

Kelly Carroll for NYPAP

Inspired by Grassroots Stories: Community Architectural Advocacy

Frank Grassi – Guardians of the Guardian (Angel Guardian Home, Dyker Heights, Brooklyn)

August 24, 2021

Kelly Carroll: So, good afternoon. This is Kelly Carroll for the New York Preservation Archive Project. This series is called Inspired by Grassroots Stories: Community Architectural Advocacy. I want to thank NYPAP, the New York Preservation Archive Project, and also the New York State Council on the Arts and to Pat Reisinger for making this program possible. This is a series of neighborhood interviews from local people who've been involved with preservation on their community level.

And today I have the pleasure of interviewing Frank Grassi, who is a lifelong resident of Bay Ridge--or Dyker Heights depending on who you're talking to--but he's been involved in the community as a past president of the 68th Precinct Community Council and also as a professional videographer of many community events. And he is an activist for the continuance of what he calls "a small town feeling in a big city." So, thank you so much for being here today.

Frank Grassi: My pleasure.

Kelly Carroll: My first question to you is, how long have you lived in this community, and I say "this community" because I'm also a resident of the area. And how would you describe our community's--what you call a small town in a big city feeling?

Frank Grassi: Well, it is a town where people help other people. Where there are a lot of different events such as cleanups and graffiti removal and just a general feeling that if people are concerned about an issue, they will come to a meeting somewhere in the community to discuss it with usually elected representatives, or with members of the police department or whatever agency the city has that would address that issue. And what I found about Bay Ridge is that mostly it's family oriented, even today, with the changing demographics in in the community.

I know my block has changed considerably in the last few years, mostly being Asian now. It was mostly when I grew up Italian American, Norwegian, Irish--a lot of longshoremen worked here and lived here. They used to take the 69th Street trolley car down to the dock down on 69th Street, which is now known as the Veterans Memorial Pier, and they would hop a freighter or other motorized boat, go out to the Narrows and then be at sea for several, several weeks or several months. And so, basically, it was that kind of a working-class community where a lot of immigrants from a lot of different places came to the area and raised their families and tried to make the neighborhood a better place to live.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely, and this community is still so diverse with new immigrants from, as you said, Asia and even where I live--deeper in the neighborhood--there's a lot of people from the Middle East and the Balkan region that are coming here. What would you say, how would you describe Bay Ridge or Dyker Heights? What sets this place apart from the rest of Brooklyn or the rest of the city?

Frank Grassi: Well, first of all, it has...it's one of the few places that hasn't been over built...yet. We're going through a process now where we're starting to see more and more high-rise buildings. There's a

young lady in this community, who I have to acknowledge, and that is Fran Vella-Marrone. And Fran is the President of the Dyker Heights Civic Association. And one of the things that she is well known to me for is advocating for a special zoning area for Bay Ridge which allows them to limit the amount of the height of the structures that are being built in the community. I believe I--and I really do believe this--that this is primarily a neighborhood or a community of one- and two-family houses. There are some apartment buildings, no doubt, but they've been able to limit the height of those apartment buildings, and that that means a lot to homeowners such as myself who grew up in this neighborhood.

I'm living in the same house--as I mentioned earlier to you--I live in the same house that I was born into. I was born here in 1942. My parents bought this house in 1940. I had uncles and aunts and my grandmother living here, it was a place where there was always family gatherings, whether it was in the backyard or on the front stoop. I grew up with my friends across the street and next door to me. We'd play ball, we played stoopball, we played stickball, all the old childhood games you could think of. And one of the things I loved about it was it was a safe place to live, it was always a very safe community. The neighbors were always watching out for one another. People, you know, they got concerned if they saw a kid walking down the street by himself, "Where's your mom? Where's your Pop?" And it's that kind of feeling that this neighborhood engenders. In general, I find it because it was really...this block especially was noncommercial except for trolley cars, which are now replaced by buses. The B64 just came by my house here. But I remember growing up with the sound of trolley cars in my ear. The trolley cars--I don't know where they started at the other end--but they would go all the way down to the 69th Street Pier. And before the Verrazzano Bridge was put up and before the roadway that leads to that bridge was put up, you could take the trolley car for a nickel and go all the way down to the 69th Street Pier.

Then, when the Verrazzano Bridge came up they kind of did a dogleg somewhere around Seventh Avenue and I never understood why that happened, I still don't understand why that roadway was not connected from one side to the other, but they make you go across on Ovington Avenue and then back again to Bay Ridge Avenue or 69th Street and then continue on your journey. And that happened in about the 1960s, when the Verrazzano Bridge was being constructed. So, I mean what your question is, is what is making this so special? I think it was a connected community in general. It is connected by people, connected by homes, and connected by people that just wanted a better life for themselves.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, I think that what you said about the construction of the Gowanus Expressway, the Belt Parkway, or you know the 278 as some people call it, and the Verrazano Bridge was really the biggest change that has ever happened to this neighborhood and when they put in those highways, they did cut a lot of blocks in half. But other than that, the building stock in this neighborhood is almost essentially intact as it was when it was first being built right around 100 years ago. Bay Ridge in this area took off when subway opened down here in 1916, and you're exactly right that the only area of high density is this along Fourth Avenue, where we have some elevator apartment buildings. And those were built because they were close to the subway.

But the rest of the neighborhood is very low scale, and that is due to many advocates' work, including Fran Vella-Marrone, and the fact that we have good zoning in this in this community. So, to feed into that, what we don't have are a lot of landmarks. And I know that you are involved with a group called the Guardians of the Guardian and this was involving the preservation of the Angel Guardian Home,

which is in Dyker Heights. And so, I would like to hear a little bit about how you got involved with the Guardians of the Guardian.

Frank Grassi: Okay, well, first let me say that I went to school in this neighborhood. I went to, what was called at the time, St. Rosalia School which was on 65th Street and 12th Avenue. I went from my first grade to my eighth grade in that school, and at that time there were Franciscan nuns that were our teachers. And that was adjoining St. Rosalia's Church and eventually became Regina Pacis Shrine, which is still there. And I noticed every day across the street, there was a large hill, and the nuns would take children from the Angel Guardian Home--which I didn't understand what an orphanage was when I was a kid but I came to know what it meant--and the nuns would take the children out to this hill, which had a gazebo at the top, and they would let them play and run around and so forth, and so on. And so, I was always fascinated by that. So, that was about a block away from my school.

Eventually, I got into doing other things as most kids. I went to Fort Hamilton High School in 1960. In fact, I just was looking through the 1960 Fort Hamilton yearbook, *The Tower*, which you know, reminded me of some of my earliest preservations which are not architectural, but I started out as a recording engineer, recording the chorus at Fort Hamilton High School. I eventually turned that into a business and I became--I had a recording studio in the basement of this house where I recorded a lot of the local bands and preserved a lot of the music from the '60s, of which I still have a lot of tapes, believe it or not, from a lot of those early bands and I'm still in touch with a lot of those musicians.

Well alright, to get to the get to the story about the Angel Guardian Home. Later in my life, I started doing work with the 68th Precinct Community Council, this was about 1988. And one of the officers there was a community affairs officer named Richard Pascone and he invited me to tape some things for the community, such as a tape that we did for senior citizens on how to be safe walking the streets. We did a documentary later on during the Persian Gulf War. First of all, the parade that they had on Seventh Avenue when the soldiers were deployed to the Persian Gulf and then later on, we actually had the return of the Normandy, which came back from the Persian Gulf and sailed under the Verrazzano Bridge. And I was allowed to go on to a New York City fire boat and videotape the return of the Normandy with three other cameramen up on the banks of Staten Island, and we did a documentary on the return of the U.S.S. Normandy.

So, I was always interested in local community history: preserving, documenting things that were going on in this neighborhood. And I guess from that, I stayed with the precinct community council until about 1997, and then I was asked to be president of the precinct council. And so, I stayed as president of the council, right through about 2002 just right after 911, and by that time I switched my occupation. I went to work for New York City Transit two weeks before 911, and I ended up working in the Bronx. And so, I had by that time developed a number of people who were community active representatives. I'm talking about city councilmen, Marty Golden our state senator at the time, Vincent Gentile who was our city councilman, and I was always interested in things that were going on in the community from the perspective of the police department's activities, respective of what the community felt were important issues for them. Things like parking, things like you know, give me the number of people coming into the community. Those were all concerns.

And so, as the president of the council, I made a lot of links with people. And one day I got a call from an old school chum of mine from, actually, St. Rosalia School, and her name was Mary Jo Tipaldo. You probably know Mary Jo, she's a community active person herself. And she said, Frank, you know

everybody in the community, you've done so much work with audio, with video. You've been in so many different areas and you've met so many people. We would like to see if we can try to get the Angel Guardian Home landmarked, and you know the Home.

And I said sure I do. And she said, would you be interested in working with us on the committee? We have about maybe half a dozen or so community residents that live on 64th Street between 12th and 13th Avenue and we're hearing that they want to turn, they want to tear the building down. And I said well, that building's over 100 years old, you know it's gotta be used for something. I know it's an old building, and the Sisters of Mercy had put the building up for sale. And so, we heard that it was going to be destroyed, and I said that's such a great building and it has such a history that, that should be preserved. So, we had a couple of meetings at Mary Jo's house and I met the other members of that committee and we decided that you know, there must be a purpose for it.

My wife Laura, who is also a member of that committee suggested, why don't we try turning it into a senior residence? Bay Ridge has no senior facilities for senior citizens. They just come and congregate, and maybe even a place for them to live? Maybe we could turn this building into some sort of condo unit. I mean, there are a lot of people that live in the neighborhood that own houses that don't want to move to Florida, don't want to go to Pennsylvania, don't want to go to other places. They'd like to stay in the community in which they were born and which they were raised. So, maybe what they can do is somehow sell their homes--maybe even to the city--and in exchange, they would get a permanent place at the Angel Guardian Home, which at that time was empty.

And maybe they could refurbish the rooms for...as a senior residence. So, that was the initial idea, and I thought that was a great idea and so did the other members. And so, we approached our state senator, our city councilman, our assemblyman Peter Abbate, and tried to you know, see if that was a workable solution. And of course, it turned out that everybody said no, it's really a lot of work to turn something like that into a senior residence because of there's a lot of laws, and a lot of restructuring of the building itself and restructuring of rooms, and so we don't think that's a workable solution. And so, the idea was sort of pushed down.

We did have a meeting at what used to be called Regina Hall in my old school. We had about 350 people show up to that meeting--mostly seniors--and they were all in favor of the idea. Let's see if we can turn this thing into a senior center or senior housing. And that was the original purpose, and a lot of people signed petitions and we went to the community board, spoke with Josephine Beckman, our Community Board 10 president chairperson. And we met with a lot of political people along the way and tried to get them to you know, to see if there's a possibility that we could even landmark the building so it wouldn't be torn down, and that was the original idea.

We met with--I'm trying to think of his name, I'm sorry--City Council Carlos Menchaca. And who belongs to the community board and who, actually, Carlos--it's in his district. The Angel Guardian Home is like a couple of blocks away from where the boundary lines are from Dyker Heights into Sunset Park. So, Carlos Menchaca was the City Councilman we were told to go and see, and we had a meeting with him as well and tried to see if maybe he could get behind us. But he was involved with stuff going on down at Sunset Park towards the old, what is it, Bush Terminal.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, Industry City rezoning.

Frank Grassi: Industry City. The long story short was, we did pursue from 2016 until 2019, yeah, it took us about four years. We finally were able to get enough people behind us to bring it before the Landmarks Preservation Commission who then approved, I would say, the major portion of the property as a landmark. There was another building on the side that we thought they would consider as well, but we were told they never considered that part of the building as part of the main building. And that's where we still have some issues with them about that. But we felt that the entire structure was a turn of the century edifice, and it should have been considered as a whole, and unfortunately the Landmarks Preservation Commission didn't see it that way.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, you've touched on a lot of a lot of topics that I was going to bring up. One being the idea of the senior housing, it was such a great idea. And I love that what set your group apart from many groups that I've worked with over the years, is that you actually had an idea of how to use the building. And you put that idea in front of you know, influencers: elected officials, community leadership. A lot of people ask for buildings to be landmarked and they have no idea of how that, what that building's next life might be. Which is okay, because landmarking can't preserve use and it can't regulate use. But, I did like the idea and I know that when the Sisters of Mercy were going into the sale you know, how did...the Guardians of the Guardian also...you were so at the forefront of every decision that was going on. You guys always had the first news. So, when you, I understand that the sale was a little bit of a hush hush sale?

Frank Grassi: Oh yeah.

Kelly Carroll: Could you talk about that, and how that made you all feel?

Frank Grassi: Well, at the very beginning, from around 2016 when we heard the building was being sold, we tried to get information from the buyer. And we tried to get them to tell us exactly what was going to happen with the building once they purchased it. We could not get that information. We tried to get information from the Sisters of Mercy. They pretty much said well, this is a private deal and it's not something we're really sure about yet, and so we can't discuss this with you. So, we sent letters--I mean actually, Mary Jo and some of the other members of the committee did most of that work. They sent tons of letters, tons of calls, they were rebuffed at almost every turn.

The Sisters just did not want to discuss what the outcome of that building was going to be. Along the way, just as a side note, I was also of the idea that if we couldn't for some reason turn it into a senior residence, it might not be a bad idea to turn it into a museum that would document some of the growth of this community with the Italian American residents, including my parents who moved here back in the nineteen, late '30s and early '40s and some of the stuff they did during the war. And some of the conditions of the Angel Guardian Home when it was an orphanage, maybe a museum of some sort that would document the history of the building.

Document what it meant to the community, because it was at that time, you know, there was a lot of unmarried women that were having children out of wedlock, and it was a thing with the Church. You know, that was not as a proper thing to do, but where were these children going to go? And so, they ended up usually in the orphanage, and that in itself meant there was a lot of history that could have been documented. And also, I thought, possibly they might even consider using the building for an arts center. Maybe a place where people could exhibit local paintings, or even do theatrical plays. There was so many possibilities because the building is immense, it's a huge building. It was nearly at the time, it

was a half a block long at least, and there was a huge courtyard--for anybody that doesn't know--that was a park, where the nuns would take these children for them to exercise and play, and so forth. Loaded with trees, and was just a beautiful, beautiful place. And of course, surrounded by very, very high walls which was the architecture of the time, and that's all gone now because they've built condos. And there's some 300 units or so that are now there. And they just took the property and took all the trees out, took all the greenery out.

It's a sad state of affairs. It hurts me personally, because I know what it was, and I thought it should have been open to the community to do things with it for the purposes of the community, and the seniors that wanted to stay here. So that, you know, that was just another thing. But you know, whatever is going to be is going to be, but my feeling about that is: that a lot of times we in this country don't honor our past. I know you just came from Italy on a vacation and I'm sure you saw buildings that were centuries old, centuries old. In America, for some strange reason we think of something is over 25 years old, it's got to be torn down and replaced by a condo or replaced by some modern structure. And the modern structures weren't built to the same standard that the older buildings from the 1900s and the 1800s were built in. And this building, I think, was built in, if I'm not mistaken, 1899 I'm not...

Kelly Carroll: That's correct.

Frank Grassi: That's correct? 1899. And you know, it was built like we used to say, like a brick battleship. It was just built to last it. It weathered so many storms, so many hurricanes, so many winters and it still looks like it was built yesterday. And you don't see that kind of construction anymore.

Kelly Carroll: You're exactly right. When I wrote a letter for the Guardians of the Guardian, I believe I said that the building looks intact because of the quality of the craftsmanship of its materials.

Frank Grassi: Absolutely.

Kelly Carroll: And that's also true for the whole campus of what this was. This was you know, a typical turn of the century Catholic institution with the walls like you described. We have Visitation Academy in Bay Ridge that still has this campus feel with landscaping, a pond and trees. This, you know, the building that was carved out--there were several buildings that were demolished, even before the Landmarks Commission decided that they were going to prioritize this for designation.

And the biggest loss, I think, was what they called the Mercy Building, or what some people call the Convent Building, which is on the side street. And according to the Director of Research, this building was described as "secondary to the main building..." I'm quoting "...in its siting and prominence, and as such, not as essential or critical to appreciating the special architectural and cultural significance of the Angel Guardian Home and its history." How do you feel about that, and the loss of that building?

Frank Grassi: It's a total fabrication of intent--they just...I don't even think they came down to look the other building. I think they sent some people from their office to come down and just have a general look at the building. I really believe that. These buildings were built within a few years of one another, so if the architecture for the main building was considered relevant to its historical status and relevant to its landmark status, then why wasn't the side, but we consider it the same way? I don't, I just don't.

I think it was carved out for political purposes and for maybe for a real estate deal. That's the only way we can look at it. I see no other reason why that building, which was connected by the way by a stone--I

think it was a stone archway--and a gate that connected the two buildings together. The nuns would often use that second building as an extension for children that were being sent into the orphanage, that when they ran out of room, they would bring them to the second building. And I believe, sometimes, I know for a fact that it was being used as a senior center for community residents.

And they evicted the seniors. They kicked them out after a lot of protracted talking and fighting and trying to save the building, the residents of that building were just literally told that they had to leave by a certain date and I don't know where the building stands now. I haven't been back there since the landmarking, to be honest with you. And I was told that it's going to become a school, or it's going to become a yeshiva, I'm not sure which. And I'm seeing that as I rode, by I'm noticing that some of the religious symbols that were part of the building--which made it a landmark--are being removed. Crosses, statues, things like that which were part and parcel of what that building was. And the Landmarks Preservation Commission just ignored it and is just making up their own way of going along with it and, and I think a lot of it has to do with the with real estate interest, more than anything else.

Kelly Carroll: Okay, we should, when we're done with this interview, I would like to speak to you about things being removed because iconography's removal, if approved, is supposed to go through a public process. So, we should speak about that off of this. But thank you for letting me know.

So, the thing that's, this building is incredibly special. But what makes it stand apart, and the reason that I wanted to speak to you about the Guardians of the Guardians' work is that this is the first landmark to ever be designated in the neighborhood of Dyker Heights, which is an exceptional accomplishment. After its designation, do you think that having a landmark building in this neighborhood for the first time has had a positive impact on the community?

Frank Grassi: I think it's too soon to know that because there's still construction work going on. The neighbors that live on that block are daily complaining about noise, cement mixers, drilling going on day and night. And I know that they're limited to certain hours that they're supposed to work but the neighbors have told me that the neighborhood has been littered with trash, that people have been trying to break in and that is not boding well for the landmark. The Landmarks Preservation Commission really has you know, they sort of said okay you're a landmark and they walked away from the process.

That's my personal opinion, you know, I just think that there should have been more done by the construction companies that are involved in protecting the landmark because right now I'm seeing, I'm hearing the stories of windows being broken and parts of the building being removed, and no one is consulting the Guardians of the Guardian. I guess they figured well, we're satisfied, we got a piece of the cake and so we're not going to push any further. But you know, to me it just hurt me to watch that, even if there was landmark that there was just a total disregard for the community's interests.

Kelly Carroll: That brings a really good point which is, you're totally right about once something is landmarked the work doesn't stop. The work begins at designation, actually, because then there's stewardship, right? So, if people want to make changes to the building, if somebody is doing something illegal to the building, groups like yours are there to be the watchdogs and to be involved. So, stewardship is a really important, really important part of landmarks. And I would agree that the mess that is over there right now because of this development that is taking place on the non-designated portion of the site is adversely impacting this landmark building. Which we will get to the bottom of.

Frank Grassi: I've seen them taking apart, you know, things that they said "Oh, it's not essential." I was there the day that they took down the fire escapes on the back side of the building and they said "Oh look, you know, the fire escapes weren't originally part of the building." I know, but they're fire escapes, you know? And sooner or later you're going to have to you know, put back something if you're going to use the building in any case. But the community was not consulted about that. They just went to a guy with a blowtorch and started disconnecting all the steel fire escapes. And again, this hurts a lot of the people who live there, some of them even said that they wanted to sell their homes and move out of the neighborhood because they just can't take the idea that they're going to be loaded with not only the condos, but about a sixth of the property has been given to the, or sold to the School Construction Authority and they're going to build a K through six, I believe.

Maybe I'm wrong about the age group. I think it's going to be a school, public school. Now, you've got a public school right on the corner of 65th Street and 12th Avenue, it's the Christa McAuliffe IS 287, I believe, is the is the number. And so, you've already got a school there. You've got another school about four blocks down on 14th Avenue. You've got other schools in the neighborhood that you know, and they keep saying, "Well, we need more schools, because District 20 is a very, very popular district." Well, sure it is, and the more you build schools, the more it's going to become more popular, and more people are going to move into the community. And we're already seeing we're already seeing what the impact is. And I'm not, I'm not denigrating people coming into a community trying to make a better life for themselves, but it is overwhelming the infrastructure of the community.

I can tell you from a personal point of view, just on this one block we had sanitation people picking up trash the other night and the family that lives adjacent to my family—this is a two-family house I'm living in--the house adjacent to mine is a two-family house, there's about...there are more than two families living there. The amount of trash that was put out on one garbage night was astounding. I mean, and not even put out well. To the point where they pick up the plastic bags and they break from the bottom and these guys are trying to do a job and they're being overwhelmed, and even one of the sanitation workers said to me, he said, "I don't understand. How come you only put out one or two cans and these people put out six?"

Kelly Carroll: Right.

Frank Grassi: and it's the same size house? Well, that's the problem. And it is impacting the infrastructure of the neighborhood, there's no doubt about it.

Kelly Carroll: It is and that's...every community has different issues in New York, and this is...this community is absolutely plagued by overcrowding and violations of zoning in terms of one- and two-family houses having as many as 40 or 50 people in a structure.

Frank Grassi: And it's not for lack of trying, because you know, we had several people here that formed committees. There was a fella I went to high school with him--Bob Cassara--and Bob I don't know if you've heard that name but Bob...

Frank Grassi: Yeah, I know Bob.

Frank Grassi: Okay, he was involved with trying to you know, have you know, inspections on some of these homes where he felt they were digging out the basements illegally, they're converting places into living spaces that weren't supposed to be living spaces. I'm seeing it here on my own block. There are

things that are going to be fire hazards. That sooner or later, people are going to say wow how did we let this go?" And nobody cares now, but maybe through your organization, you can make more people aware that these things are happening and it's not going to get better, it's going to get worse. I mean, I'm staying here because I love the neighborhood. I've loved it since I was a child, my wife says "Let's go to Florida, let's go someplace else, we can buy a condo somewhere."

And I go yeah I do, but I really love the neighborhood and I love the people here. And I hope, and even though we've had a difference of culture in the community, I'm finding my neighbors are terrific, respectful, nice people; family-oriented, hardworking and I'm all for them, as long as they're willing to keep the neighborhood to some semblance of a family-oriented community, I'm with them on that. And I would continue to you know, stay here and live here--drag me out by my feet, I guess.

Kelly Carroll: It is a wonderful place to live, and I think we have time for one more question which is: What are some places in this area that you think should be landmarks--that are maybe already landmarks to people in the neighborhood--but aren't actually protected New York City ones?

Frank Grassi: Well, you mentioned one earlier, Visitation Academy. To me, that is, well, it's not in this exact neighborhood. It is part of Bay Ridge, it's been there for a long time, and that should definitely be landmarked. I believe also well, we already have one. One of my friends owns a place called the Gingerbread House which I'm sure a lot of people have heard of.

Kelly Carroll: I love that house.

Frank Grassi: They're friends of mine. Yeah, it's a great house and we go visit them on a regular basis-- Diane and Jerry Fishman. And that house has been landmarked for a number of years now, and that is already is a landmark. But I think, gee whiz, I really haven't thought about that much, you know? I mean maybe in...well, we did lose a landmark. The St. Rosalia's Church on 14th Avenue and 64th Street was already taken down for a condo or for a school, I don't know which yet, but that would have been a nice place. That was where my parents had been married, and so I would have liked to see that stay but unfortunately, it was it was sold off by the Diocese because they needed the money.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah.

Frank Grassi: Other places? Well, St. Philip's Church--I don't know if that's considered a landmark. Is that considered a landmark? Well, that's got Tiffany windows in it, a lot of people don't realize that. As a videographer, I did a lot of weddings--ton of them—I, you know, I was in the video business from 1980 to almost 2002. And I used to use the slogan "Preserving the present for the future" when I did a wedding. And I used to tell the brides and grooms, this is not going to be important to you right now, but it will be down the line. Because I used to interview the parents and the grandparents of the bride and groom and have them say something about the kids growing up. And what it was, it was a historical document of the family.

They would tell us stories "Oh, my granddaughter used to run through the sprinklers naked and we used to spray her with the hose" and those stories like that just meant so much to the family, and the people that we did video for understood that. But one of the places we did work was St. Philip's Church on...I think it's 79th Street and 10th Avenue. It's a beautiful campus. The church is like, it goes back, I guess it goes back to the 1900s, somewhere around that time. And I noticed that the windows were stained glass and I asked the pastor at the time, "These are beautiful windows, where are they from?" He said,

"These are Tiffany windows." So, he told me that that's the truth, and I assume it is. But that would be a great landmark, I think that would be a nice building to have as a landmark. Okay, so I don't know. There's maybe a couple other churches. There's one here on 70--I don't remember the name of it--but it's on 71st Street between 10th and 11th Avenues and I hear their bells from the tower charming, and during the holidays, they play Christmas carols on the bells. They have a--I forgot what they call it-- keyboard. But it plays melodies and that's always nice to hear because that's about two blocks away from where I am, and that that would make a nice landmark too, the church. It's an old church, but that's just suggestions.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, the churches here are wonderful. I love the Shrine of St. Bernadette.

Frank Grassi: St. Bernadette's is another church that's been around a long time, absolutely.

Kelly Carroll: That's a great Art Deco church. You don't see a lot of Art Deco churches in...anywhere.

Frank Grassi: And I don't know about Regina Pacis Church on 65th Street, that's a block away...

Kelly Carroll: It's not landmarked.

Frank Grassi: I don't think that's a landmark.

Kelly Carroll: It's not.

Frank Grassi: My father directed the choir in that church for 50 years.

Kelly Carroll: Wow.

Frank Grassi: I saw that church being built from my sixth-grade classroom window and watched them-- and I have the original book from that time, I don't have it in front of me, but I do have the book where they dedicated the church, I have that original. And I have a lot of older types of books about Brooklyn. There's one on the Brooklyn Navy Yard, there's one here about Floyd Bennett Field where I was stationed as a naval, I was a naval journalist. I was actually a navy journalist and I was stationed at Floyd Bennett Field, which was the naval air station in New York. I have a historic Brooklyn calendar which has a lot of old pictures of Brooklyn. I've got a book that my father's friend from his choir called *The Streets of New York* and the author is J. Ernest Brierley and it talks about New York City in the days when the Dutch where the you know, the rulers of the ruling class of the historical you know, mayor and so forth of the city.

So, I have a lot of stuff. I do like to read up on the older things and the older stuff and as I mentioned earlier, I also had a recording studio and then later a video company, where I get a lot of documenting of music and of the things that happened in Dyker Heights and in Bay Ridge. For instance, we had a replica of the of the wall that they have in Washington, D.C. which was the wall of the Vietnam era wall. And I videotaped that for the commanding officer of our precinct. He asked me if I would do him a favor and just videotape some of the people talking about the wall, and I did tape some of the ceremonies and I still have all these videotapes. They're on VHS--or Super VHS--and I'm transferring a few of them over to DVDs now, just so that the next generation has a digital version of whatever it was I taped back in the day. So, we do have a lot of things that I've tried to preserve for the future generations. I'm thinking ahead there.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, I think you've always been a preservationist, and that the Angel Guardian was your first architectural preservation foray.

Frank Grassi: Absolutely. You're right, absolutely right. I'm glad I was able to be part of that group of people and they're still there, they're still fighting the good fight and trying their best to you know, they're still, I think, trying to petition the Landmarks Preservation Commission to come back and take a second look at the second half of the second building. Which, I don't know if it's too late for that. It probably is. But that building should have really been considered as part of the whole landmark.

Kelly Carroll: I agree with you one hundred percent.

Frank Grassi: Well, I hope I gave you some insight. I know I've talked a lot.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, no! This has been...thank you so much! I'm going to stop recording. Thank you so much.