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Edited interview with Ethel Ennis

— I was born in Baltimore on November 28, 1932. I lived in northwest Baltimore on the 500 block of North Calhoun where I was born on the third floor of a row hous. Yeah. We moved to Riggs Avenue where we lived on the 1200 block. I went to school at number 111 elementary school. Used to call it 111. We were a small family, my mama, daddy, brother and we were influenced by my grandmother. Grandmother was very religious. She was the family councilor. She sort of did and didn't live with s. She would visit everyday. Grandmother's teachings made an impact on me from the start and I have kept them to this day. She would quote the bible all the time and apply it to life giving both side of the story--what to be, what to do in life. She would tell the negative and the positive sides to the story. It is so funny, with her sense of right and wrong--she would let you decide which way to go. If you decided wrong they you would have to pay for it.

If you tried to do right, you wouldn't get instant rewards but the rewards were so great when they did come that you would never think other wise. They would come from God.

By using here teachings I found that life wasn't as hard--it was hard enough but not as difficult to me....my life has been nice remembering those teachings.

I was taught by mother and grandmother that this was a white man's world though. It is funny--when I came in I thought "Oh this is a nice world!" They would come back, "You can't enjoy all of it. Just a little piece of it...because of the color of your skin." "If you are going to survive, you have to study hard, do the best you can, be threee times better in what you do. And do not waste you time...use all of it and definatly be a lady."

8. My being a singer just happened. I was with an all male group called Riley's Octette. I was the piano player at that time. We would work on the outskirts of town where my age, 15, wouldn't be a question. There were all ages in that group and I was the only female...so it was a great place to be. We used to work in funny places. Imade \$2.50 a show.

One night in Randalstown I was asked to sing the song "In the Dark"

Now, I used to listen to the blues while in the Gilmore Projects...came up through the floor. It came from the house with the blue and red lights and the wonderful bass was booming and the Blues were just pouring out. She would be down there frying her fish and making here cornbread...That was not of my Grandmother's thinking and teaching however, "No Blues." I was taught hymms and definately not the Blues. But I was asked to sing "In the Dark"

"Ethel, if you can sing this songe, we can keep this generous tip."

OK, I sang the song not knowing what the words meant....they loved it, the band loved it and I was a singer. I thought I woud be paid double to sing and play the piano....forget that!

I don't know too much about Cass Elliot....

Zappa---Frank---I have seen him perform. He is a free spirti, he releases what we alld have--just to be crazy--I am getting to that point now.

Billie Holliday was a poetic singer. She painted what she sang....you can see the pictures clearly when she sang. That, to me is what a singer is.

They all left. They had a desire...I never had a burning desire to be a star or to get away from anything....I guess i believe that wherever you are rooted there you will bloom. This is my home...When my spirti came here this was it! Why tear myself away? A lot of people can do it elsewhere but a lot of them have to as some pint go back home.

Soft Power is lwhat grandmother would call spirit or God. It is the reason we are here tody taling. We all have it.

We come into the world programmed and aquire a second program--society teaches us this to live together under control. Sometimes the programs clash and that is when you have to go with feelings...

We are taught so many things that mke you unhappy...If you are not true to yourself -- ~~xxxx~~ sthen you have to pay.

You have to remember that the next person is you...we are all one. Part of the same one.

You have to know the spirti and not be afraid to listen and to practice what it tells you.

I could always come back to Baltimore and be refueled. I could go home to rest with friends and family. I never have wanted to leave friends and family.. I could never m ve away from my neighborhood...we have made friends there.

I remember the Royal Theater, Hollywood on Penn. Ave! And there was Gambies, the Casino, The Comedy Club, Tiajauna--it was there that I saw Billie Holliday. In '56, '57 I was working at the Red Fox a few steps awy from Billie Holliday...

Penn. Ave was alive with entertainment...I worked all these places but not as part of my life. I was always the church girl working in clubs... But I didn;t want the life...I didn't like the clubs in the daytime... Why hide from the beautiful day?

Pennsylvania Avenue was just loaded.
Every corner that you turned, you found a bar or a nightclub.
They had entertainment. Floor shows and bands. Big bands and things
like that. They had to entertain the people.
Cab Calloway, Baltimore's his home.
Billie Holliday, she's one of our great sin ers....artist.
We had just countless different bands

Billie
When we speak of music and we characterize this music as whatever it is, I
kind of feel that any type of music would be soul music. It all
depends upon the person that's going to do this music. It's
how much they feel and how much they are going to put into that music.
It is just the feeling that you put into it.
There is music that lets you down
There is music that picks you up
I have to work on the basis of the feeling of the person
the feeling of the person that is trying to portray something
in the music.

X We had the live people performing live acts right on the stage.
Real singers, real dancers, real people
Oh, it was so wonderful, oh, god in those days of the early twenties
we thought we was good!

And I rember that they would just go crazy for Pearl Bailey, and I remember
that they would all come out to hear her. And I remember that one time
one guy was trying to heckle her and she stood there and said...I am
getting paid for mine....what have you got.

X And in the afternoon everybody would sit on the front stoops on those
marble steps....and you had to be dressed for the afternoon...other
wise you couldn't come out...and sometime we would just sit out on the
front steps and sing.....

Oh, we worked like the devil but it was like a family thing...you would
work like the devil and then sign at the top of your voice.....

And when we were children...dad always wanted us to be a t home and
so we would bring out the friends to his house in Highlandtown and
that is why he bought the piano so we could stand around and sing...

And on Pennsylvania Avenue...there was gambies....the Cas\$no, the Comedy
Club , The Tiajuana.....

Their was the Plantation Club, and Green Willow, the Ritz. The Spot ,
the Wagon Whell, The Golden Room, ..The Spinx Club.

We went to New Albert Hall..

X My mother never did allow me to go to any other theatres...we always went
to church...there was the music there...that is what I went for if for
nothing else for Momma and the music.

I rm mber going to the eagle theatre and seeing a man play the paiano ther.

And we would gather out aroudn that old record changer and the kids would
sing all the songs.....