I don't have a lot of stairs now, you know. Well, she, of course, grew up, you know, in a four story walk up. So she was not intimidated by stairs.

Abby: Right, You were not going back to Brooklyn. Ira, you were going back to Brooklyn.

Ira: Right.

Abby: So you talked about your . . . your kids a little bit and maybe you can expand on ways in which living in this neighborhood and Penn South and having the relationship with other kids in school and Hudson Guild and things like that affected their lives. I think you've talked mostly about your oldest son who's a musician.

Ira: Yeah, well, I mean, he . . . and that was directly . . . I often thought if he had . . . he was . . . he was five when we were flirting with the idea of getting that brownstone in Park Slope. And I often wonder . . . wondered how different his life would have been because there was no question that his . . . his music and jazz interest and career happened because of I.S. 70 where he went to school. For one thing, I mean, we . . . we never listened to jazz. Jazz was not . . . we were . . . we were folksong people, you know, Alan Arkin and Pete Seeger. And, you know, that was the music that he grew up listening to records of. We were not jazz aficionados. We had never been to a jazz club in our lives. And so where did it come from? And . . . and first of all, in PS 33 across the street, they had a music program and they had a . . . a Black music teacher named

George Scott, who had been a musician himself before he went into teaching, who had . . . who had instruments in the school. And David got interested first there . . . first played the cello there. And . . . and . . . although Scott had been a jazz trumpeter, I think, and I didn't know that until later, but Dave had first listened . . . Then he goes to I.S. 70 on 17th Street and . . . and they . . . and every kid had a . . . It was . . . it was very heavily focused on music and art as well as academic stuff. And every kid who went to I.S. 70 had to choose something in music or something in art, and it was serious stuff. It wasn't like, you know, music appreciation that we did where they . . . where you'd listen to the first bar of something and had to identify it. You know. It taught you not to like music.

Trude: It was band, it was musical theater, it was art. I think there was one more.

Ira: Anyway, he chose . . . he chose the jazz band and . . . and his first lessons, he had no instrument. He . . . he didn't own a saxophone, but he picks the saxophone and . . . and the school has a saxophone. And he is . . . he is taught by one of the teachers. His first . . . his first teacher of saxophone was in I.S. 70 and decades later, she appears at a jazz club where he's playing to see it. And it was just . . . it was just wonderful stuff. But . . . and then he makes friends with a Black kid who was playing the trombone in the jazz band and the . . . the . . . that kid's father was a jazz pianist. His mother and father were divorced, but his father was a . . . still jazz pianist playing up in New Haven or something. And the kid had, because of his father, had this enormous collection of jazz records. And David and he become best friends. And he goes back after school to this kid's apartment, which was on 27th Street or something, near 5th Avenue. And they listen to jazz records, you know, and David has never heard of Jazz. We didn't have any. And his whole interest and development, both in school and because of that friendship become . . . becomes who he is. And, you know, when he's 14 and 15 and he suddenly develops this passion for . . . for jazz music and for playing the saxophone. And, you know, he ends up . . . he ends up in music and art he has a bit . . . a bit-role in that . . . in the movie, "Fame" where they use the kids who were in the school at the time and he's . . . he has about 6 seconds of playing the saxophone and standing on the cafeteria table in the school.

Trude: Piano.

Ira: Huh? On the piano, he was standing? And then he . . . he . . . he . . . he ends up auditioning for and getting into the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, and he becomes a professional jazz musician. None of that would have happened without being here in this

community and going to the public junior high school, . . . intermediate school, that half the parents who have kids here fled because it was, you know, it was the seventies.

Trude: And it had a reputation.

Ira: Had a reputation for being a rough school. And there were a lot of non- white kids there. And, you know, white kids were in the minority really there, and . . .

Trude: No, I don't think so.

Abby: You don't think so, you think that was the perception?

Trude: I don't think that they were in the minority, but it might have been, but I don't think so. That's a little exaggerated.

Ira: But, you know, there were . . . there were tales of . . . I mean, you know, we both grew up in not great neighborhoods and went to public schools. Neither of us were very intimidated by these fearful stories. Not . . . you know, I mean, I grew up in the days of the Blackboard Jungle.

Trude: There were a lot of stories, but we always encouraged people to ask the kids, you know, if they were really worried about half the kids because the kids going to the school are going to be honest and are going to really tell you . . . they're . . . they're not going to tell you It's wonderful if they're having trouble and they're not going to tell you scary stories if it's something they can handle. So with the kids, almost . . . I don't think anybody said anything against. They all said it was manageable.

Ira: But if you talked only to the parents . . .

Trude: The parents were very nervous.

Ira: All you got were the scare stories. So our kids all went to I.S. 70 You know, they . . . they . . . I'm sure they had some rough moments.

Trude: They had some run-ins.

Ira: There are always bullies in schools. And it was not, you know, there were always some . . . but we all did. And, you know, and . . . and . . . they didn't talk about it much. But . . . but . . . but they got through it and . . . and . . .

Trude: They sometimes talked about it later, you know.

Ira: Years later, right.

Trude: Years later. You'd say—

Ira: Look, I never told. . . talked to my parents about the gangs in . . . in high school in the fifties when I was there and which were a source—

Trude: Or being threatened or thrown out the window.

Ira: you know, a source of terror some times and you learned to sort of manage it. But . . . but . . . but the kids got a great . . . they . . . they got a great education in . . . in PS 33 and I.S. 70 and they all end up . . . ended up going to good high schools. Three of the . . . three of our kids went to the High School of Music and Art and majored in music. And, you know, our second son was in the . . . played drums in the Dance Theater of Harlem on Broadway, you know, because he got . . . that . . . that was entirely through the High School of Music and Art, which began with him being a drummer in the jazz band in I.S. 70. And our fourth kid ended up at the Bronx High School of Science. And . . . so, you know, the kids, all did fine and . . . and . . . and . . . more than doing fine.

Trude: They were not afraid. They were . . . they were exposed to all kinds of people and all kinds of families. And they were not afraid. They were not afraid to . . . in their relationships, or in getting around the city. And I think that was one of the most valuable things that they got from going to the public schools and . . . and remaining in the neighborhood.

Ira: Well, they also learned they learned to make distinctions like, you know, David, our oldest, there were some rough kids who were not white in I.S. 70, but he never associated that with skin color, even though those kids were Black or Latino because his best friend was Black also. So . . . so the stereotypes about, you know, that if you . . . if you . . . if you lived in the suburbs and just read stories about the city schools, you . . . you . . . you made associations with the bad stories with it. But if you actually went to the schools and your best friend was Black, as well as the kid that you feared, it just didn't have the same, you know, and . . . and . . . and so . . . so and when . . . when our second son was going to the Dance Theater of Harlem, he was 14 years old and he was, after school in I.S. 70, was taking the subway up to 145th Street and, you know, so . . . so the . . . the . . . the experiences were were not antiseptic, but they were also wonderful. And they were . . . they . . . and . . . and . . . and . . . you don't have to deny the existence of the bad stuff in order to appreciate the formative things that happened from

the good stuff and . . . and . . . and I think that was the experience that all four of our kids had.

Abby: And your son David lives at Penn South.

Ira: He does.

Trude: Yes, he does.

Abby: You said he actually lived with you after graduating from Eastman.

Ira: Well, when he came back, you know, the classic way in which you make your way in the world of jazz is you hang out at the clubs with other musicians. And in order to do that, you have to have a place to live. And, you know, in the thirties, there were cheap places to live in Manhattan where jazz musicians could do that. And in the eighties, a lot of David's friends who came to New York trying to get . . . break into jazz, couldn't do it without having a job because they couldn't support their rent without having a job and they never got to do what . . . So he lived here. He came back and lived here . . . probably what, two years?

Trude: I don't even think it was that long.

Ira: And he . . . and he didn't you know, and he was hanging out at the Jazz Cultural Theatre, which was a jazz club on 8th Avenue and 29th Street, that was run by Barry Harris, who was a famous jazz pianist that David had a long association with coming from that. So the ability to sort of come back and have this as a base and come back and stay here for a while was . . . was very critical to, you know . . . He ended up meeting somebody there through whom he got his first job playing when he was in his twenties with the Count Basie Orchestra. You know, so all of a sudden, you know, he's out on the road with . . . with all of these, you know, Black musicians from the . . . from the . . . from the thirties and forties who were still some of the original players from . . . from the . . . from the Basie band. Basie was . . . was dead at the time. But . . . but the rest of them . . . and you know, so that . . . that whole . . . that whole thing that happened with him happened from . . . from A to Z because he was . . . he was here.

Abby: And . . . and what building does he live in now?

Trude & Ira: Seven

Trude: He lives . . . he has a three bedroom apartment now 'cause he has two . . . two kids.

Ira: And his kids grew up here playing in the same . . . they went to the same . . . They went to PS 33 then they went to Midtown West where she taught.

Trude: 47th / 48th Street

Ira: 47th / 48th street. But they had the same kind . . . then they went . . . they went to . . .

Trude: Where did they go? Oh, they went downtown to something Tech. It went by the bridge, by Brooklyn Bridge.

Ira: Yeah, but . . . but they . . . they had the same . . . the same kind of—

Trude: It was a public school, too.

Ira: experience and . . . and . . . and it was, you know, it was . . . it was very nice. And they, you know, they had the same thing. They grew up, you know. They . . . the . . . one of his . . . one of his kids is following his path and . . . and plays the saxophone and . . . and . . . and did some busking playing his saxophone in the subways, which David did when he was a teenager also, And—

Trude: You make good money that way.

Ira: And, you know, they . . . they grew up, you know, they . . . they knew their way around the city by subway by the time they were six years old.

Trude: Yeah.

Ira: And they, you know, they knew . . . they knew where to be and where not to be. They knew what was safe and what was not safe. I was always nervous about our grandkids coming in from outside New York and being in the city 'cause they . . . they didn't know how to navigate. But the kids growing up here learned how to navigate.

Trude: And they didn't do anything foolish. You know, they knew the safe way to do things generally.

Abby: And they were lucky probably.

Ira: Yeah, I mean, well, that's always true. That's true wherever . . . wherever you are. But yes. So, you know, I think it was . . . I think if you talk to them and ask them the same questions, they might not say exactly the same things that we say, because kids don't

always share everything with their parents. And I certainly didn't and I don't think they did. But I think that for all of them, the living in the city, growing up in the city, was a positive experience and . . . And . . . and I think that those who have kids and have the kids in New York . . . They, I mean, the . . . when our second son was . . . was here from . . . from Georgia for Thanksgiving, His . . . he has two . . . two daughters and a son. And the son is just 20 / 21. And is a . . . is a big basketball nut. You know, he grew up and he became . . . and he loved to play . . . to play, played with me, and he plays all the time. And so they were here for five or six days and at 10:00 o'clock at night, He . . . he's antsy, you know, and he decides, I'm going over to Chelsea Park to run and he takes his basketball or, you know, he just goes out to the track there and he runs. And I'm thinking, well, you know, it's 10:00 o'clock at night. It's Chelsea Park. It's . . . it's a little dicey. I don't say anything to him. He's been there before and he goes out and I'm always a little relieved at 11:15 when he'd come back and didn't have a . . . 'cause, you know, you never know in the city, you know, that . . . that woman who got pushed and . . . You know, stuff . . . stuff happens. But . . . but . . . but that's always been true. It's been true in bad times. It's been true in good times. You know, sometimes the city is safer than it is at other times. But there's . . . there's . . . there's always the possibility that around the next corner, something bad happens. And . . . and . . . but you can't stop living because of it. And . . . and you can't let that, those things and those possibilities, define what your life is. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that . . . is that everything that our kids became, they became because they lived here.

Abby: And you mentioned another one, another one of your sons connected with someone from . . . from Penn South who he's known nearly his whole life.

Ira: Oh, he . . . yeah. He's our second son, again. He . . . when he was living here and he was 11 and he was babysitting for two kids in . . . who also . . . whose parents were original tenants here. The kids were like eight and five, but he was 11, you know. He used to babysit for them and he maintained contact with them, you know, now through Facebook and stuff. And so he came up here for Thanksgiving last week. And . . . next thing I know, he's . . . he's having lunch at their apartment with his wife and . . . and . . . and . . . and . . . and the . . . the father is dead now, but the mother, who is an original tenant, is still living here in the same apartment. And . . . and her two daughters, for whom Andy babysat, are now in their fifties. And they came from wherever they were in the city. And they all had lunch and it was just like . . . it was . . . and it was an important reunion for him. I haven't seen those people for decades.

And . . . and he told me that the mother asked about us and was surprised to learn that we were still living here because—

Abby: You don't see each other.

Ira: We don't . . . we haven't seen each other since the kids were all tiny, you know. But . . . but he maintained that . . . And . . . so yeah. So there are relationships that . . . that were formed here that . . . that . . . that when the kids come back, even the ones who don't live here, they . . . they . . . they restart and . . . and so . . . in that sense . . . you know, there was . . . in that sense, it was a real . . . it was a real community, and a real neighborhood.

Abby: No that's . . . those are long term . . . long term relationships. Trude, are you surprised that you've lived at Penn South for 60 years?

Trude: And no.

Abby: No?

Trude: This is my . . . this is my neighborhood. This is my home. We have a house in Connecticut, that . . . a summer house. And so in the seventies, when we got this, it was important for us to be able to get away. We didn't have . . . you know, sometimes it was hard. The school . . . the schools the kids were going to, there was sometimes a lot of stress on the kids. And so . . . and Ira was working very long hours and he was not home, you know, always on time. So we started . . . and there was no place where else we could vacation reasonably either with four kids. So we got this little house in Connecticut and that . . . that sort of gave us a very good balance of, you know, of intense city living and relaxing beach, you know, living. And we used to go up there for holidays and summers.

Ira: Well, the kids, you know, growing up with all my romanticism and the value I put on kids growing up in the inner city and we very consciously in deciding to live here, wanted as much as we could, as much as possible, to recreate for our kids how we grew up. And . . . and . . . and as much as . . . as much as I value that, there was something nice about getting these city kids out where there was woods and ocean and, you know, and the . . . We bought this little ramshackle, unheated cottage for very little money up there in 1970, and we bought it mostly to have for the summer vacations, but we decided to try to put electric heat into it and use it sometimes in the winter weekends. And we . . . the first time we took the kids up there, and I always regard this as a wonderful sort of city-kid story. We . . . we . . . we go up there and the oldest one is, is seven or eight and the youngest one is . . . is . . . a year. And . . .

. we go up there and the first weekend . . . and the house was this little cottage that was just right on the road and then we had three acres in the back, most of which was woods. And so we put the kids out in the back, here you are.

Trude: Enjoy the forrest. Go have fun.

Ira: and we were . . . we were in the house and she was making lunch, and I was doing something . . . puttering around, "And it's time for lunch," she says. So I go back to call kids in and I don't see them. I go out and look back and there is about, you know, 2 or 300 feet of . . . of grass . . . a backyard, and then there was woods. And I don't see them. So I get a little worried that, oh, they must have gone into the woods. But, you know, so I go back and I walk back to the beginning of the woods and I call them and they don't answer. And I listen . . . and they're little kids so I figured . . . I don't hear them. So now, I'm getting a little panicky. And I go into the woods and I'm thinking, oh, God, you know, they . . . they fell down some sinkhole

Trude: A well.

Ira: There's a body of water back in there that I don't know about. I mean . . . and I walked all over. I must have spent 20 minutes walking all over the woods, listening and not hearing them, calling and not. . . . First weekend out of the city, we lost our kids. And I turned back and I'm just totally despondent. How am I going to tell Trude, that the kids are gone? and I'm walking . . . So I turn around, I'm coming out of the woods and I'm walking toward the house and as I get closer to the house, I see all four of them. They're sitting in front of the house on the edge of the road. And I run up and I . . . "What are you doing?" First of all, they felt more comfortable with their bottoms on the asphalt road. They didn't like all that scratchy stuff in the grass. Plus they . . . I said, "What are you doing?" We're counting the cars. [Abby laughs] So . . . so much . . . You know, they were city kids. They were going to stay city kids. Now eventually, you know, they all . . . they all, you know, got used to and loved the contrast. But that . . . that . . . that first . . . that first afternoon when they stayed who they were, you know, they were . . . and . . .

Trude: And of course, you couldn't get on the grass here in the . . . in the co-op. They had a very strict gardener who didn't like you to walk on the grass.

Ira: It was all decorative. I mean the kids were not allowed.

Trude: The kids were not allowed on the grass.

Ira: So . . . so . . . so the—

Abby: Right, that was the world they knew. There was the playground, but . . .

Ira: Yeah, I mean, it was the same thing. You know, I played . . . played baseball, softball all my life. I never played on a grass and dirt field. I know that the teams I rooted for all played on grass and dirt because I went to the games, but I only . . . I only played on asphalt, you know, with those clinches up there. Whenever we hit, they . . . we played . . . we played on asphalt and they . . . and . . . and the balls got ruined very fast. But . . . that was . . . that was . . . 'cause you were in schoolyards. You didn't play, you know, we didn't have playgrounds, we didn't have Little League, we didn't have any of that. And . . . So that's . . . so our kids were . . . were . . . were used to that. But the . . . but the . . . but the place in Connecticut became a very nice . . . as Trude said, a balancing thing for . . . for . . . for the . . . for the city life and . . . I remember the kids used to go to this summer sort of day recreation place,

Trude: Park and Recreation, they ran a summer . . . they ran a summer program for kids.

Ira: And they had . . . all the kids except them, were local kids from . . . from this little town in Connecticut. And they were all very different. So for . . . so our kids were kind of a little exotic for them when they . . . "you live in New York, do you ever go to Central Park?" You know, "oh yeah, we go . . ." "You go on the subway by yourself?" They were all . . . and then . . . then I . . . You know, I remember our . . . our . . . again, our second son, Andy, came back one day. He was a very sort of slight and . . . not frail, but he was . . . you know, he was . . . he was a . . . a small kid. And he came back one day from that summer program. He says, "you know, Dad," he says, "the kids here think that we're tough." [Trude and Abby laugh] And it was all, you know, it was all just because there was something about the city. And . . . and David, who was then in high school, at one point said that he had . . . you know, they were . . . in Old Lyme, they had one high school and everybody went there. And so when someone asked David where'd he go to school, he said that he went to the High School of Music and Art. And he said "and the kids are, 'they have a whole high school for music and art?'" and David said "Yeah, no, they have one for lunch and gym, also" [all laugh] But . . . but it was . . . it . . . it . . . it . . . it was such different kind of cultural thing. Yeah, and it was . . . and it was important for them to see that difference. You know, I mean the . . . the . . . New York in its own way can become very

parochial and isolating. And you tend to think everything is like it when, in fact, nothing is like it. And so . . . so having this . . . this little respite of . . . of going to this little town in Connecticut for summers and occasional weekends was a very interest-interesting and balancing thing. But also it was an educational thing. It was a . . . it was a different . . . a whole different sociology.

Trude: And we were not alone. A lot of the families had places that they could go, maybe not as far as Connecticut, but upstate New York or . . . or . . . or closer to . . . Connecticut but closer to . . .

Abby: And . . . and do you think that that was directly as a result of living in an affordable middle class—

Ira: Oh, absolutely.

Trude: I think so. Otherwise, how could you do it?

Ira: I mean, you know, the house we bought initially in 1970, was . . . I think we bought for \$17,000. And I was terrified how we were going to buy a house. You know, the whole idea of having a house and an apartment was so alien to me and to how I had grown up. I was . . . I was absolutely . . . If she didn't push it, I never would have done it.

Trude: And if we had moved to Brooklyn, we would never have done it. But . . . but we . . . but that was . . . that was the exchange. That was the deal we made. We didn't buy that house in Brooklyn. We got the bigger apartment here. And then we got the house in . . . the little house in Connecticut, which we never would have done if we had the house in . . . in Brooklyn. So . . . so it was a . . . and it was, you know, it was . . . it was dicey financially when the kids started going to college, four kids and they were only like two years of separated. So there was times when there was more than one in college at the same time and, you know, she was still teaching in public school, which was not earning very much money. And I was . . . I was working at a nonprofit which . . . which was not a way to get rich. And . . . and . . . and I . . . I remember having tough financial times during the years that they were in college, but living here for what we were paying made everything possible. It made the job possible because I was nearby. It made the house in Connecticut possible because it was . . . And, you know, we were living in the middle of Manhattan at . . . at a . . . I mean, with four kids and . . . and . . . and . . . and working for nonprofit. I mean, it was . . . it was . . . it was just an unbelievable blessing. And it made everything that we became and everything that became . . . was possible for our kids and everything that we valued over . . .

over . . . over all these decades, It made it . . . it made all of that possible.

Trude: Made such a difference to us. Yeah.

Abby: Well, we could talk a lot longer, but we've already been talking a long time, so I think that's a good . . . good note to end on. Trude, is there anything else that you want to add? Something we've missed or haven't . . . haven't talked about that's important to you?

Trude: What do you think? Can you think of anything?

Ira: No, the only . . . the only thing I would add to that last point about how living here in such an affordable way for people like us made everything possible for us and for our kids. It worked so well, this experiment, that they never did it again. And instead, New York became a place where, you know, you paid \$50,000 rents or you . . . or you lived in poverty with nothing in between. And the in-between was not a mystery. What . . . what the ILGWU did and what the law permitting it did in . . . in . . . in building this, it could have replicated and . . . and New York's housing problem would not be what it is today. And . . . and . . . and families, you know, the whole thing about no affordable housing, this is it. And it . . . it . . . They did this experiment in 1962. It worked perfectly. And they never repeated it. You know, and . . . and . . . so there's—

Abby: There're, perhaps, a couple other examples. And some of them . . . some of them have privatized.

Ira: Yes, and then the privatized.

Trude: Oh, they have? I didn't know they privatized.

Ira: But, you know, the success of this place has never been systematically replicated. It's not the only one. There's Co-op City and there's, you know . . .

Trude: Rochdale.

Ira: But . . . but by and large, the . . . the . . . the continued frustration over a lack of affordable, middle-class, family housing, particularly in Manhattan, is treated sometimes as . . . as an insoluble problem financially. But the fact is, is that what this place proved is that you could do it, and it works, and it worked perfectly. And the people who began this place, and who sustained it in the early years, and who resisted the urge to privatize and, you know, and . . . and . . . and that was not a given. There were lots

of battles about that. And people like Dave Smith, you know, heroically resisted all of those tendencies and kept this place the way it was and the way it was intended to be. And if it had been replicated a dozen times, New York City would be a Manhattan, particularly, it would be a different and more hospitable place than is today. And . . . and, you know, there were specific decisions made, you know, it went . . . it went the way of Mayor Bloomberg instead of . . . instead of this way. And that's . . . that's one of the . . . the reasons that this place has been so successful, I think, also points up how the rest of the city has not been successful.

Abby: Yeah, we are . . . we are in an oasis.

Ira: Yeah, it shouldn't be an oasis. That's right.

Abby: And especially people like you have lived here for a long time, it's become a model as a naturally occurring retirement community, a lot of people aging in place.

Ira: That's right . . . we . . . we often joke that when we came here, you know, we were . . . we were in our early 20s. We were 24. I was 24 when we moved in. And we were just starting a family and we were . . . and everybody else was old, you know, because the place opened up as a retirement community for the ILGWU retirees to a large extent and . . . and . . . and now young families are moving in. I mean, there's a young family who lives in the apartment next door who came in. It's . . . it's . . . it's . . . it's one of the studio apartments and they had one infant and now, you know, he's four and they . . . it's . . . and they just got . . . they just got a two-bedroom apartment and they're . . . they're switching. But, you know, they were . . . and all of a sudden we looked and said . . . [Trude chuckles] now . . . now . . . we're . . . we're the old codgers in this place. You know, everybody . . . my God, you know, everybody . . . We used to joke everybody's walking around in their eighties and their last legs and all these young families, there're so few of them. And . . . and now we've lived here long enough so that . . . so that the . . . the shoe's on the other foot.