VILLAGE PRESERVATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Janet Coleman

Conducted and transcribed by Josie Naron
New York, New York
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General Interview Notes

This is a transcription of an Oral History that was conducted by Village Preservation. The Village Preservation 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 Greenwich 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.

THANK YOU

Summary of Janet Coleman oral history:

Janet Coleman is a writer, actor, radio producer, and historian of the theater. She worked at the New York Review from 1963 to 1966. She authored both *The Compass: The Improvisational Theater That Revolutionized American Comedy* and (with Al Young) *Mingus/Mingus: Two Memoirs*. She is a founding producer of the seminal off-off Broadway's Loft Theatre Workshop. She and her husband David Dozier currently host Cat Radio Café, a "live salon of the arts, exploring the politics of art and the creative bounty of New York," on WBAI. She is currently writing a biography of Viola Spolin, the creator of theater games. Highlights of her oral history include firsthand memories of Charles Mingus and the improvisational jazz scene that surrounded him in Greenwich Village; memories of the early years of the Loft Theatre Workshop; and early recollections of the Greenwich Village of her youth.

Excerpts from Janet Coleman oral history:

“It was in those days, a flourishing and unusual and magnetic scene. The one that when I caught the fever, it was centered around Mickey Ruskin's bar on West 10th Street called the Ninth Circle. It was Mickey Ruskin and Bobby [Krevit?]. Mickey subsequently went on to create Max's Kansas City, but in those days, which had, I think, chickpeas as the snack, the Ninth Circle had peanuts. Which you chomped into and threw the shells on the floor. So it was a jam-packed place every night with artists and bar-hoppers and literary figures. It was quite a unique circumstance. And I, who had just gotten out of college at about 20, just 20-ish -- I'd started at 16 and a half -- was totally engaged with the place. The notion of bar-hopping or bar -- it was like *Cheers*. You know? It was an early and a better version of *Cheers*. Everybody was into the future. Everybody seemed to be an artist or a writer, [laughs] or a drunk. And that was very interesting to me too, because I really legally hadn't drunk a thing before I set foot there. And then I think it was like, a few sips of beer.” (p. 7)

“But on the side, he [Coleman’s father] was a major intellectual. But he had a warehouse on Hudson Street… I could meet him for a piece of pie, which he shouldn't have been eating, after I moved to Christopher Street. Anyway**,** I do remember the specifics of that street [Macdougal Street] at that time. Besides the Gaslight, where you could peek in and see this other overinflated poet, Hugh Romney, who later became Wavy Gravy, sounding off down there in that basement place. And upstairs, The Caricature, which was run by a lady named Liz. And that's where the chess players gathered. It was chess and hearts and go. I think the game of go was one of the specialties of the house. And hamburgers that were big, giant hamburgers on, I think it was rye bread. Toasted rye bread. Oh gosh, they were so good. And that place has gone, and I don't know exactly who's in it now. It's hard to keep track [of every new place on Macdougal Street.]

But also**,** that's another thing I learned from my father when he showed me where The Jumble Shop was or this bookstore, that bookstore was. He said, "New York is a ruthless city." And of course, now my experience of living in the Village over 50 years -- oh, more than 50, closer to 60 years -- is that yeah, it is a ruthless city. But something about these streets, which were once Indian paths, Native American pathways, that provide the gridwork for this fanciful little Village that has a 12th Street on one side of Seventh Avenue and then another 12th Street on the other side. The whole place had an aura that has never failed to charm and

create a sense of love for the sheer place in history of it. That you could go to Provincetown Playhouse and you could see where the earliest artists who made this Village a mecca for other artists. Edna St. Vincent Millay and Eugene O'Neill and that whole crowd." (p. 10-11)

" And then the theater we found was a loft at 152 Bleecker… It was absolutely in the center of all that activity… Across the street was the Circle in the Square. It wasn't the old one. The old one was where I was taken to plays as a child. [It] was near where I live now. Near where Gristedes is now was where -- right. [laughs]. I remember going down in there. And near also what became the Theatre of [the] Ridiculous, but was originally Café Society. I have a feeling the Circle in the Square was around there. Yeah. It was a square. It wasn't Washington Square, it was Sheridan Square. But anyway, it moved, and it was on Bleecker Street. It was just like The Dugout, the bars, the music bars. The Bitter End was there. The Village Gate was there. Mingus played at the Village Gate. All the folk singers. You had Odetta, you had jazz, you had Nina Simone, you had folk music. It was just an astonishing street. You might see Dustin Hoffman walking down it to go to a rehearsal at the Circle in the Square. So anyway, we started this theater about that time. I was still at the *New York Review* for two years of this theater. It must have been 1964 that we planned it, and it must have been 1965, January, that we started -- it started production." (p. 24-25)

[00:00:00] JANET COLEMAN: Okay, great.

[00:00:00] JOSIE NARON: Yeah, yeah. Okay. So let's get started. So I am Josie Naron, the oral historian at Village Preservation. It's March 29th, 2025, and I'm here today to speak with Janet Coleman, who is a multi-hyphenate writer, performer, producer, and chronicler of theater and arts history writ large. Janet, is that a pretty good way to sum up --

[00:00:25] JC: Yes. In a way, yes. Yes, and a bit of a connector working on improvisational theater in particular in my literary life, trying to make the connection between the music of Charles Mingus and the legacy of Charles Mingus, whom I met when I was a very young girl in Detroit, not in Greenwich Village. And the improvisational theater that I took up with very early in my career, as a bohemian.

[00:01:01] JN: Yeah. [laughs]

[00:01:01] JC: In Greenwich Village, who was swept up in the off-off-Broadway theater movement and created, with college friends, also living in the Village, a theater of our own. Anyway, to be continued on that one.

[00:01:15] JN: Yeah, I think all roads will eventually lead us back to the Village.

[00:01:19] JC: All roads. Absolutely. Because part of the mythology that my parents created about my childhood -- after we-bought-you-at-Macy's-in-the-baby-department -- was that I was born in Brooklyn, but I was conceived in Greenwich Village. And I remember taking that bit of drama with me to college when I was about 16 and a half, to Ann Arbor, Michigan. And one of my college friends, Edmund White, was there simultaneously. I think he actually put that bit of braggadocio -- I was born in Brooklyn, but conceived in Greenwich Village -- into one of his memoirs of that same period.

[00:02:05] So, I sometimes pass the house where I was conceived on 13th Street, and as it turned out, it's almost next door to the house that my first -- I guess you would say, my first literary, serious literary employer. I think she was in her twenties, too**.** Erika Munk. Lived in as a child, that was her childhood home. So I was conceived and she lived, and we both worked at the *Partisan Review,* which was three blocks above the deadline for the territorial

end of Greenwich Village, 14th Street. I think it was on 17th at the time. But we both worked there and came back down to the Village to hang out at bars. So we were highly literary by day and [laughs] highly drunk by night.

[00:03:02] JN: [laughs] What is the bohemian lifestyle, if not that?

[00:03:06] JC: Exactly. It was in those days, a flourishing and unusual and magnetic scene. The one that when I caught the fever, it was centered around Mickey Ruskin's bar on West 10th Street called the Ninth Circle. It was Mickey Ruskin and Bobby [Krevit?]. Mickey subsequently went on to create Max's Kansas City, but in those days, which had, I think, chickpeas as the snack, the Ninth Circle had peanuts. Which you chomped into and threw the shells on the floor. So it was a jam-packed place every night with artists and bar-hoppers and literary figures. It was quite a unique circumstance. And I, who had just gotten out of college at about 20, just 20-ish -- I'd started at 16 and a half -- was totally engaged with the place. The notion of bar-hopping or bar -- it was like *Cheers*. You know? It was an early and a better version of *Cheers*. Everybody was into the future. Everybody seemed to be an artist or a writer, [laughs] or a drunk. And that was very interesting to me too, because I really legally hadn't drunk a thing before I set foot there. And then I think it was like, a few sips of beer. Anyway, that's a preamble.

[00:04:38] JN: Yeah, no, that's actually perfect. Because I think it really gets at the -- to me, oral history is this kind of wacky combo of linear and non-linear memory.

[00:04:50] JC: Right.

[00:04:51] JN: And we start chronologically, but it's going to take us all over the place, you know? And for the sake of this interview, again, I think all roads will eventually get us back to the Village.

[00:05:02] JC: Absolutely.

[00:05:03] JN: But I'm also really interested in kind of getting a sense for you and how you grew up in New York and in Brooklyn, and then how you ended up in Michigan.

[00:05:14] JC: And how I ended up actually in Brooklyn -- in the Village, really.

[00:05:19] JN: Yeah.

[00:05:19] JC: Where I was originated. I'll talk about a little of my connection to the Village at a very young age. My attraction to it. My mother used to work downtown on weekends. We lived, after World War II, in a veterans project in Canarsie. Then we moved to Sheepshead Bay to another veterans project. And it was about then that my girlfriends and I began taking the subway to New York City, as you called it when you lived in Brooklyn. And also, my father on weekends -- my mother worked on weekends downtown in the neighborhood of her origins, the Lower East Side. She worked at these giant coat and suit places. She was a great salesman. She had been on the streets of the Lower East Side, like Pike Street, which I think is where she lived at the age of nine.[1] "Hey lady, come in here," and, you know, "Get your coat. Oh, you look beautiful, lady."

So my mother was a really great saleswoman and could sell me the Brooklyn Bridge. And she would work. When my father and I would drive her to work, to the Lower East Side from Sheepshead Bay. And then we would drive home, and my father would take me on tours of Greenwich Village, where they had lived as a couple. Where I was conceived, and where he had lived as a student and an immigrant from Newark, New Jersey. My father and a number of his best friends, lifelong best friends, were also attracted to the Village. He finally finished college on the GI Bill, but at the time, he was intermittently taking courses at NYU.

[00:07:16] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:07:17] JC: And so, he lived here, and one other friend lived at 2 Perry Street, and another friend lived on Jane Street. And these were names that I always heard about when I heard my parents reminisce. And when my father drove me around Greenwich Village and showed me all the places where he lived, and showed me the jumble shop and the places that existed when he lived there, which had been what, 30 years before? I don't remember the exact age range there. I could have been in my teens when he started taking me. They were even younger. And I was utterly charmed by the look of the place, by the names of the streets, by the places that my father rattled off. West 10th Street, right above Julius's. He lived on Waverly Place. He lived on Jones Street. He lived, I think, off Charles Street. And he lived at Patchin Place. And I remember so distinctly my father opening -- we walked through those

[1] Coleman's mother helped out her older brothers, who had a coat and suit store.

gates at Patchin Place and I thought, this is the cutest street I have ever seen. I was a kid. And he took me to the set of apartments that he lived in to point out the nameplate of Djuna Barnes, the writer, the experimental writer. The feminist writer, the writer about sex and sex fantasies. And also e.e. cummings in lowercase. That's the way he wrote his name. [laughs]

[00:08:57] And these things -- I mean, I knew I was destined. I wanted to be in the Village when it was time to move out of my parents' house. And well, when I grew up, I guess my fantasy was to live in a loft with an artist. That was the low level of feminist understanding that we had in those days, that I was going to marry an artist. No, live with an artist. I was that advanced. But he would be the artist, and I would be [laughs] the person who lived in the loft or the garret. The garret, that was it.

[00:09:35] JN: The garret is very literary.

[00:09:36] JC: Right. That was literary. Garret in Greenwich Village. So, when I graduated, as I say, it was, oh, in high school. By that time, my parents had moved to Forest [Hills], or not -- Kew Gardens, Queens. And my new classmates had been at James Madison in Brooklyn for six months. And I moved to Forest Hills High School, which was a totally different, new, bourgeois situation, where kids were supposed to wear cashmere sweaters and be in sororities and lah-di-da. But I gravitated immediately to a bunch of kids who were going to visit MacDougal Street and Washington Square Park and folk music. And we were singing folk music and we were going to hootenannies and we were beginning to make our stops in the Village a regular thing. Billions of kids have this memory, right? Whole generations of them remembering Happy Traum or all those musicians who hung out and played in Washington Square Park until even Bob Dylan. By the time Bob Dylan hit the streets of West Fourth --

[00:10:55] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:10:57] JC: The street of West Fourth, which my windows look out on now. I believe I was then living on Christopher Street.

[00:11:04] JN: Okay.

[00:11:05] JC: And I was seeing this guy who I thought was -- what is he? Who is this guy? What's he imitating Woody Guthrie for, phony. [laughs] I went to see him at Gerde's Folk City and they were all -- anyway, I didn't get to move here for about six months. I lived on 57th Street on my cousin's couch, and then got my first apartment on Christopher Street. One room. Beautiful fireplace. I think the kitchen had a door. You could close the kitchen. It was a refrigerator, a stove on top of that. And I forget, cabinets or something on top for the very few dishes that I needed, because whoever ate at home? Who cooked? Well, I think I was macrobiotic for a while, so maybe I cooked that kind of brown rice and that.

[00:12:00] JN: A lot of raw food?

[00:12:01] JC: So, yeah. Well, I don't think it was raw food in those days. It was macrobiotic food, whatever it was. But, and I want to say in high school, the places we really became comfortable in -- it was mostly surrounding MacDougal Street.

[00:12:15] JN: Yeah.

[00:12:16] JC: And there was a place called The Caricature, where people played chess for money. My father had been a chess player. My father, up until he died, was a chess player. Played at the Marshall Chess Club, played with Bobby Fischer, lost to Bobby Fischer. So he maintained his kind of intellectual connection with the Village throughout his life. In fact, I think he had a warehouse. He was in -- sanitary supplies, paper towels.

[00:12:48] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:12:49] JC: But on the side, he was a major intellectual. But he had a warehouse on Hudson Street.

[00:12:55] JN: Wow.

[00:12:56] JC: I could meet him for a piece of pie, which he shouldn't have been eating, after I moved to Christopher Street. Anyway**,** I do remember the specifics of that street [Macdougal Street] at that time. Besides the Gaslight, where you could peek in and see this other overinflated poet, Hugh Romney, who later became Wavy Gravy, sounding off down there in that basement place. And upstairs, The Caricature, which was run by a lady named

Liz. And that's where the chess players gathered. It was chess and hearts and go. I think the game of go was one of the specialties of the house. And hamburgers that were big, giant hamburgers on, I think it was rye bread. Toasted rye bread. Oh gosh, they were so good. And that place has gone, and I don't know exactly who's in it now. It's hard to keep track [of every new place on Macdougal Street.]

[00:13:55] But also**,** that's another thing I learned from my father when he showed me where The Jumble Shop was or this bookstore, that bookstore was. He said, "New York is a ruthless city." And of course, now my experience of living in the Village over 50 years -- oh, more than 50, closer to 60 years -- is that yeah, it is a ruthless city. But something about these streets, which were once Indian paths, Native American pathways, that provide the gridwork for this fanciful little Village that has a 12th Street on one side of Seventh Avenue and then another 12th Street on the other side. The whole place had an aura that has never failed to charm and create a sense of love for the sheer place in history of it. That you could go to Provincetown Playhouse and you could see where the earliest artists who made this Village a mecca for other artists. Edna St. Vincent Millay and Eugene O'Neill and that whole crowd.

[00:15:13] And then later in the '60s, where my real life began here. *Partisan Review,* I was working at *Partisan Review* and meeting people like Susan Sontag and Jonathan Miller and all of what's called the New York intellectuals, the *Partisan Review* crowd, and Erika Munk. That's something that sort of faded by the mid-'70s, I think. And the Village became another kind of destination. But still, the aura of artistry and art and bohemianism has managed to pervade the place, even though, I don't know, it's not really that bohemian [laughs] anymore. It's very, very expensive.

[00:16:08] JN: Yeah. I'm just going to back up on a couple of things --

[00:16:12] JC: Sure.

[00:16:12] JN: -- that I want to [come back to.] So I really like this idea that to kind of be in a place for 50, 60 years, you have to both have a really good memory for places that used to be there, and also have a sense of comfort for places coming and going. And I think a lot of these interviews I do, specific stores or bars or restaurants are so dear in people's memories.

[00:16:47] JC: Yeah.

[00:16:47] JN: But what you're talking about is also just kind of the neighborhood and the streets as an entity that are there throughout all the changing.

[00:16:58] JC: Right. And the kind of pride you have in having, you know, when a tourist gets out at Sheridan Square and says, "Where's Gay Street?" Oh, well, you go down Christopher and you make a, whatever it is. It's a kind of pride of place that's kind of remarkable.

[00:17:15] JN: Yeah.

[00:17:15] JC: Listen, I remember when West Fourth Street, besides Bob Dylan -- and Suze Rotolo -- had Joe's Dinette. Joe's Dinette was downstairs. The Little Place, where you could get spaghetti with clam sauce and be served by a waiter with a white napkin over his arm. It was this totally Italian neighborhood on my side of the Village, which is within the -- which, well I lived on Christopher, but that was different. That was pretty much almost touristy and very gay-friendly even at the time.

[00:17:49] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:17:49] JC: Which made it a fairly safe place for young women to live. Because [laughs] they weren't interested [in] attacking me. Anyway, it was an interesting scene, that knowledge, also, of a sort of simmering rebellion in this place, so very many years ago, before Stonewall. I mean, that was there too. The *Village Voice* was there, at Sheridan Square. A bookstore was on the corner where I think The Monster [is now]. A kind of nightclub place. I'm not even sure, come to think of it. I see it every day but can’t remember if it’s still there. West Fourth Street was full of -- had an old bookstore, an art supply store, a jeweler with actually conventional jewelry. Because if you wanted bohemian jewelry, you went to Eighth Street. And it was full of jewelers, which were, I don't know, I guess the fad for big, clunky, arty, swirly jewelry was over. And then you went there for shoes. You went to Eighth Street for shoes, and now you go there for little wine bars. [laughs]

[00:19:12] So, the ruthlessness is also -- it doesn't really change, at least so far. Fingers crossed, doesn't change the height of the place. Doesn't change the grid of the place. I think that happened before my time when Robert Moses cut Seventh Avenue South. And Jane Jacobs, the great Jane Jacobs, stopped that move before it totally obliterated the Village. So, my real memory of being a young woman in the Village, it began when the East Village was just the Lower East Side.

[00:19:53] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:19:54] JC: It didn't have a real estate name yet. It had zero gentrification. In fact, it got worse for many years in the alphabet part of it. And, you know, junkies. My husband [David Dozer] and I, we moved in together and lived together for about three years and then got married. We met in a kind of improv -- he was an improvising actor, and I had just started improvising at this Loft Theater that my college friends and I started at 152 Bleecker Street. Which was above at the Cafe Au Go Go. Famous place where Lenny Bruce was busted. And next to it, what was the name of that theater? The Variety Theater, where Jane Bowles's play -- the heck was it called, I forget, was produced.[2] Another, The Bleecker Street Cinema, where it seemed to me you sat on wooden benches there. It was the most uncomfortable place. But you got all -- they'd show experimental films of Stan Brakhage.[3] You didn't have to go far. You could go for a double feature of *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and, I don't know, *Breathless* (1960), something like that, in the middle of the day. That's how Susan Sontag did it. But that's how anybody could do it, who looked at the marquee to see what was going on.

[00:21:20] There was such a community of young, young, high school kids, college kids who were in on this idea of being free. And I think so many of them were actually inspired by *On the Road* (1957) and by that group of people who were also Villagers. Allen Ginsberg, who walked -- I remember being shocked, being in a place called, oh, now if I forget it. It was a fish restaurant [The Captain's Table] on Sixth Avenue where now I think a Blue Mercury makeup store is. It was a real restaurant, service, waiters, all that stuff, fish. And I remember seeing Al at the cashier's desk, seeing Allen Ginsberg pay with an American Express card. I thought, "What is that? Allen Ginsberg has an American Express card? This is crossing Sixth Avenue."

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[2] *In the Summer House* (1953).
[3] The Film-Maker's Cooperative, founded in 1961 by Jonas Mekas, Shirley Clarke, Stan Brakhage, and other independent and avant-garde filmmakers, often showed their works at the Bleecker Street Cinema.

[00:22:34] JN: This feels wrong!

[00:22:35] JC: This feels wrong. [laughs] Later, many years later, I had an opportunity to interview him and I said, "Did you ever have a beatnik kit?" And he said, "Beatnik kit? What's that? No, I never had a beatnik kit." Because he was a great collector of everything beatnik. His collection later showed at a museum [the Whitney Museum], a beatnik show of all his chronicling of Greenwich Village in the Beat years that he was there, a little before my time. He was the '50s, that whole group: Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs. There was still that Howard Johnson's where Jack Kerouac had had his first date with Joyce Johnson. And Joyce Johnson was also an editorial assistant. She'd preceded Erika Munk at *Partisan Review.* She was a literary young woman who… I guess she was working when she met Jack Kerouac. She was working probably as a secretary to a publisher, something like that. The kind of things that were available to women in those days. So where was I, besides dropping names of who you saw on the street?

[00:23:43] JN: I mean, that is kind of the name of the game in the Village at this time. The people were such a big --

[00:23:53] JC: Giants walked the streets, and they were. And I'll talk more about the true giant, Mingus, and what ways he was seen on the streets and [how] I saw him. Anyway, what was your question?

[00:24:05] JN: I was going to take us on a little detour to Ann Arbor.

[00:24:10] JC: Sure. Oh, yeah.

[00:24:11] JN: Because I think that's important both for how you ultimately meet Mingus and then kind of who you are when you're spat out at the end of college, back into the Village.

[00:24:24] JC: Right.

[00:24:24] JN: So how did you end up at Michigan?

[00:24:28] JC: My parents said I couldn't go to the University of Chicago. Even though later in life it was every -- I wrote a whole book about it. The Compass, the origins of

improvisational theater in Chicago. So I couldn't go there. I don't know, there was -- I was too young, it was too dangerous. They wanted me to go to Queens College because I had a state scholarship. It turned out that [Michigan was] a quite low-cost place that had a choice of math or philosophy.

[00:25:04] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:25:05] JC: That was the choice you had as a student at the University of Michigan. And they had a literary prize, so they had a big writing community there. They had a literary prize called the Jule and Avery Hopwood Literary Awards.[4] These two guys were Broadway playwrights who'd gone to the University and I guess were English majors and bequeathed a scholarship. Actually, it was a series of scholarships. There was a freshman, there was a senior, there was a fiction, there was a nonfiction. There was a playwriting one, too.

[00:25:45] Let's see, who won it? I know Paul Mazursky, I think, was a winner. Edmund White, of course. My best friend, Ann McIntosh. I remember the morning of the -- that the Hopwoods were being awarded, and we were, I dunno, we had envelopes and we were trembling. We took a cab to the dormitories. And I won first prize for literary nonfiction. I did a piece on Ernest Hemingway, whom I admired greatly. [It was] called "What Price Iceberg," which was based on some Reichian idea that was also descended from my father, who had gone to Reichian analysts after World War II. And later, bioenergetic ones. And that figured pretty largely in my life of going to a shrink. Everybody did it. But mine was even more outre. You took off your clothes and kicked and screamed, da da da. Anyway, I'm jumping ahead there.

[00:26:49] So that's Ann Arbor. So Ann Arbor had also this -- there were a couple of New York kids that I knew, Perry Letterman. I didn't know him from New York, but we spotted each other on the Quad and immediately had that Brooklyn to Greenwich Village connection. I still remember his old brown leather jacket, red woolen hat and his New York accent. We [were] immediately drawn to each other. And his background as a guitar player in the Village. And there were a collection of folk musicians. Al Young was one of them. Al Young, who is the late Al Young now, died a couple -- several years. [He] was practically the only African-American I can remember. I mean, there were two or three. It was pretty much an

[4] Avery Hopwood and Jule Hopwood Creative Writing Awards.

all-white campus, and a majorly Michigan or state-attended college, because I think it cost nothing for people from Michigan to go to the University, be in Ann Arbor.

[00:27:54] And they called it the Harvard of the Midwest. Because it was a university, not a college, it had a lot of graduate students there that were engaged in very interesting work, particularly in the music department. The art department, Milton Cohen was there, doing the ONCE [Festival] project. Al Young was the editor, with Ann Doniger of the -- what was it called? *Generation*, the literary magazine. Tom Hayden was the editor of the *Michigan Daily* and [laughs] already very progressive and almost, you know, troublemaker at the time. He helped us get rid of the terrible, racist Dean of Women who ratted on every woman who had to -- you had to climb in the windows to stay out after 10. It was the very, very beginning of the feminist revolt.

[00:28:53] JN: Yeah.

[00:28:53] JC: So there was Al, there was Tom and there was David Newman, who was the editor of the campus humor magazine, *Gargoyle*, who later of course, became an editor at *Esquire* with, I forget his partner now, Bob. Oh. What was his partner's name?[5] And they wrote *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and they wrote *Superman* (1978). And all of these guys were touched with some kind of both writing genius and social consciousness and humor, either one or the other.

[00:29:33] And I remember submitting a story that I had written in high school to Al Young, that all my teachers were very -- it was about dating a Black kid. And it was in the style of J.D. Salinger. And my teachers were very impressed with it, and I sent it to the *New Yorker*. I guess I did that in high school and they sent me a note that said, "Try us again. We can't, we're not taking this." It was a little [of a] hot topic really, if you think about it, at the time. But, "Try us again." Because it was funny, too. And Al read it and he decided not to publish it in *Generation*, which made him guilty for the rest of his life, which is one of the reasons he finally said, "Let's do *Mingus/Mingus* together and we'll get it published, and we'll have our dual reminiscence of our lives with Charles Mingus." This was years after we graduated. But all of these relationships. When you meet people in college. Edmund White, who was gay and beginning to share it. Not out exactly, but not hiding anything. [He] belonged to Sigma

[5] Robert Benton.

Nu; he was a transfer student. And my other friend, my friend, another transfer student from Vassar, Ann McIntosh.

[00:30:59] The University of Michigan had a lot of interesting writers. They had Donald Hall; they had X.J. Kennedy, the poet. Very interesting poets. They had a Shakespeare guy, it was Arthur Eastman. But their philosophy department was terrific. The math or philosophy, it worked out really well -- the philosophy part, because my great books and philosophy teacher was Frithjof Bergmann who died, I don't know, a couple of years ago. I think he was over a hundred, or a hundred years old. And he was a magnificent teacher. And who was the other guy? John? Oh gosh, wait a minute. Marshall Sahlins. Marshall Sahlins, who turned out to be the brother of Bernie Sahlins, who owned the Second City, who was one of the early owners of The Second City. And I began to be, not so much immersed with that, but as a historian, yes. But that form of theater. But Marshall Sahlins, I think he was the head of the James Joyce Society, and he invented the -- what do they call 'em? Talk, talk, where you talked, talk-ins. Teach-ins! Teach-ins.

[00:32:14] JN: Ah, of course.

[00:32:14] JC: He and Frithjof sort of invented the teach-in on the Michigan quadrangle. And Tom Hayden was one of the beginners of the Port Huron Statement and the SDS. So it was quite above my head, really, but certainly in the air, that kind of activist politics. I was engaged with it, but not like they were. Because I was younger.

[00:32:44] JN: Yeah.

[00:32:45] JC: But that isn't even it. I was somehow finding my way.

[00:32:49] JN: Yeah. I'm struck by how similarly to the culture in the Village at the time, it sounds like there really was something in the water on the campus.

[00:33:02] JC: There was. There was almost -- yes. There was a street called -- I can't believe it, I've forgotten the name of the street.[6] It was a crossroad near a couple of bookstores. It was like, a porch. Al Young lived across the street with his guitar. And the porch people, all the

[6] William Street.

musicians would gather and play stuff and then they'd have parties. And it was quite a little Greenwich Village all its own. Of course, I never had a drink at a bar. I was not old enough in the state of Michigan, I think. I think you had to be 21 to drink there.

[00:33:35] JN: Mm-hm. And you were what, like 16, 17?

[00:33:38] JC: When I started?

[00:33:39] JN: Yeah.

[00:33:39] JC: Yeah, yeah. Right. So, [I'd] go back summers and I'd go back to hanging out at the Village or whatever, whatever we did in the summer. Go see art movies. We'd see [hard?] artists. I think when I first moved here, the Judson Dance Theater was going. I saw Yvonne Rainer. And you looked at these forms, this stretching of the definition of art. And it was very participatory. You didn't necessarily have to train with George Balanchine to be in the Judson Theater. Not that I had an impulse to join them, but there was stuff -- as a writer, it drew me anyway to performance, I think. And I think another thing that drew me to performance was [pauses] shrinking. The bioenergetic stuff where you'd say, "No, no, no." And you'd exercise your voice, and you'd get very expressive. So, yeah.

[00:34:48] JN: I don't know much about that at all.

[00:34:50] JC: You don't? Well, I don't know --

[00:34:51] JN: No. [laughs]

[00:34:51] JC: I don't know anybody who does it anymore, but I remember my friend Peter Boyle did it. He went to my father's shrink, the late Peter Boyle, the actor. But I should talk a little bit about the Mingus thing and how --

[00:35:04] JN: Yeah, I would love to know -- so I know you met him -- with? Through Al Young, or no?

[00:35:11] JC: No. Separately, we met him completely --

[00:35:12] JN: Separately, okay.

[00:35:14] JC: Al was from Detroit.

[00:35:15] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:35:16] JC: He met him in New York.

[00:35:18] JN: Okay.

[00:35:18] JC: Mingus was playing on West Fourth Street across Sixth Avenue from where I live now, east of Sixth Avenue. At what became a laundromat, but was first The Showplace, the scene of some of his most famous chasings of musicians around the block, yelling at them, "Play with taste, man."[7] Ted Curson and Dannie Richmond, all those players that were with him on a regular basis during that time, early '60s. In college, because of curfews, if you wanted to stay out late, you almost had to go away for the weekend. And a dear friend of mine, Sharon [Cheri] Sandweiss, who's now been for years in San Diego, was born in Detroit. And so, I visited her on what was a Shabbos night weekend. They had challah and prayers and wine, the whole works. Stuff my Village-y parents never, never had. My mother also [was] in somewhat revolt from her Orthodox Jewish family. And oh, she wouldn't -- I remember asking her why she wouldn't change dishes for Passover like Roberta's mother. "I don't do that. I have the dishes, but I'm not going to do that. [laughs] My mother did that."

[00:36:43] And so, we had the dinner and I remember it was -- she drove. That was another thing I couldn't do. So we had dinner and I said, "Why don't we go to hear Mingus, Charles Mingus." I knew about him because my friends were talking, I had records. I listened to him in New York. I had listened to him on Symphony Sid on WEVD and also in high school under the covers. Late at night you'd listen to Symphony Sid bringing in these jazz musicians. And I was really impressed with the work of Charles Mingus. Charlie, they called him, which he hated. Never called him Charlie. People still do. You've got to correct them for his --

[00:37:34] JN: Yeah.

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[7] Mingus's famous album, *Mingus Ah Um,* originated during this period.

[00:37:35] JC: -- the memory of how he hated being undermined, and not dignified enough for his kingly tastes. And they were -- [laughs] they were kingly tastes. He had great taste, especially in -- everything. [laughs]

[00:37:55] JN: I did read your half of the Mingus book.

[00:37:59] JC: Yeah.

[00:38:00] JN: Didn't make it all the way through Al's half. [laughs] But I just really got drawn in. It's such a rich text, both because of this kind of larger than life personality that is -- it's just all out there. But I think the phrase you maybe use in the book is his "extra-musical abilities"?

[00:38:35] JC: Yes, yes.

[00:38:36] JN: That he was a great musician, but also just kind of one of those rare people that had a gift for --

[00:38:44] JC: Anything. Yes. Anything. I remember he had extra-sensory abilities. I remember the late Si Johnson, his arranger, saying -- I don't know, Mingus, he and Mingus were up on the roof of Mingus's apartment building. Well, Si also was a photographer as well as a musical arranger, jazz composer, too. And as he said, a piano player once in the Mingus band. I think Mingus scared the hell out of him, you know, screaming at him and stuff. His teaching methods. Anyway, Si's camera was about to fall off the roof. Before it had even moved, Mingus reached his arm backward and caught the camera as it began to fall. Mingus and Sue lived on East 10th Street at that point. They lived in the Village.

[00:39:25] He also had a studio way east on Avenue C. But he lived on Avenue B, then two places on East 10th Street once he was with Sue Mingus, who only recently died at 92. And named a Jazz Master, by, I forget who names you a jazz master. But she really kept his memory and his recordings and his bands, his various ensembles -- and created, really, the Mingus Orchestra. Which was a dream of Mingus's, I think, that he never anticipated accomplishing. A band, an orchestra with French horn and jazz guitar. And just extraordinary

vision that she drew from him. It was as if he had passed the torch in some way of his legacy to her. And me too, you know?

[00:40:20] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:40:20] JC: Because we all -- every important birthday of Mingus's, wherever those bands were playing, we could drink a toast of Ramos Gin Fizz or Mingus eggnog to him and tell stories. I mean, not that long ago when -- during his centennial year, I played Joe's Pub. I got up in between the numbers of the Mingus Big Band. I told stories about Mingus. I did that at Birdland. And Joe's Pub. And Dizzy's. And it was really -- and what was that other place now on Avenue A where they played? So, it was a great -- the kind of pinnacle to me of my trip with Mingus from college.

[00:41:01] And to answer your question, how did we meet together. No, I was in this Seder kind of thing -- not Seder, but Friday, Shabbos. Shabbat. And Cheri drove us to The Minor Key, and we sat in awe. It wasn't a crowded room. It wasn't packed. You might think that this great artist who was being talked about in *DownBeat* as best bassist or best composer, jazz composer, would've packed a room. And it was on a Friday night. But it wasn't. I remember distinctly, it wasn't full. I remember the white tablecloths and having a clear view of the band, and just being utterly fascinated by the eyes, the presence, the spontaneity, and the air of the moment. Feeling, oh, what's he going to do next? Or, where is this going? It was transportable. And so we had a conversation after it, because we stayed for the second set. And we hung out with Booker Ervin, Dannie Richmond, all these guys.

[00:42:09] And Mingus was a very protective figure. He at the time was trying to write his book. Which is, by the way, the name, the credit I gave myself on my resume to get me the job at *Partisan Review*. Mingus said, "You want to edit this book?" And this comes after the meeting. Next morning, Cheri and I went back to meet again to exchange addresses and so forth. And Mingus said, "The next time you're in New York, when you come home for school vacations, call." There's my number, and so forth. And sure enough, I did. And sure enough, I did visit him. He lived in Harlem.

[00:42:53] JN: Mm-hm.

[00:42:54] JC: And I guess I was still living -- and I remember staying with another girlfriend. It was seven o'clock in the morning after, while we read this astounding bunch of writing on yellow foolscap, legal pads. Which I think I still have a sheet of, in my Mingus carton of memorabilia.

[00:43:16] JN: Yeah. What do you think you immediately saw in each other that kind of just established that trust? Because it sounds like, you know, as a protective man with this kind of larger-than-life personality and a reputation for antics, what did you see in each other that just clicked?

[00:43:44] JC: Safe space is one of them.

[00:43:46] JN: Yeah.

[00:43:46] JC: On a very enormous level.

[00:43:48] JN: Yeah.

[00:43:48] JC: A safe place. And he admired -- I think I sent him my stuff, my writing. And he wrote me when he was in England, making a film called *All Through the Night* [sic].[8] It was based on Othello. And he was one of the -- and Othello was a jazz musician. Who played Hannibal Lector again? I think he was in it, and he starred in it as Iago. I forget all the cast members. But it was a hit movie. I think it was on recently. And very avant-garde, and made in Britain. And he was there. And maybe he was also playing -- I don't know if Ronnie Scott's club existed then, but he was doing the music scene as well.

[00:44:35] And he had this book that he was writing, a story. It was called, it was called a name I -- it's in my book. I put it in, but I won't say it, 'cause it's quite vulgar. And he knew he couldn't use that as a real title. So his alternate name was *Beneath the Underdog*. The story of a half-Black, half-white -- his father was a light-skinned Black person who had been in the Army. Very tough. His stepmother was a gospel person. And so he'd go hear this music in the gospel church and also he'd hear Duke Ellington on the radio. Those were his formative sounds, as mine were Charles Mingus. I can't really say what it was, but it was the beauty, the

[8] *All Night Long* (1962).

unexpectedness. For years, I didn't realize, long after I was producing and playing in improvisational theater and doing all kinds of improvisation with my guy who became my husband, and I had to like, make him pass the Mingus test. What did Mingus think of him? That story's in the book, too, about him.

[00:45:47] JN: I did clock that one and loved it.

[00:45:49] JC: Mingus sticks his fingers, his Lloyd's of London fingers into an electric socket and David doesn't blink. Okay. He passed the test. He's not afraid of me.

[00:46:02] JN: Both trying to out, like, poker-face each other.

[00:46:05] JC: They're not afraid of me. [laughs] He's my kind of guy. And so, we became, he and I, David and I, I don't know, it clicked, whatever. He was also -- Mingus was his idol as a kid. He was a drummer. Later when Mingus asked him to do a nightclub act with him, David said, “I have an idea. When we have this nightclub act, I can play drums.” And Mingus said, "What jazz pole did you ever win?" And he didn't. It was to show that the white guy couldn't really play drums. That was David's idea. But Mingus was really thinking, this is the real music business.

[00:46:49] But anyway, for years, I didn't get the connection between what I was doing. Because I didn't really identify as an improvising artist, or any artist at all. I knew I was a writer and I knew I wanted to be -- and I knew I *was* a writer. And knew I had some kind of reluctance to really do it. I did it, but to go -- I got this job after *Partisan Review* at the *New York Review of Books.* Based on my terrific knowledge [laughs] of how to do subscriptions. So I was in, and they moved me up pretty quickly to Bob Silvers' assistant. So I was in a room with Bob Silvers for about three years. I wrote a piece about it for the 50th anniversary.

[00:47:41] JN: You sent me that one.

[00:47:42] JC: I sent it to you, yeah.

[00:47:43] JN: Yeah.

[00:47:44] JC: That was a definitive literary connection that I would never -- and yet it didn't satisfy some other desire, deep desire, that had more to do with Greenwich Village than it had to do with putting out a magazine week after week of intellectuals criticizing [laughs] other writers. You know, writers and artists.

[00:48:11] JN: So when do your interests not start to split away from the literary, but start to expand into performance?

[00:48:20] JC: I would guess about the year we -- Ann and Ed and of course, with the unmistakable footprint of Lyn Austin, who was then a Broadway producer, and Ann was her secretary. We were both from Ann Arbor [and] we were both philosophy girls, Nietzscheans. We were deep into it. And both trained by Frithjof and Marshall Sahlins and stuff. And we were going to the Ninth Circle every single night, and we had this kind of burning desire to be a little more useful in society. We were both Hopwood winners, after all. But she was working in the theater, and I would go to her -- she went to Boston, Broadway stuff. She was, I guess, with the Phoenix Theater. And then she was working for Lyn Austin, who was Roger Stevens' associate. She was an older woman, about, I don't know, 15 years older than us? And she had done "Mary, Mary." She had quite a success record, but she was intrigued at this -- Ann was getting a slush pile to read of plays. And she gave me a bunch. And as we were concocting this theater, I think by then we were definitely concocting it along with Lyn and with Edmund. We called him Ed White. And who was -- had a play. These were people who were seriously literary from college.

[00:49:51] JN: Yeah.

[00:49:51] JC: And went directly to the Village. We all lived in the Village. Ed and Stan Redfern, his roommate and maybe boyfriend at the time, lived on MacDougal Street, Ann lived on 13th Street, and I lived on Christopher Street. And then the theater we found was a loft at 152 Bleecker.

[00:50:14] JN: Mm-hm. And that was the one above Cafe Au Go Go?

[00:50:18] JC: Yes. It was absolutely in the center of all that activity.

[00:50:23] JN: About as central as you can get.

[00:50:25] JC: It was, yeah. Across the street was the Circle in the Square. It wasn't the old one. The old one was where I was taken to plays as a child. [It] was near where I live now. Near where Gristedes is now was where -- right. [laughs]. I remember going down in there. And near also what became the Theatre of [the] Ridiculous, but was originally Café Society. I have a feeling the Circle in the Square was around there. Yeah. It was a square. It wasn't Washington Square, it was Sheridan Square. But anyway, it moved, and it was on Bleecker Street.

[00:51:02] It was just like The Dugout, the bars, the music bars. The Bitter End was there. The Village Gate was there. Mingus played at the Village Gate. All the folk singers. You had Odetta, you had jazz, you had Nina Simone, you had folk music. It was just an astonishing street. You might see Dustin Hoffman walking down it to go to a rehearsal at the Circle in the Square. So anyway, we started this theater about that time. I was still at the *New York Review* for two years of this theater. It must have been 1964 that we planned it, and it must have been 1965, January, that we started -- it started production.

[00:51:51] Earlier that summer, we rented a beach house for six weeks. I think it cost, I don't know, $600 for the two of us in Hampton Bays. It was an enormous beach house facing the bay. And it was behind the owner's house. This was just a lucky strike extra there. And I don't even remember that it had bedrooms, but I remember that we had guests, naturally, for the weekend. We had Ed White and Stan Redfern and our other college friend, Thayer Burch. Was she living in the Village? Bice, she was called Thayer Bice. She was in advertising. And she was going to come with us. But she was also a writer and I think a Hopwood winner. And she was going to bring a friend of hers that she had met at an advertising place called, I think it was Norman, Craig & Kummel. That's my best guess. The new copywriter was kind of dis-- I think his wife, he had just separated from his wife and he was very demoralized. And the way I heard it, he had been involved in the Second City. He invented -- he started Second City.

[00:53:14] Well, as I later learned and wrote a whole book about, David Shepherd originated the theater that preceded Second City: The Compass Theater, which was in Chicago, the place I originally wanted to go to college. And eventually, almost did. I practically -- I did go

there for graduate school, only it was in improvisational theater. I went there to see what it was, and I was still working at the *New York Review,* doing these two things. Anyway.

[00:53:46] JN: So you went to grad school mid-'60s or later?

[00:53:49] JC: No, I didn't go to grad school.

[00:53:50] JN: Oh, okay. [laughs]

[00:53:50] JC: I considered it -- it was like grad school. So was --

[00:53:53] JN: Okay, got it.

[00:53:53] JC: So was the *New York Review of Books*, of course.

[00:53:56] JN: Yeah. An education in itself.

[00:53:59] JC: Absolutely. I got to meet Norman Mailer, and to really know these people, too. And I must have been sort of cute or something, or engaging in some way, because they were -- and also I wasn't gruff like everybody else, like Bob. Bob was all business. Might have seemed scary, but when a guy grabbed, took your cigarettes, your Gauloises and smoked them, or your bagel, you know, it was little -- [pauses] I knew the soft side of Bob Silvers. Also another kind of just a wonderful mentor about free speech, about publishing, about taste. Between him and Mingus, that was understanding [pauses] what it was all about and how it was almost something that you had as an internal organ, your taste buds. [laughs]

[00:55:00] JN: Yeah.

[00:55:00] JC: And you do have taste buds, as a matter of fact. So anyway, David Shepherd, and I remember this very vividly. I guess I wrote about it already. We were all, like, drinking at the beach house, and I was drinking away. I had never -- when I discovered alcohol, I thought, This is amazing. No wonder everybody's having such a good time. And [laughs] and I was a barfly at the Ninth Circle, where everybody was talking at the top of their lungs.

[00:55:34] So, I was passed out on the sofa. And when I rose, I see everybody is seemingly doing something in front of me. They're on a kind of stage that isn't a stage. It was a big circular beach house. And so, there was a natural stage there. Only it was in round. But they were facing us, so it wasn't in the round. They said, “Go on, you be the wife.” I said, "What?" He's the husband. Stan Redfern was the husband, and I was the wife. And they threw me in and they said, “You're this, you're that.” You're having a -- I think I was -- we were married, there was a refrigerator in the room. And then I went, I said, "Okay. I'll do it." And whatever the premise was, I was in the scene, but I walked, I was moving through this imaginary refrigerator. And Stan Redfern said, "No, no, don't." David Shepherd had already taught them about the invisible -- what's called "A Where." The space that you work in. And in improv theater, they don't have real objects. They have invisible objects. That's part of the weirdness and the specialness of what was so interesting about it. And [pauses] because you could invent anything out of empty space. You could have a spoon. You could have a bird, an animal. Anything could be in an empty space if you picked it up and made it --

[00:57:00] JN: Yeah.

[00:57:00] JC: -- made it look like the weight and the height and the hardness of a refrigerator. You don't walk through a refrigerator.

[00:57:10] JN: Sure.

[00:57:11] JC: And I was doing that, so I jumped back, I remember, and suddenly I was honoring this invisible refrigerator. And then there were other things where I was playing characters and getting, you know, people were laughing. And suddenly I was not myself, or I was myself, but I was imitating my friend who I worked with at the *New York Review.* And this was all David Shepherd's doing. And the next morning I remember going to the *New York Review,* going from the Village on the A train to 57th Street where the *New York Review* was then. At 250 West 57th Street, the Fisk Building, and thinking, My life has changed. And we're going through the turnstile. I said, “This is an adjustment here I have to take. I don't just work at the *New York Review,* and I'm not just somebody who's supposed to write. But I am into this thing. I don't even know what it is.”

[00:58:13] JN: Yeah.

[00:58:13] JC: And so Ann and I and Lyn, with Lyn's real blessing, and Ed White was interested in it, too. It was somewhat fascinating because it had its own playwriting devices. It was really a technique for making theater on the spot.

[00:58:33] JN: And how was that -- I mean, I can see how improvisational theater as a writer would appeal to this kind of making something from nothing, but with constraints.

[00:58:47] JC: Yes, with constraints that weren't the same as sitting in your head at home by yourself. It was with people and people laughed and --

[00:58:54] JN: Yeah.

[00:58:54] JC: -- you just did it, and there it was.

[00:58:56] JN: Was it kind of that communal, that social aspect that --

[00:59:00] JC: Totally.

[00:59:01] JN: Okay. So that's kind of what pushed you into that.

[00:59:04] JC: Right. And I remember at that time -- I'm now writing a book for Bloomsbury Press. This is my second book. Well, it really would be my third book on improvisation, because I consider the Mingus one about it too. Even though I didn't get it. I didn't! I didn't get what the connection was. Maybe not till a few years ago, even.

[00:59:30] JN: Yeah.

[00:59:30] JC: Oh, yeah, this was what attracted me. I just didn't have the words for it. I wasn't a musician. But maybe I was a musician.

[00:59:37] JN: Now do you see them kind of all as like circularly --

[00:59:40] JC: Yeah.

[00:59:41] JN: -- connected?

[00:59:42] JC: Yeah. And David, my husband, who wasn't my husband yet, I guess. Anyway, we decided Ann and Lyn and -- we would just devote Monday to a workshop that David Shepherd would conduct. And we invited all our friends, some of them from Ann Arbor, others were actors. David Shepherd invented some -- [laughs] invented, invited some people that he knew from other iterations of his theater, the Compass. He had done the Compass in Chicago. And then after it moved to St. Louis and it moved to Bucks County. He was in Hyannisport. And a lot of people who became very famous actors, like Alan Alda and -- well, Mike and Elaine were in the original. Mike Nichols and Elaine May. So they became famous as famous can be. And then the others were left to continue the improvisational theater. They decided to start the Second City. And so, so many of them who had been in the David Shepherd thing, which was more a scenario-based play-oriented thing. It was really about reflecting the issues of our time. The Compass Theater was "following the direction you're already going in," Shepherd's philosophy. By the way, he lived in the Village too. Yeah, for years and years.

[01:01:01] And so there were all these actors in our workshop. I invited Norman Mailer, who I thought, well, he's perfect for this kind of thing. Because his personality is so ebullient and he's so stage-worthy. And he was working at the Actors' Studio, but that was another method. So he came in and I remember he showed up with, I guess, Buzz, what was his name? Buzz Farbar, his posse. And he's wearing a trench coat and a hat. And he was talking in an Irish accent, but he threw himself into it, you know? And years later, in that workshop, a combination of actors and total amateurs. And me, who was pretty much a total amateur at the theater, except that I was a producer. [laughs] We were about to produce our first play around the time that this workshop started. And, well, I guess I should tell a little bit about that too, because it involved so many Village places.

[01:02:04] JN: Yeah. Before you get into that, I am curious, so how does getting involved with the Loft kind of change your conception of yourself as an artist? Before that, are you kind of leading with like, I'm a writer. And then after that, are you still a writer? Are you something different? Is it morphing?

[01:02:32] JC: I'm still a writer.

[01:02:33] JN: Yeah.

[01:02:34] JC: And as soon actually as I left the *New York Review* to devote myself to the theater, I began getting writing jobs. *Village Voice*. This was really something. This guy named Howard Smith, he had a column for years and years. The *Village Voice* was, as I say, still in Sheridan Square. And you know, it was like an old, old kind of Village-y house with rickety carpeted stairs and you could hear the floor crunch under you while all these people were busy. It was still run by the original editors. And Howard Smith wrote this column of Village events, what's going on in the Village, art and all that. And he had a habit of hiring people to write for him with no name credit, for $10 a piece. I'd never written for publication, I think, at the time. I wrote my -- I didn't publish, I won a writing award, but so far I had sent stuff to *Seventeen* and gotten nice rejection slips. But I had to take myself seriously in that way if I'd already -- I guess in high school, we were -- we had very writer-identified. My friends were also going to be writers. And [pauses] so, I guess I got jobs writing for book reviews.

[01:04:02] JN: Mm-hm.

[01:04:03] JC: The *New York* -- yeah. Wait a minute. Ted Solotaroff was a friend who was a critic and a writer, and an Ann Arbor graduate also. He was, what was he? He was working at the -- it wasn't the *Herald Tribune* anymore. He introduced me to Clay Felker, who was running *New York Magazine* as a Sunday supplement in the, I think it was the *New York World Journal Tribune*. First it was the *Herald Tribune*. It morphed into the *World Journal Tribune*. As we began, New York began losing newspapers. And who was that book review editor? I guess it was Ted, I think. So I began writing book reviews for them. And then Clay Felker started giving me articles to write at -- one article, I remember, to write for the Sunday supplement. But pretty soon, the thing had turned into *New York Magazine*. And I began writing for them. I'm just trying to think. Was it maybe around the same time? It all became one big thing.

[01:05:15] JN: Yeah.

[01:05:16] JC: So I really couldn't tell what was what. So I had an identity. Being a producer meant that writers went after -- they want to be your friend. And actors certainly -- deplorable people. We all make nice to the casting director or the producer or smile a lot, show a lot of personality. I mean, that's actors. That's what they have to sell, is their body. So that's sort of

when the trouble began, and when I didn't know what I was. I just had to keep doing all of the things.

[01:05:54] JN: Yeah.

[01:05:55] JC: Because I liked being a producer. It was fun. We actually got to a point, we had -- Harris Yulin came in. He was an actor in one of the shows. Also in that show was Suze Rotolo, who was introduced to us as, [whispers] “that's Bob Dylan's ex-girlfriend.” She was a wonderful woman and I resent so much the rendition of her that they did in *A Complete Unknown* (2024). She was a complete bohemian. She really was. She didn't like the scene of pursuing fame and fortune. The famous photo of her was actually taken on my street. Walking down the street, Freewheelin' Bob Dylan. Yeah. Every store on the street has that in the window, or had it in the window if they closed.

[01:06:44] And [laughs], I tell you -- that it was just such a great time where you didn't have to really choose between what you are. And I said to my father, I said, "Well, what should I be? You think an actor or a writer?" And he said, "I like that you're an actress." He wanted to be a writer himself. And this had come sort of so easily to me, being able to -- being a published writer at 20. Writing critiques of people. I remember getting from the *Herald Tribune,* writing a book review of Sheilah Graham, whom I worked for, had worked for as a temp, an office temp. The book I later got to criticize.[9] And her calling me after saying, "Is this Ms. Coleman?" And I said, "Yeah. Oh, who is this? Ms. Graham? Sheilah?" "This is --" oh no, I didn't recognize her. When she said, [exaggerated voice] "This is Sheilah Graham." I said, "Oh, how are you, Ms. Graham?" The thing had already hit the newspaper stands. And she said, "Well, I guess I never should have fired you." And [laughs] I guess you shouldn't have. But I was right. My criticism was good. It's just that gave you a kind of power over people older than you.

[01:08:13] JN: Yeah.

[01:08:14] JC: And I remember crit-- who was I writing about? It was a review of Joan Didion's first book, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, and finding her pretty right-wing. Admired John Wayne and all that stuff. And I think --

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[9] *Beloved Infidel* (1958).

[01:08:32] JN: [laughs] Arguably, yes.

[01:08:33] JC: [laughs] Yes!

[01:08:35] JN: Nobody wants to admit to that, but --

[01:08:37] JC: No. Well, now they don't, anyway. I mean, now they do. We'll see. I don't know how much, you know.

[01:08:48] JN: Yeah. The idea of, through literary criticism specifically, having genuine power to wield in the literary world over people older than you --

[01:09:03] JC: Right.

[01:09:03] JN: -- actually kind of brings me back to this idea of you as a really young woman having Mingus's manuscript in your hands. And him trusting you as the kind of steward of it.

[01:09:22] JC: We must have talked about this stuff. When I read his manuscript, I thought [of] James Joyce. Here I had taken a whole course [on *Ulysses*] with Donald Hall. Written a whole paper. [laughs] Yeah. I was in -- and later, of course, at WBAI, produced many years of Bloomsday. James Joyce on the radio. Radio Bloomsday. And with Caraid O'Brien, who was a great Joyce scholar and actress. He [Mingus] liked college kids. Seeking, I think, from us, with his own stature, where he might've had doubts about himself is that he hadn't gone to college. He graduated high school and began playing almost immediately. He was playing with Charlie Parker, and he was a prodigy as well. He was in the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic Orchestra. He was playing in Watts, in Los Angeles, where there were so many young jazz musicians. But he came of age -- he was a born star. Making the bass into such a unique instrument, you know? But he also had, as you can -- I'm going to stand up a little. My feet are gone.

[01:10:41] JN: Yeah, no. Also, if we need to take a break at some point, if you want to get some water or stretch your legs or anything.

[01:10:47] JC: Is that okay? You can cut here, right?

[01:10:49] JN: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:10:50] JC: Well, yeah. Well, let me just finish this thing. So I think he was interested in both Al and me because he thought we could make him publishable. When the reality was that he was inventing language at such an amazing rate. Whatever he could use, sounds in instead of words. He could use stream of consciousness without -- he improvised. Of course he could use stream of consciousness as a writer. So he was totally fascinating to me on that score. I thought he had it really over me as a writer, and as I say in the *Mingus/Mingus: Two Memoirs*. He later -- I thought that the *Beneath the Underdog*, the final edition, and so did Sue Mingus, as a matter of fact. We always tried to figure out how to get this enormous swath of musical composition, almost, in words, an autobiography, to have its original outpouring-ness. This outpouring of genius.

[01:12:01] JN: Yeah.

[01:12:02] JC: And that's yet to be done. Although I still, I think Sue and I shared in the last couple years, some disc of the entire manuscript. This was all in handwriting, mind you, originally. And it had been typed.

[01:12:23] JN: From a commercial publisher's perspective, is it that it's unapproachable, quote unquote, or that it's just kind of -- it's not in a form that they recognize?

[01:12:37] JC: Yes, some combination of that. But I don't know, maybe someplace like the Dalkey Archives, if they still exist. I'm not sure. The Dalkey Archives,[10] which really has the guts to publish serious, literary, complex stuff of the written word. I remember, because I knew Jason Epstein. He was one of the founders of the *New York Review*, and before I got the job with Bob Silvers, I was auditioning for the role of Jason's secretary. And I told him then, since it had worked so well at *Partisan Review* -- he was at Random House, the head of Random House, and in fact, Mailer's editor. And I said, "Listen, I'm in touch with Charles Mingus. He has a wonderful manuscript, his autobiography. He wants to call it this name I can't mention, but he also would call it *Beneath the Underdog* if necessary." And I said, "The only condition is he wants to have it published with a white leather binding like the Bible." And that was the breaking point for Jason Epstein. He said, "Well, fuck him." And that was

[10] Dalkey Archive Press.

that. And he didn't hire me, but he recommended me to -- he thought that he would be too bossy or tough on me. Too much for a small person like myself to put up with, to endure. Maybe I was too sensitive. Who knows.

[01:14:10] But anyway, he recommended me to the *New York Review.* And then hounded me to go do favors for him for years after. But I have actually more fond memories of his ex-wife, Barbara. But even who -- what kind of a fabulous world was it that I blew into. Big, big luck. And then the second luck was really Lyn Austin. Both of us, Ann and Ed and I meeting her and having this loft that she brought in friends like Jean -- what's Jean's name?[11] She was a major lighting person. Her name was skipping my mind now. Wouldn't have last year, but it is now. And Oliver -- not Stone. Oliver Smith! Oliver Smith's a great set designer. Showing how we could have movable furniture in this thing, and how we could light it in a very simple and inexpensive way. And all these actors from the Actors Studio flocking to The Loft, to put on plays by new playwrights.

[01:15:27] That was what we wanted to do. That was our mission, to put on plays by young playwrights so that we would -- it's not so different from the mission of any other of the off-off-Broadway theaters. But the ones that were to our taste. The first one, by the way, was called *Barroom,* by Larry Alson**.** And it featured at the time -- want to hear this name-dropping?

[01:15:52] JN: Yeah.

[01:15:53] JC: Ralph Waite was in it. He was one of the bartenders, Jerry Orbach was in it, and I forget, he was a barfly. Marty Fried directed it. And his -- I don't know if it was girlfriend or wife, Brenda Vaccaro, was always around hanging out. Marta Orbach, Jerry's wife, had a small part in that. And they did a short one-act by the author. And [pauses] Joe Don Baker. A guy named Will Hare who had a -- these were all -- Jamil Zakkai, who had been in the Living Theater, in the original *The Connection*. John Coe, who had been in *The Connection,* who later worked in the Open Theater. It was just an extraordinary moment. And --

[01:16:39] JN: You really have this collection of living theater history.

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[11] Jean Rosenthal.

[01:16:44] JC: Absolutely. At one point we said, Why are we just doing it here? Why don't we do it for a real audience, as a real play? And we got together a production with Harris Yulin, who had been in that play that I was in with Suze Rotolo. And it's funny, interviewing all these actors for the books about theater. I realized that actors remember every person who was in every one of their early plays. They remember the director; they remember who made the costumes. And I guess I do too.

[01:17:22] JN: Yeah. [laughs]

[01:17:25] JC: And so we gathered, got some money together and we staged a production of this play by -- I guess he quit playwriting soon after. Ralph Arzoomanian; it was called *The Coop.* It was about a prison and there was an Irish guy, a Black guy, some other kind of guy, another kind of guy in a prison. And it was very poetic. And Marty Fried -- and originally Harris Yulin -- was the director and I don't know, the big producer. For real money, Lyn Austin stepped in and said, "Well, I don't think Harris is cutting it. We have to get rid of [him]." So that was a terrible thing, because Harris then went on to an extraordinary acting career of his own. But he was a good director, too. You'd never know it [laughs] from *The Coop*.

[01:18:15] It ran, I don't know, seven, ten nights. It got a pan [from Stanley Kauffman in the *New York Times*] -- well, not good, but it was okay. It was at the Actors' Playhouse. It was around the corner. You could go to rehearsals in your pajamas, practically. And so this whole neighborhood was just redolent of creativity, particularly in performance. And I have to say, still is. There's still -- what is the name of it? Where Café Society was, and then the Theater of the Ridiculous is the Axis Theatre, an ill-named title for a theater. But nevertheless. Randy Sharp runs that. The Actors' Playhouse isn't really a theater anymore. But all of those places on Bleecker Street. And the Cornelia Street Café was here for so long.

[01:19:08] JN: Yeah. I was talking to someone else in another one of these oral histories who was a writer in the Village in a later era, in the '80s and '90s. But we were talking about how there is this natural -- there's really no distinction between your personal social life and your professional life when you're kind of living in this circuit of creativity, and it's literally bounded within the neighborhood. But something we were talking about is how the kind of

affordability of the neighborhood and, you know, not just housing, but affordable cafes and bars and things like that --

[01:19:53] JC: Absolutely.

[01:19:54] JN: -- really fostered what was able to grow there. And so, I don't know. I'm curious. I know an answer to this, but I'm curious if you think we'll ever see something comparable or if the market is --

[01:20:13] JC: Well, I say [this] as they're demolishing my hallway and the tenants are -- some of them leaving, a new family building has been taken over by not a family. And they're whacking away at it. I have a sort of ominous sense that -- watch out for Greenwich Village. We need this preserved, absolutely more than ever. And it's a national treasure, really. Almost every inch of it is a -- the form of it, the shape of it, the intricacy of the streets. And the intimacy. The craziness of the streets has something to do with the nooks and crannies where a bar could be, or a bookstore could be, or a hangout.

[01:21:12] There's supposed to be a new place called, painting, or what is it called? I don't know. Somebody told me about it. Art, Wine and Conversation, something like that. We'll see. I don't know how, you know, wine glass for $18. It's not [laughs] conducive exactly, to the life of a starving artist. And there have been many years; decades, really. Including the years David and I spent back and forth to Los Angeles -- you had to, if you really wanted to make a living.

[01:21:52] JN: How long were you in LA for before --

[01:21:55] JC: About five years. But then we would go back and we were known to a number of people, so we would still get work. We did a movie while we were here, we did for -- Whoopi Goldberg, whom we met out there. And we did some television stuff here and also for people that were assigned by people out there. But that sort of thing doesn't last forever.

[01:22:19] JN: Yeah.

[01:22:21] JC: But it was a choice to come back to New York. I had a book to write, also. My husband said, "We can't live two places at once." So I had *The Compass: [The*

Improvisational Theatre that Revolutionized American Comedy]. I was signed by Knopf to do that book on the improvisational theater. The thing, write about what you know. And now I'm writing another one called *Mother Improv*, which is the story of Viola Spolin, the woman who invented theater games. Those games that you play with empty space and each other.

[01:22:56] [BREAK IN AUDIO RECORDING] I want to also talk about Cornelia Street Café, so.

[01:22:59] JN: Yeah. All right. So why don't we pick back up there. So, Cornelia Street Café.

[01:23:05] JC: Yeah. Yeah, I want to talk -- sing praises and homages and say how much I miss the Cornelia Street Café since it closed due to rent hikes. I mean, there was a place you could actually go out for breakfast. You got an artist discount. I think you got 20% off your bill -- if you ever worked there or played there or performed there, you got a starving artist card. That's what it was. From Robin and his partners. Finally, he was left -- he was the sole partner. But Robin Hirsch, who was a writer, too, and who started his café with a couple of friends. He had been in England and kind of just -- I guess he went to school with the Monty Pythons. So he had a kind of similar background. He was a Cambridge student writer, but he also had a theatrical kind of -- it was in the air somehow. The '50s; the late '50s and after. If you were going to the mid-'60s through the -- I mean, the '60s lasted till way into the '70s.

[01:24:21] JN: Mm-hm.

[01:24:22] JC: That great time in American -- in bohemian life, certainly. But in American life, there was a huge, huge swath of time allotted to it, where all these different creative movements and liberation movements and stuff began happening. And infiltrating the world of music and art and -- they were mirrored. You mirror society and the changes in it.

[01:24:50] JN: Yeah, I was actually going to ask because I think it's both unusual and completely understandable to talk about the decade of the '60s entirely through its art, without talking about any of the kind of touchstone political moments.

[01:25:09] JC: It's true, although, yeah.

[01:25:11] JN: But as you said, they're mirrored. And so I'm curious what your experience of that was. Are there any particular moments that stand out that kind of made their way into your circles and your world?

[01:25:26] JC: Well, I think the Kennedy assassination changed everything. The shock of it. The reversal of everything. I mean, we'd heard of World War II, but we weren't in it. You know? But to have that, you know, the beginning of the sunshine of young Americans with the Kennedy couple. And the way they doted on the arts and on fashion and music. And he came out to -- John Kennedy was in Ann Arbor. He made a famous speech, "Ask not what your country can do for you." He did that in Ann Arbor. I won't say what I was doing that night. I think I was having a nervous breakdown, actually. I remember. [laughs] But anyway, I heard the thing reverberate throughout the campus. You could hear his voice. So that was -- I mean, we were already -- I remember Ed and Ann and I all going to Ann's that night of the assassination from our separate jobs. I think Ed was at *Time* and Ann was wherever. And I think I had a temp job and they sent us home early. I had a temp job on Bleecker Street. Can you believe it? That was comfortable. Get up.

[01:26:52] JN: Yeah. Walk like, two blocks.

[01:26:54] JC: Yeah, two blocks. And we all met at Ann's house. I remember watching all that on television. And then the subsequent assassinations when we were at the theater, I remember the shock of it all. And [pauses] yikes. I think those have been indelible influences. And you don't even know in what ways you're altered. I mean, I'm now doing this book on Spolin and the games and the people who set up The Game Theater that I went [to], the *New York Review* said, "You are working too hard. You need a vacation. Where do you want to go? The Bahamas? We'll pay for it." And I said, "Chicago. I want to go to Chicago." So I went to Chicago to see this work and now reading, say, the work of Paul Sills, who was director of the Second City. They were making Story Theater, but they were at a loss, also, for where to go, how to reflect what was happening politically without having to be topical. How do you raise that to art or incorporate it? It happens. It happened in the next generation. They didn't -- it came out through rock 'n roll, I think.

[01:28:14] JN: Yeah. Do you think that in your generation there was at least an attempt at a conscious keeping those worlds separate?

[01:28:29] JC: Maybe. Because we had lived through the Silent -- we weren't adults during that Silent Generation, but there was a lot of fear about expressing, you know, rebellion and stuff. Because of the blacklist and the Red Scare, all that. Maybe it happened to our parents or their friends or whatever. I did a series that started at the Cornelia Street Café, for WBAI, about Red Diaper Babies. And it turned out there were more of 'em than you thought. And they were -- Oskar Eustis; the guy who was Joyce Carol Oates' husband, who was a neurophysicist at Princeton; and a guy on Radio Free Eireann, the [rebel Irish] show on WBAI. I mean, people were popping out of the woodwork who had had experiences [with the Red Scare].

[01:29:23] I guess I do want to talk a little bit about Cornelia Street, because I talked about Robin. When we came back from LA, we weren't -- although we were getting these jobs, we had done -- David and me. David Dozer and me. We had done a lot of commercials before we left. We wrote and produced and played in them, and sometimes hired our friends when we had group scenes or something. I remember, I'm Jason, I'm hungry, Jason Hungry. It was hamburgers and department stores and Fords and cigarette lighters that exploded. Well anyway, we were go-to, because that was also part of the fallout of improvisational theater. In it, you could be funny on the spot or you could write a one-minute spot. You excelled in the short form. You know, blackouts. So we were very good at the one minute. And David was a super writer of brief theater, and he'd gone to Carnegie Mellon. Carnegie Tech, rather, now Carnegie Mellon. We call him on the radio now "the displaced playwright" because the radio plays he was writing were moved to another night, so we called him -- anyway. Once you have a handle on radio, you keep it, you don't lose it.

[01:30:50] JN: Oh, right. That's a good one.

[01:30:52] JC: So, we decided to do theater again. To do kinda off-off-Broadway type theater. And we did a show called *The Coffeehouse Years of Dig Rezod*, which was his name backwards, which was stuff he had done in college and performed at a coffeehouse in Pittsburgh. With a friend of his whom we still work with, who's now in Texas. And --

[01:31:17] JN: Roughly what year is --

[01:31:18] JC: I'm trying to think. About 1992, I think. And we --

[01:31:21] JN: Okay.

[01:31:22] JC: One of the playwrights from The Loft, Lawrence Osgood, became one of the participants in a project involving theater games. We had a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to teach improvisation and develop a performamce with high school kids. High school kids from New York City high schools, and then also later at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater. So I had a skill for that, organizing groups and teaching 'em how to play. And I mean, I guess I could still do it if I could see [laughs] straight. And so, Larry Osgood introduced me to Robin, and I said, "Well, I've written this book. And my husband and I, we do this thing and we'd like to be able to try it out here." We had tried it once at a place called Nada, which was on Ludlow Street. Out of our neighborhood, but it was run by somebody who was somebody connected to my family in California. And that was a neat place, Nada.

[01:32:31] And we did this first set. And I remember Joe Chaikin was [in the audience] and we did this poetry reading. It was like a mock poetry reading of little skits and poems. And it was like, drinking a lot of imaginary glasses of water, which is what poets always did. And doing these awkward introductions to our work and stuff. And then we gradually worked on it -- The Coffeehouse Years of Dig Rezod: A Dada Beatnik Cabaret. David is a couple years older and he was a professional actor when I met him, and been in *The Premise*, an improvisational theater which was also on that Bleecker Street corner. I think it's a drugstore now.

[01:33:22] And so we began performing, doing stuff whenever at the Cornelia Street Café. We added it to our circuit. And somebody saw us there, the arts director of WBAI, where we had worked in the '60s doing short radio plays by David called *Poisoned Arts*. But it featured a 15-minute segment of this thing that he wrote about a young married couple who adopts an old man from the welfare department, and they were very Dada-ish and charming, delightful pieces. I must say, I was the luckiest girl in the world to have this guy that I lived with write such a neat part for myself. And it went on -- I mean, WBAI was on 39th Street and then it moved to a church on 62nd Street. I don't know. They took us off, they put us on, and we began doing half-hour extended versions of this radio theater show.

[01:34:32] And they weren't doing original radio plays in those days. They were doing those kind of things where you took [exaggerated voice] footsteps and spoke in sonorous voices.

And this thing was like, real-ish or kind of comedic, cartoony voices with sophisticated scripts. And kind of original, live, crazy little sound effects. I remember there's one scene where Emily Ann Andrews, Charles and Emily Ann Andrews, they go to the America, America, America celebration, where they have a big cherry pie, and it's a celebration of George Washington's birthday. Emily Ann jumps into this cherry pie, and you hear this unforgettable sound. We did it by, I don't know, plopping something into thick oatmeal.

[01:35:22] So we were doing a lot of radio work, radio theater work. And then, we were at the Cornelia Street Café and the arts director then comes and says, "Why don't you do this at WBAI?" I said, "Why? What? We did that. We were at WBAI. Now we're professionals. We wrote a movie, we sold movies, TV, and whatever." We decided to go back just to do this one thing, which had what they call Foley. I mean, it was in front of a live audience and it was people doing radio the way they did it in old times with, you see the sound being created -- sound effects. It was a lot of fun. It featured stories about all the WBAI radio stars: Steve Post, Bob Fass, and Larry Josephson. They all had episodes about radios, going to radio school. It was fun.

[01:36:18] And so we came back for a night to WBAI, which was now, ugh, in a studio on Eighth Avenue. They had come down a peg. They'd lost their church on 62nd Street due to, I don't know, I think it was the FCC case. Pacifica versus, I guess, the United States of America [Federal Communications Commission vs. Pacifica Foundation]. It was a George Carlin thing, the "seven dirty words." The lawsuit cost so much money that WBAI lost the church, a renovated church that was turned into a beautiful sound studio. And by the way, you still can't say the dirty words. Even though we sort of nominally won the case. We didn't go to jail or anything for playing them. We, the station, it wasn't me. It was one guy who played the George Carlin *7 Dirty Words* record over and over and over again. Some other guy was in a car with his daughter and he said, what's this? And he reported it to the FCC. That's it. It was the FCC versus Pacifica, which BAI is part of.

[01:37:24] And so it was from the Cornelia Street Café that we added WBAI in there. And we sort of threw ourselves into that after the first recording the arts director had dragged us into doing. Coming back, like, every week, we would do the Poisoned Arts Minute, which were little shorties three-minute or sometimes longer, shorter. The Poisoned Arts Minute with the same characters but as little blackouts. And we had everybody in there. Old friends;

Renee Auberjonois, Tim Jerome, people from the station, Bob Fass, Steve Post. All of them participated and this was a lot of fun. And then, I don't know, by some kind of accident, the same arts director asked me if I wanted to do a live show. I'd never done live radio. I'd only done this production stuff, as an actor.

[01:38:22] JN: Yeah. The shorts were pre-produced and then aired?

[01:38:25] JC: Right.

[01:38:26] JN: Okay.

[01:38:27] JC: Yeah. Right. We recorded them. They weren't live. It was a different story. I mean, so, or we'd make things and send 'em to Bob Fass, make skits and he'd play 'em. Little satirical things. And, I don't know. I went on live and suddenly I had some facility for doing it live, and we were still doing those minutes. So that's how David became The Displaced Playwright. His minutes were displaced from Tuesday to Wednesday, something like that. And I had this show, a stand-alone show called Cat Radio Café.

[01:39:08] JN: And how did that get its name?

[01:39:10] JC: It was David's idea. I think it was, there was a cat radio thing. It was so cats could listen to the radio when they're -- when you're gone. You could leave on the radio and they'd have something good to listen to. That's really the reason [laughs] for the name of it. And so, Cat Radio Café became a salon of the arts type of show. And I still do it. And we still do little jokes and whatnot. Prerecord 'em and -- as if live. And then the other things are Zoomed. We do 'em on Zoom a few days before they air. And I can pretty much do anybody I want. I had the jazz singer, Lorraine Feather. I've had Ishmael Reed. I've had Andrew Berman, frequently, who talks about -- he's a genius of preservation and of architecture and all that. He knows everything. And a lot of stuff that happens in the Village. La MaMa. When I think about it, it is a gravitational force in my life, where I live. Where I breathe.

[01:40:33] JN: Yeah. I mean, it's really like a tractor beam, just -- everything.

[01:40:39] JC: Yeah. It's like somebody with an old farmhouse. Farmhouse falling down. There's apartment buildings right next to it, but you're still in this space of -- that you remember is a safe space.

[01:40:55] JN: That would actually be a lovely note to end our first session on, unless you have any –-

[01:41:00] JC: That's fine. That's fine. Does it tie together?

[01:41:04] JN: It does. It really does. Yeah. And I think it is a testament to your kind of multihyphenate work that I think we have so much left to talk about. [laughs]

[END OF AUDIO RECORDING]

Oral History Interview with Janet Coleman:

Narrator(s)	Janet Coleman
Address	5 Jones St #10
Birth year	1942
Birthplace	New York, New York
Narrator Age	83
Interviewer	Josie Naron
Place of Interview	Remote — NY, NY and Brooklyn, NY
Date of Interview	3/21/25
Duration of Interview	01:42:12
Number of Sessions	1
Waiver Signed/copy given	Yes
Photographs	
Format Recorded	.wav
Archival File Names	Coleman_Janet_VillagePreservationOralHist

	ory _archival.mp3
MP3 File Name	Coleman_Janet_VillagePreservationOralHistory _archival.mp3
Order in Oral Histories	57 [#2 in 2025]