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Nancy Ryan oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, February 4, 2020, "Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge" oral history project; Cambridge Historical Society.



## **Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge**

### **Oral History Project**

#### **Interview with Nancy Ryan, February 4, 2020**

This interview is part of “Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge,” an oral history project of the Cambridge Historical Society, in partnership with the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House and The Loop Lab. This project was funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Interviewee: Nancy Ryan

Interviewer: Lina Raciukaitis

Interview Date: February 4, 2020

Interview Location: Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House

Length of Interview: 123 minutes

Transcription: by Lina Raciukaitis, September 24, 2020, 16,370 Words

Note: The Loop Lab audio engineer Jeff Solomon recorded this interview. Jeff asked Nancy some questions and offered some reflections toward the end of the interview.

Nancy Ryan was born in New Bedford and moved to Cambridge in 1980 to begin her work as Director of the City of Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women. She has lived in the Port for forty years and worked in partnership with the Margaret Fuller House through her role as Director of the Women’s Commission and as a member of the Area 4 Neighborhood Coalition. After retiring from the Commission in 2006, Ryan has continued her local activism with the ACLU and as a founder of the Cambridge Residents Alliance.



## Start of Interview

[Recording start delayed. The following was added to the transcript by Lina Raciukaitis and Nancy Ryan but is not included in the recording]

**Lina Raciukaitis** This is an interview for the Cambridge Historical Society oral history project, "Sweet Souls: Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House." My name is Lina Raciukaitis and today is February 4, 2020. I am here with Nancy Ryan. Do you consent to being recorded for this interview?

**Nancy Ryan** Yes.

**Lina Raciukaitis** What is your full name?

**Nancy Ryan** Nancy Margaret Ryan.

**Lina Raciukaitis** When and where were you born?

**Nancy Ryan** I was born in New Bedford, MA in June, 1946.

**Lina Raciukaitis** Where did you grow up?

**Nancy Ryan** I grew up in New Bedford and left to go to college then onward.

**Lina Raciukaitis** What are your parents' names?

**Nancy Ryan** Phebe T. Huggins -

[Recording begins]

**Nancy Ryan** [00:00:00] - and my father's name was James Anthony Ryan.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:00:02] And when and where were they born?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:00:05] They were both born in New Bedford.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:00:10] Did you have any siblings?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:00:11] I have a brother, younger brother, who still lives in New Bedford.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:00:16] And what did your parents do for a living?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:00:20] Interesting. My mother was a homemaker until my father was laid off and she went to work. She always wanted to be a newspaper reporter like her father, but her father told her it was no business for a woman. And of course, in those times, [19]40s and [19]50s, you couldn't break through that ceiling. My father, interestingly, was a white collar worker in a factory in New Bedford and that factory got bought up by an investor by the name of Warren Buffett. Very, very, very rich, one of the richest men in this country. When he was creating his investment empire and he named it after my father's factory, Berkshire Hathaway. Not long after, my father got laid off. They pretty much laid everybody off. At that point, my mother went to work as a secretary in a family services program and my father went to Bridgewater State and got a Master's in Education and became a teacher at New Bedford High. He taught computer uses. At Berkshire Hathaway he ran their inventory systems and an IBM computer that was probably twice the size of this room, with cards. We used to go and watch it and the cards would go through the machines. It was very tragic for our family because all of a sudden I was fifteen, my brother was thirteen, I was getting ready to think about college, and my father got laid off. Everybody was pretty panicked, but it all worked out. And my mother loved working so, in fact she never really wanted to be a housewife. She loved being in a social setting where she could do good and so, that was all good.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:02:12] So she kind of jumped at the opportunity to work in the services -

**Nancy Ryan** [00:02:18] Yeah.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:02:18] - where she worked.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:02:18] But it was funny - I became a kind of professional feminist. I eventually ran the Women's Center in New Bedford and then I got the job here in Cambridge as director of the Women's Commission for the City and my mother would joke to me that I was such a little feminist that she went to work all day and I expected to come home from school and have dinner ready [laughter] so she said, "You know, you weren't such a little feminist then."

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:02:47] Was there - when the factory closed was there any protest or like, how was it played out in New Bedford?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:02:58] No, all the cotton mills were moving South and so it wasn't a surprise. Berkshire Hathaway was one of the few that was left and it was actually, as I understand it, profitable. And that's why Warren Buffett bought it. But gradually, it died on the vine because - it was mainly because of cheap labor. People were unionized in the North, the South was not, so all the cotton factories were moving South. It was happening all over the place so at Berkshire Hathaway it wasn't a shock.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:03:35] And what was it like growing up in your household?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:03:41] Hm. It was pretty ordinary. You know, it was me and my brother, my mother stayed home. Eventually because my father went to work in the public high school, my brother and I got sent to a regional Catholic high school because he wisely thought that it wasn't good to have your father teaching in the high school that you were a student in. I mean, our lives were just very, very ordinary.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:04:16] What do you remember about school?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:04:19] I was a really good student. I loved writing. I was a cheerleader - so it meant I got to go to all the sports things and didn't have to worry about what clothes I was wearing. I basically liked school a lot. Did well.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:04:47] Were there any teachers that really stood out to you?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:04:52] Well there was one weird thing that happened. A bunch of the teachers were nuns and a couple of priests in my high school, and there was one nun who was young and very popular and all the really popular kids hung around her. I was not one of those kids. I didn't particularly hang out with her. They would go to her room after school and everybody would yak yak. And one day she came up to me, I think I was a senior, and she said, "I just want you to know I think you're gonna be a leader so you better get prepared for that." Woah. Really? I hadn't thought about that. So anyway, that was one thing that kind of has always stood out.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:05:36] And what did you do after high school?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:05:37] I ended up going to Emmanuel College which is run by the same order of nuns as my high school and that's because they gave me an enormous scholarship and my father was just getting his career back on track. For whatever reason, I don't know, I wanted to go to Mount Holyoke but I had to go to Emanuel because of the money. Between a big scholarship, and I did work-study every year, I was able to make it through without causing enormous financial burden on my parents.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:06:18] What did you study there?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:06:19] I was an English major and I really got interested in social history and how literature and social history affect each other. I wrote my senior thesis on *Huckleberry Finn* and my analysis was that the story of *Huckleberry Finn* was the story of family life in the United States at that time. As Huck and Jim went down the Mississippi, they would encounter all these different kinds of families. First it was Huck's family which was a small family but his father beat him. He was an abused child in his quiet little secret, private, personal family. And then he and Jim run into other kinds of family - two families that are feuding almost like the Hatfields and the McCoys, and that was another form of family. And then he and Jim essentially founded for themselves their own kind of nuclear family, which was a supportive family. But it was controversial because here is Jim, a Black slave running away from slavery, and Huck, a young



white boy, but they took care of each other and there was another kind of family. That's what got me into thinking about how literature and what's happening in the world are intertwined. Then I went to graduate school at the University of Nebraska and it was another happenstance kind of thing where it was 1968 when I graduated from college, my roommate's boyfriend had been killed at Khe Sanh, the world was in chaos, I had been accepted at a bunch of fancy graduate programs in American studies, and a priest that we used to go out drinking with in Kenmore Square said one day, "What are you gonna do next year?" And I said, "I think - I don't know. I can't bear, I think, to go to a snotty graduate school in these times." And he said, "I have a friend that works with me at the British Museum summers and he has a chair at the Nebraska English Department and he said it's a wonderful place to be." The professor was very involved in Native American life as well as Medieval literature. So I said, what the hell, I'll go, and they ended up giving me a three year deal which was wonderful, it paid for all my graduate school expenses. I got a Ph.D. in English from Nebraska and that man, Paul Olson, became my mentor. And I just saw him fifty years later about a month ago.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:09:24] What was that meeting like?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:09:25] Well, it was a reunion of a program I helped to start while I was at Nebraska, a living learning center there. They had a fiftieth reunion of it, and so I went. It was wonderful to be back with people who had been so engaged in 1968 with the world.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:09:55] What was it like living in Nebraska then?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:09:57] Well it's very different. I loved it there but I couldn't live there. I've always lived on an ocean - in fact, my mother's people were whaling people who go way back in New Bedford. You could get to the outskirts of Lincoln, Nebraska and see forever. All you could see was corn and grass and it was beautiful, - it was friendly, it was incredibly friendly. It was a very warm place to be, so I still have a lot of friendships from there and I loved it.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:10:37] And what did you do just following -

**Nancy Ryan** [00:10:43] Oh, following that.





**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:10:43] Following that, what did you do?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:10:43] We had a bunch of student strikes and moratoriums against the war in Vietnam and one of the speakers that came out to Nebraska was the president of a community college within the City University of New York system, Bill Birenbaum. I met him and he actually was more interested in my boyfriend but my boyfriend wasn't anywhere near getting his degree, and so he recruited me to apply for a job at Staten Island Community College, which I did, and I got the job, and so I became an assistant professor at Staten Island. I began working with other faculty to establish joint courses so you'd get credit for both English and anthropology, English and sociology, English and history. And we also set up one of the earliest Women's Studies programs. They were starting to happen around the country and so I was able to be part of that - I would be the English person and we'd be looking at women's literature in the context of history or sociology or anthropology or other disciplines. The team teaching also was just really fun. I worked there for either seven or eight years until in 1976, New York City went belly up financially. They had a huge budget crisis and the City was taken over by an investment firm, Felix Rohatyn and Lazard Frères, and every non-tenured faculty member was what they called "retrenched". I lost my job because I hadn't gotten tenure yet. I was involved in a lot of political movements and I'd always loved making pamphlets - and to do that you had to use somebody who had a typesetting machine. You'd type out what you wanted and you'd take it to this typesetter and the typesetter would set the type, and then you would cut it all up and paste it up into a flier, and I used to love doing that, and I was kind of fascinated with typesetter. I looked in *The New York Times* for jobs and there was one that said, "Typesetter, will train." So I went to work for a fancy typesetting company that did a lot of fancy magazines, furniture magazines and arts magazines, and whatever. It was not my thing but I learned professional typesetting and I did that until my father got sick in New Bedford and I felt like I had to go back to help take care of the family because I didn't really have a career. Typesetting was never gonna be my career [laughter]. So I went back to New Bedford, I got a job in a typesetting place, and this woman came up to me one day and she said, "You know, this place is kind of on the back burner. You're not gonna ever make much money here. But there's a unionized shop in Boston that actually pays really good money and I can't go there because I've got kids but you're single and you could travel." So I got this job at a place called the Typo



House in Boston, and started commuting from New Bedford to Typo House. And I was working what they called the lobster shift, which is 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. because I was the newest person there, and it was killing me. I started to meet some people in New Bedford because of course I'd been gone for a long time, and I met somebody who was on the board of the local Women's Center, and one morning I came home from work and had breakfast with her [laughter] and she convinced me to apply for the job as director of the Women's Center there. I felt like it would be more like getting back to where I really needed to be. I got that job, but it didn't pay very much because it was a collective and I was in charge of making sure everybody got paid but we didn't get paid very much, so I got a second job teaching English at UMass Boston. I would commute two nights a week and teach a couple of classes and that's where I met the man who is now my husband, who was head of the faculty union, so it all comes around. And he was also teaching in the English department and he had two kids and a house in Central Square in Cambridge. When we decided to live together, I said I'm not moving up there until I have a job that's for me, that I want. And - because part-time at the English department was not gonna cut it - and the job of the director of the City of Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women came open, and I got it. So, I moved up to Cambridge and worked at the Women's Commission for twenty-five years. I retired fourteen years ago.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:15:53] When - what year did you start working at the Women's Commission?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:15:55] 1980. And I retired in 2006 so just over twenty-five years.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:16:07] Yeah, what was your relationship - I know you were working in Boston, but what was your relationship with Boston and Cambridge before you officially moved?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:16:16] Almost none, which was interesting. I didn't know much about Cambridge. I started to try to learn more about it and what I learned about Cambridge - which became very important to me as director of the Women's Commission - was that people think of Harvard and MIT and they don't think of this as having been a very working class city that had a lot of factories of its own. In fact, I was very involved with when MIT and Forest City



Corporation were trying to buy what's now University Park and it had been the Simplex Wire and Steel Cable Company. It was a factory and of course One Kendall Square, that was all factories, and I have friends who grew up in this neighborhood whose parents worked at the Woven Hose Factory at One Kendall, so it's - it was important to me coming from New Bedford, being a very diverse working class city, to recognize that Cambridge was in fact very much like that in between Harvard and MIT and all around them. And I always felt particularly lucky that my husband had recently bought a house in Central Square, because Central Square really suited my personality and taste, and things we were talking about before [the interview] about the vibrancy of Central Square. I walked to work every day along Mass Ave and up to the City Hall and then up to the City Hall Annex. It was great.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:17:54] Could you describe what Central Square was like when you moved?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:17:59] Well, it was interesting that particularly when I moved to the Port - to Area 4 as it was then - people would say to me, "Aren't you scared to walk around there at night?" And I said, "No..." I mean, people have to be - women have to be looking out for themselves - it was one of the things that I really learned and got more clear about as director of the Women's Commission. People would say, "Oh, Central Square, you're likely to get your purse stolen." So I went to the cops and I got the data. You were much more likely to have your purse stolen in Harvard Square than in Central Square. But that was the stereotype of Central Square: it was dirty, it was dangerous, there were all these people of color around, so you as a white woman aren't you worried? I really tried to debunk a lot of those stereotypes of Central Square because what was beautiful about it was - we were talking earlier about the Middle East restaurant and music club and how that was the meeting place for everybody. I've been talking a lot lately about Central Square changing and one of the people there said, "I met my wife at the Middle East, they can't - they can't take it away." And then I was talking with somebody else, a guy who's now our state rep, who said that he grew up in Norwood but the way that he discovered there was life outside of a small town was one day he took the train into Boston, ended up in Cambridge at the Middle East because he loved music, and he said, "Oh my God, there's a much bigger world out here and this is it!" So Central Square really was a place where a lot of people kind of grew up, and as we were saying before, the Middle East was a place where young people could get their start in music and everybody could, it wasn't any one



person's territory. And we had Corcoran's on the corner of Essex and Mass Ave, which had clothing upstairs and every possible kind of thing that you could need downstairs: towels, and needles and thread, and just everything, bathroom things. And then, almost next door to that there was the five and ten, Woolworth's, and in Woolworth's you could also get anything you needed. It was amazing. And then we had Harvard Donut. It had a very working class clientele, a very dumpy kind of a breakfast place, but it did have booths in the back where people couldn't smoke, so we used to have a lot of meetings there, breakfast gatherings. And gradually those things have gone away. It's kind of weird that Target is now the substitute for Corcoran's and Woolworth's. Oh, and the other thing is that it's nice to have these coffee shops that we have now but if you want to go there to meet somebody at a coffee shop in Central Square, you basically can't guarantee that you're gonna be able to sit because at every table there's one person with a laptop. But you could always get into Au Bon Pain, so that's gone now [laughter]. It happened to me the other day, I was meeting somebody at Caffe Nero and we couldn't find a place to sit so we said, "Ah, what the hell let's just go to Au Bon Pain." Now it's gone, so it's like, ah!

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:21:58] Yeah, lots of just -

**Nancy Ryan** [00:21:58] Yeah.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:21:58] Rapid changes.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:22:00] Very. Yeah, yeah.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:22:00] Who - like, where did you hear that being said that like, oh you should watch out when you're walking around in Central?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:22:15] Kind of everywhere. It was a stereotype. It was interesting that I would go every year to the Radcliffe Institute, a program for women scholars at Radcliffe. I knew the Director as she and I had gone to college together. I contacted her just to say, "Hey, I'm the director of the Women's Commission now," and so she would have me come to speak to the new scholars. They had women scholars from all over the country who come for a year to finish



their books or do an art project to advance their position in academia. And every year they - a lot of those women - would say to me, "Now I understand it's not safe to walk around in Central Square." So that's where I used the police statistics to say you're much less safe in Harvard Square so, basically take care of yourself everywhere. In our neighborhood there was a divide between the two large housing developments, Washington Elms and Newtowne Court, places people often call "the projects." I think a lot of middle-class white people were nervous because they weren't familiar with the residents. They hadn't grown up in circumstances like that, they had not gotten to know people well who lived there. So there was that kind of looming presence, I think, for white people. When I came to the Port, to Area 4, it was an overwhelmingly community of color with white people scattered here and there. In fact, my husband bought the house just before he and I met from an African-American woman whose husband got transferred to California so she had to sell quickly and in our neighborhood, our immediate street, lots of people of color. It's totally different now. I think that was why people had this instant assumption that it wasn't safe. And it just wasn't true. I mean, there's certainly some more crime in Area 4 and the Port than there is in some other neighborhoods but by and large it's among and between people who know each other, it's not necessarily "stranger danger". So, that was the atmosphere of why people, I think, had made certain assumptions.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:25:14] And do you call this area the Port or Area 4?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:25:18] Well -

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:25:19] Or do you kind of switch between?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:25:19] - the neighborhood has often felt that other neighborhoods have real names and Area 4 had a name that dated back to the anti-poverty programs of the Johnson administration. And so Area 4 sounded depressing to people, especially long term people of color in this neighborhood. They just felt that we weren't given the respect. Now, what really got to me was when that fancy restaurant opens up over toward MIT and it's called "Area 4". The neighborhood voted to change the name to the Port because it was originally a port and so it's in transition, we're trying to call it the Port more consistently so that that becomes the name, but Area 4 still sticks as well. I manage the neighborhood e-list and I usually write "Dear



Port/Area 4 neighbors" just so people are totally familiar, people who think of it still as Area 4 versus people who are learning to call it the Port full-time.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:26:40] When did that vote happen?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:26:41] Oh, it was a few years ago. Not too long, three or four years ago. Yeah. Yeah. And it's a little confusing because we've got Cambridgeport.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:26:52] Yeah, yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:26:53] The nickname of our neighborhood was the Port, for young people, and the nickname of Cambridgeport, Riverside, was the Coast. So, there were Port people and Coast people, mainly younger people. So the Port is very familiar to a lot of young people who grew up here, it would be interesting to ask our sound engineer.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:27:16] Oh yeah! I've heard people talk really passionately about the Port, like as a name for the neighborhood.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:27:21] Yeah.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:27:21] The Port, as opposed to Area 4 because yeah, it does sound more like a name than Area 4.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:27:26] Yeah!

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:27:26] But at the same time like, there is that historical presence of Area 4, and then the Area 4 Neighborhood Coalition too.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:27:37] Yeah. Yeah, I think if the Area 4 Neighborhood Coalition - it was very vibrant for about thirty years, and then in the last few years there hasn't been new leadership emerging but I think if we can revive it, which I would love to see, I would want to try to change the name to the Port Neighborhood Coalition really. It was a coalition that started here



at the Margaret Fuller House as a coalition of groups that served the people in the neighborhood. That's why it wasn't the neighborhood association, it was the Neighborhood Coalition because it started that way with representatives from service groups and then it evolved into more of a neighborhood association.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:28:28] Yeah. So when was the first time that you heard about the Margaret Fuller House?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:28:38] I feel like I heard about it from the second I landed, but it was when I became the director of the Women's Commission. The Women's Center in New Bedford was a very, very racially, culturally, diverse center. The staff was that and the communities we served were very diverse, and so when I came here I wanted to be sure that the Women's Commission really served first and foremost women who most needed help, support, whatever. And so the Margaret Fuller House, especially because I moved into Central Square and Area 4 or the Port, this was the natural place to come, and the director, Gloria Smith, an African-American woman, and Renae Gray, a member of the Board who was then Renae Scott, who's passed away a couple of years ago - I knew Renae from New Bedford and so she was a link for me to Cambridge. I hadn't thought about that. But she was a very, very important voice here in Cambridge in this neighborhood and she lived over on Columbia Street. She was active in everything and she was one of the go-to people for anything that you thought that the African-American or other communities of color or women - she was one of the early founders of the Boston Women's Fund so she did feminist stuff, she did civil rights and civil liberties stuff, arts. She cared about everything. And so, she was one of the first people I went looking for when I moved here, and she said you got to go meet Gloria and you got to see what's going on there at the Fuller House, or "the Marga" as it was sometimes called, and how the Women's Commission can partner with the Margaret Fuller House in any way. Sitting down with Gloria, she said, "You know, we need a little more coordination in the neighborhood so that we make sure we're not overlapping with each other, and if there are things that are missing we can figure them out and try to get funding for them. So, let's put together a coalition." We would have bagels and coffee here at the Fuller House probably at least once a month for a year, talking with neighborhood people and service providers about what's needed, what we can do, and so that was kind of the basis. Then the other thing that started happening was development. Seems like Cambridge goes through





these periods of time. In the mid-[19]80s development started happening and one big piece of development was what used to be called the U.S. Trust Building on the corner of Broadway and [Portland Street] ... what's it called?

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:32:01] Western Ave?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:32:01] No no no, over here. There was a proposal to build this office and bank building and they wanted a lot more height than the zoning would allow. There was a federal program that doesn't exist anymore, the Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) that gave a low cost loan to a business which would pay the loan back to a legitimate neighborhood organization so the neighborhood organization could do things that were needed in the neighborhood. The Area 4 Coalition became the beneficiary of the money from the U.S. Trust Building. And so we probably over time took in and dispensed more than a million dollars. We had a community process to give that money away and we gave some to a neighbor who produced a neighborhood newsletter, we gave it to people who were trying to do a small improvement in their business, we just did a lot of things that were great to be able to do in a neighborhood process way. Every neighborhood had to have a go-to group that if a developer wanted to come in and do something that required city permits outside of what was part of the zoning, they had to come to a neighborhood. I can't tell you how many days we spent at a table like this, here in the Fuller House with developers and architects putting models on the table and saying, this is what we want to do here and there and here and there. And we would get to either support, change, or absolutely oppose [laughter] development projects that we felt weren't good for us. Some of the bigger developments that you see on Broadway between Kendall and here were being built at that time. Then the development slowed down for a while, and of course there was the 2008 big slow down, but now it's all roaring back and there are no longer federal programs like that one to really support the neighborhood to have any resources to make up for the impact of the development on the neighborhood. And then the other thing, of course, that's changed is the makeup of the neighborhood, and the Fuller House has just always been an anchor. Whatever was going on here, sometimes it was stronger, sometimes it was weaker, but whatever it was it was a go-to place for particularly the mothers and the kids in this neighborhood, and just thank goodness it's still here, given all of the changes.





**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:35:49] And was Gloria Smith - is that right?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:35:49] Yeah, mhm.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:35:49] Was she involved that whole time with the [Coalition]?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:35:54] For the first few years. I can't remember when she left but for definitely, I would say three or four years. I wish Renae were here, she would know. Gloria and Renae kind of hosted the Neighborhood Coalition.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:36:11] At the Margaret Fuller House?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:36:12] Yeah, here at the Margaret Fuller House. But as we got bigger we had to meet either over in the Fletcher Maynard School or once the Pisani Center got built at Washington Elms we would meet there because we'd have twenty-five or thirty or forty people at our meetings. We couldn't all fit here. But it was always seen as the home of the Area 4 Coalition. The other thing that we did, starting pretty early when we got that money, was that we would hire a part-time, usually younger person, to be our kind of neighborhood staff person, and he or she would make sure that fliers got delivered to houses for meetings and then when email started becoming a methodology, maintain an email list, and just, it was great to have somebody who could do outreach and go around and talk to the small businesses in the neighborhood, and that person was always based here at the Fuller House. It was just always kind of the center.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:37:21] In what year did the Neighborhood Coalition form, about?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:37:27] Yeah, I think, I would say probably 1982 or [198]3, something like that?

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:37:35] And it went on until like 2000?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:37:35] Oh, until, let's see.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:37:40] Or recently.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:37:40] Till pretty recently.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:37:42] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:37:42] Until four or five years ago I would say. So it was very, very active I would say in the [19]80s and [19]90s and the 2000s still somewhat and only really into the last four or five years it kind of dwindled. In part because some of the folks who've been involved from the beginning - I was involved from the beginning and I sort of backed away because I had a bunch of other involvements and I chaired it for about ten years, I think. Co-chaired it with Jackie Carroll for a period of time, she's an African-American woman who was very, very active in the neighborhood. I think she's still around, but not well. I also feel that no one person should be the figurehead of anything. So anyway, a group of people including Renae Gray took leadership. We had a four or five person neighborhood leadership group that made the agendas for the meetings, and made sure they happened, and got the places to meet, and food. Renae got sick and other people just got tired. As younger people have been moving into this neighborhood, they haven't felt the need to have a real neighborhood association, and for me that's always been something that a neighborhood needs. It protects the people in the community. It provides community and a neighborhood feel, and that's why I resent a lot of the development going on around the neighborhood that is going to be micro units and studios because I feel like that will be people who are just passing through for a short period of time and therefore that it takes away from the sense of, "I'm here for the long haul, this is my home and these are my neighbors, and I want to have a sense of community." And that's also what provides for safety, a strong sense of community. So all of those things have dwindled and that's too bad.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:40:05] When it first started, who was part of that little core group that started it?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:40:11] Core group.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:40:11] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [00:40:11] Ron Benham and Elaine O'Reilly lived on Harvard Street and I got to know them pretty early from when I moved here, and I think Ron was the chair of the board here at the Fuller House and his wife, Elaine O'Reilly, was very just active in the neighborhood and so, that brought in the board piece of the Fuller House. And then there was a man named Clifford Truesdell, and he's passed away now, he used to live near me on Essex Street, and Clifford was someone who was very politically astute and he was really good at learning about potential developments and what the dangers were and how to shave them down a little bit or whatever. And there were people from the health clinic across the street. There were people from Just-A-Start, which is a program that builds affordable housing and also trains youth, particularly youth at risk, in the building trades and stuff. And, what other - oh, Concilio Hispano used to be next door as well. The building - I'm saying next door, what I mean is really on Windsor Street - there was the health clinic, and Concilio Hispano shared a building there. Area 4 had a much larger Latino population than it does now, including an older Puerto Rican community, and a lot more Central Americans who were fleeing the wars in Central America were coming here. There was a big Salvadoran community, and so Concilio was the go-to place to support both longer term Latinos and then more recent immigrants. So, they were all part of the initial development of the Coalition. We always tried to make sure that people from the Tenants Council at Newtowne Court and Washington Elms were part of it. One of the biggest struggles for the Coalition was to be a coalition for the whole neighborhood where there seemed to always be a kind of wall between so-called "the neighborhood" and "the projects", and that was something that we constantly were trying to break down and make sure that people from Washington Elms and Newtowne Court felt part of the Neighborhood Coalition and that - we also had a lot of politically active, engaged, white people and so many of the folks from Newtown Court and Washington Elms were people of color, and really trying to create trust and engagement, and - it was always somewhat difficult. We tried to have meetings at the Fletcher Maynard because that was very much a school that attracted and supported a lot of kids from the neighborhood, and so their parents were comfortable there, so as we grew we would try to meet there. So, I don't think we ever completely obliterated the gap but the Coalition wanted that to happen. So, gradually the leadership became more white and that



became problematic, and then as Renae Gray got sicker it was like - she was a link, a really important, strong link.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:44:26] Yeah, how did you know her in New Bedford?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:44:28] Oh, Renae was one of the founders of the Haymarket People's Fund based in Boston, and she was one of the founders of Haymarket, and Haymarket gave the New Bedford Women's Center some funds here and there and the Fund created a coordinating council. They were trying to identify people from outside the immediate Boston area that were doing the kind of work, racial justice work, that was important to Haymarket. So, they invited me to become involved to be on this coordinating council. But then also, as I said, in New Bedford at the Women's Center we had a very diverse staff and at one point, I can't remember, we had some kind of an issue that involved cultural clashes, and so we asked Renae - she and one other woman came down and kind of facilitated a discussion for us to try to solve our impasse, which was great. So I knew her in several different ways.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:45:53] What was she like? What was it like working with her?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:45:59] Renae was a very warm, positive person. She almost never got negative, even when she was really angry at something that was going on. But that didn't mean she wasn't strong and clear in her beliefs. So, she was a kind of a draw for people. People found a - especially, I think it's fair to say, white people and white women in particular felt really comfortable working with Renae because she would be very clear about how race affected people of color and herself in the community here and all of that, but in such a way that was kind of affirming for people to be in the conversation. And some people for excellent good reasons were just angrier at how race had affected themselves, their lives, their families, their communities. And so Renae, who had become a skilled facilitator on race issues, and I wanted people to be talking to each other and she created spaces for that to happen. So she was involved - I mean, almost everybody and anybody in Greater Boston wanted Renae on their board or active in their organization so she did many things, but she was on the board and engaged here for quite a long time. She was a fan and supporter of the Margaret Fuller House



forever, and just lived right over on Columbia Street, you can practically see her house from here.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:48:16] And did she - you might have mentioned, but did she grow up in the Port?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:48:20] No, you know, I don't remember where Renae grew up and I also don't remember exactly what brought her here. I think I only learned that at her funeral. Her daughter grew up here, Michelle Scott, and Michelle is very, very much around and very much like her mother in certain ways and works for the Human Services Department for the City. I think Renae grew up in Ohio, but I'm not sure why I even think that, but she probably got drawn here for school of some kind and then for a while she lived in Cambridgeport, but then moved over here to the Port, the real Port! [Laughter]

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:49:05] And how - what was it like when you first got involved with Gloria, Gloria Smith, and like, that kind of connection that drew you to her?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:49:14] Yeah, it was just great to have a place where I felt that both as a neighborhood activist and the director of the Women's Commission I could contribute and find allies. We did a few programs that featured Renae or Gloria or people from the Fuller House, and we brought people here for meetings and things to talk about women's issues. There was a very controversial Take Back the Night march in the early [19]80s that was planned here and it was being planned by a lot of relatively naïve, mostly white, women. And so, we were having our meetings here and it turned out that the group had decided that they were going to have the march come up Western Avenue right through Riverside and the Hoyt Field area, and it would be a bunch of white women yelling, "Take back our lives, take back the night!" From whom? From Riverside? That whole part of Western Avenue, on each side, Riverside and Cambridgeport, were communities of color, and Hoyt Field was a center of communities of color [laughter]. Eventually we had to pull the plug on the march because it represented that whole thing about white women not recognizing the stereotyping of Black people and brown people as dangerous, and the neighborhoods as unsafe and - so anyway, when you think back on it, it was pretty awful at the time. So that was a thing that Gloria was involved in, Renae was



involved in. And I was also recruiting women of color to be on my Women's Commission and - so, to try to diversify, make sure that we were really fully participating in the life of the City. And this neighborhood was statistically, in the [19]80s and at least early to mid-[19]90s, this was the largest community of people of color. It had the largest percentage of women headed households with children under eighteen, and so that was a big focus of the Fuller House and the Women's Commission, which was looking at women heading households, raising children, trying to work, and needing to have their children cared for after school, and so there was a lot of focus at that time about how to support lower income single women headed households. There was afterschool programming, summer camp, daycare, and there would be breakfasts here for single women to come, women headed households to come, and strategize about how to manage their lives because it's a lot of stress.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:53:09] Yeah, so the Woman's Commission was also fairly new when you started, right?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:53:18] Yeah, it was founded in 1977. It was commissioned by the City ordinance in 1977 and I started in [19]80 so yeah, it was pretty new.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [00:53:32] Were there issues that the Commission was kind of focusing on? And did they differ from issues that you wanted to focus on, things you were bringing in?

**Nancy Ryan** [00:53:42] Well, I developed a plan to look at what were the major public providers of women's needs and what we could do to make them more women friendly - and that would be all women, not just white women. At the School Department, the Women's Commission working with other people helped to start the Teen Health Center at CRLS. The School Department for a while wouldn't allow contraception to be provided at the Teen Health Center, but it meant that teenagers and their families had immediate access to good healthcare because that was a big concern. And women are the people, whether they're a women headed household or a woman living with another adult, women are usually the people who oversee the healthcare for the family. So healthcare was important. And over here this health center, the Windsor Street Health Center, was really the largest provider in the City of healthcare services to Black and Latino families, so partnering with them and working to create this Teen Health



Center at the high school. And then with a couple of teachers I helped to start a Young Women's Commission at the high school. It lasted for about ten years, we were trying to promote girls' leadership, and self-esteem, and a sense of you have rights and you have needs that are legitimate. The schools were one big place where I wanted to make changes. Another place was what was then the Cambridge Hospital, which had a series of neighborhood health centers. It's now called the Cambridge Health Alliance and it has three hospitals. At the time it was just Cambridge Hospital. At that time we wanted to be sure that abortion was accessible, and a lot of the leading physicians at the hospital were Catholic. And it turned out that the head of the anesthesia department was a guy I went to Catholic high school with, Jimmy Quinn! And he was dead set against the hospital doing any abortions, and the head of the OB/GYN was also a Catholic guy. We had to really fight to get abortion to be able to be provided at the Cambridge Hospital to women who just couldn't, for whatever cultural or financial reason, couldn't get to one of the clinics. Many women couldn't get to Planned Parenthood or some other place, and very often that was people whose first language was not English. So that was another way of trying to get services for women in the community that otherwise they wouldn't have. I chaired for a long time a women's health task force that involved heads of the many departments in the hospital that provided services to women to try to make everything more women friendly. So now, there is a Women's Health Center at Cambridge Hospital and that's where OB/GYN is but there are all kinds of other services there too, and that was part of a - you know, all of this was collective, it wasn't just me or the Women's Commission, we were working with other people. Schools, healthcare, and then police. That was a biggie. When I first came here the Women's Commission director and the police department were at war. The police department would not give the Women's Commission any statistics about crimes against women and so the Women's Commission director just made a big stink about that, so the Police Chief and the Women's Commission weren't speaking. But when I started, the state required that every police department have a rape and sexual assault unit, officers who were specifically trained in domestic violence and sexual assault. And so, I kind of snuck over there and got to know the police officers and there were three of them at the time, two men and a woman, and they were fantastic, and they became long term friends. Mike Giacoppo, Mike Walsh, and Kathy Murphy. Kathy Murphy became the very first female police officer in the City's service who became a sergeant. There had not been a single woman above the level of police officer to be a sergeant. I mean, it was nuts. Together, we did wonderful stuff, and we created a domestic violence task





force that met at the police department every month and it involved everybody who served anybody who was in need of domestic violence services, and so we kind of modernized the police department in that area and in sexual assault. When I started there, the police department was down on the corner of Green and Western and the detectives were all in one big room and they each had a little cubicle around the edge of the room. And half of the cubicles had pictures of naked women, like that you find in a garage, or you used to find in a garage - and it was nuts. I walked in there and I said, "You can't bring a woman into this room and talk to her about sexual assault!" With Mike and Mike and Kathy, we went to the police chief at the time and we said, "This has to change." And he says, "Well people have rights to express themselves." No. Not in a workplace, no. There is this thing called sexual harassment, which didn't get to be big until the Clarence Thomas hearings, but I said, "No, no, no. This violates the law and you got to clean this up." So, we had to do stuff like that early on, and that didn't necessarily involve the Fuller House, but we did do domestic violence workshops at Newtowne Court and Washington Elms to just help women know what they should tolerate and not tolerate and where they could get help. So - all right, so those are the three of those, just thinking about the institutions - so what I wanted to do was make the institutions that the City had control of more women friendly and also more friendly to people who didn't look like the City's management, mainly Italian and Irish white men [laughter]. So, some people kid that they thought Bob Healy hired me because I had an Irish last name and he didn't realize what he was getting. And we did a lot of work in the court system as well to try to make sure that women got a fair shake and also that domestic violence was seen in all of its horror by the judges and the DA, it's not just pushed aside as, "Oh, that happens." Wherever I could, I would be involved here with the Fuller House and with people at Newtowne Court and Washington Elms, and at the Fletcher Maynard School. And then one other thing that affected people immediately in this neighborhood, and we focused a lot here, was in 1995 Bill Clinton and Joe Biden basically got rid of welfare as we know it, and so huge numbers of families that depended on welfare were all of a sudden either being given a work requirement or having their benefits shortened. If they had another kid, that kid wouldn't be covered, wouldn't be included in the family number, it was horrible. It was one of the worst things that Clinton did - that, and increase penalties for crimes - and so we started what we called the Kitchen Table Conversations, and they were for women. The Women's Commission - we got a grant, we provided dinner every Friday night at the senior center, and then we moved it over to the Fletcher Maynard, and it was a lot of women from this





neighborhood and we - it was primarily a place where the women themselves could share strategies about surviving the end of welfare as we know it, and we had childcare. We hired a woman from the neighborhood who provided childcare, she and her daughter did our childcare. So, that was another kind of connection with this neighborhood. There were women from other parts of the City but the one - in part because we were doing the dinner both - at first at the senior center and then at the Fletcher, it made it an easy place for women from this neighborhood to get to. We did that for quite a long time. So, that's some of the connections. And Renae was definitely a part of that, she would often come to our dinners. She was an inspiration- she was a single mother and so she was kind of able to be a kind of mentor to other women who were single parents and struggling with low income, and low self-esteem, and in some cases depression. We found that there's a lot of what you might call situational depression among lower income women, because everything just seems too much. You're either isolated at home with young children and not much community or you're trying to work and raise kids and you're short on money. And so there's a lot of stress that actually can kind of accumulate into almost a clinical depression, and we actually had a woman who worked with our group on that whole issue of depression. And that, as I said, was a lot focused here.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:05:03] Yeah, all that work city wide sounds, just like, incredible - just like, such a gargantuan task too in so many ways.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:05:10] Well, it didn't seem that way. We had a lot of partners.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:05:12] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:05:12] I mean, I'm telling you the story just from my own participation but there were a lot of different groups and individuals around the City who worked on this, on all these different things. So, when we had our domestic violence task force meetings, we had Transition House, and a program for children of women who'd been affected by domestic violence, and a few other things, and we had - and the police folks - and we just had really rich conversations about how to confront this problem. And so, a lot of participants who brought great energy, and expertise, and thoughtfulness, and commitment.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:06:01] What did it - like, for you participating in all of it like, what did it feel like?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:06:08] Well, I just felt lucky to have that job. Honest to goodness. I kidded people, I never wanted to say it in front of Bob Healy but - he was the City Manager who hired me and he was there forever, and - that I'm doing a lot of things that I would do without pay. I mean, I'm doing things - every day my job involves doing things that I feel committed to doing no matter what, as a community member. So I'm just really lucky. And then I ended up with not a very big one, but I ended up with a rare public pension having done that work. So that helped me to retire and keep doing other things that I want to do in the community. I just felt lucky. Sometimes it was exhausting and overwhelming or frustrating. Sometimes things didn't go the way you wanted them to. But when the School Department voted - the School Committee voted not to allow contraception to be distributed in the Teen Health Center, we had a pretty high teen pregnancy rate here, and that's - if it's an unwanted pregnancy, it's gonna affect all the rest of your life, and your child, and you are gonna have a much more difficult life. And so, how could we approach that in the school? The School Committee was just too timid, but they eventually allowed contraception, so.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:07:45] And could you elaborate a little bit more on living in the Port and also like, working at the Commission? And you said that a lot of your work was centered here through the Margaret Fuller House or through the Kitchen Conversations too.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:07:57] Well they just -

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:07:59] Just that connection.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:07:59] Yeah I mean, one of the things I loved was that my personal life of activity in the neighborhood and community and my professional, so-called, life were so intertwined and so, I didn't ever have to feel like my work was separate from the rest of my life and that felt great. I felt like I could move with others among these City systems, and in funny ways I had the Port at my back, I - whereas a lot of the systems I was trying to penetrate or change or whatever, I could always say, "And it's particularly important to women living in



Newtowne Court and Washington Elms because I know them, and I live there, and I'm part of that neighborhood." And so, it was a way of hopefully bringing voices from women here into the chambers of City institutions to try to get them - and one thing, this is weird but it made me feel so good - and we worked hard at making sure that the Cambridge Hospital, it used to be called Cambridge City Hospital and a lot of people still call it Cambridge City, and the way that that gets perceived, much like Boston City Hospital, is that it's a hospital for poor people. It's not for everybody. And I started - when I started my Women's Commission job, I said, "Well, I had Harvard Community Health Plan at that time, I said, "No, I should get my healthcare through the Cambridge Hospital, and one of their clinics." So I started doing that and then - you just wanted to really diversify the whole thing, and what was really exciting was the day that the Globe - the Globe ran a whole series of race in Boston about a year and a half ago, and one day it was about healthcare and how women of color going into healthcare settings are only seeing white people. So, I had a very short, successful experience with breast cancer, and so the day that I went in for my breast cancer surgery I'm in the surgical area and the workforce is everybody, and the patients are everybody, and it was like, phew, this. This is the way it should be. The surgeons, the nurses, the other caregivers, the other patients, were speaking many languages, were just very, very diverse and I felt like, yeah, this is the way it should be. So, this is not what they're describing in the Globe, so I'm happy about that.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:11:02] And speaking of healthcare, could you talk a little bit more about the health center that you mentioned that was in the area?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:11:11] Yeah, I didn't get my care at this particular one, the Windsor Street Clinic, but I was very active with it. And so, it's much bigger now. It's right across the street here. It used to be next door. There's an old brick building that's closed there that you can kind of see here, and so half of it - through, yeah right there.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:11:32] Just this one through this window?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:11:32] Yeah - oh, next to it. Right next to it. Anyway, the half of it was Concilio Hispano and the other half was the Windsor Health Center. And it was very small, and it was a lot of African-American patients and some Latino patients and so, one of the wonderful things



was that finally they bought this building from Polaroid, it was a Polaroid factory. I mean this was, as I said in the beginning, this was a factory town. There were factories everywhere. So that was a Polaroid factory, and so the health - the Public Health Department and the Cambridge Housing Authority jointly bought this building, and so part of it is - the Housing Authority has a program teaching computers and other things to young people primarily but also to the community, and then the second floor was a combination of Boys and Girls Club and the Community Arts Center, which is a hundred year old institution here in the neighborhood, and finally had a decent place to be. They used to be in the basement - when I started here I got very involved with them, I was on their board - they were in the basement of one of the Newtowne Court buildings and the pipes were going across the - I mean, you could hear the toilets flush from upstairs. Anyway, they finally got a really nice space and they moved the health center next door, and that just made it, I mean, it was large and light and clean, and the Public Health Department is located in the basement. So, it kind of brought health and youth care all into one space and that was really great. But the clinic here was full of really devoted providers who really cared about the community so that when I started running this Kitchen Table group, I would find a number of the women that their primary care doc was somebody that I knew well and was someone who was really connected to the community. So, that was cool.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:14:01] Yeah it's amazing to hear you talk about like, how intertwined everything is in the community or like, at that point when you were working at the Women's Commission too, how like everything was kind of working together and there were all these things in the community and the Margaret Fuller House was part of that too. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about Gloria Smith and working with her when you first got connected to the Margaret Fuller House?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:14:32] Yeah, she was - she had a lot of great energy and she was very focused on the community, and her husband was, I think at that time he was principal of English High School in Boston, which is an incredibly diverse - had been, all that I remember, a struggling high school because of so many kids from impoverished families, and immigrants, and stuff. So, they were an interesting couple. Sid Smith was white, and Gloria's Black. And she just - this place was a struggle, it's always been a financial struggle here. You know, it doesn't have any



kind of a permanent strong funding system and being a place - and even though it's named after a famous person, Margaret Fuller, it just was always struggling to keep the building secure, to provide funding for the programs, and so the main thing I remember about Gloria was it was - I mean, she was both trying to do all these wonderful things, but also just really struggling to keep the finances going. And I think that's eventually why she left, because it was just exhausting. And I think for every director who's been here that's been the biggest focus, and the biggest struggle, is how to sustain the House into the future over time without having to be writing grants 24/7 and crossing your fingers and then having these funding sources that say, "Well, we'll give you money for three years and then we're done with you." And so that's been, I think, that's really hard, so I think that was why Gloria finally left. And it's funny, I'm on Facebook, and this is a very peculiar thing, somebody friended me, a woman named Iona Nze, and I thought, hm, that name is so familiar. She became the director, I think, right after Gloria. So, she's an African-American woman, she was only here for a few years. I can't remember all the directors, Gloria's so vivid to me because we started - she was happy to have - she had Ron and Elaine and other people - but she was happy to have an institutional partner that was really interested both in the House and in the neighborhood, and so we did a lot together.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:17:39] Did you have a sense of what was really important for her at the Margaret Fuller House? Like what her main kind of, goals were?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:17:48] I think that the women of the neighborhood were the most important to her, and the children, but how to really support the women so that they weren't in a constant struggle. So, to do activities here that were fun. And I remember there used to be a kind of a cookout in the backyard, in the parking lot back there, and just other kinds of things to - and to have this be a home to people, a place where they could come if they needed something, and somebody would help them find out how to get it. It wasn't - everything wouldn't be here, but if you needed healthcare or if you needed food or, you know. Eventually - I don't think at the beginning there was a food pantry here but I think now there is, but I don't remember one back then but, it would just be a place where women in the neighborhood could come. Men too, but I think her focus was a lot - because there were so many single women headed households, and therefore that was a big need. So, keeping the doors open and keeping it a place where people felt really comfortable, at home was, I think, a big focus.



**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:19:19] Do you remember other staff who were here too?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:19:26] I honestly - I don't really. I know there were other people here but they're not coming to mind.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:19:44] So, I was also curious about just your kind of experience with seeing programs, or just being around the Margaret Fuller House and seeing what kinds of programs were going on, and from your perspective what you saw, like what your sense of people's experiences were here.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:20:06] One of the things that I have always experienced is the number of adult women that I met who said, "This was my place when I was a kid." And there were so many more families who grew up here and stayed here, long term families. And so, I met all these adult women who said, "I came here as a child, and this was my place." And so they felt very, very, very connected to it when their own children were born and would come to the Fuller House for afterschool activities, for daycare, afterschool activities, expeditions and things like that. It was just really, really important to so many people's lives. So, my own interactions were the place was always buzzing. It was always the people in all different rooms doing different things. And when computers became a thing and you needed kids to know that they could learn how to use them. I think downstairs, the room below here, had a computer lab that was one of the earlier ones around so that - they really wanted the kids here not to get left behind in that world. And as I said, we had so many meetings here with developers, and trying to bring in people from the neighborhood who were abutting any of these developments to be able to have a say in what happened to them. But the main thing is it was, day and night, it was buzzing.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:21:56] And I was wondering, with the Coalition and meeting with developers, did the Coalition have to really fight to meet with them or did they know that they should come to you?



**Nancy Ryan** [01:22:06] The City started making it in a sense necessary that a developer get neighborhood support. This was one of the parts of Cambridge that was getting hit the hardest. Large commercial buildings creeping up Broadway and things on Portland and some stuff getting built on Harvard. It was just really - they had to come here and get our blessing or listen to our concerns and change, scale back, whatever. So, after a while it became really old because it felt like all we were talking about was FAR, floor area ratio [laughter]. We were having to get into the weeds of development and what we were really more interested in was what's the impact on the community of this process, this building, this development. And one of the sad, sad things is without an Area 4 Coalition, that thing, I can't see it from here, but Mass and Main, the big tower that's just gone up.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:23:24] Yeah, the new - the new one.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:23:25] Yeah.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:23:25] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:23:25] That was being planned and then executed at the time that there was no Coalition. And so, that was a shame. I was part of fighting it with another group of people, but without the Neighborhood Coalition we had less ability to affect it and so they got enormous up zoning, I mean, just outrageous. Outrageous. And I think that some of the people who voted for the zoning are now looking at that ugly tower and saying, "What did we do? Oh, what did we do?" And we especially fought it in part because it's across the street from St. Paul AME Church, which is kind of - there are two or three big old anchor churches in the Port, St. Paul's, St. Bart's, and Union Baptist. I'd say those are the three well-established churches. There are some smaller churches around, but those were the three. And the two of them, Union Baptist and St. Paul's, it's across the street, Union Baptist, it's kind of catty corner and it's this - it's eighty percent luxury and it's - and ninety of the units are studios. And so, it's not gonna help the neighborhood. It's not at all gonna take any pressure off the price of the neighborhood housing. In fact, it could make it worse. It probably will, has even, even made it worse. So on the basis of the needs of the neighborhood, a bunch of us tried to fight it, to scale it back, but we did not have a majority of City Council members who agreed, so we didn't do so well. So that's why we





worry also about the Middle East. It's across the street so it's technically in Cambridgeport territory, but it's still right across the street from the Port and it will affect our lives here, whatever happens there. And so, we need anchor institutions like the Margaret Fuller House to be here to support the neighborhood when all these things are happening to us.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:25:44] Yeah. What group were you working with?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:25:47] A group called the Cambridge Residents Alliance. We formed in 2012 to try to start dealing with what, 10 Essex, that got built over there, the building with the aqua trim. I don't know if you've seen it on Essex Street, just behind H Mart. And then Mass and Main, has a new name now called "Market Central", it was called Mass and Main at that time. And so we formed to try to say, how can we keep Cambridge livable, affordable, and diverse? That's our tagline. We're not winning on any of those [laughter]. But we're fighting.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:26:30] Yeah, and were you surprised that the work you were doing with the Coalition was so focused on development and like, new developments [and things]?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:26:43] Yeah I mean, that's - it had to veer into that direction for a while because that's what was happening to us. And the only good thing about it was, as I said, the money that came from the U.S. Trust Building that gave us the ability to, in a sense, kind of ameliorate some of the impact of development by supporting local institutions. And we actually still have some of that money left over, so if we ever get the Coalition back together we have about a hundred thousand dollars that we could spend, because the money kept getting invested each year so it would make money while we were spending it. We tried not to spend all the capital so that - so we saved well, and we still have that.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:27:35] That's great. What were some things you were able to fund with that?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:27:40] Well, I mentioned the neighborhood - there was a neighborhood newsletter that a guy named Gerry Bergman produced for four or five years and that we then hired local kids to distribute. We broke up the neighborhood into distribution pieces and paid





kids to drop it so we could drop it at every four thousand doors in the Port. Anyway, as I said, we hired a neighborhood organizer who was helping us to engage people, get people to the meetings. He or she would make calls and visit with people and visit with the local businesses. I know that we helped a couple of local - oh, we gave some money to the Community Arts Center. That was one where we would try to fund something small. Our grants were between five and ten thousand dollars, sometimes smaller. But the Community Arts Center was really important to us because that genuinely serves particularly Newtowne Court and Washington Elms. Historically, that's been the focus of the kids who come there, and it's an incredibly wonderful program that's close to a hundred years old. And so, we helped fund them. I think we gave Concilio Hispano money to do specific outreach to Latin Americans. I'm sure there are other things that are different than that, but at any rate, that's kind of what we do.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:29:26] And who were some of the people who worked as the community organizer based in the Margaret Fuller House?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:29:32] Um -

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:29:32] The neighborhood organizer.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:29:33] Yeah, yeah. Yeah we had a bunch of different folks. We had a young Haitian man who's - he's now a teacher in New York City, Jeffrey. He lives next door to a friend of mine so I see him when he's home visiting his mother every now and then. Jeff worked for us for a couple of years. We had a woman named Jude who worked for us for a couple of years. She was very dedicated to organizing around criminal justice and stuff like that, so that was great. We had a young man who was relatively new here, and he - but he had a lot of good energy and he helped us beef up our social media stuff, which was good. And gosh, going way back, I know Selvin would probably remember some of the folks better than I would, but I'm - because they were always based here. But we were always trying to find people from the neighborhood, boys and girls, men and women, whatever, younger people, who could really reach out into the community. So we would - the person would go to the Tenant Council meetings and try to bring issues that had come up at the Coalition to the Tenant Council and



bring their issues back to us. So we probably - ten or twelve, over the years, people working for us.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:31:33] And what were general, just, meetings like, for the Coalition?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:31:40] We would move them back and forth between, well, among, let's see, the Pisani Center, the Fletcher Maynard School, and the - what's now called the Bob and Janet Moses Youth Center on Harvard Street. Kind of three places where we felt like pretty much everybody felt comfortable. And the meetings, we would always - for quite a long while we would get twenty-five to forty people, which was great. And we started - we used some of the money that we had to get a local restaurant to cater some food for us for the meetings, and so we would pay them to bring us samples of their food, so we would have a sort of small dinner beforehand. So, we would always say 6:30 to eat and schmooze and then seven o'clock, we'd meet roughly seven to nine. And it would be a combination of - we would try to highlight a program that was going on in the neighborhood, we would have a report on development things that were going on, we would talk about if there were - we'd always have - the City eventually assigned a neighborhood sergeant to every neighborhood group. So we had a neighborhood sergeant, it was Sil Ferreira for a long time. So Sil would come and update us on any crime or police issues that we needed to know about, either citywide or local. So that was mostly it. And then when certain things would come up - one of the biggest meetings we had was when the City was doing what's called the K2C2 planning process. K2 meaning Kendall Square, C2 meaning Central Square. And they did this - they did a presentation to the Coalition and we really organized people to come out, and I think there were probably eighty or ninety people at the Pisani Center that night. And they're showing us a PowerPoint, and their focus is Main Street. So you can picture that, Main Street goes from here, right at Central Square, all the way down into Kendall, through Kendall. And so they were showing a slideshow and all of a sudden one of the things that they were talking about is building an enormous building at Main Street right across the street from Washington Elms. But then a slide came up and it was that half of the front - the part of Washington Elms facing Main Street was cut off and a mixed use five-story building was replacing it. Meaning, I mean, they were talking about completely transforming a part of Washington Elms, which is a hundred percent public housing, and changing it to mixed use housing and trying to make Mass- Main Street much more walker



friendly. And people went nuts when they saw it. It was like, stop everything folks, wait a minute. You're not taking away our public housing. And the whole thing was they were trying to make Main Street more comfortable for people to walk between Central and Kendall, and comfortable meant kind of fancy shops, and then making white people [laughter] more comfortable, the white young professionals going down to their jobs in Kendall Square feeling more comfortable walking down Main Street. It was incredible. People went nuts and that was the end of that. So, but they actually had that kind of in their plan with no particular plan to highlight it for the neighborhood that they were talking about completely changing. Not Washington Elms, I don't mean Washington Elms I mean Newtowne Court cause it's Newtowne Court at this end, Washington at that end. So anyway, it was completely changing the face and the use of - "Well, you know, there's all that green space in Newtowne Court and Washington Elms and it's kind of a waste, we could build more housing there, build a high rise." So.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:36:23] Yeah. That's kind of like... ugh.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:36:25] So that was one of the more memorable Coalition meetings.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:36:30] Yeah. I mean, where these developers like, did you have a sense of where they were coming from?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:36:38] Well this was the City.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:36:38] Oh, this was the City?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:36:40] This was the City!

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:36:42] Oh wow.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:36:43] This was the City leading this process. Yeah. And not really consulting.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:36:50] Yeah.



**Nancy Ryan** [01:36:50] So that didn't go over well. That was that. That was the end of that plan. I mean, they're still building a lot down Main Street but that's what they got permission for, so.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:37:01] Yeah. Are there -

**Nancy Ryan** [01:37:02] There's -

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:37:03] Oh sorry.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:37:03] No, there's this thing across the street from Newtowne Court, there's this area, it's where Main Street and Mass Ave are kind of on each side and it's called the Osborn Triangle. All of a sudden that name emerged, I'd never heard of it in all my forty years here and all of a sudden we have a name for this area, but it's right across the street from Newtowne Court. And all of those buildings are old factory buildings. So, again, it's an example of this being an old industrial city that all of a sudden is being transformed into this shiny modern high tech biotech infotech area. And so, all of that is being built up now. Novartis is at kind of one end of it but there's all kinds of other stuff gonna go up there. So it really changes what the front yard of Newtowne Court looks like, feels like.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:38:01] Yeah. Are there maybe a few other examples you could give of big issues that came up in the Coalition or like, very memorable meetings or issues?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:38:20] We've had a couple of, there were a couple of times when - like someone was shot right on Windsor Street and - somebody who's very popular in the neighborhood - and we had a quite tense meeting because it, again, kind of brings up the stereotype of the neighborhood being a dangerous place or that there are gangs or whatever. And I remember the police department coming, and they didn't have a suspect, and people were really tense. Like, who - do we have any reason to think that, kind of, there's a killer in our midst, or on the other hand it's like, no this isn't essentially - this doesn't happen very often, this isn't essentially a dangerous area but how are we going to keep it safe? And you just get into a lot of those urban environment questions about how you deal with a crime problem if you have some people who



are pretty committed to it, but you don't blame an entire neighborhood or create - people were very concerned about - so the police said, "Well, we're gonna have a lot more police patrols in Newtowne Court and Washington Elms and around." Well, that doesn't necessarily make Black and brown people that comfortable.

[Recording cuts out - battery had to be replaced]

**Nancy Ryan** [01:40:03] I was trying to think of other kind of memorable Coalition meetings. I'm trying to get as far back as I can. We had an interesting, complicated problem happen, which was that the City, in particular the Community Development Department and to some degree the Human Services Department, kind of wanted to have more influence in the neighborhood because the Coalition had been a strong partner in all of this. And so, a member of the Community Development Department partnered up with some people, some strong people in the neighborhood, to create a competing organization in the neighborhood. I can't remember what it was called. This was probably in the mid-[19]90s. And one of the things that happened was that a developer who wanted to build on Broadway was kind of somewhat being thwarted, and so it offered funding to this alternative group and actually gave them office space on Broadway, and helped them to start a program to train interpreters for the medical systems, which is a good job for people who start out with another language and can learn medical interpretation, and it's a pretty good paying job because definitely Cambridge Health Alliance needed things like that. So, it became really complicated and we were furious that this was a City backed kind of thing but the City not even in it officially because they had basically front people, and one particularly very strong woman in the community - all of a sudden her son got hired by this alternative group because they had all this money from the developer and basically running this alternative organization out of this office. And we didn't - we had the Margaret Fuller House. I mean, but it was really nasty, and they were basically trying to say, "No, no developers have to come to us, not to you." And it just became incredibly tense and complicated. And finally, what happened is that I think the developer kind of pulled back some of the money from it. They got what they needed. And so Renae, in her way, decided to create an alternative - no, tried to create an opportunity, a facilitated discussion, between people who were supporting the alternative agency or organization and people who were supporting the traditional Coalition. So we had a meeting over at one of these corporations over there on



Broadway and it was somewhat helpful and it became clear that if this guy wasn't gonna - I think he was making about sixty five thousand dollars, which was humongous money for anybody here, and it - and once he wasn't gonna get paid any longer at that level, it wasn't gonna last. I mean, the people who were in it were in it more for the power and potentially some of the money, and not for the long term well-being of the neighborhood. And it got - so that kind of just faded away. But it was two or three years of weirdness, and I work for the City but I'm, in this issue, part of the neighborhood group and just furious that the City would try to pull this off and in a sense be supporting a developer and the march of the developments from Kendall up Broadway toward here. So, that was tense. But we all felt like we outlasted them. But it's again, it's another area where race issues can get complicated, because in some ways the majority of the leadership of the Area 4 Coalition at that point was white people. We had Renae, we had some other people. And the folks that this developer was giving money to were people of color. And it's sort of like, well we would rather have had the people of color providing leadership to the Area 4 Coalition, but nobody was gonna pay anybody sixty five thousand dollars and give them an office. So it was painful to try to sort out in a respectful way what was going on.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:46:38] And I was also wondering how the Coalition dealt with, or reacted to, the end of rent control?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:46:45] You know how it ended? That it was a state-wide ballot?

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:46:53] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:46:54] Because Cambridge had historically supported rent control. And so, I mean, there wasn't - nobody knew exactly at the moment that it ended - we obviously did a huge amount of work to make sure that everybody voted for it and Cambridge overwhelmingly voted for it. But there were only three cities in the state that had it and the rest of - what does anybody in Sherborn or [laughter] Chicopee or whatever know about rent control? Nada. And the real estate people had so much money. But - so I think that - and we talked about it a lot because we were aware that it was likely gonna really affect the neighborhood but you couldn't exactly say how and when. But it meant the, sort of, the beginning of a lot of condoization now



that there - rent control also controlled how you could make condos out of your three-story or your six-family, whatever. And you could condoize but you couldn't rent them out. And so, it meant that if you weren't gonna live there, you couldn't have a condo. So once all that went away, the thing I remember most is the kind of, the onslaught of condoization of buildings, one right at the corner of my street. It was a four-family, four floors, large apartments, and it was rent controlled, and I saw kids grow up there. And then it was bought by a developer shortly after rent control and developed high end, and the fourth floor recently, which I call a fourth floor walkup, and they called the penthouse, sold for one point four million dollars. One floor of a four decker in this neighborhood.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:48:51] That's insane.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:48:52] Nuts. So we didn't - we certainly talked about it and we're worried about it, but we didn't - there was no way - it just started happening, you know? The building started being sold or being really fixed up, and rents increased, and people being slowly pushed out and then, you know. It's been so painful to not ever know quite where and how to intervene. So now - and the result of the referendum was that it became a state law that you could not have rent control. So now, our state rep from this neighborhood is working with a coalition of other progressive state reps to bring back, to allow, rent control in any city that wants to have it. So - and then under whatever, in whatever framework they want to make it. For us it's probably a little too late, but it's at least something, so hopefully that will pass. And then we'll see if we can create a process in Cambridge for another kind of rent stabilization program. In Berlin, they just have created a five year freeze on rent increases. In Berlin, Germany. Or, you could increase with some very small percentage, but not - we've had people getting huge rent increases here.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:50:25] At least you know then like, okay, five years.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:50:27] Right.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:50:27] I know what I'll be paying.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:50:29] Yeah.





**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:50:29] But, yeah it's also so confusing to me like, why it was state-wide in the first place.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:50:34] Because the real estate industry hated it.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:50:36] Yeah, yeah, they weren't making any money off of it!

**Nancy Ryan** [01:50:39] Right!

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:50:39] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:50:40] So, that's why. They powered it. They couldn't defeat it in any of the three cities and so they just put it on a statewide ballot. Brilliant. And they have the money to do it.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:50:55] Yeah... I was thinking I could ask you a few more questions about the Margaret Fuller House and I'd also like to ask you kind of more about what you're doing right now.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:51:10] Mhm.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:51:10] And then we'll kind of wrap up in a little bit, but - so I wanted to ask what you think of the relationship of the Margaret Fuller House and the Port and also to Cambridge, like wider Cambridge.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:51:29] I think it's still - I'm not here as much as I used to be, but - it's still I mean, a really important anchor to the sense of well-being in the community. I don't know the current executive director, I've known Selvin Chambers for a long time so when he became the interim director I was relieved because I have a lot of confidence that he cares deeply about the neighborhood and he knows the neighborhood and the Fuller House intimately. And he has a lot of skills. So, I don't know - I came to a meeting here to see that when they were talking about





the possibility of leasing the land of the parking lot and building something there to give the Fuller House some income and also to perhaps provide some housing. I don't know where that ended up, but I was glad to see that somebody was trying to figure out - again, it's what the YW did with building the public housing on the site of what had been their swimming pool so that the Housing Authority had to pay them a land lease, so they get some money and then housing gets built. So I think they were trying to do something similar here, I think there was some pushback. But I think right now the Fuller House is not as much in the sights of the City. I think it's - the last director was complicated. I guess that's one way to put it. She was really kind of corporate oriented and - but also with all her corporate orientation, my understanding is that the finances here got pretty shaky. And so, Selvin kind of came in to try to stabilize that and hire a new director. So in that period, I think the Fuller House hasn't been a visible actor in the life of the City. But I'm hoping that it will come back. So I'm hoping at some point to meet the new director.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:53:54] And you kind of addressed this, but are there any other ways in which you think that the role of the Margaret Fuller House has changed in - well, in the Port specifically?

**Nancy Ryan** [01:54:06] Yeah, I don't think - its fundamental role has been pretty much the same since the very beginning. It's a neighborhood settlement house that fortunately has outlasted a lot of the changes in the neighborhood and has been able to continue both physically being here and supporting, in the programs that it runs, the needs of the community. And I think there's still a strong relationship between the Community Arts Center and Tutoring Plus which takes place at night at the Community Arts Center and here as kind of the three young people focused, young people's well-being focused programs. They interact and I'm really glad for that. So I'm hoping and I'm assuming that the new executive director will potentially - they had a big coming out party for the last one before Selvin, and I went to that over at the Elks. But I don't think - I didn't see a notice of a welcoming party for the new executive director. So I'm hoping there will be one and get to - it's a her?

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:55:29] Mhm, her name's Kim. I haven't met her yet but -



**Nancy Ryan** [01:55:31] Oh good, yeah, well I'm hoping - so, I'm hoping that she has vision and skills for the next iteration of the Fuller House. But just the fact that it's been here and it doesn't go away, and it's a - there aren't many neighborhoods that have an institution like this. We talked about the Cambridge Community Center, so Riverside primarily has that, but other than the community schools, which are the programs that the Human Services Department runs at night in the neighborhood schools, they don't have a Community Center or a Fuller House. They have their youth centers in more of the neighborhoods but nothing quite like something that sees the whole well-being of the families of the neighborhood its mission. And that's what I think is hopeful about this place.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:56:44] And I'm curious about what you're up to right now.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:56:51] I'm very active with the American Civil Liberties Union. I've been the state board chair for six years and - I'm on the board and doing a lot of work to deal with the current immigration stuff, police brutality stuff, artificial intelligence, facial recognition stuff. We just were able to pass a ban on facial recognition technology in Cambridge a couple of weeks ago. We have worked hard on making certain that if the police department wants to purchase any - or any other department of the City wants to purchase any surveillance equipment, they have to bring the request to the city council and explain what it will do, why it's needed, and who will control it. So the ACLU is pretty active here as well as statewide and a national organization. So I work with that. And I'm a - I was a founder of the Cambridge Residents Alliance and I've been the president for the last seven years, and we've been trying to deal with the development in Cambridge and bring people into an understanding of what's happening in their immediate neighborhood so that the neighborhoods themselves can deal with it. But it's been really hard because the developers have so much money, so much money. And I was just very, very involved in the whole attempt at saving the courthouse in East Cambridge to try to maintain it as a public resource because a developer was wanting to buy it from the state, and enormous amounts of money were used and they defeated us. So the city council voted to allow it to be sold to a private developer, so, a twenty story building in East Cambridge. So I'm pulling a little bit back from some of this development stuff because I feel like it's kind of eating me alive and it's not a very hopeful time in this country in general. And in particular, I felt like my effectiveness has kind of come to an end. I don't feel effective in that



work right now so I'm pulling a little bit back from that. I'll keep supporting it, but I'm not gonna lead it. So, and figure out what are the other things I want to do with my time. I'm seventy-three, so I feel like it's a good time to be figuring out - I mean, I'm never gonna stop doing community oriented work, social justice work, racial justice work, but really wanting to figure out what next.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:59:49] That's exciting.

**Nancy Ryan** [01:59:49] A little scary sometimes.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [01:59:53] A little scary, yeah. Yeah, is there anything else you would like to add or anything else we haven't - we didn't touch upon?

**Nancy Ryan** [02:00:03] I don't think so. I got a real kick out of learning more about the history of the Margaret Fuller House. I didn't know about the whole Black Panther thing here. It was before my time in Cambridge. I was really excited to hear about that.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [02:00:19] Early [19]70s, yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:00:19] Yeah. And anyway, I'm looking forward to this whole - the conclusion of this study so that I can learn more about the Fuller House that I don't know.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [02:00:34] Do you have any questions, Jeff?

**Jeff Solomon** [02:00:43] Um -

**Nancy Ryan** [02:00:43] Did you come to the Fuller House when you were here?

**Jeff Solomon** [02:00:44] Yeah, so I came to Margaret Fuller - I think I came like once. I went to the Boys and Girls Club mostly, when it was the Boys and Girls Club.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:00:56] Yeah, in the gym over at -



**Jeff Solomon** [02:00:57] Yeah. So when I - I used to live in Dorchester and when I started going to afterschool, Boys and Girls Club was where I went.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:01:07] Yeah.

**Jeff Solomon** [02:01:07] So my grandmother wanted to like, switch us to the Boys and Girls Club here -

**Nancy Ryan** [02:01:11] Makes sense.

**Jeff Solomon** [02:01:11] So we - we got to the -

**Nancy Ryan** [02:01:13] So were you here at the health - here at Windsor Street, or across the street in the gym at Newtowne Court?

**Jeff Solomon** [02:01:22] See, I didn't even know they had a gym in - across the street at Newtowne Court.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:01:24] Oh, that's where the Boys Club used to be, it was before it was the Boys and Girls Club.

**Jeff Solomon** [02:01:29] That's crazy.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:01:30] Yeah.

**Jeff Solomon** [02:01:30] So, we came to it when it was right here at Windsor Street and then once, one year, I saw like, a lot of like African-American kids were mostly coming here when I was like, adolescent teenage pre-teen years.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:01:45] Yeah.



**Jeff Solomon** [02:01:45] And I was like, I wanna go check and see what that's like over there. And then, I remember when I first came here, my friends that I'm friends with now that - we've been friends like, since we were eleven, they were playing video games up here in the attic, right over there -

**Nancy Ryan** [02:02:01] Yeah.

**Jeff Solomon** [02:02:02] And I'm like, this is the place that I want to go to then and like, I don't want to go to the Boys and Girls Club anymore, I want to come to the Margaret Fuller House. So when I was - when I finally got to be a teenager and work in the [men's] program, I worked at Boys and Girls Club for three years, and I did my last year in the [men's] program here working at Margaret Fuller House so, it was pretty cool.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:02:22] Nice. Nice, nice.

**Jeff Solomon** [02:02:23] Yeah.

**Lina Raciukaitis** [02:02:23] [Inaudible]

**Nancy Ryan** [02:02:23] That's it, are we done?

**Lina Raciukaitis** [02:02:31] Yeah.

**Nancy Ryan** [02:02:32] Yeah? Cool. Great, thank you.

### **End of Interview**

This interview is part of "Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge," an oral history project of the Cambridge Historical Society, in partnership with the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House and The Loop Lab. This project was funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

