SAVING PRESERVATION STORIES:

DIVERSITY AND THE OUTER BOROUGHS

The Reminiscences of

Fearonce La Lande and Elizabeth Slaughter

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Fearonce La Lande and Elizabeth Slaughter conducted by Interviewer Liz H. Strong on October 24, 2017. 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.

The Corona East Elmhurst Historic Preservation Society was founded in 2014 and promotes the history of the area. In this joint interview, Fearonce La Lande and Elizabeth Slaughter speak about their childhoods and experiences growing up in Corona-East Elmhurst and how the neighborhood has changed over the years. Both founding members of the Corona-East Elmhurst Historic Preservation Society, they advocate for educating current residents about the history of the area as a middle class black neighborhood that was home to Dizzy Gillespie, Eric Holder, Nancy Wilson, and Marie M. Daly. They have both also been involved in the efforts to landmark the Dorie Miller Coops, as well as the neighborhood as a historic district. The group has also conducted interviews with older residents to preserve their stories and experiences of the area.

Elizabeth Slaughter and Fearonce La Lande are both lifelong residents of Corona-East Elmhurst and are founding members of the Corona East-Elmhurst Historic Preservation Society. Fearonce La Lande grew up in Corona and is now a lawyer. Elizabeth Slaughter also grew up in Corona, in the then-newly built Dorie Miller Co-op.

Transcriptionist: Matthew Geesey

Session: 1

Interviewee: Fearonce La Land, Elizabeth Slaughter

Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Liz H. Strong (Q1), Anthony Bellov (Q2)

Date: October 24, 2017

Q1: It's Tuesday the twenty-fourth. It's October, Tuesday the twenty-fourth. We are here interviewing Liz [Elizabeth Slaughter] and Fearonce [La Lande]. My name is Liz Strong. Anthony's on camera.

Q2: Anthony Bellov, the one and only *[laughs]*.

Q1: This is for the New York Preservation Archive Project's oral history collection called *Saving Preservation Stories*. And I think that's—

Q2: And ready to clap.

Q1: Yes, do it.

Q2: Okay, clapping.

Q1: Thank you. So we'll just get started, as I was saying, we always like to get to know who you are as people before we really get into the details. So each of you please, in

whatever turn you like, tell me where and when you were born and a little bit of your life growing up.

Slaughter: All right, I'll go. I'm Elizabeth Slaughter. My family inherited a home on 102nd Street in Corona in the mid '30s. Later they moved to 111-17 Northern Boulevard, a building that was considered a luxury apartment at that time. It had a large gracious marble lobby, ornate wrought iron and glass entry along with chandeliers and a wrought iron staircase. The building was diverse with young well-educated families who became life-long friends of my parents. Most moved on later to purchase homes in East Elmhurst, Jamaica and Brooklyn. The men and women went on to executive and senior positions in both corporations and government.

I am one of few people that was actually born in Corona, not in a hospital but born in a house. I'm one of six and when you're number five of six, Dr. Foster Pettie basically said, "We've got this, right?" And so I was born in my parents' bedroom at 33-20 112th Street in Corona. A couple of years later we moved around the corner where we lived for forty years until my mom eventually moved to Florida. So we didn't leave Corona until 1994, having been there since the mid '30s.

All six of us went to PS 143 from 1935-1960. Our names were often confused which happens, though generally we did not overlap much. Except I don't know why they would call me the boys' name but they did. All the teachers were straight out of catholic school—and mean! But education was utmost for them and it was easier to follow the

rules than incur their wrath. Unfortunately, many of the boys who were not good students caught hell.

I had a wonderful ‘50s childhood growing up in Corona. It was a great time that few have an opportunity to experience.

Q1: If you don’t mind, what was great about it? Share some specific memories that kind of stand out.

Slaughter: It was a time and I think many people can relate to a time, the ’50s and ‘60s when life and people were just different. In 1953 my family moved around the block, literally, to the Dorie Miller Co-operative. It was a complex of six buildings, funded by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and managed by the classy east side firm of Brown Harris Stevens, Inc. It was the first predominately African-American co-op in the country when it was built. It was solidly middle class and included a diverse group of mostly liberal leaning folks both black and white, families with and without young children as well as retired. The idea of buying something that you owned shares but not the land was familiar to Manhattan but much less so in outer boroughs where the idea was to own house and land. So, it is my presumption that those who purchased apartments in Dorie Miller had to be somewhat forward-thinking as this was not the norm—especially for African Americans in the 1950s. I was in morning kindergarten and at lunchtime, I would carry my Annie Oakley lunchbox across the street—without my

grandmother—and have lunch with the construction workers who were building Dorie Miller. It was fun. They were nice. Not today.

Dorie Miller was a quiet, peaceful enclave which many referred to it as a type of Mayberry. Nothing ever happened there other than people going to work every day, parents watching children, children playing with children. As I mentioned, it was primarily an African-American community but there were children of all backgrounds, Christian, Jewish, all types. And there were no distinctions made, other than those that children make—who was good at jump rope, was a crybaby or wore braces. The main problem as I recall were adults with no kids who complained about kids. The adults with kids took care of that. We were one community.

Everyone worked, except retirees and one white lady with a newborn whom we all referred to as Baby Brother—and later simply as Brother. I guess to move into a co-op, you had to have a stable work history. So the people that were moving in there were from all over. They came from Manhattan and other parts of the country because this was a very special place to live. As I said everyone worked which meant that our vision of adults was of people who worked. You worked. Every day.

One of most interesting aspects of Dorie Miller was the value that was put on widening the perspective given to children. For years there were Saturday classes on science, math, sewing, dance and theater. There were Easter Fashion shows, Halloween apple bobbing parties, professional performances by rising stars like Louis Gossett Jr., Ruby Dee, Ossie

Davis, Cannonball Adderley and many others. As children we were treated well. Our school, PS 143, did not have a library but the Queens Library Bookmobile conveniently stopped at Dorie Miller. So, there was a lot of things growing up there that formed our expectations like standing up to people, speaking your mind, seeing our parents head the NAACP, fighting for certain civil rights, taking on the mainstream—white—newspaper to publish a paper that focused on African American accomplishments, and aggressive letter writing to set the record straight. These expectations, quite honestly, have worked for and often against us. Dorie Miller kids of that era have each struggled with not fitting an expectation. As we started our own work career, I would say at times it was problematic. No was not good enough to not require a response. We always pushed back. Our parents and village were the model that we reflect for better or worse. It was different. It was different.

Q2: I'm going to interrupt for a second. I'm getting a lot of crinkle from the paper. If—

Slaughter: I'm so sorry. I'm going to put it right here.

Q2: That's perfect. If you need to refer to it, that's not a problem.

Q1: So tell me a little bit about your life growing up and when and where were you born?

La Lande: Okay, well, unlike Liz, I wasn't born in Corona but my family lived in Corona since the early '30s as well. I was born physically in Flushing Hospital which was the

closest hospital but I lived in Corona since birth, as did my other—we had a large family as well. There was nine of us. So it was a great thing. Having brothers and sisters, I never could imagine how people have one-child families. It's just a figment of my imagination but it's a great experience.

So my family lived there—well, my father's side, he came in the '30s. But my mother and her mother and father, they were born all in Queens, in Flushing, which is the next neighborhood. So I can go back probably one hundred and fifty years or so being in Queens, both parents—both grandparents on my mother's side. So we've always lived in Queens. It's a wonderful, great experience. My grandmother used to talk about when she went to school, walking through the grain fields, dirt roads to go to school and her older brother carrying her on his shoulders if the snow was too high and that sort of thing.

So we've been in Queens a very long time and particularly Corona-East Elmhurst. I went to a school which is specifically down the street where Liz grew up, which is 143 [P.S. 143 Louis Armstrong School]. I was there in elementary school when they were building Dorie Miller. I attended [P.S.] 127 which is on the East Elmhurst side and that's where I went to junior high school. I've been in Queens a very long time and I wouldn't live any place else.

Q1: You mentioned how much you love having siblings so I was wondering if you could say a little more about who they were, what kinds of things you would do together.

Slaughter: Didn't I go to school with one of your cousins?

La Lande: Loretta *[phonetic]*, yes, right, right. So yes, my father had two brothers who also lived in the community. We probably half-populated all of Corona-East Elmhurst because there were probably about close to twenty kids between two families. I'm sorry I forgot the question.

Q1: You spoke very highly of having siblings. I was wondering if you could tell me some specific memories about that, who they were, what kind of things you do together.

La Lande: Okay. Well, one of the biggest things is when you have sort of stair steps, you learn and know everybody because somebody no matter where you went, somebody knows one of your brothers or one of your sisters, or multiple of them. As a matter of fact, just this past weekend when we did our walking tour, somebody I didn't know came from Staten Island because he read about us, saw it on Facebook and he came to attend the walking tour. The first thing he said, "La Lande? Are you Richard's brother?" And I said, "Yes." So then he says, "Well, he was my sister's first boyfriend." I said, "Oh, is that right?" Now I don't remember him or his sister but that sort of thing happens all the time.

So the block where we lived which is—we always have this border dispute between what's the starting line and ending line of Corona and East Elmhurst because it changes with the post office, with who's in the mayor's office. It's never consistent. So where we

lived on 107th Street between Northern [Boulevard] and 32nd [Avenue], sometimes Northern was the dividing line, some people said 32nd Avenue was.

So on that block, there must have been sixty houses. We knew everybody in every one of the houses because our brothers, we were all playing on the blocks. We had the largest family but it was one of the two that were quite close. So we probably had over one hundred children living on that block.

I'm a lawyer now. I went to law school later in life and one day at law school, there was a seminar and this judge was speaking. That was a judge that grew up on my block and I hadn't seen her in forty years or so, I guess, something like that. So it's just those sorts of things. When you have siblings, they tend to multiply your relationships in the community and with other people.

Slaughter: As opposed to where I grew up in the Dorie Miller co-op with a ready-made play group of probably two hundred, three hundred kids. So there was never a need to go beyond the borders of where we grew up, which in some ways, it's kind of a limited world but that was the only world we knew. We all went to the same school. We all went to the same high school. Our parents knew one another and it was a very—it was a tight community because the children and the parents and the buildings, and we were a little bit separated from the rest of Corona just by virtue of the location and the imposing way we looked.

So there was no reason for us to go beyond. I would tell people that—Dorie Miller was at the corner of Northern Boulevard and 114th Street. I don't think in the time that I lived in Dorie Miller I went beyond 108th Street. No reason. There was nothing for me to go to. So it was kind of opposite. You knew everyone and I knew that little circle of people, the big circle sort of, just in Dorie Miller. Strange.

La Lande: It was Mayberry *[laughs]*.

Slaughter: It was. Nothing bad ever happened.

Q1: How did you guys come to learn about the history of the area, famous people living in certain homes? You had this wonderful family history going back that gave you that long memory. But as you learned about the history and as you began to internalize it, what did that history mean to you or signify to you?

Slaughter: Well, it started with I would say my brother, one of my brothers graduated from Annapolis [United States Naval Academy] and he was the first African-American in New York City to receive a congressional appointment to Annapolis. He went to 143. He went to the public school. He went to the local Catholic school and everyone knew him. Sadly, a few years after he graduated, he was killed in the plane that he was flying in.

This was a very big deal to Corona because everyone—it made the papers. He's Annapolis. Annapolis, that's a big deal. And because of his passing, because of his tragic

death, there was a medal, an award given by the local public school, Public School 143, in his memory. For several years, that medal was given to the student with the highest character or grades or something like that. As the changes happened at 143, meaning different principals, different administrations, changes, things got lost and the medal somehow was no longer given. We were informed by a former P.S. 143 teacher and long-time Dorie Miller resident, Ms Yvonne Lambie, that the medal was no longer given. And with that information, our current president of Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society said, "Oh, no, this can't happen. This is part of our history."

And that's where it began. Carol Drew-Peeples began the fight to not only restore the medal but more broadly to shine a light on the Corona and East Elmhurst history. So with that tragedy grew the enormous interest and desire to maintain the history of Corona and East Elmhurst. To honor Carol Drew—that was her pushing, pushing to make sure that that happened and the award is given now.

Q1: That's wonderful.

Slaughter: That's how we began, I believe.

Q1: Tell me a little bit about who your brother was, what he was like.

Slaughter: As I said, I'm one of six.

Q2: My brother was—

Slaughter: My brother, Kent [W.] Slaughter, was one of six. He was number five—four. He was number four of six if you start from the bottom, the youngest up, he was number four. Kent was number four from the bottom.

In any family, even though there are six, there's always somebody that's sort of first among equals or first among the three. There's always somebody that's a little bit—that stands out. Kent Slaughter stood out. Kent Slaughter was the one that got the awards. He was more of a leader. He went to Brooklyn Tech [Technical High School] after Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School. He went on and got the congressional appointment as I said to Annapolis.

Well, that sort of stood out in the community. Even though, when he would come home from Annapolis, my mother would say, "Put your uniform on and walk in the street with your uniform on." [*Laughs*] Kent would say, "No." The people that he grew up with in Corona were—how do you describe, Northern Boulevard. It had a variety of characters. But he enjoyed—

La Lande: That was the main strip.

Slaughter: The main strip, Northern Boulevard was the main strip. He enjoyed the variety of characters. At any time of the day or night, you could take a stroll on Northern

Boulevard and those characters would be available for whatever. But Kent enjoyed that environment. So for him, putting on his uniform and walking down the street was just not something he was going to do. He was really one of them but stood out in the fact that the whole community knew that he was first in New York City to get a congressional appointment to Annapolis. He was quite a bit older than me but paid attention to me, which was nice.

Interesting that he was class of ’57 at Annapolis and his class had their sixtieth reunion and they invited myself and my brother, Lance, my younger brother, Lance to the reunion so we could meet the rest of his classmates that came. It was a wonderful opportunity. I presented them with a video that I had of the graduation from 1957 that my father had taken and they were just thrilled to have us there. So it was wonderful. But Kent was first among six.

Q1: Thank you. I’ll ask you the same question and I’m not interested in the formation of the group, we’ll get to that. I’m sort of interested in how you came to be aware personally of the history around you and why it mattered.

La Lande: Well, I guess for a couple of reasons, one, I was not a very attentive child in the sense of knowing everything that was going on around me. I just enjoyed it or didn’t enjoy it. So I never thought much of who the person was in terms of their stature but more did I like that person or I didn’t like them, okay.

For example, there was this one man that lived directly across the street. He had probably the biggest house on the block and he had a plot of land next to him. And we were always out on the street playing ball or whatever and the ball was always going on his lot. And he was the meanest guy on the block, probably the only mean guy. He stood out in that sense.

But as I got older, people would say Harry Belafonte lived here and I knew about Malcolm X, he lived in the neighborhood. I learned that Jimmy Heath lived in Dorie Miller and his brother and Nancy Wilson lived there and Cannonball [Julian Edwin] Adderly. I'm a lover of music and that sort of began to open my eyes and start thinking about, what have I been missing all this time in terms of these people?

I was enjoying being a kid and that was enough for me until I got older and began appreciating history, et cetera, et cetera, music, and how did I not know that Jimmy Heath who still lives in Dorie Miller was living there? So it's sort of an awareness of the community, at the same time my own general awareness of what was going on in our country and the world, certainly in the neighborhood.

Actually when I moved away from the area specifically—I still always went back there because I still have many friends there, I began to appreciate it more because I had a more reflective approach as opposed to understanding as I was growing up.

Slaughter: When did you realize that the former attorney general, Eric [H.] Holder [Jr.], was in your community, was from your community?

La Lande: Well, I knew that a while before—I didn't know him. I did know his brother. I met his brother but I didn't know that. I thought that was a great thing as well, the fact that he came from our community. A very likeable guy, apparently just as his brother, he came to—the founding members of our society, they were part of a group that had these reunions every two years or so and Eric Holder came. He came to the last one, right?

Slaughter: Yes, yes, Eric Holder came, sure.

La Lande: Yes, he came at the last one while he was still in office.

Slaughter: And stays in contact with the community. It was interesting when I was reading something about Eric Holder in, I think it was *Time Magazine*, and it said that he came from a low-income community. East Elmhurst was not a low-income community. People owned their homes. So it was surprising to see it referred to in that way because even though there was Corona and East Elmhurst, there was Corona and East Elmhurst because East Elmhurst had homes, very nice homes with backyards and Corona was often walkups or apartments—

La Lande: Two and three families.

Slaughter: Two and three family apartments. So it was odd to hear that Eric Holder's growing up was referred to as low-income. That was not at all, not at all.

La Lande: Yes, that was sort of the distinction between Corona and East Elmhurst, even though we don't think as a society, and I think most people in general, we think of it as one community. But there is that difference. When I went to 143—my family was poor. So I'm letting that be known and so if somebody said we came from a low-income family, I'm okay with that because it was true. But there was that distinction. So when I went from attending 143 from kindergarten through sixth grade, which is what all my brothers and sisters went to the same school. They all knew everyone of us, all the teachers—

Slaughter: Same teachers.

La Lande: Yes, we had the same teachers. And we went to 127. There was a difference. Now my newly found friends all lived in single-family homes. They were well-to-do folks. So that was a middle-class community.

So that was the distinction but most people don't see—that I know of, don't really see that distinction. I realize how false a distinction it was but some people did utilize that. I didn't think much of it. My friends were my friends.

I always called Northern Boulevard the Mason-Dixon Line between the two because that was the sense that was in my head. But playing sports and being in the community, every team I was on, there was "people from Corona" and "people from East Elmhurst" and we all acted like there was no distinction whatsoever.

Slaughter: I never went to East Elmhurst though

La Lande: You never did?

Slaughter: I never went beyond 108th Street, remember?

La Lande: Yes, you did say that. I can't believe that [*laughter*]. I was all over. I walked so much in all the different areas of Corona and East Elmhurst. Now East Elmhurst itself was probably smaller geographically because LaGuardia Airport takes up a big part of that. So geographically it's probably smaller. Corona goes all the way south to the Long Island Expressway, almost. So it's a larger area and Corona would be more diverse in terms of its architecture, its structure, the makeup of the people who live there. It's just larger. The houses are more variable. The ones in Corona-East Elmhurst are mostly single-family homes. That's the largest makeup of it.

Slaughter: And Corona, the part that we're talking about is really North Corona, the part that started out as primarily German, Italian, Dutch and African-American. That was North Corona. That's the piece that's closest to Citi Field. That's North Corona. South

Corona was solidly Italian and for the most part remains solidly Italian. So that was a real distinction, whether it was North Corona or South Corona. Though people were welcomed—well, we were welcomed in South Corona. I don't know if South Corona was welcomed in North Corona too much. But it was a time that people were looking to guard their turf, you know kids. But what did I know? I was in Dorie Miller. I only heard about it *[laughs]*.

Q1: Tell me a little bit about how not just the community has changed over the time that you've seen it grow but also physically how it's changed, how it looks different, how the buildings have changed?

La Lande: Again, we did a walking tour. This is our second walking tour we did this past weekend. A lot of places, I'll use Northern Boulevard as an example, I knew every store from say 110th Street and Northern Boulevard all the way to Junction Boulevard, 94th Street. Now I know almost none of them and not just because the owners of the stores have changed but they've torn down buildings and put up these tall narrow buildings, where you have a twenty-foot—because that's about the average size of most small buildings is about twenty feet wide. Now they have a six, seven story building twenty feet wide.

On this one block we looked at as we were going to our last stop, we used to have this movie theater which I used to go to almost every Saturday morning, five cents to get in, get a ticket for a prize, you see ten cartoons and two movies, full-length movies for a

nickel. And the name of the theater was the Palace but we had it nicknamed as the Dump for various reasons. They used to have a matron there when you went there on Saturday mornings.

Slaughter: Why was it called the Dump?

La Lande: I really don't know why. It was heaven to me but it was the nickname [*laughs*]. So on Saturday mornings, we would have a matron there. She would be in a white dress, and all the kids had to sit in the front section of the theater. And when you left out of there, when the cartoons were over and the two full-length children's movies were over, you had to leave and she had a flashlight and she made sure you left.

So when I would leave, if there was another movie I wanted to see, I would sit down there with an adult. I would pick out somebody I knew because I almost always knew somebody and I'd sit next to them and watch it.

The point I was making about this building is that it's no longer there. I was standing out there on Saturday afternoon, saying, "Where's the Dump? Where's the Dump?" They had torn it down. I was there about three years ago because they had turned it into a church and a friend of mine, a large family from Corona, there were eleven of them. They lived on 108th Street and Northern Boulevard. Their father had just died. I think he was ninety-four years of age. So I was there for the services. So I was in the building. It was no

longer a theater obviously but it was a church. And now it's gone. There's a new building built there.

So the changes are massive. You can't even tell—I can't tell which buildings were what anymore. I actually had to ask somebody, "Am I on the wrong block? Wasn't that where the Dump was?" The only reason I knew was because somebody helped me remember and there was a funeral parlor there. There was a young lady I grew up with, her father owned the funeral parlor. And that's a church as well but I knew where that was and I knew the Dump was the next corner. And it wasn't there. So a lot of changes. The development in the neighborhood, they're not concerned with any of the historic stuff, no concern whatsoever. They just tear down and—

Slaughter: Well, not just the neighborhood but Corona and East Elmhurst, from north to south has changed dramatically. It was—as I said, Corona was primarily Italian, German, African American and Dutch. As evolution happens with all neighborhoods, it over time changed. It's now become primarily—North Corona at least—primarily Latino, a Latino community. And fully a Latino community and Flushing where you went to school is an entirely Asian community, entirely.

It happens with time that neighborhoods change. It's happened in Brooklyn. It's happened all over New York and in other places. There's really no way to stop the evolution of people moving from one place to another. But what our organization, Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society intends to do and hopes to do is to

preserve what has been. So that for the people who are coming and for the people who are there and for the people who have passed on, there's some legacy to understand why this place is the way it is, why Dorie Miller is the way it is, where Dizzy [John Birks] Gillespie lived, who is Dizzy Gillespie, why a certain house is named after somebody.

Even though there's evolution, there has to be education and learning so that people have a full knowledge and enjoyment of why they're in a certain community. You would never want to live some place and know nothing about it. When you travel, you sightsee and you want to learn things, so when you move to a place, a new environment, you want to learn what's happened, who was there, what's important to this community. And that's what Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society is trying to do, maintain, promote, educate, have tours where people can see what's going on, learn about it.

When we had the walking tour this past weekend, we had people from all over New York City come. They were from Brooklyn. They were from the Upper West Side. They were from all over, simply to learn. It's been a wonderful experience, as I walk with people who—there was a lady I was walking with who came from Sheepshead Bay, just curious because she heard about Corona-East Elmhurst, knew nothing about it and wanted to take the walking tour. It's also become a great opportunity and a great joy for people, let's say who are retired and like to walk, walk and learn. There was another couple from the Lower West Side, just came to learn. So Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society is championing *[laughter]*—you know what I mean.

Q2: You can say that sentence again if you want, championing.

Slaughter: Got it. Championing the effort so that people can learn about this community, can find out the famous people—Madonna [Louise Ciccone] lived in Corona. Who knew? The first African-American to receive a Ph.D., Marie [M.] Daly—

La Lande: In chemistry.

Slaughter: In chemistry, grew up in Corona. Malcolm X, there's just so many people that this community is enriched by, their history, that it's important to know about it.

So we go into the schools. We go into the churches. We go to tours. We go to speaking engagements and we make an effort to for people to learn. And we hope that people will join in our effort and join the Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society which is a 501(c)(3) organization and help us look for other ways that we can establish learning about the community.

It's interesting that—and I think you alluded to it, that the borders, the boundaries have changed and in part, developers have changed those boundaries. I've heard East Elmhurst referred to as West Flushing because East Elmhurst maybe was not well known but Flushing is and it maybe will attract more people. The area that's next to Corona is Jackson Heights and so the Corona boundary keeps moving west to include Jackson Heights so that the developers can say, "It's Jackson Heights." Because Corona has a

different perception. The perception is it's primarily Hispanic. So if you move the border to include—to call it Jackson Heights, you'll invite a different type of people to come. It's really the developers. Even the LaGuardia Airport, that whole area is solidly East Elmhurst but because it's got those big houses that overlook Flushing Bay, the developers are seeing that as an opportunity to create a different environment and call it something else. Is that right?

La Lande: I certainly agree. It's really taken a place. They've changed the zip codes, moving the blocks. One of the churches that is two blocks over, they have it 94th Street and 96th Street—well, 94th Street was basically the borderline for Jackson Heights. Now there's a church that's on 96th Street, two blocks away, now they're trying to call that Jackson Heights. And it is part of that—any time you have Heights in the name of where you live, it adds a certain—

Slaughter: Cachet.

La Lande: Right, exactly.

Slaughter: Brooklyn Heights, Jackson Heights.

La Lande: But all of that was—Corona actually in its history, East Elmhurst was Corona. It wasn't. Developers also did that years ago, okay, just like Nassau County was actually a part of Queens County before that was changed and separated. So we have all these

things and it's still being done. It brings dollars to developers when they can say what it is and what they want to say about the place. So that's part of the huge problem that we're facing.

Slaughter: We've worked so hard at trying to landmark certain important buildings, like Dizzy Gillespie's house, like Marie Daly, as I mentioned, she was the first African-American to receive a doctorate in chemistry—was it from NYU [New York University]?

La Lande: Yes.

Slaughter: From NYU. The Dorie Miller complex because that was the first African-American co-op and still beautifully maintained. We've tried to landmark that and we always run into difficulty because the association, they are using a different perception of what is—what should be landmarked, either a Manhattan perception versus a Queens perception of what should be landmarked. And we've had great challenges in trying to get these important buildings. Right now I think only Louis Armstrong's house is—is that a landmark?

La Lande: Right, that's a landmark.

Slaughter: That's a landmark.

La Lande: Actually it's a federal landmark as well.

Slaughter: Right, yes.

La Lande: But getting locations, sites in Queens or even districts in Queens are extremely, extremely difficult. It's an automatic no. They say no as a point of procedure and try then to get you to challenge it, the LPC, [New York City] Landmarks Preservation Commission. It's a very uphill battle on everything. As Liz says, it appears to be that they have a Manhattan measurement, yardstick to measure Queens and that's unfair because you can't do that. Manhattan is Manhattan. Brooklyn is Brooklyn.

Slaughter: Right, and the architecture is so different in Queens because it was settled by the Dutch. You see a lot of Federalist architecture and as Carol Drew Peeples mentioned in our tour, houses built by the Dutch that are shaped like barns. Those houses we would like to get landmarked, at least a few of them, that typify the beauty and the skill of those who have created it. We've had enormous difficulty in getting just those types of—not all of them obviously but certain ones landmarked because of what they represent to the community and to the history of the community. They've challenged us constantly, constantly. So we continue to fight on and Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society always encourages people to join us, like us on Facebook, join our organization and help to maintain this beautiful history that we have. We don't want to lose it. Once it's gone, it's gone. It's gone.

Q1: How did the two of you get drawn into being part of the founders' circle? I mean you mentioned this lovely story leading up to the idea of the history but how did you get pulled in, how did you get involved?

La Lande: Well, I think I mentioned earlier, we got involved—or at least I got involved because the three of founding members—the three founding members of—the three principal founding members were part of a committee having these reunions every two years or so. They formed—they were on a committee within that. They called it the Double E Reunion *[phonetic]* for East Elmhurst primarily. But it was Corona and East Elmhurst in reality.

So they found that they had a similar concern and attitude in relationship to Corona-East Elmhurst and the importance of preserving because they actually moved away from New York. They would see it when they came back and recognized the fact that things were changing and what was going on, this isn't here, et cetera, et cetera.

It was their idea, the tree of them. That's Carol Drew-Peeples, Evelyn Seabrook and Deborah Tyson Scott. They were instrumental in joining us together. I actually didn't really know Carol. I had heard her name and mentioned that knew that she was well regarded. But I didn't know her personally and Deborah I didn't know personally either even though there was a connection there through marriage, that I didn't know. I knew the name but I hadn't met her. But Evelyn Seabrook, we were in kindergarten together at 143. So I had known her almost my entire life.

So I'm a little older than most of them except for Evelyn and so I wasn't really going to the reunions. We used to have them in another organization, we used to have them all the time as well too. I knew all the people who organized it. I didn't even know these, so I didn't even go to the first two, I think it was. But Evelyn invited me so I took time to go and through that connection, that's how I became a member.

Most of the members—and I'll let Liz speak on her own—but through some connection with somebody that was one of the principal founding members, that's my belief. Anyway, that's how I got involved and I wasn't one hundred percent enthusiastic about it but out of my respect for seeing how hard they worked, I said I wanted to be a part of that because on my own I was becoming more aware of the importance of that community, the sister communities of Corona and East Elmhurst. I'm saying what a great place I've grown up in and I think everyone should know about this place, for so many different reasons.

Slaughter: My connection is through our president, Carol Drew Peeples. Carol and I grew up in Dorie Miller along with her two sisters, Donna and Paula. Our parents were very close friends. Her father ran—among other things, he published the local newspaper. He was a newspaper publisher. My dad was an attorney and then a judge.

So together they were, along with quite a few other people in Dorie Miller, the Solarchik family, the Kaiser *[phonetic]* family, many other families were activists. And I just want

to add, the few families that I mentioned, they are not all African American. As I said, growing up in Dorie Miller, it was quite diverse. But they were all activists in terms of doing what's right and civil rights and getting children what they need, speaking up.

Our parents, Carol's parents and my parents were lifelong friends. So Carol and I grew up together. Eventually Carol's family moved to East Elmhurst and I guess I went off to college. So we were not totally connected for a while. But our families remained connected and so we were.

When Carol stepped up to the opportunity to reinstate the Lieutenant Kent Slaughter medal—which I wouldn't be surprised at Carol doing because that's her style—when she stepped up to do that, she called me and I said, "Well, yes, I'd be happy to join you." But knowing that Carol had more on the back of her mind. It was way beyond the medal. When I agreed to join Carol, I knew I was joining something much larger than just a medal opportunity. It was going to be much bigger because Carol's dad and Carol's mother were about the entire community.

I happened to love history. Carol really, really loves history and maintaining and highlighting a history. It was an opportunity for both of us to work together. Carol Drew Peeples is nonstop, I would say. She moves forward. So whatever difficulties we've run into, Carol just kind of pushes them aside and keeps going. That's her background. That's how her dad was and that's how she was raised. So we're not surprised that we would

move forward to a much larger mission in characterizing the history of Corona and East Elmhurst. So we really follow her lead and we have to keep up with her.

La Lande: And as Liz referred to earlier, there's a lot of diversity in Corona-East Elmhurst where we grew up. Now when she referred to Mayberry and I sort of said the same thing, particularly around Dorie Miller, because that's probably my perception of that area, but my family struggled economically. Again, it was nine of us and stuff like that. My mom and dad broke up when I was probably about twelve years of age. It was a struggle. I worked since I was thirteen years of age nonstop since. That's sixty years ago. So I've always worked and always struggled in terms of doing that.

And a part of that which is a part of that Liz never saw was there were gangs in Corona-East Elmhurst, mostly in Corona but there were gangs and they had differences, et cetera, et cetera. Having an older sister and an older brother, I knew everybody in every one of the gangs and so that was sort of a protection thing for me. But it was also a measure of respect because part of it was basically territorial.

There was a long-running thing between the Italian-American community in the southern part of Corona and the northern part, which is mostly African-American. But it wasn't really racial, it was territorial. That's a distinction that you don't often think about because I have a couple of friends who grew up in South Corona, African-Americans and they were in the gangs—

Slaughter: In the Italian gangs?

La Lande: In the Italian gangs. They knew them, grew up with them. And until he brought that to my attention, this one particular friend, I wasn't even aware of that and I think that's a distinction. But there were gangs and everything wasn't Mayberry-land over in Dorie Miller but it was—

Slaughter: In Dorie Miller, it was.

La Lande: I'm just saying, as it was in Dorie Miller, because I remember this time I was at a party. I was about fourteen, fifteen and everybody was at the party, I mean older guys. I was probably one of the youngest guys there and earlier in the day, a good friend of mine, he had said that he had had a fight. We used to do this thing, sham boxing. I don't know if you remember that. You just box with each other. And you're not fighting them, you're just boxing and showing your skills.

And he had done that with a guy that was in one of the gangs earlier in the day. And he had beat him and the other guy was older, was supposed to be a more physical type guy than he was. So he had said to me—my nickname was Ronnie—"I don't trust him. I don't know what he's going to do."

So we're at this party, we're out on the street. The party's over and sure enough, this guy hits my friend, knocks him down and starts kicking him while he's on the ground. Now

this guy's older than me, bigger than me but I had told my friend I said, "Don't worry. I'm here." I had to do something, so I grabbed him from behind and this guy knows me, knows my brother and all these other guys, big guys, older than me—actually my brother was there too, but he was in a conflict. He didn't know what to do at first.

So I grabbed this guy and held him so he couldn't do anything. And one of the big guys grabbed me by my collar and pulls me off of him. But he's not going to do anything to me because he knows that he can't do anything. He's got to protect me but the guy that was beating up my friend was his buddy. It was a sort of complicated situation. But those things did exist and happen and I never got hurt. My friend, he eventually got up. He wasn't too badly damaged but those are the intertwinings because everybody knew each other and though they may have been in rival gangs or different gangs, there was a limit, there was a code, there was so far they could go. And this guy could not do anything to me because of that code. It was a protective code.

Slaughter: I knew about the gangs because even in North Corona, there were different gangs. But because I had a couple brothers older who would be out and about, I would hear about them. But again I'm—*[unclear]*—

La Lande: Right, a little protected.

Slaughter: Right.

La Lande: But it was an interesting time growing up there. It really was.

Q1: And it's incredible that—

Q2: Can we take a break right now?

Q1: Right now? Okay.

Q2: I want to adjust the mike.

Q1: Okay, go for it. I'm going to remember the question.

Q2: Yes, hold the phone.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: Should we mark the tape again?

Q2: Oh yes, we mark the tape. It's October 24, 2017, part two, same interview, part two, clapping.

Q1: Okay, so where we left off, you guys had shared some wonderful memories about the community and the diversity there and we were starting to talk a little bit about the

formation of your society. So I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the early meetings, some of the first conversations and debates about what the overall goals would be and how you would set priorities and tasks for the coming years. Just tell me a little bit about that process.

La Lande: Okay, well, we've been together about three years now. It was formed in July of 2014. So we just celebrated our third year, third or fourth year and we had the annual meeting this past weekend. Most of our meetings are via telephone, conference calls. We have a board of directors and we have several different committees and we've actually throughout the three years, we've changed the names of the committees at various times in order to do the things we've trying to do.

But there's a lot of outreach. There's a lot of individual initiatives, reaching out. For example, Deborah reaches out through you and we go out to that. A lot of things are done based on persons being in particular committees as well as individual initiatives.

It's been a lot. For example, one of the committees I'm on is a community committee and one of the things we're doing is we just started an oral interview with people, elderly in the community who have their own personal reminiscences. We just conducted our first one. We've interviewed individuals before but this is the first time we did it on videotape. About a month and a half ago, we visited churches, interviewed ministers, pastors, to help us get their membership involved in this project as well.

We recognize the importance of getting perspectives that people have. I think we did nine people very recently on that. Only about ten minutes each, in an attempt to find out how to do it best and whether or not to have a script or a series of questions or just to have them talk. What we did was just to have them talk. We had one person ask them a question in case they did drop off or didn't have a whole lot they wanted to say, to pull it out.

To answer your question, most of our meetings are via conference call because we only have—we just got two new board members. We have about only five people who actually live in New York right now—five or six, I'm not sure. And the rest live outside of New York. So conference calls work. And sometimes I may have one or two conference calls every week for a whole month. It varies. It's a hardworking—because every time you do one thing, there's something else to do. And that also is what generates us because as you find out more, you say, oh, how did I never know this? And it drives you to find out more.

Because as Liz was pointing out, Carol, she loves history and she has very high research skills. I'm always asking, "How did you find out this and how did you find out that." Finally, just recently I was able to refer something to her that she didn't know about, so she could so some more research. But we tend to challenge each other to get better collectively for the benefit.

Our motto is to preserve, protect and promote Corona-East Elmhurst community. So that's our mission, that's what drives us. Whatever it takes, if we have to form an ad hoc committee to make sure that doesn't fall apart, that we continue in our struggle and drive to make that happen. As a matter of fact, we had an ad hoc committee for a map. We won an award from—I forget what organization we won it from.

Slaughter: I forgot.

La Lande: A thousand dollar award to have a map done of Corona-East Elmhurst. But we had to use this particular map guy. I can never remember the technical term for what a mapmaker is.

Slaughter: Cartographer.

La Lande: Yes, that's what it is, okay [*laughs*]. We didn't quite get along. He had his own perspective on how he wanted the map to be done and that's not what we wanted. We formed a committee—well, we formed a committee when we were working with him, working on finding somebody after him in order to do that. We were going to utilize—at least going to contact people, young people in schools that do mapmaking, that do art design and stuff. We started doing that.

Also on our annual tour, this guy I was telling you about that knew my brother, he's a designer, an art designer. He makes maps. And so he volunteered to do the map that we

wanted to do. So anyway, that's how things developed and evolved from doing an ad hoc committee and so on and so forth, to get our map done.

Slaughter: I joined this committee a year after it was formed and in the first few meetings, there was just a lot of discussion, a lot of discussion on so many things to be done. We wanted a place to house all of our documents. We wanted to give tours. We wanted to go into the schools. We wanted to go into the churches. We wanted to meet with the people in politics, to get things done. It was so much going on, I was like almost dizzy by the number of things that were on the agenda to try to accomplish.

Well over time, like any organization, we were able to prioritize what it is we really wanted to do, what was our main focus and what we could put on the back burner so to speak. What we really wanted to do was to A, grow the organization so that more people would know about Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society and through that, we would have a Facebook presence and we would become a nonprofit organization so that we could conduct ourselves in a certain way. All of this has to be done and somebody has to apply for the 501(c)(3) and somebody has to fill out the documents and somebody has to organize the whole thing.

All of that really is done by a few people within the organization. As Fearonce was saying, we don't all live in the area. So it's done with conference calls and lots of discussion and things happen. But those important things about becoming a nonprofit organization and prioritizing what it is we really wanted to focus on took probably six,

eight, maybe even ten months because of all the different ideas that are being thrown about.

The one thing that we found out from being a 501(c)(3) is that we cannot entertain politics, right? We cannot get involved with political campaigns which is important to know because sometimes that's where the money is, in the political campaigns. But that being said, we don't want to misstep and so sometimes there's a lot of discussion about how to go about something because for many of us, this is the first time that we've been in this type of organization.

All that to say that initially a great deal of discussion, then secondly, we kind of narrowed it down. We prioritized, we realized what we had to do. We formed different committees to focus on areas that we wanted to focus on. As he mentioned, there is a community—what's your committee called?

La Lande: Community action.

Slaughter: Community action. The particular area that I'm focused on is the education committee. I go into the schools. I speak to the teachers. We put on different types of events to highlight the diversity within the community and to highlight the history in the community. Someone had mentioned they wanted in Black History Month, obviously we would focus on the history of Corona and East Elmhurst, all the people that are well-known within our own community. So that people can understand the value.

We want to include parents because many of them have come from someplace else and they don't know anything about the community, even the grandparents. The children may be third-generation coming here. But the parents may have come here only in the '80s, which doesn't really give them an opportunity to learn too much, especially if there are language issues.

We want to educate, so that people learn about, so that people have a sense of the value of their community, so that they can pass that on, and they have a sense of who they are. Obviously, certainly we want to include a great deal of the Hispanic culture that is part of the community now.

There are other committees that have to do with outreach and speaking to any number of non-political people that can help us, either in historical preservation or in landmarking, whatever we can do to focus on what our mission is which is what Fearonce mentioned. What started out as a lot of discussion and not sure, we kind of brought it in and focused it and we are much more streamlined and we run very well organized. Everyone knows what their job is—jobs are [*laughs*].

La Lande: Yes.

Slaughter: And sometimes, what's that word that Carole used? Volun-told. You're volun-told *[laughs]*.

La Lande: Oh, yes, volun-told.

Slaughter: We were volun-told. It's not a big organization in terms of who does the main work. There are probably ten of us that really do a great deal of the work. We're kept busy, with our hand in a lot of different things and working for the benefit of the organization. That's how it began and that's sort of where it is now.

Q1: Thank you. That was a beautiful overview. I wanted to ask a little bit about all the research that you guys have been doing, all together, photographs, primary source documents. I also wanted to ask especially about the interviews that you mentioned. What were the goals of conducting these interviews and what are some of the stories that really stick with you, that you've heard?

La Lande: Okay, well, I think one of the goals was we knew we wanted to do this but we weren't sure exactly—

Q2: I need you to say the words interviews otherwise we're not going to know what you're talking about. So restart with the goals of these interviews.

La Lande: Well, the goals of the interviews were different. One of the goals was to get experience in doing it because we knew we wanted to do the interviews as a way of informing the community that we existed, to let people know that what they had to say

was important, that their memories were important, as an opportunity to spread the word and an opportunity to get more people involved. It was all those multi-level things. Because the reality is that throughout the years, the earliest we probably go back in terms of our own minds and memories would be the early ‘40s specifically. Obviously a lot of stuff took place before that but the people that were involved, that’s as probably early back as we go.

There’s other people that have memories earlier than that, how people got there. One of the things I learned was that only out of about twenty-five people in the room, only two people were actually born in Corona-East Elmhurst that were there. And all of them had memories of when their parents brought them there, either from one of the islands or Trinidad or Jamaica or from Harlem or the Bronx, when they were four or five years of age.

So that was some of the things that actually came out. That’s what I found most interesting. And also one of the things that Liz said, that the community—I never remember so much of saying that person was white or Italian or Jewish or whatever. They were just friends. We were classmates. When I was in 143 in kindergarten, as I look back, it was probably half and half, probably African-American and white people, as opposed to something else.

Slaughter: Yes, that’s for me too.

La Lande: I don't remember any Latino. It was just black and white so to speak.

Slaughter: But you remember how mean the teacher was.

La Lande: Actually I liked most of my teachers.

Slaughter: Our kindergarten teacher.

La Lande: Oh, Miss Denelfo *[phonetic]*.

Slaughter: We had the same one. Isn't that amazing, the same one.

La Lande: Yeah, that was—

Slaughter: She was mean.

La Lande: That was seventy years ago.

Slaughter: I don't know what background she was, Denelfo, she must have been Italian maybe, I don't know. But her voice was like a military person—not what you would expect from a kindergarten teacher in the '50s.

La Lande: We had a—I sort of got off track here but in terms of why we were conducting these interviews and what we got out of them, so I think we learned a lot that we need to—we got a little criticism because some people found out afterwards and wanted to know why they weren't invited. That was one of the things we learned, we have to be more inclusive in terms of making sure we invite folks, maybe having a script, do fewer people, give longer interviews, that sort of thing.

There's one person there that didn't want to be on camera. He was speaking with—him and his brother were sitting like we are but he made sure the camera wasn't catching him because he had this aversion. I've known this guy since I was in junior high school and I never knew that until he was doing the interview. I'm saying, "What's with that?" But that's the way he felt. They were sitting next to each other, with his brother and he actually did most of the talking [*laughs*]. His brother's on film but he did most of the talking. So that was interesting.

We're learning a lot, just being out there. That's one of the thrills for me. I'd much rather be out there in the community.

Also this past weekend because we had a very eventful weekend, Friday, we—I don't know if you've heard about The Giant Rock? I guess you didn't, okay. Right across from LaGuardia Airport is The Strip, it's Ditmars Boulevard and that's where all the hotels are for the airport. We all as kids used to visit this giant rock and I'm talking about giant. And it was so big and so deep in the ground that these two hotels tried to blow it up when

they built their hotels. They couldn't blow it up because it was too far down in the ground.

What they did, unbeknownst to the community, they called this rock The Pet Rock. So right now, the top of it isn't—in terms of the way the ground is graded, you can only see the top part. Maybe the top part is as big as this room. And it's maybe another five feet higher. It's still difficult to climb up. If you're unskillful, you couldn't get up on this rock. I remember asking somebody the other day at this event and she said, "I could never climb it. My brothers used to always tease me but I couldn't get up on the rock." You had to oftentimes get a running start to get up on this rock. It was like in the forest. It wasn't just clear out there. There was a lot of trees around. Another guy was telling me his brother used to jump from a tree. I don't know how he did that but that's what he said.

So anyway, the community was outraged when we found out that the hotels had named this The Pet Rock. We don't know where that name came from. So other people who are in contact with our organization outside of geographically New York, learned about it and so they contacted us. Well, we knew about it but we never made a really big issue of it. But we started a petition to sign, to get the name changed from The Pet Rock. As a matter of fact, it's in our newsletter, yes, okay.

Slaughter: To what?

La Lande: To The Giant Rock. As a matter of fact, the borough president was out there. The local assemblyperson was out there because they responded to us. They said okay, they agreed with us. They would re-bed it and they built a whole new plaque to put out there.

We had a ceremony Friday afternoon and it had about fifty, sixty people there. People made speeches. Carol spoke. We gave certificates to the two general managers of the hotel. They dedicated it and it's now called The Giant Rock. The borough president spoke, Jeff [Jeffrion L.] Aubry spoke, he's the assemblyperson.

So that's one of our recent victories. It just shows how collectively when you work towards a particular thing, it can be done. And the response on the part of the general managers was pretty quick. That's one of the reasons we gave them a certificate. It was heartfelt what they did and the way they did it, all respect. Because one of our criticisms was they never contacted the community about this but that's kind of understandable. But they made up for it.

So now it's called The Giant Rock and that was one of the—we preserved the integrity of name of the Giant Rock because that meant a lot. Everybody you talked to who grew up in Corona and East Elmhurst knew about the Giant Rock. People talked about they had picnics down there with their families because right below the Giant Rock is the Grand Central Parkway, which is now multi-laned. There was a point in time where there was only two lanes in either direction. It's about four lanes now in either direction. And there

was an area down there where you could sit and have picnics, and grass. There was grass down there; you could have picnics down there. People talked about doing that.

So it's a great victory for the community. It may seem not too significant for most folks but it was very important.

Slaughter: Well, it has a lot of history, certainly.

La Lande: It's ten thousand—the rock, they have statistics saying it's been there over ten thousand years. It came from the ice slide or whatever from up north, ice age, yes.

Q1: How did you guys identify the first few sites that you wanted to get landmarked? Out of the many homes that were there, the old buildings that were there, how did you prioritize these are the ones we're going to petition for first?

La Lande: Well, do you want to go?

Slaughter: No, go ahead.

La Lande: Well, part of it is based on the research that was done but some things we already knew. For example, I did not know Dizzy Gillespie's house was where it was. Okay, I didn't even know Dizzy Gillespie lived in the community. I knew Louis Armstrong because I lived a couple blocks from him. So I knew that and I've been there

myself to visit the house. It is very historic. But I didn't know Dizzy Gillespie until I became a part of this organization.

And Our Lady of Sorrows Church, I used to go to church there every Sunday morning and I would pass Dizzy Gillespie's house and I never knew that was his house. To go to church, I would pass his house. So that was one. So members of our society knew of that and so that was one of the things. And it was common knowledge that he lived there even though I didn't know it and that he owned the house because I did the research and got a copy of the deed. It's showing that he lived there because that's what LPC wants. They want proof of these things. You just can't say you want to landmark this and this is the reason why. They're teaching us to be even better at it than we thought we had to be.

So that was one of the reasons. Dorie Miller because so many jazz greats lived there, that that was sort of a very obvious place to look at. Malcolm X, where we are now, in person. That's another place. Ella [Jane] Fitzgerald and her husband, Ray [Raymond M.] Brown, lived on Ditmars Boulevard, right up from the airport. These are things and we can get information on that they lived there and we have documentary evidence to support it. Those were in a sense the easy places to do because of the names and notoriety of those folks.

But also Marie Daly, as Liz pointed out, she's actually the first African-American woman to get a degree in chemistry. When we visited her house the other day, it was actually my second time because I've passed her house many times, never knew she lived there. And

again, we have documentary evidence to do that. When we knew that based on research, some common knowledge and some research, we said, "These are people we need to promote and get their homes designated." When we contacted Landmarks, they said about Dr. Daly, they said something about we didn't have proof where she went to school and we sent them the proof.

One of the problems we have with them is the fact that some of the stuff we sent them, they never acknowledged. So again we're learning how to deal with this but those are some of the reasons why we chose these sites, ones that are very obvious and we shouldn't have a problem doing it, as long as we—they find it easy to say no to things we give. But those shouldn't have been so difficult. Rather than saying no, they should say, "Well, we need this from you. We need additional stuff like this and that." They basically would just say no to our proposals. But those are some of the reasons.

Q1: What are the benefits of going to Landmarks Preservation Commission as opposed to trying to get on the state and national historic registers? Why was that organization identified? What were the benefits that you were hoping to get specifically?

La Lande: Well, I would think it's more that they're local. In other words, if they won't do it or not give us some acknowledgment, why would the state? Why would the federal government? I think they would ask the same questions. Why are you coming to us when your local people are not doing it?

And again to me, the big problem is that a different yardstick is being used to measure the significance. For example, like Dizzy Gillespie's house, it's not the greatest looking building. It has two entrances because a lot of times, corner properties are made—I think all over New York City, that they have two addresses. A lot of people don't know that. They actually have two entrances, one on the street side and one on the avenue side. So it had two addresses. It only had one block and lot number but it has two addresses. And it's not the most beautiful building. It doesn't have the architectural necessities. You wouldn't pick it out for its architecture. But it's significant. Here's one of the greatest musicians the world has known that lived there for a significant part of his life, him and his wife with his family—because other relatives, it's actually a three-family house. And it's important to the community, so why not?

Saying no has to have significance to it, not just hey, no. Give some integrity, credibility to the community that's recognizing that. So that's how we see it, it's only going to come from us because there's other historical societies in Queens but they have not paid a whole lot of attention to Corona-East Elmhurst. There's a Flushing one. There's a Queens Historical Society. I think there's one in Long Island City—

Slaughter: Newtown.

La Lande: Newtown, right. There's another one, okay. So we don't want to be dismissed. We want to acknowledge the history, the architecture because there's significant

architecture. Our Lady of Sorrows Church was built—the new structure was built one hundred and seventeen years ago, a beautiful church.

I just found out about the synagogue, the Northside Hebrew [Congregation] temple, there was a synagogue. It was built in 1920. I've only known it as a church because it's now a church but it was originally a synagogue built for a synagogue. To me, in my own personal mind, that's one of the spots I think—because the architecture is great. They can't deny it for its architecture, for example. Now it's another church.

The point is that the reason for doing it, the obvious reason is that we love this community and it needs to be remembered in a significant way. That's the importance, again, educating people so they don't lose sight. So young people can know the significance of where they live. Imagine someone living in Dizzy Gillespie's house and they probably don't even know.

Q1: You probably aren't the only historical society in Queens to have noted the difficulty with getting sites in Queens landmarked specifically. Do you have a sense for why? What sets Queens apart in the mind of the LPC? What are the challenges specific to Queens for getting these sites landmarked?

Slaughter: Well, I'm really not sure because it feels as if the value is not there for the people who are doing the landmarking. They look at let's say a structure that may actually look like a barn, built by the Dutch in 1918 and they say, "Huh, so?" Or looking

at Dizzy Gillespie's house and say, "Oh, it does not really look like anything." Maybe it doesn't meet their criteria for sensing the quality of a landmark structure.

That's all I can understand about it. As you mentioned, they're using a different yardstick. Structures in Queens are younger for the most part than the ones in Manhattan, which was settled earlier. They're younger and the construction is different. Teddy [Theodore] Roosevelt didn't live in it. It just doesn't have the cachet that many of the structures in Manhattan do. Also there is not the power behind getting these things landmarked. In Manhattan, you have a different power structure that can put not only resource but political power behind getting things landmarked. Maybe there's just not that level of resource in Queens to do that because all the others have had difficulty as well.

La Lande: Yes, I think Liz hit the nail on the head with all those different reasons. And I'll add just the physical structures, if you have a massive building in New York with creative architect and historical architecture and nobody lived there, it has significance. In Queens, they want everything there, the person, the architect and all the documentary evidence, the political support. In a neighborhood that people often struggle just to make ends meet, they don't have a whole bunch of impetus to say Dizzy Gillespie's house. So what? I don't know who Dizzy Gillespie was, is or whatever. I need a place to live, okay, and feed my kids, et cetera, et cetera.

So the community's political will is not significant nor are the politicians because they have other things. It would be on the back burner, whereas the level of community involvement if you will in Manhattan is just totally different. There's a lot of power in Manhattan as Liz pointed out.

Slaughter: And money.

La Lande: What?

Slaughter: And money.

La Lande: And money, yes. So they can get done. LPC can just say no.

Slaughter: And there can be a structure in Manhattan that is—let's say I'll pick just, let's say in Harlem, that a person who lives on the Upper East Side will say, "Yes, that should be landmarked." They have no real connection to the community but they feel that it should be landmarked. In Queens, you probably won't have that crossover. It's going to be people from the Corona-East Elmhurst area that will want something landmarked and not somebody coming from Maspeth who says, "Oh yes, that thing should be landmarked in Corona-East Elmhurst." It's a different kettle of fish really.

La Lande: That's a very good point. One of the things we're trying to do is to develop relationships with the other historical societies in Queens and we recognize that all the

time. The two walking tours we've had, people speak up about the same situations and problems. In attending functions with the HDC [Historic District Council] because we're one of their *Six to Celebrate* honorees for this year, that the energy and the passion that the people at these meetings have and it's almost like Queens is a forgotten borough. And they themselves recognized, they're not the opposition because they're actually of the support.

But when you see that and then if you have a—the biggest event we've probably had, we had a couple—this is our second walking tour but we also had a Queens bike initiative. We did a bike tour as well. So you may get thirty or forty people involved in looking at these things or at least being a part of—but when you come to Manhattan, you have a couple hundred people with political contacts, connections. When they say, jump. they ask, how high? Whereas when we say, jump. they say, get out of here [*laughs*].

Slaughter: Talk a little bit about the *Six to Celebrate*.

La Lande: Okay, well that was a big thing for us for HDC and they've given us a tremendous amount of support.

Slaughter: Say what it is.

La Lande: Do you know what *Six to Celebrate* is?

Q1: Well, for the record, go ahead.

La Lande: Okay, okay, well *Six to Celebrate*, the Historic District Council every year awards six societies I'll say, for recognition of the work that they're doing in terms of preserving and promoting historical homes, preservation, buildings, districts if you will. So we were one of the awardees for 2016. So part of that, our two walking tours, they were supportive. They actually put on a walking tour for us and they taught us how to do, help teach us how to do this other one which they also fully supportive. They always have somebody at our tours as well, in terms of supporting us.

We get a grant from them for both tours. We got a grant from them to use for whatever you want to do for doing our website, help us doing our website or whatever. And also we get put in a booklet that—they produce the booklets for whatever society that was honored for that particular year. And there were six societies every year.

They do some tremendous work. We stay in contact with them all the time. They are probably the most supportive of all the organizations that I've come in contact with. They came out to our annual meeting last year and gave a presentation. They often have educational programs and we've attended many of them. In fact, Deborah attended one the other day. I think they have four this month, we're not sure if we can make it. We're not making all of them because we missed the first one.

Slaughter: It was quite an honor to be noticed by HDC.

La Lande: Right, thank you Liz, it was. It was a great thing for us. So we received the public recognition of being awarded that. It was a very great honor.

Q1: So you were there, what do you remember it being—?

Slaughter: I was not there. I was not there, but I know that you were there.

La Lande: Yes, in Queens, I have some flexibility—

Slaughter: He's the boots on the ground.

Q1: [*Laughs*].

La Lande: So I attend as many as I can, yes.

Q1: What do you think about the Queensmarking system that started up, of just Queens recognizing that it's not getting the landmarking, it's not getting the recognition and so sort of getting together and make its own little Queensmarks?

La Lande: Well, I like it because I think—and I don't know a whole bunch about it because I just recently became aware of it but I think any time you do something, you need to have a plan B, particularly when you're facing forces. It helps to challenge what's

being done or not being done. It exposes the hypocrisy of it and at the same time, it generates awareness of your community, those things that you think is important. What do you think is important? Okay, we think it's important. I think that's a very good idea.

Q2: If you guys could say Queensmarking in one of the sentences, it would be very helpful for the future.

La Lande: Yes, well, Queensmarking is very, very important because we're saying even though we're standing up against the big guys and we welcome that challenge. We're not trying to get away from it. But we recognize the weaknesses of the process. If you don't challenge anything, it remains the same or it gets worse. Either one of those two but it doesn't get better.

So I think that's a very good way of dealing with the fact that the powers that be for whatever reason and there's multiple reasons, we're going to counteract that. I think that's something that we can be put into. For example, I remember somebody saying to me, "Well, if Dizzy Gillespie's house doesn't get designated, speak to the owners and get them to put a plaque up there." Which we want it to be designated as a historical site but it doesn't stop that from being done in preparation for the larger picture. You always, in my mind, need to have different ways of approaching it. That may be an *Art of War* technique but anyways it deals with how you have to work with what you have and keep on moving.

Slaughter: That's the purpose of the Queensmarking?

La Lande: Yes, they're saying if you don't recognize us, we're going to recognize ourselves.

Slaughter: That's great.

La Lande: We don't have to wait on you.

Slaughter: Good.

Q1: You guys are still a relatively new organization. You've done a lot in the three years you've been active and I was wondering do you have any advice for other organizations that are just getting started. Any learning experiences, things like, "Oh jeez, definitely don't try that," or something that you know is really valuable or really important? What would you say?

Slaughter: Well, I think the first thing that comes to my mind is to not be disheartened by the pushback that you'll get because even though you may have a great idea about preservation, not everyone else has the same great idea. And not everyone else is interested in your idea. But if you feel that it is important, continue to push your idea and pursue what it is that you feel is important to your community because eventually some

part of that will be done. And with that little part that gets done, you can move forward and do more.

But initially, we were misguided by some others, even people that we would have trusted, maybe in office and maybe in other types of organizations, we were diverted, we were ignored, we were chastised for being too forward, for wanting too much. And with all of that, as I said, in part it's our training, our growing up that says, "Look, we're not interested in the negative part. We're going forward." That would be my suggestion, to just eliminate the negative and move forward. Anything else?

La Lande: Well, I was actually going to say that same thing. Focus on the positive and to be passionate. I mean I have to admit that I've always been a hard worker. If something needs to be done, I say well, don't ask somebody else to do it, if you're not willing to do it yourself. But to that, I would add that the work ethic of the people in our society set a new bar for me.

Slaughter: In our organization.

La Lande: In our organization, right, yes. It's always a challenge. I think people need to be challenged because that's how we grow and develop. I have been challenged so I'm trying to meet that bar. When you have good examples around you and you follow through with them, that's going to make your goal easier. It's going to make your organization stronger and I think we have all of those things here.

Part of that what operates inside of me is that person is not going to make me look bad. I'm going to work as hard as they work, okay. So that's one of the things that has generated within me personally in terms of that.

I think that organizations are made up of individuals and what we do is a result of that interaction, our own individual perspectives and when you join them together and challenge each other in a respectful and positive manner, and know that those other folks are as passionate as you are, that's the energy behind the locomotive and we're going to keep on moving it forward.

Slaughter: I always kid Fearonce about the work that he's done. I always say, "If you want something done, ask a busy man." He's the busy man and he gets it done. He does, he does.

But again, in any organization, you have people who are sort of with you, really with you, not sure they're with you, and I don't say that you weed them out. I say that you encourage them to see why you're so passionate about what it is you want to do and maybe along the line of saying, "Well actually yeah, I can go along with that." And get those people who are kind of on the fence. They like the idea but they're not sure what's involved to move along with you. That's sort of the marketing that we have to do within our own organization and to use the skills that people have because they're best at it. We have our techie who does all that stuff and we have our speechwriters. We have our

speakers. We have our researchers but each person uses the thing that they're good at and they get a lot of pleasure out of that. So that's another thing I would encourage, use people's skills that they have. Even if it's keeping things neat and orderly, use it.

La Lande: And I would add also that reach out to other organizations that have similar thoughts and ideas and work in unison with them. Find HDC, I mean that was a tremendous thing on our part. I forget which member of our organization did that.

Slaughter: They're partners, you need partners. You need help and you need ideas and you need to work with other organizations, to the best that you can. It helps everyone.

La Lande: And I think some of the things that we need to do as an organization, one of our weaknesses, I would think, is on the financial level, in other words, raising funds, getting support, getting grants, all those things, even building the membership and getting more dues-paying members. All of that is part of that and I think that's probably one of our weaknesses.

I would say to other folks that are interested, you also have to work on all those things. That's probably the hardest part in continuing, even though we recognize this, it's always there. It's always the elephant in the room. We haven't let that stop us but moving forward with bigger and grander things, it can make it that much more difficult.

Slaughter: Our board members are—they are members. Obviously they're members but they are assessed an amount each year that they're expected to contribute financially to the organization. In addition to the hard-working people that we have, they open their wallets as well. I'm very proud of that.

Q1: You guys have been very generous with your time. I only have one other question. What is the plan, what is the repository for all of the research and all of the work that you have done? What are you going to do with the artifacts that you've found, with the interviews you've collected and with your own records and research about these sites?

Slaughter: We're looking for a spot.

La Lande: Yes, that's one of our biggest goals is to finding a location within Corona-East Elmhurst that would house all of these things, the artifacts, the photographs, the memories, whatever you call them, the films. That's also related to what I just said about the finances, is that's on our wish list and we're going to do that but we recognize it's a big wish and it's a difficult wish. But we know we're going to do that.

So that's what we're looking to do, whether it becomes something that's donated or based on grants that we get, whether it's local, state, federal, whatever the case may be, we're going to be seeking out all of those in order to get that repository to do those things. So that's a part of the road that we're on. We're certainly going to do that and it's a big task but we feel we're up to it.

Slaughter: We're looking around. Some of the local public schools are interested in housing some of our memorabilia of the famous people who went to that school. There are other locations that we hope to designate, that will give us a floor, a room, a space for all of the documents that we have, so that when we do have our annual meeting, we can have it in that location and have all the history as a background, a space kind of like this. That would be wonderful.

La Lande: Yes, I like this.

Slaughter: For instance, the elementary school that Fearonce and I and all the others went to, PS 143, is interested in having a glass case of some of the famous people that went to 143. The medal that I mentioned, my brother's medal that they give, it's now a plaque with his picture on it and it has each person who's received the award; it has their name on it. I guess we started back in 2013. We redid the award and it's now a good-sized plaque. They have that in a special place and they'd like to bring in more memorabilia from people who went to 143.

And because of the evolution of people coming in and out, we're always trying to grab something new, something from the Hispanic community, something from the German community. I think I heard something like fifty-three different languages spoken in this one public school. So if we can grab pieces of that to honor the people who are now

coming in to that school, it would be a great way to educate about the variety of people within the community. There's another school that was the old Tiffany—

La Lande: Right, the factory.

Slaughter: Factory. It's now become a public school, the Tiffany School [P.S. 110]. And they still have Tiffany glass in it. So we're trying to bring some—there are a couple churches that have Tiffany glass. So we're trying to just corral a lot of different pieces and put them in places where people can really feel good about the fact that that's part of our community. That was here before I got here and it will be here after I leave.

So we are looking for a spot or spots and that's one of our priorities right now because we have a lot of history and a lot of information. We need to have a place for it. So that's sort of number one in addition to growing our membership of the Corona-East Elmhurst Historical Preservation Society dot org, where people can join, go to our website and join and like us on Facebook.

Q1: Guys, thank you so much. Is there anything that I should have asked you that you really wanted to talk about today?

La Lande: Not that I can think of.

Slaughter: No, I think—

La Lande: We really appreciate the opportunity and the questions were remarkable. You made it so easy.

Q1: Oh, good, that's great to hear.

Slaughter: Did you mention anything about the Queens [Borouogh] Public Library, about the—

La Lande: Oh, yes.

Q1: Did you want to talk about it?

Slaughter: They have a building—they own a building, they own a house that was—who lived in it was the person who created those stories called—

La Lande: The Purple Crayon.

Q1: Oh, Harold—

Slaughter: *Harold and the Purple Crayon*.

Q1: Yes.

Slaughter: Crockett Johnson, Crockett Johnson. And so his house is owned by the public library, the Queens Public Library. They're wondering if they should demolish it. So we're hoping through community efforts that we can encourage them to make it a children's library; to educate, to have children's performances, just connected with a little walkway from the main public library rather than demolish it. What a perfect building and named after *Harold and the Purple Crayon*'s author. So we're hoping to bring some public pressure to do that.

La Lande: It's just amazing how easy it is for those who are—for example, the Queens Public Library is a separate system from Manhattan and Brooklyn. They're totally separate, and they're sort of dismissing us when we raise that, which is not unusual.

Slaughter: Again.

La Lande: It always happens. I mean it's to be expected. So that's why we have to mobilize our community to fight that because it's so easy for them to say, "You're standing in the way of progress. We'll tear it down, we need a whole new building." So on and so forth. That's what happens. So that's a fight where we're getting ready to wage.

Slaughter: Right.

La Lande: So we're setting up a meeting with the president—

Slaughter: The Crockett Johnson Building, Children's Museum, Children's International Library.

La Lande: As Liz mentioned it's a win-win situation. We're not saying—not to ignore the fact that's one of the busiest libraries in Queens because it happens to be but it has a dual purpose. It doesn't just have to be one way and I think that's often what blinds people. It's my way or the highway and that's what we're challenging.

Slaughter: So that's on our top to-do list as well.

Q1: Guys, thank you so much for your time coming in. You have wonderful stories and I've really enjoyed talking to you.

Slaughter: Thank you.

La Lande: Okay, thank you.

Slaughter: Thank you so much.

La Lande: Thank you, both of you. Anthony.

Q2: You're welcome. I'm going to kill it now, right?

Q1: Yes, yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]