

**Interviewee: Marvin “Rey” Baumel: “Raised on the Beach”,
Beach High, Latin Band Leader, Actor, WWII Vet**

Interviewer: Kathy Hersh

Location: 1001 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, FL,

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Q: Rey, you said you first came down here in 1938. You were 13 years old, I think. What was your very first impression when you laid eyes on Miami Beach?

A: It was love at first sight -- a kid who grew up in Brooklyn, born and raised in Coney Island. I first came to Miami Beach with my folks. We drove down, before expressways etc., in 1938, two months after I was 13 years old. And came to Miami Beach and there was the hotel the Princess Ann and I remember the owner, Furtell, that was somehow friends of my dad's and we stayed there just temporarily until we found an apartment to live. But my impression, I guess it was love at first sight. It was September. We were very concerned driving down because a hurricane was supposed to hit Miami. Welcome to Miami! And instead the hurricane hit New York. I'm laughing. Here we are, well, we dodged the bullet the first time we are here. I don't know what it was, the palm trees, the essence of Miami, not immediately, but soon after -- I went to Ida Fisher Junior High -- I just fell in love with Latin music. I heard it really for the first time. That's what turned me to everything Latin. My desire then, at that early age, was not to learn about Latin stuff, to be Cuban. That's what I wanted to be. This is BC, this is "Before Castro". I'm talking about '38, '39, '40. So I loved the music, I loved the food, I loved the girls -- I think it was a combination of Miami Beach and puberty kicking in at the same time, and it was terrific. It was fun.

Q: So how did you fit in at Ida Fisher Feinberg Junior High School?

A: At first I came home crying. Thirteen years old and crying, "I'm never going back." I don't really know what the problem was, then. I know one of the things that rubbed me the wrong way was the prayer from the Bible at the beginning of each class, and that was compulsory. And even at age 13

it rubbed me the wrong way. I felt I shouldn't be doing this, not because I was Jewish, but because, I don't know, I felt strange about that. And of course the teacher said, "You read that like everybody else reads it." Okay. But then after I went back I just grew to love it. Fell in love with Spanish. I was on the verge of taking French. And my neighbor who was a senior said "you know, I think you'd probably do better taking Spanish." She really had the future insight. I had no idea what was to come. And I said "Yeah, that sounds interesting." Well I fell in love with Spanish and I was speaking Spanish fluently at age of fourteen, fifteen. Had a great Spanish teacher that I loved.

Q: So you went onto Miami Beach [High School]?

A: Yeah but I was already speaking Spanish in junior high. Junior high was ninth grade. I had a buddy who was also, not Latin, [but] who liked Latin stuff. So we were together all the time.

Q: Was it the music that drew you to the language?

A: Yeah, I would say predominantly. It was the music -- that beat was just fascinating to me. And I got so wrapped up in it.

5:00

I remember not being able to afford bongos so I got two Quaker Oats -- in those days didn't have a rim -- I tied it with a string, and those were my bongos. Funny. In fact -- this is sort of tangential in a way -- this was the beach I used to go to all the time. Right here at Tenth and Ocean Drive because I lived on Tenth and Lennox for a long time. Walked down every single summer, went to the beach here at Tenth. Except when the kids from high school got together -- 14th St. Beach was the high school hangout. That was the beach for the senior high.

Q: That's just where everybody knew they would find their friends?

A: Exactly.

Q: And what was that like? On Saturdays or Sundays, or when?

A: No matter when. Whenever you went to the beach. Of course you went to school -- most of the time. Yeah, it was a hangout. 14th Street Beach was the mall, so to speak. That was great. Here, there was a lifeguard station -- a wooden one. Not a station, a lifeguard seat, and I think they eventually built a building here with restrooms -- what I remember. Going way back.

Q: Did you have any religious affiliation?

A: You mean then? Well my folks being Jewish, although my dad was agnostic, maybe bordering on what one would call an atheist, I guess. I'll never forget my dad saying... sitting me down, and this was still in Brooklyn, and saying "now people believe that God is an old man sitting in heaven with a long beard and he has a big book and he looks in the book and when you die you go up there and if you did bad things there in the book. And if you did good things they're in the book. If you did bad things you go down there, if you did good things you go to heaven. Do you believe that?" I said, "no." He says, "Neither do I. Let's play chess." But it was interesting to me because he didn't say what he thought, although I guess I knew. He first asked me what I thought. I thought that was interesting.

My maternal and paternal parent grandparents. I never knew my paternal grandfather, he was still in Europe, but they lived on the lower East Side, spoke no English, at all. My dad's mother lived to be pretty close to 100, I'd say, shaved her head, with her shawl, very religious, very Orthodox and, of course, when they came to visit, then my mother went through the motions, because they were Orthodox and kosher, so she had the separate dishes and the like. But we never did that. I was Bar Mitzvahed by the skin of my teeth.

Q: Here on the beach?

A: Let me think. No, no, it was in New York. Before I came down.

Q: You were going to be an artist, and you painted some murals. Tell us about that.

A: I never knew what I was going to be when I grew up and I still don't know.

Q: Tell us about these murals that you did, that you painted when you were in high school, I believe?

A: Well, yes, art to me... I still have the *Beach Breeze*, which was the school newspaper. I found that and I was the co-artist on the *Beach Breeze* and I was seriously going to pursue art. I had already arranged to go to Mexico to Guanajuato to study with a student of Orozco. Murals appealed to me -- Diego Rivera and those things, the bigger the better. Age sixteen. But I had no experience in oils. So I asked my art teacher at Miami Beach High, Miss Folsom, and she said, "sure, we'll help you." And she had the custodian crew make a 4' x 10'. She asked what size do you want? I said, "No I want a mural." I wanted bigger and she said "we can't do it that big." 4' x 10' and she says "and we'll supply all the materials." And I said "terrific." My homeroom teacher -- I got the annual here with the picture and a signature - Jean Pettit was dynamite, she was terrific.

10:00

So it was my journalism class that she taught, it was my English Lit class that she taught, and my homeroom. And I decided to do the mural on journalism, on the gathering of news, etc. And I did it, and it took forever and I kept doing it and doing it. Then I decided to do two murals, one wasn't enough. So it ended up I was still doing the second mural -- let's see, the first one I did in '41. I was sixteen. The second mural, I was going to college at UM and came back whenever I could to complete the second one. And both murals were completed. I got the award from the American Legion medal. Outstanding art award, which was gratifying. Wow, this is an exercise for me. It's the way I looked at it.

Q: You said they were in a post office?

A: Later on in years I get a call from somebody who said, "your mural is hanging up in the post office on 13th and Washington." I said, "you're kidding." "No there it is." So I went down with my wife and saw it and there it was. As you walk in and you turn to the right and there it was up there. And like -- I can't use the word -- like a dope I did not take a picture. I didn't look at it as that great an accomplishment until I started thinking about... if you did it you did it, that's what you did.

Q: Where is it now?

A: That's the question. I have been trying to find it. I spoke to Paul George and Arva Parks and they gave me some leads. Howard... what's his name? The historian here -- Keinberg. I tried tracking it down. I'd love to have it because this is celebrating the 70th year since I painted it. I painted it when I was sixteen. I'm 86. And I would love to have those pictures to say "Hey, grandkids. Look what your grandpa did when he was your age."

Q: Tell us what Miami Beach was like during the war. World War II?

A: I know which war.

Q: Well, we're always in some kind of war.

A: It was really interesting because I used to go to the beach all the time. What did you do? It was before TV, was before anything. And summers came; we didn't have money to travel or anything. In fact, my folks had to leave here because the summer doldrums, my dad couldn't make a living, went up to New York -- to Brooklyn. So sometimes I'd be here and share a room with a roommate we just do things, but at that age I was still going to high school and they were marching platoons in the street. I'd go down on the beach and there would be no one on the beach, or practically no one. And then all of a sudden, at the end of the day they would come after they did the basic -- whatever they did -- and you would be inundated with platoons of GIs, of Air Force guys. It would be like you had to step over. I finally knew where not to be. And then they would be all over the place to finish off. They did their calisthenics on the beach and then the sergeant would yell and they all run into the ocean -- that was the best part. To some, it happened almost every time, there would be a couple of guys who would stand there and they were terrified. They had never seen that much water. They came from who knows where. Where maybe the biggest thing they saw was a pond or a creek, as they say. And they would not go in the water. Until the sergeant said, nose-to-nose, "you get in that damn ocean."

Q: So the sergeants made them?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. They had to get in there and they were terrified.

Q: Were you aware of German submarines off the coast?

A: I heard about it. The only inkling I think we got was it was so pristine and I remember the first time I had “what’s that on your foot?”

15:00

And it was tar. It was oil. We had no idea, then we heard rumors that there were... that the submarine was sunk and that there were sightings at Government Cut and things like that. I never saw that.

Q: Were people afraid of an invasion?

A: I don’t remember that. I was a kid...

Q: What about blackouts?

A: No. I don’t remember blackout... I remember blackouts, but...

Q: There were no civil defense patrols that made people...?

A: I don’t remember that at all. I certainly would I think, if it were so, but I don’t remember it.

Q: But you do have memories of the soldiers marching?

A: In fact when I used to walk down the street to Washington Avenue, my dad had a store right here, between Ninth and Tenth on Washington Avenue. So walking down this street brings back a lot of memories.

Q: What kind of store?

A: It was really... It wasn’t his store; it was a jewelry shop-- Joe Shure’s Jewelry Show. He had a concession -- a handbag concession in that shop for years. This is still post-Depression. I’m talking about late ‘30s. Trying to eke out a living. And he was always... he did pretty well. In fact, at one time, in New York... We came down because of my mother’s health. He finally gave up on retail and said it was too much aggravation and got a job at what was then Miami Air Depot -- MIAD -- and ended up working at Pan American Airways for 18 years. He said “no aggravation, get to paycheck.”

Q: Well it was pretty seasonal, right?

A: Oh absolutely, that's why he had to rent every summer. Well the thing is in summers, it's hard to believe... -- remember this kid I was talking about before -- at 10 o'clock at night, walking down Washington Avenue trying to find something to eat and there was nothing open. There was a restaurant around 14th Street and Washington, Holloman's, or something like that. Everything was closed. In fact, you'd go up... we ended up eating peanut butter sandwiches out of the machine, that was our dinner. Couldn't find a place. And I remember going up to Lincoln Road, looking down Lincoln Road, which was totally dark. Hard to imagine. I mean dark.

Q: This was during the war years?

A: Yeah pretty much so, I'd say, and also afterwards, the summers were the doldrums. Nothing happened. And the fancy shops were on Lincoln Road. They just closed. Because there's no business. The only business that my dad got, he said, they were waiting for the Cubans. The Cubans would come and shop at some periods during the summer.

Q: From Cuba?

A: Yes, and that and just come and shop and not stay or anything, that I know of.

Q: So things started revving up in the late '40s to?

A: Revving up, how?

Q: Well, nightlife, bands, hotels, people coming down for the season?

A: Yeah, I'd say...

Q: When did that get going, would you say, roughly?

A: I know with me, my first band. Let me backtrack. I was in the Army. I got in the Army in '44 and ended up in the War Department show, playing bongos. That's another story. That's another story that nobody would believe. "What did you do in the war, Daddy? I played bongos with a Puerto Rican orchestra." That's another documentary. And I got out and I wanted

to again pursue a career in art. So my brother who was a concert violinist was the assistant conductor and concertmaster of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. So, I got out and my girlfriend, who later became my wife, was living in Chicago. So I decided to go to art school in Ft. Wayne. I went to the Ft. Wayne Art School. And I think the real reason I went there, so I could be close to my girlfriend in Chicago. That was a commute, you know. But I ended up playing in the symphony, in the percussion section. For my brother. Somewhere I have a picture of my brother and me backstage at the Ft. Wayne Philharmonic.

20:00

Which was then a civic orchestra, well esteemed, conducted by Hans Schwieger, who went on to conduct - I forget which orchestra.

Q: So you are always musical?

A: It was there but I never really knew how much I loved classical music until later on in years.

Q: But then let's shift back to Miami Beach and you were in this craze of Latin sound, the Latin musical sound?

A: That's when I had the band.

Q: How old were you and when did you start? How did you get started?

A: What happened [is] I came back for vacation, from art school, just for the summer, fully intending to go back to art school and then play in the symphony again, when I got a weekend job. I was just playing with three other guys, just for kicks, and I saw an ad in the Miami Herald and it said "strings wanted, Latin room, Pan American Hotel. 2nd Ave., Miami." And I said, "Let's go. We'll audition." We went and auditioned and the guy liked it. He said "we'll hire you for the weekend. What's your name?" I said, "Marvin Baumel." He said, "we can't do that, you're a Latin band. You know, you gotta have a Latin name." So, I said -- this is 1946 - 47, I guess -- "let me think." "No you can't think. I have to call the Herald in, the deadline is now." So, I had a recording that was "El Rey del Mambo," by Machito. Nobody knew what the mambo was, hardly, in this country. So I said "Rey - Rey Mambo." And I figured for a weekend, what the hell.

15 years I had the name, Rey Mambo, and what was even worse my wife was Mrs. Mambo, for 15 years. People would say “what a funny name. Where did that come from?” Then the mambo hit. Came to this country. It was a sensation. So I was in that group and then went on and started working the clubs. Clubs which are no longer in existence and some of the top clubs in Miami, Miami Beach.

Q: Could you name some of those -- mention the clubs?

A: Well when I went on, actually, I worked the hotels on Miami Beach and that's when my wife worked with me. She was a singer. We met when she was with the USO. And we met while I was still in the Army. I was in Daytona Beach at that time. And my job was to take care of the shows that came in and see that they got bed and fed and whatever they had to do. And there was this girl's trio like the Andrews sisters -- a blonde, a brunette and a redhead. And little did I know the redhead would end up to be my wife for 59 years. Where was I going with this?

Q: You're forming a band, and when did you form the band where your wife then became the lead singer?

A: My wife sang and then I said to her, “you know this is ridiculous. I've got a band, you're a singer, why aren't you singing with the band?” She says, “You know why. I don't sing in Spanish.” I said, “I'll teach you Spanish. I'll teach you to sing in Spanish.” And she said, “you're nuts.” And I said, “No I'm not.” And she learned to sing phonetically in Spanish, perfectly. In front of the band. You'll see pictures. Played maracas and sang, but she couldn't speak Spanish. Someone would come up after we did a number and say, “perdóname, yo tengo una petición -- una canción.” She would say, “un momento.” And she'd pointed me. They couldn't believe it. Here she's singing, and we did typical stuff. Imagine going in somewhere in a foreign country and hear someone sing jazz and you go up to them and they don't speak English.

Q: What were some of the songs and some of the favorite tunes?

A: You never heard [of them]. I used to avoid the “Bésame mucho, quiéreme mucho.” “Perfidia” I liked. I fell in love with that song. For some reason.

Q: Perfidia?

A: Yeah, but the songs that we did, in fact, our songs, Latins would know what they were -- "Possession" [SINGS] It's a beautiful song, very expressive -- beautiful, beautiful poetry --that was our song.

25:00

We did a lot of very typical Cuban stuff, because in those days you'd listen, you get Havana like you get any local radio station, if the weather was okay. Probably still can. So I used to hear these songs and then a friend of a friend, a contact who was a publisher, he would get me the song and we'd do it. Right off -- right hot out of Cuba. Really, typical stuff. So, those are days even before cha-cha-cha, what they called "Guarachas" and then I expanded the band when I went to the hotels because we had to play acts, shows. So I needed guys who could read music as well as play Latin music and play all kinds of music. So it sort of expanded. I still had a small group -- the smallest would be a quartet, the largest would be 8 pieces.

Q: And what hotels did you play?

A: I opened the Seville Hotel when it was brand-new and I was there for about three years. After Seville, opened the Carillon Hotel. Played in the Fontainebleau. That was just off nights. The Golden Gate, which isn't there anymore. The Thunderbird Motel. The Sahara Hotel. I'm trying to think of... The Aztec Motel. The Crown. I'm trying to think of what else. And then I played in what was Copa City, down here, which was the outstanding nightclub, not only locally but I would say in the south, commensurate with anything up north.

Q: What was that like?

A: That was George and Murray Weininger had Copa City with the biggest acts. I still have some of those ads. So in those days it was Harry Richmond, Sophie Tucker. I've got a picture with Lynn and myself sitting on a sofa talking with Tony Bennett. I got a picture of me in my rumba shirt with my arm around Nat Cole. And I have one that is a classic, of Lynn backstage. Because we used to play for dancing and then the show... There would be two shows, the second show would come on and Jimmy

Durante would be waiting in the wings to go on and there's one shot of Jimmy Durante doing the mambo with my wife. Which is a classic. It's a classic. It was terrific. The acts were the top of the line: Dick Shawn, Jack Carter. There was a comedian who filled in for somebody who I won't mention because they bombed. So they said get the kid who's at the Five O'clock Club. So who was the kid at the Five O'clock Club? Buddy Hackett. So he came in. Not bad.

Q: Did you know Desi Arnez?

A: I didn't know him that well. I used to see them at the musicians union. Musicians union used to be in Miami city and I'd see him there. I think he was there one time with his father. I can't remember exactly.

Q: Were there a lot of competitors in other Latin bands?

A: Every hotel had a Latin band. In the 50s at that time... these people who circled the Palladium on Wednesday nights in New York came down here and they had to have their Latin music.

Q: So it was a New York influence then?

A: Essentially it was during the season also but somewhat in the summer but mostly during the season. Like I say, Jewish people had to have their Latin music and Chinese food -- those were the two musts. So they came down and every hotel, the major band was a Latin band. If you heard an American band in a hotel it was usually what they called the "relief band." [It] was the other band that filled in after the Latin band. And we had some excellent, excellent bands, that unfortunately you don't hear too much about them, at all. It was Sacasa who opened the San Souci Hotel and then went to the Casablanca which I saw go up. That's the hotel with the guys holding up the roof out in front. We used to laugh about that one.

30:00

Q: You saw some of the Art Deco District hotels being built. Like which ones?

A: Oh gosh. I don't remember which. One of my buddies in high school, his father -- I don't know if he owned or managed the Cardoso. So, I had a gig

there one night, -- New Year's Eve. Playing drums with sticks. I hardly knew what I was doing. I was used to playing hand drums. But those hotels -- you know it's like the old cliché, "if I had known I would've paid more attention." Those hotels went up... I remember Lynn and I taking off a couple of weeks, not a couple of weeks, we just stayed at the Leslie Hotel.

Q: What were the rooms like there?

A: Room, nothing to speak of. And then they went thoroughly downhill. It's just something to see, and that's why, again it this lovely lady and her fortitude, Capitman. I don't know how she's referred to, is there Bear? I think of her like the young kid in Tiananmen Square who stood in front of the tank. That's what I was telling people, and thank goodness for that. Because look -- who would've known -- look what we've got. That's the way life is: it goes down, it comes back, turns around and what a great place.

Q: I see that you also did some standup comedy was that also on the Beach?

A: It was in the Playboy Club, Miami when I first started.

Q: Was that on the beach?

A: No, Miami City, 77th and Biscayne, approximately. I did stand-up on the Beach. I actually... There was an organization, I think they're still around, called the Footlights, here in town, and that was a businessman's lunch, so to speak, but anybody who was of any notoriety, it's like a Friars club. It's like a local Friars club. People would come to these things because they were hilarious, raucous, raunchy, and I don't care who was there. It didn't make any difference whether it was Sen. Pepper or the governor, they destroyed them. Some of it, I just cringed that place was mobbed. People were in hysterics. I had the band at the Seville Hotel and they had one of those things and I started doing shtick behind the drums. I always enjoyed comedy and then one time somebody asked me to sit in at the Friars... at the luncheon and I said, "don't ask me to get up because I'm not a comedian." But guess what, so I got up... but that's another documentary. I got up and somebody who saw me, Alan Gale, who was very well known here and very popular, took over what was Copa City and converted it into a vaudeville theater with Dave Tyler, a big band, Arthur Treacher was the

lead, Paul Winchell with his ventriloquist dummy, June Taylor dancers and all that.

And I broke up my band that was making money with everybody [saying] “you’re absolutely crazy” and fortunately I had a wife who said, “you know you’re going to be sitting behind the drums saying ‘I coulda, shoulda, woulda.’” She said, “I don’t want to live with a guy like that,” and thank goodness. I mean, she was terrific. She said, “get it out of your system.” Which I did and the place lasted two weeks and then it was very tough. So I teamed up with singer who is very popular here, Dick Sterling, and went on as a comedy team and got a lucky break when somebody got sick at the Playboy Club over here and as a result got the Playboy Club here. We did all of the country, pretty much. The Playboy circuit. The country and Jamaica.

Q: So you lived on the Beach for a while?

A: I lived on the beach for a long time until... I would say... working the Copa...

[INTERRUPTION]

I lived lives on the beach for a very long time. Then when I got married we lived on 15th and Alton, which was close to Copa City because I didn’t have a car, so I had to depend on sidemen who had cars. For quite a while lived there and... then we moved to town -- to an apartment and I’m trying to think. It was probably around the time pretty soon before Lynn became pregnant with her daughter. Our daughter was born 55. So I would say from ‘38 to ‘55. Miami Beach, and then Miami city.

Q: And you could get around pretty well without a car on Miami Beach, then?

A: Oh, yeah. I had a bike. That’s how we went to school -- on the bike. And then when I graduated I went to the University of Miami and then you had to take three buses to get there. So, I took a bus from Miami Beach to downtown Miami, another most from Miami to Coral Gables, and another bus from Coral Gables to the University of Miami. My friend was also going to the University of Miami, taking pre-engineering at that time. You’re not going to believe this. My friend, who was starting to learn Spanish, and we

would talk on the buses in Spanish so no one would understand. That tells you a little bit about how things have changed.

Q: So when did you see the big changes or did the exodus from Cuba affect the Beach that much?

A: That was '59 and already I was living in town and '59 when Castro took over. The exodus, I guess some came beforehand, others after. It was gradual and I'm trying to think of where I was at the time. I was still with the band and I was sort of transitioning into my new profession. Which was corporate conferences, which I did for about half my life, over forty years. Doing corporate humor.

Q: That's not an oxymoron?

A: No actually they really needed it. It was sort of unusual thing. I was very fortunate with that. It started to really skyrocket. Then I had an article on the front page -- feature story on the front page of the Wall Street Journal and that changed my life.

Q: Back to the Beach, since we we're really focusing in that area.

[INTERRUPTION]

Was there a place you played that was sort of the pinnacle place to play -- where you knew you were good or had arrived to play there?

A: I wouldn't say arrived. I don't think I ever had that feeling. You were more involved in making sure that you worked -- all the time. Which was not always easy for a working musician. But those were the days -- and it doesn't exist anymore -- we were working steady. You had a steady gig. You worked a week you had Mondays off and, like I said, at the Seville Hotel, I was there for three years. There and other hotels. I enjoyed the Fontainebleau because it was the Boom Boom Room. But it wasn't the... I wasn't the steady band. It was... "Chico the laughing Cuban" was the band, yeah, believe it or not. I can't tell you why he was laughing because this is a family video.

Q: No it isn't.

A: No I won't go there. I'll go there off-camera. Mandy Campo I think worked there. Had some good bands. The Boom Boom Room was a swinging place. Really swinging. Then there was a TV show. I don't know if it was "Surfside 6", something like that, that was supposedly taking place in the Boom Boom Room. And then right across was a houseboat and there was Larry King doing the show from the houseboat, and interviewed me, just what I was getting into show business.

Q: So did you hear him on the radio?

A: Oh yeah. He started off in Pumpnick's Restaurant, believe it or not. He started off down here.

Q: I hear that he owed people a lot of money.

A: Everybody. Except me, cause I never had money to lend him. Now I spoke to a couple of people, I saw one of them at a reunion or somewhere, I don't remember, very wealthy, outstanding member of the community and said, "he still owes me money." Never paid it back. I said, "maybe he can't afford it." I said, he has a lot of wives.

Q: Arthur Godfrey? I gather that was a controversy, when the street was named after him.

A: It was a controversy because he had -- if I got my facts right -- I think it was the Kenilworth Hotel, and in those days -- hard to believe -- restricted clientele. That was nicely put. Gentiles only. That was very common -- in the telephone books in the Yellow Pages and all their advertising. Signs outside. I never saw -- although people swear up and down in all the years that I've been here -- "no Jews or dogs allowed." I keep hearing that but I've never seen it. Not that it would surprise me. And of course, bear in mind, also that these were the days where any blacks, those terms, called Negroes in those days, if they were on the beach after dusk had to show their working permits, otherwise they were in trouble. So the back of the bus routine, the colored and white water fountains and restrooms and all that. You're in the South. My wife worked in the Red Cross Department Store, which was quite the place on Flagler Street, and she was told not to call the Black folks "sir" or "madam" by the manager. "Call them customer."

Q: She was told that?

A: Straight out. Which she didn't pay attention to. The times were very difficult. I remember even as a kid in high school writing a letter to the Herald and I said "if you have an article in the Herald about a, quote, Negro who was arrested or in jail and you put the word Negro after when somebody else is arrested who is white, I think you should put that in after their name as well." Of course I never heard anything never saw anything.

Q: Did you get published?

A: No. But it's just to give you an idea of what was going on in those days.

45:00

Q: But the beach became very Jewish, or known as a Jewish enclave later. And from what I've heard before, Jews who had businesses didn't discriminate against black people. They didn't mind they're coming in and patronizing their store.

A: I don't remember any customer at my dad's concession -- my dad's handbag concession -- I never saw any blacks or people of color coming in and shopping, at all. Now, when I was a musician, this just occurred to me, is that after the job a lot of us used to go to Mary Elizabeth or Sir John and I used to go and sit in on congas and bongos. With no problems at all. There was never any problem.

Q: Going that way?

A: Yeah, and we were welcome with open arms. It was really extraordinary. In fact, I remember a wonderful singer, Hal Frazier, who was excellent. We were at the Playboy Clubs together and we were working the St. Louis Playboy Club and he lived in town and he said, "I'm driving home to Miami, do you want to go? We'll share the expenses." I said, "terrific." He said, "okay." So we came down. I think probably pretty much around the Mason-Dixon line, when it was, we went to eat and came out and I went in the front to sit. He said, "no you can't sit in the front anymore. You have to sit back." I said, "don't you have the colors mixed up here." We were always kidding each other. He says, "no believe me." He says, "anybody asks you hired me to drive you down to Miami." Wow.

Q: Speaking of eating, one thing I read about the Beach in its heyday, is that there was so much eating going on.

A: Wolfie's.

Q: Tell us about your experience.

A: Wolfie's was a great hang out. The waitresses, every waitress was a Jewish mother. "You're not finishing that?" I swear. And then before you even ate they put down a bucket of peppers, a bucket of rolls, coleslaw.

Stuff comes up and I remember a guy, he never worked for me, but he was notorious, and he would come and he would never buy anything. He would just sit there and he was the guy we used to call, "are you gonna finish that?" He would have everything. He would have all the rolls and this and that and the leftovers. You could make a meal not buy anything. And the service and the food was outstanding. I'm talking about the original Wolfie's. Not the one when they moved down to Lincoln Rd. I think that was another store there. That was the place you hung out. After a gig you work till midnight and then you got there and all the musicians and entertainers who were working in the area used to come. You'd sit there in and you'd B.S. till two in the morning.

Q: So any famous names of people what we would know?

A: I think occasionally you'd have somebody come in. I remember one instance, right after we played shows -- they never paid enough money to do a rehearsals -- we did what was called a "talk-over" at the Seville hotel and that's why I had the musicians who could sight read. So they had the act come, you go to another room where there's a piano or something like that and you look at stuff so whether it was Ruby Valley or whoever it was, some of the singers, good names, we just talked it over and then you go play it cold. So they had to be good players. I remember one time a guy who was in charge of the entertainments said, "We got a good comedian coming in. He's supposed to be very funny. He's the son of a rabbi." I said, "oh boy." The only thing we were concerned about "does he have a lot of music?" He said, "I don't think he has any music." Great. Jackie Mason. I never heard of him, then. "Yes, he's supposed to be very good." Well, let me tell you. He was fantastic. First of all, we loved him because he come onstage and the first thing he'd say -- "get lost." He had no music or

anything. He'd just stand up and talk. He was hilarious. So you knew something was cooking. There were a lot of firsts in that respect. So, these kind of people would show up at Wolfie's, sure. I'm trying to think if Larry King was there. He was at the competitor, Pumpnick's. Maybe the same time. I'm trying to think. But at the Footlighters, anybody who was in town who was of notoriety would show up at the Footlighters and that meant Sammy Davis Junior, Johnny Mathis, wherever they appeared would show up at the Footlighters luncheon and get roasted -- get torn apart, to pieces. That's what they went there for.

Q: What about the Jackie Gleason show?

A: I did two Jackie Gleason shows. Let's see, this was my profession 4.8 when I start do acting. Start going on interviews and did commercials and then I did some films. And I did two films with Sinatra: "Lady in Cement" -- this was all done here -- Sinatra would come down and entertained at the Fontainebleau and then do the films. So it was "Tony Rome" was the first, "Lady in Cement" was the other. And I got two really good chunks in that film.

Q: What was it like working with Sinatra?

A: He was the ultimate in professionalism. First of all he came on the set at noon after working and doing his shows. He'd come on the set at noon after working his shows. He didn't like to do a lot of takes, understandably.

But not only after doing his shows, then they'd go to Jillie's. Jillie was a buddy and that was a hotspot, before the "rat pack," for Sinatra and his clan. They used to go there and party and all that stuff. He'd come on the set and he knew his lines and he was terrific. Terrific. And was very complimentary to me when I did the second film with him, "welcome aboard," he said.

Q: He remembered you?

A: Yeah, that's another story. Now I ended up like Jackie Gleason [STAMMERS] looking at those big blue eyes, he was great. The other film, "Goodbye, Columbus" was done in New York. That I did with Klugman and Ali MacGraw, Dick Benjamin -- that was done in New York. A lot of stuff was going on here film-wise. There was the Ivan Tor studio so, consequently,

the Flipper films. I did a couple of those, which somebody just sent me is up on YouTube. And I'm trying to think of some of the other films. A lot of commercials. The agencies came down. They loved to come down -- primarily for weather. They had the clients. They wanted to shoot. Where do you go to shoot? You can go to the Bahamas but it was cheaper to come down to Miami. So I had quite a few national commercials, which was great.

Q: What was it like working with Jackie Gleason? You work a couple of the shows?

A: I worked a couple of his shows. I was instructed the first day, "you don't talk to Jackie unless he talks to you."

Q: Did he ever talk to you?

A: No. He never spoke to anybody that I remember. It was a pretty cold environment, there. I also did an industrial -- what they call an industrial film -- and industrial are filmed in-house for the trade, and this was for Anheuser-Busch. And I did it with Gleason and Jack Palance. And that, also, wasn't a happy place. Carney was terrific. Carney was wonderful -- Art Carney. He is friendly and all that, but Gleason was not. At least my experience.

Q: That seems to be a lot of people's experience, according to what I've read. There was a decline on South Beach.

A: Yeah, I had an aunt who lived in a room on Ocean Drive. And Lynn and I wanted to help her. She was my mother's sister. And [we] set up an apartment. She cooked on a hot plate and used the bathroom sink. I don't know how she subsisted, but she did and I guess a lot of people did. No, they have to be here on Ocean Drive. They have to be at the beach. They have to be with people they knew. It's very tough like that. We were willing to do what we could, but she didn't want to move. And she died here on Miami Beach.