

**GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
EAST VILLAGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Oral History Interview
PHILIP HARTMAN

By Liza Zapol
New York, NY
June 9, 2015

Oral History Interview with Philip Hartman, June 9, 2015

Narrator(s)	Philip Hartman
Birthdate	8/14/55
Birthplace	NY, NY
Narrator Age	59
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	Neighborhood Preservation Center, 232 East 11 th Street, NY 10003
Date of Interview	June 9, 2015, 12:30pm
Duration of Interview	1 hour, 26 mins
Number of Sessions	1
Waiver Signed/copy given	Y
Photographs	Y, 3 images
Format Recorded	.Wav 48 khz, 24 bit
Archival File Names	Hartman_PhilipOralHistory.wav [1.39GB]
MP3 File Name	Hartman_PhilipOralHistory.mp3 [98.6MB]
Order in Oral Histories	17



Philip Hartman at the Neighborhood Preservation Center, June 9, 2015. Photograph by Liza Zapol.

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Philip Hartman

“Honestly, it looked so gloomy. It wasn't like walking through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris or something. It was, “Oh, there it is.” The Five Spot was still there, I believe, on the corner. I knew so much about East Village history at that point. I had never been to the Fillmore [East], but I had been hearing about the Fillmore [East], and the yippies, and the Nuyoricans. I probably built it up in a way that couldn't be matched by the initial look, anyway.”
(Hartman p. 3)

“Then in the Summer of [19]'74, I was working at a film bookstore called 'Cinemabilia' on 10th between Fifth [Avenue] and Sixth [Avenue]. Kind of famous at the time...I really wanted to work there, and I got a job my summer after freshman year. That was the Summer of '74.

I was really the odd man out amongst the staff. It turned out that everybody else was a musician. I was the weird Ivy League guy. At Princeton I was the artsy outsider type, but when I was at Cinemabilia, I was this straight, Ivy League guy. It turns out that the people surrounding me were Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell, Bob Quine, Robbie Dupree. Punk rock was born that summer. Terry Ork was the assistant manager of [Cinemabilia], and Terry was the Godfather of Punk Rock. He produced Television's first record, and he helped Patti Smith. Patti Smith came to the store the day she signed her record contract. It was just an unbelievable community to stumble into.”
(Hartman p. 3)

“The Village Voice' review refused to give the name or address of the restaurant, because they didn't want to ruin it. It was really amazing, it was such a beautiful review. It was a pretty wild time, you know? It's early '80s in New York, on The Bowery.”
(Hartman p. 9)

“[My] movie was called 'No Picnic'. It featured a lot of people who hung out at The Jones. But it was a portrait of the East Village, and the change in the East Village. This was '85. Already in '85, we were lamenting, 'Look what's going on here. We don't even recognize our own neighborhood.' You can imagine how we feel now thirty years later.”
(Hartman p. 11)

“...I had an apartment on 9th between First and A. It was on the south side of the street. It was a sublet. The sublettor, when she handed me the keys, said, 'I want to just be clear. When you walk out the door, never turn right. Always turn left.' Avenue A was off limits at that point as far as she was concerned. Now look, she was kind of straight. But there was a feeling amongst a lot of people that it was kind of no man's land over there. Gradually the community started gravitating east.”
(Hartman p. 16)

“This is a very unusual community. It's amazing. It's rebellious. Its iconoclasm has such deep and profound roots, which is part of the great joy of being here and being part of it, and also can be part of the challenge of being part of it.”
(Hartman p. 20)

“I love the East Village's body. I love the regularity of the cornices at the top of the tenements on the side streets. I love the scale of the East Village in general. I love the brick of the East Village. I love the trees of the East Village. I love the grid of the East Village. I love the history of the East Village. I love walking down the street knowing that Ed Sanders walked down that street, or that Allen Ginsburg sat under this tree. Or that Jack Kerouac was photographed in front of this fence.”

(Hartman p. 23)

“Don't complain that the neighborhood's changing, and give up on it. Create things that are going to make sure that it stays as true to its history as possible. Whether it's you sitting here doing oral histories, or keeping a softball league alive where one didn't exist before. We have the opportunity to create a legacy every day. Folks who abandon that responsibility are making a mistake. That's our duty. Create a legacy every day.”

(Hartman p. 25)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Philip Hartman

Philip “Phil” Hartman was born at the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital in 1955 and lived with his parents in Bayside, Queens and Old Bethpage, Long Island until he was eleven when he moved with his family to Great Neck, New York. The shift from being in a Jewish minority in Old Bethpage to a Jewish majority in was “uncomfortable,” however Phil enjoyed Great Neck for its proximity to the city, as well. As it came time to consider college, Phil went to an interview for Princeton University “as a joke,” feeling at the time that he was a “long haired, anti-war, anti-everything kind of kid.” When he was accepted Phil found it hard to reject the offer, yet always felt that he did not belong at Princeton, leading him to an exchange semester at Bard College in New York. This exchange offered him a chance to pursue his academic passion for film under Lithuanian filmmaker Adolfas Mekas, whom he described as an “amazing, rich, wonderful character.”

Phil Hartman’s introduction to Greenwich Village was through his parents, who took their family to Monte’s and The Olive Tree on MacDougal Street. This early time in the West Village would later be complimented by an exploration of the East Village with a friend. Phil described this first contact as “honestly, it looked so gloomy...I knew so much about the East Village at that point...I had probably built it up in a way that couldn’t be matched.” This initial reaction was later countered by a visit to St. Mark’s Cinema, where Phil saw a triple feature that was the beginning of many years of trips to the Village for films, music, and more.

After completing his first year at college, Phil got a summer job at the film bookstore Cinemabilia on 10th Street. Phil found himself working as an outsider amongst some of Punk Rock’s early founders, including Richard Hell, Terry Ork, and Rob Dupree. Even as a “weird Ivy League guy,” Phil loved the music, and counts this introduction to it as “one of those great blessings in life.” He recalls seeing the Talking Heads, Television, Patti Smith, and being a frequent visitor to CBGB’s. Phil was once asked to give a tour of Cinemabilia to David Bowie, whom he describes as “a gentleman and a charmer.” Cinemabilia deepened Phil’s passion for film, and furthered his desire to make films of his own.

Phil’s exposure to the early Punk Rock scene developed into a love for the music, and he became “all about CBGB’s.” This love for Punk Rock led to a job as a Vice President of Ork Records, where as Terry Ork’s only employee they scouted bands such as the B-52’s at CBGB’s. Upon graduating from college at Princeton, Phil sought out “the place least like Princeton in America.” This led him to Akron, Ohio, where he worked at a deli counter while writing a screenplay. This screenplay for a “punk rock detective story” would eventually be sold to Warner Brothers, but never produced. After a short time in Akron, Phil wished to return to New York, where he decided to stop writing for money and open as restaurant with a friend instead. This was the beginning of The Great Jones Café.

The Great Jones Café was a solution to Phil’s professional desires at the time, but was rooted in a family tradition encouraged by his mother centered on food and sharing it with others. While she was the inspiration for his idea to open the restaurant, she did not approve of it as a career choice, asking him to “please don’t do this.” While the size and state of The Great Jones Café at that time made it a “tiny little dump,” Phil and his friends were determined to make the venture succeed. As they approached the last month before opening, Phil and his colleagues discovered that they had not decided what they were serving in their restaurant, having been

focused on the bar component of the establishment. Inspired by an exciting and adventurous trip to the 1982 NCAA Men's Basketball championship, they decided to serve Cajun food. The Great Jones Café functioned with his partner, Rich Kresberg, a Paul Prudhomme cookbook in the kitchen and Phil behind the bar, and quickly became a sensation in the Village.

Within four months, The Great Jones Café had already become “pretty out of control...kind of a phenomenon.” The restaurant earned high praise in an anonymous review in the Village Voice, which withheld their name as already a ninety minute wait for a table was customary. This success was encouraging, but the Bowery in 1983 was still “pretty scary.” Phil recalls that when closing after four in the morning, he would “literally say a prayer that I made it out alive,” and would walk home in the center of the street to avoid muggers. Phil is careful to point out that the nostalgia for this time in the Village can be powerful, but that as a father of three, he is glad that gentrification has made it safer for children. The Great Jones Café itself was the scene of much raucous and wild behavior, ranging from gun-wielding regulars, to Bill Murray and Dan Akyroyd dancing on tabletops. Phil also recalls the prevalence of cocaine at the time, which led to some dangerous behavior on the part of some customers. This all became much more complicated when Phil's girlfriend at the time, Doris Kornish, got pregnant when Phil was twenty-eight.

The next years of Phil's life were devoted to his new child, Doris, and the completion of his first film, ‘No Picnic.’ The film was shot much more elaborately than most beginner's indie films, and had over 200 cast members and dozens of locations seeking to capture a Village that was quickly vanishing, even in 1985. Seeking capital to complete the film, Phil began to seek out other restaurant ventures that he could expand with. This eventually led him to John Touhey, an investor who had approached Phil in the Great Jones Café, and with Doris Kornish they opened Two Boots Pizza on Avenue A. Two Boots was similar to the Great Jones in that it rapidly became a huge success, as the Village community gradually shifted eastwards.

Two Boots Pizza is a very special place for Phil Hartman, as it has been the center of not only his life for the last 28 years, but also for his children. Phil recalls how they grew up in the restaurant, having birthday parties as children there, musical shows as young adults, and now working there as adults. Although he has always encouraged his children to pursue their own paths, Phil feels that it is “pretty fucking great to be sitting ten feet away from your son and working every day.” Two Boots has grown exponentially from the first location, and now can be found in several states across the country, as well as several locations within New York city. Phil credits the growth of his business to the New York community, and has worked hard to give back to this community fundraising with Two Boots for the Lower East Side School, and for the Lower East Side Girls' Club. Phil also fondly recalls his work creating the HOWL! Festival, an arts and cultural festival that celebrated Village life and work.

Phil ends his interview by reflecting on the Village and how nostalgia can distort the nature of cities as settings for constant change. Phil states that although he has moved out of the Village, he will always love it. He is glad that some of the old Village institutions and ethnic traditions, but he is also glad that a new generation gets to experience the Village, and that they are interested in its history, as his children are. He believes that change is necessary and healthy for the Village, and that instead of complaining about change, people should “create things that make sure it stays true to its history.” He ends by saying “we have the opportunity to create a

legacy every day. Folks who abandon that responsibility are making a mistake. That's our duty. Create a legacy every day."

General Interview Notes:

This is a transcription of an Oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

GVSHP began the East Village Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP East Village Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing East Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

The views expressed by the contributor(s) are solely those of the contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or endorsement of our organization.

Oral History Interview Project

Zapol: —Offices of the Greenwich Village Society. If I can ask you to introduce yourself please?

Hartman: My name is Philip Hartman. I usually go by 'Phil.' There's another Phil Hartman who is out in the world. When you share a name with somebody, it can be a mixed blessing. He happened to be somebody we would like a lot. We would get each other's mail, but he met a very sad end. I'm the only one left now.

Zapol: Can you tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early childhood?

Hartman: I was born on August 14th, 1955. I was born in Brooklyn at Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, which no longer exists. I was probably in Brooklyn for maybe three or four days, and then my family was living in Bayside, Queens, where we lived for six months. The most notable thing that happened there was that I fell down the stairs as a toddler and crashed into the milk bottles, back when they were using milk bottles. The milk bottles shattered all over the floor. My mom was standing at the top of the stairs and looked down at me, screaming, and when I landed she saw me in a pool of milk and broken glass. She loved to tell the story. There I was smiling. She said, 'That sums up your disposition, that even in the broken glass and the milk, you're smiling.' We had lived in Bayside—six months in Bayside. Then we moved to Old Bethpage, which was a new neighborhood out on Long Island on the Nassau-Suffolk border. It was one of those brand new post-war developments. It was an amazing place to grow up. Just the greatest memories.

We lived there until I was eleven. Then we moved closer to the city to Great Neck, which is a very different kind of community. I grew up in a neighborhood that was middle class. My parents were public school teachers. It was very ethnically diverse. Not racially diverse, but ethnically diverse. There were a lot of Italians, a lot of Irish. Then a handful of Jews. They put all the Jews together in one area of the neighborhood. Their explanation was that they thought that we'd be happier living near each other. I don't know what the motivation was exactly, but I always found that interesting.

Then we moved to this new community, Great Neck, which is ninety-eight percent

Jewish. Very high-achieving—a lot of wealthy, powerful people there. That was kind of an uncomfortable place to go through junior high school and high school, but it was close to the city, so that was great. We spent a lot of time in the city. Soon as we could hop on a train and come in.

Well, let's push on. OK. Then I went to college in Princeton, which was a really terrible match for me. I had gone to my interview in Princeton as a joke. We were long-haired, anti-war, anti-everything kind of kids. A friend of mine went down there just to go behind enemy lines. We thought it would be really funny to interview at Princeton, because kids like us went to Columbia or to Yale. Princeton was pretty beautiful. Then I got in, and it's hard to turn down Princeton once they accept you. but it was not a good match for me. By the time I was a junior, I was looking for the college least like Princeton in America. I took a semester abroad at Bard College, which is Upstate New York. All of a sudden, lots of people kind of looked like me and acted like me, which wasn't necessarily so great either. It had a film department there, and I was a film major. I got to study film with Adolfo Meksas who was a really amazing, rich, wonderful character, then went back and finished at Princeton. That's me through age 21. [00:05:00].

Now to backtrack a little bit, because we're talking about the Village. My parents, who were wonderful schoolteachers—very interested in the arts—they would bring me and my sister into the city, and we would go to usually the West Village. My dad's going to be eight-nine. We were just reminiscing the other day about Monte's, which is this restaurant on MacDougal Street. Still there, a few steps down. We would go into Monte's, or we would go to the Olive Tree—I think it's still there actually, on MacDougal Street. Those were just wonderful experiences, the energy in the city and the racial diversity. I've always said if I could go back in time to one place and one time, it would be to the corner of Bleecker and MacDougal in 1961, because I just love the music, and the politics, and the spirit from back then.

I missed that. But we used to go in in the mid-[19]60s. That was my first experience of 'the city', as we called it. I had never been in the East Village until I was in the tenth grade. Then one of my pals, who was a really intellectually curious kind of amazing guy, we took the train in. We were driven to the subway. We took the subway in from Queens. Got off the subway in the West Village and walked across. It was kind of a gray day. I'll never forget this. We had been walking across 8th Street, and we came down and all of a sudden this vista opened up, and it was where the Cube is in Cooper Square. My friend said, 'There it is.' Honestly it looked so gloomy.

It wasn't like walking through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris or something. It was, “Oh, there it is.” The Five Spot was still there, I believe, on the corner. I knew so much about East Village history at that point. I had never been to the Fillmore [East], but I had been hearing about the Fillmore [East], and the yippies, and the Nuyoricans. I probably built it up in a way that couldn't be matched by the initial look, anyway.

We pushed on, and we went to St. Mark's Cinema. We saw a triple feature that day, which included *Gimme Shelter* and *Putney Swope*. I can't remember the third film. It was \$1.50 for three films. The St Mark's Cinema—probably before your time, but it was just an amazing place. The floor was always incredibly sticky. We were never sure what that was down there, but those five or six hours that day watching that triple bill were life-changing for me. Besides, the fact that *Putney Swope* has the funniest opening fifteen minutes of any movie in history. Later on, [Robert] Bob Downey, Sr. became a friend of mine, which I never would have guessed that day, but he's a wonderful guy, and I've gotten to know him.

That was my introduction to the East Village. Over the next few years when I was in high school and college, we would come in all the time. Movies—especially foreign films—concerts in Central Park. Then in the Summer of [19]'74, I was working at a film bookstore called 'Cinemabilia' on 10th between Fifth [Avenue] and Sixth [Avenue]. Kind of famous at the time. Sold not just books but graphics, doodles, posters, stills, scripts—anything related to film. I really wanted to work there, and I got a job my summer after freshman year. That was the Summer of '74.

I was really the odd man out amongst the staff. It turned out that everybody else was a musician. I was the weird Ivy League guy. At Princeton I was the artsy outsider type, but when I was at Cinemabilia, I was this straight, Ivy League guy.

It turns out that the people surrounding me were Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell, Bob Quine, Rob Dupree. Punk rock was born that summer. Terry Ork was the assistant manager of the bookstore, and Terry was the godfather of punk rock. He produced Television's first record, and he helped Patti Smith. Patti Smith came to the store the day she signed her record contract. It was just an unbelievable community to stumble into. It wasn't like I sought it out, but it was just one of those great blessings in life that I happened to be there from the very beginning. [00:10:00.0]

I saw Talking Heads the second time they ever performed. I saw Television and Patti perform at Max's Kansas City that summer. Just amazing, really life-changing.

I wound up going back to Princeton, but I would come in every weekend to go to CBGB's. The most important day of the week was Wednesday when I'd open the *Voice* to see who was playing at CBGB's, and just come in. Talking Heads. Television. Patti. Just amazing. Also, a good buddy of mine who worked at the store with me had a band called The Marbles, which was a second-tier band, but he's remained a really good friend of mine. We like to reminisce about that summer. I continued to work there for a few years. That was my introduction to the East Village.

Zapol: Can you tell me a particular story about a day working there that summer? Or a particularly memorable day?

Hartman: Well, a couple of things stand out. One is I remember the day Bob Quine arrived. Bob Quine was about ten years older than everybody else in the store. I was 18, going on 19. The other guys were 20, 21. This guy walks in who was—I don't know what he was then. Maybe his late 20s. Bald. Glasses. Nobody really knew where he was coming from.

He would say that he played guitar, and no one knew what to make of it at first. But it turned out that he was really one of the great guitar players in rock'n'roll history. He met Richard Hell in the store there and became part of The Voidoids, and then Quine played with Lou Reed. He played with Tom Waits. Bob was really, really special and had some, unfortunately some sad times later on. To be there when those relationships were born was really great.

I was also in the store the day David Bowie came in to do research on his new film, which—I'm not even sure which one it was, so I don't want to misspeak. It might have been *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, but I was put in charge of showing Bowie around the store. Bowie was wearing a blue coat that actually looked like it was made out of human hair—blue hair.

David Bowie was such a gentleman and a charmer. No pretension, no arrogance. Just a little kid's excitement about seeing all the cool stuff we had there. I'm just so lucky to have had those times in that store with those people. Being a film lover, it just deepened my knowledge, my love, my obsession. A lot of time spent in the way, way back when I was supposed to be working, but just reading magazines about Godard and Truffaut. When I talk about a kid in a candy store, I mean I just had access to the greatest stuff in the world there.

Zapol: Can you talk about a particular friendship that developed that summer?

Hartman: Well, as I say, I was a little bit of the outsider there, but I always really liked Richard, and he was breaking up with Television. Well, within a year I guess they had broken up, but I maintained a relationship with Richard over the years and have done some projects together with him. When I had my movie theater, Richard did a curation program there. I've always been a big fan of his, and it's been great to see his evolution from nihilistic rocker to poet and *New York Times* book review critic.

Richard still lives in the neighborhood. I haven't seen him for a while, but he's still here. Then as I said, this guy David Bowler, he was a film guy and became my good friend. We lost touch for about twenty years, and the last six or seven years we've gotten back together again. He actually is a wine importer now. He's one of New York's leading wine importers and supplies wine for my restaurants. It's kind of cool the way the it's come full circle. [00:15:00]

Zapol: That summer were you living in the city, or were you living in Great Neck?

Hartman: No, in Great Neck and taking the train in. All my friends were working as lifeguards—stuff on Long Island—so it was a thrill for them to come and visit me also at the bookstore and to get a little window into my world there.

Zapol: You were about to go on. How did your relationship with the Village then continue after? You continued to work there, then, summers?

Hartman: I worked there summers, and also I would go in on weekends unbeknownst to my family. My senior year, I would come in every weekend, work at the bookstore, crash at my friend's apartment by Columbia [University]. For me at that point, the Village was the Bowery, because I was going to CBGB's. It was all about CBGB's.

I was so into CBGB's and Max's, which was up on Park [Avenue]. That when the next round of clubs opened up, the Mudd Club and Area and Danceteria, I kind of rolled my eyes at them. I was really old school. I'm just old school in general. Even with punk rock clubs, I was old school.

Zapol: So what would that mean in terms of CBGB's, versus these other places?

Hartman: There always seemed to be an authenticity issue with the later clubs. When it changed from punk to new wave, and it went from—Well, when the music changed from being elemental

and raw and it became a little more pop-y, I had mixed feelings.

I actually became vice president of Ork Records. Terry had this big plan that he was going to take over the world. I was his one employee, which meant that I was hauling sheetrock up five flights of stairs to help build his office, but it did give me the opportunity to work in the business a little bit.

For instance, we went to CBGB's one night because we heard a new band was in town from Georgia. It was a Tuesday night, and it was a late set, like eleven [o'clock]. They were absolutely amazing. I'd never seen a man or the woman who was the front person, dance like they did. But on the Tuesday night at CBGB's, at the beginning, it could be rough. A lot of truckers there. They got booed off the stage.

Turns out it was the B-52s. We had to console them when they came off the stage, because it was their big night here in New York. Terry was going to sign them, but it didn't work out. But yeah, that's how far back we went. The B-52s were one of the new bands that we were dealing with. You know what? I still listen to the live Talking Heads record. I think it's the greatest record ever. That music and that culture just really stands up well.

Zapol: When was that that you became VP of Ork Records? How did that happen? Or even just to go through the chronology, you were saying that you spent summers and then weekends working.

Hartman: Yeah, a lot of summers and weekends. Then when I graduated from Princeton as a film major—it didn't even have a film department. I had to create my own major there. I graduated from Princeton. I worked at Cinemabilia that summer. But I said, I gotta go to the place least like Princeton in America. I threw my backpack on, got on a bus in September with my mom weeping, "Can't you just stay for Rosh Hashanah?" [00:20:01]

I said, "No, I gotta go now," and got on a bus late at night and woke up in the morning as the bus pulled into Akron, Ohio. I had this idea in my head, because Akron was known as 'the armpit of America' at that point. I had this idea in my head, this is going to be the antidote to Princeton. I just got off the bus in Akron, looked for the nearest community anti-war center, plunked my backpack down and said, 'Hey, I'm new in town. Does anybody know a place to crash?'

This really great German woman took me in and gave me a place to live. Then I settled

in. I found an apartment. I found a job in a deli, slicing pastrami and corned beef. I just wrote and kind of eradicated the Ivy League experience as much as I could.

What I wrote, my first screenplay, was a punk rock detective story that was kind of based on Television and took place in Long Island City back when Long Island City was super gritty and nobody stopped in Long Island City. Just rushed through. It took place in Long Island City and on the Bowery.

I began work on that there. Eventually, I came back to New York. I sold that script to a producer at Warner Brothers—kind of skipping way ahead here, but I sold that script to a producer at Warner Brothers who had the bright idea—He was a very sweet guy. I love him, but his idea was to bring in a band to star in the film. His idea was that it should be either The Doobie Brothers or Fleetwood Mac.

No. That's not right. I worked for Warner Brothers for—I sold maybe four scripts to them, but they had just a different idea about what to do with them. None of them got made into films. They would option them. They always liked to have one alternative kind of weird dude in the stable, and so I provided that function for them. It was very frustrating. I eventually said, “Listen, I don't want to write for money anymore. I'm going to open a restaurant with my friend to support ourselves,”—to support myself—“and then I can write whatever I want.” That's pushing the story forward a little bit, but it turned out that restaurant that I opened was literally a stone's throw from CBGB's. It all kind of tied together right there.

Zapol: Where was the seed of that idea, of the restaurant?

Hartman: Well, listen. My mom is a Jewish mother and liked to cook, liked to feed, liked to eat. I definitely grew up in a house that appreciated food. I always had a thing about restaurants. It's funny. I was with my dad the other day. We were reminiscing about the restaurants of my childhood. Going out to eat for us only meant going to an Italian restaurant. There was no other thing. There was no Thai, no Japanese. Chinese was for takeout only.

Going out to eat meant going to an Italian restaurant. We had the funky neighborhood place. We had the kind of like Mad Men bar pizzeria place. Then we had the fancy place with the fountains. That was the only differentiation was what level of Italian we were going to. But going out to eat meant getting Italian food.

I've always had a thing about restaurants. I love feeding people. I love sharing food. All

that came pretty naturally. As it turned out, my best friend from high school was in the restaurant business and wanted to open his own place. At this point—and this is pushing ahead to when I was twenty-seven, I guess—I encouraged him to make a phone call about my favorite bar that had closed down. It had been dark for a while.

I said, “You want to open your own place. Find out if this is available.” We made an appointment with the landlord. We were living in Bridgehampton at the time. As we're driving in, he turned to me and said, “Listen, why don't you help me get it started?” I was working as a screenwriter, but as I said, it was not a financially or karmically satisfying existence. [00:25:01]

He said, “Why don't you help me get it started?” At that point, we went over a tremendous pothole. We were both [makes sound, ‘boop’]. I remember flying up in the air. It was right by LeFrak City on the L.I.E. [Long Island Expressway]. I turned to him and said, “Yeah.” Getting it started, I never anticipated it would lead to thirty-two years in the restaurant business. That place was the Great Jones Café, if you know it. It's still there thirty-two years later. We sold it to some customers of ours, and they've kept it exactly the same. It's a museum of 1983 when we started it—started building it in 1982—when we opened.

We were pretty naïve. We wanted to open a place. I lived on Elizabeth and Houston, so the Great Jones was two blocks from my house. My friend had experience in the restaurant business, but it was a tiny little dump. When I brought my mother there, just at the bus station when I got on the bus for Akron, she wept. She said, “Please don't do this.”

The Jones is tiny. We're in a conference room here. The Jones' dining room is as big as this conference room. We were about a month away from opening, and we didn't even have a menu yet. It never even occurred to us that we needed to decide what kind of food we were going to serve. It was going to be a bar. We knew it was going to be casual. We knew there would be burgers. But what else were we going to do?

Well, we're also huge college basketball fans. We had just been down to New Orleans for the NCAA tournament. If you know anything about basketball, but there's a big tournament every year, March Madness. We love to play basketball, watch basketball, eat basketball.

We went to New Orleans with my high school buddies. It was the year that Michael Jordan hit the shot. Michael Jordan became Michael Jordan that night. Of course we had snuck down, and we were in the front row. The whole thing was just an amazing experience. We walked down Bourbon Street with Michael Jordan after the game and fell in love with New

Orleans.

When it came to decide what to serve at the Great Jones Café, we looked at each other and said, 'Well, what about doing Cajun food?' Nobody was doing it in New York at that point. I stood up on a chair the day before we opened, and I wrote the menu by hand in magic marker on the wall. There were no menus to hand out to people. I wrote it on the wall. Rich went into the kitchen with Paul Prudhomme's cookbook. Prudhomme was the first famous chef down there.

Literally, I tended bar. Rich sat in the kitchen with a cookbook in front of him, and we had friends who were waitressing. That was it. There was no dishwasher even at the beginning. Somebody would order shrimp and andouille gumbo, and Rich would flip the pages in the back, and then he'd make it. He's really good at following recipes. The food kicked ass. Eventually we could hire somebody to do the cooking, but it was totally hands-on.

The bar top had been covered with, I don't know, a half inch of soot over the years, so we had a sandpaper party. All of our friends came in, they all got a square of sandpaper, and we hand-sanded down the bar. That took a couple of days. Everything in that place was done by us. I've opened a lot of restaurants at this point. Still a lot of hands-on stuff, but there's something about your first place when your friends are chipping in.

That place, everybody thinks of it as an instant success, but just like everything, it's not always so instant. That first summer we were open, we would pay our friends to come in and sit at the bar, just because there was nobody in there. We just needed the place to feel like something was going on. When I say 'paid them,' I mean give them free drinks.

It caught on pretty quickly. By the fall—we opened in June of [19]83 —by the fall it was pretty out of control. Again, this was before your time, but the Jones was kind of a phenomenon. Even before the reviews came out, there would be an hour and a half wait. The place only sat twenty-four, and it would be, I don't know, sixty or seventy people waiting outside. You do the math. They're three turns down the road. [00:30:00]

People just loved hanging out there. I mean people loved the wait more than they loved the food, I think. Then the reviews came out. *The Village Voice* review refused to give the name or address of the restaurant, because they didn't want to ruin it. It was really amazing, it was such a beautiful review. It was a pretty wild time, you know? It's the early [19]80s in New York on the Bowery. It was pretty wild.

I was the bartender, so I would close every night. I would lock the door as I left with my

back to the street at 4:30 in the morning. I literally would say a prayer that I made it out alive. Because the crack epidemic was just beginning. AIDS was beginning. New York in the late [19]70s and early '80s was—We would romanticize it, but it was pretty scary. I would often walk home, I was living on Tenth [Avenue] between 1st [Street] and 8th [Street]. I would often walk home in the middle of the street—literally down the middle of the street—so that I would avoid anybody jumping out from a stairway or an alleyway. It was pretty challenging.

Zapol: Did anything ever happen to you?

Hartman: Thank god, no. I was pretty lucky. And listen: we all kind of miss the old days, but I also raised three kids in this neighborhood. As a parent, you've got to be pretty happy that the neighborhood has changed and is safer now. I always count my blessings that my kids got to grow up in a—even though they kind of are wistful about what they missed, at least they've been safe. So far, anyway. I'm knocking on wood. I don't think you can hear that.

Zapol: Tell me about that wild time at the Great Jones. What were perhaps some memorable moments there, some memorable evenings? How can you characterize some of the wild times?

Hartman: Well, really it was kind of a Wild West saloon with all the good and bad that that conjures up. The wild times kind of varied from both ends of the spectrum. On one end there was the night that Bill Murray and Dan Akroyd came in and were dancing on tabletops. There was a lot of intense celebrity stuff going on.

But this is the Bowery. This is a super funky joint. Everybody got treated the same, but so there's stuff like that going on. Then there were the hardcore regulars who could get pretty scary. There was a night that Mohammed, who was a Middle Eastern prince, pulled a gun and put a couple of bullets in the ceiling in the place. There's nothing like getting a call at home from your employee saying, "He's got a gun. What do we do?" Not cool.

There was a lot of scary stuff like that. There was one of our regulars [that] took a bottle, broke it on the bar, leapt over the bar and trapped the staff in the kitchen, threatened them with the end of the broken bottle. There's a lot of substance abuse going on.

I mean there was so much coke. Are my kids going to hear this by the way? There's so much coke in this place that customers would, as part of the routine, would give me a vial when they came in. It was like shaking hands. They'd give me a vial. I actually got to the point where I

would take it, and I would pour a little bit down the toilet and then hand it back to them, just so they would think that I had done some, and I hadn't insulted them. [00:35:00]

Coke is a fucked up drug. It drives people to behavioral extremes that I got to see up-close. By the second year, we were open there in the peak of the Wild West-ness. My girlfriend, who also worked there with me, was a big part of the place's success. Her name was Doris Kornish. She got pregnant and had a baby in the midst of all this craziness. No one else was having babies at that age. She got pregnant when I was 28. It was pretty out of the box. It was hard for everybody in that community to deal with because all of a sudden, in the midst of all this, whatever—gun shots, drug taking—there's a big woman with an eight month pregnant belly in the midst of everyone.

We really had to chill out. In the summer of [19]85—this is two years in—I finally got to make my own movie. The movie was called 'No Picnic'. It featured a lot of people who hung out at the Jones. We shot some of it in the Jones, but it was a portrait of the East Village, and the change in the East Village. This was '85. Already in '85, we were lamenting, "Look what's going on here. We don't even recognize our own neighborhood."

You can imagine how we feel now thirty years later. But this was in 1985. We shot it in July in the hottest, stinkiest locations. It was very satisfying, though, because I had been writing commercially for all those years, and the scripts had gotten twisted into things I couldn't always recognize. This was a chance to write my own script, shoot it myself, use my friends. There were some professional actors in it, but it's got an enormous cast.

Most people, when they make their indie debuts, they shoot it in their parents' house with three or four people. This had, I don't know, eighty locations and two hundred people in the cast. I just felt like we needed that to present a cross-section of the neighborhood. It was about gentrification. It was about rent strikes. It was about rock 'n roll.

Looking at it now, it's very poignant, because so many of the things in it have disappeared. Even at that point in '85 there's a shot outside of the St. Mark's Cinema with the marquee dark because it had already closed. We were already crying about that then. There's been a lot more to cry about since then.

I'd been living in the East Village at that point since [19]80, and hanging out since [19]74. I already at that point had considered it home. Doris was one of the most active folks at CHARAS [Chino, Humberto, Angelo, Roy, Anthony and Sal, Incorporated], which is the

community cultural organization that was in El Bohio. Chino, who we've talked about, was one of the names in the acronym that comprised CHARAS. He ran the film program there with other friends of ours—Kevin Duggan and Matthew Sieg.

The film program at CHARAS was an amazing ongoing institution that presented indie films, indie filmmakers—often from the neighborhood, but I mean John Sayles and Spike Lee. This is Spike Lee with his student film. She brought a lot of amazing people in. Some of the programs were thematic. We were very involved with the CHARAS community, and we had our production office for *No Picnic* in CHARAS. We shot a key scene in one of the rooms in CHARAS. We transformed the building.

My child's third birthday party, I think, was in CHARAS. That's a whole other story, the saga that's gone on there. But stayed really close with Chino and a lot of the other people from there. [0:40:00.0]

Anyway, we shot this movie in the summer of '85 and tried to capture as much we could. It was shot in black and white. It's pretty beautiful. The guy who shot it is named Peter Hutton. I had met him through Doris at Films CHARAS. Peter went on to be the Head of the Bard College Film Department. He's a very acclaimed art filmmaker that shows in museums all over the world, but this was the first feature he ever shot.

We shot the film that summer. It captured as much of the neighborhood as we could. Avoided getting shot at on certain blocks, which wasn't easy. Nobody got hurt and [we] had this raw footage, which looked really good. Wim Wenders' producer saw it and came in as an executive producer and provided some finishing money. But we still didn't have enough money to finish the film.

We sat on Avenue A, Doris and I, and on the back of a napkin at Sidewalk Café, figured out how much money we needed to finish the film, how much we were getting from Gray City [phonetic] [00:41:11]. It wasn't enough. We had been editing for a while and realized we needed more money. One day a total stranger came into the Great Jones and said, "Listen, I hear you've got a great place. I've always wanted to open my own restaurant. I've got some money. I don't want to spend it on cars or jewelry or a yacht, but I want to have a restaurant. I bought a lease on space on Avenue A. Would you come look at it and let me know if you're interested?"

Because of the success of the Great Jones, my partner and I had wanted to open another place. We had tried to do it at the corner of 2nd [Street] and [Avenue A], which was an old bar

called The Scorpion. We didn't get it, somebody else got it. As it turns out, talking about neighborhood and New York City cultural history, the guy that did get it was called Mike Swier. He had a partner, but Mike—who we know as 'Big Mike'—opened 2A, which is still there to this day, then opened Mercury Lounge, then opened Bowery Ballroom. Then the company blew up, and they start Williamsburg Music Hall. They present concerts and festivals all over the country.

If he hadn't gotten that bar, who knows? We didn't get it, but I love the fact that Mike got it and has created these institutions that had been so important to the community. He wound up splitting up with his company once it got big, and maybe you'll talk to him sometime and hear about that. He just opened his own club out of L.A. with one of my two good partners. We went out for the opening last week. Saw Spoon at the opening night, and I just love that.

It's all come around. He's in L.A. now. We have a couple of places in L.A. OK.

That didn't work out, the place at Two A. Then we tried to get another place. It was on 5th [Street] between A and B. Actually. We thought we had gotten it. We opened a bottle of champagne on the stoop and toasted. It fell through at the last minute. That turned out to be the place where Sophie's was reborn. Sophie's is this amazing East Village institution where—I have three kids, each one of them did all their drinking as teenagers in there, so if we had gotten it, they wouldn't have had Sophie's. I love that we didn't get it, but Sophie's—and Sophie's is still there.

These are the two greatest East Village—or two of the greatest East Village bars, Two A and Sophie's.

When I went to my partner and I said, “Listen, do you want to look at this space? And maybe this will work out and we'll get to open another place together,” he said no. He said, “I'm through,” because those places had fallen through. He didn't really like living in New York. The Jones was just enough for him at that point. He said, “I'm really not interested.” He's still my best friend, by the way. Thirty years later.

I went to Doris, who was my girlfriend at the time, and I said, “Well, are you interested in coming aboard as a partner?” She said, “Yeah.” We went over together and looked at it with this stranger—his name was John Touhey. It was a place called maybe ‘Southern Style’—I'm kind of spacing now. It was a soul food restaurant on A between 2nd and 3rd. It had been closed for a while. It was the Red Lantern many years before, which is a famous neighborhood coffee shop from the 1930s. [00:45:00]

We said, “OK, well, this could work.” We started getting to know this stranger, John, and starting batting around ideas. Doris and I loved pizza. We used to go to a place around the corner from here, which was a place that the poets from the Poetry Project used to hang out at. It's called the Orchidia, and it was an Eastern European pizza joint. I'm not sure if they were Ukrainian or Polish.

It was just a very quirky place. We'd get pilsner beer and pizza there. We said, “Hey, what if we combined pizza and beer with Cajun food? Because we know Cajun food,” not really knowing that there was a big Italian Creole community in Louisiana. We started developing this idea. We took a trip down to New Orleans with John, his wife and kid. We had a child almost the same age at this point.

We really wanted to have a family place, because at that point—this is the fall of [19]86, so my son was two. I just couldn't be working until 5:30 in the morning, praying I was going to get home alive much longer. We evolved this idea, “Let's combine Cajun and Italian. Let's make it family oriented. We'll make enough money to finish our film.”

The deal we made was to get \$25,000 up front, and a piece of the business. Our deal was to help John get this place started. We committed to six months. We got the money. We finished our film. It won Best Cinematography Award in Sundance. We opened Two Boots in the spring of 1987. June 24th.

Again, people think “Oh, it was an immediate success.” Well, we had a big party on Thursday night when we opened. Friday was our first regular night opened. There wasn't one customer in the place because Avenue A between 2nd and 3rd back then, you had no reason to be there if you were not buying drugs. I mean, no reason. There was only one restaurant within five blocks at that point, and it was a place called Hy and Lil's. It was a little Latino coffee shop there.

But if you're coming down there you're coming to score on 2nd between A and B or on the corner of 2nd and B. Nobody there on Friday night, even though I had a successful restaurant already. You've got to understand Avenue A was on the edge of the wilderness at that point.

The first few weeks were kind of touch and go. The pizza we served at the beginning was awful. We were using the wrong flour. You'd think we would know what we were doing. We didn't know what we were doing.

We had a couple of great employees there. In particular our manager from the Great

Jones who had come over with us, she was a New Orleans—excuse me—a Louisianian from Monroe and an incredible food person. She became our manager there. We had a young kid making pizza. Her name was Lynn Loflin. I just wanted to get her on the record here.

We had a young kid making pizza named Santo Fazio who was a struggling actor, but just like an old school, from-the-neighborhood kind of guy and was good-looking, charismatic. The pizza station was out in the dining room, so he was part of the show there. You know how it is. Whether it's a restaurant or a movie, sometimes it all clicks. Sometimes it doesn't. Well, it just totally clicked, Two Boots.

It was a full service restaurant. No slices of pizza, no delivery. It was just like a small beer-and-wine bar, but a good-sized dining room. Beautiful lighting in there. Everybody looked good. It was the kind of place where Ukrainian grandmothers would be sitting at one booth, a punk band in Mohawks would be at the next booth, some Wall Street guys who had heard about it would be at the next booth. Everybody just felt comfortable. There was no airs. No bullshit.

[00:50:00]

Pretty quickly it took off. The six months turned into, well, it's been 28 years now. I like to say that every day I have woken up asking myself, “Should I be making pizza? Should I be making movies? Movies? Pizza? Movies? Pizza? Movies?”

I've made two films. I've made another film after that. I've written screenplays. But ultimately I just felt like Two Boots could reach the most people and do the most good, even if maybe writing screenplays or directing films would have been more satisfying for me personally on some level, as far as contributing to the world—and trust me, I've thought about this endlessly—I just feel there's no comparison that what Two Boots has been able to do and will continue to do, is pretty special.

Zapol: So talk to me more about the evolution of that community around Two Boots from being, as you said, ‘at the edge of the wilderness’ to kind of being a center of its own.

Hartman: Yeah. Well, eventually you had two reasons to walk down Avenue A. One was to score drugs, and the other was to come to Two Boots. But literally I could look out the window or step out the door and look up and down the block, and if I saw somebody from five blocks away heading in our direction, I knew they were coming to Two Boots, because there was really nothing else down there.

Back then it was the kids' furniture and clothing district. A lot of the districts in New York have been lost over the years, or they've moved out to the boroughs. But this was amazing. It was a furniture, toy and clothing district, and they were all closed up at night. At night we were it.

The Jones had been a gathering place for a lot of the indie film community and indie rock community. Two Boots inherited a good bit of that. The community was coming further and further east. When I got my first apartment—well, my first apartment in the East Village was on St. Mark's Place between 2nd and 3rd. But a little while later I had an apartment on 9th between First and A. It was on the south side of the street. It was a sublet. The sublettor, when she handed me the keys, said, “I want to just be clear. When you walk out the door, never turn right. Always turn left.”

Avenue A was off limits at that point as far as she was concerned. Now look, she was kind of straight. But there was a feeling amongst a lot of people that it was kind of no man's land over there. Gradually the community started gravitating east, and I was living on 10th between First and A at that point in Doris' apartment.

We were raising a kid in the neighborhood. Right at the beginning, before we opened Two Boots, we put on the window and hand painted, “Children Welcome.” People used to laugh at that, saying, “Children Welcome? There are no children in the East Village.” We had one. That was ours. At the beginning there were not a lot of kids. We had our own little community with a lot of single moms who had kids, but over the years that changed, and it became a sanctuary for people with kids.

We had these stools that we had inherited from the original Red Lantern, and you could spin on them. The kids used to come and put their bellies on them and spin around on the stools. For a lot of kids—I've heard this over the decades—those memories are really important in their childhood, spinning on the Two Boots stools. In fact, Jonathan Demme's kid spinned off the Two Boots stool and almost cracked her head open. I always imagined the headline in the *Post*, ‘Silence of the Lambs Director’s Kid Splits Her Head Open.’ [at Two Boots!]

It was great to have a place that families could come. I think it became a little overwhelming for some people that there were so many kids there. It kind of became so out of control, but who knew at the beginning that the community would change like that. No, we were happy to be in the vanguard of that, because we were just starting our own family at that point

and then had a second child and a third. They kind of grew up in the restaurant and had birthdays there. We became more and more kid friendly. That's become a big part of Two Boots' culture ever since. [00:56:00]

Zapol: Talk to me about that, about having a family business in that way. What kind of responsibilities did your partner and children have in the restaurant itself?

Hartman: Well, first of all it's funny because I just came from a staff meeting at Two Boots headquarters, which trust me, is very, very funky. When you hear the word 'headquarters,' just understand it's pretty casual. We have a conference table like the one we're sitting at right now. Anyway, we just had a meeting there. My son now is working with me. I walk into the meeting and for the first time ever—this just happened an hour ago—he was seated at the head of the table, because he was running this meeting, and he made a statement that he was filling that chair. I found that pretty cool.

He's thirty now. Two Boots is twenty-eight. He's been in it for his whole life. That's meant many different things, because we had a video store where we worked, we had a movie theater, we've had full-serve restaurants, we've had bars, we've had live music venues, we've had pizza joints. Two Boots has meant a lot of different things and meant a lot of different things to my kids, but they have hung out there. They've celebrated events there. They've had their own events there. They've later on thrown their own parties there. They've booked music at them. They're all musicians, so they've done a lot of their own music events there.

They've all worked there on and off. Doris, their mom, also worked with me for many years, up until 2005. Now my son, after doing a lot of different things, he, as I said, is a musician. He's a writer. He's a film guy. But over the last couple of years he's been with me more and more. Now he feels maybe he wants to stick with it. I'm good with whatever. I've certainly encouraged him on his own path, but it's led him back to Two Boots now, and it's pretty fucking great to be sitting ten feet away from your son and working every day.

We have a great time together. We just got back from California, and listen, we butt heads. He's really his own man, which has been wonderful to see. He also gets it in a way that—I've got a lot of long-term employees who've been with me twenty, twenty-five, twenty-eight years, but obviously there's something special about the way you son's going to get it. It's not just that he's going to carry on the tradition. He's going to reinterpret it his own way. That's what

excites me.

Zapol: So in this conversation, it's clear that Two Boots has grown in many ways. Just talk to me about that transition, maybe just from one to several Two Boots. How that happened.

Hartman: I meet people all the time who are opening a restaurant. I just met somebody on Avenue A the other day. It was the second day they were open. I went in, introduced myself, wished them luck. One of the first things they said to me was, “Yeah, this is a chain.” I said, “What do you mean, it's a chain?” They said, “Well, this is our first place, but it's going to be a chain. This is just a prototype, and then we're going to do lots more.” I'm like, “It's your second day.”

First of all, I hate the word 'chain.' I don't even call our place a chain. But just do a place; make it great. Worry about that. Then if, god bless, you if you can grow it, and it's appropriate, grow it. There was never any plan. There's never been any plan for anything, let me tell you that. Kids, restaurants, movies—no plans. **[01:00:00]**

I've got a lot of passions, which lead to a lot of projects. I'm a project junky, so I can never get enough new projects. But there's no big chart on my wall that's saying, we're going to open this place here, and I'm going to make this movie then and have another baby here. It's just been improvised, let's say.

Two Boots was busy right off the bat. I mean crazy busy. We didn't serve slices of pizza. We didn't do delivery. We had to do something, because it was just out of control. We didn't even know that pizza was going to be the thing at Two Boots. We served a full menu of Cajun food, but quickly it became all about the pizza.

We opened a little place across the street, just to catch the overflow. Do slices and do delivery. It took us two years to open that place. Then our original partner John was moving to Park Slope from the East Village, and he wanted to have his own place. He asked our permission, because it was our intellectual property. We're the ones who created it with his money.

That's the other thing. We owned a tiny piece of Two Boots at the beginning. He gave us cash to finish our film. We owned a tiny piece. But John's a great guy. He really appreciated that it was our idea and all our work. John was a real estate developer and definitely made his own contributions to the spirit of the place, but it was all Doris and I. There could have been a battle

about who owned the concept, but he was just a great guy, and said, “I know you created this. I would like to open a place of my own in Brooklyn.”

We helped him do that. We traded a piece of this for a piece of that. He had great success with Two Boots in Brooklyn, which was there for twenty-four years and a really big part of the Park Slope community. Then Two Boots became ours. We gradually opened a branch on Bleecker Street, which was the next neighborhood over. Then we moved to the next neighborhood over in the West Village—but gradually. We were doing it once every three years, because we were still, Doris was running her film program, and I made one movie and then I was writing other scripts. I made another movie in '95. She made a documentary.

It wasn't just all about the restaurants. We opened them really incrementally—not like boom-boom-boom-boom, “We're creating a chain.” Honestly we opened them self-consciously, also. It was, we don't want to seem like we're trying to take over the world or the neighborhood. It was always a little bit of mixed emotions that we grew. We tried to manage the growth conservatively.

The other thing about growing a business is that you want to provide opportunities for your employees. Each time you grow, you open up a whole vista for the employees. Somebody who was a pizza man now can step up and become an assistant manager. The assistant manager now maybe wants to run their own place. It becomes really important for the staff morale to be part of something that has a future, and they're not just going to be stuck in the same position.

That was always one of our motivations to grow. Also we were having more kids. Honestly, it's expensive to have kids in New York. There weren't community schools in our neighborhood like there are now. We helped start the Lower East Side School, which was on Avenue D and Houston. That was the first community-based school. That was in [19]87 maybe? [19]88? But we ended up putting our kids in private school, which I have very, very mixed feelings about. I'm a child of public school teachers. My aunts and uncles were all public school teachers, and my sister is a public school teacher.

The kids going to private schools put other financial demands on us. Anyway, we opened in the West Village and then had the opportunity to cross 14th Street, which, for all downtown people, is a major trepidation. We were approached by Grand Central. They were totally redoing Grand Central. They wanted to make it the cream of New York. They wanted us to come in as this subversive downtown component. [01:05:00]

We built a Boots Grand Central, which was a huge leap from our little funky downtown store. It was an enormous expense. It took three years to get it open. That was a real turning point for us, because it gave us exposure that we never had before. Now we have seventeen locations. We're in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Upstate, Baltimore, Nashville and two stores in L.A.

Look, I don't know how deep we want to go into this, but Two Boots is a beautiful thing. It's been really successful. It's been fortunate to be able to give a lot back to the community. It's not the icing on the cake. The 'cake' is our relationship with the community. But it's not easy. We've done it all mom-and-pop style. It's not like we had big investors or we've had investment bankers supporting us. It's been done super DIY, mom-and-pop.

We're not MBAs [Masters of Business Administration], so we've done this all kind of flying by the seat of our pants. There have been missteps. I tell my kids, "If you don't want to strike out once in a while, don't step up to the plate. But if you're going to get in the batter's box, you've got to accept the fact that once in a while you're going to strike out." You're going to hit some homers. Baseball explains everything. You try to learn from your mistakes and not make the same mistake again.

I mean the one constant has been our commitment to the community. There've been times when I've been almost too focused on that and have let kind of the business take a back seat to it. I'm trying to create a little bit better balance these days. But I love our partnership with this organization. There's probably, I don't know, forty or fifty organizations that we work with on and off, but there is maybe half a dozen that we've had especially close and ongoing and fruitful symbiotic kinds of relationships with. GVSHP [Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation] is definitely one of them.

Zapol: Can you talk about a particular event or moment in which you felt like you were having this wonderful relationship with the community—the ways in which you like to give to the community?

Hartman: Well, first of all this is a very unusual community. It's amazing. It's rebellious. Its iconoclasm has such deep and profound roots, which is part of the great joy of being here and being part of it and also can be part of the challenge of being part of it.

Let's see. Just recently we had a really beautiful event. We throw a Mardi Gras party

every year, which is part of obviously our Two Boots culture. We do it as a benefit for the Lower East Side Girls' Club, which is an amazing organization. It's a lot of fun. Live music. Dancing. Celebrity King and Queen. We've had Susan Sarandon and Cyndi Lauper and Judith Malina and Taylor Mead, Quest Love, Jonathan Ames.

We've had a bunch of cool people who have helped us raise money. We've raised over \$100,000. The Girls' Club took that money and, they built a \$23 million headquarters on Avenue D, which is out of this world. But they used some of our money to put in an industrial kitchen into the building. We've created the Two Boots Pizza Academy in their building, and we just graduated our first class from the Academy. **[01:10:00]**

There were six women in it. Four of them were moms, and two of them were teenagers who go to the Girls' Club. We created a curriculum, so it was four weeks in the Girls' Club in the kitchen there. It was about pizza-making, but it was really about everything. It was about kitchen skills in general. It was about hygiene. It was about what it takes to find a job, get a job, keep a job. It covered resume writing, what to wear at your job interview, how to do a job interview, how much makeup to put on. I really wanted them to be prepared for anything and everything.

Then they spent four weeks in an externship at a branch of Two Boots. These women were so great. They loved it so much that I couldn't even get them out of there. "Can we stay an extra hour? Two hours?" We just graduated them. I've got to tell you there were a lot of tears flowing that day. The Girls' Club put together a beautiful graduation ceremony, so there was live music. There was a chorus. There were probably a hundred, one hundred and twenty people in the audience. All their families were there. [There were] a lot of speeches, and each of the women spoke about their experience and how momentous it was for them. It wasn't until the organist starting playing whatever the graduation song is called—[hums "Pomp and Circumstance"] a-dadada-da-dum—like I'm weeping, and I'm thinking, for most of these women, no one has ever played that song for them. They haven't graduated from anything. There was such a sense of accomplishment that they had made it through this program. That was the most important thing that came out of it—a sense of 'I can do this.'

A couple of them were looking at their grandkids and kids in the crowd, and they were like, "Maybe you didn't believe I could do this," because a couple of the women have had really difficult times in their lives. For them to prove to their families that they could do this, it's really amazing. I gave each of them a free pizza card for a year. Except for one of them I didn't give

the card to, because she got something better. She got a job.

This seventeen-year-old girl, she's never had a job in her life. She's now working at Two Boots. That's really the best outcome. I didn't know how this was going to go at all. I didn't know if these six women would make it all the way through, but I had hoped one of them would qualify for a job. One of them did. If you're down on Avenue A, you can see Jennifer down there. It's awesome.

OK, so that's a recent program we did with the neighborhood. We do the Plaque Ceremony with GVSHP where we commemorate an important cultural site. We don't just hang a plaque there. We have an event with poetry reading or live music. The last one we did was at the Fillmore [East] East. Lenny Kaye, who's one of my pals—heroes, actually, more than a pal—who's Patti Smith's longtime guitarist and soul mate. Lenny came with his guitar and rewrote one of his songs, sticking Fillmore [East] lyrics into the song. My son jammed with them on violin on the sidewalk on Second Avenue and 7th Street, in front of a really great crowd of people, standing in the rain under umbrellas.

We unveiled the plaque. Lenny sang. We delivered pizza. It was just beautiful. We do that twice a year with you guys. I mean we have a zillion other things, but I also did this big arts festival. Started it twelve years ago, the HOWL! Festival, which was a celebration of the East Village culture. We had three fabulous years in Tompkins Square Park. It carried on for a bunch of years after that, but super ambitious and very challenging. [01:15:00]

The goal was to bring together all the arts organizations and all the artists in the community and to kind of stave off the final homogenization of the neighborhood. We probably bit off more than we could chew. But did a lot of amazing things. We had two hundred events and a thousand artists involved. To this day people come up to me and say, “Yeah, I met so and so.” Well, half the people at the Girls' Club met through the HOWL! Festival. Reverend Billy now is part of the Girls' Club. Oh, Beck Underwood, this animator. Laurie Olinder, who did our posters.

The Girls' Club has gathered a lot of the elements of the HOWL! Community under one roof over there.

Zapol: I'm mindful of the time, and I know we're getting close. It's 1:48 now. As you talk about the homogenization of the area, what do you feel like are some of the challenges that you're kind of dealing with in terms of the Village? What are your hopes for the future of the Village—also

your position in respect to some of these challenges?

Hartman: I moved out four months ago, after thirty-four years in the neighborhood. Six years around the neighborhood before that. I'm not one of those people who left saying, "Oh, I can't believe how it's changed," and, "Those freaking yuppies. I can't take it anymore." I love the East Village. I will always love the East Village. I love the physique of the East Village [in] the way a man or a woman would look at another man or woman and love their body.

I love the East Village's body. I love the regularity of the cornices at the top of the tenements on the side streets. I love the scale of the East Village in general. I love the brick of the East Village. I love the trees of the East Village. I love the grid of the East Village. I love the history of the East Village. I love walking down the street knowing that Ed Sanders walked down that street, or that Allen Ginsburg sat under this tree. Or that Jack Kerouac was photographed in front of this fence.

I love the fact that those projects on Avenue D are not going anywhere, no matter how many folks in the community have been forced out over the years. I'm not saying that that's the greatest housing, but it has ensured the diversity of the neighborhood. I used to always say that when Joselito's, this restaurant on Avenue C and 6th Street, I said, "When they go, when that place leaves the neighborhood, I'm out of here." They actually moved, but they're still in the neighborhood.

I love the little Latin restaurants in the neighborhood. People always ask me, "What are your favorite restaurants?" My favorite restaurants are not in the Zagat book. They're not on Yelp. They're like Rossy's on 3rd between B and C. They're Casa Adela on C between 4th and 5th. Oh my god, there's just nothing I like better than that.

Also let me just pipe in, I also love the Eastern European community here. Tom Birchard from, or Birchard, from Veselka is a good friend of mine. I love Stage, which is a little lunch counter that is on Second Avenue. I've said that enough times. I love the East Village. Listen, it's changed. I make fun of the girls from Murray Hill who come down for the bottomless brunches right by my office on B and 3rd every weekend and throw up in my gutter. But this is New York, and neighborhoods change. If they didn't change, how awful would that be? I've spent some time in Europe and talked to young people there, and a lot of them grew up feeling imprisoned in the neighborhoods because there's so much history, so much tradition. "Things never change," they complain. That's why they love New York and the United States. [01:20:00]

This is just part of what a city is. It's not going to stay exactly the same, but one of my jobs is to keep the history of the community alive. Support artists. Be a loud voice that speaks to the memory that's baked into the sidewalks and the street corners here. I moved out of the neighborhood, but it was more because my ex-wife was living around the corner, and also, I wanted to see some new things. I wanted to wake up in the morning and not have so much history in every step I took.

It's almost all great history, but I was looking for some new history. I'm living in East Williamsburg now in the old Italian neighborhood. Oh my god, it's awesome. But my office is still on 3rd between A and B. I'm here every day. I had a goodbye party when I left, but it wasn't like I'm breaking up with the East Village. It's like, "I still love you, but we're just taking some time apart."

Who knows. I might even move back eventually, but I'm optimistic about the future here. I'm not like, 'It's over.' It's never over. It's just part of the healthy evolution. It's our duty not to evacuate and make sure that—My kids, three kids born and raised in the Lower East Side, they're all living in Brooklyn now, but they've been so inundated with the counterculture.

I was just telling you before my daughter is actually doing an oral history interview of a great East Village personality today. My kids love the neighborhood as much as I do. Hopefully their kids will, too.

Zapol: Thank you. Thank you for your time today. I want to see if there's anything that I haven't asked you that you wanted to share today?

Hartman: Well, I will add that I think it's important to create institutions that can keep the spirit of the East Village alive. It can be a nonprofit like this. It can be a restaurant like Two Boots. Two Boots was born in the East Village. We're all over the country now. I really do think we'll be all over the world eventually, but we're spreading the East Village gospel wherever we go. I think it's important to create institutions and institutions right here in the neighborhood. That's been a mission for me. I'm really proud [that] the Great Jones is still alive thirty-two years later. Two Boot is still here.

I started the East Village Softball Association, which is now in its eighteenth year, I think. I think there's nowhere where you could see the evolution of the East Village any more vividly than in the East Village Softball Association, which, in its beginnings, was a bunch of

renegade artists and drunkards, and getting people to wake up at one in the afternoon for a game was challenging.

I remember pitching to a guy who—a guy, this is, who wore nothing but a thong when he was at bat. It was like there were no rules. The running joke used to be that there was drug testing in the league, but you had to test positive to be able to play in the league. This was in the late [19]90s we started. Now, eighteen years later, there's a lot of different kinds of people who maybe take it a little more seriously and take it a little differently. But you know what? God bless them. The league is still there for them to make into whatever they want. I'm not playing this year, but I played up until last year. **[01:25:00]**

I just think the legacy of those institutions is really important, and we should all be looking at—and don't complain that the neighborhood's changing and give up on it. Create things that are going to make sure that it stays as true to its history as possible, whether it's you sitting here doing oral histories or keeping a softball league alive where one didn't exist before. We have the opportunity to create a legacy everyday. Folks who abandon that responsibility are making a mistake. That's our duty. Create a legacy every day.

Zapol: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]