

Offspring | April 6, 2012, 8:46 AM | 2 Comments

## A Close Encounter of the Inter-Generational Kind

By JOE STEPANSKY



Joe Stepansky

Sixty-one-year-old Kwame Morales is interviewed by middle-school student Eva Furlow as part of a program to link seniors with budding pre-teen filmmakers.

Kwame Morales is 61 now, but when he was 12, he was homeless and sleeping on trains or in drug shooting galleries.

That bit of personal history definitely caught the attention of film student Nana Brew-Tetteh, an 11-year-old student at the Academy of Arts and Letters.

"I want to follow up on that," said Brew-Tetteh, one of 12 middle-schoolers who are participating in a program run by Old School Films to connect senior citizens with youngsters.

The goal is to expose children to real stories while also teaching them how to capture real life on video, said Old School Films founder, Aaron Lubarsky, who came up with the idea 10 years ago by visiting his grandmother at a nursing home.

"I'd go to these senior centers and I'd notice all these neglected senior citizens," said Mr. Lubarsky. "I'd ask them basic questions and I was amazed at how they'd light up."

And that was indeed the case last Wednesday when students from the Adelphi Street school sat down with their senior counterparts inside the Walt Whitman Houses.

Given the setting — the houses are situated in [the second poorest census tract](#) in the city with an estimated 30-percent unemployment rate among young men and [two fatal shootings in one month](#) — it's no surprise that the seniors had lots to say.

Two 14-year-olds, Jason Critchlow and Raiden McLean, manned the camera as Rasheem Allah, 63, recounted his life and the changes in the neighborhood as it went from working-class to lower class area after the Brooklyn Navy Yard closed in 1966 to today's gentrified hipness.



Joe Stepansky

Brenda Johnson was interviewed by Ayzha Cobb Murray as Autumn Doyle ran the camera.

He peppered his story with frustration over the lack of jobs and programs for the current younger generation of public housing residents.

"We're surrounded by all this good, but when you come in here there's this violence and chaos," said Mr. Allah. "It wasn't like this when I was growing up."

For Critchlow, an eighth-grader, Mr. Allah's words did more than just tell a story; they built the proverbial bridge to his future as a filmmaker.

"I learned a lot in what they had to say," said Critchlow. "Finding out about people's lives and what they've been through, it's really interesting. I'd like to do it as a job."

*The students will take their hours of footage and edit them into mini-documentaries that will be showcased in May. For info, visit [oldschoolfilms.org](http://oldschoolfilms.org).*

---

*Joe Stepansky is a second-semester student at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism and a graduate of the program's rigorous "Winter Academy."*