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**Williams, Nicola, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, May 11, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project, Cambridge Historical Society**



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Oral History Interview with Nicola Williams

Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project

Interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis on May 11, 2018

at 144 Mount Auburn Street, Cambridge, MA

Lina Raciukaitis: My name is Lina Raciukaitis and this is an oral history recorded as part of the Cambridge Historical Society Caribbean Oral History Project. Today is Friday, May 11th 2018. It is around three PM and I'm at 144 A Mount Auburn Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts with Nicola Williams. Nicola, do you consent to being recorded for this interview?

Nicola Williams: Yes I do.

LR: And so I'm going to start with some questions about your early life history. First what is your full name?

NW: Nicola Amorie Williams.

LR: And when and where were you born?

NW: I was born on May 16th, 1963 in Kingston, Jamaica.

LR: And where did you grow up?

NW: I grew up partially in Brooklyn, New York, between two and a half and ten; and then returned to Jamaica between ten and fifteen; and then returned back to New York, Brooklyn, New York, where I graduated from high school and went to college upstate New York, and then moved the day after college to the Boston area. And I've been in Cambridge for about thirty-two years.

LR: And what was the reason for the – for moving back and forth?

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NW: My parents separated and my grandmother was sick when I was around ten. So my mom and my siblings and I moved to Jamaica and my grandmother passed away about within six months and we stayed for about five years.

LR: So what were your neighborhoods like growing up in the different places?

NW: Well I grew up in the islands, I grew up in the city, New York City. That was like a little Jamaica because we had a large Caribbean population, but most of my life actually has been in Cambridge, as an adult. But my youth – I also in the summers would spend time with my cousins in Montreal. So, I would say between New York, Canada, and Jamaica was most of my youth. And as an adult here in the U.S., and I did spend a couple of years in London working on a Carnival project there. And that was 2004 to 2007.

LR: What is the neighborhood in Brooklyn called?

NW: Flatbush. Flatbush, near Midwood, near the junction. I went to Midwood High School and it was – I mean, we grew up in the church so for us we didn't, couldn't really go outside of the church much. But we were a close knit family so we live – I lived with my grandparents, I lived with my aunt, we were very much an extended family, everybody supported each other. Very close knit family. And when I moved to Cambridge my siblings followed me as well as my mom.

LR: How many siblings do you have?

NW: I have two brothers and two sisters, and they're – a brother in Cambridge, and another brother in Watertown, and two sisters in Watertown so we're very close in proximity.

LR: And what are the names of your parents?

NW: Cecile Angela Williams, I mean Medley was her original – was her maiden name, and Noel Ivanhoe Williams, my dad.

LR: And what did they both do for a living?

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NW: My dad worked in banking so he did computer technology early on. He was like a systems, back then, librarian, computers, and he worked in the financial industry like Goldman Sachs and the finance banking. And then he left that industry and he's retired now. But that was his main career, in that, and self-taught, very smart, very – in math, he was very good in math and so he worked early on – he was a computer systems tape librarian. I don't know what the equivalent of it is today but, my sister is in computer systems now too. And my mother, she's retired. She worked for tourism, Jamaica tourism, for twenty-five years; and then she worked for the City of Cambridge in a role as an administrative assistant for former Mayor Ken Reeves; and eventually she worked – then she worked for a law firm as an administrator; and then ended up in her final job where she retired from, with Cambridge Health Alliance, where she worked in payroll. Administrative work.

LR: And where were your parents from?

NW: Both my parents were born in Jamaica. My mom became a citizen in the fifties because her mom came here I would say in the forties and – to New York – and was able to – my mom was a citizen when I was born so, and my mom's an only child, and it was through my mom where my grandparents on my dad's side, her – she sponsored them. So she sponsored that side of the family and their family came over – my grandparents and my aunts and uncles, but it was through my mom how they got here. So in the 1960s there was a big exodus, at least in our family, from Jamaica. Some went to London, some went to New York, of which I was part of that, and some went to Canada. And to this day we still have family in those three areas. And we don't, I don't think we have any relatives that we recognize or any close relatives, not even like cousins, left in Jamaica. So most of our families have settled in these three areas and I would say the majority are in Canada right now in terms – on my dad's side. My mom has no siblings so her cousins are in – have been in New York. So I'd say New York and Canada are the major places where our family has settled.

LR: Why did your family choose those two places, as the main places?

NW: I think, well, my aunts – my mom could only sponsor my grandparents and my dad. And so there were – and she actually, and so, and they end up sponsoring their children, but my older aunts went to London and New York for nursing. One went into nursing in London because at the time when she was being trained Jamaica was a British colony. So in the sixties – we got independence in 1964 I believe – and so prior to that there was sort of seamless travelling to and fro to London. So they moved to – so I had two aunts who moved to London

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for work or for training. One went to school and then one was a seamstress so she worked in the factories, and another got training at one of the top schools in London and moved to New York afterwards. I don't know how. Maybe my grandparents sponsored her after my mom had sponsored them, and she settled in New York. The one – the other aunt, the seamstress, went to Canada because that was – she ended up there because Canada had incentives for immigrants. So she and another aunt ended up there. And an uncle. So I think it's more of paperwork. I think it was just probably easier to get into Canada and my mom was able to sponsor, like I said, my dad and his parents and a couple of his sisters. And his brother too, yeah. So I think pretty much opportunity. My great-grandfather was in the British War. My grandfather's father. And – on my dad's side – and he actually was Jamaican but was based in Sierra Leone, Africa. So he was recruited from Jamaica and so he was a veteran. He became a general, which is great, and my grandfather worked at sea and he became an engineer, self-taught at sea. And then when he moved to New York he ended up working in the lab for Leviton, where they do to switches, and he ran and managed that lab. So he was self-taught as well. In terms of college, I was the first one to graduate in my family from a four year college. Like first – you know, we've had other family members do community schools or technical, but not four year colleges. So I was the first one in my family and many of my cousins followed, including my siblings so – but we were a very driven family and took a lot of initiative and have been in leadership roles within the community. My grandfather always had a shop and taught electrical to his sons as well as community members who wanted to learn. And he could fix anything. And he spent twenty-five years at sea and had lots of stories, running the engine room on these big cargo ships. So that was his – but he learned to be an engineer and then took his skills and was able to work in an industry that utilized his skills which was great. Not everybody had that opportunity. But my grandfather applied himself and got a really good job. Same like my dad – had good – very smart. And my mom too, very smart. And education was number one for us. It was just a given that I was going to be the one, the first one, to go to college and it was the expectation and everybody supported that. But certainly – and I'm the oldest amongst my siblings so I had to set that example as well. But yeah, education was a very important part of my upbringing. It was, there was no question that I was going to go to college or that we were going to. That was our way of improving our lives.

LR: Where did you go to college?

NW: I went to Wells College, at the time it was a women's college, we had about 500 students. So rural New York, upstate New York, and we had two African – two Blacks – one was African-American and the other was myself, in my class. But it didn't really hinder me in terms of like – we had a Black and Latin Women's Society, I was head of that. We had – I infused my culture and shared that with my fellow classmates. Every year we had

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our dinner that featured curry chicken, so definitely had the Caribbean culture introduced, and we had reggae festivals, et cetera, in college as part of our learning; and I was very much involved in special events committee, and social committee, and in leadership roles in school; and was very much encouraged. And we brought the first African-American woman who ran for president, Shirley Chisholm, to our college, and that was, being able to meet her was a great thing. So we definitely had a supportive environment. It wasn't very diverse but we had a lot of support.

LR: What did you study?

NW: My major was – my grandmother passed away from cancer and so I really wanted to major in – I wanted to be a chemist. And I aced chemistry in high school, I went to a medical science high school, and it was my favorite subject. When I went to college I just, I liked chemistry but when I got to physics it just didn't, I didn't connect with it so I decided to switch my major to economics because I was really good at math, and I loved microeconomics and – very analytical – and I thought – and I really liked government, I was really good in that subject in high school as well, so I chose a path around economic development and I became – my first job in Boston was in insurance and financing. I was a tax analyst and again used my math skills which I probably got from my parents, and then shifted into marketing. Well, while there. But I have always been involved and engaged in community organizing since I was in high school in Jamaica.

LR: What kind of community organizing did you do in –

NW: In Jamaica?

LR: – in high school in Jamaica yeah.

NW: Oh yeah! Well, so I had an American teacher because remember I had been living in the U.S. since I was two and a half to ten so, I connected with an American teacher. I went to a high school, it was kind of like middle school slash high school, and Mrs. Moretsky I remember was American and we connected because I grew up in America and we were – it was this Catholic school and I had a scholarship because you would have to pay or you would have to take a test and do well and get a scholarship. So most people like myself needed to get a scholarship to go to a good school. And we – so I got in, and the school was looking to do fundraising. It was a private school and we didn't have to pay because if we got a full scholarship based on passing an examination

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and – but we wanted to contribute to the school so we had a brainstorming one day in class thinking about what kind of event we could do to raise money for the school, and I raised my hand and I said, “Let's do a carnival, but American style carnival.” And being in Brooklyn we have Coney Island and so I grew up with that. And I said, “And let's have pizza, American pizza.” Because part of it, it was that I was missing America. And at the same time I just thought it was a good idea and I knew how to make pizza, my family did too. My siblings they were all – they were born in America even though they lived in Jamaica with us too, but they were all born here except me. And so my family and my siblings and I, we got together and we had a booth and we had pizza at our booth and it was the most successful event for the college – it was great, we had an American style carnival! And we had a teacher who totally understood it, who was American, and we raised money for the school and so I think that was my first kind of organizing experience of getting my family involved to help to raise money for the school. And then we organized some of my classmates to – we had a – we were right across the street from a cricket club and wanted to try and find more ways of raising money for the school, and people would park on our campus and I think that they should pay for that, it's a way to raise money for the school. So I put up a sign with my friends and we said “parking, a dollar” but we were reprimanded by the headmistress because we didn't get permission and we were supposed to do that. But to me I thought it was like, if they're parking there they should pay, and people were willing to pay. So, we got reprimanded because I didn't ask permission. But the intention was good. Because when – cricket was very popular there and I wasn't into cricket and, like I said, the cricket stadium was across the street and there wasn't many places to park, so they should contribute. So that's how I guess I got involved in it and then while in college I did a lot of organizing. I became a leader of the Black and Latin Women's Society club in my sophomore year and I didn't really know much about it but the person who was leading it was – there was nobody behind her to pick it up, or at least she said that, so I said “OK I'll try it.” So for three years I was in that position. And I felt, I think we did a lot. We, like I said, brought Shirley Chisholm to the school, we had fundraisers for causes in the community, we networked with other colleges, we had I would say the best events, it was well attended. And so, I guess it just continued in church. We were very much involved in the church so I would help to organize church fundraisers or cook in the church as a way to do fundraising, so have just kind of been, always been part of some way of doing community work. And I think that led to me starting my own company that focuses on – my company, the Williams Agency, I started in 1995 as a way for me to give back to the community but finding a way to make a living. And so, we focus on mission driven projects. We plan events that matter. Most of our work works with social causes and issues, and so that's kind of a culmination of all things I want to do for the community, at the same time being a social entrepreneur, making, trying to make a living through it as well.

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LR: What are some of their main events that the Williams Agency organizes?

NW: So the Cambridge Carnival I was appointed in 1983 by then Mayor Kenneth Reeves as a community organizer person who had good organizational skills, but I didn't know much about Carnival even though in New York we did – my grandparents did live on Eastern Parkway which is the main thing for Carnival so I was familiar with it, but I didn't I participate in it because we would rather participate in church than out in the streets. But we saw it, it was familiar with us, it's something we grew up with. So I was familiar with the Carnival, but I knew I was a good organizer and I knew I was networked and had good organizational skills so I think that's why I was chosen to help this group of people who had intention of doing Carnival but needed guidance and needed to facilitate the process through the city. So I was kind of like a facilitator and kind of helped to navigate the process to help organize, and I guess I used my organizational skills and figured it out as we went along. But the – so that's one event that we volunteer, we provide pro bono services, I'm the president of the Board. I feel it's a major contribution to the culture and the preservation of our culture in Cambridge and the community. So we do that, you know, happily. The other events that I help to organize – I was one of the founding organizers of the Boston Local Food Festival which is based on the Greenway. We started in the front of the Children's Museum. I used to be on the Board of the Children's Museum so I tapped that network to see if they would be interested in hosting this event, and we thought we'd have – our goal was ten thousand people the first year, we ended up with thirty thousand people. We've moved the festival to the Rose Kennedy Greenway because we outgrew the space quickly and now it's about fifty to fifty-five thousand people. It's New England's largest one day farmer's market and about a hundred vendors. So that was about – this will be our ninth year – so that's one of the festivals I got involved in, and partly because of learning how to organize a festival through the Carnival, I developed those skills. And then, we've done work with the anti-smoking campaign when we first started in Massachusetts, we did a lot of community outreach work, organized events or existing events and do community promotions within those events. Over the years we've decided – we've done events like the Greenovate Awards for the city of Boston in terms of green and environmental leadership, recognizing that, we organize their awards. So we've done a variety of events from thirty people – we do a food trade show, we help to organize that, that's a B2B event, connecting buyers and suppliers. Over the last couple of years we designed our own events instead of helping support existing organizations, their event, we decided to develop our own, and I developed, launched the Boston Jerk Fest six years ago. And the Boston JerkFest is a Caribbean food event so it is a fusion of my passion and support for local food as well as a reflection of my culture. And there are jerk fests across – it's not a unique concept, there are jerk fests in Miami, in New York that's a few years older than ours and certainly in Jamaica as well. There's actually a Boston Jerk Fest in Jamaica, so it also gives homage to

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that, but it's a way of celebrating Jamaican food, Caribbean food and culture, and the difference from these other jerk fests is that it incorporates some of the values that I believe in, which are respect for the environment – so we have minimal waste, zero waste event. Another value is local food so we try and highlight each year – something like two years ago it was local goat from Vermont. Last year was ethnic crops in our demos, chef demo competitions. This year is going to be Cape shark which is the same as dog fish. So we try and incorporate some of those values within our festival. Diversity, which is an important value to our mission. So respect for the environment, diversity, community – it's a very much community event, we give away a hundred tickets to the community – and culture, learning about culture, my culture that I grew up in and that I'm passionate about, and value of local food, supporting local. And so we have about seventy percent of our vendors are local within New England. So we do one and we have one in Vermont as well. We did it two years in a row and then we've taken a break because the location we had was on a farm, which is great, but it was sold, or, for sale, so we are regrouping. We'd like to do it again. So we have the Vermont JerkFest as well. And I also organize Brew Fest and Spirits Festival, mostly around local, because they're part of the food system. And we got involved in that by organizing the Boston Local Food Festival so they're fundraisers for an organization which I'm on the Board, Sustainable Business Network, which is responsible for the Boston Local Food Festival. And the Local Food Trade show. So I do a couple of fundraisers a year around still food, but more around spirits and brews.

LR: So was your first Caribbean Carnival – like participating in it and being a part of it – was that in Cambridge?

NW: So in terms of – well, I never – the first one that I actually participated as a spectator, I guess in New York growing up because you buy food. So it's – I mean literally it's outside our door so we get to buy food, but we didn't jump up or – what they called jump up, or jump in – to the Carnival. We mostly – because we were young, like teenagers so thirteen, ten to fifteen, so we would observe. Or we would go back – even living here, we'd go back to New York for that event which is more like an annual thing where people come back to New York for. And so we've done that, but mostly to eat the food and see the excitement, to just be part of it. But so as a spectator I've had experience with that, and then actually literally being in the parade my first one was in London, and it was the first time I missed Cambridge Carnival because it was the same weekend and at the time frame. And it was the Notting Hill Carnival in which I had gotten a contract with the Mayor of London back in 2004 to work on the Notting Hill Carnival which attracts a million people. It generates ninety-four million pounds for the city of London, and it generates three thousand jobs. So, the Mayor Livingston back then at the time wanted London to be the cultural capital of the world, and he decided that he would start with its largest event and taking a look at that event wanted a team of consultants to kind of have a fresh perspective with an

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entrepreneurial eye that would take a look at how can the community take more ownership of the event. Because the event was very successful in that it generated a lot of money et cetera, but a lot of that money wasn't going back to the community. Everybody else was benefiting. And so the art form was definitely making an impact but it was a lot of that art form that community created wasn't there. They didn't have any sponsors, a lot of people were making money but not a lot of that was being returned to the community. So our team led a community action plan working with the community over a period of a year and doing some focus groups and interviews and research, looking at best practices internationally like for example a green event, looking at the Lowell Folk Festival which is a model for greening of events. Looking at the Montreal Jazz Festival as a model for marketing. Also the New Orleans Jazz Festival, this is before the levee broke, but it still is a model for marketing. So looking at best practices internationally and how London, through the Carnival, can borrow and learn from these practices and incorporate that with the idea of having the community more empowered and more entrepreneurial. So we were chosen because being from the U.S. one, we had experience with Carnival, two, had marketing experience, three, economic development – I had done a lot of work in economic development before I started my business – and so our team included Miami Carnival which is like the model for carnivals in the U.S., New York Carnival, and Cambridge Carnival. And there were different Carnivals but the mine, the collective resources that we had was very helpful in providing this document and blueprint prior to the Olympics that London ended up being selected for. So the community was in a better place, and we hope that they adopted some of the strategies that we put together with their input. But it was very interesting. One of the things that I found that was very common, like a lot of the carnivals, is that the London Carnival started – was around forty years old at the time so it's probably like fifty-five years old now – but the carnival started as similar to how a lot of carnivals have started as out activism, out of freedom of speech, out of freedom of expressing yourself and I think at the time they started in London was, the community felt that they didn't have enough of a voice and they, through the use of Carnival, was able to express who they were and their culture. And so it really came about activism and I feel like my role in Cambridge Carnival has been, even though we're modern day, more modern and in terms of London Carnival we're only twenty – this year we'll be twenty-six years old – I've become an activist in Cambridge through the Cambridge Carnival as well and it made sense, going to London and understanding where they were coming from. That even though we're different societies, different political systems et cetera, it is kind of the same sort of rooted in African traditions and being able to express who you are as an individual and share in that culture with your neighbors, and making sure you have a voice in the community where you live. And that's so important and it, to me, made it even more important, made me more committed to Carnival in terms of that I'm doing it – playing this role as a leader – because it's bigger than me. It's representing people who may not be able to share their voices and that it's important to our culture and to

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who we are as a people. And it's something that we value in our community in terms of Cambridge. But it's not easy. But it's not easy anywhere. So it just, that also confirmed through that process as well.

LR: What was it like participating in that Carnival?

NW: It was great because it wasn't – I chose to participate in that Carnival as a spectator, it's exciting, it was eleven hours of non-stop dancing (laughs) and I just embraced it because I haven't really been able to do that here because I've been the organizer or the lead organizer so I haven't really been able to participate as a spectator. I'd like to! I don't know when that will happen and we're trying to develop leadership in order to do that, but I intentionally wanted to participate as a spectator because it wasn't organizing, we were just helping to provide a support and report so we weren't involved in the operations of the event. But certainly I needed to see and be part of the event in order to give a perspective of the report that we were putting together. So I had to be there and not here. But it was – so I can say that I did. I have not been to Trinidad Carnival which is our model. I feel that I do need to do that. But we have members of our committee who have been, and many times. But I think that's important, I mean I am still a leader here and we have – our Carnival's very unique but I have not seen the model. I've seen certainly Notting Hill which is based on that model and it's a million people I mean, so it's much, much bigger so I'm glad I've done that but I haven't been to Rio, I haven't been to Trinidad, and I hear that if you haven't been there, you do need to. But I think Notting Hill Carnival is very similar to Trinidad, they have a panorama which is a pan competition and its own event in itself, that's quite big. So I participated in all of that so I wasn't in Trinidad, but I got close.

LR: What were some of the other aspects of it, some of the other main events?

NW: Well London is very different because they have these static sound systems where it's – like I said, a lot of the money doesn't go back into the community, so what happens is you have these entrepreneurs that set up their sort of spaces, and the public they just kind of – and then the city allows that where you can like, a block can just be shut down and have a certain type of music, and people pay and they just revel. And so they have these, they call static sound systems, and it's safe which is great, it's just that the whole city like a whole section of the city is pretty much Carnival. And it's like all day for three days almost. In Trinidad it's like non-stop for three days but here – or Rio – but here, it's certainly from eleven to eleven P.M. Here in Cambridge we don't have that. So the city just – everybody celebrates, which is good. They have a very thorough public safety plan and that's a lesson learned that I brought back to Cambridge and initiated that process by learning from London,

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to get our city to start to think proactively, putting together a public safety plan. London, because of the political system, they have – arts is very much, or, the government is first at the table. Here, the government is pretty much last at the table. So they are – they have Carnival curriculum in the schools, they have twenty-four carnivals in the U.K. alone, it's not just Notting Hill. They have line items that fund Carnival projects year round. They have a full time Carnival officer whose job at the Arts Council is to fund Carnivals. So it's very much integrated in the fabric much more than here in the U.S. in terms of just, like I said, curricula in the schools, line items on the arts, but the political system is different there whereby the arts play one, a bigger role, but the government plays a bigger role in the arts. But that's just how it is I mean, because of the political system. So while the government's playing a bigger role in the arts, they recognized earlier on or, I don't know when did they recognize, but there's certainly enough to be able to have people working to fund projects year round. And so they do have entrepreneurs who would make a living on Carnival, and they actually – and I did some consulting for one of them – that they actually save their costumes so that they can use it in other events internationally. Different countries will hire them to be opening ceremonies and stuff like that. So they have enough to put in a museum and, amazing work, artists, and these artists are funded. But some of them are funded and also are entrepreneurial. Most of them aren't as entrepreneurial and that's kind of where the mayor was trying to encourage to leverage. Like you've got funds. Leverage that, you can multiply that. And some have done that very successfully and others haven't. And innovation certainly, and because it's so integrated in the society there's a lot more support for it and so there've been innovations around that as well. And I mean you generate ninety-two million pounds for the city, you're definitely contributing to the fabric of the community and it's the largest event. So the concern was how do you get more of those dollars circling back into the community which was – because people just do because they're passionate about it and like I said they do have some support but it could be even more. And there are challenges and issues that we've learned from over the years that they've learned from and that other communities can pick up. I mean it's an urban environment and a major festival.

LR: Yeah. What are some of the other things that you brought back to Cambridge from that experience?

NW: Well the public safety plan – I organized a forum from being there which was a critical part of our change in Cambridge, our Carnival. Because we realized that we were growing every year and we needed a plan for that growth. So the carnival committee was at that place back in 2004 but the city wasn't at that place, 2003, 2004 and the city wasn't at that place. For example the police department would say whatever detail would show up would be at Carnival when we kind of really needed more than that. And so we organized a forum using some of

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the tools that I learned from London. I planned a forum from London and the community got together and that's when we sort of realized we outgrew Central Square and it was a critical turning point for Carnival. Just like how we are now at a critical turning point in that, are we too big for Cambridge, or what do we do? So we changed our conversation from if we're going to have a Carnival to where we're going to have the Carnival, and utilized the forum as a way to get community input. And like every other Carnival that I know of, Carnival is planned by the people for the people. We put that in our little tagline because that's how it is. It's not – the city doesn't plan it. It's designed to be a grassroots, that's the beauty of it. It's also the challenge of it because you don't have a lot of resources. People, we make do with what we have. Other cities like Toronto which I think is the largest one in the Northeast Carnival, they probably have a million people, they have a line item in their budget to support the Carnival so that pressure is less on the artists and the organizers and the city does their part because they realize the economic development and tourism part of it. We have a very interesting city. Our city is a very wealthy city in terms of resources and tax, et cetera, so economic development in terms of what the Carnival could bring is not – is a blip – is not as big as what a biotech company can do. Compared to London, ninety-four million pounds is huge for an event that attracts a million people, and Cambridge is only a hundred thousand people so London's a much bigger city. Toronto also recognizes the value of economic development with the Carnival and has invested monies in it so that it can continue to bring return and tourism. We're in a very unique city. We already have a lot of tourists, we already have – so an economic development picture is not as relevant we think, as other cities, how Carnival could be. Like Miami and New York et cetera. So there's certainly economic trickle down monies flowing through Carnival but it's not – there are other things here that our city has. You know what I mean? We're not strapped compared to other places where they do need this as more so than others. So I think it becomes less – and the economic returning investment becomes not a priority as in other cities. So these other cities value the Carnival a little bit more because of that part of it I think. So what our unique thing in Cambridge is that it's the largest event that's a diversity event, really. I mean, I think no other event in Cambridge brings out as many people of color. And if we're an event that values diversity, you definitely see it in Carnival. So I think that that's one of our strengths. And I think that's one of the values that the Carnival brings. But we, in Cambridge, we're a very diverse community so we have diversity in Carnival but more ethnically diverse than any other festival in the city. I can hands down communicate that. And part of it is that people who have been here, who grew up in Carnival, or who've let – a lot of the Caribbean folks – they can't afford to live here anymore, or they've moved out, or they have homes that they've held on, but the opportunity was too great in terms of the developers offering them good money for something that they didn't pay that much for and so they've sold out. I mean it's just a business decision. But that means that they leave. But their family has a connection here, or they have cousins here or something, so they still come back. So that,

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to me that's even more so to preserve the Carnival because a lot of the people can't afford to live here – the reality – anymore. And so this Carnival, the legacy of the Carnival, becomes even more important because of that. And as our community changes we're not losing some of the cultural fabric that we have. It keeps it there.

LR: Who specifically – it's probably a long list – but who specifically participates in Carnival?

NW: You know, honestly we don't have a lot of cultural costume groups that participate in Cambridge. In the past we used to have Brazilians, the person who was leading on the Brazilian effort in Carnival passed away and his organization disbanded after the leadership passed away. So we miss that. We still have in and out the Brazilians. The – we have a large Haitian community. So, people can participate in terms of being in the parade. In terms of groups we have one costume group in North Cambridge. And just to let you know the skills of putting together these costumes is a technique that has to be learned over years. Like wire bending is like even a term that you have, or these backpacks that you create to carry these heavy costumes that you can – in London they use innovation to make them really light. So that is a skill that a lot of the – and other Carnivals have the same challenge that a lot of the seniors and people are passing away and we hope that that skill doesn't die with them. But we need a new crop of young people to be trained on these skills, and these skills need to be trained by professional artists that either come from Trinidad or London or other Carnivals. And we don't have that homegrown in our community. We certainly have a Caribbean community but we don't have a Caribbean community that have the, all the art form that it would take, or the learning, or the knowledge to put together these elaborate costumes which is a specific skill set that's passed on or learned, et cetera. We have that in Boston so it doesn't mean that we don't have it locally but it's not in Cambridge specific. So one of the things that we've done we've worked with local community groups like the Margaret Fuller House. We had a “kids in costume” program there where they made their own costumes using feathers et cetera. They don't design these intricate wire bending, like I said, skill set – like literally you have to weld together. So you really have to be a visual artist that's trained in this. But certainly anybody can put together a costume in terms of like, recycled materials, so anybody can participate in Carnival. We don't have a criteria says you have to have wire bending in our judging or in our participation. Some carnivals do. Ours, we don't. We have very, ten simple things as our criteria: endurance, performance, creativity – there's ten things that we use to judge our – choreography, we include dance, some people don't, we do. So we do that intentionally so that we can reach a broad set of skills of people. So I would say the participants – we have the DJs participate from the community, certainly local, we have a North Cambridge group that has participated over the years and they get a little frustrated because they win in terms of choreography and they come third or first – and second, but they never win because they can't,

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feel they can't honestly compete against these elaborate big wire bended costumes. So the skills are not here because they have to be trained, and like I said, we don't have enough of a critical mass. And they have these camps which require a pan yard or a costume yard, and Cambridge we barely have a backyard. So, you know what I mean? So that's also part of it, the economics of being, having a space to have a shop. I mean, artists can't even barely have a loft here as you know. So it's – so there's a lot of reasonings behind why that it's not here. They may not be afford to live here, they may not can afford to have, because you definitely need space to house these costumes and develop them and build them and most people do it in their garages. We don't have that as much here. So we have – but what we have is people, community, DJs, so the – and then we just developed a steel pan program which we're really excited about, and the first workshop he had fifteen students sign up who were interested. So, part of developing that program is a way of, through pan, that belongs to the community, that can be housed in the community, that uses a lot of musical sort of, traditional musical skills – we feel that that's easier to transfer to the community in terms of learning and building on versus having these wire bending kind of elaborate designers. Doesn't mean that we can't do that but it probably would need to be an artist in residence, it would have to be a more collaborative effort. But we feel that like a pan program, which pans will last twenty plus years, can use traditional music methods et cetera, and we have a better chance of preserving at least that part of the culture. So that's kind of how we went that way to engage the community because we also have to be practical about the skill set and also what is required in order to have these costume camps. We don't even barely have the land, you now, to have that. So we have to be realistic about what we can and can't do. And so that's why when you asked that question, we would love to have more costume groups coming out there but most of them come out of Boston and Cambridge participates but they just sign up with the Boston camps because they have been doing this for many years and like I said they have more affordable space to provide the space to do it. Now if we have spaces in Cambridge that we're able to develop that, certainly. But it requires something that is either very expensive or very limiting and we don't have enough people leading this community with those skill sets. And even more so with being shrunk because of the changes in the environment. We basically are becoming a city of rich and poor. And – which is just the reality of what's happening in our environment.

LR: And with the DJs that come in and the program with pans, could you elaborate more on the importance of music in Carnival?

NW: Well, I mean, every costume group – so, Carnival is about rhythm, movement, color, culture, and part of culture is movement and rhythm, part of our culture. So you can't do that without some kind of music in it. And

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you know, more modern side is using sound systems where it's like the DJ comes and they play the music to accompany the costume groups, and the costume groups they dance, they dance to something. And you could dance to steel pans, which is rhythm. We have a rhythm section which is more based on drumming and percussion verses based on orchestra kind, which is – you can do all of that with pans but for the Carnival it's more based on that when they do stop and perform it's more orchestra related, but while they need to provide the beat for the dancers. And so you could do it with that, you could do with drums. The more traditional folkloric parts, like the puntas, which were part of the Carnival in the beginning. And the Panamanian groups they were more folkloric, they didn't have sound systems, they had more, it was more drums that they would bring with them in the streets to perform. And the street is the stage for Carnival. And so it's not a procession. After twenty-six years we're still reminding people it's not a procession. So they're not going to go like really fast. They're going to perform in the street. And these costumes are very heavy. And to perform with these heavy costumes – some of them are on wheels, to carry them with this backpack that's designed to carry them – so to perform with these costumes takes time and so it's not a procession, it's like you're performing as you as you move along. And so the biggest complaint for Carnival is that “Why is there such a big gap?” Well, people want their space to hear their music along with the costume groups. So music – and so each group has to have some kind of music sometimes we've shared the music because it costs about two thousand dollars just to set up a system in there, and we don't provide the funds for these groups, they actually pay a small fee to be part of the parade. So they have to raise their own money for that. And so some cities do. We just don't. We barely have enough money to organize a Carnival. So but they are passionate and committed to doing that. So these sound systems have to accompany the performers, the costumed performers, as part of – and they practice and do some kind of choreographic performance when they get to the judging stand which is the same as the viewing stand which is the same as where they do the competition. So we have judges that are judging based on the criteria that we provide and the – that we call band leaders which are the people who – the band of people, not necessarily band in terms of music but band of people masqueraders. These band leaders choose music and they choose the revelers, masqueraders, and when they get to the judging stage their music that accompanies them, they play a particular music so they can perform in front of the judges, because one of the criteria is choreography that we have so they have to, they dance and get judged on that as part of the five or ten things that they're judged on. Now the DJs they come in and one of the things, like I said in London they have these static sound systems which is basically DJ stations but they don't move. They're static in that they set up on the street and they stay there all day. Here, we have mobile DJ meaning like they're in the parade or we – over the years we used to have DJs that would stay behind but we don't have any space for them to stay behind after the festival. So what we've done is we've offered them a space on the stage. And while people are waiting for the

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parade to come down they get their fifteen, twenty minutes and we try and reach out to local youth so that they can get their space to do their thing in front of thousands of people. And they actually pay to be part of it because the reason why we charge, it's a very small amount, but we charge because so many people are interested and if you don't show up – if it's free sometimes people don't value it as much – if you don't show up then you've just lost an opportunity for someone else. So we actually have them pay to be part of it, if you can't afford it, people sponsor it, we sponsor you. We just want you to value it, and people just can't wait to get in. And that's also been an area where we can keep that youth connection because young people tend to want to be in that space. And so these last two years we've mixed it up and we've put DJs on both stages so that it's – we feel it to be more integrated. We have that, and that's really mostly the youth voice on that, and they dance and they – and people dance, they just come and after the viewing stand they just, they would dance for three hours if they can. And so they – the public participates too. For most of the time while the parade is coming through, they observe and after the parade is over they cannot wait to participate and that's when they have permission in our Carnival – other Carnivals might be different – but in our Carnival that's when we give you permission to participate, to jump in, and do your thing, and dance, and whatever. Mostly dance. And then of course we have food and we have a kid's fest with stilt walking, we try and connect it with cultural Caribbean cultural things, face painting, again designs based on our culture, soccer which is definitely connected, we've had super soccer stars day which is connected to the culture of the Caribbean. I mean we have diverse vendors too. I mean everybody's invited. We don't turn away anybody. But certainly it's very much Caribbean focused but available and open to the whole community. People look forward to getting rum cakes which they don't normally get. So you can find food that you don't normally have. There's one Caribbean restaurant – since I've been here for thirty years there've been two in Cambridge: Izzy's which is a Spanish Puerto Rican restaurant in Central square, and a colleague of mine had a Jamaican restaurant, Rhythm and Spice, that in 2009 closed. And I think they were about nine years old, from 2002 to 2009. Other than that, there are no Caribbean restaurants. There's a new one, a Spanish one that started, it's Fabrica I think, in Central Square. But there are very few, there are no English speaking Caribbean. There is a small Haitian café, but very few Caribbean restaurants in Cambridge. So people look forward to the food because they can't find it as easily or, the diversity among non-Spanish or non-Haitian food, so it's something that people – you have more variety and choices.

LR: During carnival, what's the main thing that you do? What are you doing during the actual event?

NW: I am the organizer so I solve problems.

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LR: OK.

NW: As a producer I solve problems so you know making sure that they're – troubleshooting. In terms of my agency, we're lucky to have interns and we're based in Harvard Square so it's very attractive to interns and so we always have at least one or two interns that work with us throughout the summer to help with Carnival because we're a volunteer organization, so we lead, my agency leads in the organizing of the vendors and their permitting, and, so kind of overall leadership and the marketing and the PR. And so on Carnival Day, I'm ultimately responsible for the event. But we have a committee, everybody has a very, role. But in terms of the go to troubleshooter, I'm it. But we have – we work as a team and everybody has their specific strengths that they bring. We have someone on our committee that's in charge of the kid's fest area, someone in charge of the – we have different people in charge of vendors, we have someone in charge of entertainment, someone in charge of parade. So we do have people and we've hired a company, a local company, over the years that we've worked with on the , event operations to set up, break down, set up logistic stuff, so we've hired in that area. But we all work as a team and we work in partnership with the city as well, with the police, so I mean we've been doing it so long we can do it in our sleep. But yeah, pretty much my role is just to solve problems and when everything is over, especially after the parade is over, then I relax a little bit and I would go hang out and play the scratcher with the steel band group. And jam. I love percussion, so. They have an instrument for me and I would jam. If I'm jamming that means everything is in order (laughs). So that's how I participate in it. And of course I buy my food if I have a chance to do that. But just to make sure that everything's – after the parade, then I'm happy. Because we have a parade going on the same time as the festival, so we just need to make sure the parade gets through in a timely matter, and so that the people can dance. The public who's waiting to dance (laughs) can do their dancing and have their participation. And then what's really exciting is that we have a Haitian group that comes every year, it's not organized, they just show up, I don't know when they jump into the Carnival but they organize amongst themselves and they have this Rah Rah group I call them, and then they have their instruments and they dance, they do almost like slam dancing but they're not, that's just how the culture is, it's like they're not fighting it's just slam dancing! (Laughs) That's how, that's part of the culture. And they go after the parade and in the parade, they go up and down the street, up and down the street, and they have drums and percussion instruments and they just kind of huddle together and just rove, which is so exciting! They just pop up, it's like a pop up and you know, you see, they show up! They don't sign up, they don't register, they just show up but we know we expect them and they just do their thing. And then the last couple of years, having a steel band group stay behind, they do the rhythm section so it's like they just literally like people would come in and just hit the cowbell or hit the, whatever, just whatever instruments. People from the public can

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participate, like myself, just grab an instrument and just hit on it and just, in a melodic way, and just dance. And just right into the streets, right in the street. I mean that's just like a jam session. Kind of like the static sound that happens in London, but on the festival footprint. And they literally would play for hours and just jam, they get on first. So they just take breaks and they just jam. And this Trinidadian group that we partner with and they're working with us on the steel pan program. So in the future, kids and their parents would be jamming. But that's to me had been a special thing where it's like these pop up, like the Haitian group, would be doing their thing, and people just jamming, and these – like spontaneous things – and the steel pan group, they're just doing their thing. We'd love to have more of that but you can only have so much resources. So I'm, like I said, we don't control, they just come, which is great, but we'd love to have more. We'd love to have Capoeira, just do it right in the street, like how in Brazil. There's so much potential but there's limited resources to make it happen and we see that it's there but we just are constantly scraping by to make this happen.

LR: And even though you are in a very – even though you're in a coordinating position and there's a lot that you do during the actual day, is there something that you look forward to seeing like in the crowd, or like look forward to experiencing or being reflected?

NW: Oh, happy – what makes me feel really good and all of the committee members is that people are very happy at the Carnival, it's a joyous event. So being able to – and the crowds of people, I mean a sea of people you can't even see the end. And so that's really rewarding when you have no advertising dollars (laughs) and you see a sea of people they keep coming they come for a reason because they're happy to be there. And so the massive amount of people enjoying themselves and all different colors but certainly largely people of color, and having fun, they have their face paint on, they have – they're buying food, they're enjoying their food, the vendors are happy because people are appreciating their food. The sun is out, it's usually sunny. But people are there, if it rains they don't care. And just people – the music, the performers, we have a lot of talented musicians. They're getting good energy. The people are dancing – if people are dancing in front of the stage that's good, they're connecting with the performers. So we have these areas that – so as you walk or I walk down the street from one end of the Carnival to the other, whether I'm – one end could be a DJ and people dancing, young people gather to dance with the DJ and then the next area is the steel pan which is more a mature crowd and sometimes some college young person coming in and just bringing up an instrument or even bringing their own guitar and just jamming or just jumping in, in a different way there, and then right next to it is the food and trying mango or sugar cane which you can't really get, and having a kid, a white family trying, face full of yellow mango, just dipping in like pepper mango and just exploring, experimenting on something that

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they probably never tried before. Or people lining up to gather up their five and ten pies of rum cake because they can't get it till the next year. So the rum cake folks which is a church in Brooklyn that comes every year to do this, that people come back every year looking for it, so people are looking for their vendors and the lines are long but people don't mind because they're having, because there's entertainment all around them and just people just walking, parading around in their culture and their flags, and they're being proud of who they are and they're displaying their flags in any which way whether they're putting on their face or they tie it to their costumes or – and then you go to the kids area that there's stilt walking, face painting, all kinds of action and activity going on and happy kids coming out there with colorful faces. And then you look at the stage with a world – an African – a Haitian group performing, and a female percussion artist doing their thing to the beat and a female DJ because we really work hard at getting that diversity in many ways, and people connecting with her. That's amazing to me.

LR: Yeah, I feel like I just saw it all. (Laughter)

NW: Yeah exactly!

LR: So going back to when it first began, who were some of the other people who you worked with, some of the key leaders who helped put it together, put Carnival together?

NW: So certainly we were – we got some seed money and support and brought me on board just as a volunteer community person. We have to give credit to the Mayor at the time, Kenneth E. Reeves. His family, his parents are Jamaican. He wasn't born there but he's definitely connected to this – I think he might have been born in Detroit but I'm sure you could find his history. But he definitely, he was the mayor at least three times. And very much wanted – saw this as a way to celebrate part of his ancestry and culture and Caribbean connection and endorsed the festival and brought me in as a way to help them get it off the ground. So, and provided some seed money, small but we were able to start. So without him we wouldn't have been able to I think be where we are today. So we have to give homage and respect and appreciation to him. And then all the other founders were Everton Daniel, which you've met and I'll make if it has an "s" on it. It's on our website, his name. Edir Passos, which is from Brasileiro, Inc., who passed away. The late Orville Wright who ran the ensemble department when he joined us from Berklee College, Professor Orville Wright. And then, Carl Greenaway who also was a musician, producer kind of musician, from – Orville's from Trinidad, Everton I think is from St. Vincent, Carl Greenaway's from Montserrat, Edir is from Brazil, so to give you a sense of where. And Lynette Laveau Saxe, she is from

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Cambridge. She would be a good person to interview From Trinidad. I think she's spent most of her life here, was born in Trinidad. One of the founders. And she has a Caribbean focused show on CCTV, or at least at one point. David Martin, he ran a Caribbean radio station in Central Square, out of Central Square. WRCA, it's not in existence anymore but he used to have that station there, so he was one of our founders. My mom, Cecile Williams, she worked for Ken Reeves at the time and she had joined the organizing body. And myself. I think we were the original group. And so mom, Jamaican, Lynette was Trinidadian, David Martin, Trinidadian.

LR: What was the atmosphere like putting it together for the first time?

NW: It was what we call "bacchanal" (laughs) which is a Trinidadian mess, in that you had people from different islands, and everybody had their vision, so there was, like anything I think, it was not unusual. Anything starting out – it's like a start-up. And there were strong personalities. So my role was more of trying to keep the peace kind of thing. But it's not – it's not a bad thing because even amongst our family it may be like we're shouting but we're not, it's just part of our culture of how we communicate. So it wasn't unusual in that – it's kind of – part of it was cultural, and part of it was also getting on the same page. A group of people who have never worked together but we had the same goal, so keeping people on the task, on the goal, was kind of my role. And then eventually we elected a president, which was Orville Wright, from the group. And I think he served – especially when I moved to London he played a major role. So we've had at least one other president. And it was a lot of work, I mean as volunteers, it's a lot of work. We have more of a rhythm now because we've been doing it so long, but it was a lot of – and it still is – a lot of work. Back then used to do the clean-up ourselves, now the city does that. We have to pay for it but – so, it's just a lot of work for volunteers, with people who didn't know each other, but I think it wasn't as bad starting as the growth, when we were growing. We had different personalities and different – but we all had the same goal. We wanted to celebrate our culture, put together the best event that we could, we have "international" in our name intentionally. We have our logo we still use to this day. So we – the foundation I think took a while but it was solid to work from. And I think that it's still today a few people that organize this event and people just assume – make a lot of assumptions. The community – there are a lot of assumptions out there that the city pays for everything, which is not true, that the city organizes this event, which is not true, that we have all these resources, which is not true. So there are a lot of misconceptions so people think we don't need help (laughs) when we do! They just see a beautiful Carnival every year and they don't really know what it goes to put it on and how much stress it could be or pressure it could be or responsibility it could be. You know, we, yeah. So it hasn't been very easy for us over the years especially in dealing with the city. It's much better now, the last couple of years, but it took us a good twenty

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something years to get to this place, where it's always been a challenge to navigate through the system and get support. And I'm not talking financial because that's neither here nor there, but I think more of institutionalized support was very challenging for us. But I feel that we're at a place where history now institutionalized in terms of us being – surviving that long. There've been other festivals that've been more robust than ours and they've gone, and we're here. So we're a very resilient community, Caribbeans. We can make something out of nothing. I mean that's a lot of steel pan. What do you think that is? Oil drums. So we can make beauty out of nothing. And I think that's inherent in our nature, in our culture, that so we yes, we may have differences, but we still press through. So I think – and we all know that what we're doing is bigger than us. What we're doing is providing a voice for a larger body of people and that it has its historical significance, cultural significance, and it's very important to Cambridge. Whether it's being recognized by the city, or the leadership, or not, we know it is important and the community have communicated that with us by thanking us when they can, or when they realize that we have to go through, or by acknowledging our contribution, or just by showing up they're just saying that – we got to be doing something right for so many thousands of people to come every year and be happy. And like with any event there are challenges as you get bigger. There are safety issues that we're concerned about that people use the Carnival as a way to settle scores. It doesn't belong there. We're an event that's about joy and happiness. We don't condone violence at our event. We're not the only event that have experienced that, especially as we grow. But we are concerned as a community about it. And so in our programming we try and come up with ways to mitigate some of those things, and the best way we can do that is through our programming. The type of music, when we provide the type of music, how we provide the type of music. We would love to have more live music. We feel that would change the dynamics. We just can't afford it because we don't have anybody work for us for free even though we are volunteers, we respect and value artists so we do pay them. The costume groups they get a fee for if they win. We can't pay everybody who comes in but we have to give a prize for people who are judged. That's kind of the incentive. So we do that and most of our funds are raised through the vendors. Little, not too much in sponsorship. But mostly in vendors. Really that's it. And so, like I said, we make do the best we can. But I think over the last ten years we've had a very good rhythm in terms of the committee and working together and jelling and all that. But like I said, like any new organization there are going to be bumps and hurdles and – but I think again we were focused on really making the best for the community. And I feel very proud of what we have. Not a lot of carnivals have live music, that's always been part of what we are. We're very international in terms of our, it's in our name. And we are looking forward to moving to the river which we feel would be – I don't know any other carnivals that have a river in the background. So I think we would be very even more special.

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LR: And what were earlier versions of the event like?

NW: It was more like a street fair. And we used to hire groups of people in from Boston, costume groups who are good in their craft. We didn't have a competition. We didn't have enough cache to bring out people for a competition – I'm not talking people to the event but the band, these artists. So we had to for the first five years we paid a group called D' Midas International. And they've been with us since the beginning. I think they took a few years off but pretty much since the beginning we used to pay them money to bring out costumes to the event, like a fee. We didn't have a competition, and then eventually we did. And then Clay Douglas, he passed away, he was like a first local homegrown, and he was right up there in the beginning and he created costumes from recycled materials and it was fascinating. He's a great dancer as well. I don't know where he's from but I know Everton would know I think he mentioned him before. But he was a wonderful spirit of our festival. And we have a Spirit of Carnival awards that we've recognized over the years in Clay Douglas and Edir Passos' name. And now we would add Orville Wright to that. So three of our key sort of contributors to Carnival have passed away. Two on our organizing committee and one who was part of the festival. So we had to – and then because we were before Boston, kind of – Boston's forty years old and we're twenty-five now so they're fifteen years ahead of us. And they came out first and when we first came out we also got pushback from the Boston community, especially the organizer of the Boston Carnival and they said we didn't need another Carnival in the area. And I said, well it wasn't my choice, I was in the media about it, but the community wanted it. And so our city supported that. And so we're going to go ahead because we have a Caribbean community here and if it's warranted and needed then we will see. And but we're not going to put you down but we're not going away. And so eventually they became, like we became the little sister to that Carnival. They came to our forum that we had in 2014, they provide advice, they're supportive. At first it was like, what are you doing. And now there's mutual respect, which is great, because we came from a place of we're not going to put you down, but we're just going to do our thing, and have always respected and not disrespected the leadership there because they were doing it before us and a lot of the costume groups come out of there and we have to respect that. But our Carnival started in the middle of August, that was a date we were – we ended up with. And so for us the first several years, we brought in like a costume group but no matter what we always got year old costumes because we – protocol, or the right thing to do, was that Boston was the, The Carnival, and they needed to reveal their costume, the band leaders, at the Boston event which was two weeks after ours. So we had one year old costumes. And some of them were tattered, they weren't in great shape, so it was kind of more like a street fair. And then I think the critical point – I mean but we were growing every year, but I think the critical point, turning point, one, another critical turning point is when we had to change or date because of rain and major – so we

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changed it to the day after Boston Carnival. Because we – Carnival – I think there was only one year period that we changed the date because of weather, because it's rain or shine and people come out. But it was very dangerous. So we agreed with the city to change the date and our rain date happened to be the day after Boston Carnival and that date worked for us because then it was Carnival weekend in Massachusetts! (Laughs) And we had so many people! Guess what? Our costumes were great because they were already revealed in Boston the day before, it didn't matter. So people would go to both or they could choose one or the other. And it wasn't – it was OK because it was – Cambridge, we had our brand, we were more organic, we like to say (laughs). Our streets are smaller than New York or other urban areas so we can't have these huge sound systems on our street so we said, "Be organic." And so that increased the size tremendously of the amount of people that would show up because a lot of people come out – so you know, Boston Carnival reaches around between three hundred thousand and four hundred fifty thousand people. They're the third largest Carnival in the northeast. So you've got Toronto, New York, and then Boston. So we're pretty big which is interesting, compared to like, there are places like Miami and other Caribbean populations that have – Hartford, et cetera – have higher Caribbean populations that have less people to their Carnival. And Boston's been around I think longer than some of the others as well. Certainly not New York and Toronto but kind of up there. So that's very interesting, so we already had – that's another reason why we think Carnival works here because we already had a footprint in the Carnival space in the Boston area that drew hundreds of thousands of people every year. So we were just peanuts to them. But what it did was – so that's why we were able to access all of the art form and the people. So a lot of people came. And then after a few years we felt that we were losing our identity, was like Boston Carnival Two. Vendors wanted to jump over the next day, they didn't want to plan ahead and stuff like that. So the city and us, somehow, a lot of times we were in synch, we decided collectively that you know what, it's not working for us. It's just not as manageable for us to be right after Boston. And so we decided to move our date because Long Island happened to give up their date so we worked with the city and came up with a new date of the – right after New York. So the Carnival season in the sort of northeast part is New York, - somebody's trying to reach me so, can we take a break?

LR: Oh yeah.

[Start of Part II]

NW: The carnival season started with Boston Carnival then the weekend after was New York Carnival, and they were always the weekend after New York Carnival, so in a row. So we're two weeks after Boston, and then we

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got better costumes and then we had our own space and so we can bring back our own identity. So that's where we want to be. And Long Island had given up that date. So we took it and then the date that we used to have, Worcester has taken it so that we actually have – and then Springfield also has a Carnival so in Massachusetts we have four Carnivals.

LR: Are there people who go around to all the Carnival?

NW: Yeah. Especially the costume groups because they get to present their costumes. Again, they won't present new ones (phone rings) – they won't present new ones until after so I don't know what's – these others, they probably get old costumes. I don't know if it's hard line anymore, but it being Worcester, but certainly we don't care. We just want to get costumes that look good in the event but we don't – it doesn't matter to me like if that's a Boston in terms of being the first. So yeah, we're the Sunday after New York and everybody has their date, it's kind of respecting other people's Carnivals so we kind of coordinate amongst the collective body of Carnivals to make sure that we're at least within the same region not competing. And the last Carnival in the U.S. that we know of is Miami Carnival, the October weekend because it's nicer down there. What is that weekend? Columbus Day weekend? Yeah. Columbus, the holiday in October.

LR: And was there a certain year that was your favorite or most memorable to organize or to attend? To be part of?

NW: I mean each year I think it gets better, I mean honestly the twenty-fifth year, this past year, was beautiful. It was great until we had a problem at the end of the festival that had nothing to do with us. But I think it was one of the best Carnivals in terms of just the weather was great, the costumes were great, we had the mayor there – we had the mayor, the city manager, the new commissioner. So I think it was just very uplifting, it was a milestone year for us. So I think each year it gets better. I wouldn't say there was one particular year that was – I don't see it that way, I can't compare it that way for twenty-six years. Each year I think we just try to make it better.

LR: And what are your hopes for the future of Cambridge Carnival?

NW: Well we hope that we'll be sustainable and not having to continue to stress about how we can make ends meet because we are a volunteer group. My hope is that we'll have Carnival costume groups coming out of

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Cambridge more but we have to recognize the challenges of making that happen, given that you need space, et cetera, which is at a premium. I would hope that we would have a Caribbean cultural center of some sort where we would be able to generate income to support our Carnival. We don't necessarily – we as Caribbean people like to have tools so we can fish, versus having a lot of hand-outs because we're not used to that in our country. So I think for us it's just being given the tools and the opportunity. So if we have a center, a space that we can use to raise funds, support our programs, be entrepreneurial like a social enterprise, I feel that would be great. Sort of like how the city have provided an opportunity for the cultural, the multicultural arts center, that was a real estate deal that the city had done to support that. So that the building was able to have them use it as long as it's used for an arts program. The Dance Complex, the city has allowed them to purchase the property for a dollar or something like that, and then they have their programs out there and so I feel that we can be in a similar position where – for being creative and sustainable, to try and find ways to generate our revenue to support our mission, would be great. And so I feel that that could be one opportunity. And then we can continue to collaborate with the community based organizations for the steel pan program. The Cambridge Youth Steel Orchestra, we feel that's an opportunity for youth to perform across the city as well as to be presented internationally. We feel that we have a lot of talent here, the pans are the best pans that you can purchase, we made – that was intentional to make sure that we had good quality products. So everybody in the region is going to be looking at this program as well as us to make sure we want to be successful so we feel that this is something that we can represent our city very well. There's not a lot of – I mean there are pan community programs around but I feel that this is a great opportunity for us to stand out. I think being our goal whether it's this year or next year is to move the Carnival to the river. It's been a part of our strategic plan so we'd like to be able to see that plan realized, but we don't want it to sink us financially because we know that it comes with more expenses, but we've kind of outgrown Kendall Square, we need more room to spread out, and we feel that there's a lot of room on the River, it's under-utilized, they used to have the River Fest there, it might be coming back there but we feel that it's an underutilized asset that's part of our community that would be fascinating and would set our Carnival apart, besides the fact that it's international and it has a lot of live music. It would set us apart even more and celebrate one of our environmental assets as well. In terms of other things, I'd like to see – when I was in London I saw that, I went to the, I think it was in Leicester? They had a Carnival there that I was really impressed with and it wasn't a very traditional Carnival in that huge big wire bending costumes, we want that to remain, but what I was really impressed with is that every single non-profit organization in that city was in the Carnival. And I was really impressed seeing people in wheelchairs in costumes, and they had a group with everybody in wheelchairs that was able to parade quote unquote in the Carnival and I was so enthralled and impressed with that and I thought, wouldn't it be great for us to have that. And you know traditional

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Carnivalists, they make comments, “Oh, well that’s not a real Carnival,” but I feel that the community part of it is something that we can do here, that we have the potential to do, we have a lot of cooperation, this is a good creative space, we want to use technology, we want to use our assets that's in the city. It'd be great to have a costume as a barge when we move to the river where we can have maybe a commissioned artwork of the most innovative costume using technology that we can have on the river, or have a display that's on a barge or a band on a barge in the river so that we are using our assets again, but it would be very different but at the same time incorporating other groups in the community, so we feel those challenges will be great. A Google or some technology company I could see supporting something like that. So we want to be more integrated in the community. We don't want to be – feel like we're isolated or we're always that group over there that impacts the community hugely every year in terms of one day, we want to be able to be more integrated in the community and we feel that there's some work that needs to be done on the city's leadership to embrace us further in order to give us that opportunity to be more integrated in the community. So we feel maybe the answer is through the steel pan Cambridge Youth Steel Orchestra, that might be a way to do that, but we feel that we have tremendous potential, it's open to everybody, and we just need people to come in the doors (laughs). And just because you – the door is open, people are welcome, just come through because you are welcome and this is not my event. This is our – planned by the people for the people, it's for the community it's a community event, it's not my Carnival. It's everybody's Carnival.

LR: And what keeps you coming back to the Carnival every year?

NW: I think the more underlying thing is about voice and freedom and expression. That's really – because it reminds me, and I reflect back always, why we're doing this. Why it's so important. And at one point slaves were not allowed to celebrate who they were in the Caribbean and they were not – and I'm sure there are many experiences here as in America for African-Americans but I don't have that particular experience but I do in our culture understand and relate and feel that it's important to have a voice to celebrate who you are, to value your culture in a community where you live. And I feel that's one of the things that I expect from this city and that I expect that our neighbors expect that, and we want to continue to do that and we want to continue to provide a value, we feel that there is value in that diversity, even though it was rooted in expression and culture and not being able to express yourself is so important. One of the American ways, to be able to express your freedom of who you are. And so I think that's what is the impetus for us to continue. And of course it's about joy and culture and movement and art and all those good things but it's deeper than that. It's about, like I said, and so I feel that it gives voice to people who may not be able to, or could, or know how to use their voices. We

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want to get more and more – we don't want our legacy to die we want to preserve it, and it's a problem and a challenge for Carnivals all over the world that a lot of the organizers are aging out and therefore there is a big concern that the history and the culture will die and we don't want that. And so for us our way of starting the Cambridge Youth Steel Orchestra is a way of encouraging, and it's a youth led program so that we're building and developing leadership through at least that avenue. We'd like to continue that in other areas but it's not only our challenge, it's a challenge across the board. But when I got involved a lot of people that were involved were much older than me. I was twenty-nine when I got involved, I didn't know what this was. So I feel that. And we've also have had people who have been with us since they were eighteen and we're grooming leadership but we still need to do more because the next – we need to pass the baton and we need to – but to pass the baton want it in a place where they don't have to go through what we had to go through to get us to this place. So we want to have a good foundation and a place to build from instead of starting from a place where we started. So my hope in terms of the future and the legacy of the Carnival is that we will be in a place where I can feel that I can step aside knowing that we have full support from the city, from the – we already have support from the community at large because they show that by coming. But we need full support from the city, the businesses that come, across the board, and we're not there yet. And we also take responsibility of we need to do more. As volunteers we are limited but we need to continue to do more to become more integrated in the community. And so we'll continue to do our part.

LR: And so we're nearing the end of the interview. I was wondering if you have anything to add about Carnival or your experience with it that we haven't talked about?

NW: Not really, I mean I think that we are blessed to be in a city that even though it's been a struggle, that we are still having a Carnival, so I appreciate and value that. And that the city has been flexible and supportive in that way, and like I said, they've come around a long ways from where we started so I feel we're in a really good place to build on. And I hope that our community will continue to value that and we have newcomers who have probably different expectations and we just don't – we want to continue to value that diversity and value the culture and we hope that it will be continued and won't go away. So we are concerned about our legacy, but we also are hopeful because African-Americans, Caribbean, the Black diaspora have come from a place of tremendous – being able to overcome anything. So that's kind of who we are as Black people, as Caribbean people, as people of color in terms of cause we are the foundation of the Carnival doesn't mean that we have a diverse committee, but we certainly are the foundation and the core of the Carnival. And we're a resilient

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people, so I don't think that we will go away and we just need to continue to do what we're doing and continue to improve and get better and bring others along with us.

LR: And I have one question just related to the project. What would you like to see as an end result of an oral history project?

NW: An end result? Well I mean the fact that we've been twenty-five years and nobody asked us who we are and what we're about in terms of preserving our history. I think we've come a long way so that's a good thing. So I think it's just being able to – one of the things in London that I was very impressed with is that they archive a lot. And they preserve a lot. And, including the history of Carnival and Carnival and they're working on a Carnival Museum now, et cetera. And so it would be great, and we started with an intern on a project to try and collect all our posters and any kind of history that we have, especially after me coming from London knowing that for them, piecing together all this stuff could be challenging. So we started a process of trying to gather all our articles and all our stuff and I think it needs to be housed somewhere and we don't have a place to house it. So I would hope that because we have a historical society and they have a lot of archives and records I would hope that we would be able to have a place at the table for all this work that we've put in with Carnival and I don't know how that happens but maybe it starts with this.

LR: OK. So that's all from my side. Thank you so much.

NW: You're Welcome.

LR: For participating in the oral history project.

END OF INTERVIEW

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