

Paving the Way for the Next Generation of German American Friendship: Consul General Powell Opens HipHop Exhibit

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Interview with Martha Cooper

File Martha_Cooper.wmv

(Words that could not be identified are marked “???”)

Question: I was just thinking with all the – no, first I was just thinking, how did you get the guys to take you with the subway? I mean, that's the hardest part.

Martha Cooper: It is the hardest part, always, as a journalist, making a connection and getting people to trust you and I was able to do it through photographs, because photographs was always part of graffiti. They tried to take their own photographs. There is one picture, if you look at the Hip-hop-files and they're in their room, designing trains, and one guy has his photo album open, but they were shooting with – we're doing okay! - they were shooting with, like, cardboard cameras and the pictures weren't very good, you know, because the trains were rolling by. So I started in dealing in pictures of their trains. They wanted that. No, I didn't actually go into the yards and have a talk for a long time after I had (inaudible, both speaking at once)

Interviewer: So you took first pictures of the trains?

Martha Cooper: Of the trains. And I had met this one guy, and it was a gradual thing, you know, working your way into – well, having them trust you.

Interviewer: It was like the first thing you said 'Hey, look, I took some pictures of your (inaudible, both talking at once)'

Martha Cooper: No, I was introduced to this 'King'. Oh, no, actually it was - it's in the Hip-hop-files, but when I first met him, he had his sketchbook, and he opened up his sketchbook, and he had a clipping from the New York Post, my newspaper, of a picture that I had taken, and it happened to have one of his tags in the background of the picture and it had my credit line on it, Martha Cooper. And he had pasted that in his sketchbook. So when I met him - 'Oh, you're Martha Cooper' - he immediately saw me as a possible source of fame. Because fame was the ...

Interviewer: Main thing?

Martha Cooper: Yes.

Interviewer: So that's why they--?

Martha Cooper: I mean, it gave me credibility. He knew in fact that I was a professional photographer and worthy of speaking to. But it was maybe a year after that that I went into the yards, that I would spend the night in the yards.

Interviewer: Was that the most exciting moment, like, doing this night job?

Martha Cooper: Yeah, I mean, I would say going to the yards was the most exciting day, because up until then, though I had heard a lot, I'd seen trains, I'd heard the descriptions of what the yards were like, but I didn't quite understand how they could paint the whole train. I didn't really understand, how it was done. The sequence of events, you know, exactly how they got into the yards and how long it took, how they climbed up on the trains. The trains are in part really close together, so they never could really get back to look at the whole space, so it was really, you know, it brought everything together.

Interviewer: To be there?