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King, Albert, Oral history interview conducted by Sady Sullivan, November 4, 2009, Voices of Brooklyn oral histories: Sports and leisure, 2008.031.6.002; Brooklyn Historical Society.

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Oral History Interview with Albert King

Voices of Brooklyn oral histories: Sports and leisure, 2008.031.6.002

Interview conducted by Sady Sullivan via telephone on November 4, 2009

SULLIVAN: Hello, this is Sady.

KING: Good afternoon, Sady. This is Albert King.

SULLIVAN: Hi, thank you so much for -- for calling us.

KING: No problem. Sorry it's been this difficult.

SULLIVAN: I know, I know. No, I apologize, too. It was just hard to schedule. [laughter]

KING: No -- and then, I changed my number. I didn't know if you called or not. It -- just -- a couple personal things happened. But I'm -- I'm ready to go.

SULLIVAN: OK. Um. Well, I am recording. So do I have your permission to record?

KING: Yes.

SULLIVAN: OK, great.

KING: Oh, you're doing it -- I thought it was -- the young people were going to do it.

SULLIVAN: Um, well, it ori -- that was going to happen originally. But then, because, on -- we had to schedule this for short notice -- but, this is for -- I'll tell you about the project. This is for a curriculum kit that we're putting together, that's for students. And it's talking about sports in Brooklyn. And, so, um, we're using some, um, oral history interviews in the curriculum kit to, just, you know, make it more lively and -- and interesting to the students.

KING: Good.

SULLIVAN: Um, so that's what this interview will be part of.

KING: No problem.

SULLIVAN: OK, great. Um, so -- I will, just to formally start the interview with the date: It is November 4, 2009. I am Sady Sullivan with the Brooklyn Historical Society. This interview is for the Sports and Brooklyn curriculum kit oral history project. And I am speaking with Albert King. And, if you would, introduce yourself to the recording.

KING: Uh, yes, my name is Albert King. I was born in Brooklyn, New York.

SULLIVAN: Great. And, you play basketball.

KING: Yes. Uh, I -- I was -- well, I played basketball growing up in Brooklyn. I first -- I grew up in an area called Fort Greene, New York. I mean, Fort Greene, Brooklyn. I started playing basketball when I was probably ten years old. My whole family played basketball. I went to P.S. 67 Elementary School. I played basketball there. I went to Sands Junior High School -- it was called back then. And I played in junior high school basketball. And basketball really took off for me starting in high school. I attended Fort Hamilton High School, in Bay Ridge. And then I attended the University of Maryland on a basketball scholarship. And after that, I'll just give a quick overview -- I was drafted by the New Jersey Nets back in 1981. And that's when a dream came true about playing professional basketball.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: And we can go whatever -- all of it, if you like to. Whatever you'd like to go into.

SULLIVAN: Great. Well, yeah. Let's -- let's go back, um, to the beginning. Were you born in Brooklyn?

KING: Yes. Born in Brooklyn, I grew up in Fort Greene. That's right on Myrtle Avenue, close to Flatbush Avenue.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: Four brothers and one sister. We're all very tall. Right now -- I mean, we're all 6'6. In that area. And my sister is 6'1.

SULLIVAN: Wow.

KING: Yes, yes. We're very tall. We have a basketball team, it seems like.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: Grow -- but growing up in Fort Greene, right there on the playground, we played basketball -- after our homework, of course. Uh, every weekend. Even on the weekdays, we'd try to sneak out. Our parents let us go downstairs and play for a little while. And growing up in inner city -- the big thing was playing basketball, or being involved in gangs. We chose the basketball side.

SULLIVAN: Mmm. Um, and -- um, Fort Greene, when you say -- did you play in the park? In the Fort Greene park?

KING: We -- we played in Fort Greene park, which everyone knows is a historical park. And we also played right in the projects. Right -- we grew up on, at 79 North Oxford Walk. Right in that area. There's basketball courts throughout the projects. So Saturday mornings, and coming home from church on Sunday, and after school -- like I mentioned, after homework -- we'd just go run downstairs. We lived on the 12th floor -- so it was good exercise, when the elevator wasn't working.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: Uh, to run up and down those steps. But we'd go right downstairs, and everyone was out there playing. It was great memories, of just playing basketball in the rain, in the snow -- we took the shovel and shoveled the snow away to play basketball. It was a way of life, back then, as far as something to do, to keep you active. Which was great for everyone.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. And so who were -- who were the other people that you were playing with? The other kids?

KING: Well, some -- I mean, there were friends I have -- Andrew Nichols, Bernard Walton, uh, there was Hector -- I mean, there was so many players playing down there -- friends, of course, and just all the people that lived in the area. I have a, a brother that -- he was pretty good. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: That's a real -- that's a joke. He was great. Uh, he's three years older than I am. We didn't play against each other, because -- when, um -- you can imagine, when you're 12, and your brother's 15, you don't play against your older brother. He doesn't want to be around you. Um, but there were so many great players -- young players -- and older players -- that went down to the court. It was like people going to picnics. When people go to a picnic, or they go to the playground, or they go to the carnival -- they go to a circus. Our entertainment was basketball. The whole neighborhood -- the whole projects -- we keep saying projects -- we don't say neighborhood, back then.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: Uh, everyone just gathered around the basketball court. And, watched everyone play.

You win, you stay on the court. You lose, you have to get in line for the next game.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. And what was the -- what was the feeling. I mean, was it -- was it really competitive?

KING: It was very competitive. Sometimes, it -- it was a little bit too competitive. Fights -- you'd have a little fight, now and then. But the big thing was, everyone wanted to fulfill that dream of playing professional basketball. Growing up in the inner city, of course, you're poor -- you don't have a lot. And you -- looking on TV, you're seeing Dr. J. You're seeing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. You're seeing Wilt Chamberlain. You're seeing Walt Frazier. You're seeing all these professional players, and when you're on the court, you become someone. I became Dr. J. Someone else was maybe Wilt Chamberlain. Someone else was Clyde Frazier. It was a dream of saying that, "Wow -- we're on the court playing skins and shirts -- on this hard -- I mean, on the pavement. But maybe one day we'll be able to play at Madison Square Garden," or the Nassau Coliseum, back then.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Um. And, for how many people that you were playing with back then -- how many of you did get to play professional?

KING: That -- that's -- that's something that, when I talk to young people, I let them know -- it's a dream. Everyone has dreams. Everyone has inspirations. You want to be -- you want to fulfill them. Uh -- but to answer your question -- and I say that first -- is that, myself -- I became a basketball player. My brother, Bernard King, he became a bask -- a professional basketball player, mostly with that other team, the Knicks.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: Umm... one other player. He's a coach, now. He lived in the Farragut Projects. Anyone that knows Brooklyn and Fort Greene, they know Farragut. His name is Armond Hill.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: He went to Princeton University, which is even more outstanding. He went on to play with the Atlanta Hawks. And now he's a coach with the Atlanta Hawks.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: So those are the three that I remember, right off-hand. In that area. Because Fort Greene and Farragut is very close together. We are the three that I know of, that played professional basketball.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: So you have thousands and thousands -- tens of thousands -- of players. Throughout the years. From the '70s, '60s, to now. And -- and there's been three. So that says a lot.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm. And what did -- what was the neighborhood response when -- when you were drafted by the Nets?

KING: Oh, the nei -- the neighborhood response was incredible. I mean, they would have loved for me to play with the Knicks, but being with the Nets was even, uh, was even a thrill for everyone. I think the big thing was, it was even more exciting when we went to college. Not a lot of people in the neighborhood had the opportunity to go away to college. They might go to community college, or unfortunately, a lot of people didn't have the opportunity to go to college. So there was even more of a thrill with the older, elder people, as you may say --

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: -- when we went to college. Than the pros.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: When we went into the pros, I was living in New Jersey, it was a little different. It wasn't like you were right there in Fort Greene. But when you came -- when we're able to come back into the neighborhood to visit, and to see people. Of course you felt big-time. It was -- it was a big-time feeling, to say that you played professional basketball. But as far as basketball, there's nothing like playing basketball in the neighborhood. You make money playing professional basketball -- but my memories of playing basketball in the neighborhood, in Fort Greene, throughout Brooklyn -- that, that's -- it doesn't get any better than that. You do basketball professionally -- it's a business, and you do it for the love of the game. But the love started right there on those hard -- along those pavements.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Um. What was the -- what was the feeling of, of competitiveness, and, and you said that sometimes, like fights would happen. But how, in terms of, of learning, and people getting better -- because you're practicing all the time. How -- what was that atmosphere like?

KING: Practice -- when you say practice, we didn't -- we, we played. We -- practice is more when you get into high school, and when you get into college and professional. When you're in the play -- when you're on the playground, you're just playing basketball. You -- you're not doing drills. You're just playing one-on-one, three-on-three, five-on-five. You're -- you're just playing basketball. And the competitiveness comes in whereas -- I might have been a good basketball player in junior high school, or high school. I might have had my name in the paper. Uh, might have been on TV. But your reputation means nothing when you step on the court in Brooklyn.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: When you step on -- [laughter] when you step into the playground, and you're going to that court -- it's what you do out there. It's not what you bring out there with the name. You have to show people what you can do. So, when you do have a name -- people, as they say on the street -- they come at you a lot more. They -- they want to, they want to beat you -- they want to be better than you. They want to show you up. And it's how many "oohs" and "ahhs" you get on the court, on the -- in the neighborhood. More so than, uh, how many newspaper clippings you have. Because, as I said, it is -- it's a, it's a festive atmosphere. Everyone stops what they're doing, surrounds the court, and it's time to show what you can do.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: And there's no place like that but Brooklyn.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Would people come from outside the neighborhood to play?

KING: Peop -- especially on Saturdays. Um, people used to come up on -- oh, I forget them name of the -- right by the Brooklyn Bridge. There was a -- I think it was Tillary Park. People used to come from different neighborhoods on Saturday morning to play at Tillary Park. It was a place to come early in the morning -- 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock in the

morning. And especially after you get in junior high school and high school, people start hearing about different players. "Oh, let's go down there and play against Albert King." "Let's go play against Bernard King." So I think that was one of the big things that brought people back into the neighborhood, and just to look and see who they could play against.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: So we had a lot of people come from different places. Marcy Projects, Bed-Stuy; we had them coming from all over to say, "We want to play against these King boys."

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: "See what they're about." [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Um. So, tell me -- going, going back a little bit. What was -- you were playing -- did you start playing for a school team at P.S. 67? Was there--?

KING: I played a little bit at P.S. 67. I was average.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And I played in junior high school. In the 7th grade, I didn't play that much. What happened was, with myself, and even my brother Bernard -- is that, we met a coach by the name of Gil Reynolds. Anyone that plays bas -- that has played basketball back in the '70s, the '80s, the '90s -- would know that name. Gil Reynolds.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: He was for the -- it was the Recreation Department. We met him at the St. Johns Recreation Department.

SULLIVAN: Oh, where was that?

KING: Ah -- St. Johns Recreation Department -- I forget. One thing about when you're -- when you grow up in New York -- you know trains. You take the train everywhere. You don't know the neighborhoods all the time.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It was off of -- East and Parkway.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It was -- it was off of East and Parkway. I forget, uh, the stop. But Gil Reynolds -- anyone that knows basketball knows the name Gil Reynolds. And we owe him our -- giving us the opportunity to become better basketball players. So for myself -- in the 7th grade, I met him. I wasn't playing that much. I was -- I was playing. But the next year just took off, because under his direction, you mentioned drills -- we started doing drills, we used to practice all the time. He -- he broke down the game of basketball, and the fundamentals. Instead of just talent. How to be fundamentally sound. So, we -- I used to travel on the train. I used to walk from Fort Greene, Myrtle Avenue, to Flatbush Avenue -- catch the train -- I used to have my green bag that said "Recreation Department" so everyone knew I was good. And we used to go to practice, and we practiced two to three hours, twice a week. Doing drills. Drills, drills, drills. And the next year, for myself, in the 8th grade -- it all just took off. I was starting, was playing all the time. Was getting recognized. And we owe it -- and a lot of players in Brooklyn -- owe their basketball skills to Gil Reynolds.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Um, tell me more about him. What was -- what was his background, and why was he such a good mentor?

KING: He was probably only 5'7. I mean, I'm 6'6. So 5'7 is not that tall. Probably 5'6, 5'7. He was left-handed. He had the military background. He was strong. He was one of these -- he looked like he was in the military. And the thing about him was that he took no nonsense. He used to always tell us, "Son" -- he used to always say "son." He'd call -- no matter what your name was, he called you "son." "Son, don't mess with me. I'm a black belt in karate. I'm going to show you how to play basketball. If you don't listen, we go one-on-one. And I'll show you that I'm a black belt."

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: The funny thing is, no one ever found out if he was a black belt or not. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: No one wanted to take the chance. So he might not -- he might have just been a white belt. Who knows? But he just had the voice. He had the discipline. But more importantly, he can play basketball. He could get -- he was out on the court with us all

the time. Whenever we played basketball, this old man -- I mean, I'm 49 now, so I -- I called him old back then. He was probably only in his late 30s.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: He was -- and I was 13, 12. He was on the court playing. We'd be like, "Who is this short guy on the court with us?" But he was so strong. He knew the game. He played it the correct way. And he had the one thing that you could give someone, that you know they're a great person. Respect. Everyone gave him respect. And -- and when he passed away, there were so many people. Hundreds and hundreds of people came back for his funeral, to pay their respect. Because he was just so good of a person. And he took care of everyone.

SULLIVAN: Um, so was he a teacher also, or was -- was coaching his full-time job?

KING: Coaching was his full-time job. Uh, he coached at, uh, Laurinberg -- it's a prep school. "Laurinberg," I think it was called? And the thing that we just knew -- we knew about him, but the main thing we knew about him was basketball. He loved basketball. He called you at home. 7, 8 o'clock at night, after a game. Talk to you about what you did right, what you did wrong. He called you whenever. And the game -- the game was very important to them -- to him. And it seems like all we were learning was basketball. But now that you're older, you learn that you were learning -- you know that you were learning more than that. You were learning discipline. You were learning respect. You were learning teamwork. And those things -- as you can tell, I -- I -- I love that man. He, he, he did a lot for me, and he -- and more importantly, he -- you didn't have to be a star. He, he treated the first team player like the last person on the bench. He calls them up, talks to them -- he, he just had the respect of everyone.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And had he -- where did he play? I mean, before -- before he was a coach?

KING: He never played professionally.

SULLIVAN: Oh.

KING: He never played in college.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Played a little bit in high school. It is just -- he knew the game. He learned the game. He studied the game. He was the -- people that know basketball -- he was the John Wooden -- of UCLA -- of Brooklyn. He was that great of a coach.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: Never had the opportunity -- if he had the opportunity to become a professional coach, he would have been great.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: He might have lost a lot of players [laughter] -- because they couldn't handle the discipline. But as far as knowing the game. We all owe him a great deal.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. And was he from Brooklyn originally?

KING: I don't re -- I don't rec -- remember. I think he was from the South.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But Brooklyn -- he only coached in Brooklyn. Other than at Laurinberg Prep school. He never went to Manhattan, never went to Queens, never went to the Bronx. He was a Brooklyn man.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: The Brooklynite.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Um, so tell me about playing basketball when you got to Fort Hamilton High School.

KING: Fort Hamilton High School. As I said, Fort Hamilton -- Bay Ridge. Totally different environment. All my brothers went there except one. My oldest brother, Thomas, started at Fort Hamilton. Then my brother Bernard went there. I went there. And my younger brother Gerald went there. My little brother Ronald went to FDR. I don't know why. But Fort Hamilton was -- you take the train -- the D train -- to 84th Street, in Bay Ridge. And either you walk a couple miles, or you take the bus, and it was a different world to me. Growing up in Fort Greene, is the inner-city. Probably 80% black, 20% Hispanic, or somewhere in that area. You go to Fort Hamilton -- I'm like, "Where am I at? This is different."

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: "Looks nice. There's some grass out here, and nice houses... nice homes." It's probably 90% Italian. So, I mean, back then you say, white-black, no one said Italian, Irish -- whatever it may be. So it was different for me in the sense of -- I started to learn, there was more than Fort Greene in this world. Fort Greene was all I knew. The projects. The crime, unfortunately. A lot of negative -- a lot of positives. But it taught me that there's another world out there. So it was good to be able to take that train ride. Take the bus ride. To see other parts of the borough. So playing at Fort Hamilton, we had wooden backboards. I say that only that nowadays everyone has fiberglass. Basketball for me went very well. Started every year. All-city, all that good stuff that you become if you play good. So it was -- it was very memorable from the standpoint of, made a lot of good friends. But basketball wise, wise -- it -- it was, it was great. You couldn't beat it. We never won the championship, but there were so many great players from different teams, from different boroughs that you played against in high school. So I enjoyed my three years. I went from the 10th grade through the 12th. Fort Hamilton.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. And so why did your brothers and you all go to Fort Hamilton -- you know, why did you travel to go to high school?

KING: That's something that I have always tried -- I never asked my older brother that. He's the one that started it out. I think the -- the way it worked in Brooklyn at the time -- because all the brothers were good. All the brothers were all-city, and one of the best in the city, as you may say. So when you were in junior high school, they had open enrollment, where you could either go to -- if you live in a certain area, the only two schools you could go to outside of that area was Fort Hamilton and FDR.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: How that happened, I'm not sure. If we didn't play basketball, we would not have been at Fort Hamilton. I know that for a fact. But I'm sure everything was legal, but I'm sure there was some help somewhere [laughter] along the way to get us into Fort Hamilton. But they had open enrollment, open enrollment where you could apply at Fort Hamilton or FDR. If you wanted to go to a school outside of your area.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: So it was -- it was a long ride. It, it probably took us an hour or more to get to school every day -- one way. And then going back home. But it worked out well, because you -- again, it opened your eyes. That there is other places to go, places to see, and people to meet -- outside of your own community.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. And how was it -- I mean, how was that community and the team -- were they -- you know, were they playing the same as you? Were you learning different things from the team?

KING: Um, my team that I played on was not a great team. [laughter] Uh, we were -- in the sense of players. We played well, we went to the playoffs, we won a lot of games. But as far as when you go up against teams from, let's say Fort Greene, or Bushwick or Bed-Stuy. We might have beat them, but they had more talent. So most of the players on my team came from Bay Ridge.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So, growing up -- you did not have a lot of great player -- a lot of good players in Bay Ridge, compared to the urb -- the inner city. [Interview interrupted.]

KING: Good, good.

SULLIVAN: Um, cool. So you were saying that there -- that, you know, there wasn't as many good players from, from Bay Ridge.

KING: Yes. There -- well, there -- I mean, because -- as you know, when you're in an inner city, you play basketball, or you're involved in trouble. Something negative. And when you live in a nice area, you have more opportunities to do other things. So it wasn't just basketball. So the players that I played with -- they came from an environment where they didn't spend their whole time playing basketball.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: In Fort Greene, you spend your whole time playing basketball. You should be studying more, probably, but we did our homework. Or, you're involved with, uh, something that you shouldn't be involved in.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: So, I think -- I think that's, that's the big difference. So you -- when you have -- we say conversation now, but back then -- when you talk to your teammates, or when you go out to have pizza, or you go out to have something to eat -- it doesn't all evolve around basketball. You have other type conversations.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: And, but when you're in Fort Greene, it's either -- did you see Dr. J last night? Did you see Walt Frazier? Uh, did you see that person get hit with a bat? Did you see that fight? Uh... you know, those type things. So, the conversations were different. So your outlook in life changes when you're in a more positive environment.

SULLIVAN: Right, right. And so -- was that -- was that hard for your Bay Ridge teammates? I mean, did they understand what Fort Greene was like, and -- and, you know, how was that -- how did you make that transition back and forth?

KING: Um... I think that the big thing was, in certain part -- I mean, a lot of families in Fort Greene had, had two parents. But then again, a lot didn't. We did. Uh -- my mother and father have been married over 58 years.

SULLIVAN: Oh, wow.

KING: They've married for 58 years. Uh, they were very strict. Uh -- we knew the belt. [laughter] We'd call it the belt. Uh, but they went -- we went to church every Sunday. We had to do our homework. And there was other -- there was many other families in Fort Greene that was in the same situation. But then again, there was other -- a majority of the families were not. It was more, maybe one parent. Um, maybe sometimes no parents. You lived with your grandparents, you lived with your relatives. You're out on the street more. You're not at home. You're not doing what you need to do. So I grew -- we grew up in a more stable environment. Which gave us the opportunity, when we went to other areas of Brooklyn, we were able to handle it. Of course, we were still Fort Greene. And will always be Fort Greene. Uh, but we were able to handle other environments more. And we were -- we were probably accepted more. Because we were able to have different type conversations, I would say. And this is all -- I'm saying all this looking back. When I was there in that environment, it was just that -- what I knew.

This is how I -- you're supposed to say please. You're supposed to say thank you. You're supposed to say excuse me. Uh -- sometimes, unfortunately, that doesn't happen if you don't have the -- the best upbringing.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Which happens now and then. So we were accepted. We played basketball -- I'm sure that helped. Uh, we were great. I'll say that. So that probably helped.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm.

KING: But as far as being accepted. I think we were accepted. Because we -- we had good people around us. In Fort Greene and in Bay Ridge.

SULLIVAN: Mmm-hmm. Um, was there -- was there times that -- I mean, was there racism that you were dealing with on the basketball team or in the school or in the neighborhood?

KING: I -- I would say... from a race -- for me, personally -- for me, personally -- no. And I think the -- the cushion for me was basketball. It's where Albert King, Bernard King, Thomas King -- we all played basketball. And, and when you play something that people love, uh, we all know that we don't live in a colorblind society. In the '70s, or in the '80s, or wherever it may be -- or in the '60s. You had that cushion. You had that ability to not have to deal with certain things other people would, in front of your face.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Now, what happens behind your back, when I went home, I don't -- who knew -- I couldn't, I couldn't tell you that. But as far as for me, at, at high school -- good, bad, maybe it would have been good if I saw something different. I never saw the racism.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I never had to deal with it. Now, when you're on the train sometimes, or -- when you're walking down the steps, and someone moves to the other side. Or they might hold their bag a little closer. Or you -- you go on the train, and they might move to -- they walk into the train and see you sitting there, and they might want to sit, sit somewhere else, or stand up and not sit down next to you. Yes, I've dealt with that.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But as far as on the school level -- I haven't dealt with that, no.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. That's been one of the interesting things that, um, I've -- I've interviewed some -- I talked to Al Vann, and Alan Fishman -- both of whom played, um, high -- basketball in Brooklyn in high school. And both of them talked about how it was -- it really helped with, like, the -- the racial tensions in the city at the time, and -- and they really credited the game with a lot of that. That it's such a -- that -- the team sports of it.

KING: Mmm-hmm. I mean, it -- it helped them in their, in their life, as far as not having to deal with it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I mean -- and there's good to that, and I guess there's bad. The good is, you don't have to deal with it on a personal level. The bad is, sometimes you're isolated. You -- you're in a cocoon. You don't really see what's really happening in the world. And your friends might be dealing with that. And you're -- your reaction is, "What are you talking about?" When you're 13 years old, you're 14 -- they might be talking about this happened to them, that might have happened to them. And you -- you're saying to yourself, "I don't know what you're talking about."

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: "Not happening to me. You must be -- you must be imagining something." So you don't really understand or, or appreciate, or comprehend what -- what other people are going through.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So -- not that I wanted to have racism, or having negative things happening to me. But I would say that we were definitely sheltered from that because we played basketball.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And, um, are your mom and dad from Brooklyn, too?

KING: My mother is from South Carolina. And my father is from North Carolina.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: They both came up here when they were -- my mother came up when she was 18. And my father was 17 -- well, he was older than -- I said 17. He was, uh, [inaudible] years; 25.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And did they meet down South, or did they meet up here?

KING: They met in New York. At a ballroom. I forget the name of the ballroom. At a dance hall, they called it. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Oh, wow.

KING: Back then. The dance hall. My father used to love to dance. I think that's where we -- that's where it came from. All of us -- we love to dance. And my father used to love to dance. Uh, he probably hasn't gone dancing in 30 years --

SULLIVAN: Oh...

KING: Probably more than that. He -- he gave that up. [laughter] He gave that lifestyle up. But they met at a dance hall, and --

SULLIVAN: Do you know where that -- was it in Brooklyn, the dance hall?

KING: Um -- it was in Manhattan.

SULLIVAN: Uh-huh.

KING: It was in Manhattan. It wasn't Brooklyn, unfortunately. But it was -- I forget the name of the hall. I can find out, if you need to know. Um... but the thing is, he was very quiet, very shy. And he was a dancer. And they met, and... fortunately for us, they did. And, it took off from there.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But he's from North Carolina, and my mother's from South Carolina.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And what kind of music does he like?

KING: Well, then? Then he loved the -- I guess it was big band, back then. In that time -- in that era.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Uh, he -- as I said, he's -- he's -- and he's always telling us -- he used to love to dance, he -- he went out -- he used to be at the dance hall all the time. He was addicted to it. Whatever that means -- dancing.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But now he's more -- he's more into the ministry. As far as -- he goes to ch -- on the church level.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So that -- that probably ended -- no, I said 30 years? I'd say probably, 45 years. Probably.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: 50 years ago, he gave up the dance hall.

SULLIVAN: Um -- and do your parents still live in Brooklyn?

KING: Yes, they live in -- close to the downtown area. Yes.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: We grew up in Fort Greene -- but, they -- they're close to Fort Greene, but not -- not right in that area.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And so, did -- how did you start playing basketball? Was that something that your -- did your parents encourage it, or how did -- how did you get started?

KING: How -- basketball was -- I couldn't say in the genes, because my father didn't play basketball. He played baseball a little bit, down in North Carolina. Just -- recreationally. Uh, we lived on the 12th floor. My brother Thomas, the oldest, I mentioned -- and Bernard, is older than me. And Ronald is only a couple years, so -- I used to look out of the window when I was probably five, six -- because you -- the tall high-rise buildings -- I used to look down onto the court. Because you could see the court. You go to one side of the house, on the apartment, there are courts. You go to the other side, there are courts. I couldn't go downstairs. My mother wouldn't let me. It's not like you live in the suburbs, you could just go out in the front yard and just play a little bit, in the driveway. So I'm up on the 12th floor, looking down, through the bars on the window. My older brother Bernard -- I mean, Thomas, first. He used to play -- they used to have games every weekend. At the Fort Greene tournament. And I used to just watch him play. From above. I could see half the court. The other half of the court, I had to stretch -- I couldn't see. And I said, "Wow." I just got fascin -- fascinated -- we became so infatuated

with playing basketball that we said, "We want to be like Thomas. We want to play basketball." Not because, at that age, you want to play professional basketball. It's because it's your older brother.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: This is my older brother. And I want to be like my older brother.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And Thomas -- I used to -- he used to dunk -- now I call, I didn't know back then -- it was dunking, probably. But he used to dunk, he used to jump real high. They called him Spalding. I'm walking -- while my mother is taking us to school, or we're going somewhere, to the store -- people would be saying, "Did you see Spalding yesterday?" He had -- that's his -- that was his nickname -- and everyone knew how great he was as a basketball player. So as a little brother, it was great to hear that. Spalding. He has 30 points, he was jumping over the rim... we exaggerate in Brooklyn. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: So -- it's -- it was just -- became the thing. That I want to be like Thomas. And then my brother Bernard -- he's three years older, so it wasn't as much. It was mostly us watching Thomas play. But when I was in junior high school, my brother Bernard was at Fort Hamilton. And he was scoring 25, 30 points a game. CY All-Star, in the paper, New York Post, Daily News -- so I'm, I'm like, "Wow, this -- this -- they're great. I would love to play basketball like that." So those -- those two inspired me to want to play basketball better.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But Bernard -- Bernard -- myself, Ronald, my brother Gerald -- it all started with Spalding. As they called him.

SULLIVAN: [laughter] And -- and just for the recording, so I -- I -- it's -- he was called Spalding because he could -- was bouncy and could jump as high as -- like --

KING: I guess so. I never -- I don't -- I don't know to this day why they called him Spalding. But we played with a Spalding basketball. So I guess it has to be something with that.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: He -- he had a really bad surgery on his, uh, knee. Back then they had open surgery, so they opened the whole knee up. But he was probably -- had the most talent of anyone in the family. And it was incredible the way he used to be able to jump. So I guess Spalding probably came from, as you're saying, bouncy and all.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It was incredible the way he could jump.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Um, oh -- so how young was he when he hurt his knee?

KING: He was in college.

SULLIVAN: Oh, wow.

KING: Yes. So that -- he went to Wes -- Virginia Wesleyan. And when he -- first year there, he hurt his knee. So that, that ended his basketball side.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

KING: But anyone -- Brooklyn -- say the name Spalding. They'll know -- Spalding is Thomas King.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Um. So -- maybe -- we can talk about University of Maryland. And -- and playing basketball there, and how -- how that transition was, from, from Brooklyn to Maryland.

KING: University of Maryland -- um, 1977. Um -- I took a -- took a car ride with a friend. His name is Winston. He was an older gentleman, was my friend. We drove from Brooklyn to Maryland. Dropped off my bags, and he left and came back to Brooklyn in a half an hour. I'm like, "What is this? Where am I at? I'm at the University of Maryland." Great university. Homesick. Being from Brooklyn, now you're -- I considered Maryland the South.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Not like Deep South, but when you, when you're from Brooklyn, and the neighborhood, and you're around all these trees and grass, and... this is different. Boy, you don't hear any shooting or anything. [laughter] Uh, it's a little -- it's a little different. I stayed on campus. Stayed in the athletic dorm. Uh, started playing the first year. And, it -- played in a conference called the ACC tournament. And that, that was a very

competitive, uh, tournament. Meaning that there were so many good teams. We played against North Carolina, North Carolina State. We played against Duke, Clemson. So, I - I think that ACC probably was the best league out there. I'm sure others say differently. But it, it was a great -- it was a great experience. I -- my coach was -- his name was Lefty Driesell. And, I met a lot of good people there. I met my wife in college.

SULLIVAN: Oh.

KING: So -- yes. I knew you would appreciate that -- [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: Ah, so -- it, it was -- '77-'81, was the college -- University of Maryland.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And, um, who were the other -- who were your teammates, and where were they from?

KING: My teammates. There was no one else from New York City. We had Reggie Jackson, was from Philadelphia. "Dutch" Morley was from some little town in Pennsylvania -- Hershey, Pennsylvania. Uh, we had Larry Gibson, who was from Baltimore. We had Jo Jo Hunter, Billy Bryant, from Washington, D.C. Later on we had Buck Williams -- he was a great bas -- NBA player. He was from Rocky Mountain, North Carolina. So there was -- there was all mixes, and we had different people from different backgrounds, which was -- which was interesting. Different accents. Uh, different beliefs. Different ways of handling their lives. So -- now that you look back, it was interesting. Back then, it -- it, it wasn't. Because it was just -- OK, this guy, he's here playing with me. He's at the University. We're going to school here. But when you look back at it, there -- there was just so many different personalities, which made it interesting.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But there was no New Yorkers. So. I was at the top of the list, I'm sure.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And how -- how -- everybody coming from everywhere -- how does -- how does a sort of team cohesion happen?

KING: How does it happen? It... it takes a little time for it to happen. [inaudible] One thing with the University of Maryland was, we had so many All-Americans. All-Americans is, like if you're a top player in your city, or you're one of the top players in your city --

you're known as an All-American. The good and the bad for us is, we had 12 All-Americans. And when you have 12 All-Americans playing on the same team, it was very difficult in the beginning, because everyone had an ego. And everyone was used to being, as we say on the street, the man. So it took us, as a team -- and just individuals at the University of Maryland -- it took us two years or so to really, uh, come together as a team. And it's -- it's something where, when you play basketball -- I think, just in any aspect of life -- if you have too many of the same thing, it's not good for business. Or, it's not good for a team. You have to have different personalities. You have to have different -- that -- people that can handle different roles. Not everyone can be a scorer. We had probably 12 players that came from a scoring background, instead of different individual pieces to put a team together.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So I mean -- but that -- that's something that happens at a lot of schools. A lot of schools -- I mean, universities -- bring in -- try to bring in the best players, instead of trying to bring in pieces to put together a team.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Uh -- and what did -- what did your teammates know about Brooklyn, or what did they think about New York? I mean, it's such a -- there's -- there's so much sort of mythic ideas. Did you -- what was confronting that like?

KING: Well, I -- when you look at the time -- 1977. Let's see. You probably would never have heard of the word, the movie "Carwash." Um... you heard of Shaft. You heard of Shaft? You heard of Shaft?

SULLIVAN: Yeah. Yup.

KING: You heard of Pam Grier? [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Yeah. [laughter]

KING: Pam Grier, "Shaft," uh, "The Mac is Back."

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Those were movies that were out about Harlem and different places in New York City. So that's all they knew. They -- they knew the fancy, the -- as they say -- crime. The crowded, I mean, so many people. So when I came to school, they -- they probably

perceived -- I don't know if that's true or not -- that I was a New Yorker. Which, I am a New Yorker. I'm a Brooklynite, more so.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But the thing is that, that's what you knew. And what I knew about them was what I saw about the country. Or what I saw about some small town in Pennsylvania -- coal mine. That's -- that's what you bring to the table when you meet different people for the first time. So they -- they were infatuated, or people just in general at the university -- when you said you were from New York, it was like, "Wow, you're from New York City? Boy." All they know is what they see on TV.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So you had to bring out the other side. And, and the other parts of, uh, Brooklyn and New York.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But it was big time, being from New York. People -- people look up to you when you say you're from New York City.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And what was -- you, you've described it a little bit, but I wondered if you could describe, uh, Fort Greene a bit more. What it was like when you were growing up there.

KING: Fort Greene. Whoa, boy. 79 -- [laughter] 79 North Oxford Walk. My -- my whole life, I -- growing up is, is Fort Greene. It's -- it's [unintelligible] -- is a convenience store. We used to always go to get pumpkin seeds, to get peanuts. To get soda. It was right across from Fort Greene Park --

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It's Cumberland Hospital. It's the monkey bars, it's the swings, it's the playing Ringolevio-- that's where you tag someone, and they're it -- and they got to tag other people. It's playing Skellzies. Skellzies is where you take a soda -- soda bottle top -- and you have different squares with numbers, 1-12. You have to get it, and you go with your index finger on the ground. Hit it -- and have to get it into the box. To go from 1-12. You have to know the game to understand it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It's -- it's -- being out -- just being outside, just running. Just -- I felt, it was great, for me. It was being free. It was, it was being -- in a area where -- people say it's crime, people say that it's not clean, people say all these things. But it was home. It was home - - the 12th floor. The three-bedroom apartment with four brothers in one room, your parents in another, your sister, your other little brother in another -- cramped. Living in a place where the elevator works every couple days. And the other -- next days -- you got to run up the steps, or you got to take the shopping cart and push it up the steps for 12 flights. It's -- it's -- in the summertime, not having air conditioning, to have to have the windows open. Uh, in the wintertime, freezing cold. Four or five -- four or five blankets -- it's, it's all those things. But I think, the big thing is, I would do it all over again.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It's, it's having the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway keeping you up all night because it's hot and you have to have the window open and it's right across the street. It's -- it's all those things, and it's more, and it's, it's where I will always, always call home. It's -- friends that I -- I mean, I lost touch with most of my friends were there, from there. It's -- it's a lot of despair. It's a lot of crime, as I said before. But it's a lot of -- there was a lot of togetherness. The older people living in that area took care of each other, took care of the kids. Times have changed with that. Growing up, you did something wrong? It was like -- they must have had some type of mental telepathy, or something. Your parents knew about it before you got home.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: It, it was like -- it was like they probably just like sent a signal from one, from one building to the next. And by the time you get -- [laughter] I'm telling you -- by the time you get upstairs, you're going to be ready for it.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: Doesn't happen anymore. They -- it -- it was just sitting on the park bench. Or sitting on a bench in the projects. Uh... just sitting there. Talking. You know, drinking some

soda, or eating pumpkin seeds. It, it, it was the best of times. Um. Everyone wants to have money, everyone wants to live in a nice place. Everyone wants to drive a nice car, I guess. Or have nice clothes and all. But to experience Fort Greene. To experience Brooklyn. There is nothing like it. Brooklyn has changed. Brooklyn is now like, the new Manhattan. We all know that. But what it was back then was just -- it was just such a together -- togetherness. Uh. P.S.67 was an old, run-down school. You probably had 35 kids in a class. You had kids sitting on the window. People exaggerate, but it really happened. People used to sit on the -- kids used to sit on the, uh, the ledge in class. You have 35 seats -- I mean, you don't have enough seats. You have 35 kids, you probably have 25 seats. People are sitting on the windowsill. Um. It's all those things. But it's all good things.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Nothing like Fort Greene. Nothing like playing stickball, playing, of course, basketball. But there's -- there was so many things to do. And, and you look now, and say, how did you find things to do? Because you were creative. You didn't have a real baseball field. You didn't have great basketball courts. You didn't have -- all the things that you want to give your kids -- but it seemed like you had everything you need.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Which -- which made it so special. And, what will always keep it in your heart. That there's nothing like Fort Greene.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: No matter what people say. No matter what they would ever do to that neighborhood to change it for the positive, for the negative. The way it was is the way that we will always remember it, and always want it to be.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Um. Do you go back and visit? Um, do you have friends that -- from -
- that you grew up with, who are still living in the neighborhood?

KING: Um... I -- I don't go back as much as I used to. Um... do I have friends that I still -- Tony Finkland, or I have -- it was Charles, uh, there was Hector, there was Bernard Walton. There was different people that I lost touch with.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Um, there are people that are doing good. And there are some people that are doing bad. And, there's a lot of people that are no more. And, there are other people that are just hanging on. So I think that that's the other side of growing up in the inner city. Is that you shake your head sometimes and say -- you thank someone above -- you thank your parents, that they gave you the opportunity to do the right thing. Because there -- there are a lot of people that are gone. There's a lot of people that are died -- I mean, that are dead. They've been killed. They've been shot. They've been stabbed. Uh, sickness. That is taking over. And they're no more. There are other people that are susceptible, and then there are other people that you lose contact with. But that -- that's in any neighborhood. You could -- you could be in Bel Air. And the same thing could happen. But as far as seeing people -- I don't see that many people. As far as going back, going to work with the Nets, I have had the opportunity, fortunately, to do a lot of -- do a lot of events in the neighborhood, in Fort Greene.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And, Park Slope. I don't remember Park Slope being like that. I don't remember Brooklyn Heights being like that. I don't remember Flatbush Avenue being like that. It, it seems like another world, now.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It -- it's all tall buildings, it's -- the thing that I, I used to always say, and I say now, is that, when I was growing up, everyone was running to get out. You wanted to do whatever you could -- say, "I'm getting out of this neighborhood." Now, you can't afford to go back.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It's too expensive.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I live in New Jersey, and -- and it's more expensive in Brooklyn than it is in Jersey.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Times have changed. Times have really -- I should have -- I should have got, maybe, like ten brownstones. I would've been calling you from my island in -- [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Yeah. [laughter]

KING: I would've been laying on the beach. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: Oh boy.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Um... well let's see. Going back, sort of chronological. Um. Tell me about what happened when you graduated from the University of Maryland, and, um, and started to play professional basketball.

KING: Started playing basketball professionally in 1981.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I was drafted by the New Jersey Nets in June of 1981 at the Felt Forum in Manhattan. Uh, I had my pinstripe bell-bottom suit on.

SULLIVAN: Ooh.

KING: Gray -- gray one. I'm showing my age now.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: Uh, had my little afro. And I was sitting there, just waiting for my name to be called. It, it was the greatest feeling in the world, to say that you -- and then to be drafted, where you could play close to home, your parents would come see you. Friends could come out to see you. I guess that's good and bad. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: But it -- it was a great feeling to be able to play professional basketball. And, it was something where, through high school, through college, junior high school -- people would say, "Oh, you're going to play professional basketball. You're going to be a pro player." But to be able to say, "This is the day. This is when it happened." It means more now than it did then, because then, you said, "Ah," -- you take it for granted. "I'm going to play basketball." Uh, as you moved along in life, and based on how you were playing. But as you get older, you appreciate what happened then. So I was drafted in 1981. By

the Nets. I lived in Hackensack, New Jersey. In the condo. I was big time -- "I'm 21. I'm single. I have a condo in Hackensack."

SULLIVAN: Yeah...

KING: "I just know I -- I got it made. I have my 1977 Oldsmobile." [laughter] I just knew I was cool. And, it, it was great. I mean, you had the opportunity to travel around the country. Uh, you meet different people. I mean, the traveling was great. You stayed in great hotels, you traveled first class all the time. Um... you play against your idols. You play against other great players that you saw on TV growing up. Not growing up, but probably through high school and college because they were -- they were around that age. It was like, "Wow." You think about it -- there are probably 30 teams in the NBA. You say, there's 12 players on a team. How many millions and millions of people have played basketball, and -- and how many of those have had the opportunity to play professionally?

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So, it's -- it's something where, when you just sit down and think, later on, or when you're talking about it -- it, it's a great feeling. And it was an honor.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. How was the -- did it feel different? Like, the actual playing? Like, were the games different from playing in college and high school?

KING: It was different. One thing about high school is, it's great playing in high school. College -- there's nothing like college. Because the atmosphere is -- is, you play twice a week. And the crowds are yelling -- you ever see college basketball, they had the pom-poms, they had the cheering, and it never stops. Professionally, there's no greater game. College, it's the best atmosphere. Talent-wise and playing basketball, there's nothing like professional. Because you say, in high school, you're All-American. Or All-city. In college, you're All-American. On each team, there's probably one or two All-Americans, on each college team. In the professional ranks, everyone was All-American.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So no matter who you're playing against -- of course, when you get to the NBA, you have All-Americans, but then again, you have All-Stars. That's even a different level. But every night, you're playing against players that are just as good as you. In college, maybe two or three players are just as good as you. In high school, maybe one or two are compared to you. Or maybe, probably even one. In the NBA, everyone's on the same level, and then you had the next level. The All-Stars.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So it was competitive every day. You play a lot of games. You play 82 games a year. Throughout -- I mean, for the season, you're traveling -- uh, used to get up at probably 5 -- you play a game, you wake up 5 o'clock the next morning, travel to the next city. Uh, you might play a game that day. Or you might have the day off, or you might have two games in a row, where you wake up at 5, go to another city, play that night, wake up at 5, go to another city. I'm not complaining. But it -- it -- but it's very tiresome. You make good money. Now they make great money, or they make incredible money. But it was -- I would never take it back. I would do it all over again.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I would go through the traveling, I would go through the injuries, I would go through the -- the pain and suffering to become a NBA basketball player, and say that you played in the NBA. Uh. It's the -- it's the greatest feeling. Especially when you go back to where it began with -- began -- where it began at. Where it began, and in Fort Greene -- you started in Fort Greene, and you ended up in the NBA. That's, that's -- that's incredible.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And to have two from the same family? That's even more of a blessing.

SULLIVAN: Yah. And did you -- how, how was that with your -- with your brother. Would you guys talk about that it's pretty amazing that you both got to play professionally?

KING: We talk about it now. Back then... I think sometimes you take things for granted.

Because you grow up -- as I said before, people assuming that you're going to make it to the NBA. But when you have a chance to step back and say, how many players in the

NBA, how many millions of millions of young people want to play in the NBA. How many make it. Now you put into that two from the same family made it -- you don't, you don't find that that often.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So it definitely was a blessing.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And --

KING: And he was -- let's, let's make sure we say -- he was an NBA All-Star.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Bernard King is known. You -- BK, they call him. Bernard King. 60 points whenever he wants. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: I'm not joking [laughter]. Oh, anyone listening to this -- they'll know. BK -- Bernard King -- New York Knicks.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And, would your parents come to -- would they go to both of your games when you were playing professional?

KING: There was a overlap. Where -- when I came out in 81, he was already playing in the NBA. But he was playing Golden State, in out west. But once he started playing in New York, and I was still in New Jersey. They had to sometimes alternate, or -- sometimes you have games on different nights. But the nights that there was a game, and we both were playing, they had to alternate. Either they would go to New York, or sometimes they would, ah, come out to New Jersey.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: My father thought he knew basketball, and anyone that seen him at a game -- I'm going to give you a little secret.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: He used to always carry a little pad. One of those little -- little pads you could put in your pocket. So we thought -- I think we were known as people that could score -- my -- Bernard scored a lot of points. I scored points. So you would assume that he's keeping

track of the score. Anyone that knows basketball would not understand this. He was keeping track of fouls.

SULLIVAN: Huh.

KING: And nothing else. I'm like, "What are you doing? Who cares about fouls?" I never found out the rationale behind that. But anyone that saw him with a book at a game would say, "Oh, OK, he's probably keeping track of how many points they're scoring, or how many rebounds..." All he was writing down was how many fouls everyone had.

SULLIVAN: Huh. Was that because -- I mean, it sounds -- it kind of makes sense if you think about, like, a protective parent or something. Is that what he was doing?

KING: I need to ask him the question because I never -- I just -- I'm just in shock when he told me that. Or when I saw it. I'm like, "What? You have two kids playing in the NBA, playing basketball in the NBA, and you're not keeping track of how many points they're scoring, or how many rebounds they're getting?"

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: You're keeping track of something that -- I don't know. I'm going to find out.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: I'm going to find out this week. Now that I said it again. [laughter] Because I don't -- and he said, "Oh, I --" He, he -- he could've been a coach, I guess, in his own mind.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Only in his mind, probably.

SULLIVAN: [laughter] Um, do you play basketball -- do you and your brothers play basketball now, for fun? I mean, together, like -- Thanksgiving, you get together -- would you maybe play?

KING: Mmm. I... no. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: That's a sure [laughter]. I was trying to come up with something -- no. My brother -- Bernard -- Bernard couldn't play because his knees are very bad.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Myself, over the years -- I would say up until maybe the last two or three years, I really haven't concentrated on basketball that much. I, I, I have the itch about basketball now, than -- than, more than any time in my whole life. As far as since I retired.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Um, but a little secret -- from the time I stopped playing until probably -- even up until now. I probably -- I probably have not played basketball more than 20 times.

SULLIVAN: Wow.

KING: That's a lot. No -- 20 is probably a lot. I would say probably 10.

SULLIVAN: Wow.

KING: Yeah. Yes. I, you know -- no. I probably going to -- I'm probably going to be playing more basketball starting now. Because our son -- he's, he's 13.

SULLIVAN: Mmm.

KING: And he thinks he can beat me. So now I think I need to get back in shape -- basketball shape -- and, and go out on the court.

SULLIVAN: Yup.

KING: But -- but the thing is, basketball was great for us, and, and it gave, gave us the opportunity to do a lot of things in life. But as far as playing, playing, playing all the time -- we never -- neither one of us ever did that. We watched the game, we enjoyed going to the game, analyzing the game. But as far as putting on shorts -- and not those short-shorts we used to wear --

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. [laughter]

KING: Shorts -- [laughter] playing, put on shorts, you know -- no. No, we haven't done that.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Too much ice. Why put all that ice on your knee after you're finished.

SULLIVAN: Right. [laughter] Do you -- does your son want to play professional? Does he know? I mean, he's young, but...

KING: He's young, but yes -- he has that basketball itch. And, and me as a dad, I'm, I'm, I'm always knocking him about -- let's get the work done first.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Let's get homework done first. He knows -- he has this PlayStation and the NBA games. He's playing at his school. He loves basketball. He's mentioned before, "Oh, I want to play in the NBA." And then I do my cold water act and tell him about everything else in life.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: That -- education -- schooling comes first. You have to study. You have to get good grades. If you don't get good grades, you're not playing. Um, but as far as him wanting to play -- yes. Absolutely so.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And I -- I would never take that away from him. But I want him to know that there's more than just a basketball side.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: The normal parent.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Um. So when you were -- when you were playing professionally, I have the sort of similar question as to the -- my college question. Like, how -- were there other people from Brooklyn, other people from New York? Where was everybody from, and how did -- how did you all get together as a team?

KING: In professional basketball -- I would say in my era, in the '80s going forward -- for the amount of, for the amount of talent that's in New York, there was not as many bask -- professional basketball players as there should have been. Uh, why is that? It's hard to say. Um -- I, I think one thing that happens in Brooklyn is that -- you probably have more point guards than you would have big men. Of course, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar would be an exception. Lew Alcindor. I -- I think one of the big reasons why you probably didn't have as many NBA player -- New York players playing in the NBA is that -- shooting. When you were growing up, you played -- this is just my outlook on it. Is that in New York City, in -- when I was playing -- you had a lot of very tight rims. I'm getting very technical on you for a second.

SULLIVAN: Yeah, yeah. This is good.

KING: You had -- you had very tight rims. Shooting was not a very big part of playing basketball in New York. Dribble, dribble, fancy dribble, drive to the whole, spin -- under the basket, flip it up, put it in. You didn't have a lot of players to shoot 15 -- we call them 15-foot, 20-foot jump shots.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You -- now you go to the suburbs, or you go to the country. You imagine -- most people in the suburbs, or in the country -- you don't have basketball courts where you go and you find 50, 60 people playing. Or, 100 people were looking at you playing. You're in your driveway. What are you doing? You're just shooting. You just shoot. By yourself, or -- one other player with you. One other person -- you're just shooting the basketball.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You go in the suburbs, into the playground -- what do you see? You probably see a couple kids shooting the basketball. People learn to shoot better in the suburbs, in the country, than they do in New York. New York players do not like to just -- one player rebounds, pass it to the other one, shoot. Go to another spot, throw it to them, shoot. We want to play basketball. We just want to play one-on-one, three-on-three, five-on-five. You mentioned the word "drills" before.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: When I grew up -- when I was growing up, playing with Gil Reynolds -- we did drills. When I played basketball on the playground, we just played basketball.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: When you're in the suburbs and the country, you do drills. You play basketball, but you do drills. So I think that what happens, when you get into the NBA, you get into college -- you need to be able to do drills. And that was something that was lost on a lot of players in New York City.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: We want to showboat. We don't want to study. Like you got to study for your exam before you do the exam -- all we want to do is do the exam -- we just want to go out there and play.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: We don't want to break it down to get us ready for that. So that was just my little thing on [laughter] why there's not that many -- as many basketball players in the NBA as there should be. Uh, but as far as us playing in the NBA as a group -- one thing you find is that -- which I found a little difficult at first -- and all NBA players do. Is -- when you're in high school, they tell you what time practice is. Tell you what time the game is. You go to the game on the bus. You go eat -- you go eat together. You go home. You do whatever you got to do. College -- they tell you what time to wake up, they tell you what time to go to bed. They tell you what time to go to practice, they give you a piece of paper with all the instructions on what time to be somewhere. Now you get to the NBA. You're getting -- making good -- you're making a lot of money, living in a nice place. No one's telling you what time to wake up. No one -- no one's telling you what time to go to bed. No one's writing on a piece of paper what time to be at practice. The structure changes.

SULLIVAN: Oh...

KING: And your first couple years is very difficult.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Especially your first year. No one's telling you what to do.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You -- you're looking around, "OK, what time is practice. OK, practice is this time. OK. Practice over? Bye. Bye." Everyone goes their own way.

SULLIVAN: Hmm.

KING: Some people are married, some people have other things they want to do. You don't go eat as a team, you don't, uh -- you know, you go to a hotel. In college, you go to a hotel before the game. In the NBA, you're on your own. So the most difficult thing in

the NBA is to get used to being a real person. [laughter] Because you don't have anyone telling you what to do. You have to -- you have to fulfill your own life.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You have to fill it up with different things to do. So, I think that's the biggest part of playing in the NBA, is that you're -- you have to be very independent, and you have to find things to do with your time. If you don't, that's where you get in trouble.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And even on the road, even when you're on the road, traveling to another city -- everyone doesn't eat as a team. You might have one or two players that eat together. But mostly, everyone's by themselves.

SULLIVAN: Wow, that's so surprising to hear, because I guess I just -- like, I see teams play, and it takes such coordination, and so I sort of imagine that you have to take that off the court, too.

KING: Now, you have times when you might do it -- at Thanksgiving, if you're on the road, you have Thanksgiving dinner. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Or, overall, but it's never -- it's not real -- I think now, they do it more. When I -- I think now, they give them breakfast, so I guess maybe make them come together. Or have them come together, and they all sit down as a group to eat. Because they supply the food.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But in the '80s, and probably the '90s, you're on your own.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Which made it a lot tougher, as far as getting used to life. When you play basketball, people tell you what to do. Once you stop playing basketball, there's no one to tell you what to do. It's very difficult.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: It makes it very difficult on a lot of people.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So growing up in New York, and then playing in Jersey, made it a lot better -- because your family's close, so you have people around.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Not that you want to be around your parents all the time. Not when you're 21, but [laughter] --

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: -- you had the opportunity to go home.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Which made it a lot better.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Much -- a lot easier. Much easier.

SULLIVAN: And so, you have continued to live in New Jersey?

KING: Yes.

SULLIVAN: And, and is that just because when you were playing for the Nets, that's -- you sort of got roots there, or -- or -- why, why that?

KING: I think, playing with the Nets. Never moved anywhere else. If I was playing, probably, in Chicago, would I have moved to New Jersey? Prob -- probably not. I don't think so.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Um, now that I'm older, I would say that -- probably up until maybe five, six years ago, I used to go -- come to New York -- of course, to visit my parents. Uh, maybe to see a friend now and then. But mostly I was in New Jersey. I have found -- I have -- I miss Brooklyn, now. The Brooklyn that is out there right now is incredible. You could -- there's so -- it's, it's changed, and as an older person, I appreciate the change. As a younger person, I liked what it was before.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But I could see myself living in Brooklyn again.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I -- there was a time where I would never say that. So, I -- I'm in New Jersey because I play basketball in New Jersey. But now that I'm older, I could see having a brownstone,

or living in a condo somewhere. You -- there's a nightlife. In New Jersey, there's no sidewalks.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: There's no place to walk. I go to events or activities or speaking engagements in Brooklyn -- you see people walking on the street and you see activity, places, stores, restaurants. I like it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I don't need the grass anymore.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You -- when you grow up in New York, you think that you want that front lawn, and you think that, "Wow, I need that front lawn. I need to be able to walk out of my house and see that grass."

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Now you don't need that anymore. And, and the social activities -- I mean, social activities you get involved in now in Brooklyn is great.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I like it better than New York.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I mean, Manhattan. Brooklynite, as we call it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Brooklynite.

SULLIVAN: Well, good. I like to hear that. I like Brooklyn, too. [laughter]

KING: Excuse me? You like Brooklyn?

SULLIVAN: Yeah, yeah. It's good to hear that. Um --

KING: Absolutely.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Um -- so, what would you say that your, your playing basketball all the way from, from being a little kid through playing professionally, what -- what have you learned that you use in other parts of your life?

KING: That -- you mean from growing up and playing professionally?

SULLIVAN: Yup.

KING: Um... I -- what have I learned? I, I think that you have -- when you play basketball and you start at an early age, you become accustomed, I guess, I'll go back to a little bit what I said before. One, you become accustomed to people telling you, or letting you know, what you need to do in life.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Uh, took a while for me to get used to being independent. After not playing anymore. You, you're used to people -- you're used -- you're like, "OK, what am I supposed to do today? No one told me what to do today." Uh, because it takes a while to get used to saying, "Well, this is my life. I have to do what I need to do. Not what someone's telling me to do."

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Playing basketball -- I'm in the restaurant business now -- uh, has helped in the sense of communication. When you play basketball, you're always talking as a team. So I try to have -- I brought -- I, I -- not consciously -- not on a conscious level, it just has happened that I look -- I look at this business as being just like teamwork. You -- I'm in the fast food -- Wendy's -- business. It's -- you have different individuals. But in order for us to be successful, we have to work together. Uh, when you have a meeting -- a meeting -- I consider a meeting is just like, when you had a meeting with the coaches. Uh, I'm the coach now.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And I have players on the team. They have different personalities in this business, the restaurant business. You have to handle them differently, just like you did when you played basketball. Uh... but you have to be the coach. You have to be -- you have to motivate, you have to discipline, you have to decide who's going to move ahead in your company, who's best for the company -- so those are things, from a comp -- from a business standpoint -- is the same as coaches have to do.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Or, someone in the front office. So, I think that's -- that is carried over. But, but the big thing is that -- again, the adjustment of growing up playing basketball, and that being a big part of your life. That's a big void. You have to be able to fill that void. And, fortunately for me, and, and, Bernard -- and, and a lot of other players -- they're able to do that.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: There's -- there are other players that -- being from New York, being from the country, being from the suburbs -- nowhere -- no matter it might be -- have not been able to fulfill that void.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So -- that's something where people look and say, "It's great playing basketball" -- which it is. Never would like to change that. But how many people do you know that, their profession ends in their 30s?

SULLIVAN: Right.

KING: People are just starting their profession in their 30s.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: They're just moving ahead. They're just 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s. Something you have done since you were 10, 11 -- I mean, 10, or even less than that. I mean, you start playing probably when you're six, seven. It's over when you're in your 30s.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Some people -- some people, early 30s. Some late 20s, some late 30s. But you have to switch gears and go on to something else. So you learn a lot from playing basketball, and you could move it over to what you're doing now. But most people have more time to develop, to be able to move on to something else.

SULLIVAN: Right.

KING: Most people in their early 30s -- I mean, you know what you are, or what you want to be -- but you're -- in a regular business sense, your business is just taking off. Your career is just taking off. You're just learning, and you're -- you're just developing your skills.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Here, you -- you really can't use your physical skills in your next career. Uh, so that -- that's what makes it a little bit different. Most people, on the business side, they can take what they've learned -- their skills -- take it into their next career.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Or their next job. You, you're not going to be shooting hoops [laughter] at a desk. Or working in a -- wherever you might be working.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Not at all.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. So how did that -- um, so you -- I think, you played until 1987, is that right?

KING: 1989. 1990. 1990.

SULLIVAN: 1990. So what did you do -- how was that transition for you, and what did you do after?

KING: Uh, for the first -- I always say, for the first year, I twiddled my toes, my fingers and my toes, and like, "OK, what am I doing here?"

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Uh... I, I didn't do... first two years, I would say, I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything constructive. Meaning that, um, I wasn't involved in business. I wasn't working. I was -- I don't -- I just did -- time went quick for me, those first two years.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And then after that, it was like, "Albert, what are you doing? You -- you need to start looking at a career, or looking at doing something else." I even, I even, I guess, opened up the classifieds. And was looking for work. Um... just opened the classifieds. I was like, "I don't know what I want to do. What do I want to do?"

SULLIVAN: Right.

KING: What -- what happened to me, fortunately, was that a neighbor was in the restaurant business. I mean, they still -- they're still in the restaurant business. And they're in the Wen -- they're in the Wendy's business.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And I was talking to them one day about the Wendy's business, and I said, "I would like to probably try that." Let me -- so I worked without pay [laughter] at one of his stores for probably around six months.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: To see if I would like it. I did -- I mean, I said, "Let me, let me find out if I would like to try to go into this business." Now, of course, I had the mindset of probably going into it from a business standpoint. Not working at a store every day. But I -- but I still wanted to get a feel for how it is to be involved in that business. So I went through that for six months. After that time period, I went to the Wendy's university -- hmm -- as they call it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You have to work in stores, you had classroom training. You work the register. You work the fry station. You work the sandwich station, you work the grill, you clean the bathroom, you clean the dining room. You do everything that anyone that works in the store would do. To get through the training. Then you have the classroom training from operational standpoint, financial standpoint, those type things. After that, I went into the business. I invested with the person in one store, and that was in 1995, I started out. And I went on my own in 1998. To open up stores.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And I thought that -- I said, "Let me go through this training, and I'm going to open up a Wendy's business. And I'm going to just sit in the office and relax." I ended up training, running the register, working the grill, working the sandwich station -- when I went into business.

SULLIVAN: Oh my goodness.

KING: I was working the register, working the grill, working the sandwich station [laughter].

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

KING: I was like, "Wait, something's wrong here." But -- there was nothing wrong there. That's what you're supposed to do.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: To know -- to be in business, you have to know your business.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Uh, so, I -- I enj -- plus, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being on the line -- we call it "on the line." I, I, I enjoyed working within the store. People come in, they, they look -- they order and then take a double-take. Aren't you Albert King?

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

KING: Why are you working here? No, they might know. Some people I tell that I -- I'm the owner. Other people -- most of the people, I don't.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Uh -- what's the difference?

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: To me. And -- and the thing is that I don't -- I never understood why people are surprised that an owner is working in a business.

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

KING: It -- but I think what happens is that, you go to a pizzeria, the owner is working in the business. You go to a lot of restaurants, the owner is working in the business. But when you play basketball, the perception -- and I tell young people that all the time -- or, or just anyone -- it doesn't matter what you did, it's what you're doing. You have to be involved in your business.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: But when you play basketball, people assume that you have "x" amount of dollars. And you don't have to work anymore.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: No matter what you have, you still -- you still have to be productive.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: So, that's what I've been doing. I moved on a little bit from working the line as much. Because I've learned another level -- another lesson, I guess.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And I guess it's part of basketball, too. The coach cannot be on the court.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: You have to have players, and you have to coach them. If I try to be on the court all the time, I could never be a coach.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I could never grow my business. So I learned that you have to hire people, good people, to run a store. That gives you the opportunity to open another store.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: If you try to just stay in your store all the time, you could never grow your business. So that's -- that's something -- a lesson that I learned is that you can't treat -- you can't do everything. You have to find good people to do things for you if you want to grow and become a larger and a successful business.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. It's interesting, the -- the, like, working in a store that you own. That is such a, a Brooklyn thing. Like the -- you think of the storefronts, and family lives in the back.

KING: Absolutely.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: That's -- that's how people are successful.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: And, and if you want to stay with one store, you can do that. Even the people with the storefronts, you're talking about. If they open another business -- they have to find someone dependable. Because you can't be everywhere at every -- at all times.

SULLIVAN: Right.

KING: But you go to pizzerias in New York, in New Jersey -- no matter where -- the owners are there, or different restaurants. That's all -- that's part of life.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: I don't think -- you don't see Michael Jordan on the fry station. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. [laughter] Well, great. This has been wonderful, talking to you. Is there anything else for, um, for thinking in terms of this being part of a, a curriculum

for, for kids, for students. Is there anything else that I -- that I haven't asked about, that you think would be good to, to talk about, for, for the kids?

KING: And the kids are from the -- what area -- I mean, they're from Brooklyn?

SULLIVAN: Yep. Well, actually, they can be from all over New York. But we're focusing on Brooklyn.

KING: I think, the big thing I like to stress to the young people is that no matter where you're from -- and they probably heard it before -- no matter where you're from, no matter what you have, no matter who you're living with, never use anything negative as an excuse. Everyone listening to this can be and will be successful if you try. You have to try. You might fail. I have failed in making the winning basket, I have failed in the bi -- in the restaurant business. But I have always picked myself up and moved on. If you - - if you are too scared to fail -- as they always say, you will never succeed.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Give it a try. Whatever it is you want to do in life, it can happen. But if you don't go and try it, it will never happen. Try it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: Try it. Don't be scared.

SULLIVAN: Good advice. Um. Thank you -- well, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. And I'm sorry it was, it was hard for us to, to schedule it.

KING: No, I'm sorry that we couldn't connect earlier. But if you need anything else as far as the call, or the quality is not what you want, let me know. And we'll work something out.

SULLIVAN: OK -- great, thank you. Um, I do have a release form that -- to be filled out -- so that this can become part of the archives. Should I mail it to you, fax it to you, email.

KING: You want to email? I guess everyone emails nowadays.

SULLIVAN: Sure.

KING: That would be good for you?

SULLIVAN: Uh, yeah. What's your email?

KING: It's, uh, [address redacted for privacy]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

KING: At aol.com. Just like my [address redacted for privacy]@aol -- no, [address redacted for privacy] -- at aol.com.

SULLIVAN: Great. Well, thank you so much. And we'll let you know when we -- when the curriculum kit is coming out, too. So you can, you can -- you can see --

KING: Please do. My son -- he'd be impressed.

SULLIVAN: Yeah. Good.

KING: [laughter] No prob -- I would, too. Because it's an honor. Really. I -- I appreciate it.

SULLIVAN: Well, thank you.

KING: Anytime.

SULLIVAN: Thanks.

KING: OK, you take care of yourself.

SULLIVAN: You too.

KING: OK, bye.

SULLIVAN: Bye.