

**Interview Subject: Andrew Capitman, son of Barbara Capitman**

**Date Recorded: 1/13/12**

**Location: 2655 Pine Tree Drive**

**Date of Birth: 8/17/50**

NARRATIVE: He talks about coming to Miami Beach with his parents, driving down from New York in the 50's and early 60's.

Talks about his father's background, and his parents' move to Miami in 1973. Andrew was working for a bank in Nassau and spent a lot of time with his parents on weekends. His impressions then was that it was very "outré," filled with old Jewish people.

Parents lived in Coconut Grove, which was the only "cool" place in Florida before the drug-induced boom.

Parents were "proto-environmentalists." Father got sick and died in 1975.

Mother had interesting career doing public relations work for industrial designers. She did marketing research in the 50's and 60's. He and his brother decided that Barbara should do something that would make a difference.

09:06: The historic preservation movement was quite new. There had been historic preservation. The Rockefellers had been involved in things like the restoration of Williamsburg.

11:24 We were walking around and my mother said, "I think this is Art Deco." And that wasn't really a known concept. But she absolutely focused on it, as here are all these old Jewish people. Miami Beach is being torn down ....terrible infill going on... my mother got this idea and that became her absolute committed thing that she was going to do. And that's how it started.

Sept. 1976 incorporation of MDPL [Miami Design Preservation League] was December 1, 1976.

Between December 1976 to April 1979 was the critical period in forming the South Beach historical district. He talks about process of becoming a national historic district

14:20 Parents were young communists, level of political training. "I grew up in a party family the opposition was incredible." This story really starts with why is

there this neighborhood and what is this neighborhood about. Accessible urban tropical environment created with a "look." Most of buildings had simple construction, uniformity of construction. Unique façades with themes, efforts put into the lobbies. Same motifs used. A lot of the architects were commercial people who thought up the modernist look. Miami Beach was about packaging from very early on.

18:26 Packaging of winter vacation.

19:00 DIANE CAMBER, very early co-worker with B.C.in MDPL. Her family came to Beach in 1920's. Long stint as director of Bass Museum, her father was a gambler. Leonard Horowitz's father was basically a gambler. Gambling boats offshore.

Este Kefauver hearings in 1950's.

Middle-class guys who came on vacation wanted to play poker, go to the dog races. Hole in the Head, Frank Capra's first color film, takes place in the Cardozo. Frank Sinatra. Explains plot. Dog track was right next to Joe's. We used to show it every week at the Cardozo during the winter.

Gambling was a huge thing. Miami Beach became a big resort town in no small part because of gambling.

1962-63, Boeing 707 could take people to the islands as easily as coming to Miami Beach, rise of Las Vegas and legalized gambling there as opposed to illicit gambling here.

To be a cabana manager was about running the poker game. There were not so many types of entertainment. Playing cards was a really big thing.

26:34

Q: When your mother decided to do this, what did you think about it?

A: From the beginning I thought it was viable. BG as leftist coming from leftist family, he was aware of skepticism of capitalist enterprises. In a capitalist context, you can't deny people their development rights. You can make more money by preserving than by destroying if you've got something very unusual.

28:03 In Miami Beach you could attract the same people who would want to live in SoHo or Georgetown were the same kind of people who could be attracted to a neighborhood in MB that was low rise, different , not t cookie cutter and if you coupled it with the right kind of commercial activities like movie theaters, good restaurants, bookstores.

Urban people often have very low boredom thresholds ..... I thought that you could make this into a really cool neighborhood using the architecture as a thematic backdrop. So I was always enthusiastic about it. So as we progressed through this long, behemoth battle to get this turned into an historic district, it was important that it gave the idea that this was important, worth preserving.

30:00 came down for first Art Deco week Sept. 1978. Barbara organized that, the MDPL. In the Cardozo Hotel, hq, Busby Berkley-esque synchronized swimming. Describes scene. Swing orchestra (Bill Wade) We had the first Moon Over Miami Ball in the ballroom of the Edwards Hotel.

Remembers going on roof of Victor, this is absolutely marketable package-able, viable. I'm going to come do this.

This was absolutely no example of what it could be. It was all in our minds that it could be cool. But there was nothing cool yet.

Dec. '78 took all money and put a deposit down on Cardozo Hotel to make the C. the pilot project. BC was running the nonprofit org so not appropriate for her to be involved.

Miami Beach was a pretty corrupt environment but we were clear that we had to be pretty correct.

Attacks from Chamber of Commerce, most of city commission, Stephen Muss and the big hotel owners, the opposition was fierce. Describes MDPL and Chamber forces on same plane going up to Gainesville (he means Tallahassee) to the hearing on status.

Abe Resnick, tearing down of the New Yorker, he was quoted as saying he was the owner and had a right to tear it down

"If I owned the Mona Lisa and I wanted to rip it up, isn't it my right to do that?" New Yorker was wonderful, Henry Hohauser.

Q: Did they know they were up against? with B.C.

37:15 My mother was hugely determined. I have nothing to lose. What can they do to me? And she did have nothing to lose...She hoped that it would be a preserved neighborhood where it would still be a comfortable for old people. That was her idea. The whole idea of upmarket expensive was something she hoped wouldn't happen. One of the charges about preservation is that it leads to gentrification and it becomes more expensive, pricing out older people.

Preservation without gentrification was what my mother wanted.

Re: Matti Bower and effort to restore buildings in Washington St. area

My mother and I wrote the initial grant to form MBDC, urban development action grant. DENIS RUSS.

Describes demographic of Miami Beach in the 70's. Good analysis of differences between Jewish population.

I thought my mother's idea was a good idea but outside of NYC public housing is pretty small.

70's, 80's, 90's rise of Orthodox phenomenon

45:40 Anti-Semitism

Snobism, German Jews looked down on Eastern European Jews, Jews born in the U.S. in the 1920's were a big part of the assimilation movement.

49:27: My mother had a good idea, she had nothing to lose, she had the best possible imaginable skills set for taking on what was a hearts and minds battle and she stuck to it. She just stuck to it. It wasn't that she was formidable. It was just that she had a very good idea. This neighborhood was slated to be torn down. There was no idea that you could create a set of associations. Rich people, cool people, trendy people don't go here. Young college educated urban hip professionals don't come to MB. They'd rather be dead than go to MB.

Barbara understood that h.p. in general was striking a chord all over the country, that people didn't want to live in a development house or cookie cutter apartment....She graduated from NYU in '44. My mother knew how to harness the press. She graduated from NYU '41, '42 she got a journalism job when women didn't get journalism jobs. She got hired at Modern Plastics. She got exposure to the design community. She did publications for industrial designers, Center for Research, was about packing research. She had long appreciation of industrial designers and doing PR for them so she was a press member of Association of Interior Designers. She had the connections. She loved journalists. There was nothing she wouldn't do to give a writer a story. People loved her and could see the story. Very little about MB is legitimate but the phenomenology of these MB buildings built by 7 architects with the hip orientation for their time created a phenomenon for the existence of these buildings. She saw the kernel of truth. We got artists and writers and gay people right from the start involved in this and the neighborhood became cool.

Cafe Cardozo was really important. Christo surrounded islands in Biscayne Bay. He took all our rooms in 7 hotels for his entourage. Talks about Christo groupies. Avant guard, very cool. Thousands of people came. Did mailing of 400 creative directors inviting them. Everything else ensued from there.

58:37 Miami Vice. Burn Notice, new Charlie's Angels. Scarface. The Birdcage. They got into popular lexicon, had enormous implications.

1:00:00 Past its prime in terms of being cutting edge. It is now a legitimate industry. Real challenge in running small hotels and an entertainment arts neighborhood, who are the workers. Always a challenge to get good chamber maids, managers, dealing with highly demanding clients, high touch service. It's different, it sustains itself.