

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

Oral History Interview  
ALBERT FABOZZI

By Liza Zapol  
New York, NY  
April 7, 2013

## Oral History Interview with Albert Fabozzi, April 7, 2013

Narrator(s)	Albert Fabozzi
Birthdate	n/a
Birthplace	NYC
Narrator Age	n/a
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	Albert Fabozzi's apartment overlooking Tompkins Square Park
Date of Interview	April 7, 2015, 10:30 am
Duration of Interview	2 hours, 5 min
Number of Sessions	1
Waiver Signed/copy given	y
Photographs	Y
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MP3 File Name	Approved: FabozziAlbertOralHistory.mp3 [149.9 MB]
Order in Oral Histories	12

### Background/ Notes:

### Interview Summary:

Interview was at Albert's home on the south side of Tompkins Square Park.

### Addendum:

*(Notes about special interviewee requests- issues with sound, etc for later editing)*

Interviewee requested a single redaction to sound and audio. Original audio and transcript is closed forever.



Albert Fabozzi in his apartment with his painting in background, April 7, 2015.  
Photograph by Liza Zapol.

## Quotes from Oral History Interview with Albert Fabozzi

“We got to a point where we didn’t want to live under the pressure of the bars being raided all the time. It was just to a point where it was like, this is insane, we deserve to be able to go out and have a good time and not have to worry about going to jail for dancing—for dancing in a bar. We weren’t committing criminal acts, but it was considered a criminal act then. It had such a stigma. How could you go out and have a good time, knowing that any minute this place is going to light up, and it’s going to be filled with all these—You see all these badges and all this. That’s quite intimidating.”

(Fabozzi, pp. 9-10)

“What’s interesting is that the West Village was really a gay ghetto. It was a result of society not accepting who we are, so you congregate into a particular area, and that becomes your place to find someone like yourself and to go out and have a good time. All the bars were there because of the elevator—of the highway, the West Side Highway. A lot of the bars that were along that waterfront had a certain kind of privacy and mystique about them, because it was at the end of the island, and it offered us a sanctuary that you couldn’t get anywhere else. It was an ideal spot for gay people. All the bars were there—the Eagle [Tavern], the Spike, the Law [00:30:36], the Mineshaft, the Anvil, I mean [laughs] it was like, you could go from one to the other, to the other to the other, to the other.”

(Fabozzi, p. 11)

“We fought to get the park [Tompkins Square Park] renovated, because now I faced this park, and every day I looked out, and it was prostitutes, homeless, cooking—oh, it was unbelievable. The kids from this school had nowhere to play. Never did I see kids. There were no playgrounds. I says, “You know, this is crazy.”

There was talk about renovating the park. We were ecstatic. It was, oh, they’re going to renovate the park! Well, it turns out the mayor decided, all of a sudden, that the park wasn’t going to be renovated because the community didn’t want it. Well, when I heard that, I called the people from the Democratic club, I said, “Did you hear what just happened?” I says, “Well, this is unacceptable!” We called the mayor right away. It was [David] Dinkins at the time, and we said, “Look, I don’t know who you spoke to, but we’re the community also, and nobody came and asked me,” I says, “And we want that park renovated!” I says, “This is unacceptable.” We formed a coalition, and we went out into the streets, and we picketed City Hall. We picketed the mayor’s office, Manhattan Borough President, I mean screaming and yelling with signs up. I didn’t believe that I would—The members in my Democratic Club used to take tranquilizers, because they were afraid of the anarchists and the squatters, all these people. I used to look at them and laugh. I said, “Oh, god,” that’s what I told them. [laughs] “You’re afraid of this? This is nothing. [laughs] You don’t know what fear is.”

(Fabozzi, p. 16)

“I went to New York City Partnership for Housing, and I sat down with them, and I negotiated for market rate housing, largely because in order to make this a safe place, you have to have people that are interested in the safety of the neighborhood: people that care, and people that are working people. I knew that the only way to do that was to bring in a little better housing. I knew that that threatened people who lived on low income, but you can’t have one

without the other; you have to start somewhere. [00:01:39] I knew that I was going to protect the low-income at the same time, but I knew that this was an issue that had to be dealt with, because when you better a community in terms of economically, you'll get better education. You'll get better services—sanitation, police protection. All of these things were neglected here, because this neighborhood was viewed as a 'Let it go. It's a dump.' I was not going to live here and think of myself living like that and have people think of us like that. No, I'm not going to live here like that.

When I went to New York City Partnership for Housing, I went through the neighborhood with my vice president from the board. We made a map of all the empty lots, and I went from the big lots to the small lots. I had it all mapped out. When I went up there, he said to me, "Oh, Mr. Fabozzi," he says, "we really can't build anything. The lots are too small." He says, "Anything on a big lot, we're not going to build a building five stories, because there's going to be elevators, and we don't have the money." I said, "Oh really," I said, "let me tell you something," and I took out the map. "You see this?" They said, "Yeah." I says, "This is a map of the neighborhood. These are the lots. These small ones, fine, keep them community gardens. I agree with that, but you see these big parcels? I want them bidded out to market rate housing." I says, "Why don't we see these lots as a project, not as a singular parcel—" see it as a—That's how I got this building built up the block here."

(Fabozzi, pp. 22-23)

"Before the riots, they tried everything in their power to prevent the park from being renovated. They used to do what was called 'ring around the park,' and they'd get all these people who joined hands—and literally did it around the entire park—[in order] to not to let anybody in and out to chase out the homeless and the people that were—god knows what they were doing in the park. Then they would riot, picket, and of course the police were called in to try to maintain calm. But they were vigilant. They were determined to get their way, as well as we were."

(Fabozzi, p. 24)

"What I miss about Greenwich Village is the camaraderie of the ghetto that was there. I used to walk down Bleecker Street. There was one antique shop after the other, and in the evening, if you were strolling that street, the chandeliers were lit at night and everything in the windows. It was just magical. You could walk by, and it looked like these little treasures and you went from one to the other, to the other, to the other. It was so beautiful and quaint. It was the charm of the whole experience there. That's gone."

(Fabozzi, p. 40)

## **Summary of Oral History Interview with Albert Fabozzi**

Albert Fabozzi (19??- ) is the former chairman of Community Board 3 and an East Village resident for almost thirty years.

Fabozzi moved into an apartment in the West Village from Coney Island, Brooklyn, where he grew up with his mother, siblings and step-father. He describes a working class upbringing and relatives who were connected to organized crime. As a child, Fabozzi accompanied his stepfather, who was a bookie and the president of the local night club association, to restaurants and clubs in Coney Island, where he was exposed to famous entertainers Dinah Washington, Judy Garland, Lena Horne, and Johnny Mathis. Especially memorable was the Jewel Box Revue, a drag troupe, which was Fabozzi's first exposure to gay culture.

At age twenty-four or twenty-five, Fabozzi moved into a West Village apartment with a boyfriend. He describes the gay bar scene of the West Village. Fabozzi moved into the East Village with Glenn, his partner and almost immediately became involved in a Democratic club, which later led him into politics.

In the early 1990s, Fabozzi was appointed to Community Board 3 by New York City councilperson, Antonio Pagán. In 1995, Fabozzi became chairman. He discusses his political involvements as part of the Community Board, including controversy over renovating Tompkins Square Park, his opposition to the volume of social services provided in the East Village, and his support of market-rate housing, which attracted more people of an affluent demographic to the neighborhood. Fabozzi was also responsible for creating park programming. He began the annual Charlie Parker Jazz Festival and annual Christmas Tree activities in Tompkins Square Park.

Fabozzi discusses his motivation for his run for a position in the New York City council, the influence of his partner on his creative life, his career as an interior designer. The interview concludes with Fabozzi's reflections on his relationships in the Village and the sense of home he finds there.

**General Interview Notes:**

This is a transcription of an oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP began the East Village Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP East Village Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing East Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

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

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

## Oral History Interview Transcript

**Zapol:** OK, this is Liza Zapol for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Oral History Project. It's April 7th, 2015, and I'm here in the East Village at East Seventh Street—178 East Seventh Street—and if I can ask you to introduce yourself, please.

**Fabozzi:** Well, I'm happy to meet you, and I'm Albert Fabozzi. I'm the former chairman of Community Board 3 and an East Village resident for almost thirty years or so. [laughs] I feel like a piece of historical furniture sometimes here! [Zapol laughs]

**Zapol:** Let's delve in. Where does this story begin? Tell me about your family, where your family's from, and where you grew up—a little bit about that, any stories you have about that.

**Fabozzi:** Well, I'm a Brooklyn kid. I grew up in Coney Island. Oh my god. I was the kind of a kid that didn't need any toys, because I had all the rides, and everybody knew me, so I used to go on all the rides for free, because my father had the shooting galleries in there. My mother had the corn and watermelon stand next to Nathan's [Famous]. I used to cut the watermelon, peel the corn. I was only like maybe ten years old.

Then about when I was thirteen, I got a job in Steeplechase [Park] working for the George C. Tilyou's and that place was just magical, like you never saw in your life. It was a big, glass and steel glass enclosure, where all the rides inside, and outside, there was a park. had the parachute. they had a racetrack that ran around the building with six wooden horses on the track, and it was just spectacular. Being a kid in a place like that was like, I didn't need anything else, you know? My grandfather had a tailor shop on Mermaid Avenue, a few blocks away from there. We lived above the tailor shop. That's where I grew up.

**Zapol:** Where did your grandfather come from before that?

**Fabozzi:** They came from Italy. They came from Naples.

It's funny because my grandmother would always come in on a ship. At that time people traveled on ocean liners. Airplanes were unpopular until the late [19]50s. When I was a kid, I used to go to the dock every time the ship to come in to meet her. I used to run around the ship. I was always so excited. I knew that the day would come when I'm old enough, I'm going to go on an ocean liner to Italy, and I did. In 1966, I sailed on the [S.S.] Raffaello, I went first-class. I



went to Italy to visit my grandmother, because she went back as she got older. It was an experience I'll never forget. They actually treated me like I was the mayor of the town. [laughs] I was the only person from my family that ever went to my father's hometown where he grew up!

My father was an interesting man. He had a barbershop in Coney Island, and he was also a self-made musician. He played any instrument with strings. Never took a lesson. He was really amazing. You know, I always envied the fact that he never taught me how to play, because I missed that. I would have liked that, you know?

My parents divorced when I was ten, so I pretty much grew up with my mother, and she was a force to be reckoned with. My mother was an incredible woman, in terms of—She was nominated to be the first woman chairman of a local union, which was unheard of for women then. She was really quite a person. She was a waitress, and she worked for a restaurant in Coney Island that—The unions were very powerful then. My stepfather, her second husband, was the president of the nightclubs association, so I knew all the nightclubs. I used to go to the Copacabana, the Latin Quarter, Ben Maksik's Town and Country [Night] Club and I'd go backstage. I'd meet Dinah Washington, Lena Horne, Johnny Mathis, and I was only seventeen years old! I knew all these people! I even went back in the dressing room with Judy Garland. I used to be on the stage up at Maksik's, and I'd go there at night, and, oh, I'd never forget. They would treat me, give me the ringside table, and I'd never pay. [laughs] I was a spoiled kid at seventeen.

**Zapol:** Tell me, did you have any siblings? Did you have any brothers or sisters? [00:05:02]

**Fabozzi:** We were five children. My older brother passed away when he was fifty-something. He had a lung problem. Now, there's just my two sisters and my older brother. I'm next to the youngest. I have a sister that's ten years younger than I, But they're all married. They all have children and grandchildren. Their children have children, so I have like maybe seventeen nephews and nieces and maybe ten great-nephews and nieces, and then maybe another ten great-great. It's that kind of thing. The nephew that owns the brownstone in Park Slope, he's a doctor. His sisters are registered nurses. One of his sisters teaches nursing. I mean, they're all good kids. I got another nephew, he's a principal of a high school: Fort Hamilton High School, in Brooklyn. He's the principal.

**Zapol:** Tell me about what it was like growing up then—you were the second to the youngest, so were you close to your siblings? What was it like growing up with them in Coney Island?

**Fabozzi:** I was very close with my sister, because my two brothers were much older. My sister and I are only a year apart. It's interesting, because I'm in June, my sister's in June, and my youngest sister's in June, so the three of us celebrate our birthdays. I would give her \$5, and then that \$5 would go to the [laughs]—in the end I'd get it back, because I was the last at the end of the month. It was so funny.

I'm very close with my sister that's a year apart from me. Her son is the one that's a doctor, and her daughters are nurses. She and I are very close. We more or less supported each other, because our family was kind of dysfunctional. My mother worked to raise us—to raise her children. I have to really admire her. She was an amazing woman. I think that she was a good role model for my sisters, because she really took charge and really gave us a decent place to live.

**Zapol:** You were in her father's home? Was where you lived above—?

**Fabozzi:** We still stayed in the apartment where my grandfather—My grandparents lived in that. He had the business downstairs, the tailor shop. I used to go down, maybe, and put the clothes up on the racks and stuff, or deal with the people who'd come in and write up the receipts. [laughs]

**Zapol:** Were you pretty independent as a kid? Tell me a story about yourself as a kid.

**Fabozzi:** I lived my life in the streets. We didn't have things like you have today. When we played in the street, we played 'Cowboys and Indians.' We used to take broomsticks and ride them like they were horses. We didn't have computers and things that you could stay—We were very active! We would play stickball on Saturdays by the beach, because we lived a block off Surf Avenue. Along Steeplechase, you used to have that block on the weekends when nobody was around, and we would have stickball games. We would play in the street. I hung out on the boardwalk at the beach all the time. That was my life. But we used to play *ringolevio*, kick the can. [laughter] Kids [have] never even heard of these games. Who plays things like that today, you know?

**Zapol:** You mentioned before we started recording that your mother's family ran the Brooklyn piers. Tell me about that, how did—

**Fabozzi:** That was my mother's sister and her children. They lived on 43rd [Street] and Second [Avenue], right off the pier. My aunt owned a bar on the waterfront. It was called Mom's Place. It was very well-known. All the sailors and everybody, and all during World War II, they all used to come in there. Everybody knew Mom and so her sons. My cousin, Tony Stretch, this man was maybe six four, six-three. He has shoulders like this. His hands were like that, always with a cigar. He became the vice president of the union, the ILA [International Longshoremen's Association], the CIO [Congresses of Industrial Organization]. They worked for [Albert] Anastasia at the time. Anastasia was, I don't know if you remember, he was murdered in the barber chair. They used to work for them.

Sometimes I'd be there on the weekend. The unions would strike, and the riots would come up the streets, past the house, and the guys yelling, and I was only maybe ten years old.

[00:10:02]

**Zapol:** What were some of the stories you heard about the piers? What was it like?

**Fabozzi:** It was a really tough life. My older brother worked with the longshoremen, because he was involved with—my cousins got him a job on the piers. He worked I don't know how anybody could do that. It was just torturous. On the very cold days, you're freezing out there. You couldn't dress warm enough! They were driving these high-load machines, taking the load off the—and at that time everything came in by ship. Today it's all airplanes. When air freight came in, it really decimated the waterfront, and they lost all of that, so the neighborhood changed a lot.

I remember there was big companies there, like American Can Company was there, and I used to watch all the trailers come in and out. It was unbelievable. But it's changed dramatically. It's nothing like that today. Nothing.

**Zapol:** You said your uncle also worked for Anastasia, so the mafia was kind of involved.

**Fabozzi:** I don't think it was a secret who they were those people. I didn't understand that at that time. I was only ten years old. I could never understand why sometimes people used to walk on

the other side of the street to avoid us. They were so afraid of them. [laughs] They had a very notorious reputation.

**Zapol:** When did you learn? How did that come together?

**Fabozzi:** In Coney Island, it was almost the same thing, because my stepfather, he was a bookie. All the guys there, I knew all of them, actually. They treated me like a prince. No matter where I went, I never paid for anything. The restaurants always, “Oh, that’s Tony’s kid, give him what he wants,” you know, that kind of thing. You don’t see it for what it really is at that age until you get older, and you say, “Oh my god.” But then, I realized that for them, it was their way of making a life for themselves. They didn’t know anything else. I think it was like a fight to survive. You really had to be a strong guy to survive those times, because if you didn’t have a skill or a profession you had to find a way to make a living and raise your family. Some people resorted to illegal activity. But you know, the police force at the time wasn’t particularly honest themselves they worked hand in hand.

**Zapol:** Did you have any experience with the police when you were—? No. Did your stepfather or uncle try to bring you into the—

**Fabozzi:** No, no, no, no. My mother was very overprotective. She didn’t want us to have anything to do with that. They were what they were. I think my mother’s side of the family was really unbelievable. I heard stories from them that I couldn’t possibly imagine that anybody could live through that. But that was then. Times were really crazy.

**Zapol:** What kind of stories did you hear? Or what’s one of the stories?

**Fabozzi:** Oh, my father would walk with a machine gun under the blanket with the kids in the baby carriage. [laughs] Who ever heard of anything like that! It’s just insane, you know? Of course, none of these people are alive today. I knew that when I moved here, and I got involved in politics, since my name and their name is different, I was lucky that nobody associated me with any of this nonsense, because that’s not me.

**Zapol:** What was your mother’s family name?

**Fabozzi:** Sabotino. My (stepfather, whose name I prefer not to share) [laughs] They'd say, "Oh, that's Tony's kid, give him anything he wants."

We'd go to the nightclubs. They would treat me like a prince, because he was President of the Nightclubs Association, of the unions. They would give me a ringside table, I'd go backstage, I'd meet everybody.

**Zapol:** You must have enjoyed that, you know. [00:14:49]

**Fabozzi:** Yes, I did. I remember when the Jewel Box Revue used to be at the Maksik Town and Country Club, and it was a drag show that was very like Las Vegas. They were the most talented guys you ever wanted to see. They were all men, but one more gorgeous than the other, and they extravagant—because it was a huge nightclub. It had stadium seating with a big dome ceiling that was like the stars. It was an incredible nightclub. I remember when I used to go backstage, and I was fascinated by these guys. I never saw guys dressed like that and looking like women. There was only one woman in the whole show, and she was the emcee. She was a lesbian. She came out in a tuxedo, and then Lynne Carter, he was the most talented person you ever wanted to hear. He should have been part of history. I'm sorry I never videoed it, or photographed it, because he was one in a million. I see drag acts today, they were nothing like—This man was so talented. You could close your eyes, and you could swear Pearl Bailey was standing in front of you, singing, or Phyllis Diller. He not only acted like her, but he looked like her. They used to do these little vignettes where they would do a western scene, then they'd do a ballet, and they would do rock 'n' roll, and that was their whole—They were very popular. They used to pack the house. Really, it was incredible.

I remember one night I was there when Judy Garland was there. She had her fit-and-a-half in her dressing room, and she started throwing things all over the place, so they cancelled her show, and they brought in Harry Belafonte to replace her. [laughter]

**Zapol:** That's amazing.

**Fabozzi:** Yeah, she went wild.

**Zapol:** Growing up, at what point did you realize that you were gay? How did that affect your relationship to your family?

**Fabozzi:** You know, I was engaged to be married. My brothers became hairdressers, and my brother-in-law, so they took me into the business. When I graduated high school, I went temporarily to Brooklyn College for a year, and I was sort of like, in limbo. I had no clue about what I wanted to do with my life. My brother said to me, “Look, we’ll send you to hairdressing school. We’ll pay for it. You’ll come into the business.” So I did. We had about twelve beauty salons spread out the—

I met this wonderful girl whose mother worked for us, and we started dating. Eventually, I got engaged. One night we went on a double date, and her best girlfriend [and] her boyfriend, they joined us. One night coming home in the car, her boyfriend came on to me. I was like, “Oh,” I says, “Are you kidding?” I says, “You’re like—” I said no, because I know that was his girlfriend. She was like, “Me?” He was a handsome guy. He was blonde, blue eyes, and I was very dark hair, dark eyes, so it was like opposites. It was the first experience I ever had with a guy, and we wound up in a relationship for three years.

Of course, there was no question about my lifestyle after that, and I never got married. I couldn’t allow myself to do that to anybody. I wouldn’t want to betray her in any way. But I never regretted my relationship with her, because I love women. I had sex with women before men, so—I think that that was kind of an asset for me, in terms of growing up, that I was able to relate to anyone and everybody and really appreciate women. A lot of gay guys, it’s like, I don’t know. It’s like, oh, god forbid, that kind of thing. I don’t know. I think people should be versatile with their lifestyle. I think they’d have more respect for each other. Less discrimination.

When I moved out of the house, that was like a big drama, because Italian families, you leave when you’re married. Of course, how dare you leave the house but we had at that time we had a beautiful home in Mill Basin [Brooklyn], and we owned a beautiful corner house with a swimming pool in the back. It was right off the water, and across the street there was a cabana club, and it was a really beautiful place.

**Zapol:** When did you move to Mill Basin?

**Fabozzi:** When we moved out of Coney Island.

**Zapol:** With your stepfather, or—

**Fabozzi:** My family, they put enough money together, they bought the—we actually bought the house before it was built. They were developing the land there. It was all landfill. We bought the house off the plan, and it was a beautiful house; it was two family. I lived there until I was twenty-four, twenty-five years old. Then I moved in to my own apartment with a boyfriend.

**[00:20:14]**

At that time, 1966—I remember I was in the Stonewall the night they had the raid. Funny about—They used to be able to park in the front, and if it wasn't that I [had] met somebody that night, I would have been in the raid. I met somebody; we left the bar just before the raid. I had my car parked right in front of the Stonewall! At that time there was two sections to the bar, one when you came in. You walked in where the bar was, and then the second room was the dance floor. When the police used to raid the place, the light used to go on, and everybody would separate and stop, you know? The police used to raid the bars constantly. It was like—

I have to tell you, the drag queens, we really owe them a lot, and we really should have a lot of respect for them, because they were the ones that stood up to the cops. They got to the point where they wouldn't want to take no nonsense anymore, and if it wasn't for them, it would have never started, that gay movement.

**Zapol:** At the time of Stonewall, you said you had moved in with your boyfriend—where were you living at that time?

**Fabozzi:** We took an apartment in Kew Gardens—

**Zapol:** Uh huh—

**Fabozzi:** I stayed there maybe for about a year or so, then I moved to Bleecker Street and Thompson [Street]. I was living with a friend of mine who was an artist, and through him I learned how to stretch canvas. I learned a lot about the technique with art. Then when I met my boyfriend, he was an interior architect from Pratt [Institute]—he graduated Pratt—and I learned how to do interior design through him, because he was so talented. He was one in a million. That's how I got involved in design. I went from hairdressing to being an artist to being an interior designer, working for a company in Chelsea, fifteen years.

I practically renovated all of Chelsea and the West Village. In fact, I did quite a few apartments in the West Village. One of them, RuPaul lives in the building. I did Gary Beach's

apartment. He won a Tony award on Broadway for *La Cage aux Folles*. I did the guy from Ernst & Young, one of the executives. I did the guy that owned Netscape, I did his place. I met incredible people—Marisa Tomei, Eric Stoltz, we did work for him and stuff. Going through that, and then going through—

When I worked on Madison Avenue as a hairdresser—in the middle of all this—I used to work on Carrie Nye, Dick Cavett’s wife, and I did Barbara Taylor Bradford, she wrote the book *Woman of Substance*—these were all my clients! So there wasn’t anybody—Gena Rowlands, Ann Margret—There wasn’t anybody I didn’t know! [laughs] When I tell people these stories, they say, “How is it that one person could do all this? How old are you?” They used to say to me. Now you’re going to know how old I am. [Zapol laughs] I went from hairdressing to painting to design to politics. It was almost like, how could one person do so much in his life? Especially the political career, that was something in a million years, I never thought I’d be having breakfast with the mayor. I used to be invited to Gracie Mansion, and he would invite me for breakfast, or I’d go there for a barbeque, or sometimes for lunch. Often I’d be in meeting with the Manhattan Borough President. I’d be with senators, congressmen, Supreme Court judges. They used to come in here and have coffee!

**Zapol:** From your evolution, you were talking about living on Bleecker Street and then coming to here. Around what time were you living on Bleecker Street and Thompson?

**Fabozzi:** When I was living on Bleecker Street, we were friendly with Robert Mapplethorpe and all my friends that were connected, that whole scene. Those were great times.

**Zapol:** Around what year was that, that you were there?

**Fabozzi:** Seventy-seven, somewhere around there?

**Zapol:** Before that, then, we were talking about Stonewall. Tell me about how you feel like Stonewall shifted—may have shifted—the gay community, might have shifted your experience of going out. You were talking about a club before that. [00:24:48]

**Fabozzi:** We got to a point where we didn’t want to live under the pressure of the bars being raided all the time. It was just to a point where it was like, this is insane, we deserve to be able to go out and have a good time and not have to worry about going to jail for dancing—for dancing



in a bar. We weren't committing criminal acts, but it was considered a criminal act then. It had such a stigma. How could you go out and have a good time, knowing that any minute this place is going to light up, and it's going to be filled with all these—You see all these badges and all this. That's quite intimidating.

When that night provoked this group to such an extent where they established—I'm trying to remember that group—ACT UP was one of the big groups that came out of that, and if it wasn't for them, dealing with the AIDS crisis would have even been much more traumatic. Without these groups and the formation of these groups—

Then I remember when Buddy Nero [00:26:28], who started God's Love We Deliver, he started the Gotham Business Association in the West Village, and all the people, all the gay guys that owned the businesses became part of that organization. They were learning, little by little, how to protect themselves and gain a little more—a voice—in the community. You could only do that through numbers. Then we slowly but surely discovered that changing the politics and getting involved in politics was the way to do it. The only way to do it was to come out and admit who you are. We started a campaign of telling people to, "Come out, let people know who you are." A lot of people didn't realize that their brother or their sister or their cousin was gay because they all they were very in the closet.

**Zapol:** When did you come out to your family? Or how did you?

**Fabozzi:** I think when my mother met my boyfriend that I lived with here—we were together for eighteen years. My mother loved him. Loved him. Mothers are very perceptive, and she was a very smart lady. She knew when I was with somebody that was good for me. When she met him, there wasn't anything she wouldn't have done for him. It was clear to anyone that this was a relationship, so I didn't really need to say anything. But I knew that as long as she—and believe me, this was her—and—

**Zapol:** Mm, beautiful.

**Fabozzi:**—she just adored him. In fact, when I used to go there for dinner, she used to say, "What does Glenn [Barnett] want?" I'd say, [laughs] "What do you mean, what does he want? You don't know what I want!" She wanted to know what he wanted; she wanted to please him.

**Zapol:** That's wonderful.

**Fabozzi:** His family today treats me like family. All his nephews call me ‘uncle,’ because I knew them when they were born. When I met his sister, her first child was only three years old when I met them. Now she has three grown boys. That three-year-old, his wife just had a baby boy. They named the baby ‘Nathan Glenn.’ They gave the baby Glenn’s middle name. That was really nice. They sent me a beautiful email. The baby’s so adorable.

**Zapol:** This question of coming out came from you saying that people started to really come out, that that was a part of the campaign, that you needed to make sure that people knew who you were. So tell me, you lived on Bleecker Street, and then what happened after that? Where did you live?

**Fabozzi:** On Bleecker Street I met Glenn walking down to the piers. The piers at that time, before they were gentrified and renovated, they were these piers—

What’s interesting is that the West Village was really a gay ghetto. It was a result of society not accepting who we are, so you congregate into a particular area, and that becomes your place to find someone like yourself and to go out and have a good time. All the bars were there because of the elevator—of the highway, the West Side Highway. A lot of the bars that were along that waterfront had a certain kind of privacy and mystique about them, because it was at the end of the island, and it offered us a sanctuary that you couldn’t get anywhere else. It was an ideal spot for gay people. All the bars were there—the Eagle [Tavern], the Spike, the Law [00:30:36], the Mineshaft, the Anvil, I mean [laughs] it was like, you could go from one to the other, to the other to the other, to the other. [00:30:30]

What was nice about that, as opposed to today—because now we’re sort of homogenized into society. It’s very different, but then you were always guaranteed that you’d run into somebody you knew. You always had a friend. I miss that. I really do. Because that whole environment has disappeared, because of the way we live in society today, which is OK, but I miss that.

**Zapol:** Tell me about a particular night, or perhaps it’s the day that you met Glenn, along the west side there.

**Fabozzi:** We used to go down to the waterfront for sunset to smoke a joint, and I passed him in the street. He would be coming, and I would be going, then turn around and look at each other,

didn't think anything of it. But this happened like three times in the same week. Finally I said to him I stopped him, and I said, "My mother has a saying." He says, "What's that?" "It's, 'If you meet somebody for the third time, turn around and look.' We've got to go have a drink." So we went to Julius'. At that time I knew the guy that owned the bar. Fred Lutz. Owned Julius', on—where was it, 10th Street or something, over there?

He was such a nice guy. His family owned a very successful business. They used to pack meat and stuff. They even owned racehorses. But he was a nice guy. He was really nice. We used to go there for drinks. That's how it started. I said to him—he was in his graduating year from Pratt, and I said, "Oh, what do you do?" He says, "Oh, I'm graduating Pratt," he says, "I'm an interior designer." I say, "Oh really?" and he says, "What do you do?" I says, "Well, I'm sort of an amateur artist. I work in my friend's studio in SoHo." I says, "When he's not there. I have the keys. On my leisure, I go there and paint." So he says, "Oh." I says, "Why don't you come up to the studio some time. I'll show you what I've been doing." One afternoon he came up. Designers used to come up and buy my paintings off the wall before I even finished them. I never thought that I could do anything that people would buy. I was having fun. I didn't want to make a career out of it, but I just loved doing it.

He would come up. I did a triptych that I had just finished—which his nephew has today—hanging on a wall in Williamsburg. He sat down—and picture this fifteen-foot ceiling with a skylight. This room thirty feet tall in the middle of SoHo! It was right across the street from NoHo International. At that time, SoHo was the place for artists. Now it's all expensive boutiques. It lost that whole genre that was there, which is another thing we lost. I mean the city is just not the same.

Anyway, when he saw that painting, he said to me—and he stood there for about a half hour, sitting on the floor staring at this thing, and he said to me, "Would you mind if I take this painting to a house I designed on Long island?" I says, "Really?" He says, "Yes, I want to hang it there," he said. "I think it's just perfect for what I did." I was like, [laughs] "Somebody likes—" I was like, "Oh, this can't be possible!"

Well, we get to his house. Now mind you, I did not have a design education, and I was not from any kind of sophisticated kid. So here I am, a Brooklyn kid, coming off the street—Even my vocabulary was—I think half of the time you didn't understand what I was saying, because it was all street talk from Brooklyn.

We get out to this house, open up the door, walk in, and it was done in stages. When you walked in, it was the existing conditions, but the new addition was on the lower level. When we got to the lower level, it was Bauhaus to die from. Ah! I never saw anything like that, all built-in seating and casement windows. I was just dumbfounded, and I says, “You did this?” He says, “Yeah.” I says, “I never seen anything like this!” [00:34:57]

Well, our relationship went through the whole renovation of that house, OK? Not only did I learn everything about the construction, because during the course of the whole transition, he would take me, and he’d say to me, “You see this attic?” He took me up in the attic—“You see those beams?” I said, “Yeah.” “You know, I’m going to take that out. I’m going to take this out, and I’m going to elevate the ceiling.” He made the ceiling eighteen feet on an angle in the living room. Wind up is, my brother-in-law—my sister’s husband—is a genius when it comes to carpentry. He was a brilliant scientific mind. When he met Glenn, the two of them were like two peas in a pod. He was so fascinated by Glenn’s design, and he understood everything that he was intending. My brother-in-law did the renovation to the house! It was published in *Newsday*. [laughs]

What we went through, it was a series of events that you couldn’t plan if you tried in a million years, to have an experience like that. It was just like something made out of heaven. It was the most amazing thing! We bonded, right, even more so because we had the same likes and interests, and I was so fascinated by what he did.

The year before he died, I went to Parson’s School of Design, and I decided that this is what I want to do. I was kind of uncomfortable doing it, because at my age, I said, “Oh my god, I’m going to be the oldest guy in the class. [They’re] going to make fun of me.” Well, it turned out because, living with him I learned how to do elevations, floor plans, and isometrics, so I got there—[laughs] I was the top of the class! My professor couldn’t get over what I was doing! He said, “You know, Albert, I had a lot of people in my classes. I was very glad to have you.”

You have no idea what that did for me. All of this I made as a result of my relationship because I wanted his family, his friends, to see that he didn’t make the wrong choice and that they could be proud of me and that I could be something he could be proud of. I did it for him. In addition, it worked out for me. If it wasn’t for him, I don’t think half of what I became—Even my political career, it was all a result of him. My design career—

When he died, I stayed here for about a year. I was so upset and depressed that I couldn't function. Sitting here for a year, I said to myself, I would be doing his life a disservice, or his existence, if I didn't live up to all the things he saw and wished for me. I said, "He taught me how to design. He loved my artwork. He encouraged me to paint. He bought me the easel. He bought me the paints. He bought me the brushes" Everything he encouraged. I said to myself, "If I sit here and let that go to waste, what purpose would his existence have been?"

I got up. I took his portfolio. I took all those pictures and put it in mine, and I went and applied for a job in Chelsea. It was on 18th Street right off of Seventh Avenue. Alongside of Solco Plumbing was a kitchen place, and I went in there because Glenn taught me all about kitchens and stuff. I showed them the portfolio, but it was his work, and I said it was mine. They hired me!

I get the job, and I'm there two weeks. My manager—eventually, we became friends, and she became my boss in the end, but we started off on the wrong foot—she said to me, "What are you doing?" I says, "Well, I'm drafting. Somebody came in and I'm drafting a bathroom." She goes, "We don't do it that way." I said, "Well, how do you do it?" She said, "I have a format. I want you to follow that." So I says, "OK." She comes out with this graph paper. I took one look at it, said, "I can't do that. That's very disconcerting. I'm not trained that way," I said. She says, "Well, I'm going to take it up with the boss." I says, "OK." [laughs] A week later the boss comes in, calls me into the office, and said to me, "It seems we have a problem here," I says, "What's that?" He says, "Well," he says, "we have a format. She's the manager," he says, "and I like what she's done so far, and I feel that we want the employees to follow that." After he gave his whole speech, I says, "Look, Mr. Palmer," I said, "I'm trained very differently from this," I said, "and I'm not going to do that." I said, "I'll make a deal with you," I said, "you give me one month with this company, and if I make you no money you fire me, OK? Is that a deal?" He says, "Yeah." I says, "OK." The second week, I sold a \$60,000 job to a foot specialist. He had a penthouse on 19th Street in Chelsea. I'll never forget him, the nicest man you ever want to meet. I did a renovation for him that was to die for—\$60,000 bathroom. After that they never said anything to me. [laughter] **[00:40:55]**

They were an ordinary company then. I brought them sophistication. They didn't know shit from shinola [Zapol laughs] until I got there.

**Zapol:** Well, I want to back up a little bit, though, because we haven't talked about your coming to the East Village, really—moving in with Glenn, who I understand lived here already. Is that right? Tell me that story—

**Fabozzi:** No, he didn't live here.

**Zapol:** Oh OK! So tell me how that happened.

**Fabozzi:** It so happens that one of his friends was living in this building, Eric. When they all graduated from college, Eric went to Mexico to teach English. He was living in the small apartment next door to this, which was the studio, which was our apartment originally. Eric said to Glenn—in fact, if you read the *New York Times* article on me, it comments on this situation. Eric said to Glenn, “Why don't you take my apartment?” because they were all looking for apartments. They were graduating college. He said, “Why don't you go take my apartment in the East Village, because I'm going to go live in Mexico.” Glenn says to me, “I'm going to take the apartment in the East Village.” I said, “If you go there, I won't go there to see you.” [laughs] Of course, because I heard about this neighborhood being so bad. I said, “That's not a safe place. You want to go live over there?” He says, “Well, then you're not going to see me, because I'm going [laughs].”

Ultimately, because I wanted to be with him, I came here. While we were here, every day there was somebody being mugged, or some of the apartments being robbed. I started worrying about him. I said, “I'm not going to live in fear here.” I said, “This is crazy.” He came home one night, and he says, “Oh, I found this flier on the tree out in the park about this Democratic club.” And I said, “Oh, Glenn, I don't want to be involved in no politics.” He says, “No, no, no, let's call them.” That's how we got involved. I met these people, and I says, “We met these people. They were so—”

Sam Turvey was a lawyer who lived across the street. In fact, I designed the gate on that building over there, near the church. You see the building on the corner? That was designed by Calvin Falks. That's a really historic building, but the building next to it, I did the gate for them, because Sam lived in that building at that time, before he left. We met these people—lawyers, doctors, architects. We were shocked, because you never saw those people out in the street, you know?

We fought to get the park renovated, because now I faced this park, and every day I looked out, and it was prostitutes, homeless cooking—oh, it was unbelievable. The kids from this school had nowhere to play. Never did I see kids. There were no playgrounds. I says, “You know, this is crazy.”

There was talk about renovating the park. We were ecstatic. It was, oh, they’re going to renovate the park! Well, it turns out the mayor decided, all of a sudden, that the park wasn’t going to be renovated because the community didn’t want it. Well, when I heard that, I called the people from the Democratic club, I said, “Did you hear what just happened?” I says, “Well, this is unacceptable!” We called the mayor right away. It was [David] Dinkins at the time, and we said, “Look, I don’t know who you spoke to, but we’re the community also, and nobody came and asked me,” I says, “And we want that park renovated!” I says, “This is unacceptable.” We formed a coalition, and we went out into the streets, and we picketed City Hall. We picketed the mayor’s office, Manhattan Borough President, I mean screaming and yelling with signs up. I didn’t believe that I would—The members in my Democratic Club used to take tranquilizers, because they were afraid of the anarchists and the squatters, all these people. I used to look at them and laugh. I said, “Oh, god,” that’s what I told them. [laughs] “You’re afraid of this? This is nothing. [laughs] You don’t know what fear is. [00:45:26]

**Zapol:** Why did you say that?

**Fabozzi:** I grew up in it. I’ve seen things when I was a kid that no normal kid sees. I mean, the bookies, the mafia—these people were bad, bad, bad, bad people. I knew guys that were murdered. I didn’t have anything to do with any of that stuff, but I knew it was going—and you hear from this one to that one, you know. It was unreal.

[laughs] But I said, “You’re afraid of these people? You don’t know! You don’t know what fear is.”

**Zapol:** How did you then become more of a leader in that group?

**Fabozzi:** After meetings, we decided to change the politics here, because we knew we couldn’t get our way unless we got rid of the councilperson. Politics is a very savvy game. It took me a while to really—I really got so involved in it, that I figured it out, what they were doing. They were creating a social service annex here in the East Village. What they were doing is that the

councilperson was working with the Manhattan Borough President of using this as a dumping ground, because she didn't want to upset her constituents on the Upper East Side and Upper West Side, because those people didn't want any of the social services. But we were carrying one-third of all social services here, as a result, and that was unacceptable. We said, "The only way we can get our way here is we have to get rid of this councilwoman." We brought up Antonio Pagán. I fought with his campaign. Don't ask; we all did. We got him elected.

**Zapol:** Tell me about him.

**Fabozzi:** When he became councilperson of this district, my boyfriend kept saying to him, "Antonio, how many people do you allow, [do] you appoint to the board?" I knew what he was doing, [laughs] and I said to him, "Glenn, don't do that, I know what you're doing." Sure enough, I get a letter from Ruth Messenger, from the Manhattan Borough President, that I was appointed to Community Board 3. Well, Glenn was so proud that he faxed the letter [laughs] to practically half the world, and his friends were calling him the 'First Lady of the East Village.' [laughs]

I call Sam—that was part of the club—and I say, "Sam, I know nothing about politics. I don't know what to do. What should I do?" He said, "Look," he said, "go and have a good time." [laughs] He says, "Just go and have a good time, but don't think about it." He says, "I know that you will do good." That's how it started! I go to the meetings, and the anarchists would be throwing things and screaming and yelling, and the people in my club would be [laughs] taking tranquilizers. [laughs] I would get up, and I'd wait until they'd calmed down a bit, and I would say, "Look, if you want us to help, we're here to help you. We're not here to hurt you. But if you don't want to be helped, and you want to continue this disturbance, then we're not going to accomplish anything." I said, "Your days here are over. Accept it. Over! Period. You want to come to me, I'll help you, but if you continue this way—what can you solve by this behavior?"

**Zapol:** Around what year are we right now?

**Fabozzi:** Nineteen, ninety-two, 1993, [19]94; I became chairman in [19]95.

**Zapol:** Gotcha.



**Fabozzi:** When Glenn died, in '92, and Antonio was the councilperson then. I had control over the park because of who I was. The commissioners let me do whatever I wanted. When Glenn died, I planted the tree, and there's a plaque on the fence now in his memory. [00:49:56]

All the commissioners, I knew them all. I mean, I used to go to the Central Park, at the Arsenal at their offices. In fact, my name is in the tower in the book. The only people, VIP's signed the book up there. I was invited up there because I was chairman of the board.

When Antonio became councilman, that's how I got on the board. Then about a year or two on the board, since I was very vocal and didn't take no nonsense from anybody, but wanted to play a very fair game for everyone. I get a phone call one day, and they said to me, "Mr. Fabozzi, we're considering nominating you chairman of this board." I said, "Look," I said, "I don't think I could do that. That's a big responsibility. I'm flattered," I says. I call Sam, I says, "Sam, do you know that this is?" He says, "Yeah, I know, I was part of the group that nominated you," he says, "and I know you could do this."

I won the vote by three-quarters of the vote of the board. I became the chairman of the board. I settled some really big disputes. There was a big dispute in Chinatown, about the OTB [Off-Track Betting] and all the nonsense. The union from some of the Chinese restaurants—the Jade Palace and places, they were feuding, and I sort of mediated it.

**Zapol:** What was the feud about specifically, in terms of OTB?

**Fabozzi:** If I remember, I think it was a union dispute at that time with them. Then there was the OTB thing. Chinese people love, unfortunately, they like to gamble. But it was hurting the community. People were putting themselves in hock, gambling all their money away. They didn't want that OTB's. They didn't want them there. Boy, they used to riot, come to the meetings and really put up a big fuss. I tried to mediate it, to sort of defame what was happening. In fact, in the article I think it even says that I calmed down that whole situation.

That really was my purpose was to come to an even medium with everybody, you know? Even if you were my enemy, I wanted to listen to your argument, because I'm sure that whatever there is you feel has some kind of merit. Let's explain it, let's see if we could come to some kind of a compromise here—get the best of everything.

**Zapol:** What happened with the squatters and the anarchists in the area?

**Fabozzi:** Well, we finally got the park renovated. They closed it for a year. I remember when I called the commissioner, I said, “The first thing I want you to do is to tear down the band shell, that concrete monster thing.” [laughs] We stood by the window here with a bottle of champagne when the bulldozer came. They came early in the morning, because they knew that nobody would be up. They came in with a bulldozer, [laughs] and we drank champagne. I says, “Glenn, this is for you. [laughs] I’m doing all this for you.”

**Zapol:** How did the park change, then, after that?

**Fabozzi:** Well, the original layout is what it was—

**Zapol:** Mmhm.

**Fabozzi:**—but they took away the band shell. They redid all of the playgrounds. They put new playgrounds, and that was really the most wonderful part about it, because when we started seeing the kids from the school playing, that was never the case when we were here. They didn’t have a place. Now they got places to play!

**Zapol:** This is the, a Catholic school around the corner?

**Fabozzi:** St. Brigid’s.

**Zapol:** St. Brigid’s, yeah.

**Fabozzi:** When we reclaimed the park, we decided that we needed to do things and events in the park to keep it from falling back in the hands of the wrong people. I started the Charlie Parker [Charlie Parker Jazz Festival] concert. I started it with Sam Turvey and the councilman Antonio Pagan. We were all members of the board that put it together. At that time, we had Phil Schaap from the jazz channel on the radio. He was our emcee. I remember the first concert I did. The first concert, I did the poster. The second concert, I did the t-shirt. I did that for a couple of years, while I was politically involved. Now it’s an annual concert. They do it every year on his birthday. We landmarked his building on Avenue B, Judy Sneed owns that building, and she was a member of our club. We landmarked it with a plaque, in memory of Charlie Parker. We changed the name of the street to Charlie Park. In fact, they gave me that as a gift.

**Zapol:** What—

**Fabozzi:** The street sign.

**Zapol:** Ah, I see, I see. [00:55:43]

**Fabozzi:** They gave it to me as a gift.

When I sit back and think about it, I say, “My god, did I really do all this? Like how is [laughs] that possible?” I look back at it, and I’m just amazed when I think about it. How in god’s name—and I didn’t even realize it at the time. God knows I put my life in jeopardy. I didn’t even think—because you don’t think!

**Zapol:** Tell me about putting your life in jeopardy. What happened?

**Fabozzi:** I was attacked at a board meeting. I never in my life expected it. I bent down to get something out of my attaché case, and as I got up, this guy came outta nowhere and throws this cake in my face. OK? Oh, god. What a mess. The cake on me? I was a mess. Now picture this auditorium lined with police, all over the wall. They get the guy. They arrest him right away. Well, now I’m trying to get myself clean and get this meeting into some kind of order, so I brushed it all off. I didn’t panic, and I turned around. I said, “OK, the fun’s over. Now let’s get down to business.” [laughter]

**Zapol:** You kept your cool.

**Fabozzi:** I’m a street kid, you know? I been hit many times. I know how to fight back, let me tell you.

I even told the District Attorney then, I said, “Look,” I says, “I think this guy should be reprimanded somehow—some way, whatever—because anybody to get that close to you, at a meeting like that? God forbid, it could have been something else! He coulda stabbed me!” The police used to drive me home every night in the police car, the detectives. I knew the whole precinct. I wanted to go there to give sensitivity training to the officers for the gay and lesbian, because of the gay bars in the neighborhood.

I would go to the gay bars in the neighborhood, and I said, “Look, we get complaints. [If] you want to keep your liquor license, you have to be community friendly. I’m on your side, but I can’t be on your side if you don’t behave. You have to be community-friendly like everybody else, but I will support you, I’ll stick by you.” So I initiated a gay and lesbian committee on the

board, which didn't exist before, and appointed somebody chairman of that committee. They would have issues to deal with.

**Zapol:** What were some of the issues that would come up?

**Fabozzi:** Well, the bars were very loud at night—people congregating in the streets screaming and yelling. The music—The apartments above can't sleep at night [from] the pounding of the speakers. I used to go, personally, to the bars and look at the place. I remember when the boys owned the Crowbar over here on 10th Street. They owned Elmo's in Chelsea, the restaurant. They used to own the Crowbar over here, and I used to go there.

Bob Pontarelli and his boyfriend—his boyfriend just passed away, actually—they were partners. I went there, and I said, "Look, Bob, you have to soundproof this place. I mean really soundproof it. If I get any more complaints, we'll take your liquor license away." I said, "Bob, and I like you. We're part of this community. We're gay. I don't want to ruffle feathers, but people have to live, they have to sleep," I says, "and you have to monitor outside. Have somebody outside the door so people don't congregate in the street and make noise at night."

**[01:00:02]**

I would walk at three o'clock in the morning up the avenues, and if I saw the doors to the bars open and the loud music coming out—I knew that people are sleeping, so when they used to come for the liquor license, and they say, "Oh, I'm from this particular bar," I says, "You know, I want to tell you something: I went past your place at three o'clock in the morning. That noise coming out of there is unacceptable. You want to continue with this license, you put a stop to it."

**Zapol:** That's—

**Fabozzi:** They didn't think that I went—

**Zapol:** Yeah, right. [laughs]

**Fabozzi:** When Housing Works came to us—going back to the one-third social services in this community. That was a very big issue here that I wanted to put a stop to. Now, I'm not insensitive to social services because believe me, they're very necessary. But to dump it all here is unacceptable, because it denies us other services that are just as important. I knew that when

the prospectus used to come to me, they never thought I would read it. They were these big things because their money was granted [Zapol sneezes]—

**Zapol:** Excuse me.

**Fabozzi:** Bless you. Their money was dependent on the federal government grants. I'm reading the prospectus, and Housing Works in particular is one issue, and Charles King didn't think that I was somebody that was going to read this stuff. Well, I discovered that in the prospectus that their money is granted under the conditions that 60 percent of the clientele come from outside the community. Oh, so in other words, what they were saying was, "Here's where the problem is, and this is where you need it." Oh, but you're recruiting people here, and now you're saying, "here's the problem." Well, no. If I put something in this community, you address the people in this community. You don't import people from somewhere else and say, "Now this is where the problem is." Well, of course! That's not going to happen here. When I used to sit down with Ruth Messinger, I said to her, "Look, that's not going to happen here. Not in my community." I says, "And if you think for one minute that we're carrying one-third of the percentage of social services, you better start spreading it out through the rest of Manhattan, because we're not going to take it here."

**Zapol:** What happened?

**Fabozzi:** I did, I stopped it. Some of the projects that they were going to put stopped. I went to New York City Partnership for Housing, and I sat down with them, and I negotiated for market rate housing. Largely because in order to make this a safe place, you have to have people that are interested in the safety of the neighborhood: people that care and people that are working people. I knew that the only way to do that was to bring in a little better housing. I knew that that threatened people who lived on low income, but you can't have one without the other; you have to start somewhere. I knew that I was going to protect the low-income at the same time, but I knew that this was an issue that had to be dealt with, because when you better a community in terms of economically, you'll get better education. You'll get better services—sanitation, police protection. All of these things were neglected here, because this neighborhood was viewed as a 'Let it go. It's a dump.' I was not going to live here and think of myself living like that and have people think of us like that. No, I'm not going to live here like that.

When I went to New York City Partnership for Housing, I went through the neighborhood with my vice president from the board. We made a map of all the empty lots, and I went from the big lots to the small lots. I had it all mapped out. When I went up there, he said to me, “Oh, Mr. Fabozzi,” he says, “we really can’t build anything. The lots are too small.” He says, “Anything on a big lot, we’re not going to build a building five stories, because there’s going to be elevators, and we don’t have the money.” I said, “Oh really,” I said, “let me tell you something,” and I took out the map. “You see this?” They said, “Yeah.” I says, “This is a map of the neighborhood. These are the lots. These small ones, fine, keep them community gardens. I agree with that, but you see these big parcels? I want them bidded out to market rate housing.” I says, “Why don’t we see these lots as a project, not as a singular parcel—“ see it as a—That’s how I got this building built up the block here. [01:05:25]

**Zapol:** Which building?

**Fabozzi:** Right here. It’s a beautiful apartment house.

**Zapol:** Mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** That was originally supposed to be Housing Works.

**Zapol:** Mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** Oh, they wanted to kill me for that. They wanted to put an SRO [single room occupancy] there. Would have been gigantic. We suffered enough here. How much could the neighborhood tolerate? You got a school here with kids, and you’re putting a building here with—In all due respect, there are people that are needy, yes, but they’re drug addicts. They’re people with substance abuse, alcoholic abuse—There’s a school here! How could you ever see this place coming out from under the water if you don’t improve where people—You have to bring in people who care about making a difference. Not people who want to keep the status quo because of their activity. That’s not the way to save a neighborhood.

**Zapol:** How did that happen in terms of changing the neighborhood, in terms of changing those buildings or those particular lots?

**Fabozzi:** Once we got this park renovated, it immediately increased the value of the real estate around. Right away it became very attractive to developers. That's when they sold the Christodora, and they started making that a condo.

When the park was renovated, restaurants blossomed around the park. It was good for business. You got Sunday brunch now at the park. People came in. All those people that used to yell at us and call us all kind of names, when that park was done, [they] used to sit out there like this and this in the sun, enjoyed—now it's OK. But before you were calling me all kinds of names.

**Zapol:** The Christodora, that was a part of the Tompkins Square riots as well, too. Were you here when the riots happened, tell me about—

**Fabozzi:** Yeah, right in front of my building—

**Zapol:** Mm.

**Fabozzi:**—three hundred riot police. The cops used to take me home at night in the police car. I'm sorry I never filmed it, because three hundred riot gear police right in front of your door—I didn't think at the time that I was experiencing something that was—It was known all over the world. My friends in Paris knew what was going on here. This was a big thing, the Tompkins Square riots. I mean, and I lived it!

**Zapol:** Tell me about that progression from your point of view—what happened before the riots?

**Fabozzi:** Before the riots, they tried everything in their power to prevent the park from being renovated. They used to do what was called 'ring around the park,' and they'd get all these people who joined hands—and literally did it around the entire park—[in order] to not to let anybody in and out to chase out the homeless and the people that were—god knows what they were doing in the park. Then they would riot, picket, and of course the police were called in to try to maintain calm. But they were vigilant. They were determined to get their way, as well as we were.

I kept going to the police. I would sit in meetings with the commissioners, and I would say, "Look, I don't care. Under any circumstances, this is not going to happen here. We're going to get this park renovated."

When I went to the meetings at Manhattan South, I used to sit at a table the size of this room, with all the brass, all the gold badges. I'd be sitting at the end of the table, and I'd say, "OK, I have a question for you: You're telling me that my neighborhood is the drug supermarket of New York City. If that's the case, then why is it that there's one patrol car at twelve o'clock, patrolling the area from 14th Street to Houston? Our precinct is short of manpower, and it really needs to be replaced, so you explain to me, if this is the drug supermarket of New York, how do you explain that?" [laughs] They would look at me like, who is this guy? [Zapol laughs] I says, "We're not going to live in fear here, so let's get this straight." My district manager, Martha Danziger, she used to look at me and say, "Boy, it's about time we got somebody with a backbone." I wasn't afraid of nobody. They didn't scare me because they were cops. [01:10:36]

It all had to do the way I grew up in Coney Island. I had no fear about speaking up and speaking out, because if anything my family did, it took no nonsense from nobody. If you felt you were right—not to say that you would do it when you're wrong, because that's wrong—but you do it when you're right. You know you're right. Believe me, they all looked at me like [laughs], who is this guy? [Zapol laughs] But they respected me.

**Zapol:** How could you tell?

**Fabozzi:** When they used to see me, they used to greet me. "Mr. Fabozzi, how are you." They were happy for me, because I was—When you look at it, I'm making your life safer. Your officers in the street have less fear if this is a better place to live. They understood that.

**Zapol:** Yeah.

**Fabozzi:** It's a sequence of things that fall into place when you're doing something right.

**Zapol:** Then what happened? Some of the apartments started to change. People were hanging out in the park—what else started to happen?

**Fabozzi:** Well, we started initiating events. they did Art Around the Park, and I remember that was Kathy Kirkpatrick. She had Life Cafe over there at the time. We were all a part of this Art Around the Park, so we initiated that. We did the Charlie Parker concert, and I'm associated with the Theater of the New City out on First Avenue. Crystal Field, she's part of my coalition. Veselka, you know the Polish restaurant—



**Zapol:** Ukrainian, mmhm.

**Fabozzi:**—Ukrainian restaurant, he’s a member. He’s vice president of my coalition, Birchard—Tom. The Third Street Music School is part of my coalition. The Public Theater, they’re so good to me, I can’t begin to tell you. Luke McDonough, he’s the head of the costume department for the Public Theater. He gives me Victorian costumes for the choral group I have on Christmas—for the Theater for the New City. I get music from the Third Street Music School. I do this thing every year in the park, and I light the tree, and then I collect money from the business people in the area, and I get gift certificates and raffle—only for the children. It’s twenty-three years I do it.

**Zapol:** How did you get the idea to start doing the Christmas tree lighting?

**Fabozzi:** Well, when Glenn died, I said to Antonio, the councilman at the time, I says, “Antonio, I want to plant a tree in the park for Glenn.” He says, “OK, do whatever you want. I’ll tell the commissioner from the—” I forget his name. I forget who the commissioner was, but anyway, I spoke to the commissioner, said, “Look—”

I got the Parks Department—the guys that do the planting and stuff—and I’ll never forget him. He was really a nice fella. They went and got the tree. They brought back a tree that I wasn’t totally happy with, but I had no choice. They brought it back. They wanted to plant it on the other side, and I’m standing here by this center lawn here, and I’m in the park when they brought the tree. They say, “Mister, we’re going to put it over there,” so I say, “No, I want it over there.” [laughs] I wanted it over here, because I could see it from the window. They didn’t know why I wanted it there. [laughs] So, he’s, “OK, OK, we’ll put it—” so they put it where I wanted it. That’s how I got the tree.

Then I said to Antonio, “Look, now that we got the tree, let’s celebrate it. We’ll do it every holiday, and we’ll do it in memory of those we lost—our neighbors and people who passed away from AIDS and stuff.” It’d be my way of remembering Glenn. Because all of this wouldn’t have been possible if he didn’t push me into this, encourage me into it. I said, “I’m here because of him. I’m going to make the best of it.” So I did it, and I light it every year. It’s beautiful. I’ll show you the pictures. [01:15:17]

**Zapol:** Yeah, I would love to see.

**Fabozzi:** That's how it started. Now, this coming year is twenty-three years. Twenty-four years, I'm sorry. Tom and I and the rest of the group are planning on something really big for twenty-five years. I'm hoping that maybe I could maybe initiate a sponsor that could do something for us. They all want to do something really big for twenty-five years. The money we collect is a small amount of money, so it's not really enough to do something big. I don't know, I'm thinking about it. If I'm still here by then.

**Zapol:** I'll be curious to hear what you decide to do.

So tell me about how you are you still involved in the Community Board. When did that shift?

**Fabozzi:** I had an experience on the board, and, again, it goes back to the dirty politics in your living room. There was a project that came to me, to put up a building on Avenue A and 11th Street. At that time I was negotiating for market rate housing, so anything that would have suggested social services again would have been opening up a Pandora's box that I'd been trying to fight over. Sheldon Silver—I don't want to have to tell you what I think about him, OK—was pushing this project, which I think he had a lot of nerve to do, knowing what we were trying to do here. I get these phone calls from the members of the board yelling at me, "You can't approve this because you're going to breach our negotiations." "Ugh," I say, "why did they put me in this dilemma?"

I get a call from his office. His chief of staff says to me, she says, "Oh, Mr. Fabozzi, I think we have a problem here." I says, "Oh really?" She says, "Yeah, you know, we really want to see this thing happen." I says, "Well, OK, let me think about it." I got my district manager, I said, "Look, Martha, here's what we'll do. Write it up this way: tell them that I approved the project, under the circumstances that it doesn't breach my negotiation on market rate housing. that that's still on the table." That's the way I wrote up the letter. Sheldon Silver saw it [as though] I was not playing ball with the party. I said, "Look, I don't care how he feels. I'm going to do what I think is right." I have these people yelling at me. You're putting me in the middle. Oh, so that's what you do. Because you're on the bottom of the political totem pole, you get the abuse. I'm going to get blame for it. No. No way, no way. I don't care if it costs me the board, if it costs me the chairmanship. That's fine with me, but I'm not going to go away knowing that I did something because I was going to satisfy you. No, my concern was this community.

I decided that, OK, I had enough of this, I'm not going to deal with this anymore. I decided to run for the city council. I knew that I had to forfeit being a member of the board to do that.

I did. I ran for the city council, and I knew I wasn't going to win the race, but I did it for a reason, because I remember when I got in a meeting with me, and he said to me, "You know, Albert, my chief of staff might consider running, and of course you understand I'm going to have to support her." I said, "That's fine with me. I'm not asking you. I know she's loyal to you. She's your chief of staff."

She had no business coming into the race, but she decided to do it, because they were so sure of themselves that they were going to win. But I knew that that was my way of getting even with him for what he did to me. If I wasn't in that race, she would have won, but I took valuable votes away from her, and then, that's when Margarita [López] got elected. Margarita and I were enemies, but that was OK with me, because it was my way of getting back at Sheldon Silver for what he did to me. **[01:20:19]**

They were so sure of themselves that I was not a problem, had not an effect on them. But they miscalculated. If he'd come to me and said, "Look, get out of the race. Go back to the board. Take your position back. Let's all work mutually for this," that would have worked, but they were so sure of themselves, because he was Mr. Power. But now you see he's in all this trouble? It doesn't surprise me, because believe me, I never trusted them from the beginning. They all did a lot of dirty underhand nonsense. They weren't fooling me for one bit. A lot of times people, I would have to meet somebody in a bar some place, and they would try to talk to me in a quiet way, and I knew what they were doing. I couldn't be part—I just could not, because I did not want to be seen as anything other than who I am and the honesty that I am. I knew that politics could be that dirty game, and you could get trapped into it, because they play it better than you, believe me.

But I learned. I read everything that came to me. Everything. Nothing went past me. Because I did not want to be able to put up a defense or an argument to something I didn't know what I was talking about. I needed to understand. Maybe you are right. Maybe you did have a legitimate argument. I want to know. I made it my business. That's why when Charles King didn't think that I was going to read that thing—They were taking those people from outside the neighborhood. I was in disbelief! It's no wonder why—I says, "The Manhattan Borough

President's got the councilwoman in her back pocket, dumping everything here so she doesn't have to be arguing with her people uptown." That's outrageous! Let those rich people know what it's like! That there are people who are suffering! That there are people who are in need! Let them share some of the responsibility. Oh, protecting their upper class neighborhoods? Well, too bad about them. All right.

I was a force to be reckoned with here, let me tell you.

**Zapol:** What happened while you were chairperson? While you were running for city council, were you also working at the same time, or had you kind of, how—

**Fabozzi:** Yes, I—

**Zapol:**—how did you balance everything?

**Fabozzi:** Believe me, you know what it's like working all day as a designer? Being on projects all day, and being on construction sites, and then working all night with board meetings until one, two o'clock in the morning? This was my life. I had no life. It was a twenty-four hour thing. Somehow I managed to do it. But I did it.

**Zapol:** Tell me about what happened after you ran for city council.

**Fabozzi:** Well, I knew I wasn't going to win the race. I think one of the proudest moments you could have in your life is when you walk into a voting booth, and you push the lever on your own name. That was a win for me to begin with, because—I don't know, if my mother or my father, if they were alive, I don't think they ever could have imagined that their son could have been a member of the city council, or even managing. I managed the Lower East Side. It was more than a hundred thousand people here that I was responsible for. I did it.

I was so well-respected in Chinatown, and I have to say, I give those people credit—they were really very respectful. I was invited one night to a meeting, to a dinner in Chinatown—I almost didn't go! I was so exhausted from all this work, and my mind was like—but I'm sitting here and I'm saying to myself I have members of my committee that I had appointed to the board. I made Peter Chang from Chinatown, the Manpower Project from Chinatown, I made him chairman of my Parks Committee as a payback for them supporting me. He was really a nice fella. Peter invited me to this dinner in Chinatown, so I'm sitting here and I'm thinking, oh

maybe I better go. It would be the polite thing to do. Luckily, I put a jacket and tie on. It was like, whatever world that came from, it was like a miracle that he did it. [01:25:12]

I show up at this restaurant. There's a thousand people in the dining room. The place was decorated to die for! All the red, everything in red. They love red. They sat me at the VIP [Very Important Person] table by the stage. They sat me with the Supreme Court Chinese judge. They sat me with the councilperson from China, and I'm sitting at this table with all these VIPs. They called me up to paint the eyes of the dragon, which is only for VIP's—special people. They asked me to give a speech, which I was totally unprepared for. Interestingly enough, I learned a trick from an old boyfriend of mine that whenever he used to go to a party, he used to read the *New York Times* before he went to a party, so that he would have issues to talk about. I used to do the same thing. I used to read the *New York Times*.

At that time, the Senate was considering not allowing people to sponsor relatives to come to this country as citizens, OK? This is now a very sensitive topic, especially here in Chinatown. I get up, and of course they got a translator for me. Now picture this dining room: they had television monitors, so that the people in the back could see! "As you know, my grandparents were Italian immigrants. That's what this country is all about," I said. "They came here to make a better life for their children, so that we could grow up in a better place, get educated, and make a better life for ourselves." I says, "To deny people to come here to become citizens is unacceptable," I said, "That's not what this country is all about." This was my whole speech!

After I finished, the applause was unreal. Then the guy from the China council came over to me. He said to me, "Mr. Fabozzi, I have to tell you," he says, "that was really very, very nice." [Zapol laughs]

**Zapol:** It was very on point.

**Fabozzi:** See, a lot of who I am, I'm so down to earth, I can relate to you, because I didn't come from any privileged background. I didn't come from having the luxuries that a lot of my friends had growing up. I didn't have the family that could afford to send me to a good college, or see that my life went in a right direction. I had to do it all on my own. It was something that, if you don't have the tools to learn it from, you struggle. It was Glenn who taught me. He gave me a direction. I made it my business to improve my vocabulary. I became much more well-read. Everything I did was to make that boy [pause] proud of me. It got me through everything I did.

All because of him. Believe me, I look back at it, and I say, “Oh my god, how did I ever go through all of that.” [laughs] Where did that all come from?

I remember I was yelling at the newspaper reporters at the meetings, and the one who wrote the article on me, I’m yelling at her. About a week later she calls me, “Mr. Fabozzi,” I said, “What?” “My boss wants to do a profile on you.” [laughs]

**Zapol:** Why did you yell at her in the first place?

**Fabozzi:** Because they weren’t seeing outside of the story. Because it’s newsworthy—the squatters, the fights, the riots—that makes news. We look like the bad guys, because we want to better the neighborhood. I said, “You know, that’s not fair. We have a reason also, like everybody else. I live here. All I want to do is live in a safe, decent place, and whatever it takes to do that. I think that we deserve to be heard.” Then she called me. [laughs] “My boss wants to do [laughs] a story on you.”

She took me to lunch. They sent a photographer, and they photographed several photographs of me in the park, but the photograph that they used was me in front of Stingy Lulu’s. I knew those boys. They were from Turkey. They were really nice fellas. They used that picture in front of his place, on the *Times*. [01:30:26]

**Zapol:** Tell me about since being chairman of the community board, to now, some of the changes that you’ve noticed about the neighborhood, what your feelings are about the changes in the East Village, and how that’s kind of changed your life.

**Fabozzi:** We have a lot of greedy landlords here, and believe me, I’m no different from suffering from it than anybody else. They would love to have me out of this apartment, I’m sure. But I always said, “They’re going to have to carry me out.” [laughs] The reality is that the rents are very high for the business people. Unfortunately, that’s an issue that never was really dealt with, and there’s no control over commercial rents. These people who worked for many years in the neighborhood were the—Leshko’s was here for so many years, Kiev and all those restaurants, they were staples in the neighborhood. These people, they not only lived in the neighborhood, but they supported the neighborhood. The rents, they forced so many people out of business. We lost that culture.

There was something about the East Village that that was very well known for, and slowly but surely, it's gone. A lot of businesses struggle to survive. I never could understand why the politics or the people don't deal with that, to allow small business to survive by not choking them to death with these ridiculous rents, because there's no regulation.

**Zapol:** You've seen a lot of change in terms of the small businesses, then.

**Fabozzi:** Yeah, a lot of people who were here for so many years are gone.

**Zapol:** Mhm.

**Fabozzi:** That's sad because not only were they people who supported me and what we did here, I felt that if I was still here, I would have tried to fight to survive for them.

**Zapol:** If you were still involved in the—

**Fabozzi:** If I was still involved in politics—

**Zapol:**—community board.

**Fabozzi:**—I would really fight on their behalf.

**Zapol:** Have you thought about returning to politics at all?

**Fabozzi:** I remember when I ran for the city council, if you don't have more than a \$120,000, \$150,000, forget it, because it requires a lot of money. That's why a lot of these people that get elected support all these real estate people and everything, because they put up a lot of big money in their campaigns. Of course, who are you going to support? That's why we can't win. It's tough, because without the money, you don't get it. It's a tough situation. But I would never, I don't think ever [would] go back into politics. People used to come up to me and say, "Remember, Mr. Fabozzi, you're such a nice guy. What do you want to do in politics? [laughs] They're not nice people, but you're so nice!"

I remember my campaign manager, Kevin Kwong. He was a lawyer from Chinatown, the nicest man you ever want to meet. He lives in Seattle now, but he interviewed me to see whether he wanted to take me on as a candidate. After he interviewed me, about a week later, he called me back, said, "You know, Albert," I said, "What?" He said, "You know why I'm accepting

you?” I says, “Why?” He says, “Because you are the first person in politics that when you speak, you speak with such a sincerity, and it comes across. Because that’s really who you are.” I said, “You know, thank you, Kevin, because that’s really how I feel.”

**Zapol:** Hmm, mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** It comes from my heart. This is my family here is how I see it.

**Zapol:** Tell me about some of your favorite places and favorite parts about this area.

**Fabozzi:** I know mostly everybody, so when I go to Veselka, Tom I meet all the people I know, or I’ll go to Steve at Odessa, on the corner. They all know me. Again, it’s like I said. It’s like family for me. Sometimes I see people in the park, “Oh, hello, Mr. Fabozzi, nice to see you.”

**[01:35:12]**

I remember when everything was happening. [They said], “We’re so happy with what’s happening here,” and that makes you feel like it’s all worth it. Now things have changed. I’m not too happy about the things, but look, change is something you can’t avoid. It has to—things move on. You have to adjust to that, you know?

**Zapol:** What are some of your hopes for the neighborhood?

**Fabozzi:** Well, that’s a good question. One of the things I really hope is that it never gets overdeveloped. My big thing was keeping things on a low scale, because here you can still see the sky. I knew that if they had their way around the park—they would build tall buildings here, if they can get away with it. I made it a concerting issue for me that nothing was built more than twenty stories high. Every building that came to me, because I have an architectural background, I made sure that these architects didn’t get away with murder here. I’m just hoping that the political arena still sees it that way.

This is one of the last strongholds of low-rise buildings and still the feeling of a neighborhood, of a community. I don’t want that to go away.

**Zapol:** How do you sense the feeling of a community? You talked about going to some of the restaurants. Are there some other ways?



**Fabozzi:** When you could go up to the tailor and say hello, or go up the block and speak to somebody by the restaurant, say “Hello, how are you today?” or go to the bars, and everybody knew me. Again, it’s like you’re not alone anymore. I’m a single person. I live by myself, so for me it could be very lonely, if I knew nobody, or if I was in a place where I’d be a fish out of water, which is what it would be if I didn’t live here, because I’m so part of this place. This, I see, is more family to me than my family. That’s how I treated it. Even when I spoke at my meetings and things, I spoke to these people like we were family here. that’s, What more could you ask? People never saw politics that way? I’m not somebody that talks to you from a distance. I don’t talk to you with a vocabulary that you couldn’t understand. I come down to your level, but I’m articulate.

That’s what I always felt good about myself. It’s just who I am. I don’t think I’ll ever be any other way.

**Zapol:** Talk to me about your home now, about ways in which this space has changed. I know you—

**Fabozzi:** This was an education for me, this apartment. When we came here, it was two bedrooms here. It was a wall here. This was open here, and the landlord [coughs] excuse me—the landlord at the time was Arthur Brown, a really nice man. At that time, this apartment was occupied by two brothers that were going to the School of Visual Arts. They had graduated, so they were leaving. I called Arthur Brown, and I said, “Look, we’re living in that little apartment next door. We really need the bigger apartment, but we can’t live in it the way it is. It’s totally dilapidated.” This was a sight to be seen. He knew that we were designers. He says, “OK,” he says, “I’ll tell you what. Do whatever you want with the apartment. I’ll pay for the material.” He says, “I have a charge account with the”—oh I remember they were over here, Schlesinger. It was over here on Avenue B—“Go there and charge everything to me.” We had this place gutted. He paid for all the sheetrock, all the electrical, all the plumbing.

**Zapol:** Wow.

**Fabozzi:** Nobody would do that today—

**Zapol:** No.

**Fabozzi:**—nobody. But he knew that this was going to sell the building. I knew that he knew that! [Zapol laughs] [01:40:00]

Of course, after we did this, they put the building up for sale, so whenever they came to look, they came here. I remember, they would come up through the hall, and they'd come here. They didn't think they were in the same building. My neighbor downstairs, through all the construction and the noise and everything, had never been up here, and one day, after like a couple of years, he came up here for a reason, like with a leak or something, and he had no idea. He heard the noise, but he had no idea it looked like this! He came up here. He had the same apartment, and he came up here, and he says, "Oh, you mean I have the same apartment?" [laughs] I says, "Yeah." He says, "I could do this?" I says, "Of course you can!" [laughs] He says, "I'm going downstairs and knocking out the walls!" [Zapol laughs]

**Zapol:** He did?

**Fabozzi:** How I got the windows was another thing. The managing agent at the time didn't want to give me windows. We were freezing! Even though they were closed, it was like having windows open because they were so rotted away. It was so cold in the winter that we couldn't take it. It was ridiculous. I went to the managing agent, I said, "Look, the windows needs to be replaced." He says, "Well, we're going to raise your rent." I says, "Well, what will you raise my rent?" He was going to raise it really considerably. I said, "Look, I'll tell you what. If you do that, then you give me the windows I want. I don't mind paying the increase, but I choose the window." He said, "What kind of windows?" I said, "I want solid"—Glenn wanted it—I said, "I want solid sheets of glass, OK?" "Oh, no, we can't do that. They cost too much money." So I went away. I waited about two or three weeks or so. I went back. I said, "Look, here's the deal: I'll put the windows in; I'll pay for them. You own them; they're yours." He said, "Oh," he says, "does that mean if I don't do it you're Italian friends are going to come and break my knees?" [laughs] So I looked at him and I said, "Where did that come from?" [laughter] This is what he tells me! So I said to him, "Look, this is the deal, and I want you to sign a paper that this is the deal." [laughs] I wrote it up, he signed it, and I got the windows.

All for Glenn, I did it all for him.

**Zapol:** Well, he wanted them, right, you said.

**Fabozzi:** He was such a designer, this kid. He was brilliant. He taught me everything I know about design. I looked at space like nobody looks at space. If you met some of my—I did the Mary Lou Falcone—she does all of the publicity for Lincoln Center—I did her apartment. I did Gary Beach, I did clients that never in a million years that someone like me would have the opportunity to do. I used to sit in the back of the car with Bill Ackermann when he owned Netscape, and he'd be talking \$30-, \$40 million dollars, and I'd be sitting there thinking, my god. I did the girl, the woman, that was one of the big bosses for *Self* Magazine, that woman's magazine? She was my client. Used to send a chauffeured car to come and pick me up.

**Zapol:** How did you build up your business in that way?

**Fabozzi:** I worked in Chelsea for this show room. I remember—She was my manager at the time, who was giving me this hard time at the beginning. She came into a lot of money. She inherited. She decided to buy into the partnership, but on the condition that they open a new showroom. Barney's, there was a space—you know where Barney's [is], on 17th Street, which is now the Indian museum? Well, that was my showroom. She went partners with my boss, and they opened a new showroom. Spent a \$600,000, put up a beautiful showroom. That's where we moved, over there on 17th Street. That was the beginning. I had clients like you would—

It was interesting because Glenn—whatever I learned—Because Pratt was very stringent on expressing presentation is everything. I used to sit here, and when Glenn would prepare his presentations, I learned all that. I knew that there was no other way but the right way to do something. If you do it that way, it shows that you know what you're doing, you care about what you're doing, and you're giving this client their money's worth and more. That, to me, without even talking money, already is money in the bank. [01:45:27]

**Zapol:** Hm. Hm. Just in terms of how you present

**Fabozzi:** I knew it, and I would sit, if you were a couple, I would give you a pad and you a pad when I did a presentation. I had it priced to the nickel, I'm telling you. Plumbing, electrical—because I have a background in construction, my family [are] licensed plumbers and electricians, so I really grew up in construction. I knew what things cost, OK? I had it priced out—demolition, construction, materials—to the nickel! All broken down, and then what I would do, if you came to me for the kitchen and the bathroom, I took it upon myself to measure the entire

space and design the entire space, as a whole. Then I would show you, and I would preface it before I would explain it to you, that before you look at what I did, let me say to you that I know you didn't ask to do all this, but I want to show you, in stages, where you'll go from here.

I remember when I did the law firm Thacher Simpson [Simpson Thacher & Bartlett]. He was related to Heinz food. They were society people, and I did their Upper West Side duplex. That was god knows how many millions of dollars. OK?

**Zapol:** Sounds like a lot of fun.

**Fabozzi:** You have to see what I did to that place.

**Zapol:** Mm, mm.

**Fabozzi:** It was just not to be believed. I worked two years with them. When I showed them my presentation, they says, "You know, we really weren't considering doing that." Two weeks later, call me back, say, "You know, Albert—" I said, "What?" They said, "We decided to do the whole thing."

**Zapol:** That's great.

**Fabozzi:** My boss never said a word to me, ever.

When I worked as a hairdresser—There's just so much money you can make as a hairstylist, and it all depends on you being there. There are really no benefits, and it's all on commission. It's a really hard, struggling job. There are times it may have its glamour, but it's not profitable. Never did I think I would have been earning the money I earned, all because of Glenn. He taught me something that, not only did it give me such self-esteem and prestige, but, rewarding me financially. The money came because—never did I discuss money. It was the given. When you do something that makes sense—People would say to me, "Oh, well, we thought about doing it this way—" I'm telling you, "I thought about doing it that way. Yes, there are alternatives, but let me tell you why I didn't do it that way." After I would explain it, they say, "Oh you're right, I can see." I said, "Let me tell you something: I know what I'm doing," and they would say, "Yes, I know. I can see." [Zapol laughs]

**Zapol:** That sounds very rewarding, yeah.

**Fabozzi:** Yes. I used to come home at night sometimes and just cry, because I say, “You know, he never lived to see what has become of me as a result of him.”

**Zapol:** Mm. Mm.

**Fabozzi:** When he died, I designed his cornerstone for the grave. I remember when I went to the stonecutter, and he sat me down, and he opened the book and said to me, “Oh, pick out something. See if there’s anything in here you like,” I says, “Oh, I made a scale model of what I want.” [laughs] The guy looked at me like there’s nobody ever came to him—I made a scale model of the stone. In scale! The guy looked at me like, he says, “Holy—” His face lit up like you would not believe. He was so happy to see what I—He said, “Nobody [laughs] ever came to me with a scale model.”

It was a good thing I did it, because I made the base smaller than it should have been, and he made the alteration. He says, “What you did is nice, but let’s make the base a little better.” So it was nice, because it was a mutual—and I like that. I like that camaraderie. That was another thing Glenn taught me. [laughs] I says, “Glenn wouldn’t have had it any other way.” [01:50:11]

We used to go to Miami a lot, and Glenn was enthralled by the art deco of Miami. We used to go there every winter and spend time there. We travelled all over. In fact, if it wasn’t for Glenn—I was in every home that Frank Lloyd Wright built in America. When he took me to Fallingwater for my birthday, for me, it was magical. He educated me in architecture like—It was an education. It was priceless. When I got to Parson’s School of Design, and my professor the architect—he was an architect—said to me, “Oh, I’ll tell you, Mr. Fab—”

“You know something?” I said, “Never did I ever dream that this would happen to me. I was a kid in the street in Coney Island.” Until all hours of the night, my mother used to scream out the windows, “Come upstairs! It’s ten o’clock, one o’clock!” I was running around like some kind of nut. I think that’s why I’m so skinny. [laughs]

**Zapol:** Because you’re busy.

**Fabozzi:** I never sat still. [Zapol laughs] My mother couldn’t stand it—“Sit down!” [Zapol laughs]

**Zapol:** Well, you’ve clearly got a lot of energy. In these stories, it’s so clear you’ve experienced life so fully. It’s amazing; it really is.

**Fabozzi:** I'm very fortunate. Very, very fortunate. I met some really wonderful people. It's so memorable, I can't even begin to tell you, that I never—If you talk to any of my nephews, or Glenn's nephews, especially—I mean, god bless those kids. They worship me, you know? I'm very proud for them calling me 'uncle,' because I made it my business to earn that respect. I remember, even Glenn's parents. It was kind of difficult for me in the beginning with his parents, because they didn't know. They thought we were just best friends.

But I remember when he died, and they wanted to give me money. They wanted to pay for the funeral, and I said, "No," I said, "It's my responsibility," I says, "I want to do this. This is me. I'm doing this," and I paid for everything. I didn't want them to spend a nickel.

But what I did to [the] stone[cutter], I thought that guy was—[laughs] just the expression on his face alone was worth it.

**Zapol:** Well, that also seems to be a testament to your relationship, because you really wanted to see things through—

**Fabozzi:** He would have done that for me.

**Zapol:**—specifically.

**Fabozzi:** If it was the other way around, he would have done that, because that's the way he was.

**Zapol:** Yeah.

**Fabozzi:** Everything he did was—I mean, you can't imagine the—you know what's amazing? Everyone should be so fortunate to have someone in his life that makes such an impression on you, where it winds up making your life a better life, a much more fruitful life. I say to my friends who are depressed after the times, I say, "You know, you have no idea what it's like about—You need to discover who you are. There's so much in life that you could do that you don't even tap into, that you don't know your possibilities. You're capable of doing so much, you just don't—If you had the right moral support, you could do anything!"

**Zapol:** That really happened for you, yeah.

**Fabozzi:** Yes, I was one of the fortunate ones. In the end, losing him was a big tragedy, but he taught me how to survive.

My paintings, he loved. He encouraged me so much to paint. I never thought I was doing anything that—I didn't paint to sell; I didn't paint to become a famous artist. I didn't know from anything like that. To me it was a hobby. My friend Kenny was an artist. He had the studio in SoHo, and he traveled a lot. He was very successful. He said to me one day, "Here's the keys. Go up and paint. Use my studio." He taught me how to stretch canvas, because I used to go up there. I said, "Oh Kenny, give me something to do. I don't want to sit here." "Oh, I'll show you how to stretch canvas." "Oh OK, I'll stretch canvas."

**Zapol:** What was Kenny's last name?

**Fabozzi:** Kaye. Kenneth Kaye. [01:55:04]

**Zapol:** We might be at a place where it would be a good place, a good ending point for this oral history today, but I'm wondering if there's anything that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to say about your relationship to the Village, about your story.

**Fabozzi:** What I miss about Greenwich Village is the camaraderie of the ghetto that was there. I used to walk down Bleecker Street. There was one antique shop after the other, and in the evening, if you were strolling that street, the chandeliers were lit at night and everything in the windows. It was just magical. You could walk by, and it looked like these little treasures and you went from one to the other, to the other, to the other. It was so beautiful and quaint. It was the charm of the whole experience there. That's gone.

**Zapol:** You're speaking specifically about the West Village. Then also, the East Village, as well.

**Fabozzi:** Oh, the East Village. You know what was interesting about here. Interestingly enough, in 1960—Was it 1960? It could have been 1961 or [19]62 at the time. One of the very, very first vintage clothing shops in this neighborhood was Limbo on Saint Mark's [Place]. He was a friend of mine when I was a kid in high school at Lincoln. I went to Lincoln High School. In fact, I went to school with Neil Sedaka, Carole King—oh, I could go on about. In fact, Neil did my senior high school—We did *Oklahoma* but we called it 'Linc-ohoma,' and Neil wrote the music, and we recorded it. I'm on an album! [Zapol laughs] We made an album, and it's interesting because, oh, I went to school with four Nobel Prize winners. It was an incredible school.

For me, I think that as a kid growing up, to think that I went through all this today is just almost hard to comprehend. But the West Village was a place where it was a sanctuary. When you went to the west side of Sixth Avenue, you were in the sanctuary, the gay ghetto. When you went to the east side of Sixth Avenue, it was bohemian. You had Café Wha?, you had the Israeli clubs, you had all of the jazz clubs and things. What was nice about that was that a lot of upcoming performers, who weren't famous at the time, would perform for free.

**Zapol:** You were going to say something about the vintage place in the East Village.

**Fabozzi:** Limbo—I forget his name. He was a friend of ours. My god, I'm going back so many years. I'm lucky I still even remember it. I remember that it was the first time I ever saw a vintage store! [Zapol laughs] It was on Saint Mark's. It was called Limbo. I forget what it's called now. There was a lot of gay bars on the street also. There was the Boy Bar, and there was another bar there. They threw a political benefit for me one night over there. In fact, they even threw a political benefit for me in TriBeCa at Don Hill's. He threw a benefit for me, when I was campaigning. I couldn't be more part of this area than—or part of New York, I should say.

I remember one day, my company had a dinner thing on one of the boats on the river here, and I'm standing up on the top deck. It was evening, and the city was lit up so beautiful, and one of the officers on the boat come up and says, "Oh, you have to go downstairs," he said, "The meeting's started downstairs." They were having a conference. I said, "You know, I'm up here, I'm looking at the city," I says, "I'm running for the city council and to think that I could be a councilperson of this magnificent city—" He said, "Oh, stay up here as long as you want!" [laughs] I said, "It's like, I feel like I became part of Oz, you know?"

It was amazing. Glenn did set designs. He did *The Wizard of Oz*. He did the set designs for the college up in Rhode Island, the School of Design and Art [Rhode Island School of Design]. He was accepted into Carnegie Mellon, but he chose to go to Pratt. He was—so much I learned from him. [02:00:07]

**Zapol:** The set of New York, kind of the set of your story, in a sense, it's sort of intertwined with New York.

**Fabozzi:** When they started tearing down the piers—This is me and Antonio when I did the concert in the park.



**Zapol:** Mmhm!

**Fabozzi:** This is me when I ran for the city council in the gay parade.

**Zapol:** I see. I'll take these pictures—

**Fabozzi:** There was a wonderful coffee shop—

**Zapol:**—and I'll take photographs of them.

**Fabozzi:**—that was on Christopher Street, which is not there anymore, and this is Glenn and I standing on West Street at the end by the river. This is the pier.

**Zapol:** Mmhm! Which pier is that, do you know?

**Fabozzi:** Christopher Street.

**Zapol:** Mmhm, mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** This is when I got elected for CB3 [Community Board 3].

**Zapol:** Mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** Oh, I have to show you the photographs. This is a photograph—you don't see anything like—oh, this is me and Andy Warhol!

**Zapol:** Mmhm!

**Fabozzi:** Oh, I forgot to tell you, I was the stage manager for the Trocadero Ballet de Monte Carlo.

**Zapol:** [laughs] Oh, really! How did that happen?

**Fabozzi:** I had a boyfriend that danced for the Trocaderos. I wound up becoming a stage manager. This was a private party at Sardi's.

**Zapol:** Wow.

**Fabozzi:** This is my article in the *Times*. But I want to show you—look at this. Tearing down of the West Side Highway. This was when the elevator was there. This is one of my old photographs of the pier. Used to lay out there naked on the piers.

I did a painting from this, and I'm going to show you the painting, which belongs to my nephew. These are my paintings. This painting is in Park Slope. Here, I did a painting from it.

**Zapol:** Mmhm, mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** This is in Fort Lauderdale. This one is in Cincinnati. It was a wedding present. These are all mine.

**Zapol:** Mm, thank you for showing me these.

**Fabozzi:** Yeah, and these are some of my designs. Oh, and this was my doctor I did, the one I was telling you about?

**Zapol:** Mmhm, mmhm.

**Fabozzi:** This was the building RuPaul lives in on West Street. On Perry Street, this was the bathroom I did up on the top, and this is the whole apartment. Look at the kitchen I did. Look at this kitchen.

**Zapol:** Wow.

**Fabozzi:** Oh, let me tell you, I'm good at what I do. Let me tell you.

**Zapol:** I believe you!

I may take some photographs of these photographs of you and of the neighborhood—or of the West Side—when we're done, but before we finish I just wanted to ask you if there's anything else that you wanted to say or share before we close up today.

**Fabozzi:** Well, let me use the little boys' room—

**Zapol:** OK, I'll pause.

**Fabozzi:**—and then, and then we'll come back, and—

**Zapol:** OK.

**Fabozzi:** Give me a minute. Can I offer you anything, Liza?

**Zapol:** Go ahead.

**Fabozzi:** What I would like in terms of maybe like a legacy, or people to remember me, is that somebody else could be inspired by me and my life. That life is open to all kinds of possibilities that you can't even imagine, and it's just—I think that if you don't tell the story, no one will ever know that it's possible. It is.

For me, I wish that it could be for other people the way it was for me, because I don't regret any of it. It keeps me alive, you know? I try to tell my friends, or people that are down or depressed, and I say, "You know, there's just so much out there, you just really need somebody there to give you that encouragement." I was lucky. I think if anyone, people that I love, I hope that they have someone in their life or friends in their life that had the influence on me. I think if that's possible you're very lucky.

What it taught me was to do that for others. I always try to be there for other people. encourage them in any way that I can, because I know what it did for me.

**Zapol:** What a wonderful lesson. Yeah. Thank you.

**Fabozzi:** Thank you.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**