

SAVING PRESERVATION STORIES:
DIVERSITY AND THE OUTER BOROUGHES

The Reminiscences of
Sam Goodman

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sam Goodman conducted by Interviewer Liz H. Strong on Oct. 6, 2015. This interview is part of the *Saving Preservation Stories: Diversity and the Outer Boroughs* oral history project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

Sam Goodman discusses his family history and personal experiences living in the Bronx during the early and mid-twentieth century. He speaks about the reasons his family, along with many others, left the Bronx in the 1960s. Upon returning to the city in 1987 and started working as a city planner for the Bronx Borough's president's office in 1993. Working with the city, he helped to come up with solutions to the crumbling infrastructure and cites examples of communities rallying to preserve their homes, notably Nos Quedamos and the Melrose Commons. He discusses his work in landmarking a section of Grand Concourse, the pros and cons of landmarking, and the politics of development in the Bronx.

Sam Goodman is an urban planner for the Bronx Borough President's office and a Grand Concourse denizen, residing in the same apartment since 1994. After the Grand Concourse received historic landmark designation in 2011, Goodman has been a vocal public advocate for the location. Goodman leads frequent walking tours of the Grand Concourse's various sites—the Art Deco apartment houses, the Bronx County Building, Loew's Paradise, and more—ensuring the various communities now residing in the Bronx understand the history of the space. Involved with city politics and community organizing from a young age, Goodman has devoted his life's work to the Bronx.

Transcriptionist: Jackie Thipthorpe

Session: 1

Interviewee: Sam Goodman

Location: 800 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY

Interviewer: Liz H. Strong (Q), Anthony
Belov (Q2)

Date: Oct. 6, 2015

Q2: So today is October—

Goodman: Sixth.

Q: Today is October 6.

Q2: 2015. We're interviewing Sam Goodman in his apartment at 800 Grand Concourse. It is ten twenty-seven in the morning, and here's the clap [*claps*].

Q: Okay. Audio marked. Okay. So we're going to start by just saying tell me when and where you were born.

Goodman: I was born on August 5, 1952. I was born not too far from here up on the Grand—not on the Grand Concourse but further up town. And the first two weeks of my life, I spent in a converted drawer that my parents made into like a little crib in my grandparent's apartment located at 1555 Grand Concourse. So while I was born in the Bronx and I lived in the Bronx for the first two weeks of my life, my folks actually at that point were living at 5 West 86 Street. So

that's where I lived for the first year-and-a-half of my life. And before my sister was born in 1954, we moved back up here to the Grand Concourse. And one way or the other there has been a relative of mine who has lived on this boulevard on and off, but pretty much steadily, since 1927.

Q: So tell me what you know about that family history from the '20s.

Goodman: Okay.

Q2: [Videographer direction]

Q: So what do you remember about your family history from the '20s?

Goodman: My family's history from the 1920s is really something, obviously, that was told to me. My mother's family, my grandparents, were born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. And as it so happens, on the very first day my grandfather, who was 14 years old, met my grandmother. Obviously, she was twelve he was fourteen. She was washing the kitchen floor of her mother's apartment, and that started what my grandfather told me was a romance that one way or the other ultimately led to their getting married. And my grandfather was very proud of the fact that as a native New Yorker of Jewish faith, he was able to go to college and he became a Certified Public Accountant and did very well for himself. And the odd thing about how he liked to flaunt his prosperity was that whenever the family got together, for any kind of major event, he insisted that all the food that was to be served, with the exception of dessert, be placed

out on the table at the same time so that all his—the acquisition of prosperity and satisfaction could be presented to his guests, which was kind of interesting when you think about it. I didn't realize it at the time but that was part of who he was and he was very proud of his achievement and he became very successful. Breakstone Dairy Products—you may have heard of Breakstone. For the most part during the Twentieth Century they made dairy products, and that was one of his first clients. And so he did rather well and he was very, not only proud of himself, but very proud of his children.

So that was my mother's family and they lived in the only seven-room apartment at 1555 Grand Concourse. And the reason why it is the only one is because he moved into the building in 1927, and during the Great Depression, the seven-room apartments in that building couldn't rent. So all the other units on that line were converted into fours and threes and he kept his seven-room apartment. It's kind of cool. Four bedrooms, it was really kind of neat.

My father's family is very different. My father's family, my grandfather was a stow-away on a boat that departed Budapest in the early 1900s. And he stowed away, as I said, came to New York and lived in a park down in Manhattan for the first five days of his stay here in the city. And he had no family, absolutely nothing. He just decided he didn't want to live in Hungary any more. He was one of seven children and he just got on a boat, and never went back, and never saw his family again.

His first job was cleaning chickens in the back of a butcher shop. He slept on a trunk that they provided for him and they guaranteed all the food he needed and a place to sleep, and they paid

him twenty-five cents a week, which I suppose was a lot of money in those days. He was a jack-of-all-trades and ultimately my grandmother came to this country also from Hungary but she had relatives here. She was twelve years old. So the reality for her was a lot different. But she was a seamstress, and as still is done in some places people with that talent would sit in front of a window doing their work. So my grandfather saw my grandmother and he went into that shop and asked for a job so he could be with my grandmother, and that's how they met.

He was very proud also of the fact that my father wound up becoming a lawyer, an attorney. One of his clients was Rocky Marciano the Prize Fighter. So that's how—that's the story of the background of my family and all of that.

Q: Wow.

[Videographer direction]

Goodman: Okay. Did I answer your question?

Q: You absolutely did. So the next thing I'm going to ask is tell me about your childhood, what you remember the landscape was like and what you did around here.

Goodman: [Laughs] Okay. The first thing that comes to mind about my childhood was there were two distinct differences. One was the family side of it, and my mother's family and that apartment was the circle around where everything happened, most notably on religious holidays

and on Thanksgiving. Those are the best—I had the best Thanksgiving. I was always proud—I seemed to instinctively know I had the best Thanksgivings of all my friends, because my grandmother would have these huge dinners and invite everybody and it was just a very warm, cozy kind of feeling.

I have to tell you, I'm really fortunate. My parents were remarkable and my family on both sides just remarkable. What they didn't neglect is just incredible. Every conceivable thing that a kid could need they found a way to provide. And no, I wasn't the happiest kid. In fact, I was pretty miserable at some points in my life. But my family was never shy about giving us whatever we needed to the point where I can really do—I remember if I got ill, my mother would sit across the room in a chair and just sit there and spend the entire—she would read to me stories. I remember the Headless Horseman. She would just read to me stories just to get my mind off my being sick. That was the way my family was. And the memories of my childhood revolving around that, and the opulent food, you know the dinners, and this incredible sensation of we give all that we have for the benefit of our young is something that perhaps, I don't know whether it's accurate to say, but I consider it to be a very Jewish kind of thing. That raising children is considered the most important function that a family can do—is for. That's what family is there for, to create a secure and viable future and that is best served by being very supportive of kids, and so that was that.

A good example of that, I never spent a summer in New York City until I moved back here at the age of forty-two, because June 30 was the last day of school, we were on our way somewhere, whether it was to the Catskills or to Lake George in upstate New York or to camp of whatever it

was. We never spent a summer here. I never, ever did because my parents knew New York is not a nice place to be in the hot summer, so we went away. As an adult, to look back on that, you realize how much that must have meant for them in terms of their sacrifice, cost, figuring it all out, where we're going to stay, how we're going to arrange it, you know, it's complicated and there were four of us. I'm the oldest of four kids. So that is not an easy thing to do and yet we did it every year. And we never came back until the week after—Labour Day and my parents never came back until after Labour Day.

The other thing that defined my kid period, my youth, were kids. I lived in a building. The building had fifty-three apartments. There were probably twenty or thirty kids between three buildings on that block and the neighborhood was just filled with kids. We found a way to take an urban environment and make it fun. And by that, I mean we played—Freeze Tag was a big popular game, you know, using no parking signs as bases and running from one place to the next. We played hide and seek inside apartment houses, hiding in the basement, in one room or another. We figured out how to do things and make everything fun. Going to Claremont Park, which is a thirty-three-acre park off of Morris Avenue, has this huge hill and that's where we went sledding. I mean there was this real adventure.

But here's what also was very special for me. At holiday time, Christmas time, my mother took us to see the Nutcracker every season, from the time I was about four to the time I guess I would have been about eight years old. We went every year. And after the ballet we would go out to dinner and my father would meet us for the dinner and we would go out somewhere. The long or short of it is to do that my mother would come to school and pick us up, pick me up. So I was

getting out of school early. She made a point of taking me out of school to show how special this event is, because in a kid's mind, you know, to be taken out of school for something good is something very special and all the other kids were—you knew all the other kids wished they were me.

Here again, what do I know about Christmas. This community was virtually a Christmas free zone. So I didn't understand Christmas in the sense that I didn't relate to it as a religious event. But I loved Christmas trees and I used to really enjoy—[Q: Gestures to a small Christmas tree decoration in the room] yeah. I used to really enjoy the little decorations that would be placed on them. So my mother would—we would be walking downtown going from here to there and my mother would pick up a stick that fell off a Christmas tree. They had these lots where they sold live Christmas trees and she would say, "Okay, this is your tree. You can have this." And she would find something to just hang on it just to show me, This is not what we do, this is not our tradition. This is someone else's tradition that you need to respect, and it's not appropriate for you to want to be something that you're not. She actually would explain it to me. But still at the same time it's something very—she understood why I was attracted to it and she didn't say, "No, you can't do this." She taught me about it. She knew how to explain it to me in a way that would make me appreciate my holiday and respect someone else's. And I'm saying this stuff to you now remarkably intrigued by my own memory, and how that is so comprehensive, and how there was something so unique and special about how I was raised. I don't know that I was raised any differently than anybody else, but this is how I reflect on it today.

So there were the kids' things and how we played around in the street. And I can remember some apartment house—like the Lewis Morris down the block. I was explaining to our friend over here [Goodman: referring to videographer] about the history of the Lewis Morris, which was the best building on the Grand Concourse for many years, and how the doorman didn't like us roller skating in front of this building because it might disturb the people who lived in the building. So part of the fun that we had as kids was making sure that the supers didn't chase us away. We would sit in front of a building and hang out there until the super came out to chase us away. Then we'd go to another building and we would play there.

The other thing we used to do is we used to put on these little shows in the courtyard. Seventeen ninety-one Grand Concourse has this really cool little courtyard, and we would play in that courtyard and put on shows. All the people who would look out their windows and they would watch us. Sometimes somebody would bring down something for us to eat or something. We would have a really cool time.

The thing, though, was that was in the early 1960s. By 1965, all the families with kids had moved away and we were one of the last to leave.

Q: Okay. So tell me about that, what it felt like to watch everybody move away and what you understood about that at the time.

Goodman: Okay. At that time, I didn't understand anything. At that time, what I understood was families were leaving largely because they wanted to live in a house and because, instead of

three kids living in one bedroom, now they have three bedrooms for each kid. So that was sort of something that we understood was, Okay and what's the big deal. But the families that were moving into the apartments that were being vacated didn't have kids, and so little by little all my childhood friends kind of vanished. Not all, but some.

One of the things also that I was a part of, which made me again somewhat different I think, which was that by the time I was nine years old my mother and father taught me how to ride the subway. And I was in Fourth Grade and I can remember my mother asking me can I read, and of course I said yes. Can I count, of course I can say yes. "Okay, you're going to meet your father for dinner and this is how you are going to go there." And she told me exactly what to do and I got on the D train on 175th Street and went and my father was waiting for me. She said, "Be in the last car and when you get off the train dad will be there," and sure enough dad was there. By the time I was in Sixth Grade I knew how to ride all over the city of New York by subway. And I had a friend who lived in Brooklyn. He and I loved the subway, so we would just ride around in the subway in the whole city riding around.

In 1964, there was a World's Fair in Flushing. And in 1964 I was twelve years old. The way to get there was you took the 4 train, now, down to Grand Central and took the 7 train out. And I would take my sister, who at that time was about five years old, and I knew exactly how to do it and we would go to the World's Fair and play around at the World's Fair. The city of New York was there for us to enjoy. And my parents were not fearful of anything about sending us into the—you know, we went in the street. The street was part of our home, our community, and the city was our playground.

I remember going to Staten Island on the ferry and just getting off and coming back.

Q: As a Sixth Grader?

Goodman: Yeah, just flying around. We would just do this. And I'm sitting here stunned by this memory because today you'd think my parents—my parents would be arrested today for letting us do that, but we did it. And so I felt really, really special in this respect and there are lots of memories like that. I could probably go on and on and on about it. I guess again, one of the other memories—and this is somewhat relevant to our story.

Q2: [Videographer direction]

Q: Okay. So another memory, my bar mitzvah. Okay. I was bar mitzvahed on August 14, 1965. And my mother's father and his father, the man for whom I'm named, were two of the original congregates for the Mount Eden Center. The Mount Eden Center was, and remains in the memories of a lot of people as one of the most opulent synagogues in the Bronx. I have a picture of the inside. What I remember more than anything else about that day was that after years of studying Hebrew, and I was never a very good Hebrew student, I felt really good about myself. And there was my whole family, all my family, every relative I had sitting in the congregation. And the women, of course, sat upstairs and I remember my grandmother waving to me, my mother's mother waving to me. The reason I bring it up is first of all there were two other boys that were being bar mitzvahed on the same day at the same place. So there were three of us that

were being called up to the Torah to read, the Haftarah, and I was the last. I remember the cantor whose name was Avner Sobel. He was a Holocaust survivor, and in those days I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know anything about it. But he had a magnificent voice. This man had a voice like you wouldn't believe. And the room was this very large room defined by a roof made out of stained glass. So here it is a Saturday morning and the sun is shining through that stained glass and the whole room has all these different colors. It was just so beautiful. And I'm sitting there and I'm watching this and I remember just feeling so proud of myself, and it was such a cool feeling. That was very important.

The reason I bring it up because that was in August of 1965. My grandmother passed away on December 24, 1965. Remember I told you about her washing the floor? The last time my grandfather saw her was exactly how he saw her for the first time. She died with a brush in her hand having scrubbed the kitchen floor. And that happened in the kitchen of 1555 Grand Concourse. To this day, the people who live in that apartment—I don't know who they are—have no idea that this woman died in that apartment like that. And so that was sort of—that moment when my grandmother passed away, that was the beginning of what I call the major transition from one part of my life to the next. That was the start of an entirely different way of life, because a year later we weren't living in the Bronx anymore and that congregation, by 1975, had completely disappeared. There was nothing left. Three thousand members in 1965, zero in 1975. The whole congregation disappeared. And today, on that site, is a building built by the Bronx Lebanon Hospital, the synagogue was torn down. So everything, it just sort of fits like a book.

Q: Wow. So let's take the broader view at this point. What was happening to make your parents make the decision to leave in 1966? Tell me all about that.

Goodman: What was happening to make my parents leave. First of all my father never referred to himself as anything but a Bronx refugee. He actually called himself a Bronx refugee, because he never wanted to leave. My mother wasn't too keen on leaving either and I can recall that my mother always said she wanted to live near her parents. We lived on 175th Street. My grandparents live just south of Mount Eden Avenue, which is about a block and a half away. When my grandmother died that kind of changed that relationship, and so we moved in 1966.

Here's the rationale for that. On July 21, 1966, the New York Times printed an article. The first page, second section: "The Grand Concourse, Hub of the Bronx," ninety-eight percent Jewish today will be seventy-five percent Negro in ten years. And the way this story was written— Steven V. Roberts was the author of the story, he was Cokie Roberts's husband. He's a very noted journalist. He wrote that article, and the question always remains whether or not the article was intended to produce exactly what it did. But the bottom line was my mother took that article to our congressman and the congressman's response to my mother was, "Mrs. Goodman, if I were you I would move. In twenty years we're going to bulldoze the whole place down." And so in October my parents bought a house and we moved, and that was the reason.

There were other reasons. The police department passed out literature to people in our building saying, "We can no longer guarantee your safety. So to better protect yourself against what will become an increasing level of crime this is what you need to do." And there was a list on a piece

of paper how to walk down the street. Walk in the center of the street, rather than near the building or near the cars, because people will prey on those who walk too close to either one because they can hide. When you empty your garbage in the evening, have someone stand by the door so that if something occurs that you're there to watch it. Never go to the supermarket by yourself, have a friend go with you. A list of things to do before the problem was really there. And the question is, why would you be telling people this. And the answer is, because the city of New York needed a place to dump its poor.

That sounds very hard and very cruel, but let me make this point to you. First of all, nothing in this city happens by accident. The only reason why anyone spends a dime in this city is based on the assumption you'll get back a quarter. So the purpose of the city is to create wealth. That's the only reason the city exists. Nobody cares about the city of New York. What they care about is prosperity and wealth. And if that means building something beautiful or tearing it down, that's not the point. The point is how do you maximize profit, that's the purpose of New York. The third thing is most elected officials are interested in one primary function and that's to stay elected. Whether that official responds to your need or not, doesn't depend on the official it depends on you. And if you, as a citizen, are proactive and take an aggressive posture in terms of what you feel you are entitled to have as a citizen, and you demand those entitlements from the people who are there to provide it, those people will listen to you. But if you willingly disenfranchise yourself from the process, saying to yourself, "What does it matter if I vote or not, because I'm just one person and I don't matter," and in fact, that attitude is contagious, then no elected official gives two damns about you. And what they will do is not necessarily in your interest but rather in theirs.

So here we have the Bronx in the 1960s, where there is this very high demand for affordable housing for people who have very little, if anything. We have a housing stock that was so rapidly constructed in the 1920s, to accommodate a half a million plus people all within that ten year time span. We have a government that recognizes that the tax base of the city is shrinking dramatically and that the reason for this city's prosperity and what made it prosperous during the first half of the Twentieth Century is no longer viable in the second half. We have to basically control how the city is going to function, knowing that it means reducing services dramatically and eliminating a lot of what was at one time considered run-of-the-mill function, like cutting the grass at a park every week. Now, all of a sudden, they cut the grass once a month. Picking up garbage every day, now it's twice a week. Things like that started to occur. And those kinds of realities prompted people, who had the choice, to move.

But in this community, this community was identified by Roger Starr for planned shrinkage, which basically means the City of New York will provide to those on welfare accommodations in this community, on the Grand Concourse south of Fordham Road. We will tell the property owners in that community, If you accept this welfare recipient we will pay you a finder's fee of \$500 and we will no longer vigorously enforce housing codes, which basically means to the property owner, I no longer have to provide hot water, which basically means to the property owner, If the elevator goes down I don't have to fix it, which basically means to the property owner, If somebody wants their floor washed, they can do it themselves, because the super is no longer going to do it for you. This was a decision made in order to instigate the flight of those

who were living here, in rent-controlled apartments, in order for the city to quietly house its welfare clientele.

At the same time, Co-Op City was constructed in the Northeast Bronx. Co-Op City is located as far away as you can get from Yankee Stadium without being in New Rochelle. And the way it was advanced was, We will build this beautiful complete and comprehensive community, its own schools, its own shopping districts, even its own electric plant so that you don't get a Con. Ed. [Consolidated Edison] bill anymore. And the most important asset, that you have to recognize, is the only way you can get here is by car because there is no mass transit to it. So you don't have to worry about people living in the rest of the Bronx.

So as a result, before the buildings were even built forty-eight percent of the 15,000 apartments that make up Co-Op City were purchased by people living within four blocks of the Grand Concourse. That's 7,000 units emptied out on the Grand Concourse and moved to Co-Op City, all within a matter of five to seven years time. And these buildings in turn were occupied by welfare recipients, that the landlords recognized they didn't have to care for very much anymore, because those moving in don't choose where they live, they're told where to live. Now imagine a building with a hundred units in it that was built in 1920s—this is now the 1960s—and it's filled with people who hate where they live. And what they all have in common is two facts, A, they hate where they live and they all share that hatred and, two, they were all desperately poor and that's why they're there.

So whereas you had a community that was segregated by faith in the first turn of the Century, but integrated by income so that people with more could help those with less, now you have a community where everyone is desperately poor where no one has anything and no one has any reason to live, and the city knows that. The city knows that. And the city has an incentive to save as much money as it possibly can, because we all know what happened in the city in the early 1970s, it technically went bankrupt. So this community was just basically abandoned.

So here's what happens when that occurred. In the 1970s the banking industry says to this community, "We will no longer lend you any money on your properties because we see what's going on as detrimental to the viability of your community." So now you own these apartment houses that you can't borrow anything against and no one can buy unless they can pay cash because no bank is going to lend on them. So essentially, these buildings are worthless, and they are filled with people who have no reason—who are dead-enders. Then, on top of that, you have the fire insurance companies who say, "Because there is no value in the property of any significance, we will no longer sell you fire insurance, which would pay you a sum if there were a fire." So now, landlords have to get fire insurance. So here's where Uncle Sam comes in, the congressman—

[INTERRUPTION]

The congressman's comments come back to haunt you in that the fire insurance companies won't sell it, but the feds will offer fire insurance based on the assessed value of these properties. The assessed value is the basis on which the city taxes those properties. You never have an assessed

value that's higher than the real value. The real value is the basis on which you sell the property. But if you can't sell the property, essentially those properties have no value. But the assessed value on one of these properties might be \$1 million. So I can't sell the property but if I set it on fire I can collect a lot of money. So that's why 60,000 apartments were set on fire between 1970 and 1980, and the boroughs population declined by 303,000 people in that same ten-year span.

All of that decline was south of Fordham Road. And why was it south of Fordham Road? What made Fordham Road the line? No one will—this is not written down anywhere and this is my theory. What are Jews known for? Throughout history, the story of Jews, the wandering Jew going from one place to the next, where if things aren't good here we'll move somewhere else. My grandparents, my father's father, what did he do, he got a boat. He came to New York. Well, when things started to change in this community in a way that people saw as not good, So we'll move. But the difference is north of Fordham Road that's where the Italians and the Irish live. What are they known for? Italians never move. They point to a parish and say, "This is where my grandfather was Christened. This is mine. I'm not leaving." That's the difference. That's why there were no fires north of Fordham Road. Now, no one will say that. I can't prove it. [Bird chirping] But as that bird is suggesting, that is a powerful hypothesis that I believe had a lot to do with why what happened here occurred and why the neighborhood was so aggressively able to change. And the folks who were the victims of that change didn't realize any of this. And even to this day, I don't think people realize any of this.

Do you want to stop?

Q: Yeah, I'll hit stop.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: And, we're resuming [claps].

Goodman: By way of really emphasizing the points I'm making, Jill Jones wrote a book called South Bronx Rising. In that book she devotes a lot of attention to whole aspects of the Grand Concourse and what occurred around this boulevard. Two of the things that I think are most striking in her book include the reference to that New York Times story that I mentioned earlier, and how people really saw that article as being the reason why, for the first time, property values of any of these buildings started to falter. The other thing she talks a lot about was the Concourse Plaza Hotel, which was this grand hotel on the Grand Concourse on 161st Street, which was over time converted into a place where fire victims would be housed and ultimately a welfare hotel, which was so overwhelmed with crime that it just went out of business, and fundamentally abandoned. It wasn't entirely abandoned, but it was fundamentally abandoned, and has since been purchased and has been operating now for probably for about forty years as a home for senior citizens, operated by the Mid Bronx Senior Citizens Council.

The point I'm making is that these aspects, these stories, have a lot to do with who I am, both as an individual and as professional, because what I saw was that planning and directing the course of events in a community is in fact very much a function of the relationship between government and the private sector. And that relationship, which exists on every level all across the United

States is directed for the benefit of those who sit at the table. If I as an individual am fortunate enough to have a seat at that table, or fortunate enough to represent a man or a woman who in fact is sitting at that table, my experience could then be best served to improve the lives of the community that I am speaking on behalf of or involved with, and that is this community on the Grand Concourse. That's why I came back here in 1987, when I bought this apartment, and why in 1993 I was fortunate enough to be hired as an urban planner for the Borough President's Office. Fernando Ferrer hired me, and I have had that job since 1995. I'm very proud of the fact that I've watched this community and its environs improve.

When I offer walking tours to folks, and I explain to them about how this all works, I'm always astounded by the reaction on the part of the participant, in that they all know these stories. Like, everyone knows the stories of the city during the second half of the Twentieth Century, because it's not only special to New York City it's a part of the urban environment that goes across every city during the second half of the Twentieth Century. But what people never really understood as clearly as they might otherwise are the connections between one event and the next, and how a decision made to establish rent control in 1945 basically meant that the profitability of these buildings by 1965 would be very, very different. And in effect, that decision gave a real financial incentive for those who lived here not to leave. The G.I. Bill adopted for servicemen after World War II provided a real cash incentive for the children of those folks to buy a home in suburbia.

So in effect, those two decisions, which were made in the 1940s, influenced how the Grand Concourse would survive in the 1970s, in the '60s and '70s. And it's very clear that when you look in the older generation, which in this case were all pretty much people of the Jewish faith

who had come here in the 1920s, by the 1960s they're in their fifties or sixties. The prospect of their income rising over the next twenty years is diminishing, and their children are leaving for two reasons. One, they have an incentive to do so because the government is guaranteeing their mortgages if they buy a home, which the G.I. Bill offered nothing for those who wanted to rent. But more to the point, they couldn't find a place to live here anyway because the rent control market gave a real cash incentive for people not to leave. So my grandparents, my mother's parents with that seven-room apartment there were just two people living in it with seven rooms. What do they need the seven rooms for? The reason is because a two-bedroom apartment would have cost them more if they gave up that four-bedroom apartment, so why give it up. Those kinds of decisions, which were understandably and appropriately imposed at one time over time, had a very definite impact.

That's what planners do. Planners understand the long-term impact of a decision. That's why there are certain things that we see today as very positive. And when people ask me what do I do for a living and I say I'm an urban planner, what I also say is, that gives me the privilege of being able to solve problems without considering the cost or political impact those solutions would present. But the solution is nonetheless there. There is no problem that we can't solve. And had the right choices been made in the 1960s, which might have been instead of building Co-Op City for people to run to, let's see how we can create a more appropriate place for people to live, blacks and whites, Jews and non-Jews, together on the Grand Concourse.

The fact is however, the goal of the city in the 1960s was not to find a way for those groups to live together. But they needed to find a place for one group that was growing and the other group

that was occupying those apartments had to be transported somewhere else. So how do you do it? You create a sensation of fear that invariably led to what did in fact happen. Dramatic increases in crime, dramatic reductions in city services. Parks like Crotona Park, 127 acres I think it is, it was abandoned and they never cut the grass in there. Joyce Kilmer Park, right up the street here, they used to plant every—not only did they have flowerbeds but every season they would change the flowers so that they reflected the season. Now they don't even bother cutting the grass, so now everything is just what amounts to just a big, large dump.

I mean that's the kind of the thing—these are things that happen, all designed to solve problems. At the same time the problems that are being created are invariably being sustained by those who see themselves as irrelevant. Poor people see themselves as irrelevant. They don't recognize that their vote is just as vibrant and vital as a man who is wealthy. They've been conditioned to believe that they are irrelevant, and that's exactly what the city wants. If a poor person realizes what they really should have, and they don't, and starts to demand it, then what happens. People who otherwise don't have to pay them any mind will now have to pay attention to them, and that's not necessarily what people in power want to see. So I call it the ghetto mentality. Create a place that's ugly and people who live there will think that they are not worthy of anything pretty.

Q: Because they've been abandoned.

Goodman: Because they've been abandoned, and because to make it pretty for them means—if I don't ever wash the floor in the hall, then when the light bulb burns out I don't have to fix the light bulb because people don't expect—if the floor isn't washed why should they expect the

light bulb to be changed? But if I wash the floor in the hall every week, not only will people insist that it be kept clean but when the light bulb burns out it better be fixed in a couple of hours, otherwise the landlord is going to get a phone call.

Q: Yeah. So what you're describing is prejudices being used to move people and moving people being used to save money or profit depending on your goal.

Goodman: Everything was being done for the purpose of benefiting certain groups to the detriment of others.

Q: So tell me how the area had changed physically. What did it look like when you moved back in the '80s?

Goodman: Oh, well, when I moved back—I bought the apartment in 1987 but I didn't move back here full-time till 1993.

Q: Okay.

Goodman: Having said that, in 1987, this building is across the street from Franz Sigel Park. Franz Sigel Park was fundamentally abandoned. No one went into it. What makes it so beautiful is that the west side of the park is sixty-five feet above street level, which is in a sense as high above street level as is a six story apartment house. So when you're in Franz Sigel Park, if you walk to the west side of it, you can see the Manhattan skyline, you can see the George

Washington Bridge. And its way up in the air so you don't hear any noises. But what does that mean? It means if you're on that side of the park if somebody knocks you on the head and you scream no one will hear you.

On the east side of the park near the Grand Concourse also, it's a big rock outcropping. You will see it when you go downstairs. It's a big, tall—you know, it's just a big hill, right. Okay. That park was fundamentally abandoned and nobody ever went into it. It was just overgrown and that's it. The lights didn't work, nothing worked. And it pretty much stayed that way. When I was hired as an urban planner, one of the first things I learned how to do was to get the city to make fundamental repairs to address city agencies. I knew how to reach out to city agencies to get them to address certain problems. And one of the things that—I use Franz Sigel Park as a classic case because I will always remember calling the Department of Transportation and speaking to somebody, I don't know who it was, and she said to me, “Well, it sounds like the reason the lights don't work is because they have been so badly vandalized there is no point in fixing them.”

Now, I don't know how I realized this either but I called the contractor that the city used, at the time, to repair lights. And I thought to myself, you know, technically the lights are supposed to work. If I call this contractor they're going to go in there and they're going to get the lights to work, and they're going to charge the cost of that service to the city and they are obligated to make the repair. And so within a matter of a couple of weeks we got the lights turned on. And I always remember going out to this guy, whose office was out in Long Island City, and I brought him a mug and a few other things as a gift for having turned on the lights in Franz Sigel Park.

Well, clearly still the grass wasn't cut very often. But by the 1990s, the city had begun to rebound from the horrors of the 1970s, whereas there was not this aggressive rebirth that you might associate with other parts of the city. There was still recognition that the city had the means to make things work better and so that started to occur. And little by little the urban environment here, step-by-step, little-by-little, began to change and began to improve. But there was still an issue of gangs who would hang red banners around certain locations, and you knew that was the bloods and they were marking their territory with red banners. I knew who to call and they came and they took the red banners down. I'm not the only one who knows this stuff, but I was one of those who did. And since I worked for the Borough President's Office across the street from where I live, this is the community where I live and where I work, and I felt a tie to this place. It's the same place I grew up in. I remember what it was, and I see what it is, and I know certain things need to happen.

Okay. But here's probably the most peculiar story, and perhaps in many ways a very frustrating one. There was a gunfight on 158th Street, between two groups of guys, and that prompted a community meeting. Hundreds of people turned out for this meeting. As typical of the 1970s or '60s, the police department's position was, "We really don't have the resources necessary at our command to aggressively deal with this issue. We recognize the issue. We're doing the best we can." But I can't tell you how many times his response to the audience was, "We lack the resources. We lack the resources." I mean it's like they're telling us they don't have the manpower to address this problem, and in a sense they're saying, "Well, it happens. Crap happens."

So after the meeting was over I went up to this guy and I said to him, “Let me ask you something. Suppose this happened on 72nd Street.” And he looks at me and he says, “What do you think our response would be?” The point is—where the crime happens determines the value of the victim’s life. If there is a shootout on 72nd Street within twenty-four hours you can be certain they would find the people who did it. And there would be no, “We don’t have the resources,” because no one living on 72nd Street would accept that as a rationale for not being to solve the problem. But because it happened on 158th Street, the value of my life, in terms of city priority, is different. The city sees a man walking here as not as essential to the city’s profile as someone else walking downtown. That is a very profound observation that, even as recently as the 1990s, was the factor in how things were happening.

Now, I would tell you today that that’s no longer the way things work.

Q: In this area.

Goodman: In this area. That is no longer the way things work. And that really wasn’t the—I don’t think the police department back then either wanted to convey that feeling. But that’s—when there’s a dollar’s worth of resource and twenty dollars’ worth of need, priorities have to be set. And those priorities are determined by who is at that table and who in the city’s mind as a city entire is more important.

Q: So this area, I mean as you describe people moving, it was designed to be a place where for a time it could be the lowest possible priority. The infrastructure was abandoned. The people who were on welfare were moved there.

Goodman: I wouldn't say the infrastructure was abandoned. I would say that a lot of the amenities—

Q: Amenities, yes.

Goodman: —were abandoned. The snow would fall, they would plow the street. But the plowing the street was because people have to get from Point A to Point B. And who were those people? They are not necessarily the people who live here. And I can tell you a story that goes along with that too. The Grand Concourse itself was redesigned in the 1960s and the money used to reconstruct it was federal funds from a highway construction legislation of some sort. So the reconstruction of the Grand Concourse had to meet federal highway standards, which meant wider traffic lanes, narrower medians, fewer traffic signals to accelerate the flow of traffic, because a highway or a parkway has to accommodate vehicles going quicker. Essentially, what they did was they took a residential boulevard and made it a signalized highway. And in fact, to this day, there are still some signs that say Mount Eden Avenue, Exit 4. I mean, you know, it's like all of a sudden I'm living on a highway. Okay, it isn't quite that bad but that is, to a certain extent, what happened.

Okay. So the infrastructure was redesigned to accommodate what the city saw as its essential role, which is to move people quickly through the city to their home beyond the city. And the best way that the city's poorer communities can function is to facilitate that movement as fast as possible because it is essential for the city's economy to accommodate people who work in the city but who don't live in the city. That was Robert Moses' whole point. Everything Robert Moses did was designed to move people to suburbia as fast as possible. And so you took residential streets and turned them into highways.

The Cross Bronx Expressway goes right through the heart of the Bronx. Six hundred apartment houses were torn down. The landlords all got paid. The tenants got a ninety-day vacancy notice. And what you created on 174th Street, whereas before was a street, an ordinary little street, now all of a sudden there's this pit built below the street level around the Grand Concourse. It's sixty feet below street level. Where you used to overlook a street, now you have this endless rumble of trucks spewing endless pounds of soot into the air and that is forever. That never, ever stops. And the whole intent of the Cross Bronx Expressway is to move people from the George Washington Bridge to New England through the Bronx as quickly as you can, without regard whatsoever for how that highway impacts the Bronx. So what you used to have was a nice place to live and now you have a place no one would want to go near. Those infrastructure decisions was how the city looked at its function in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

The change now is we recognize that the city—one of the essential benefits of this city, more than all the other cities, is the fact that we are a mass transit city. We have the best—I mean it's incredible to think about. The mass transit system in this city is amazing, and the foresight that it

represented when it was built is incredible, which we can talk about too. But the point is that we recognize today that an urban environment needs to be there for the citizen, not necessarily only for the person who works here but also for the citizen who lives here. And whether that's a wealthy person or a less wealthy person, the city as a living organism, which is really what it is, has to be accommodating to all of us. And that is the premise on which the founders of our modern city in the early 1900s built this place. The City Beautiful Movement. Did you ever hear of the City Beautiful Movement? For a great city to be a grand city, it also has to be a beautiful city. So we're going to create places that will both be functional and beautiful at the same time.

Here is the other thing about the subways, when the subways were built in the early 1900s there was no such thing anywhere else as a subway that offered a local line running parallel to an express line. And the reason for that being so important here is, because if you get on a train at 42nd Street and you're bound for 86th Street, or you get on an express train at 42nd Street and you're bound for 161st Street, the length of time it takes you to get to either one of those stations is not necessarily all that different because one train goes right up town, the other train makes stops on the way. So you're not penalized, by living further out, based on the amount of time you have to spend in the subway. No other subway system at the time they did that had that, and the foresight that went into that. Let's build a subway system that gets people further out just as fast as those are in so that we can inspire the development, encourage the development of our city well beyond the isle of Manhattan.

The other thing that they did, which was very unique—very few systems even do this today—you pay a flat fare no matter how far you ride it. Most other cities you pay a fare based on the

length of time you travel. The more you travel the higher your fare. Well, in New York City that would be mean a person that lives in the Bronx is paying more to ride home than a person who lives in Manhattan. Well, who would want to live in the Bronx, right? They realize that. Something so simple they realize it, but no one else had realized it until then.

Q: This is all so fascinating. I want to move ahead, just because we're at an hour now, to talking about how it plays a role in historic preservation.

Goodman: Okay.

Q: And one of the things that really caught my ear as you were talking about it is people in poorer areas feeling like they don't have a voice. It's this idea of having been abandoned. I want to ask you how community organizing, neighborhood associations, played a role in preserving the beauty of the area and the history of the area.

Goodman: Okay. Playing a role in beauty and history, and the role of the citizen, really has its roots in the devastation. Again, Jill Jones' book talks a lot about the formation of community development corporations. Perhaps the best example, the one that I always love to use, is Melrose Commons. Melrose Commons is a community just to the east of us. In 1970, 12,000 people lived in the borders of Melrose Commons. By 1980, only 600 were left. At the same time, there was an advance made by the Ferrer Administration. As Borough President, he came forward with something called the Bronx Center Urban Development Plan. A plan where the Borough President initiated a review of the assets of this community, including the part that we

call Melrose Commons, and how can this plan best serve for that redevelopment of that community. And never before had an elected official reached out to the general public and asked for their input. And I can remember—and at this point I wasn't working there yet, but I was involved in this plan. And I can remember people saying to me, "We've never been asked this before. We've never been asked to show up at a meeting to talk about the future of our neighborhood." And they were so skeptical of what was happening. They couldn't believe that this was actually going on.

And this woman, Yolanda Garcia, she had heard about the city's plan for her neighborhood, which was in fact to demolish the entire—whatever was left, we're going to tear it down, we're going to replant the people who are there and move them somewhere else, and we're going to rebuild this community. And it's typical of the city's attitude, we're going to build tall buildings around a big park. And her position was that you're going to eliminate the eyes on the street, which is so important according to Jane Jacobs, and you're going to create this park, which invariably means people are going to be afraid to go inside of it, because a big park is not an asset. It's a liability in a community where crime is in fact an issue.

She was so passionate in her position that she persuaded the Borough President to oppose the city's plan, and she in turn started something called Nos Quedamos, the We Stay Committee. Her vision was to create an integrated community based on income and age. For a community to really be vibrant it can't be exclusively poor, exclusively rich, nor should it be exclusively young or exclusively old. It should be a community that incorporates everybody. She also understood, by instinct, you don't want to have thirty-five story buildings on a street because that blocks out

the sun. So she designed, with the help of a man named Petr Strand—the two of them they basically sat down and they presented over time a vision that recognized the relationship between every aspect of an urban community, the density of an apartment house, how many people should live in one building, the height of the building, the availability of commercial activity on the street, and how a commercial block need not be ugly, it can be really beautiful, and how at night the lighting of store windows invites people to stroll in the street, which then reduces crime, not increases it. She understood all this stuff.

And she ultimately was successful in getting her vision adopted, not only by us in the Bronx through the Borough President's office, but by the federal government. Henry [G.] Cisneros, Clinton's HUD [Housing and Urban Development] Secretary, came up here and indorsed the plan. Who was Yolanda Garcia? She owned a carpet shop. That was who she was. She owned a carpet shop. And she said many times to me over and over again, "We are here, we've been here, we're not leaving. In ten years time, most of those who sit in elected offices won't be here anymore, but we still will be. This is where we are, this is where we're staying, and this is how we're going to move." And one of the cornerstones of her vision was that any occupied building not be demolished to make way for a new building.

So to this day, if you go over to Melrose Commons and visit where this community's redevelopment occurred, you will see beautiful brand new buildings standing right next to an older five story walk-up, because if one person lived in that older building the building could not be torn down, and so that's how the whole thing happened. Interestingly enough, the Giuliani

Administration was vigorously opposed to almost everything she was doing, and there is lot of reasons for that, which we can go into if you want.

Q: Well, we'll see if there is time, yeah.

Goodman: But the federal government was so excited about this vision and the Ferrer Administration was so excited by this vision, and the community as a whole was so excited about this vision that it just happened. And today what this woman, who is now deceased unfortunately, today her vision to a very great extent is the vision that was there. So what you have now six story, seven story, tall story co-ops and rentals, and townhouses, and homes for seniors, co-ops for people who want to buy. I mean there is a whole integrated community there. It is seen by many folks as an ideal model of the ideal urban redevelopment and it wasn't advanced by anybody other than a woman who owned a carpet shop.

Q: That is a great example of two things. One is people getting engaged in their own community and that kind of networking. But also how the beauty of an area plays a role in its safety and in its economic redevelopment.

Goodman: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: So again to bring it back to historic preservation, how does historic preservation and saving these old buildings play a role in economic redevelopment, or how can it?

Goodman: Okay. The Grand Concourse is a grand example of historic preservation by accident.

Q: [Laughs] Yes.

Goodman: Much of what happened on either side of the Grand Concourse is the story of devastation. The Grand Concourse itself containing some of the best apartment development type buildings in the Bronx did not really sustain major widespread abandonment, although there was some. And what we've come to understand today is because almost everything that was constructed on this boulevard that stands today was in fact constructed seventy-five, eighty years ago. What you have are apartment houses where you have a four-bedroom, three-bath apartment that is 2,200 square feet that you can buy today for \$350,000 in a building up on 166th Street in a building that was a grand building when it was built designed to accommodate a real upscale tenentry that over time is no longer there. But the fundamental infrastructure of that building remains and the beauty of that building, its architecture, still remains.

The rules that pertain to Grand Concourse buildings—for example, if you look at the Grand Concourse you'll see no fire escapes overhanging the sidewalk. All the fire escapes are recessed. So when you look down the street what you see is a beautiful line, perfectly situated line of apartment houses, all approximately the same height for the most part lined up in what we call a building wall. That is what makes the Grand Concourse really special. And had the devastation of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, the disinvestment that presided over this community during that period, not been so there is a good chance that what we would have on the Grand Concourse today would more resemble 86th Street on the east side rather than what we have.

So there was this understanding that what we have is so special that cannot be duplicated, so we want to preserve it. And what we are preserving in certain areas is something that really represented a period of New York City that many referred to as its golden decade. The 1920s, was the city's golden decade, where there was this incredible upsurge of wealth, much of it false, which we found out was true in the 1930s. But nonetheless, this incredible investment, incredible development, beautiful apartment houses many of which today are still here. Regrettably a lot of what made them really beautiful was taken apart during the 1960s and '70s. But to prevent that from continuing, to stop any threat of that going forward, recently there was this thing called the Grand Concourse Historic District that was established by the Landmarks Commission. It really fundamentally covers the street between 153rd Street on the south and 167th Street on the north. And within that span of blocks, which also include Walton Avenue and Sheridan Avenue, west and east respectively, there is an example of every decade of apartment development from the 1920s through the 1960s represented in that district. And the whole idea is to preserve this forever, because that's really what this is designed to do, in order to make certain that what so defined the city during that period of time is not lost forever.

There are two other things that connect to this. One is the City Planning Commission adopted zoning that is specific to the Grand Concourse called the Grand Concourse Special Zoning District, and that was adopted in 1983. And the Commission recognized at that time, way back in the 1980s, that the Grand Concourse was very special and it needs to be preserved and that the intent of the architects that laid it out in the early 1900s was to create a grand beautiful boulevard for residential pleasure. So Louis Risse, a visionary who was most responsible for seeing the

Grand Concourse come to pass, he recognized that commercial uses should not exist on the Grand Concourse.

Now unfortunately that observation has been violated but the zoning, in fact, still to this day stipulates no signage can overhang a building. No exterior signage on the Grand Concourse south of 183rd Street can be illuminated. If there is illumination of any kind of store sign, the sign has to be inside the store through a window rather than outside on the façade of the building. Only medical offices are allowed. No law offices. None of that is permitted. Now obviously, if you go out today I'll show you violation after violation of those ordinances. But the point being was that that was what Risse wanted. The boulevard to be so special in terms of how it served the people who lived here that when it was really in fact built, that vision was adopted and the beauty of the Grand Concourse was seen as that being something so special that in the 1980s the Planning Commission adopted zoning to protect it.

The other thing is the Grand Concourse is on a list of national historic places. And the reason for that is because it is one of the few major boulevards that takes advantage of what Risse recognized. The Grand Concourse is built on top of a plateau that runs due north/south. What he saw was—he was inspired by Frederick Law Olmstead, when designing Central Park. I always like to say there is not a thing in Central Park that God put there. Everything in Central Park was put there by a man, and the man most often was Frederick Law Olmstead. Not the only one but—one of the things that he recognized was that when you stood in Central Park and look north/south, you should not be able to see any east/west travel movement. While those east/west roadways were built to accommodate movement from the east side to the west side, they are all

below grade level, so that when you stand in Central Park and look north/south you don't see a road with cars going across it.

Well, Risse took this plateau and he adopted the same idea. Through this plateau, we will build tunnels so that cars going east/west can pass under the boulevard and not intersect cars going north/south. And of course, cars didn't exist yet. But still, nonetheless, that vision was so important, and the use of topography was so comprehensive that the federal government saw fit not to put this boulevard on its list of historic places.

Q: So historic for urban planning vision really.

Goodman: Vision and beauty in the urban sense. Beauty is one of these things. The Grand Canyon is beautiful but no one lives there. The Grand Concourse can be beautiful as a place where people live and it was in fact designed exactly for that purpose. That's why the sidewalks are extra wide.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: That's why the sidewalks are extra wide.

Goodman: That's why the sidewalks are extra wide because you want to be able to promenade. That's why the main roadway is set apart from the service roadways, before anyone thought of using a roadway for movement of cars. The carriages going uptown would use the main and

those servicing the buildings would use the service roads. And it was in fact the purpose that Risse indentified as giving people in Manhattan a beautiful way to escape the confines of an urban environment and explore the beauty of the natural Bronx, which at the time was almost entirely woods.

In fact, Risse came here, according to his own words, on a rabbit shoot. When he noticed this ridge, he was so impressed with it that he advanced his vision for a boulevard that ultimately was adopted. It took a long time to get built. There was a lot of argument. But three men, Louis Haffen, Louis Risse and Louis Heintz were the three men all who shared the first name Louis. The three Louie's is what people called them. They were most responsible for the building of the Grand Concourse, which its full name is called The Grand Boulevard and Concourse, because concourse means level and it is a grand boulevard and concourse. That's the whole name. That's where the name comes from.

Q: So given that it was originally designed with this vision and that vision persists, because it wasn't torn down and redeveloped, it makes it kind of a perfect place to start thinking about people first again, citizens first again.

Goodman: That's exactly what it was originally designed for, people first. Beauty and residential functions can be partners. That was fundamentally abandoned in most American cities during the second half of the Twentieth Century as the beauty of the city was transported to the suburbs. If you want to live with trees and fresh air move to the suburbs. Cities don't function well worrying about that stuff. But over the past—really since the turn of the most recent century as the reason

for suburbia's development has sort of faded into a kind of comfortable dormancy. By that I mean people still want to live in the suburbs but they're not seen as a refuge so much as a choice. And as a result, younger folks, your age, see cities as a vibrant, pulsating, exciting dynamic, inter-racial, inter-religious, inter-faith, inter everything, a place where human beings can engage each other in a way that can't happen in a suburb because no one walks on a sidewalk in the suburbs. No one walks down to the corner drugstore to pick up a prescription in the suburbs. The idea that we can do that—

No one shares a subway ride. I mean subways are really amazing places in that you have thousands of people scrunched together, whereas there was a time when people saw that as a real liability. Now there is a certain panache to it. There is a certain fun to it. I get on a subway and I never know quite what I'm going to experience and that experience isn't seen as something we fear but rather something we want to see. You know, people come to New York today just to ride the subway, like I did when I was a kid. The whole idea of it is that, that is the role of the city now. The city provides this and New York can do it better than anywhere else because we have this amazing vision that was thought of over a hundred years ago.

How to make a great city a grand city means people want to be there. And what draws us to this place has always existed all through this entire span of time. It's just a matter of how we look at it. What is the purpose of a city today? Yes, the purpose still is to create wealth. That's really still the main purpose. But that doesn't mean we have to harm each other to do it. We can do it with each other's help. And it is much better to reach out, the way the Borough President's plan did in 1993, to reach out to the citizen rather than to tell the citizen. I mean the classic case, Melrose

Commons, reach out and let the citizen come to the table rather than telling the citizen you're irrelevant, we're the ones in power. That was the Robert Moses attitude. Robert Moses was, I'm telling you what you need and if you don't agree with me you can go to hell and leave, and everybody got up and left. I mean that's exactly what they did, all right. And so what you're left was—what you had behind was devastation.

Maybe in retrospect, it was necessary for us to go through that period, that horrible period, in order to recognize how beautiful a city can actually be, which is where we are now. I don't think—I honestly do believe a lot of people still would like to live in their own little house on a piece of grass somewhere. But that's more so, I think, more so pertains to folks in their forties and fifties, not in their twenties and thirties. And it's the age, that twenty to thirty year, from the time you turn twenty to the time you turn forty, that's the most exciting time that ever happens in your life. I can tell you from—I mean there is no doubt. There is no question about it. You are living through this tumultuous time and you're dealing with so many things but when you look back on it, as I do now as a man in my sixties, I look back on it and I don't remember all the anguish and the concerns I had so much as I remember all the fun I had. And that's what cities are, a place to have fun and to enjoy the dynamic of what we can do here, from riding a subway to walking on a sidewalk.

Q: That's wonderful. I just have a couple more questions about this. The landmark designation in 2011, you said that there was sort of a longstanding campaign to get that going. What do you know about that?

Goodman: Yes. The Borough President's office, way back, I can't remember when it started, really recognized that the Grand Concourse was something special. I guess, to a certain extent, it took that off the Grand Concourse Preservation District that the Zoning Commission adopted. So it's nothing that necessarily hit like a bolt of lightning but still, people recognized the specialty of it. Our office under the Ferrer Administration and under the [Adolfo] Carrión, [Jr.] Administration. Then ultimately with the [Ruben] Diaz [Jr.] Administration, were able to get the Landmarks Commission to recognize the essentiality of this community and what it offers.

Q: So tell me about that process a little bit, who was involved and what needed to get done to accomplish that I guess? Or I guess the other thing I could ask who were the main drivers of it?

Goodman: Well, I can't really speak to that authoritatively.

Q: That's fine.

Goodman: But I can tell you that a man named Dan Donovan, who works with us in the Borough President's office really was the Borough President's point person on this. It was his responsibility to get a lot of the historic information associated with the Grand Concourse on paper. He found the date of every building, who the architect was, and the actual size of the building, the year it was built, everything about it, we have in our office pursuant to Dan's effort. All of this information written down. All of that is needed to give to the city's Landmarks Commission to persuade them to adopt this thing. Now there was, I think, a certain amount of politics involved in that—bluntly spoken?

Q: Please do.

Goodman: I'm going to blunt now.

Q: Go for it.

Goodman: The Rudy Giuliani administration had a political incentive to make sure nothing we wanted to do succeed, because he saw Ferrer as his most likely competitor for being mayor. So for everything Ferrer wanted to do, Rudy saw it as injuring his position. So there was this real hostile relationship between these two men. So as a consequence, the Landmarks Commission was not all that enthused about working with us during the Giuliani span of time. That changed when Bloomberg was elected in that Bloomberg did not see us, in the Bronx, as threatening his own political future the way Giuliani did. And you have to understand that Giuliani carried every borough twice except for the Bronx. Okay. So not only did Giuliani see Ferrer as a threat but Giuliani also knew he didn't need the Bronx at all. So whether the Bronx was going to succeed or fail as a place—as far as Rudy was concerned in my opinion, he would rather see it fail than it succeed, only because if it failed it didn't cost him anything and if it succeeded it helped his adversary. That's why if Rudy got his way the Bronx would be the only borough without a baseball park, because he wanted to move the Yankees downtown and because Brooklyn and Queens and Staten Island all have baseball parks. Queens has City Field and Giuliani's administration built minor league team parks in Brooklyn and Staten Island, and moved the Yankees to Manhattan. The Bronx would be the only borough without a baseball park even

though it was the borough that had the most famous stadium in the history of stadiums, is located here.

All right, having said all of that—

Q: So Bloomberg comes in and that changes things.

Goodman: Bloomberg came in and that changed that attitude. But Bloomberg also didn't see the Bronx as especially vital to him. So he wasn't all that aggressive about it but he didn't resist it. And the result is that this idea started to catch fire, and our office under three different Borough Presidents wanted to see this happen, I think wanted to see this happen, because they recognized the value that that designation offers in terms of making certain that what was built here when this area was initially constructed is worthy of preservation and retention.

Now that district itself, while one of the largest ones in the city, really in fact only represents a relatively small section of the Grand Concourse. The Grand Concourse runs up to 205th Street or even beyond it and this only goes up to 167th Street. So it isn't by any means the entire boulevard. But it does include architecture, as I said earlier, from every decade, so that's there. So we have this thing, and what I like to say to people who buy into this co-op you don't have to worry about Donald Trump buying the building next door and knocking it down and constructing a fifty-story tower next door and blocking out your view. That is not going to ever happen. To that extent it's nice. In this building where we advertise, we make sure it is noted, it's in the

historic district and I have a sign inside in my bedroom that is a souvenir of that designation. I like to say that.

Q: That's wonderful.

Goodman: Yeah.

Q: Are there any buildings or areas that you would like to see the district expand to protect? Like, what's the future of historic preservation in that area?

Goodman: Well, there are a lot of people in the community who would like to see the whole boulevard designated like that, and there are pros and cons to both arguments.

Q: Yeah, tell me about those.

Goodman: The pros obviously are to preserve what is there. The con is, in many respects just as important. And that is you have a lot of buildings on the Grand Concourse today that while were at one time beautiful buildings, and still have the infrastructure that reflects that, and the facades that reflect that, the fundamental reality is that they are in rather poor shape. If you are going to tell a property owner that that property can never be altered, are you incentivizing an investment or incentivizing disinvestment. So there is this fine line between one and the other. I'm not sure myself whether it's a wise thing to just unilaterally declare everything should be preserved forever simply because it's a nice thing to do.

The fact is that if profit is still the main driver, you don't want to mess with the profit margins too much, and that would be my caution. I was somewhat—you know, to a certain extent when this initial plan was presented, I was one of the people who pointed that out. Are we really in fact preserving something that is worthy of preservation in terms of what it is today, versus are we romanticizing what it is today based on what it was yesterday? I think that a great compromise was reached. We have buildings of significant architectural stature that are preserved and yet at the same time there are buildings that are similar in that the profile further uptown that may in fact not have the capacity to be preserved anymore because they—

[INTERRUPTION]

We have buildings further uptown that might not necessarily be worthy of preserving because they have been neglected. So whether or not they are preserved will be more a matter of the market rather than a designation.

Q: Well, that brings up one other question, as we've been talking to—

[INTERURPTION]

Q: Well, I'm coming to the end either way. But I do want to ask in other neighborhoods we've spoken to, there has been a concern that landmark designation, historic preservation in general, would, A, invite gentrification, which would make it difficult for the people still living there to

benefit from the designation, or B, that it might cut into the profit of ownership or it would be telling homeowners how to live their lives, which is an invasion they don't really want. How do you balance that? What do you say to people who have those concerns?

Goodman: Well, those are the two main concerns. I personally don't see gentrification as much of a challenge here as a lot of folks do, and largely because all the development that has occurred south of Fordham Road in the Bronx over the past forty years has to some extent been designed to accommodate people of a particular income. And there is virtually no—there are some, but up to this moment virtually no market rate development is happening yet. There are a lot of proposals for it. There is a lot of energy being expressed that would see such development happening, but none of it up to this point involves tearing down a building full of people and forcing them to move. None of it. It is either on vacant land or land that is under-utilized, basically defined as former industrial type development sites. Like on 138th Street there is a lot of plans for that corridor but almost invariably the sites are occupied by under-utilized commercial and industrial functions. The Grand Concourse, we don't have that problem. There is no plan to build this grand building and the buildings that are in the historic district, that are really in great shape, are all co-ops anyway. And so co-operatives are looking for the rise in profit. So that is not—I don't see that as an issue.

The issue of the long-term viability, or how the city will direct the development or the function of a community's residential spaces, those kinds of places generally are two, three family houses. Here, yeah, it's true, I mean, if there were no landmark designation a landlord could take what amounts to a beautiful façade and replace it with plain brick, and I can show you examples where

that has happened. The beautiful façade costs millions and the plain brick costs thousands. But the point is that if the façade is in need of repair I think the historic district guarantees that the building will look beautiful, rather than just let the landlord do the cheapest thing possible and turn it into something ugly. That, in my opinion, is worth the—

I'm not making the investment but I will tell you one thing as a co-op owner across the street from a rental building, if that building next door to me is made ugly that diminishes my investment in my co-op building. So I have an incentive, a profit incentive, to want to see that rental building maintained nice so my co-op is worth more. So there is this dichotomy of forces pulling each other in different directions, and how you create this happy medium depending on who you talk to will depend upon how happy they are. I mean there are lots of people who are here today who fear this community becoming the next Park Slope, or the next Crown Heights, or whatever it is in Brooklyn. A lot of people up here use the phrase Brooklynized. We don't want to become Brooklynized.

A lot of folks are frightened of Brooklynization. And yet there are others, like me, who feel that if that means we have to keep things ugly in order to protect the people who live here, that's wrong too. That's a big challenge. Landmarking I don't think does one way or another. I don't see that one thing has anything to do with the other, in the context of the Grand Concourse, community, which is almost entirely rental buildings or co-op buildings. Not privately owned homes where the city is walking in and telling you you have to replace this or that and you will live in a three family house. I mean we don't have that here so it is not quite the same thing.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Well, my last couple of questions have to do with history specifically. One is, in the history of New York how do you see presence of minorities? How do you see any minority group being represented, under-represented or contributions being discussed? It's a really broad question so interpret it however you like.

Goodman: Okay. Minorities, everyone is in the minority somewhere, especially in New York City. There is no such thing as a minority that doesn't exist for somebody. We were all one way or the other a minority. All right, having said that, I don't think racial or religious or sex orientation, I don't think any of that relates to us in New York City so much as income.

Q: Income. Okay.

Goodman: My feeling is, in New York City today, if you are discriminated against on one level or another it is because you are not wealthy, or you are too poor or you are—you know, you fall into a category that people on the Upper East Side look down on. Okay. And I really believe that that's the challenge our city faces today. I think, in terms of faith and nationality and all of that, I think everyone in the city of New York feels proud of the fact that we are not all one or the other. Whereas religious differences very much defined communities in New York during the first half of the Twentieth Century, and were then exploited. Fears were exploited during the second half of the Twentieth Century, and as a result, so many communities were destroyed as a consequence of that exploitation. I think we have all gotten to the point today where if a man across the hall worships one way and I worship another I am not going to be afraid to live across the hall from him. I don't think that exists anymore. I don't think landlords today, as they did in

the 1960s around here, advertise exclusively in Yiddish newspapers so that people who weren't Jewish wouldn't know the ad. I mean people actually did that.

Okay, the point is that that isn't so much a problem today. But this issue of class, this issue that you have a poor door in an apartment house—which exists—that people who earn less are not worthy as much as those who earn more, that is really bad news. The reason it's bad news is because the wealthy community is being exploited and the poorer community is being denied. A bag of birdseed on Lexington Avenue costs five dollars more than the same bag bought here. A cup of coffee in Manhattan is two and a half dollars. A cup of coffee here is seventy-five cents. The difference between one and the other—a bottle of Coke, a twelve-ounce can of Coke is two bucks downtown. I can buy a three-liter bottle of Coke here for the same two bucks. The point I'm making is that is plain crap. If the communities were integrated based on income that kind of difference wouldn't exist as dramatically as it does. How that happens means that—whereas we in the Bronx are in fact paying more attention to the needs of those with less than any other borough. Similar decisions in more upscale communities have to be made so that lower income folks can live in those places just as they live here and this community is no longer considered the poorest community in the city of New York. And there is no longer a designation that defines any one place as the poorest because that invariably means something that nobody would like to be bothered with.

And again, if we are in fact going to remain less affluent, that doesn't mean that we have to be ugly. And it doesn't mean that we have to accept the poorer schools, and the worse maintained parks, and the place where the cops do nothing more than give parking tickets. It doesn't mean

that it has to be that way. I always say to people just because a community is poor, just because a person works their butt off standing over a hamburger grill for nine hours a day, coming home covered in grease—I mean, I’ve done it myself, covered in grease. You take a shower and you can smell that coming off your body, I mean, seriously. That person makes thirty grand a year. Is that person not entitled to a beautiful park? Just because they make thirty grand a year should they be denied that, when in fact a person who makes thirty grand a week has a beautiful park that they don’t even need because they have a house out in the Hamptons?

I mean the whole idea is we not only have to breakdown our segregated city based on income, but we also have to recognize that everyone, no matter where they live, are entitled to things that are well maintained and beautiful. Educating the citizen to understand that it is in fact their responsibility to pursue and in fact demand. That’s what I like to do, and that’s what I’m doing right now with you.

Q: Thank you. I have to ask, the contributions of poorer populations to the history of this area, how have those contributions in that history been preserved by landmarking this district? Do you see that happening?

Goodman: I don’t know that that—the only answer to that is that the poorer citizen here was part of the process because they are here. Their income or their status as “a minority” or not a minority group, I don’t think that has any relevance at all.

Q: Well, forget that for now. But you said one of the defining features, for you, is class.

Goodman: That's right.

Q: So I want to bring that into a historical backdrop.

Goodman: Okay.

Q: People of a certain class have made contributions, they do have value, and they are participating in history.

Goodman: Right.

Q: So how is that history preserved by preserving this space?

Goodman: Because what you have is a growing understanding that those folks, who are here, who are not necessarily wealthy, recognize and are given the chance to discover what makes their community historically significant. Because, in fact, we are all part of that chain of time. And if I as a citizen today came to New York City fifteen years ago and understood what I, Sam, as a citizen of this city today, understand the history I would think that that person who came here fifteen years ago if they knew what this community is and what it was, which is what historic preservation really is all about, they would derive a sense of pride from it. As a result, they wouldn't feel ashamed to say Bronx, New York on their envelope. They would feel proud

of the fact that they live in a place that went through so much pain, and that so many people had to tolerate such poor and such unfortunate circumstance, and yet that place is still here today.

Whereas those folks may have passed into history, they who are here today are now a part of that same history. In order to know where you are going it helps to know where you've been, and that is what historic preservation really is designed to do. We are here preserving what we have because it helps us understand where we want to go. And if we tear down everything we had or have, and eliminate it from that history book by eradicating its existence, then what do we know about the future. Are we likely to rebuild the same problem all over again? We need to understand what history is about to learn from it.

When you really think about history, history is really painful. There is nothing romantic about war, and death, and crime, and pestilence. We understand what those things were in order now to better appreciate how not to let that happen over again. And this is what the story about the Bronx really is. It is story that is painful, but if you don't derive anything else from that story what you should come away with is a sense of, I understand the threats and I understand the way things work and I understand my role as a person and I understand what all the different players at the table really are involved in. As a result we can all work together for everyone's benefit by understanding all of that.

Q: And we understand that we deserve something beautiful.

Goodman: That's right. That's right. I can give you a great example of something beautiful that hung on. Do you want to hear this, one more story?

Q: I do. Yes. Go for it.

Goodman: Okay. The Heinrich Heine Fountain.

Q: Yes.

Goodman: The Heinrich Heine Fountain in Joyce Kilmer Park. In 1897 an empress of Austria commissioned the creation of that fountain to celebrate the centennial Heinrich Heine. Heinrich Heine was a German born poet who was considered a muckraker, a satirical commentator on German society in the 1700s. He was Jewish by birth. He lived in Dusseldorf, and he wrote these stories basically poking fun at German society. And, in fact, one of the things he is credited as saying is, "Any society that burns books will someday burn people." He also was very critical of the United States, which in the 1700s was professing to be this great land of freedom, but was so adamantly jealous in preserving slavery. So this man's position was looked upon by German society as being somewhat nasty. So he was sort of pushed back into German society and rejected, so much so that he ultimately had to move to France, and he converted to Christianity.

Having said all that, this empress commissioned this fountain. This fountain is then delivered to Dusseldorf to celebrate this man's centennial. Based on this man's poetry and commentaries the city of Dusseldorf rejected the fountain. So in the 1890s, there was a small German community

here in the Bronx, and in New York City, that paid to have the fountain brought from Dusseldorf to Manhattan. They financed the transport of this fountain across the Atlantic Ocean, which is about a 2,000-mile journey. It was destined to be installed at the intersection of 59th Street and 5th Avenue right by the Plaza Hotel. When the movers and shakers in 1899, saw this fountain—the fountain celebrates Heine's poem called Die Lorelei, which is a story about a beautiful maiden who sits on top of a mountain overlooking the river Rhine. As sailors sail up the river they are so captivated by this beautiful maid that they capsized.

Okay. So at the base of the fountain today, if you go and look at it, there are skulls and there are starfish and there are all these things, and there are three mermaids, bare-breasted mermaids, that pay tribute to Lorelei who is on top of this thing. And one is called Satire, the other is called Beauty, and third one is called Melancholy. When the movers and shakers saw this women, the bare-breasted women they said, "This is not appropriate for here," so they rejected the fountain.

Now, again, the fountain is homeless. The Grand Concourse was under construction in those days. There was at the time this German community here, and so why not put this fountain here in the Bronx to celebrate the opening intersection of the Grand Concourse. So it was installed. On July 8, 1899, this fountain was installed here in the Bronx. And it stood where it was originally installed until the 1930s when they built the subway underneath. The D train runs underneath it. So now they have to move the fountain again. So the fountain moves from the southern end of the park to the northern end of the park. In 1940, it was reinstalled at the northern end of the park. And it stood there functioning as a fountain that I played around in as a

boy. In fact, if you buy Constance Rosenblum's book, *Boulevard of Dreams*, there is a picture of me at the age of three standing in front of this fountain.

Okay, the point is that it stood there until the 1960s. In the 1960s, there was a drought and they turned the water off, and the fountain was then basically left to stand there with no water running on it. And as the community's profile changed from this Jewish community to an African American and a Hispanic community, the value of the fountain as a landmark also began to change. As a consequence, in July of 1977, when there was this blackout that fountain was really horrifically vandalized. The mermaids' were decapitated, a lot of the aspects of the fountain were torn apart, and the entire thing ultimately was covered in graffiti. Now it's important to understand that, I think, the reason why that happened was because the city never reactivated the fountain. Had they turned the water back on after the drought, I don't think any of that would have occurred, but nonetheless it did. So it stood there at the northern end of the park until 1997. Now it's time to celebrate the Bicentennial of the fountain.

But before that happens—and I skipped over this, and this is really the important part—in 1985 the city's Parks Department says to this neighborhood, "We will rebuild this park. We have \$5 million to reconstruct this park. But we insist that as a condition for this plan's adoption, you the community have to agree to let the fountain be moved somewhere else because we are not going to spend \$1 million, that it was estimated to cost, to restore the fountain in a community that clearly doesn't care about it." So there was this big contentious argument. The Parks Department's position was, We're not going to waste this money. And the community's position was—a woman named Evelyn Collins, again just an ordinary citizen. She was passionate, and

she said, “We will not agree to any plan that allows the fountain to be relocated. We insist that the fountain stay here. This is our fountain, it’s been here—we recognize that it’s been vandalized but we also recognize is, and our belief is, that if it were in fact restored it would be preserved, because the community values something beautiful.” The Parks Department says, “Baloney.”

So from 1985 to 1997, nothing happens at all. The fountain is left to stand there and the park continues to deteriorate, because the Parks Department and the community would not agree on a plan. In 1997, a gentleman named Hermann Klass, from Dusseldorf, comes to the United States and meets with, at that time my office boss, named Bernd Zimmermann. He was, a native of Germany, who came to the United States, worked for the Bronx County Planning Office and for our office. He was my boss, direct boss. He was very insistent that the fountain remain in the park, and this man Klass was very optimistic that he could raise monies needed to restore the fountain. I remember he came and they set up this piano in the park and they had a concert and all this stuff to bring attention to this devastated fountain. This fountain really looked pathetic. The long and short of that story is that his endeavors were very well intended. We figured it is going to cost one million bucks. This gentleman says, “Maybe I can raise \$50,000 or \$100,000.”

At the same time while this is going on, there was a man named Stephen Kellen. Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, I don’t know if you have ever heard of it. Stephen Kellen was, again, native to Germany, came to the United States, became very wealthy. He says to the Municipal Arts Society—the Municipal Arts Society of New York City is responsible for among many things, The Adopt-A-Monument Program. This program really was designed to connect

public monuments with private resources for the purpose of restoring the monument. They did a remarkable job all over the city of New York restoring monuments. Perhaps the best known is the one in Central Park near Columbus Circle with the gold. I don't know who it is, it's beautiful.

Q2: The Maine Monument.

Goodman: Yeah, I don't know what it is.

Q2: It's the Maine Monument, to the Maine battleship.

Goodman: Okay. That may be what it is, yeah. Okay. Stephen Kellen adopted our fountain, providing \$330,000. This man was going to write a check for \$330,000 towards the restoration of the fountain. Well, at this point, the Parks Department can't tell this guy no. And the citizens are not going to approve it unless it stays here. So in July of 1997, shortly after this initial visit by Klass, it's agreed to restore the monument.

Now the monument has to be moved to Canada. So this monument has been in Austria, it's been Dusseldorf, it's been in Manhattan, it's been in two places in the Bronx, and now it's on its way to Canada. It's restored in Canada through a Bronx based company called the Grenadier Corporation. A Bronx based company, again, run by a man from Germany, native to Germany, who happens to be here in the Bronx. He has a place where they restore—you know, they work with brick and marble and all this stuff. They take it to Canada where they can best restore it. The heads, the arms, and all the various aspects of the fountain are re-carved with marble that

was inside the drum of the monument. They're using photographs that were taken by the Parks Department when the fountain was first installed in the 1890s. I have that picture inside of that monument.

The bottom line is on July 8, 1999, exactly one hundred years to the day, that fountain was re-installed where it is today in the place where it was originally installed a hundred years earlier. I, as a grown man now working here, realized I was perhaps the only one there who could honestly remember when the water actually flowed. And when they turned the water on for the first time since the 1960s I realized that no one sharing this time with me had ever seen water flow out of that fountain except me.

The whole point of this conversation, why I share this with you, is because two things. First, it was a celebration. Second, and perhaps most important, if it weren't for the tenancy of the citizen who lived here, who recognized that this was part of our place, and just because it represents a man who no one knew—no one knows who Heine is—doesn't mean that the beauty of the fountain isn't appropriate in a community of working people. That's where it is. And it stays today for the most part maintained very well by the MAS [The Municipal Art Society of New York], and by that money from a dentist named Hermann Klass, who did in fact provide enough money for the monument's maintenance year in and year out. The foundation, Anna-Marie and Stephen Kellen Foundation, still to this day are very involved in working with the MAS to make sure the fountain stays in good shape. See?

Q: That's an amazing story. [To the videographer] Got to go? [Laughs]

Goodman: Okay. Are we done?

Q2: Perfect timing.

Q: I think that's a great place to stop.

Goodman: Okay. Okay.

Q: Thank you so much. Can I just ask real quick? I mean, you must have so much notes, research, and documents. Are you thinking of archiving any of that stuff from your work?

Goodman: I have a lot of it.

Q2: You need to write a book.

Goodman: I have started already. And I am quoted in a lot of books.

Q: Right [laughs].

Q2: You seriously need to write a book.

Goodman: Yeah. I mean it is a story that is—

Q2: And not just about the Bronx, but about the bigger picture.

Goodman: It applies to everybody. This community's experience is part of the American story.

Q2: Exactly.

Q: I think so too.

Q2: And that's what makes what you're doing—why do you think I'm sitting here?

Q: [Laughs] I really appreciate your time. This was wonderful. This was really great.

Goodman: I really hope that—

Q2: Fantastic. May I ask you a really basic question that I've wondered about for years, while I'm packing up. Sorry, I don't want to steal your time.

Q: That's cool. I'll turn this off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]