

Queer Newark Oral History Project
Transcript of “Queer Newark: Our Voices, Our Histories” Conference Program
November 12, 2011
Paul Robeson Campus Center, Rutgers University–Newark

Beryl Satter: Hello everyone and welcome. I’m honored and delighted to welcome you all here today for Queer Newark, Our Voices, Our Histories. I’ll tell you a little bit more about the genesis of this project shortly but I’m delighted that we have two wonderful eminent people here to welcome you all. We have Mayor Cory Booker who will deliver the first welcome. And after that, Chancellor Steven Diner. So let’s welcome Mayor Booker.

Cory Booker: Good morning.

Audience: Good morning.

Cory Booker: I felt the energy on the first time. That’s pretty good. I am thrilled to stand for you today and feels a depth of gratitude to the Rutgers–Newark for pulling our community together and recognizing that we, in the collective of people of beauty, people of pride, people in struggle and people on the path towards a greater, richer justice. This day looks incredible. I was looking through the program and feeling myself get a little taller to know that we are having these conversations. That we are exploring our history and I hope, re-committing ourselves to the difficult work that needs to be done. I am, and I was just talking over in the corner, still a little startled at how this community is still so powerfully intolerant.

And when I say the community, I mean this larger urban space towards gay and lesbians, bisexuals, transgender. I get a little

frustrated when I see not the distant past but the recent past. When I see things like a leader in the educational world ordering teachers to black out the pictures of two young children. When I see what happened to Sakia Gunn and the lack of outrage within our community. The lack of outrage within our state. The lack of outrage in our country, in our nation. I see the quiet stories that I encounter from friends of young people being abused and beaten and bullied in their schools or in their homes. I get frustrated that I've been mayor for five-and-a-half years and in a city this strong and this great, that I happened to be the first mayor to actually raise the pride flag, something that should have been done decades and decades ago.

And so I'm glad we are pulling together today. I'm glad that we are engaging in what I'm told is the tenth time that we've done this. But my hope is that this fortify our souls to continue the fight because there's still so much to do. While individuals like the Kardashians tend to trivialize marriage, I'm a little outraged that we, as a community, cannot see that everyone can have the same right to have their marriages videotaped for TV and last as much as my bread in my fridge.

I'm still frustrated that there is not enough safe spaces here in Newark for our children to be. So frustrated that we have ignorance that still controls us and undermines our ability to make advancements in our community and health issues, wellness issues. We have a lot of work to do.

So today, I want to say thank you to those people who are committed to it. I want you to know that I stand with you. I am a part of this community in spirit and in love and I will continue to do everything I can from my position to make advancements.

Even if it's just being a conscientious objector as a mayor. I have chosen not to marry anybody even though I have the power to do that, I will not marry anybody until I can marry everybody. My mom gets upset with me as I say time and time again. My mom gets upset with me if I've said before. She says, "Cory, I just want you to marry one person. I appreciate the fact that you will not marry until this marriage of equality, but just marry one person please."

So we are going to continue to fight and I know as tough and as challenging as our history is, it is a history of strength. It is a history of perseverance. And I believe that our future will be a time where we can look our children in the eyes and not say, "It gets better." But we can look our children in the eye and say, "It is better." It is better. Thank you.

Steven Diner: Good morning.

Audience: Good morning.

Steven Diner: Yes. I've been Chancellor of Rutgers–Newark for nearly 10 years and one of the first things I learned, not quite first, but early on, is never speak after Cory Booker. Because Cory is so eloquent and I'm going to sound stumbling and—but nonetheless, that's the way it worked out. So I'm really thrilled to be here and I must say, in my job, thirty times a week, maybe twenty times a week, I get to greet conferences on subjects like left-handed tennis or right-handed golf or things I know nothing about. And I usually begin with my standard speech about let me tell you about Rutgers–Newark. And I also add, I know you don't want to hear this, but it's the paid ad from the commercial sponsor.

This morning, I'm going to talk about that speech. But it actually ties in beautifully, centrally, to what we're doing today. There are two things that are particularly distinctive I think about Rutgers–Newark. One is our diversity. US News and World Report, for those of you who don't know this, has ranked colleges and universities across the country for fifteen years on the racial and ethnic diversity. And for all 15 years, US News has ranked Rutgers–Newark number one among doctoral-granting universities in the country. And we're very proud about that and I must have said that twenty thousand times since I've been in this job, if not more.

However, because of that, we were chosen as the case study for a group of higher education leaders across the country, who is spending a year on a leadership development program and that program involved a kind of curriculum and a curriculum had never studied a real institution and that program just came to me and said, "Can we study you, the real institution, because you represent diversity so dramatically in such an important issue in higher education?" And I said, sure. And they came and they studied us.

And they then gave us their reports and one of the things they said was, "You have extraordinary racial, ethnic, religious diversity. You talk about that. You do professional development around it. But what about other forms of diversity? You're not talking about the LGBT. You're not talking about veterans. You're not talking about older adults. All of these are elements of diversity." And in fact, we had done a few things, but not much, up to that point. And that really woke us up and we established the Office of – I forgot the exact name – but, yes, Diversity Support, and thanks primarily to the extraordinary leadership of Professor Beryl Satter, who actually on my first day came to me and suggested we do a

reception and since then, I think we have embraced this issue very, very substantially.

And I'm being candid. We were thinking of diversity strictly in racial, ethnic, and religious terms. And now, we're thinking about it much more broadly, and as we should. And so, as I said, my first point I always make to people is we're the most diverse campus, but in this context, I'm especially happy to see this program because it's an extension of our commitment to a broader definition of diversity.

The other thing that I always talk about is how Rutgers–Newark is an urban university and a university in Newark and deeply connected to Newark. And what does that mean? Well, that means not only that we do service to the community, it means that Newark provides an extraordinary rich array of opportunities for teaching, learning, and research. And we have a community-based learning program that gives grants to faculty that design courses that take students into the community and we have given some modest grants to faculty to do research on Newark. This project, again, which Beryl Satter has organized, is just a superb example and I've been going around every place telling people, "But isn't this wonderful?"

We know almost nothing about LGBT or queer history of Newark. It is a rich subject, it's profoundly important, and I am just so thrilled that this conference is taking place today and that the conference is just the beginning of an ongoing oral history project that will really enlighten us. So it is exhibit A of what it means to be an urban university. Take advantage of where you are. Build around the extraordinary learning opportunities, assets that we have here, and that is exactly what Beryl Satter has done.

So I have to be at a wedding in Washington DC, so I'm going to leave in a few minutes, but that leaving shouldn't suggest that I wouldn't otherwise stay. I really wish I could hear all these. I know it will be recorded and I will catch up on it. But all of you, thank you so much for coming in. Beryl, thank you for your extraordinary leadership.

Beryl Satter:

I'm going to be very brief. I just want to just add a little bit about the history of this historic day. Today, November 12, is a historic day and it's a day to begin the public celebration of Queer Newark and I just want to tell you a little bit about how we got here. I've been given a lot of credit, but I don't deserve really, because much of this came from writer scholar and Newark activist, Darnell Moore, who about two years ago or so said to me: We live in the city and it's such an amazing city and there's so many fabulous, brilliant activists in the city and they have not—their stories have not been recorded and have not been celebrated as they should be.

And he said, somehow we should put together some kind of interview project to get these people's amazing lives on the record. So it was his idea and we kind of talked about it on and off and then about nine months ago, the chance to make this happen came when Clement Price of the Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience said, "You know, I would like our institute to do a program dealing with LGBT Newark. And at the same time, there was an artist and LGBT activist, Pandora Scooter, said, "You know, I'd love to do something about LGBT Newark." So that came together. Darnell, Pandora, and I decided to brainstorm a little about what kind of program this could be.

And we came up with this idea of a joint Rutgers–Newark and Queer Newark celebration. And the idea was that we, the

University, would not plan an event and then invite the community to come. Instead, we, the conference planners would listen to Queer Newark activists' ideas about what sort of conference they would most like to see. And then we would work together with them to make that vision come true.

So this was our process. Darnell called a meeting together in June of 2011. Many people here were there. About fifteen amazing activists and artists from Newark attended and myself and Timothy Stewart-Winter were the only Rutgers–Newark people. So Rutgers–Newark really, we were the minority here. But they came together and they went around the room and the energy in the room was amazing and fabulous and people just talked about their ideas about what they want to see happen. And together, those people in that room, many of whom will be up on today telling you their stories, shaped today's event.

And they made the following points. First, they said the city of Newark, in fact, has a history of both brutality against LGBT people and immense courage, immense creativity, immense political activism among queer Newark residents.

Second, that this complex and powerful history needs to be shared and preserved.

Third, that this mission is especially important since AIDS wiped out a whole generation and left the next generation of queer youth with few people to turn to for guidance and mentoring.

Finally, that the preservation of this history is immensely important as a resource. Not only for queer Newark residents but for all Newark residents, for historians, for artists, for activists of all sorts,

locally, nationally, and internationally. And especially, for the queer youth of Newark to whom this is actually dedicated.

So building on this important insights, we spent the next several months working together, holding meetings about every two weeks to create the conference you will see today, in which three generations of queer Newark residents will share their stories with each other and with other generations and in which the art, culture, and creativity of queer Newark will be celebrated and preserved. So this is not only a celebration, it's a historic event in it's own rights. It's also the larger—this is the public launch of a project that has already begun, another community-university partnership, the Queer Newark Oral History project. This project is dedicated to collecting and preserving the voices and histories of Newark's LGBT community in all its beauty, all its power, and all its diversity. And this has begun, Liberation in Truth and HMI are at center places for it at the moment with support from Rutgers–Newark as much as we can. I'd like Maren Greathouse, just stand up. Let's give her a hand. Maren Greathouse, recent arrival in Newark. She was hired recently to head our new LGBTQ and Diversity Center. She is a brilliant activist, a wonderful person, fabulously energetic, a visionary, and she will be coordinating, helping to coordinate the Queer Newark Oral History project, which is a complicated and ambitious endeavor, but I know we can do it and we are doing it and it's already been amazing.

So, thank you and welcome to “Queer Newark: Our Voices, Our Histories.” And the first thing you will see is a beautiful slide show by a brilliant and talented Newark artist, Tamara Fleming, which will show you the faces of Queer Newark's activists and leaders and community members.

Tamara Fleming: Hi, good morning, everyone. I'm hoping you will enjoy this presentation. It was amazing to work with so many dynamic people. I've only touched the surface. It was just four years ago that my firm, who I co-founded with Kimberly Williams, decided to move to Newark to make a difference, to bring some light. We knew that it was very important for people to start addressing the LGBT community. People of color, women, especially in these urban communities and so my heart is opening for I'm so happy and excited. This is only just the surface. There are so many other dynamic people that have been amazing. So you saw their faces and you saw their quotes and this is the instructions for moving forward I feel. If you are a young person, listen, look and see what our elders have said before us. It's the perfect guide to moving forward. Thank you so very much.

[VIDEO PRESENTATION FROM 00:17:01]

[BACKGROUND CROSSTALK 00:17:42]

Darnell Moore: Can you hear us? Good morning, everybody. Okay, so I have the wonderful task of moderating and sitting with this panel here. In a sec, I'll say names and do introductions. But I also want to say a bit about what we're intending to do in this conversation and I'm going to just ask questions and each panelist will take about three or five minutes to give responses and hopefully, we can have a good conversation.

So, I should just take a deep breath. I just had the commute from Hades. And I literally just ran through the door and I have been running for about two hours now and every train that I got to, some literally like this... nothing would be running. But I thought it was a wonderful metaphor for what it might mean to be queer.

Honestly, I had to stop and so this is what it feels like. We hit

barriers, but we find ways to overcome them. So here I am with this wonderful panel. Can we clap for making it this morning?

So I'm sitting with some wonderful folks and we have bios that are inside your programs so I won't read through them all. But I will just say names and say a bit about the folk that you'll be hearing from. So I'm just going to use first names because it's going to be an intimate conversation. Next to me is Peter. Peter is a long-time, if not lifetime...

Peter Savastano: Lifetime.

Darnell Moore: ... resident of Newark, New Jersey and is a professor at Seton Hall. Next to Peter is Marge or Margaret. Marge is also a long-time resident here of Newark and one of the bastions of the community. Next to Marge is James Credle, who many of us refer to as [Mother Cradle]. A steward in the community, has been a long-time employee of Rutgers University and a long-time activist in the community. And next to James is the wonderful Nataly. Nataly is also a long-time resident of Newark, New Jersey and a wonderful advocate and activist in our community.

So let's jump in. And I have to remind... see, these are my elders and we ought to have really good conversations that can last for hours. Unfortunately, time is not necessarily our friend today. So each response will have about three to five minutes for each. Is that okay?

I'm interested in hearing about your teenage years, your childhood, wherever you were. Can you say a bit about that? Where were you? And I guess we can start here, want to?

Peter Savastano: Okay. I actually grew up very close to here, just a few blocks away in what was once the Italian section of Newark. My family

came here at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. A little later in life, I lived farther up in North Newark, where there was also a large Italian American community. I went to both the public school and parochial schools here in Newark. I'm the product of the 1960s in many ways. So I participated in many of the social movements of that period, long before there was a gay liberation movement as it was first called very early on. I have never been able to describe my childhood in Newark as anything other than brutal, violent, and menacing, unfortunately. I spent most of my time being hunted down by hostile people who hated everything about me. And I moved around from one school to the next because everywhere that I went, I was menaced and the victim of violence in form or another. Not only by fellow students, but by teachers at the time when it was totally acceptable for a teacher to openly ridicule and make fun of and humiliate students for exhibiting any kind of difference. Not just difference around sexual orientation or...

I can tell you one story that comes to my mind actually about my experience with my own mother, which probably reflects it all. She told me once when I was around 12 or 13 years old. She was extremely worried about me, that there was something deeply wrong with me. I thought she was referring to my sexuality, which she was indirectly, and so I said, "What is it? What's wrong with me?" And she said, "You're weird. You read books. Only weird people read books." I found my solace in the world of books and music. It became what soothed me from the violence that I experienced.

Darnell Moore: Thank you.

Margaret Woods: I guess I give lie to the fact that not all African Americans come either from the rural South or from urban areas. I grew up in the heartland, in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Folks from Northwestern PA don't think of it as the heartland but it is solidly, solidly Middle West with Middle Western attitudes.

So I grew up a tomboy. In a family of five, I had two brothers and my parents. I guess because we didn't know about the Huxtables at the time, I had a Ward and June Cleaver upbringing and family. It wasn't until I went to college that I realized that we were poor. My parents had middle class aspirations and they certainly had those aspirations for my brother and myself. My father didn't graduate high school. My mother finished high school.

In terms of sexuality, I was a tomboy, nothing more or less. And because everybody in my little small town, we're about 16,000 people, ran around and had fun and could stay out until 9:00 at night. Nobody thought anything about a girl who liked to climb trees and play with the guys and catch tadpoles in the stream and the cemetery where we weren't supposed to be. I didn't date really when I was in high school. Part of it was probably because I was a fat kid and guys don't particularly like fat girls. So they didn't look at me. And it wasn't until I realized my sexual preference that I realized I was fortunate that they didn't look at me. Because I didn't have to go through the motions of acting like this is what I really wanted to do.

I went to my high school prom because I was my mother's only daughter and you have to go to your high school prom. It was the most, one of the most horrific experiences in my life. Because I don't like dresses and I had a prom dress on and makeup and was extremely, extremely uncomfortable.

I went to college in south-central Pennsylvania at an all-women's college but I hadn't recognized my sexual identity at the time. So I'm in heaven and not knowing it. Just not taking advantage of the fact that I'm surrounded by 699 other women, some of whom were lesbian though we obviously those... no one was out. Whether some of the women really realized who they were or not. Back in 1965, when I started college, you certainly didn't talk about liking women and preferring to be with women.

I guess in terms of my early activism, it was really around social justice and that was activism around race and class and power. And not really sexual identity.

Darnell Moore: Thanks.

James Credle: Well, my story is obviously much different. I grew up in the Jim Crow South in a small town in North Carolina. Family of fourteen children. Poor but the people down the street were poor. At a very early age, before I was ten, I realized that I was different. I didn't know what that meant except that I was more interested in the boys than—

[BEGIN SEGMENT 2/12]

James Credle: The boys seemed to be getting interested in girls, but I was more interested in the boys and particularly when we played football, I loved the idea of tackling them and then jumping on top and going all that. And in the Black Church, it was an abomination that man lie down with man. And so that became confusing to me. Because I hadn't done any of that. I felt like I wanted to but I hadn't done it. And abomination became like a source of confusion. As was the ideal of why someone will hate me simply because of my color. So those aspects of my life and the terms of how seeing

“Colored Only” signs and going to the back door of places and never at the front door and certainly not allowed to sit at the counter. And knowing this feeling that I had very negatively impacted me and I didn’t know who to go to or who to talk with and I had no one to talk about it.

Interestingly enough, I remember talking with my sisters and some of my cousins about how cute the captain of the basketball team was and they thought... none of them told me that I better not be talking that way. We had a great time talking about it. Gossiping and all of that. But I learned that being a scholar, I was at the top of my class in school, and then I became an athlete. So I was what you might call a scholar athlete. And that was a way of trying to become the man instead of these feelings that I had which was more like wanting to be the woman. At 17, I moved to Newark and the first thing that struck me about Newark more than anything else was that Newark was more segregated in many ways than I felt it was in the South and that became another source of contradiction. Like why would I come to this city hoping to be in a more positive place for myself as a person of color, as a black person? At that time, we will call it people. And finding that no, that didn’t exist. You can see the line starts Central Ward, South Ward, to Bloomfield Avenue and then you get... as you go across, you become black and then Hispanic and then white. And that was sort of how the city was divided. And I learned early on that most American cities are that way. Almost all of our cities are that way.

At 17, I had never experienced and did not experience actually having a relationship with a man until I went to the military. And during R&R – I drafted into the military. I’m a Vietnam veteran. I served two years in the military, one year in Vietnam – and I met a man who happened to be married but we became friends. And I

guess you might say my first date was an R&R to Tokyo, Japan, when we became intimate. Never in the combat zone, but only on R&R.

Darnell Moore: Thank you.

Nataly Evans: Good morning, everyone. My name is Nataly Maisonet-Evans. And why do I remember? I remember too many things for too long. And probably what I need to do is to break it because the teenager years that it was for many of them, it was different for me. The first thing that I remember is that at the age of five, I told my godmother that one of my girlfriends is going to give me a wedding ring. And she said girlfriend doesn't give boys the wedding ring. And that has never moved out of my head. But then I started to notice that I was attracted to the boys. The boys were always looking for me. The boys wanted to play with me. And everything was physical. And at that time, I couldn't understand and I believe probably at the age of six, I was sexually abused for the first time. Not knowing exactly what it was.

And then I, Nataly had the personality that now I have had all her years. As a matter of fact, if I think that the person who Nataly was at the age of five, it's the same person that Nataly is at 57. Then what happened was that Nataly developed the personality that she has and the personality that she has is what she has. It was nothing to change because that's the personality that I have. Growing up in Puerto Rico, you are different, but who cares if I'm different, I'm me. So they call you *pato*. *Pato* means that you are gay, I think, a faggot or something like that. Who cares what people think because this is me. So when I really realized that I was a different person than the person that I was born. I said, so what. It's like it never occurred to me that it was a big issue.

Because Nataly was Nataly. And people need to respect Nataly as who Nataly was.

Then at the age of 17, I decided to come to this country. When I decided to come to this country, I wanted to have a different life which I didn't know what kind of life it was going to be. So I wanted to come to this country. So when I come to this country, and I realized the life that I wanted to live, that's when I became to be a child. Until the age of 17, I was something. After the age of 17, what I realize, that my goal was to become a woman. Then I became a girl. And when you're 17 and you're a girl, you do a lot of crazy things because you're acting like you're a four-year-old and a five-year-old and a seven-year-old at the age of 17. But that was fine. That was okay for me. Even if I have to walk around with flip flop and pantyhose. Because I wanted to wear pantyhose even if it were with flip flops.

But one of these things that one time, somebody says to me. Do you know that if – and I was working in a hangar company, even that has to be my first year of college – so I decided just to... they said if you move to Hartford, Connecticut – and I was living in Perth Amboy in New Jersey. In Hartford, Connecticut, there is a program for transgenders. I don't know what that meant. They will give you hormones. They will give you counseling. I said I'll pick up all my stuff in a Greyhound bus, and here I go, I moved to Hartford, Connecticut, but I don't know where I was going. I know I was after something but I don't know what that after was.

I go there and for the first time decided to see a lot of other women like me. Because you see gay people, you see patos, you see a lot of things, but I don't see me. I never prostituted. I never was into drugs. I never wanted to be a show in front of everybody and

dancing, which I adored to see, but I couldn't see myself doing that. So I go to Hartford. I had to be in welfare because for you to be in welfare, you will be able to get all these things that the government was giving you. The visits to the psychologist, to the psychiatrist. You will get the Medicaid to get you hormones and everybody wanted to have titties. I wanted to have titties.

So I go there and I begin the process that I don't know where it was going to take me to. I decided to enter into a relationship, that of course, it was not a good relationship. I decided to be with this Puerto Rican guy who used to beat me up all the time. Because he didn't want me to work. Because he needed to support me. Like every woman goes through. Many of us, I should say.

So, in Connecticut I spent about five years. Going to psychiatrist and psychologist and so on and on and on. Until one day, the social worker said, you have to go back to school. We're not going to pay you for no more of that stuff. I said, okay. So here I am, with my nice dress and my heels, go to the so-called manpower program. And here I go to the manpower program with about another hundred people that at that time was trying to learn English to do whatever they have to do so here Nataly goes. Two weeks after I was in that program, a counselor said, "I have to take you out for a job, hunting." I said, "Me? Job hunting?" They had these people here for six, seven months, why me? He said, "I am promise, you're gonna get a job because you have skills." They took me to the school of medicine at the UConn Health Center in Farmington. And do you know that I was hired on the spot? Thus went, my whole life changed. I became a secretary that hardly speak any English and I was trained by the greatest person that Dr. [Ray Allen], PhD, is. And this person taught me to be political. Taught me how to speak English. And taught me how to behave in

all kinds of environment. And among all of those things, one day I learned that Aetna Health Insurance will pay for my surgery, pay because I was working, I was a State employee. In 1981, I became the woman that I am today at the age of 27. That's when the woman began. That's when my life started. So even that I am 57 years of age, in my life, I'm 30. Because my life started the day when I became a woman. Thank you very much.

Darnell Moore: I can listen to you all for days. Your stories are amazing. I want to veer away from... the questions are for the youth. All of you talked a little bit about the notion of difference. Being very aware that you were different from others because of, you know. You sort of went the books. You, this idea of becoming... being a tomboy. James, you know, becoming an athlete. Nataly, embracing this aspect of yourself as woman. I'm wondering, you had a concept of yourself. Did you know other people around you who might have been experiencing difference themselves? I don't know if you call them lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, but were you aware of others, friends, family members in your circles of youth or as teenagers, or as adults, who might have also been facing some of the same types of issues.

Peter Savastano: Yes, most definitely. We call them queers and fags in those days and sissies and not queer in the Queer theory sense of the word, that's for sure. I think it's probably a fairly common experience that when... well, I'll just speak for myself. Taught as I was to hate what I was, I not only hated it in myself, but hated it in others. So many times, to deflect the attention from myself, I did to others what was done to me. I don't know if gayness runs in families, but I could say that my mother had three or four cousins, males, who appeared to be like me. One of whom, babysat for me and was in the habit of wrapping himself in my mother's curtains and dancing

through the house. I didn't know if that was what I wanted to be, so I was sort of a little taken aback by that initially. And there were certainly others that I went to school with. Even someone who is here today who was certainly the victim of the same kind of ridicule that I was. And some of those people are still my friends today. But yes, certainly they were visible but not to be admired and I think we also kept our distance from each other because we knew that guilt by association would probably bring the same kind of discrimination and violence upon us as a group, for being individuals.

Darnell Moore: Thank you.

Margaret Woods: I was born in Pittsburgh in the projects, in what's called the Hill District. We moved to New York when I was about five, excuse me, about four. And at five, we came back to my mother's hometown in Northwestern Pennsylvania, which is I consider my hometown. And I remember the first Christmas there. We were getting ready to open up presents and my parents hadn't found a house yet so we lived with my grandparents and my aunt and uncle in a two-family house. It was a double house. My grandparents on one side. A maiden aunt who never married, who I had some questions about but as I got older, but she never identified as being a lesbian. And my aunt and uncle on the other side. We're all sitting around the Christmas tree and this man comes in. And I'd never seen him before. And everybody is all excited. And people start crying and they're embracing him and as we started opening gifts, they gave him some gifts. And he started crying. And I couldn't figure out who this man was or why he was crying. I didn't know until probably 10, no probably 15 years later that Elton, who I grew up with, and who was now I know a queen, had just come back from a state psychiatric hospital. He was the only

African American man in a circle of men in my hometown. All the men were white with the exception of him. They were Catholic priest[s] and the sons of the doctors and lawyers in my hometown. And they got busted one night. And the white men said to the police, if you publicize this, you're going to be talking to my father's attorneys or you're going to have to deal with the Catholic Church. Elton basically said, "Yeah, I'm a faggot and what's wrong." And for that, he spent two or three years in the psychiatric hospital.

I didn't fully appreciate what that meant until I was about 25. And so that was my... sort of my first introduction to someone who identified differently. My recollection is I didn't grow up with any friends who I thought liked girls or liked boys because you have to understand – I'm 64 – and when I grew up, that's something you didn't talk about. It's not like that you didn't talk about it, but in the African American community, it wasn't anything that was even a possibility. So it wasn't even a matter of thinking about it. Because black folks just didn't do that. It was something that white folks did and definitely, if you're black, that didn't happen.

So I found out again when I was about 15 or 16 that one of my first cousins was gay. And Elton had taken him under his arm and sort of mentored him through the very rough waters of my hometown in Pennsylvania. My cousin, John, died of AIDS, now almost 30 years ago. But I remember him as someone who was extremely, extremely talented, artistically. He was extremely bright. He was about... probably eight or nine years older than me and he graduated from Syracuse and he was probably one of just a handful of African Americans who had at his generation graduated. John taught me, as I got into my later teens, that it was okay to be different. But again, I didn't name what that difference was. I just

knew that there was something, that I wasn't quite like everybody else. And I watched the quiet battles that John fought as an African American man in a small town in Pennsylvania. When he escaped to go to Syracuse and he came back, he would come back and he'd be wearing lime green socks and yellow pants and a red blazer. And it was, again, as I got older, I realized that that was his not-so-subtle way of dealing with who he was and announcing to his family, into his community, that he was a gay man. So interestingly enough, it was gay men who taught me to begin to be comfortable with who I was and not to apologize for that.

And then just lastly, I remember when I met my partner at 25 and she came home with me to my home in Pennsylvania. We've gone back home a couple of times. And we're at my aunt and uncle's house, John's parents' house. We're at the table because we did everything around the table with food and my family. We were getting ready to eat. My aunt had left the room. My cousin John was in New York. He wasn't back home. And my uncle looks at me and says, "What's wrong with you?" And I said, "What do you mean? What's wrong with me?" And he looked at [Aidel], my partner, and said, "Well, basically, why are you with her? There has to be something wrong with you."

Now, again, the words were never the identification, was not put there in terms of a label. But the behavior he was saying was not natural and I remember when I get really angry I come close to blacking out. And that feeling sort of came over me. And I remember turning and looking at him and saying, "And you're the alternative." And just as it came out of my mouth, my aunt came into the room. And she must have seen the look on my face. And she must have said my family's nickname for me is Margie and they knew my temper. And so I know she is saying, "Oh, Margie

is about to go off.” But it was my uncle’s name. I need to rescue Bud some kind of way. So she started shoving food at us as a way to just shut us up. And had she not come in the room, I probably would have continued to have some choice comments for my uncle and I’m not quite sure how that would have played in my family. But my aunt was able to kind of just quiet the waters a bit and after that, my uncle and I just sort of kept a polite distance from each other.

Darnell Moore: Thank you. And by the way, your cousin John sounds like me. Yellow socks and...

Margaret Woods: Oh, yeah.

James Credle: Green pants.

Darnell Moore: Yes.

James Credle: Red blazer.

Margaret Woods: High-top sneakers.

James Credle: There was only one person that I knew in the community who I thought was a cousin who was, as described in my community, funny. He wasn’t gay or homosexual or anything like that. He was funny and I don’t know even today if that was true or not. But that was the only time. But I come from a very small – when you say small, I’m talking about 200 people. No traffic light. I’m talking about small. You guys talk about small, you talk about thousands of persons. I was saying 200 people. That was when I was growing up. I’m 66 so from the time that I was able to do anything as far as learning what community is all about, that was the size of the community and it’s about the same size now. We still don’t have a traffic light. We have progressed to some roads

that are paved. We're okay that way. But as far as it goes, when I moved to Newark, I moved with the purpose of doing what my sister had done. She worked as a domestic and she was the first one in the family to graduate from college. She graduated from Shaw University by being a domestic here in Newark. Well, with families. She would come to Newark to live with my aunt and uncle but she would work in the surrounding communities for white families and therefore, she didn't have rent to pay or food and all little stuff. And they also gave her a stipend and clothing stuff like that. So she would go back to Shaw and she graduated. So I came to live with her with the purpose of working and going back to school. I graduated third in my class so the idea was to go back home and go to a black college. Although I really wanted to go to North Carolina, which at that time, was an all-white institution. Instead, I started working and I started sending money home to help my family, then I got drafted into the military and once I got drafted into the military, the house that my family was living in was so poor that I decided that I could use my stipend to buy my family a home. So I used my—

[BEGIN SEGMENT 3/12]

James Credle: ...GI bill while I was in the military to buy my family a home. I say all of that to say that when I met my first partner, we played on the basketball team together and we threw passes at each other on the basketball court. In the middle of the game, he was... yeah, that was kind of a pass... he was my partner for 11 years. And I say all of that to say that when I went home, my family knew that Nick and I were coming and they had a bed for us to sleep in. They accepted Nick, they accepted me. And my family, my mother and father, came to Newark. My father loved the Yankees so before he passed, I took him to a Yankee baseball game. But

they met Nick's parents and although we never had a discussion about our relationship and the fact that I was gay, I was very proud that my family accepted me. I still am.

Nataly Evans:

Going back to my years in Puerto Rico, there is a lot... what makes a difference in the people that I met in Puerto Rico was the fact that... is that here was the guy who wanted to be with me and the guy who wanted to be the friends. So the guy that wanted to be the friend, some of them today they're gay, there's about one or two, and other one they saw that we're gay, then they were not gay. Whatever that, they went into... but that was when I was very young. I was probably 11 and 12 at that time. I lived in a village in Puerto Rico. So when you go to high school, you go to the town. It's like you go to downtown. So once you go to downtown, then you meet everybody from all of the villages. Because everybody goes to the same high school and definitely you had the same person that you are in your village.

When you go to high school, you see that there is so many other people that looks similarly like you. And then we all bunched together. We were united even though we didn't know what we're doing but we were hanging out together during the day, at night. And I think that was the first group of people that I believe was... we were supportive of each other. And once I came to the United States, this is the same people that helped me to move to Connecticut.

When I went to Connecticut, I was able to see that regardless that I have many other friends, we're talking about... it was about 30 or 40 like me in half of Connecticut. Everybody looking for the same thing. But regardless of I was different than everybody else, I don't know why. We will look alike but we were all different.

And that difference moved me into getting a job like many other people couldn't get a job. That difference helped me to follow my dream of having a surgery. But once I had a surgery, somebody said to me one time, we need to navigate through the world and we have to be able to not be seen by anybody.

We are women, we have behaved like women and we have just to go like a fly, like a leaf, undetected. I think it was like... that was the way to be. So that's what I did and unfortunately, I never had the chance of a nurturing environment. And then we had the chance of having a lot of other people because every time I see a person like me, we look at each other, we know who we are with each other and everybody would walk their own way. Because if three of us are together, everybody knows. So if we all move around, nobody would know. That's what I was taught to do.

And then it was the fact that, as much as I wanted to be part of the community, if I will go to a gay bar, people look at me funny. Because I didn't belong. I couldn't do the dance. Or I couldn't do the positioning and the movement. I couldn't do that. I wanted to do but I couldn't. I couldn't go to the bar because I wanted a man and I didn't know... I mean, it's a lot of things that's inside me. And that's what I actually did. I became the woman that I am. I had had my issues. I had had my problems. But I don't think that my problems are because of my sexuality. But my problems are all the problems that we have as human beings and as women. So I have been married twice, going toward my third marriage and one time, I went back to Puerto Rico after I got married in 1982, I believe, that was my first marriage. I decided to go back to Puerto Rico to the people who see me born where I grew up. I went to motor vehicle with my new driver license. My name is Nataly Maisonet Del Valle. And I'm a female, so here I am with my

driver license. I got a motor vehicle because I needed a Puerto Rican driver license.

It turned that somebody from my village was working on motor vehicle and I have forgotten my driver license from Connecticut. So when I came back with my driver license, guess what, you cannot be able to get a driver license because such and such and such and such. I have learned that I need to follow the rules of the law. But I have my rights and I have my responsibilities. So if I commit to my responsibility, I better have my rights. And the day that I left the surgery room in 1982, it was an attorney who signed that from this day on, you are a female and I must be respected as one. And a lot of you who knows me, a lot of people wants to be boxed into something else. No, Nataly Evans has to be a female wherever I go because when I left the surgery room, after so many years, a lawyer said you are a female.

Under the rules of this country, when I changed my name, I was told I was female. So I do not allow absolutely nobody to tell me that I am differently. And that's exactly what I told the people in motor vehicle. So they gave me my driver license but three weeks later, it was a private detective looking for me. Because they have identified that my birth certificate was different. I went to a lawyer. I said this is what I have. Well, you have to call Vital Statistics in San Juan. God only knows. I took all of my papers to Vital Statistics in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In less than a half an hour, I left Vital Statistics with a birth certificate that said that Nataly Evans was born as a female in 1984.

Let me tell you, I have heard so many stories about birth certificates. I have had so many stories about Social Security card. But Nataly Maisonet never heard about this is my papers. I did my

responsibility to go through all of the channels to show you who I am, give me what is mine. That's all I wanted. And believe me, if I am the person that I am today, it's because, first of all, you need to know who we are. You know to know you. And once you know you, you have a set of responsibilities to me. And once you meet that set of responsibilities, I want my rights. And up to today, I make sure that my rights are taken into consideration everywhere that I go. Do I see my friends everywhere? Do I see some of my... I respect everybody. I love everybody. I wish I can be closer to this community more than what I am. Because I am is in me. Well, life taught me that you have to go out like the leaf and fly around because what I was taught at that time, that you have to become like everybody else in America. Thank you.

Darnell Moore: Well, all right, Nataly. I'm going to shoot about three questions at you. So this one don't think too hard. This is sort of fun. The first is going to be... it's going to be sort of like a game. So you got to give me the answer and then we're going to move right on. All right? What was a typical outfit for you at the age of 16? Go.

Peter Savastano: Cut-off pants, sandals, a ripped shirt with tie dye, loads of beads, long hair – hard as it is to believe – tied in a braid, and in the winter, a long coat that came all the way down to my ankles.

Darnell Moore: Lovely. Go.

Margaret Woods: I shudder. A short skirt, a blouse with a Peter Pan collar, and shoulder-length hair.

Darnell Moore: Next.

James Credle: Just tight pants and a T-shirt to accent the positives.

Nataly Evans: A lot of make-up, short skirt, and cleavage.

Darnell Moore: All right. What was your favorite song at 16? Let's start with Nataly.

Nataly Evans: You ask me to think too far. Damn. There is not one song for me.

Darnell Moore: Give me a couple.

Nataly Evans: I don't have a song at 16.

Darnell Moore: Okay. And if you can't think of songs, maybe you can think of a band or a type of music that you were listening to. What type of music did you listen to?

Nataly Evans: I love salsa.

James Credle: I guess no particular song either, but Aretha Franklin was always part of my list because she spoke to something deeper and... yeah.

Margaret Woods: Remember I grew up in the Midwest. So Northwestern Pennsylvania, half an hour from the Ohio state line, so Midwest. Country and western music because it was all they played on the radio. And then when my brothers came home, it was The Temptations and Aretha Franklin because they came from New York City and brought what I now know is real music. But I do like some country and western.

Darnell Moore: [Crosstalk 00:12:51] country and western fan, you know.

Margaret Woods: No, I'm being facetious.

Peter Savastano: Tighten Up by Archie Bell and the Drells.

Darnell Moore: All right.

Peter Savastano: And Do the Funky Broadway.

Darnell Moore: All right. There's one more. This time, we're going to start with Marge. What was your most memorable date?

Margaret Woods: Good or bad?

Darnell Moore: Either.

Margaret Woods: We were at Sonny's Bar. It was my senior year in high school and I was trying to fit in so I was dating. My small town is also a college town. So I was dating a freshman in college. And my parents were so glad I was dating they didn't mind that he was a freshman in college and I was still in high school, my senior year. And in Pennsylvania, you had to be 21 to drink. There were only two black bars in my hometown. One was the Triple City Elks. And if you the Elks at all, that was like bucket of blood. So I knew I better not even be seen close to there. Sonny's, I figured, was safe because it was a little more acceptable. I had a coat. My date and the couple we were double dating with were drinking and teasing me. I had the car. I had to leave to go pick up my father who worked a second shift at the plant. Which means I had to be done there at 11:00 at night. I pull up, my dad comes out of the plant, he opens the door and my father rarely cursed, looked at me and said, "What the hell where you doing at Sonny's?" And I'm, "But, but," trying to get it out of my mouth, I'm saying. "You were at work." Into my mind, I'm saying, "How in the blankity blank did you know that I was at Sonny's?" Well in the passing of folks going into the plant and folks coming out of the plant, somebody grabbed Joe, my father, and said, "Your daughter was at Sonny's." So my worst memorable date was being grounded because I was at Sonny's. I couldn't explain that I didn't drink. And had all my aunts and uncles for the next week badgering me about soiling the family name because I was at Sonny's.

Quickly, my best date was my first date with my partner, who I met in 25, and it was really then that I really identified who I was. I met her at 25, we were together for almost 25 years and she died about 13 years ago, breast cancer. And so my best date was meeting her and having my first date with her where I could begin to really understand who I was and to embrace myself.

Darnell Moore: Where were you, by the way?

Margaret Woods: Where was I? I was in New Brunswick. Living in New York and a professor my senior year in college was the first African American professor of my small college. She moved to – and we became good friends because she took all of black women sort of under her wing to get us to this small college in Pennsylvania – she came to Rutgers after my senior year and taught at Douglass. And when I came to New York, we would go, we would all sort of gather at her house and she had a party. And I had met Aidel and I've been talking about her and she was about five years younger than me and I'd said to Frieda, the professor, "You know, I've met someone, but she's five years younger and I'm not really sure if I should do this." And Frieda basically said, "Get a life and bring her to the party." And so I brought her to a house party in New Brunswick.

Darnell Moore: Thanks. James.

James Credle: For me, it was what I mentioned before, and that is my trip to... I was in the military in Vietnam and I took R&R with Harold.

Darnell Moore: What's R&R?

James Credle: Rest and relaxation from the war. And we went to Tokyo, Japan, and how it happened that we got intimate was we started with a massage. I give great massages. And he gave me a great massage

and things just led to other things and it felt like being on a honeymoon the rest of the time that we were there. But of course, that was only a week. So we had to go back to the war. And I think that... when I think back on it, the idea that I didn't know if I will survive Vietnam gave inspiration for me to act. Otherwise, I don't know if I would have acted.

Darnell Moore: Thanks. Nataly.

Nataly Evans: Do you really want to know?

Darnell Moore: Yes.

Nataly Evans: The most memorable periods that I have in my life is five days after my surgery, when they removed all the tubing. I have to go and pee in the toilet and because a lot of people says, "Well, you don't know what happens after the surgery. I don't know if you have feelings. You don't know if you don't have feelings." And when I sit on the toilet and I pee for the first time, and I feel that I was fully alive, that has been the most memorable life of my life.

James Credle: I'd say it was the best.

Peter Savastano: That's a hard one to follow. I'll try.

Margaret Woods: Yeah. I'm glad it's you and not me.

Peter Savastano: Well, I guess I'll just preface this with saying at least when I was growing up, there were strange ideas about what the cure for homosexuality was going to be. So as a very young boy when I started to exhibit strange behavior, my father was convinced baseball was the cure. So I spent most of my childhood hitting balls with a bat. It did not cure me. And then, the thought was going on dates with women would be the cure. So my first worst date was with Susan who I went to high school with and it was to

go see the... it was a double date and it was to go see The Sound of Music in Montclair. First of all, to go from Newark to Montclair was like going from Newark to Paris in those days.

And I remember just feeling really weird like it was such a strange, really strange fit. And then my first date with a man... well, this was my generation of gay men. You had sex first and then you decided whether you were going to go on a date or be friends or whatever it is was. So by the time I got around to a first date, it was a guest who was coming to dinner experience for two reasons. I was bringing another man home to dinner and I was bringing a black home to dinner. In an Italian family in Newark in those days, that was not something one did. I think there was a part of me that sort of did it deliberately to provoke my family, frankly. But those are the two experiences that I remember.

Darnell Moore: Can you sort of paint a picture for us of gay life, queer life in Newark? Just give us a sense of sort of what that was like for you. I know all of you arrived at different times. Were there clubs and bars to go into? Where do people congregate? Was there a sense of community here? Entertainment? It's a broad question but gay life in Newark, what was that like? What was your sort of first encounter with that?

Peter Savastano: Yes. I mean, there were all sorts of places one could go to meet other gay people. I think of what used to be called the Fairy Loop in Branch Brook Park, where...

Margaret Woods: Used to be?

Peter Savastano: Well, it may still be that. But I remember we would all go and hang out there. There were benches we would sit on. Eventually, one day, I remember going and the benches were gone. So the

Essex County Park Commission had come and removed the benches. And then I remember there being other than Murphy's, there was a bar up on 5th Street, called The Other World, and in fact, that was the place where we had the first meeting of the first gay organization in the Essex County area called The Organization for Gay Awareness. And I'm still very fuzzy on this. I don't know how this happened, I must have been about 18 or 19 years old, but I remember being taken with some friends to somewhere in Newark at 2:00 in the morning where it appeared to be this kind of moving disco or party and it was, I remember, there was maybe three white people there, which I was one. There were loads of drag queens there, sex workers. The music was incredible. The incense was great, if you know what I mean. And I remember the next thing I knew, it was 11:00 the next morning. And it was fun.

Margaret Woods: Incense will do that for you. I'm probably going to lose my lesbian credentials. Gay life for me when I came in early '80s to Newark was really non-existent. My partner and I did, not that it wasn't here, but my partner and I did most of our partying and socializing in New York. That, I think, largely was because she was adamant that I run a social service agency working with kids and given the homophobia in the African American community, she was concerned about my reputation, about my job, and so most of what we did was in the city. I never stepped a foot in Murphy's, which I know is almost sacrilegious, but it's my reality.

So my first real introduction, I guess, to gay life was I was running Tri-City Peoples Corporation, which is still on South 19th Street and I was living in New York and it was before we moved to Newark. And there was a person who I lovingly called Dora the Dyke because she was this big, strong, strapping woman. And short, natural, very dark. And when I came in as the new director,

she decided to like me. So she took me around the neighborhood and basically said, “Don’t mess with her because if you do, you gonna have to answer to me.” Well, if you had ever met Dora, if you had any kind of sense at all, you don’t want to mess with her. So folks left me alone. So I could travel into New York City from work at 11:00 at night, standing out on South 19th Street and Springfield Av, waiting for the bus, and nobody touched me.

Dora got married, invited me to her wedding, and I said to my partner, “We’ve got to go to this wedding.” And she is saying, “You drag me from New York City to Newark and now, you expect me to go to a gay wedding.” And she finally agreed. And the wedding was at People’s Choice, which is a bar up on the top of Market Street and...

James Credle: First Choice.

Margaret Woods: First Street.

James Credle: First Choice.

Margaret Woods: First Choice, I’m sorry. It was First Choice. Yeah, thank you. First Choice. And that my first introduction to the gay life in Newark. I went to a gay wedding and Dora had a tux on and her bride had a gown on and a minister married them and then we partied at First Choice.

Darnell Moore: When was that, by the way?

Margaret Woods: That probably would have been ’82, ’83, probably.

James Credle: Yeah, ‘80s.

Margaret Woods: Yeah, it was in the ‘80s, yeah.

James Credle: Yeah. Bernie would know. '80s, right?

[BEGIN SEGMENT 4/12]

Peter Savastano: You were the flower boy.

James Credle: My introduction to Newark was really as a result of HIV/AIDS. I don't know, some people may know that I was very actively involved with the Vietnam Veterans Movement prior to getting involved with the LGBT and gay movement and at the time, I joined a group called... when I first became involved with the gay movement, I joined a group called Men... well, it was Black and White Men Together. And the reason I joined the group was because I found that when people... I was trying to get involved in New Jersey, but I found that it was mostly white male-led and their agenda didn't fit with the kind of issues... they had no concerns about the community. And since I was involved with the Vietnam Veterans Movement and was secretary for years to the National Association for Black Veterans, I spent a lot of time dealing with issues of racism.

The experience that I got from trying to join the groups in New Jersey was they simply was not interested in that. They were interested in gay rights as opposed to what I felt needed to be dealt with and that was human rights. I think that's still an issue today. It's the contradiction that goes on in our community.

In any case, I joined Black and White Men Together because they were working on racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and anti... and HIV/AIDS discrimination. So that fit well with an agenda that I felt we needed to deal with. And from 1980 to when the group started, to 1990, I will go to New York every Friday night and at the time, I had just finished my 11-year relationship

with Nick and I was seeking to do other things. So for those 10 years, I went to New York almost every Friday night and we discussed these issues in [CR] sessions and I got to meet people like Bayard Rustin and Audre Lorde and even James Baldwin. Both of whom spoke to our group for the first time.

The first time they spoke to a gay group was because of our work and because we wrote the issues that we were dealing with in our newsletter and we shared it with people like them because we wanted to invite them and wanted them to know of our work and they were our visionaries and in fact, the group and what we were about was modeled after Bridge Called My Back. And it was issues of women of color who were talking about their experiences and we modeled our work around that kind of coming together.

And in 1990, MACT was called by Pattie PenDavis, Pattie LaBelle, the House of LaBelle, because people were... members of the House Community were sick and dying and not getting information about HIV/AIDS prevention. And for me, I had been involved in a study group in New York because I was part of Men of All Colors since 1982. I had been involved in a study group around issues of behavior and what was happening in order to prevent HIV/AIDS infection. And at that point, I said it's time for me to go home.

So I worked with another person, [Barbara Ford] to write a grant to the state to do HIV/AIDS prevention and we target the House Community. And that's when I became introduced to the gay community in Newark. Although I lived in Newark and I had a partner, Nick, and we spent most of our time in New York. Occasionally I will go to bars but only when friends would come. I went to Murphy's. I did go to Murphy's. I did go to the First

Choice. And of course, one will never forget the Paradise Garage. That was the place to go. That was in New York, however.

Peter Savastano: [Crosstalk 00:04:45] There were lots of Newarkers there.

James Credle: Yeah, and very, very much the place to be. In any case, my work began in Newark at that point. And hopefully people will get a chance to see some of the work we did around that because we found an actual *Hot, Horny, Healthy, [Wet, Wild, Well]* process that we use to help people understand about HIV. Unfortunately, we were doing this work and because we were doing it with the houses, someone got word about what we were doing so they decided in the *Trentonian* that they would castigate our work. And the state comes down and right now, the state will not allow any grants that has anything about it, that has anything about Balls in it, because they were saying that we were using funds from the state to buy stiletto hills and wigs and gowns and stuff when in fact, we paid for the Balls through the funds that we got from people who came.

And I must say that the first night that we did the Ball, it was February, it was snowing and a blizzard, and I said, “Oh, child, this has been to the bad time to have a Ball.” Those who told me from the House Committee, “Don’t worry, folks will show up.” And honey, by the time 12:00 came, we had over 500 people in the house and the Balls were a hot thing for us and I hope people get a chance to see because... should I do a little thing about it now? Could I... Yes, I will.

May 5th of 2012, we will have the *Newark is Burning, Too: Walking for Tens*. So buy your tickets. Because it’s going to be hot up in Newark on Saturday, May 5th, 2012. We’re going to

have... give you a little taste of what it is like to go to a Ball, if you've never been to one.

Darnell Moore: And before we move on to Nataly, there may be some folks who I'm not familiar with Houses or Balls, can you say like a few words about what that is?

James Credle: I guess the best description that I can make of it is not necessarily an active one, but it mostly reflect what people wouldn't understand. People know about fraternities and sororities. And they know what that experience is like. It's a group of like minds and people coming together for a particular cause. Well, in the House Community, there are mothers and fathers from the various houses who actually mentors and people who look out for young people, many of whom who have been what we call runaways and throwaways and one can imagine what it's like to be in a family when you are very young, maybe even 12 or 13 years old and because you say, "I think I'm gay," your family says, "You're out of here. You're no longer a part of this family." And what happens to those kinds of youth?

So the Houses have been a place where a lot of these kids end up and they end up in places where they are mentored, they are helped and assisted to go to school, to continue their schooling, to hopefully graduate. But the Balls is a part of what I call the self-esteem building because the Balls allow you to be on stage, allow you to exhibit who you are in a very profound way that people enjoy and people appreciate and it can certainly build your ego and make you feel like you belong to something bigger than you are. And that's what all of us seek and so the Houses that have been in place for youth. And I guess, as I said, the best way to describe it it's not necessarily physically a house, although the Houses have

helped people stay in homes and have helped put food on the table for those who need it.

Darnell Moore: Thank you. Nataly.

Nataly Evans: I think that Newark is a wonderful playground. And it has been a wonderful playground for me because I am quite different and we have a diversity of people in Newark. In Puerto Rican neighborhoods, everybody is about 4'9", 5'2". But in Newark, you get 5, 5'1" and 5'2" women. So I flow very nicely. So between going to Lancer's and Fernanda's and all these other club including Murphy's, I flow like everybody else so I think the whole city of Newark is a wonderful place to be.

Darnell Moore: Thanks. I just have one more question for us as we sort of end... and then... One, reflecting on sort of your own life journeys, where you are today. What words would you leave, what words of wisdom do you have for generations to follow? And you can sort of speak whenever you feel moved to do so.

Margaret Woods: Well, I guess I'd say to young people to stand on the backs of people who came before you. I'm very clear that I stand on the back of Elton, of my cousin John, of my partner Aidel. They gave me the courage to identify who I was and be who I am. And at 64, and as I look back on my journey, I realized I had several coming outs. I came out when I first started dating Aidel and admitted that I like women. I came out, my parents died when I was 24 and 25. So I never came out to them, but I came out to my two brothers, who are eight and nine years older than I am once I had been with Aidel for a few years. And their response to me was, "What took you so long?" Of course, my responses were, "Damn." I was worried about this and they just said, "Hey."

I realized that I was embraced by my family and supported. They never named the relationship between Aidel and I, but they called her their niece and their sister. And so I'd say to young folks, it's not an issue of it gets better. It's an issue of it's okay. And embrace who you are and be who you are and if you do that, then you'll figure your way through this journey because life really is a journey with lots of ups and downs. But you find family. And it's either your biological family or it's the family you make. And I've had a combination of both.

And then lastly, because of my journey, I've realized that I'll apologize to nobody for who I am. And people will either accept me for who I am or they won't. And that's okay. Because it's their right to do that, but it's my right to be who I am and as an elder, I guess, I say to the generations that came after me, mentor young folks. Give them a touchstone. Give them a model that says you can be who you are and it's okay to be queer, whatever that means for every individual.

Darnell Moore: Thank you.

James Credle: Well, you said a lot and it's hard to add to that. A couple of things I would add. One is that have your coming out as a life-long experience in the sense that you're always going to meet someone new. You're always going to encounter something different that don't you and you have to express that whoever or whatever that might be. So in effect, you have to come out again and again and again.

The second thing is something that I mentioned before and I think it's crucial for us as a community. And that is we really need to envision, to build, to create, and then support our own institutions. If we do not have those institutions, then we will have nothing that

we can leave to our youth, to our family, to our friends, to those who come after us. That says who we are, what we did, and how it may impact you in deciding what you want to do with your life and how you want to go forward and what the challenges are that you are meeting. In other words, you have a history and if you have that history, you can add to it and change things and make new as opposed to always repeating what may not have worked. And it's important that we always constantly move forward and seek to do new work. There's a lot of old work out there but unless we understand that old work, then the new work is going to be more challenging than it need to be.

And finally, if there is something very complicated, remember that complicated things always can be reduced to simple things step by step by step. And patience is important because as you go through things step by step by step, you get to the complicated part because you have taken part. You have taken a part to things that are small and doable and that you felt you could handle.

Nataly Evans:

I believe that the most important thing that I can pass to others is you have to be honest to yourself. You must know who you are before you move on into anything you do. And don't take no shortcuts. Because shortcuts do not exist. Don't believe that having a vagina or a nice or good boots is going to make you the person that you are because they may look good, that's not who you are. So therefore, you have to be able to build yourself with responsibility and with rights because that is what you're going to take upon as you go on in life. And it's never going to end. To today, as for me, being here today, it had been a step forward in my life and I appreciate everybody for inviting me because for the many of you who knows me for many years, probably you've never ever saw that Nataly would be sitting where she is today. So

I appreciate the fact that I have come to the institution and I have never been far away from here but I have always been scared of it because the person who Nataly is. But to end my piece, be good to yourself. Be responsible. And make sure that you exercise your rights all the time. Because if you don't, somebody will eat you out and you are too precious to let somebody else to eat you out.

Peter Savastano:

I guess I would say given where I come from, the kinds of odds that I faced to get from there to where I am at now, is nothing short of a miracle. So miracles are possible. I know that at some point in my life, I had to make a decision and that decision was that there was a truth that lived inside of me about myself, that no opposition could deny, no opposition could smother or destroy, and I was going to live out that truth, even though I didn't always understand fully and completely what it was and I think that it can continue to reveal itself to me in ways that I never anticipated. When I think that I come from incredible poverty, incredible violence, abuse, and neglect, and that I am the only person in my entire family to have a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree, a PhD, how that happened, I do not know except that this force that I describe as a spiritual force inside of me propelled me and compelled me to do that. That's the first.

The second is, I do not believe that any of those things would have happened in the way that they did if I had not lived all of my life in this city. I encountered people. I encountered circumstances. I encountered knowledge, love, compassion, support in a place that in retrospect seems incredibly small to me now as opposed to I remember as a little kid walking around this city and thinking it was the biggest city in the world. And when I wander around it now, I see it's really a very small place in many ways geographically speaking. It has none of the magnitude, at least

geographically, that I thought it did then, but it has as much magnitude. It has as much sophistication as New York City, as San Francisco, as Los Angeles, as all these different places that I used to fantasize about as a young man that I wanted to be as opposed to where I was.

When I look out and see the faces in this room of people that I have grown up with, people that I have collaborated with on many social change issues, not only the sexuality issue, the race issue. It's just an incredible, incredible, wonderful, wonderful gift. And I think if nothing else, we should all remember, I would say that wherever you are, is the best opportunity you can have to become who you really are or who you want to be or to discover the mystery of what that is.

Darnell Moore: Thank you. I see why all of those forces were trying to keep me from this panel. And for being here, my heart is touched and I'm certain that everyone in the audiences, can we please give them a round of applause.

[BEGIN SEGMENT 5/12]

Peggie Miller: Good morning, good morning. Let's give a great round of applause for such a beautiful, beautiful day. Amen. My name is Peggie Miller, as we stated. I am CEO of PMPEnterprise and under that, back in 2000, I just felt that being an aggressive woman, I felt like I was in the background. I'm like, "You know, I wanna be seen, too, like the femme girls." I always said, "You know, I wanna show off my wares and my style because I thought, I said, "There is nothing more beautiful than an aggressive woman in a suit." With some funky shoes.

So that started and I teamed up with sister from another mother here, and with her fashion and style, then we brought on a new millennium butch fashion show, which now have... we gave shows all around Newark. It was well-received. They came from all over for our first show and I was so elated because it was a sold-out show that we had to turn people away. They were just so excited to see aggressive women in their style and it was just fantastic. With that, we have been moving forward and doing a lot of things for the aggressive women, not only showing exactly our style and what we have, but we are trying to move to other levels. We came out with a magazine right now that we are doing, NMB magazine which we have.

And also we have coming forth, we're getting ready for our second table book. What you're going to see later once we get finished here. So I'm going to let my partner speak. You're going to see some footage of what was captured from my great New Millennium Butch models. They are wonderful and I just wanted that to be captured in a book, a table book that will be there always be there, something that will be always be seen.

And so that's currently what we are doing now, moving forward in 2012. We are working on a documentary to document everything that we have done from 2000 and moving forward. Just to hold this footage because to me it is important. This is who I am. I stand in my truth. I am an aggressive woman and no longer do I want to be in the background. I want to be seen, respected, and loved for who I am.

And also, I want to just give one prop before I turn it over to a great partner, Miche Braden, who is currently doing an off-Broadway production of The Devil's Music. Please stand up,

Miche. She has been with me through this at St. Luke's Theater in New York. So if you have some time, check it out and Jae, take it away.

Jae Quinlan: I just want to add that NMB or *New Millennium Butch* as the brand so when you hear NMB, that's what we're referring to, is more than just a look good, feel better type of thing. What we have created is a space for masculine-identified lesbians. Not only to be recognized, but to uplift, support, and mentor not only one another, but the upcoming generations. So as we move forward, it is our intention to work in the community as mentors for those coming underneath to create an environment of information and education and support. Not just for the MILs, but for everyone.

I think that there is a need in the community for some "edumacation," if you will, on who we are and who we are not. So having said that, the images that you will see mostly are of our African American sisters that are part of our troop. I want to say in this forum that we are looking for more people to represent the community in a diversity of ethnicities. So I am the person that you need to see. If you feel like you can strut your stuff, want to strut your stuff, want to reintroduce to doing something new. Please see me afterwards. Roll that beautiful beam footage because we are beautiful.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Good morning. My name is Tim Stewart-Winter and I teach History and LGBT Studies here at Rutgers-Newark. I want to give a quick shout out to my students in Introduction to LGBT Studies, many of whom are here. And without further ado, let's get started.

So this is the panel on the middle generation. We...

Female Speaker: I'll be in the middle, thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: We have June, Jae, Bernie – Bernard, and Kitab. So maybe we could start off by having you each talk a little bit about your childhood and teenage years and what those were like for you. And how you first came to Newark, if you came from somewhere else. Let's start here.

Kitab Rollins: Well, I'm a virtual life-long Newark resident. I was born and raised here, the West Ward. So I grew up with my mother, my father, my two siblings. My grandmother lived upstairs and my grandfather did as well. My aunt lived down the street. So my family, my close family was really... we were all really close in proximity and kind of growing up.

So I grew up. I pretty much... my family knew that I was going to be gay while I was really young because I would run around with a towel on my head or put my pajama bottoms as my hair and the tops as my little skirt. That kind of stuff. I'll play with my mom's... her clothes and her heels and all that. But I was a playful kid. I was a precocious kid. I was a colorful character, as I still am. But I had a really fun upbringing, I might say. My parents were around. Travelled around. Well, we were always out and about. We did a lot of family activities.

But from a young age, I was always exposed to openly gay people. My aunt always kind of had a gaggle of gays around her. She was a self-proclaimed hag. So I always knew... I always had a real life view of what gay people look like, how they acted, who they were and it wasn't... it was never a foreign concept. It was never like bad. It was never... you shouldn't be like that. They were always fun, cool people to be around. And I always kind of a admired them,

And so although I had these feminine tendencies as a child, although it was cool to know them, be around them, it wasn't necessarily be cool to be gay. So that's not how I identified. I didn't feel that I was gay really. I just had this ways about me. I wasn't necessarily checking the boys at a young age either. I just had this kind of girly ways.

So my childhood, elementary and teenage years were regular. I can't say that I grew up getting teased or bullied or anything. And even though there was always a kind of buzz going up in school if I was gay or not, it didn't detract from being popular or having friends or anything like that. I had a very positive experience growing up. And so childhood and teenage years were formative. They were good, I might say.

June Dowell-Burton: Well, I was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, so like Marge, I'm from the Midwest. Came to Newark first go round in 1993. Second go round in 2003. So I roll the clock back my childhood. Born and raised in St. Louis, as I said. Product of Catholic school upbringing, from K all the way to 12. Similar to Marge, I went to an all-girl school from 9th grade all the way to 12 grade and I just wish I knew then what I know now. I was in heaven, too, just didn't know it.

So I'm also a second generation lesbian. I feel there is not enough conversation around second generation, gay people in general. But my upbringing was sort of okay. I was really confused as to why after my mom was divorced, there was maybe one or two roommates that kind of hung around just a little too long. And so it's like U-Haul syndrome. They'd come. The kids would come. And we were together for 10 years. So my mom and her partner and my mom who was not out. Yes. So like they were there for

10 years. So for 10 years, I had to explain to people like, where's your dad? Who are these other kids? Who are they to you? So it was a little confusing.

And it wasn't until after I came into my own sexual identity in my late to mid-20's, after being married to a man, having a child, that I began to question. Now, I'm looking at my life and comparing it to how I grew up. Unfortunately, my mother didn't have the answers because she was from an older generation where being gay was not discussed. It was something you just did. You were that way. You had cousin Johnny who wore his pink tennis shoes and that was his way of identifying as noted in the earlier panel.

So pretty much, she was not comfortable with me coming out, so to speak. I was very girly. We had the Peter Pan collars, uniform, blue and white kind of sort of what I'm dressed in today minus the shirt. But it was a horrifying experience for me. Because I felt alone. I felt that because I married this man, had a child, that somehow, somewhere, I was making a mistake. And sacrifices were made in that choice to be out. That choice to be who I am today. First experience of gay bashing actually came from my mother. Driving my car and when I came out, I mean I came out. I mean it was... I had shoulder-length hair that was gone. I got a hat that said dyke bitch on the front of it. I had rainbow stickers on everything I could possibly own and this is at 27 years of age.

So my mother who's very conservative, very just like you act but you don't let anybody know. You have your girlfriend, but she's on the side somewhere minding her business. No PDA, no nothing. Yeah, it wasn't a pleasant experience. And then I had to deal with the whole heterosexism portion of it because I had been... got divorced, and had to deal with the judicial system and

taking away my child because I got married in the State of Florida... taking away my child because of being a lesbian. And it is on the Divorce Decree.

And that's how I came to Newark. So basically married in Florida. My mom saw me raising this two-year-old child by myself as my husband went out to sea. And I was here. And I met some really great people. The first go round in 1993, my sister who models, we auditioned for MTV The Grind. I actually ended up getting picked and she did not. It was actually her audition. And that's how I kind of came in to Newark. I met this wonderful person, Anthony Wiggins, who if anybody goes to the party at the Coffee Cave later you'll meet him. And he kind of introduced me to all of the Newark places to be. Zanzibar, which was... that's where all the gay kids hung out and partied. That's how I got here.

Jae Quinlan:

Well, I think I had an exceptional childhood. I think I was very fortunate to have both of my parents in a time where most of my friends in school either came from single-parent homes or they were being raised by their grandparents. I had my parents and I had both, full sets of my grandparents. So it was like love on top of love on top of love.

Very early on, I realized that there was something – I'm going to say exceptional, okay – about me. Because my parents were in this order... my father was a police officer. My mother was a social worker. So my brother and I would get teased all of the time and they would call him piglet. It was difficult. But I was the boy. I did not see a place for myself early on in girly things. I had an Afro, I had a big, old curly Afro. I mixed and matched my clothing. Would wear... remember the shirts you used to have like the sparkled images on them, like bicycles, motorcycles, the girl

with the big Afro and stuff like that. We are those with the popcorn pants and my tennis shoes would be Converse with different colors and I would draw on them.

And I found that it was difficult to interact with the girls. As a matter of fact, I remember specifically a party when I must have been about eight years old. And I went to parochial school so I was at Lutheran School from kindergarten to sixth grade when I got kicked out, but that's another story. Being at this party, at a black association meeting, one of the young people had a birthday party. And I was dancing and my father was like hovering in the background. He walks over, I'm dancing with a guy and I'm leading. And he walks over, whispers in my ear, "Nini, the boy is supposed to lead."

And I stopped, pushed the boy back and I said, "Not when he steps on my shoes." That is more like... and then I pulled him back and continued to lead him in the dance. So I sort of kind of like have been developing that persona since then. I think that I definitely, after being taunted and teased about not being able to fit into the girly girl aesthetic, as we were growing up, I found more and more solace doing things with the boys. I was molested and in turn, just sort of like internalized that into manifesting my artist persona. I became withdrawn, like around 11 or 12, and I remember specifically destroying a piece of furniture that my mother bought for me that I begged for, which was a desk. And it was plain, unfinished, just regular wood and I did a very detailed pencil drawing of Bugs Bunny and Friends playing on the crabapple tree that was outside of my window. And that became my escape and it also sort of grew me up and protected me for a long period of time.

Once I left parochial school because I was a nerd, it was very difficult for me in public school because I was in classes that were advanced. And all of my friends, as much as I wanted to fit in with my black friends, but I could not because they perceived me as other than because I was in special classes with all of the white kids. So it was difficult for me to fit in. Until I had a fight. And that's what leveled the playing field. Seriously, which is just insane.

So yeah. My parents then – I think it's very important to say – that before my 16th birthday, my father left the Police Department and became a pastor. And shortly thereafter, my mother also was ordained. I remember at that time that I had begun to go out into the world. And like the Village was heaven at that time. And I, too, frequented the Paradise Garage, Better Days, Pandora's Box, the Duchess. Yeah. All of those places. Right. Sanctuary.

And all I remember hearing in school was stories of people being bashed. This was before I started going to the clubs. And I would start to go to the clubs and I'd start to see these people that were talking about gay bashing and I'm like, "What was that?" Like we had to justify being there. Which was a deranged message, right? Because nobody asked. Like wherever you're hanging out.

So my parents became pastors. And I then also began to run into the same people that I served with in church in the clubs and that's when I started to have a problem. Or that's when they started to have a problem, let's say that. And my messages began to get very skewed. Up until that time, I had been very entrenched in church. That's how you get your allowance, because you go to Sunday school and you stay for church. And it was a part of my life. I'm going to leave that right there because... yeah.

Bernard McAllister: I'm Bernard McAllister. Most people know me as Bernie Jordan Ebony. I was born and raised in Newark. My childhood, my early years, if I could just give you an example, would be Good Times mixed with the Brady Bunch. Because it was the best childhood one could ever ask for in the City of Newark. I was raised by my mother, me and my sister, but we had a very eclectic family. Everybody was doing something. We had hit men in the family. We had pimps in the family. But it was a wonderful atmosphere of... I know it sounds strange, but it was a wonderful time.

And I remember my mother leaving us with an uncle. And he was telling us how to make money and I remember, I was like, "Oh, so that's how you do it." And I remember my stepdad coming home from being incarcerated for so many years and he just loving me and looking at me like I was different from the rest of the kids. Like you don't have to play baseball if you don't want to. And I remember that and it was just a beautiful... and I was raised in Ironbound section. At the time, it was going from Italian to Portuguese to Brazilian, wave hadn't yet, but it was so many different ethnic groups down there and it was such a beautiful place to live at the time.

And I remember us not locking our door, but it was just a great time for me. And I had my cousin, Cornell. And I need to say that he was the most influential person in my life. He was a bartender at Murphy's. And I remember being 13 years old and he told the whole family that he was a bartender somewhere else. And one day, I followed him, and I had to report back to the family. And I told them like, "You know, Cornell is at this place around the corner and you should see it, what's going on." And of course... and I was there yelling. Because I was always a very grown young man. I was never... like people about 10, I hang with 20-year-

olds. I always want to see what the world was like. My mother had raised us to always ask questions, to be strong. I come from a family of fighters. Be it physical, mental, spiritual. We didn't take no easily. And we weren't bullied. So when I remember – I'm going to skip around a little bit – I remember being a teenager and my sister and Cornell getting me drunk, and saying, "Go on in, tell your mother you're gay." And I'm going to tell you something. And this rings in my ear every now and then. I remember telling my mother, she was cooking chicken, picture this, Newark nineteen-something. I can't remember when exactly, but it was early '80s and she says, "Well, what d'ya wanna talk to me about?" And she was cooking chicken thighs, which I can't stand."

June Dowell-Burton: You don't like thighs?

Bernard McAllister: No, I can't stand dark meat, as far as cooking, eating. And she was cooking and she said, "What's wrong?" I said, "Ma, I think I'm gay." And she never turned around, she never skipped a beat, turning the chicken, and I think what she said, "Well, you don't wanna be gay, Bernie." I said, "Why is that, Ma?" She said, "Because, you know, gay men are never happy." And it resonated with me for many, many years. And I didn't quite understand what she meant. I said, "Well, I think I'm gay." She said, "Well, no, maybe you're just going through something." Like...

June Dowell-Burton: A phase.

Bernard McAllister: Cornell is... they thought he was going through something, too. And they laughed outside the door. And I said, "Why would say they're never happy?" She said, "Bernie, I'm sorry. They're never happy." And that resonated with me for many, many years. And for many years, I wanted to prove her wrong and seek out being

happy, not knowing that the happiness was already there. I just didn't know it because she had already told me and she only went by what she saw in the family members of mine. See, we weren't the type of family to get bashed. We whooped people's asses. We come up from a family of fighters and that's what we did as groups. Mother takes off the wig... So I never really had those issues where being bashed or being called anything out my name or maybe feeling less than in the family because my family was always there with me. We may fight in the house, but outside, this is my cousin. And we had a very large extended family. So when my mother raised me, she was raising eight other cousins like that. So when we ate, everyone eats. When somebody got new sneakers, everyone got new sneakers. And I—

[BEGIN SEGMENT 6/12]

Bernard McAllister: I carry that with me to this day. And I'm sure that I can go on with that in the next question or something. But that's what my teenage years are. I always and I'm thinking of the Ironbound section being like Mayberry. Just very all concrete. And I had a wonderful childhood that I wouldn't change it for anything in the world.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I want to ask. It sounds like you've had a range of experiences in school and I'm curious what were your sort of survival strategies? When you felt different from the norm, what were ways that you managed to kind of... or did you not need survival strategies specifically as a queer person?

June Dowell-Burton: I'll go. I think when I came out I think my best survival strategy was in a bottle. And it weren't water. I mean I think just to kind of numb what was going on. I spent a lot of time in the clubs because that was the only place I could truly be myself. So a lot of

time, getting messed up. A lot of incense and other things, at first. But then when you come to your senses and you realize that nothing is going away because you're self-medicating. A good therapist would say that.. Good friends, ones that you can trust and be true and who'll be true to you. Ones that will like not always agree with you and say, "June, that was kind of F'd up, you know..." Good house music, some good Gospel music. A pen and a piece of paper. Getting pissed at the world and doing something about it. Because my life is one big book of LGBT social injustices. I mean we can start with the gay bashing from a mother who's also gay. No information. We could talk about the court systems. No LGBT rights for women who come out later in life, losing their children. We can talk about the Sakia Gunn issue. We can talk about what happened in the park. We can talk about unsafe spaces in schools.

So I think my last survival strategy was just to do something and just get pissed and do something. That's it.

Jae Quinlan:

I don't think there's ever a time when we're not working in some mode of survival. Even if we deem that survival trivial and for me, that's why I tend to like want to live. Initially as a child, I would say that it was like escapism. I wanted to remove myself. After being molested several times, I had to find safe places to live. So it wasn't even about being queer. It was about just being safe. And as a queer person of color, the queerness is like tertiary. Or it might even be farther back than that.

I mentioned that I grew up primarily in parochial schools as elementary school, but the other schools that I would attend, high school and on to my first year college, predominantly white. And there I found myself working very hard to survive amongst my

own people, fitting in to black culture, and junior high school after being in parochial school predominantly white, religious thing, very difficult.

Faith and what I did not mention initially was that I didn't grow up here. I'm born and raised New Yorker. I came... faith brought me here. God brought me to Newark 17 years ago and saved my life. So even after being separated from what I believed in, finding that there was no support, letting go of God for a number of years and then being reintroduced to a loving, accepting God is a [thrival] mechanism for me in present day.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Just so folks know, you're a minister at Liberation and Truth Unity Fellowship.

Jae Quinlan: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Church. Do you want to say... We can come back to that.

June Dowell-Burton: Okay, good.

Bernard McAllister: Well, survival for me, I need to say that drugs is very prevalent in the neighborhood. I came from a family, the immediate family that didn't do any drugs. But I remember being like 12 years old and something waking me up out my sleep. And it was the streets. I came from not a conservative family but a very structured family in the sense, on my mother side that you worked hard, you did what you're supposed to do, pay your bills, and that's your life.

But again, my dad's side was the pimps, the drug dealers, and all those things and I remember being a little boy being excited. Being excited at the idea of going into the streets to seeing the world for what it was. And I remember like being 12 years old and somebody introduced me and say, "Hey, you wanna try this?"

And I need to say I'm not sure but with me being gay, but I was skinny. I had big eyes, a big head. And my waistline was like 21 and I want to fit in. I wasn't muscular enough. I wasn't light skinned enough. I wasn't smart enough. I wasn't athletic enough. It was always a lot of "not enough."

Once I took the pull on the marijuana, I became more than enough. And I was the one who would jump off the plane first without a parachute. I was the first one at the club. I was the first one to dress differently. I was the first one... if somebody said something to me, I jumped up... mind you, all of this is working out of fear, of wanting to belong, to be a part of. But not knowing it at the time because again, I'm like 15 years old. The people I'm hanging with are like 30. I remember hanging with my friend's mother and he said, "Are you going to hang with Malik?" I was like, "Hell, no girl. I'm going to hang with Malik's mother." And the kids will be outside playing and I'll be inside drinking beer with his mother. And my mother said, "Well, who?" I said, "Yeah, me and Malik are very good friends, Ma." She said, "Well, he just act like he walked past you, you didn't speak." I said, "Oh, we spoke earlier." Not knowing that I'm really friends with the parents. Because I always want, don't ask me why, I wanted to be grown. And he called me. And I remember going to the village for the first time. I was about 16, 15 and Cornell was named – again, Cornell was very prevalent in my life – you'll hear his name all throughout my life. He passed away maybe 12, 14 years ago.

Tim Stewart-Winter That's your uncle?

Bernard McAllister: That's my cousin. He's my god brother. My mother's sister's son. He was my world because he represented gay to me. And he looked just like Sylvester and I just thought he was everything. So

he said, "I'm gonna take you somewhere. Just don't tell them where we're going." Because I talked a lot. I was like 14 or 15 and we go to the village and he was Miss Gay Pride '81 or something like that, '82, who knew. And it was at Peter Rabbit's. I don't know if anybody can remember. Peter, you remember. And he said, when you go to the bar, this is what you do. Don't ever turn your back. He gave me the instructions on what to do. Somebody offers you a drink, you shake your head like this and all that. And we were leaving because he had to get his gown and stuff ready. So we're walking and I see these two men kiss. And I knew I was home.

That was all I needed. And I mean it wasn't like nothing salacious. These men were in love. Well, I was 14. Shit, they were in love to me. And they kissed and I remembered going up to them doing like this, like watching them. I'm like, "Oh my God." And that was it for me. Addiction, I was afraid was very prevalent thing in my life throughout all my years, especially in my gay years because I started using drugs at such an early age and I stopped at such an early age. I have 21 years clean. So remember half my life, most of my life, well, half of my life, I've been clean. Again, it's always been having to stand up for something. And survival mode for me is standing up for people who can't stand up for themselves. And that's where the House became prevalent for me. Because I got involved in the ballroom scene at a very early age. And I remember them telling us that New Jersey kids couldn't come to New York and walk balls. I remember them telling us, "Well, if you are going to walk balls, you have to write checks. You have to break the law and after, well, we're not gonna do those things."

We were sitting in my house and we would just bring people together and I was always just hear people stories about kids saying their parents put them out and they're prostitutes and you now me... You're 14 and you're a prostitute? Why? Because I didn't have that experience because remember my family, my extended family was very close to me. So my survival mode was not necessarily from me, it was from my community. At an early age, I had something in me that told that is not about me, it's about my community. And that they have to be helped and protected as much as I need to be protected. And I wore that badge for many, many years and that's what my survival mode has been not for me, but for others.

Kitab Rollins:

I think for me, survival mode in my teenage years, early college years, late high school, early college, just generally was just... I just want to fit in. I mean, I always stood out to some degree a little bit. I'm from Newark and so I had the street styles into like wearing Timbs and baggy pants and just the style as I've already dressed. But I'll put a little spin on it so it was cool to be different to an extent. And so I was different to an extent. My clothes that was cool to be a little out there. But again, like sexual... in terms of sexuality, I didn't identify as gay until I was in college anyway. And so high school, I just... no, I just downplayed stuff. People came at me like, "Are you gay?" "No." And it was... that was my truth. And so I just wanted to fit in. And so if there were behaviors that I was doing that people would talk about, I would just downplay them. I would shy away from stuff. I would shy away from talking about certain activities like the arts, dance, ballet, that kind of stuff that I will watch on PBS, but I wouldn't say that I watched them on PB... I wouldn't talk about that I like that stuff. Because it wasn't cool and I want to be cool and I want to be popular. And I was and want to stay that way.

That was pretty much high school. College, when I started coming in to my sexuality, realizing that I did like men and embracing that, still even though my immediate friends kind of knew that I was gay, I came out to them like sophomore year, something like that. But it was just publicly, I just wouldn't talk about it or, "Have you had a girlfriend?" "No." Even though I was dating a guy or something. I will just not talk about that. I will just leave that part out. And just kind of had this outward appearance of everything is cool. I'm cool. I'm popular. Everything is good. I'm Kitab. That was really that. That was really it for me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Thank you all. I want to ask now about some places. And some of you've mentioned Murphy's, Zanzibar, and thinking about my students, for example, who... can you paint a picture of what places in Newark you went to meet people and what was it like to be there?

Kitab Rollins: I missed all that. I missed the Zanzibar. I'm on the younger side of the spectrum here. I'm only 31. By the time I got to be like 17 and I wanted to go out and stuff, Zanzibar was closed. All the club downtown were closed. All the ones that we hear about... that are lauded, I didn't get to experience. I didn't go The Garage. I missed all that. Unfortunately, [crosstalk 00:15:19] that's why I'm so fascinated by it. And plus it wasn't cool to hang out in Newark when I was in high school. We hang out in New York. That was what the cool kids did. We went to the city. I never wanted to, but actually when I was old enough to go out, Murphy's had closed.

So even when I came into... I was probably like 21 when I was out and when I was cool and gay, there were no places to come to in Newark at that time in 2001. There wasn't anything that was gay focused. So we just went to the city and hung out in the Village

and did that kind of stuff. And went to other clubs in New York. The occasional couple of clubs in Jersey, but again, it was never cool to hang out in Jersey or Newark. So it was about going into New York. And it's only been, for me, the past five years that I've taken to hanging out in Newark, in Jersey, and identifying the gay scene or the different spots that we go to, which aren't necessarily all the time gay, but they might have a gay night. Guitar Bar, Nick's, I forget, but again, when I was really coming into it, there weren't any places here, like it is now.

Jae Quinlan:

So when I was arriving here in Newark... like I said, I arrived to Newark by way of church. Thank you, Bishop. I heard that there was this place that was loving and affirming and accepting and you should go there because I was at my wit's end and I literally wanted to take my life because I had been searching, searching, searching for sanctuary, for an answer, for a place to fit in and to feel good about Jae, gay, God. My mother, ironically, is actually the reason I like that I got here. So upon arriving here, I went to church and I sat right behind the choir. And the choir was slammin' and so I started singing and the person that directed the choir was one of the most current hot deep house, probably we will have to interview her for being the first out lesbian of the deep house culture from Newark and that was Jazmina or Leslie Oliver. Yeah, say that. Let the rain come down.

We started hanging out and everything, like you got to go to Murphy's. You got to go to Murphy's. So Murphy's was the spot. And it was like church, Murphy's... seriously. Tee dance. We live in church, counted down, we're in Murphy's. Is that like... is that sacrilegious. Or...

June Dowell-Burton: Explain about the Tee dance.

Jae Quinlan: Okay, Tee dance, Sunday early afternoon hang out. When you go out on Friday and Saturday, you have to wait technically at least until 12:00 to go out. No, at least. On Sunday, Tee dance starts at what? 4:30, 5:00? 4:00? Okay, thank you. Clarity. We'd get there around 5:00.

Tim Stewart-Winter At Murphy's.

Jae Quinlan: At Murphy's, yes. And Murphy's was this eclectic, open, sometimes affirming I'm saying because we had a difficult time getting in the door to girls. Yeah. It seemed to be that the... At Murphy's, yes. It seemed to be the more masculine you were, the more difficult a time you had at the door. Okay. Add to that mixture the fact that we were coming from church into this situation and somehow we got dubbed, myself, Jazmina, and another friend of ours, the Holy Trinity. It was difficult. People wouldn't talk to us. So we would end up dancing with each other and buying each other drinks when we... there was no way to hit on somebody and effectively have anything come out of it because we were the Holy Ones.

But Murphy's was definitely that place and it opened up a lot of things for me. I met one of my best friends there. And it was like exercise. Sometimes in futility. But that was the spot. So Murphy's would be the spot for me, yeah.

Bernard McAllister: I'm kind of torn because I'm kind of in the middle and I say this because like my age, I'm 44, I came out at such a young age. I was so blessed to have been able to have a touch of everything. I remember Better Days. I remember The Garage. I remember Tracks. I remember Murphy's. I remember The Doll House. I don't know if anybody can remember The Doll House. I was like

13 in The Doll House, hang with full-fledged drags and I was just there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What was The Doll House like?

Bernard McAllister: The Doll House, this is crazy.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where was it?

Bernard McAllister: The Doll House was on corner of Halsey and Branford, in that area. And this was where all the fem queens went. And they would just come there in the club and the club would start like 2:00 in the morning. They didn't sell any alcohol because everybody was stoned by the time you got there. It was just a beautiful black and Latin women, transgender, and they will come in and I will be like in awe because I never had a problem asking people questions and that would be like... Wow. Do you know and everything and I remember that, really. And I remember like Newark was never a place where they had clubs endlessly. It was always dedicated places. There was Murphy's. There was First Choice. But I remember Murphy's would bring a sense of... I don't know... of one coming to oneself when you can go to The Barn or a drink at Murphy's.

Jae Quinlan: That's right, honey.

Bernard McAllister: Because at the time, people were coming out at such an early age. And I think that trend is happening again. People coming out at such an early age, 14 and 15, they could only sit outside and watch the grown folks go in Murphy's. And I was like, "Wow, they got in." And my cousin was the bartender. He would send me home and call my mother, say, "Well, get your son because he's got his gay ass in front of the bar." Couldn't get in. But that was the thing. And Newark was always a dangerous place. Newark has

never been a place where you could just go and just say, “Well, I’m just gonna walk down this dark street and I’m gonna get to the other end of that block safely.”

Jae Quinlan: Without incident.

Bernard McAllister: Without incident. No, Newark has always been a place that one always had to be very sharp and on your toes. You had to be on top of your game if you’re in Newark. And we stuck together then. It would be like... if somebody went to the store or Murphy’s is down the street on Edison. See, I’m old now. Because I can see that in New Jersey Prudential place and that tears me apart. But we would all go around the corner together because we knew like I don’t know, like elks we knew if we went around there by ourselves, the wolves will get us.

So we traveled together in packs. And we’ve formed bonds till this day that I’m still friends with some of these people. And I need to say, you know, the epidemic of AIDS, I lost over 400 friends. Yeah, 400 because remember, I came in the middle of the epidemic. I was there beginning but I wasn’t part of it. But I was there for the beginning and towards like when it was really, really bad. When it was like seven or eight funerals a day. And, do you remember because that’s how I met you. Coming out and reaching out to the Ball community and I remember us like saying, “Oh my God. Are we gonna get to this?” And we would go from Murphy’s, stay at the First Choice, but the best time I ever had at the club, I was at Better Days and they had the big teletron. I guess that’s what you called it then, teletron screen. And they were playing *Love Is The Message*. And the screen comes down and they just start showing West Side Story and they’re dancing but it

seemed like they're dancing to *Love Is The Message* and I'm stoned.

So oh, it was over It was fabulous.

Kitab Rollins: Where was Better Days? Where was that at?

Bernard McAllister: Better Days was on the 48th.

Kitab Rollins: Oh it was in the city?

Jae Quinlan: Behind IHOP. No, I mean Howard Johnson.

Bernard McAllister: Yes, oh my God. And that still rings in my brain about this and the coming down of teletron and... Natalie Wood flying across the screen to *Love Is The Message*. And now, that's what I consider the pinnacle of my gay clubbing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Can I ask a follow-up? And then we'll get back to June. How about the balls? Where did...?

Bernard McAllister: The balls? Well, see, at the time when the ball first started – well, not when it first started because they'd been around since the '60s. But when I came into the ballroom scene, you'll see everybody was on 125th at the Elk's Lodge. But when they came to Jersey, thanks to [Angel Claudio], Hakeem Jordan, the founder of the House of Jordan, we were able to have very nice places. We were never like New York with the underground and rats looking like horses. We would... yeah, with Jim. We were at the Robber Tree, Symphony Hall because the one thing about Jersey is that we will always try to be a class act. We always want to make it nice for everybody. We probably fought at the end and had spot cards there. We had nice, nice places. And one of my old house members is here. We would have it and we would... because if you have... I need to say this about the ballroom scene.

People don't realize that the ballroom scene was put together out of devastation because you had nowhere else place to go. But in our minds, in the early '80s, you wanted to be white women. And see, we laughed at that. But there is some truth today about the identity of black gay men because what we thought of as beautiful, we took from what the media gave us and what society told us was beautiful. So when you had balls, you wanted to be as class act as possible and I think Peter, we will discuss that. You want to come in as Erica Kane. You want to be Joan Collins. These were the things in our heads. We knew that we were going back to the projects. You understand what I'm saying? But for those hours at the balls, you want to be something other than yourself and we fought for those plastic trophies like we were on Channel 7 at the Miss America pageant and you couldn't tell us anything. So the balls here in Newark were always at fabulous places. We may have even rented this place before. So you know, definitely we would do, we would have it anywhere, anywhere that was classy.

June Dowell-Burton: Wow. You always give me so much. Well, my experience with the party scene, so to speak, kind of came through the adult entertainment—

[BEGIN SEGMENT 7/12]

June Dowell-Burton: ... entertainment industry. My first girlfriend, I happened to meet her at Zanzibar. I'll never forget that music was playing, *Was That All It Was* by Miss Carne. I'll never forget her Coca-Cola shape body dancing with herself in the mirror.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where was Zanzibar?

June Dowell-Burton: Zanzibar, actually was at the end of Broad Street right where the Broad Street train station is. Now, the home of the Bear Stadium.

So Zanzibar was one outlet, but... so back then, there were lesbian parties being thrown by Margarita, Tangee and Di, First Choice. They had like a lesbian night. So my first girlfriend, her mentality was, which she passed on to me, she was like, "Why pay to get in when you can get paid to be in."

Kitab Rollins: What year we in?

June Dowell-Burton: We're 1993, '94. So I frequented all of those bars not as a patron but as the entertainment. So I had the privilege of meeting everyone in all aspects of life. Made a nice sum of money off the books. And I can't complain about that experience and all. So then we talked about the objectification of women and how does that fit when there are women looking at women. Once again, there was no place for us to go. He mentioned Doll House, we're talking about something totally different because I'm thinking Doll House is on the corner of Lyons Avenue and... that's the connect... when you said Doll House, I'm like hmm.

And even within the Go-Go bars where I later ended up working to support myself after my divorce, that's kind of where sexuality was very fluid. That's where it's okay to complement, touch, feel, be who you are because really that's the environment where that's taking place anyway. So AIDS epidemic, very prevalent because I worked with a lot of substance users, some of which who did not make it because they actually contracted the virus through sharing needles. So it was kind of like a microcosm of what was going on in greater Newark at that time. Murphy's, classic memories, one thing I do remember about Murphy's is they just made a hell of a drink. As I said, my medication was in the bottles. I went to Murphy's quite a bit to numb the pain because I actually lived with my mom at the time in Piscataway.

So I was making that long trek from Piscataway all the way to Murphy's just to get my party on. And I think I went on a Thursday night. Yeah, it was Thursday night for me. So Long Island ice teas and just twirling to house music. And that was really like actually when I fell in love with house music, too. I can't even tell you like how many nights. That was just the food for the soul for me. But yeah, my experience with the party scene was just very, very different, coming to the adult entertainment industry where sort of promiscuous sexuality was accepted and not really shunned.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Several of you have mentioned faith and the role of faith at various points in your life and I'm wondering if in your younger life and don't feel like you have to talk about it, but I'm curious to hear how some of you or all of you or none of you have reconciled your spiritual or religious life with everything that you are including your LGBTQ identity.

Kitab Rollins: Well, I can say that I didn't grow up with a strong... my family wasn't entrenched in the church. My grandmother will go... she was in the Flower Club and all that and she will go and talk about it but it wasn't like... that's her thing.

Jae Quinlan: I don't think. Is that like the usher board or something?.

Kitab Rollins: It wasn't like you had to go to church or else you can't go out that day. I didn't have that kind of family and so I didn't have that kind of spiritual guilt kind of riding me growing up when my sexuality became an issue. Of course, I still was raised with some kind of Christian values. Actually, I was raised with Christian values to some degree, but again, it wasn't strict kind of values. Spiritually, I can't say that my spiritual leanings gave me conflict with my sexuality a whole lot. And then especially when I came into my

sexuality and owned it and embraced it, I really had challenges, I guess, engaging in those kind of religious practices because I didn't make sense to go to a place where the minister is saying that I'm wrong. Like I didn't feel that I was wrong. After I again came out and embraced my sexuality and like owned it, I didn't feel wrong. I didn't feel like it was an abomination or anything.

I'm a reflection of God and this is how God made me or allowed me to be. And so it doesn't make sense to go to a place and it's been for me the Christian church... that's my exposure, it's Christianity... so it didn't make sense that I'm going to go and take up a paradigm that says that I'm a born sinner and I'm wrong. So I just never... I didn't embrace it and so I kind of turned to the more... kind of more new age philosophy, Christian metaphysics, even some paganism like wood God I even identified with certain points because it was about your connection to the universe and the world around you and kind of not this figure that's saying, "Here's how you should be." It was more like, where all expressions of the divine and that is what resonated with me.

And so that's where my spiritual exploration kind of lies and where it's taken me. And so spiritually, I love it. Like I can't say that I have spiritual – I don't have the word – but I'm not conflicted spiritually about who I am in my relationship to God and the world around me.

June Dowell-Burton: Okay, well it seems like religion has been faith, coming up [crosstalk 00:07:46] for me, or repeating whatever they were saying. I was always in trouble because I was very defiant. Not defiant at what was being taught to me. Defiant at the fact that I couldn't ask questions about what was being taught to me. When there was a connection made about Jesus, where Jesus was born,

where Jesus lived, and I was like, “Okay, I’m looking at my map and I know exactly where Egypt is. Egypt is not a part... it is a part of Africa so there are people in Egypt that look like me and why is that depiction on the wall somebody else?”

So needless to say, and I had nuns for instructors and with her middle pointy finger, she sent me to the principal’s office, every single time. So defiance, I think. And even as I got older, being married to my ex-husband, very right-wing Christian, very mandatory church participation all day. So it’s not good enough that you go to the 9:30 service, but you got to go to the 11:30 service and then you got to turn around and go to the 7:00 service. All day. Defiance. My question is why do I have to go to every last service on Sunday to be good or to be worthy of God’s love or God’s attention?

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is after the Go-Go bar?

June Dowell-Burton: No, this is previous to Go-Go bar. It’s previous to Go-Go bar. Yes, previous to Go-Go bar. Then now in the current flux of this journey I call my life, still wrestling with... like what is church to me. I don’t necessarily ascribe to any specific dogma. I believe that we are bodies of this connected energy and like I can find beauty in that mess of papers that are sitting right there on the floor – not calling your papers a mess – but that’s my church. Looking at a rose or like fresh fallen snow. I don’t wrestle with spirituality. What I wrestle with is when other people’s belief systems are projected and very smothering on top of me.

And I came to Newark, second go-round to the LIT train, I like the color of the LIT, train of positivity, because Rutgers–New Brunswick, knowing meeting Cheryl Clarke back in 2003, there was actually a queer conference. Cheryl walked up to me and was

like, “Do you wanna lead?” Like that gave me my voice and then next thing you know, Miss Honey and Alicia were asked to come and speak to the student body about marriage equality and then Miss Honey invited me to go to church. Automatic wall went up. I was like, “No, I’m sorry.” Like that’s just not me. But I went anyway. After, she was like, “Okay. You ain’t gonna go this time. But just come check it out, try it out, whatever.” End up going to church.

Same day I went to church. Automatically, you know how like you see *Devil’s Advocate* with that. You know when Al Pacino puts his finger in water and the Holy Water starts smoldering. Well, that’s just kind of how I felt, because I’m like the building is going to fall down because I’m in it.

So I get there and I’m sitting in the back because I don’t want to be touched. I don’t want to be bothered. I just want to just kind of be in my space in dealing...

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is this at LIT?

June Dowell-Burton: This is at LIT, yes. I want to sit dealing my space, just me dealing with the fact that I’m actually in an edifice, a worshipping edifice. So choir was banging, everything was great, listen... Bishop Howard gets up on pulpit and I tell the story all the time. I will never forget. She was talking about tithing. So which is another one of my little pet peeves. I’m like, “Ten percent? Today if I don’t have 10, how is it coming back?” But that’s a whole another story. Anyway, she gets up on the pulpit and I remember she was talking about tithing and the last thing she said and I was hooked for life. She said, on the pulpit, “If you can go spend \$5 on a damn cup of coffee, then you could put your \$5 in the contribution plate.” On the pulpit, real talk. Fan ever since.

So I'm not conflicted like Kitab said like spiritually. I just have problems with dogma and people forcing their agenda or their plan of action or whatever on you and not allowing the individual to decide where they want to be. Because as children we're raised in the church, we're raised in one form or fashion, but when we mature to adults, maybe that way is not the way that we want to go. And to allow us to be free to make that choice.

Jae Quinlan:

Wow. As a child, it was conflict. It seemed like everything was in a direct contradiction of the next thing. So my mother's mother was the Bible-toting, thumping, literal translator of all things written in, but I call that book, which I could not say in front of her. I thought it was a magnificent book of stories, fantastical stories, and the one time that my grandmother ever punished me was because I said that. So my mother was raised up with that, and she was Baptist. My father's folks were Methodist. So I was raised in the tradition of you had to go to church or else.

And so spirituality didn't get attached to it for a very long time. As a matter of fact, I don't think the spirituality was even a concept, idea, perception of something that I could grasp until I was an adult. So it was just about religion. Hence, getting to kindergarten and being in a parochial school, in a Lutheran school, was about... it was religion class. But I had also been molested several times up to that point. Direct contradiction. The way that I began to feel about girls, direct contradiction according to the messages that I was getting. Even my grandmother until her sister's death, I did not know that I had somebody to identify with. I always notice that my Aunt Marie's friend who seemed like the jolly green giant with this big, giant Afro and she always had on a suit and everything. I don't remember her name, but she was

always there. She was like this looming dark figure, hovering in the background somewhere.

I never knew that there was access from this thing that I felt like I was hiding. As a young teenager, when my girlfriends were looking at the boys, they were saying, "Oh, how fine." Dada da. [Mumbling 00:16:15]. And I'm like, you are just like the finest thing on earth. Jesus Christ, when I'm looking at you. And immediately, I would get this message off like you can't do that. Like you can't say that. There's no place to put that. But everywhere you go, you can't hide from yourself. Wherever you go, there you are right there song, just like rings, rings in my ear. The older I got, the farther away from even wanting to go to church I became. And when I was 18, my parents raised three of my cousins in addition to my two sisters and my brother. And the oldest of us, her husband attempted to molest me and I let go of God. I let go of church. I chose to go to school as far away from my parents as I possibly could get. On a scholarship of course.

Oddly enough, no surprise, God found me on that journey. And that's when I came out. I came home to be met with... running from those feelings. I didn't even stay in school. I came home immediately. And went back out because I came into the same environment that I left. And it was blaring that it was not okay. My parents were just really like flapping their wings with their being pastors and everything and it was opposition. Like I challenged everything that they thought that they knew. It was not acceptable for me to be in that environment. So I left again.

And God found me on that journey. And in that journey, I was introduced or fell in love with drugs. So addiction. God found me in that journey. And then I returned home. By then, they had been

introduced to love on a grander scale in terms of being accepting not just tolerate. And I was approached by each of them. My mother's direct question to me was, "Look in the mirror." So we're looking in the mirror. We're looking in the mirror together. I'm standing next to her. And she goes, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see me and you. Like what are you saying?" She's like, "I have no idea why you wanna be a man." Like that's... you, mom, gave me what I have. You made me. You gave me this intense love for women. So what I have, what I am, who I am, came from you. From that moment on, I didn't have a problem with my mom. My father who was having a very difficult time with it, was sent to pastoral church in – what's that church on 135th and 35th of Madison – Metropolitan? Yes. So he went to... you know what's there, right? Okay, so he had to work the soup kitchen. And in soup kitchen at Madison, ain't nothing but a bunch of queens. So I got this phone call from him and he's crying. Nini, I'm so sorry. I just want to tell you that I realized that God made you who you are and if you wanted to love a pole, you have my support. Yes? God met him on that journey.

I floundered around for a long time. It had been almost 20 somewhat years of these contradictory messages. But I felt it. It was like a pull. And at the very point that I literally was about to throw myself out of a window, my mother called me and told me that she knew this woman. That was starting a church in Newark. I was living in the Bronx and I was literally sitting on the ledge. And it was like she was across the street looking at me through a window. And she said, "I want you to go and sit down on your bed. What are you doing?" She was on another side of the Bronx. "I have a friend that's opening a church in Newark, New Jersey. I think you should go. I think that you'll find what you're looking for there."

That was in 1995, in November of 1995, Liberation in Truth opened its doors in April of that year and I have been there ever since, in and out of addiction, in and out of being in my right mind or not. And I have 11 years clean and what I have found that rings true for me – and this is a period and a dot – is that contradiction does not equate wrong. It is what is. We live in direct contradiction to a number of things. It is my choice to stand up for what it is that I believe in. I'm not a fan of organized religion, but I believe that everything is spiritually connected. And just by virtue of us being here, I believe that that point is justified. I just want to say that.

Bernard McAllister: I think I was very angry at God for many years. I think that I just couldn't comprehend the epidemic of AIDS. I just couldn't. And as much as I tried, the conflict was so deep for me. It wasn't until I had maybe 10 years in recovery that I started to reconcile and come to understand that God, for me, is a personal entity that I need to embrace as if I need to embrace that it's daylight outside. It is what it is. I always believed there was something more. My mother was very savvy in how she raised us because she taught me about Buddhism, Judaism. She always mentioned a lot of isms. She would bring home... she works at the Post Office, she would bring home magazines about different things. And she'd say, "Oh, you might wanna look at this." Because I had a problem reading when I was a child and I don't know what it was but I couldn't concentrate and she would bring home magazines and comic books.

And we would always talk about things. And I would be like seven years old and we're talking about... I don't know, we could be talking about the strangest things. I don't know where she would be coming up with the stuff. We would talk about religion

and she would have my aunt, the Jehovah Witness come over, her friend the rabbi who picked up the mail will come and speak to us. And all the kids was like, “Why is the man with the hat at your house?” “My mother.” She wants to talk. And it opened my mind. But you know, I was very angry at God because I was losing so many people and I didn’t understand. And I’ve never had a problem with the Bible. But my mother was a hardworking woman so she thought that the best way to raise us is to give us the tools. She didn’t need them. She had to go to work at night. But give it to kids and we could learn from it.

And lo and behold, how about I’m still talking about that today. There’s no such thing as coincidences. And as I stay clean, I just resolved my anger at God and I accepted it for what it was. Just like he can accept my mistakes, I can accept not His mistakes, but whatever He does and with reason for what He’s done. I don’t think that everything is to be explained to me why things happen. I think the way things happen is that things happen, you accept it, you look at it for what it is, and you continue to move on. And you go on to the next galaxy. You go on to the next planet. You go on to the next chain of thought. Because if I was to sit back and think, “Well, oh my God, why would you take this one and not that one? And I always think about God in the personal aspect of it.

The Bible and the stories are cute.

Jae Quinlan: In the book, right?

Bernard McAllister: In the book. Make great many series. But the idea of God to me is so overwhelming and so complex and so loving and I just understand it. I don’t have a problem with it. It is what it is for me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay, we're running short on time so I want to wrap things up and... since the panels are organized by generation and I'm curious what you would pass on as advice to the younger generation and what have you learned or seen or known in queer Newark that you want to pass on?

Kitab Rollins: I can say that my one of my missions in life is to understand myself. That's really my main thing is to understand myself and by understanding myself, I'm able to understand the world around me, things and people around me. And so those are my parting words. Just to try to understand yourself and I find that all the experiences that I get myself into, all the experiences, all the people that I attract are just means to un

[BEGIN SEGMENT 8/12]

Kitab Rollins: Understanding myself. They're outward manifestations of what's going on in my head and in my life and in my world. And so I'm able to reconcile things, move past things, understand things by looking at my interactions with others. So I say that to say that the conflicts that you manifest, those really challenging experiences that you land in while you're going through it might seem catastrophic and might seem really hard and bad. "Why am I going through this? What is the universe's way of helping you move to a better thinking of something? And it's actually to help you out more in life. And so, take all these experiences that you're going through that seemed bad, but probably aren't. They're probably like the best thing that could happen to you and embrace it for that. Like this is a means to a better life for me and the lesson that I'm going to get at the end of this is going to be life changing.

And so just accept all things that come to you whether you know how to do it or not to understand that this is a really great life that

you're living, no matter how hard it might seem, it's a really good life and I hate to say it's going to get better, sounds so cliché. But like seriously, like as you mature and you're able to see the world through a different lens, you'll really be able to appreciate those hardships that you experienced when you were younger. And you're able to see how much it made you the great person that you are now and that you're going to be going forward. So just take these little things that happen and embrace them and love them and know that all things that happen to you, no matter how you perceive them, are wonderful happenings that are going to only make your life more wonderful.

June Dowell-Burton: I think being a Newark transplant, I think I came in with guns blazing, ready to rip down, tear down, do things my way. But I think there is this thing called transition. So coming in like how when your mom is – like for the younger generation like they're telling you like, "Look, I've been there, done that, did it already. Like you're not pulling no wool over my eyes. I know you're going out, sneaking out with your friends, doing blah, blah, blah, because I did the exact same thing." That's wisdom. Whether or not you want to respect it, whether or not you want to acknowledge it, but it exists. And if it weren't for your parents and I'm using this also to compare like the people that came before me, so yes, there is the LIT, Reverend Janice, Bishop Allen. There is the Laquetta Nelson, James Credle.

So many other organizations whose neck, and I'll just keep it real, neck, back, are used to get to where I am today. So not that it's not appreciated because as a parent you also have to let your child grow and be who they are going to be. So respect what has come before you. You may not be able to change anything, but you know what has come before you so respect what has come before

you. And there is no one saying that you can't do it your way. It's just how you do it your way is what makes the difference.

Jae Quinlan: Just be who you are.

Bernard McAllister: That's it.

Jae Quinlan: Right? I don't think there is... there are no coincidences, Bernie.

Bernard McAllister: No.

Jae Quinlan: Yes. And there is no guest list tonight either, right? Okay. Having said that, like the invitation... you don't need the invitation to make use of what has been. Wisdom is yours now. There is no coincidence that you mentioned this Bridge Called My Back because that's exactly what you have in front of you, a bridge for you to walk on, for you to utilize, for you to question, for you to analyze, for you to contradict, for you to disagree with. And at the end of the day, for you to rely on, for you to respond to, and for you then to recreate the next section of... So use us. We're here to be used. We're here, we want you to use us. Don't just sit at the feet of the wise. Drink from what they pour. And they pour lots. I also want to say as the most senior part of this panel that 50 is the new 30 so you then got a lot to look forward to.

As senior as you might like to make us, 21st century folks we ain't that old. We're in this together. Thank you.

Bernard McAllister: As I said back in what would I... I'm thinking about what would I offer to the younger generation. I think I can offer one message. And I'm going to tell you why. And this is why. Young black and Latino men, being a black gay, Spanish male in America and you would think that the world accepts you and they love you. I work at UMD and I see all the bashings and I see all the attempted

suicides. And it's mostly with the black and Latino men, the young men. So there must be a message that's not getting out to them. That you can't just give to the general audience to say take this home.

I think the first thing I need to tell you is that you have to learn to love yourself. Now, don't ask me how you do that. Watch a lot of Oprah. Live class, I saw last night. Dr. Phil or just how you get it. Get to learn and love yourself. Not your best friend's love for you. Not your grandmother's love for you. Not your man's love for you. But learn to love yourself and I guarantee you that's going to take you on a very long road and allow you to have some self-awareness and some self-loving that no matter who you fall in love with, where you go, it will not equal you loving yourself.

That's the one thing I want to say. Some people call me... I'm more like the Bea Arthur from the Golden Girls. I'm that one. I'm that hard. I'm going to hard rock out my friends. And I need to say when James and them were up here, my heart overflowed. I was crying on the inside for those I miss. And I was crying for the youth, for the ones they will never get to me.

So in saying that, enjoy the older generation. You're going to do it your way regardless. Because that's just how it goes. That's just the way life goes. You're going to do it your way. But keep somewhere a little bit of us in your pocket for wisdom. When you feel like you're getting a cold, you take something just before the cold comes, and that's my best way of doing it. If I could change anything, I wouldn't even know where to start because it's been such a wonderful journey. And just remember your journey. Please remember your journey. And if you make it to the 50, right here, what's going to happen is that there is somebody who is

going to ask you a question like how do you do it? And just like we're telling you, you have the obligation to tell the next generation behind you.

So you do have the obligation to somebody that's coming up. Just like we have the obligation to you. And that would be the only thing that I could tell you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: All right. We are out of time. I wish I could ask you the rest of the questions. But it's time for lunch. So let's give a big round of applause to the panelists. Beryl is going to say a few words.

Beryl Satter: Okay. Just to tell everyone where to go for lunch. Lunch is at Stonesby Commons. It's 91 Bleeker Street. It's Bleeker between Martin Luther King and University and we have an all-you-can-eat buffet for a reduced price so you can head over there and make sure you're back here, 2:10 on the dot. Because at 2:15, you're going to get to see a preview of a film that is being made about the Newark 7. These were Newark lesbians who got caught up for defending themselves, facing the prison systems. So you want to see that and of course, this afternoon is the final presentation of the 21st century generation. So thank you everybody for coming so far. It's been an amazing, amazing morning. And thank you to these amazing panelists. Again, we should all give them one more round of applause, I think.

[BEGIN SEGMENT 9/12]

Beryl Satter: We have this afternoon the 21st Century generation who will tell us what it's like now after all the history and all the wisdom that we've heard. But first I am delighted to introduce Blair Dorosh-Walther. He's going to show an

Blair Dorosh-Walther:

excerpt from a documentary that he is working on right now, “The Fire This Time” about the Newark Seven.

Hello. Hi. My name is Blair and this film like she said will be on the Newark Seven. This is just a seven-minute teaser to the forthcoming feature length documentary.

In 2006 I read an article in the *New York Times* entitled “Man Is Stabbed After Admiring A Stranger.” The article made it clear that a man was and I quote, “Acting in a gentlemanly fashion and just paid the lady a compliment.”

What I could gather was that a group of women had been sexually approached by a man on the street and a fight had broken out. I immediately began organizing. I’ve yet to meet a woman, a gender nonconforming trans, a queer youth, who has not experienced harassment or sexual harassment in some form. If it happens in a workplace or school there’s at least potential for institutional repercussions, why not on the street?

All of you know the story of Sakia Gunn and that of Matthew Shepard and many of you might know the study that was conducted here at Rutgers on the media attention given to these two stories. Two years after Matthew Shepard’s murder there is over a thousand articles written on him nationwide. Two years after Sakia Gunn’s there were 12.

Later I found out that the fight began when such comment as “I’ll fuck you straight and I’ll stick my dick in your ass.” Each of these women were friends with Sakia Gunn and they all knew what was at stake. What resulted from the fight was a man who had approached

them, spent five days in the hospital due to what was later found out to be a hernia.

Renata and Venice had strangle marks around their neck, busted lips, black eyes and one of the women had a handful of dreadlocks ripped clear out of her scalp. And finally, all four of these women in their late teens, never been in trouble with the law before, were charged and sentenced with attempted murder, varying degrees of gang assault and assault, receiving 3 to 11 years in prison and Renata lost custody of her 5-year-old son.

This is a really complicated story. It's not a criminal justice story where DNA evidence can prove their innocence. They were there, they participated, they fought back unapologetically. This is a story of Patrice, Renata, Venice and Terrain, each of these women coming from supportive and loving families and communities. The film will follow the journey that rippled from the night of this fight as they struggled behind bars and their fight for freedom.

Additionally, we will highlight the mainstream media's headlines providing context for the highly racialized and gendered vocabulary that allowed readers to feel that these were not really women, that they were not even human beings but a vicious wolf pack worthy of no sympathy or support, and how this plays a direct connection into our legal system.

And I just want to say something about Patrice and she remains the only woman behind bars. Patrice is a poet who wants to one day own a spa to give women a break from their daily lives and struggles. Her brother was murdered by a police officer when she was younger and

later so too is her cousin. What does it feel like to know that the very people that are supposed to protect you are one of your greatest threats?

So the film poses these questions, do we really live in a society where a judge or journalist can justly determine the threat that a queer person of color faces. This is a story where race, gender and class intersect leaving these women some of our most vulnerable and unprotected in society.

To quote—James Credle who I admire deeply said, “This is not an LGBT film. This is a film about equality and human rights.” And two of the... Terrain’s mother is in the audience but I can’t see if she’s here. If she’s here can she stand up? Is Tynesha here? I think that they’re coming in late. The mother and sister are here. Is she here?

And then when you go out today there’s envelopes that are stamped and addressed to Patrice. So if you so feel, please write to her because every time we screen the film we try to get a big group of people to send her letters and it really helps. Thank you.

Darnell Moore:

Okay. Hi everybody. So I was late this morning and didn’t have an opportunity to formally welcome everyone and to say a bit about the conference and the work that we’ve been doing. So, here’s that opportunity. I’m out of breath.

What’s today’s date? November 12th, right? Can everybody say November 12th?

Participants:

November 12th.

Darnell Moore:

And why is that important? It’s important because we’re actually making history today. This day marks a

particular moment in these particular times during which a community of amazing folk have gathered to literally make history. The making of history is not a project that is relegated only to those in the academy; those who do the work of observing our lives and attending to our voices from a distance. But history is made through the living and the telling of our lives. It is made when we lift up our individual and collective voice.

This initiative, today's conference and the ongoing oral history archival project is a collective undertaking. Both seek to make space for the writing of our names, our struggles, our triumphs in the very grains of sand that come together to forge this place that we have come to claim as Brick City.

So, we queer and allied and black and brown and white and young and old, Newarkers from the south side to the north side and those of us who love Newark from afar gather here today to make legible our very existences in a collective history of this great city. What you will hear today and what you have heard should inspire and challenge you. What you will know tomorrow because of what you've heard today should move you. Hopefully to gather your stories as if they were stones and share them as well so that legacies can be built on each one of them. So you're here on a second part during which time you'll hear from a younger generation, and there's a scripture in the bible that says "Out of the mouth of babes..." and typically we think wisdom can only come from one source from elders but I think today we'll learn that wisdom also comes from those who come behind us.

So we're thankful for you being here. We're thankful for doing this in the city. This is important. I think together we've created an institution that no one can ever erase. So no longer shall we be the rendered invisible subjects of the city because now they have to tackle with the fact that our names, your stories, our legacies will be captured somewhere in the city, in somebody's library, in somebody's archive always pushing against invisibility. So you should give yourselves a hand clap because all of you have made history by being here today. Beryl's going to come up and say a bit about... she's going to give some directions in regards to this afternoon. We hope that you will stay and enjoy the festivities after this. So you have a little bit of time to think and you'll have some time to party and we hope that you'll join us.

Thanks.

Beryl Satter:

Hello. I just wanted to just say a few words about the Queer Newark Oral History Project. This is in your program but you might not have seen it. I just want to tell you the principles animating the Queer Newark Oral History Project of which this is an opening celebration. These are the principles that we base this project upon. We are committed to inclusivity and access. Our aims include the following: engage LGBT Newark youth in interviewing each other, as well as LGBT adults, the adult Newark community, and mentor LGBT Newark youth to ready them for career and higher education opportunities. We will cement collaboration between Newark's LGBT political, service and faith organizations and Newark and Newark area, colleges and universities under Queer Newark Oral History Project.

We will catalogue, collect and make accessible existing interviews of LGBT Newark residents and former residents including an immense number of interviews which are currently housed at Drew University and are only now becoming accessible. These were a massive number of interviews that were done in 1990s at the height of the AIDS epidemic. We are also going to catalogue and make accessible the interviews completed by Newark's own LGBT Commission.

Finally, our goal is to encourage LGBT Newark and former Newark residents to donate their papers and other artifacts to our growing collection of Queer Newark.

And if any of you are interested in donating anything you have, pictures or letters or old emails or anything at all, fliers, please you could sign up outside to donate things. I hope everyone got these nice, free, beautiful black pens that we are giving away. And on the pen you will see the address queer.newark.rutgers.edu. If you look on that website there's places... we have bibliography about queer Newark up there, we have information about queer Newark, about some of the great artists whose work you've seen today. And also a place where you could find information if you want to be interviewed, if you want to donate anything these are all important things that we hope everyone here considers being part of.

Okay. Just a few reminders. First of all, everyone should remember to fill out the exit surveys, these little purple forms that's in everybody's program. It's really a big, huge help to us if you will fill it out. It should only take a minute. So before you go you fill that out and you leave it outside. There's a place to leave it.

And just a few more logistical issues, if you've parked on deck one remember to stop at registration on the way out for your parking coupon.

We'd also like to encourage everyone to stop by and visit the "e-zibit" which is outside there, which is running loops of some of the fireballs that you heard about earlier this morning and there's an exhibit out there. There's also some of the clothing worn at some of the balls, which were brought here by James Credle and are there for you to see.

Also, we have an oral history booth outside this room. If anybody wants to go and say their peace, tell their story, anything you want to say we want to hear and you can go into the booth and be recorded.

Finally, please everyone there's reception at 4:00, downstairs in the Robeson Art Gallery so it's just down the stairs you'll see it. But at 6:00 we're having a celebration party performance at Coffee Cave at 45 Halsey Street. It's 6:00 to 9:00. This is something that's been organized by Queer Newark Youth which—there'll be spoken-word performers, vogue performers, music. It's just going to be a wonderful thing and everyone is invited and please remember to come to that too so we can celebrate this wonderful day together. Okay, thank you.

A few more minutes we'll have the next panel.

Tynesha McHarris:

Good afternoon! I am honored to be here today to participate in history. My name is Tynesha McHarris. I'm in the business of advocating and working on behalf of children through education and youth development and I am so excited to be here today. I was so moved by the

previous two panels and I know you or I will be moved by these dynamic young people that are going to share with us today.

So when I introduce their names I'm going to ask all of you to give them an excited applause and love. Is that all right? Okay. We have Eryicka, Danielle and Kiyan. Tarell is on his way. We know life happens and he is in traffic but when he is on his way feel free to pause me at any moment and give him the same love that you just shared with everyone today.

So I'm going to jump right in and ask the first question. Talk to us about your childhood and your teens, which was not too long ago and your experiences in Newark or the city that you're from and we're going to start with Kiyan.

Kiyan Williams:

So, I like to describe my childhood and my life in general by the 3 Gs. It's taking me a while to remember these 3 Gs and to embrace and celebrate them and that is Gay, Glamorous and Ghetto.

I was born and raised by a single parent. My mother she gave birth to me when she was 18 so she was pretty young and my grandmother has also been a huge part of my life. So I grew up in a very strong female presence and a strong feminine energy and so I was a very effeminate child and I always love to perform for my mother and my grandmother and my mother's girlfriends. I feel like I knew how to vogue before I knew how to walk. And so my mother's friends would come visit and I would be young and I would just like... they would come over I get excited and I like go and grab like a towel, wrap it around my waist and just like strut up and

down and back and forth like I was on the runway for my mother and her friends.

When I was young a lot of people... the people in my life at that time they really they celebrated and they helped me celebrate what I've come to understand as my own feminine energy. Like I remember when I was young I consider my grandmother in gay coach we had gay mothers and gay fathers. I consider my grandmother my gay mother because she's just this really sort of, like she's a diva. She's just like this fierce older woman. She has her nails that are like this long always hot pink or orange.

She calls me every Sunday to tell me what she wears to church. So last Sunday she wore a black leather miniskirt and a cheetah tank top over a sheer blouse. And so she's just like this fabulous diva that's where I get it from. And so all these women in my life helped celebrated me and who I was.

A turning point in that was when I got older when people started to care about how I carried myself and how my body moved. And so I remember fifth grade being a distinct turning point in my life. It was when... fifth grade was when like, you know, kids can be a little cruel. Everyone had something that people would pick on you about. And so for me people would... my thing was that like I was gay. I was flamboyant. I was a fag.

I remember in fifth grade so clear in my mind right now. I was sitting on my mother's friend's bed and we were listening to Mary J. Blige's album and I'm like lip singing to "My Life." The whole time my wrist was limp and my mother saw me and she said straighten your wrist.

I tried and it just stayed limp. She was like straighten your wrist. She took my hand and straightened it but it kept going limp and she got really angry and frustrated at me and I couldn't understand why, the fact that she wanted me to straighten my wrist.

Fifth grade is when she took me... that summer she took me to... I lived in East Orange at this time she took me to Oval Park, signed me up for football and I remember she told my coach and I was standing right there next to her she said I need you to teach him how to be a man because I can't.

Fifth grade was the first time that I told my mother that I was sexually abused and at that point the feelings that I felt as fifth grade was also the first time where I had my first crush. My first... this guy who was on my football team. I wrote about it, I had this little Harry Potter journal and I wrote about it one day and my mother and my uncle had found this journal and they were reading through it. And I remember coming in the house and I see them reading my journal and I was just like this fear, this anxiety just was like in me because she was turning the page. I didn't want her to get to this page so I run in the house I snatched the journal out of her hand, ran to the bathroom, tore it out and just like flushed it down the toilet.

That's when I realized a lot of these feelings and desires and emotions that I had were considered unacceptable and that's when I first began trying to consciously conceal and hide those feelings that I had. But it was a glamorous childhood otherwise.

Danielle Cooper:

Let's see. I grew up chubby and as a tomboy so I didn't necessarily have the, hey I want you to dress in skirts and stuff, unless I had to match with my sister because I do have a twin and she's like a hood, skinny version of me. It's not a game like she'll shut this place down.

I liked my childhood because my brother wasn't... I have an older brother and he's not hammer, nails savvy at all. I am the hammer and nail savvy person. I really didn't have the issue. I wasn't like... we didn't have a religious family and stuff like that. However, my mother's side of the family kind of like knew that I was a tomboy lesbian and they tried to inch my mom to have me do different things.

Like I'm inside watching the game with all of the guys and stuff like that and I get told go outside and play. Do what? With the girls? They're not playing, they're standing. Playing requires dirt. They don't like it. That was like pretty okay.

I knew that I had these feelings because I was raised on cable and when you didn't have a child lock on the box. I knew that "Ren and Stimpy" was gay and I knew that HBO on Thursday nights after 11:00 some interesting things came on. And that was my sexual education. Everything kind of like... it wasn't even like a religion of Christianity. It was a religion of like we're a black family and in the suburbs. We are competing with other black families in the suburbs as long as like you dress accordingly when we need you to... and I played the piano as well.

So when the people came over my mother sat me down and I was just like [Pretends to play the piano]. She's like

look at my daughter, she plays the piano. Because of course there was this Asian kid who live like down the street and around the corner who was like a champion orchestra freaking violinist and stuff by the time he was 10. It was disrespectful like no competition. I just can't. Things didn't really change for me until around fifth grade and stuff like that when my mom was really sick of pressing my hair because she knew like she could run that hot comb through it but I'm going outside to play basketball and it's sweetened out. She got me a perm and then it was just like I need you to start dressing in girls clothes.

And then I dress in girl's clothes and she realized the extent of my femininity will terrorize everyone and I was one like I was trying to play it straight. I am pretending that I like him but I'm about to go ham on this pretending. Don't make me wrap my hair up in a doobie and everything I will fight you. I don't care if he doesn't like me I will fight you still.

And then that was like around the time where like fifth grade everybody is like oh you're a lesbian and I was just like kind of yeah. I told this one girl who I thought was a lesbian too it turns out she wasn't. Depressing.

I realized that point in time that lesbian wasn't a good word. I realized a little bit after that, like Jehovah's Witnesses stop by and since like my family didn't necessarily let them in, they left things like pamphlets and cartoon comic books. They left one with like Sodom and Gomorra and I read it. So I'm like oh comic I like comic pictures. Flip, flip, men laying with men, come and let me rape you whoa. A little concerning.

Then you flip over to the next page and it's like this kind of really PG, I tried to do a PG done orgy scene and then after that it's fire. Everything is gone. And then it was kind of just like homosexuality is this and that, Levitical code and stuff like that and I was just... wow that sucks. My childhood was okay. It was interesting. When I was like chunky, I could dress in anything I wanted but when like I started to kind of fill out that's when I was expected to kind of stop and kind of adhere to the gender roles that were assigned to me. It was when I didn't that like I needed a reason not to.

So it's kind of like I played basketball and that's when I got really into sports and stuff because I was like if I do sports I can dress in sweatpants and basketball shorts all day and I can just be fine with it.

And then I came into my freshman year of high school and stuff and like I didn't... this was the mistake I made. I didn't tell my brother and my sister who were going to the same school as I was that I was a lesbian. They found out when the rest of the school found out when I decided it was okay for me to take the huge gay flag and like wrap it around myself because I wanted to be invited to the gay table where the cool kids were.

And of course in high school I didn't necessarily have the wardrobe to be hanging out with the cool gay kids but of course that's another topic.

Eryicka Morgan:

Well having the childhood to me was like kind of difficult thing. I grew up in a home with my grandmother and grandfather and all my brothers. I was basically like a boy in the house. I was stuck with my brothers, I was

rougher than all my brothers. I was able just to go do things that they couldn't do but I was always feminine. Everybody noticed it like elementary school that I was feminine. No matter how much I fought, no matter how much stuff I started, no matter how many girlfriends I had they always sense like, he's going to be gay, he's going to be gay, he's going to be gay.

So anyway, as my years of growing up I just basically try to fit in with society with my brothers. I tried to do the things they were doing. My grandfather was like really strict on me because he was from the South. So I used to always dance because I survived wrestling and I used to watch *Nitro Girls*. He used to see me doing a dance. He used to kick me. He'd say boys don't dance like that.

So I kind of knew like if I wanted to be gay then I knew I was like oh I wish he... I hate to say this, I wish he'd die so I could be gay. I wish she do this so I could be myself. He always say that if you'd be gay we're going to send you down South. You're not going to be up here with us because we don't want no gay people. That's why your other gay, faggot, cousins can't come around you because they're gay and leave them in Virginia.

So when I got to fifth grade I found myself like the other two over here found themselves. My grandfather passed when I was in the sixth grade. So my grandfather died when I was in sixth grade. I just became more, like I was like this is it. My grandmother, just me [and] her, my two brothers or whatever. So I just basically, like running around in sixth grade.

I hated it though, I still had girlfriends but I was becoming more feminine. I would look in the mirror and

say oh maybe I want to get long hair? So I tried the S curl. I tried all the stuff like all the boys was doing like the regular stuff. And then like when everybody came I told my mother like I want to get girl pants and she said you can't girl pants. I said why? She said because they're for girls. I said no it don't say that in the store that I went to. She said yeah they're for girls. I said all right then I'm just not going to ask her to get it.

So then I started sneaking out going to The Globe. I used to sneak out. I used to climb down the fire escape and tell my brother don't say nothing. I used to have my clothes in a bag. I used to change, put my clothes on. And then one day I went and get my nails done and I forgot that I had nails on because I was in boys clothes and I usually get my nails done and my had grandmother came in and she made me some breakfast and I grab the plate. When I grab the plate of food she didn't say nothing and I was unaware that I still had nails on.

So therefore when I came out my whole family was sitting there and that's when they got like very tough on me where I had to make decisions either to be myself or let them control me. And my grandmother... my whole family my mother slapped me to the floor and my brothers was there, my uncles and everybody.

And my mother said this to me. You know why I don't want you to be gay? I said why? She said all faggots die from AIDS and I don't want my son dying from AIDS. I said, how do you know I'm going to be a faggot?

And she said yeah because you're wearing nails, you're going over here, you're going to wear this stuff and then it was a big thing, big she's saying. If I wanted to stay a

gay male it was acceptable but since I wanted to be a transwoman it was out.

So at 14 or 15 I just packed all my stuff up and I just kindly of went. So that was my childhood.

Tynesha McHarris: So Tarrell, we can give Tarrell...

[BEGIN SEGMENT 10/12]

Tynesha McHarris: So the question is to describe what your childhood and teens was like.

Tarell Gregory: Is this on? Okay. Let me start off first by apologizing for my tardiness. I'm currently actually undergoing a lot of dental surgery, so much that I wasn't supposed to be here today. But I told my dentist I can't miss this for the world so I'm here in front of you today.

My childhood, wow. It was interesting. I was very... a child I was very into drawing, getting in trouble in school not for starting trouble but drawing too many and doodling too much on a picture then on the back of my homework. Growing up, oh gosh forgive me.

Home life was pretty normal. I wouldn't say I was spoiled. It was only me and my brother; we grew up in projects most of our life. Gay life wasn't really accepted in my home. My mom's a Muslim. My grandmother was Christian so that was interesting living with.

We were... I grew up... I don't think I know what to say? I never came out to my family. I never once sat any of them down and said hey I'm gay or I like men or anything like that. It just kind of came out as they started seeing my creative side and the way I care for people and things like that. It was like oh you know, always ignored it so I grew up, didn't pay attention to the question.

As I got into my, I would say mid-teens is when I started having that infatuation for men and it was like wow I'm looking at this guy in gym class or why am I in swimming and not getting dressed and I'm just paying attention to everybody else getting dressed? And I'm like oh my gosh. That's when I knew I'm like okay I have something on my hands here.

I ignored it, kept on with the girlfriends to please mom and please grandma. I mean that kept me out of Church and [unintelligible - 00:02:23]. After a while I said I can't do this anymore. I stopped lying to everyone. I never told them the truth but I stopped lying. I then just went on being single. I said if I can't date the men and be accepted I just won't date anybody.

Growing up that's how I pretty much was probably until like few year ago and I'm gay.

Tynesha McHarris:

So all of the panelist touched on school but we're going to talk a little bit more about school and I'm going to start with Danielle to talk about times when there was, if there was say spaces at school and times where school didn't feel like safe, affirming or accepting space, what that was like.

Danielle Cooper:

That's an interesting question. Oddly enough at my school there was a GSA. There was affirming spaces like I had a gym teacher who was like obviously a dike. My brother told me when he had her as first year, I got a dike as a teacher. Our vice principal is a gay man. He will possibly hit on your man friend. Do you know what I'm saying? It's just like good times, good times gays around. For me the safe space was the GSA honestly. It was the cafeteria that wasn't the safe space. It was like the locker room that necessarily wasn't the safe space and it wasn't

the safe space because of other straight people. Because I was kind of known as person as if you want to fight I will fight you it's no problem, I'll go home and stay there for two weeks and come back; still got an A in my class. But, it was hard because I felt like my safe spaces weren't necessarily with like the gay people at my school and that was kind of touched on it, like I didn't have the fashion sense. When I went there, I came out my mother was not happy with me. She threw away all of my girl clothes and every time I bought man clothes if they weren't my brothers or they weren't my father's she threw them away. So I was wearing what my brother did not wear from Macy's and Sears that she bought him like years prior. I'm like I went shopping and he's just like no this is going to make me get beat in school. I'm shopping at Express because I'm fly.

So I was wearing his stuff and he informed me that I had broken the chain of history in dykedom in my high school because there was never a non-swaggy dyke who didn't dress like fresh to death, until I came there. With the two sizes, oversized boy jeans that I stole from [my] brother's closet with like the rainbow belt tied mad tight and like a shirt that I picked up from Spencer's that I obviously wasn't supposed to be wearing at school because there's just like, how do you like your pussy with a whole bunch of cats on it? You'll remember that shirt if you saw it, you know what I'm saying?

I was a kid that went to school and then kind of like changed and stuff and I came out like yeah I'm fresh and somebody walked passed with a Jean Pepe suit like full-fledged. I remember people were still wearing Phat Farm

and like Fubu and I was just like really? I'm not flier than Phat Farm and Fubu? Man, Macy's is messing up. But yeah that was really interesting.

It was like... the people that I was not too keen on like sitting next to in the cafeteria and stuff those were the cool gay kids and stuff like that. Those were the people that didn't go to the GSA meetings. When I went to the GSA meetings I was surrounded by a whole bunch of white kids with like dreads that listen to Immortal Technique and Mos Def and shit, and that are really like concerned with the plight of brown people. It's like whoa, how many African Studies course did you take in this school?

But like, yeah, basically my safe spaces were the GSA and then my safe spaces became my teachers and I went through a breakup and then like every now and again older gay people would be like you know what I'm going to take you out somewhere where gays are prevalent. Where you'll be happy and you'll leave with somebody. The Globe.

And that's when I went there and that's when like I was exposed to my first trans one was like oh she look good dang, yo. And they were just like, her? I'm like yeah. I'm going to the bar getting a drink and every apple martini the green ones and the plastic cups you'll remember if you went. And they were just like I'm about to go talk to her, about to go talk to her and they're just like all right go for it.

Hey how are you doing? And they're just like you got a number and everything? Yeah man she's so cool, swaggy man swag, swag. All of a sudden it was just like, after the whole night, you ain't peeped that Adam's apple... you

ain't? Pause! Remember what she looked like and I was just like she looked beautiful like Amazonian goddess. I love brown people. I love women. I love gay people. Thank you for taking me here and then it was just like sorry she's transitioning and I was just like so does that mean we can't be friends, I don't know I'm confused, I don't know. But yeah I got to really kind of find out the better part of the gay community by kind of going to the GSA and going to like Asbury Park. And then, my black friends realized that I was hanging with white gays and stuff like that and they're just like okay let's take you to where we go and then you'll be okay. So I got a little bit of both. So yes high school was a beautiful yet shitty experience for me. But all those like awesome, cool gay people that weren't my friends then they're my friends now. We're friends on Facebook, swag.

Tynesha McHarris:

Same question. So school, where did you find safe spaces, in other words how was it not safe and then where other outside of school did you find community.

Eryicka Morgan:

Well in high school for me it wasn't really like no organizations for gay people. It was like, all the gays that was basically there when I was there we all are like transwoman now, so I take that as like we were like popular in our school because people was like I want to be in... we went to go cheer. We just would like... it's like super gay. So the boys it was like those faggots they're crazy. They come to school with pocketbooks and stuff. So nobody really messed with us. Majority of us, like we lived in the hood. So they knew that like our brothers already was up there, or all of us homies or whatever. So basically we just got by or whatever. We found like safe spaces like me and

friends that are gay, Project Wow, AAOGC or whatever. We just used to go there and meet up and get counseling and stuff and hangout and basically get to talk or whatever. It was like... how could I put it? As a safe space we basically just had each other like to talk to, to counsel because there was nothing for like trans. There was nothing for me everything was like gay man only and we didn't feel comfortable with identifying as being a gay man because a gay man can't relate to a transwoman. So therefore it was like safe space; us just coming together, sneaking out going to the Globe, seeing the night at each other house climbing through the fire escape and stuff like that. We created our own safe space for transwomen.

Tynesha McHarris:

Can you talk about Project Wow and AOGC?

Eryicka Morgan:

I started attending Project Wow like 10 years ago and it was like a little small, little space on the third floor or whatever and it was for men who have sex with men. It was basically like just the finding out something at Project Wow.

So Project Wow I'm saying it wasn't for me then because that is focused more in gay men and with becoming transgender it was kind of like shaky. So what happened when we were going through our changes, the office, the African-American Office of Gay Concern just was coming into existence with Gary Paul Wright.

So me and my friends we start coming down there. Gary didn't care. We was young. We was off the hook, running into hair stores, snatching the hair. So it was basically just doing, like all the negative stuff but he always like... his office was always open for us to talk or we know we

needed to come somewhere, we [were] downtown, anything.

We know that we could come there, we can say it and we could talk. It they never ran us away. He never made me feel as though that it was wrong being a transgender or because they wasn't funded for transgender then, that we weren't allowed and things like that. So it was pretty cool.

Tarell Gregory:

Well, although my high school was typecast as the gay school which was Malcolm X Shabazz, I don't personally—

Danielle Cooper:

That was a rainbow city, Tarell.

Tarell Gregory:

I didn't feel that way when I was in high school. I would say there was a lot of homosexual people inside of my school but they weren't out so technically that still means you're in a straight school.

As far as safe spaces are concerned, unlike everybody I didn't have many people... I didn't really talk in high school. It's fairly the... all about work or not work but really didn't talk, I didn't really socialize much. I found a haven outside of school and outside of my home which is also Project Wow. Like Eryicka made mention of it was mainly focused on men who have sex with men so I took refuge in here and I met some wonderful counselors. By the way Project Wow is in 393 Central Avenue, North New Jersey for all you men who have sex with men.

It was a great experience for me. It's definitely an eye opener. It was such a delight for me just coming fresh off the closet to see someone who has already been through everything I'm complaining about and they actually taught me through it and it will be like oh, I'm not the only one. So that was great.

I think that was my only refuge. That and my bathroom, so I mean... that's where the magic happens. But it was a great experience and I'm truly, truly grateful and appreciative of the man that Project Wow has helped me to become and help me to find myself and become proud of who I am.

Kiyan Williams:

For me, school was... it was a duality. At times it was like a very affirming safe space, and at times it was just like hell. I was at the point when like I really learned that like, there would be times like in the morning like my mother will drop me off and I'll be catching the bus to school and I was just walk around school because I didn't want to go inside.

That confrontation I felt, because you know like people would be like oh like Kiyan is a fag, he's gay. Really, it toughened me. I was like either I'm just going to sit down and dread going to school all the time or I'm going to have to fight back.

And so, in middle school is when I really learned to just toughen up, fight back and basically I went from being bullied to being a bully, which is unfortunately how it operates and you know the hierarchy of middle school.

Then I had... I've always had a lesbian teacher who always offered like... you know, who always just like noticed me and offer some kind words, some empowering words. I remember when I was in middle school I had this lesbian math teacher and you know we would, like hating and picking each other is like a big thing in middle school. We were just like all day we'll be in class. We would like, gang up on groups of kids all day. We would just tease each other and it was a really big thing in my school

because you know, kids torment each other so much and we'd be like so emotionally vulnerable. But putting... causing so much pain and trauma to each other but that being like how we operated and existed like on a daily basis.

And so one day this teacher she sat down, she sat like... we had a whole, she sat the entire class down for lunch and she just talked to us. She was like you know what people are different, people are gay, people are white, people are darker skinned and that's not a reason for you to, you know, treat somebody without dignity and respect. And so, those words really stuck with me throughout the rest of my education experience.

When I was in high school again I had, and I was out, I had three really wonderful lesbian teachers who just really took in, like you know, took all the gay kids and they nurtured us. We had this thing called Gay Care. We would, during my junior/senior year, it was me and like my group of four or five lesbian and gay friends and we were really close like really tight with our history professor who was a lesbian, she was out.

We would kick it her classroom to like 8:00, 9:00 o'clock at night and just like, you know, talk about gay stuff, talk about music, we would dance. She would feed us, sometimes we would go out. Then she started taking us to New York, just creating a space for us to just be free, be who we are, embrace ourselves and embrace our difference. And then in my senior year in high school I had another wonderful lesbian teacher who helped us found the first GSA chapter in my high school which really created and it was really well received and accepted in my school. So it

helped create like just a great climate in the school's atmosphere for all of the lesbian, gay and trans students. And she also introduced me to a lot of LGBT writers of color and just historical figures of color and that's also where I found a lot of my community, my sense of community. I remember she first introduced me to James Baldwin when I first read *Giovanni's Room*, when I first learned about Bayard Rustin and I sort of just delved into their histories, their own personal stories and just found myself in their words. For a long time that was also where I got my sense of community.

Tynesha McHarris:

All right. Kiyon touched on mentorship. Can you all think of a mentor in your life that helped support and guide you and tell us who they are, how they supported you, why they were so powerful in your life?

Kiyon Williams:

Again, those great lesbian teachers who are now friends they were really just affirming... it's just monumental in my life. I'm just going to name them just to give them the respect that they deserve.

Jessica Flores, she was my History teacher my junior year. Mara Hues, my English teacher during my senior year, and Ms. Bell, she never told us her first name. She was real low-key about that.

But each of them they really shared their lives with us, especially being in a school where there is a lot of politics in the education system around LGBT identity, things that can become very controversial.

And so for them to have the courage just to be willing to share this part of themselves with us, share their lives with us, I've been to all of their homes. They've invited us into their homes. I know all of their partners. I met their

families. They really sort of just like brought us in and that made a huge difference in my life.

Tynesha McHarris:

Right.

Danielle Cooper:

Geez, yeah. I would have to say every teacher that I had in high school. Like Ms. Fisher, this really awesome gangster Jewish woman who was like yeah man I organized with the Black Panthers. Black Panthers were so down the Jews. I don't know what these new black panthers are doing with their lives. She was a chick that brought in the copy of *Mein Kampf* and pissed off the rest of the Jews like what are you doing. We have know thy enemy. She was just really awesome.

Carol Johnson, rest in peace. She was the one that made sure that I was never as late to school as I would have been if she didn't see me walking late and pick me up. She was the place I went to go do homework.

Marybeth Bogger who works at NJIT. When I came to the first AALLU conference here like first one I knew of, African Asian Latino Lesbians United. I had originally came to see this exhibit done by Tara Lake who was at the time running Sisters of Sakia and was talking about queer history and stuff and I did not know that this conference was like \$175.00. It was something that, something I did not have in my pocket.

I kind of like, I was dressed and I came and I was really excited and I had a button down and everything I was like oh man I'm really excited and then I got to the registration table, saw the number on the page and my face was like... it was like wanting as Tonka truck and you got Barbie for Christmas. It hurt so much. I was just like oh, oh. You mean I got to go home?

I woke up at like 8:30 to get here and she looked at me and she was like no, no, no come on yeah you come on. She gave me a name tag. She gave me a pamphlet and she said sit in the back and that's where I met Paris Harris, who taught me how to be a butch and keep a relationship functional and healthy, keep my ego in check.

That's also where I found out about LIT and this awesome work that's being done in Newark and I met like Janyce not too long after that and Jae. After that Jae has just been keeping me afloat over the pass like three years, like come to Jae, like this is what happened Jae, and she's just like why do you live that crazy life of fuckery? I need you to stop. I need you to get your life together. And I was like I got you Jae I'm about to get my life together. I would leave like six months later I come back and I got my shit together, kind of.

But yeah, wow. I remember I went to New Street for the first time and everything. I walked in and was just like hey. It was just so much like every... like I wouldn't even be able to stand here without also saying the lunch aides who gave me lunch even though they knew my parents weren't giving me money for lunch like that but they still made me a sandwich.

The security guards who kept me from getting expelled but didn't stop me from getting suspended. You know what I'm saying? It's like recognize that you did something wrong. I'm not going to say when I got to the fight. I'm just going to say that the fight was over when I got there and that you were said to be in the fight, not that you've started it and that your watch got taken off and used as brass knuckles, whatever, whatever, tomato, tomato.

Custodians who were like, watched over me and fed me dinner because I was like... that's how I got school pride because I had nothing to do after school because the cool gay kids went and did their thing and I wasn't necessarily in that so I was around the school picking up trash and cleaning toilets and floors with them. They took me in and if they saw me in the hallway even if... like they could have been leaving to go take a smoke break, to go get Chinese food, to go to the bank to come back. They're not supposed to be doing that. Let me be outside and see if it wasn't an issue.

So yeah, like everybody that kept me on the track that I was supposed to be on. I can't stop without mentioning the white Ms. Johnson because I mentioned the black Ms. Johnson, but the white one, that's my homie. She introduced me to Anytown, which is this leadership program and which basically took kids from all around Newark and took them to the woods for five days to discuss the issues around like race, gender, sexuality, classism, just like the isms of the shit that we were dealing with. I really got to hang out with like 50 people that I had never met before and just like cry our eyes out the fact that we couldn't be ourselves in the world that we often times live in day to day.

So yes, awesome mentors.

Eryicka Morgan:

Growing up in a high school and stuff I didn't really have a mentor or anything. I had organizations like I mentioned earlier; AAOGC and Project Wow that I went to, to talk to people and like I missed a lot of years of my youth due to something that I did. So I wasn't really around like for my youth years. But like now...

[BEGIN SEGMENT 11/12]

Eryicka Morgan:

...since I'm here and I'm doing the things that I have to do I would say my mentor would have to be my gay daughter because without her... I think she pushes me like to want to do better. When I see her and I think that I know everything and she makes me realize like what you see in yourself, you're seeing somebody else she made me realize you could do so much better.

Don't be like the rest of the transgender women, you don't have to go do that. She just motivates me. Like when I think of just turning back she always makes sure she gives me that extra push when I need it.

So my mentor would have to be my gay daughter. Thank you.

Tarell Gregory:

Typically in the gay subculture when you come out of the closet usually you are assigned what they call gay parents and the gay parents somehow the universe brings them to you if you're going to get them.

In my own case I was issued a gay father by the name of Hassan Robinson. I knew absolutely nothing about ballroom scenes or gay life or The Village or Project Wow or anything until I met this young man. I pretty [of] need help. I was pretty in need of help and he gave me the help that I needed. He told me the ins and outs and didn't judge me on the things that I did do but told me how to ration myself so it won't be so out there.

I learned how to moderate this and how to speak in proper etiquette and the whole fashion thing and so people don't talk about me because I was always depressed about oh why do everybody always talk about me. He was like no,

no don't worry about it. If you're going to do it do it this way and I really appreciate that.

Aside from that it's like so many people who I idolized and I have to make mention of them like Rodney Long who is someone who I've seen since I came out just dodging in and out the community or somewhere where I've been just giving, giving not taking and I'm just like oh wow, awesome.

Then you have your Darnel Moore who is just someone who I aspired to be whose taken that extra step in everything he does and has... words can't explain.

Rustin Blair who was one of the many counsels at Project Wow who knew what was in me before I did and continue to push me even though I refused it a lot of the times.

Oh my gosh, Tamara Fleming. I love your photography. I mean, I could go on but I'm going to stop there. So my mentors definitely was my counsel in Project Wow and my gay dad.

Tynesha McHarris:

It is not a coincidence that many of the names that were just mentioned are in the audience right now, so that deserves a round of applause.

Kiyan Williams:

Given another shot I don't know how I could forget Darnell. So I just want to give him another round of applause.

I feel so ashamed of myself for forgetting this man who came into my life my senior year in high school who I met in this very room at this very table. I was invited to speak about LGBT concerns in Newark's education system with a conference that was organized by Darnell. When the universe brought us together there had just been great, beautiful things that have happened since then. Yeah this

man has truly been like an inspiration, a mentor, a friend, a brother, a sister, a “brister” as we say, just a wonderful person.

Tynesha McHarris:

Shout out to the annual Safe Spaces conference look out soon for a date near you. So let’s talk a little bit about religion and the role that religion, if it had played a role in your life and your family’s life and any affiliations that you have now and any complex that may have emerged. Let’s start with Tarell.

Tarell Gregory:

Okay. Well like I made mention earlier my mom was Muslim and my grandma was Christian. So I went from church to reading the Quran and kind of flip flopped a lot mainly because I wanted acceptance from both of them. At the end of the day I think I came to terms with just believing in a higher power and I believe that living in that type of chaotic situation; what it did teach me is how **[unintelligible - 00:04:49]** and not judge people on different religions and things like that because they will go back and forth for about how this is right and this is wrong and I just sit in the middle like well why can’t we do this and compromise and badabing badaboom everybody’s happy.

And so like that’s the one thing it taught me about living and there’s so many different religions. I’m a Christian and I’m very happy with that.

Kiyan Williams:

I currently don’t identify with an organized religion. I do identify as sort of spiritual person who believes in a hodge-podge of bunch of different new age stuff.

But I was raised my mother was never really religious at all but my grandmother comes from southern Baptist church and so for a while I did go to church with her. But when I

went to church with her church taught me how to be gay. We all know when you look at the choir you know the dudes in the choir singing higher than the girls everyone accepts and embraces them. They may be what you call them a little funny or oh he's different but you know people collectively accept in their own coded words that that person is gay.

Just the flamboyancy of the African-American Baptist tradition really resonated like I would go to church and I would just like really sit there like the preacher would be preaching, I wasn't really listening. I was just like looking around the room clocking what everybody was wearing. The brought out some fierce fits for church. Until I got older and got bored with church that was sort of what I have appreciated.

A couple of my uncles are Muslim so I practiced Islam for a while. But then when I started to just question organized religion I stopped believing in sort of organized religion. And sort of wanted to get away from these religious ideologies and doctrines that said I shouldn't exist.

And so I had a friend who was Buddhist. I tried that for a minute, didn't really work for me. And something that actually resonated with me from the earlier panels that was really sort of describe my religion is that self-love is sort of what I believe as in a religion which a lot of the panelist earlier spoke about.

I truly believe that inside each and every one of us we have a love, a beauty, a god, a goddess that we need to remember and embrace and share with other people and we can't find that externally. You know we can't find that in another man, another woman, from a friend, from a place,

from an item of clothing. We really have to find that in each and every one of ourselves because we have it in us. Everything that we do in life should reflect that and should help us bring out that inner beauty so that we can share it with each other. So that's my religion.

Tynesha McHarris:

All right.

Danielle Cooper:

My Facebook says that I'm serious, it says that I'm like a follower of Christ with Buddhist tendencies some Islam reservations and like a spiritual quest or journey or something like that with an understanding of good and evil and the marriage of heaven and hell or something.

Yeah, I didn't actually have a problem with religion until I found out that religion sort of had a problem with me. That was my like word book. See if I don't have an issue when it comes to the sanctuary, but whatever.

So that wasn't my issue, like when I was younger and stuff like that like I would pretend I was a preacher and everything like that and it was really good times. The issue came in when I came out, and when I came out my sister they found out my sister was sexually active and they threw us both in the church like Jesus help them.

They threw me into the church and I went with rainbow belts on every Sunday and like it was not a game. Me and this other AG at the time like her when she went to church events like she would dress like a boy but when she went to church her grandmother made her dress like a girl.

So after church she would be really pissed off because she'd have these white stockings on and the skirt and this ugly blouse and berets. I looked older so we would walk down I would go get a Lucy and we'd walk up and down

smoking like trying to look cool and everything like that, you know.

Of course I had this really cool knee length chocolate jacket that went with my only tan outfit that I wore to church and made me look so much older when I wore it. But anyway, and my parents tried to take me to bible study and everything and I remember that they took me to bible study and we got on Sodom and Gomorra biblical quote whatever and I was like so you believe being gay is wrong?

So you're telling me I could be a good person, I can help others, you know what I'm saying love my neighbor like I love myself and you're telling me that I'm still going to go to hell because of how I love? The women who were in my all-women's Bible study group said yes and I promptly got back into the car with my mom and I said if you take me back to this bible study again we can't come back to this church.

Since I was known for being the reckless one that will take a beating just to make a point and to embarrass people... oh I will embarrass, don't make me embarrass you. Like when I came out that's when I really got to say to my parents and mean it. Don't make me embarrass you. Like there are gay people here I can find them don't make me, you know.

And they made me go back to church and promptly you know I'm saying at the church field trip to gay day, *I mean* the gospel fest at Six Flags I then sure found the other gay people. We were all at the back of the bus and we all came out like it was smiles and giggles the entire time.

I was more or less like a terror in church and then I went on the Equality Ride which was a social justice bus tour through the south where we went to conservative faith-

based institutions to speak to them about their discriminatory policies towards their LGBTQ students. That's when the religion conversation didn't... it wasn't like religion this is something that someone is using against me. It was like religion this is like a doctrine that people believed in that has caused like irreparable damage and pain to members of my community.

I can't, I need to know more about this work. I need to know why I can go to one church and talk to one pastor and they say one thing and I can go to another church I talk to another pastor and say something totally different. That's when it was like using the Bible to heal where others have hurt and screwed people up.

Like when I met an ex-gay face to face it was the most emotional... I've never cried so much just understanding that somebody made a choice to not be the fullness of who they are and how crushing that is to your soul because you're really like, these are all of my friends, like imagine these are all of your friends but you understand that the reason they're your friends is because you're not out, it's because you have chosen to live a life that's normal that other people can swallow and accept.

I was just like... I mean I did my jumping around with religion in terms of yeah I did the Quran, I did Buddhism and everything but I was drawn back to Christianity because I feel like it's not being taught the way it's supposed to be. If that is going to have people start businesses like not nonprofits like businesses making billions of dollars just so that they can bring ski slopes in. Not so that the kids can have like snow and a new form of recreation, no.

They want to bring that so they have more kids to come to their school so they can teach them more of like their lessons of hate and intolerance. I'm just like I'm over it. I'm sorry. And that's kind of one of the things like I don't necessarily see myself as like this is the Bible it's the word, breathe and everything.

But I do understand this is an awesome book of stories that has been used to inspire people and if you look at it from its historical and its cultural context you'll find a greater understanding of what the word revolution means, the greater understanding of who Jesus was in the context of that time and forever and all.

And you understand that the Bible, Jesus love[s] revolution, let's make change happen. Let's speak truth to power, let's show the hypocrisy of their laws and be like you know what you're in a financial crisis right now but you're saying that gay people can't be married you understand how much of a marketing boom that would be if gay people can get married?

Hello? We put business to shame. We would like single handedly flip this economy but they don't want our money because of what we do in closed doors but they want our fashion advice, they want our, you know what I'm saying? They want us to be there to... I'm so lonely and straight my gay man hold me, take me around your brothers type of thing.

They want to be around dikes who are just like yes, yes you are straight woman I've been in love with you for the past four years, you know this but you're still going to hang out with me for your ego boost and stuff like that. You only say

hey I got a gay friend that doesn't mean I'm homophobic.
Yes it does!

If you have to say that you have a gay friend to tell somebody that you're not homophobic you're freaking, pretty shitty homophobe sir. I appreciate the homophobes that don't you know what I'm saying like fucks with us they just like they back up.

Wrapping that up, religion tool to heal. That's my take on it.

Eryicka Morgan:

I would like to say that growing up in a Christianity home I would have to say the church would like to say please. I forgot to leave that out. All my sisters was in church who was like six and seven, we used to know what time to meet up to go downstairs when the pastor was about to preach or whatever. So I was to be like...

Church was basically like, my grandmother, she made me go to church every Sunday. It wasn't no yes, it wasn't no, no. It was like go. Clothes out Saturday night, blizzard? Church. She didn't care if we were sleeping in church she didn't care. Her main thing was to look good, everybody, church.

So we basically was churched up. I used to get dressed. I used to say I want to buy new dress clothes because every year they get smaller and smaller. I just used to go and go and go and then one day she noted like me and this boy we just started hanging together but she just used to watch us and say why are you hanging out with [Ms. Jerry's] little grandson. I say he's my friend. She say yeah he look like he's going to be gay. And I say why do you say that? And then she say yeah because you will be gay too I bet you. I used to be like no, no, no.

So then one year she knew, like at the summer camp she knew like they were going to teach like a certain lesson. I guess the pastor already, because they were on the ministry board, so I guess the pastor knew to send the young boys to like this little church, little retreat thing of whatever. And they was talking about how gays can't... like how it's an abomination against Christ and all that stuff.

It never occurred to me that I never thought of myself as being gay. And like Natalie said earlier, she showed herself as being a woman. So therefore I always took myself out the equation because I was like those faggots, I'm not a fagot. So I never looked at it like it was like **[unintelligible - 00:18:19]** and so I never felt as though... it's like still to this day I don't like The Village because I don't like to see two men really.

So therefore like in church I never used to like understand. I used to see like the guys and I like to see them like singing and stuff and I used to wonder are they going to be girls like me? I used to always think but then I realized no they're more like gay men.

So basically church to me was like another home. I used to get up and like let's go to church, let's go to church and my brother was like you want to go to church so much, why do you want to go to church so much? Because I knew like joining the choir and the back you see all the people like you, going all the little trips the church gives, all the boys stay in one room and stuff.

So it was basically after like finding out like as I got older or whatever and I started seeing it like... I started seeing church different because like my grandmother she just like talking. When I started bringing my gay friends around,

the bull daggers and the lesbians and stuff. She won't let them bull daggers in.

And I was like some of them go to church and so she stopped going to the church too because she found that I was talking to one of the people that was like the big people to church and I ended up telling her the wrong thing to do, she then left the church and everything.

So I will just say that religion... it doesn't matter like who you choose to call God even if you believe in yourself like you said that it was a god or goddess in you. I think the thing is that just to have faith and just believe. That's my main thing of religion. Just have faith and believe.

Tynesha McHarris:

So we listened to the baby boom generation panel talk about... did I hear all right now... talk about Murphy's and talk about Zanzibar. We heard the middle generation talk about going to New York City and seeing Murphy's and Zanzibar close. Here in Newark today, where does the LGBT youth community go to have fun, places and spaces to party to get entertainment where is the space now here in Newark?

Danielle Cooper:

Is it the Raven now? I thought they called it the Raven. Don't whisper now.

No, we're trying to figure out like term... it was the Globe but then it changed I thought to Raven and then it was the Globe.

Eryicka Morgan:

Brown Stone.

Danielle Cooper:

What?

Eryicka Morgan:

Brown Stone.

Danielle Cooper:

I thought it was the Globe. I think it's still Globe I don't know.

Eryicka Morgan:

Brown Stone.

Danielle Cooper: The Brown Stone, are you sure?

Eryicka Morgan: Yeah, something... that's the club that...

Danielle Cooper: Okay.

Tarell Gregory: You can call it either or. The Brown Stone AKA the Globe.

Danielle Cooper: When Nick's was open I would go and I would mingle and get a drink. I'll dance a little bit. I might even get a number. It's just... I don't know where to go now.

Tynesha McHarris: Can you talk about Nick's a little bit? What is Nick's?

Danielle Cooper: Nick's is a spot in Central Avenue and it had gay night on Fridays. Yes. Clap if you've been there, I've seen you. But that was the swaggy house music and stuff like that. Just awesome lesbians most... sometimes in couple form without any type of couple indicator but that's okay. I just remember going there and kind of doing the trial and error. You're going to walk to the bar by yourself you're not going to bar with your butch. I'm going to try to buy you a drink to start that conversation and then when I give them the money for the drink I'm here with my boo, you and her enjoy that drink. I'm thankful though because you know I went to Nick's and I got to experience a whole bunch of beautiful lezzies and I went there with some gay men and that was good times too. We shut that place down and yeah, good times. Nick's, where are we going now?

Tarell Gregory: I was very big fan of Mentors, the Globe and when I wanted to do things that were of age in Project Wow like spades and things. Nowadays I will say as far the youth is concerned when it comes to partying and things like that there's not a lot of spaces that can accommodate all the different types of gays.

So what happens is each individual click of gays probably do their own shindig and probably do what they would a hotel party or a friend's house and turn it into the atmosphere that they will want. So they don't have to be around so many other things that they have to get adjusted to.

So that's what's been going on a lot lately. So Robert Treat anyone? That was the place?

Kiyan Williams:

I never really found a place in Newark to party. Like you know the pier, Christopher Street, those are iconic landmarks and you know like gay mythology when you're from this area. But it's like a myth now because like the gentrification that's happening.

I remember the first time I went to... when I was in high school we would go to the pier and there would be no one there but us or you know we walk down Christopher Street we don't see too many people. If you're not of age and you don't have access to like bars and clubs there's like nowhere to go. But I now have a chance to experience Chi-Chi's before they shut it down. You know Secrets isn't that big of a secret, you know the secret's our, a lot of gay clubs and bars in New York.

Eryicka Morgan:

Well, like years ago I used to party at the Globe when it was like Broad Street or whatever but like now the trans community we mainly go to the Pacemaker on Lyons Avenue, the strip clubs. So just for the intimacy.

Danielle Cooper:

I just want to like... I don't know. I remember like watching kind of gay movies and like straight movies and stuff like that and kind of just like imagining and kind of wishing for like this big, beautiful queen to come and kind of see me walking down Christopher Street or the Village

or something like that and sweep me up with a fabulous line and a hair flip and shit and kind of just introduce me to like the gay clubs and stuff like that and kind of like be my ticket in. It's like if you don't have a fake ID or somebody to get a fake ID from because Valley Fair closed it's like you really, you know.

I mean it's kind of like you really are kind of just at the mercy of whatever party you can find on like Downelink or something like that or like whatever social networking thing they're on now because I don't go Downelink anymore, too many bad experiences.

But anyway, I feel like that in itself is kind of like that breaks it off because it kind of like, I remember hearing from other gay people like gay youth or young adults and stuff like that, they were kind of taken [to] those places by the older gay friends or to-be mentors and stuff like that. They kind of were introduced to the safe way to enjoy the gay scene and the not so safe way to enjoy the gay scene and everything like that. About the what, drugs?

Hi, I'm sorry plug, my bad.

[BEGIN SEGMENT 12/12]

Danielle Cooper: My phone is right here Jae, right here. Come on.

Participant: Middle age generation, right?

Danielle Cooper: Yeah, yeah. You got a better phone than I do, switch?

Tynesha McHarris: You want to talk about True Colors?

Danielle Cooper: Yes. True Colors is the youth and young adults safe space that's run out of 11 Halsey Street on Wednesdays from 4:00 to like 5:30 we have Randall who is a really awesome man come and do drumming with us where we get to kind of like going to djembe do little hand drums and stuff like that. We

also have game night on Thursdays and the second and fourth night is a movie night.

That is a place that I helped cofound three years ago actually when I originally first moved to Newark and when I was like of kind of looking for a space myself and being like all right so forget it we have a space let's try to run programming out of it and let's try to get some things happening. So we have game night and movie night and I'm just like everywhere.

Thank you Jae for sitting in the front row.

On Wednesdays from 1:00 to 3:00 we have a praise... not on Wednesdays on first and third Wednesdays of the month we have praise and worship service which is a really awesome thing because it's kind of just like praise how you want to praise, like bring in music. You want to sing? That's cool. You want to dance? That's cool. You never got a chance to shout in the sanctuary come and shout with us and have good times because we often times know that while walking this life and walking in the fullness of who we are in ourselves we definitely need some spiritual refueling.

And it's non-denominational so if you want to come with your prayer mat and everything please feel free. You want to come with your beads please feel free. You want to teach us something new please feel free. I always like learning. But the space is open from Wednesday from 4:00 to 7:00 and on Thursdays from 4:00 to 9:00.

Once again 11 Halsey Street. All are welcome. I hope to see you guys there, 4:00 to 8:00 on Thursdays. It's been an interesting week. You got anything to say?

Tynesha McHarris:

Let's give a round of applause for Jae.

Danielle Cooper:

Thank you Jae, my mentor. Good job boy.

Tynesha McHarris: In the last... the two previous panels the last question that they were asked was what words of wisdom and encouragement would they have for the generations to come and future generations and the younger generations. What would you like to share with the older generations?

Danielle Cooper: All right do you want to start this off?

Kiyan Williams: I'm rolling my sleeves up.

Eryicka Morgan: I want to... with the older generation I would like to give thanks to Nataly that spoke earlier because I've never had a chance to meet an older woman that did something positive with herself because I hear she's at school and she did all these things. I look now like my generation and generation that's after me and it's like no school, like no nothing. So to sit in audience to hear her say that she was educated and she did what she had to do without prostitute and no sex work, no nothing she just left one place and went to another place without nothing just to be able to be the woman that she is today. So I'm really thankful. Thank you Nataly.

Tarell Gregory: Well, to the previous generation, I can't stress acceptance enough and the fact that the youth are looking for just that. And I know that at time we can be a little intolerable and hard to understand so I present to the youth however like with the right networking and persistence you can find acceptance and you can find your way around all this negativity that's out here. To the old generation, help us along the way. I mean you guys know you've been through it, you've seen it, you know this already. Help us along the way because it will be worth it and after all we'll be taking care of you when you get older. Help us out.

Kiyan Williams:

What I would say to the older generations, first is just thank you for the paths you've embarked on, for building those bridges on your backs that we can cross and then embark on new trails and continue to build upon that legacy. And just continue to support us as we embark in those uncharted territories and journeys because there are of course a lot of generational differences. We live in a different time and space, politics are different. The way we understand ourselves in this world are different. Accept, nurture our difference and let us continue to keep the fire lit.

Danielle Cooper:

Older generation, let debauchery reign a little bit. I say this because hearing like older people talk about like Prides before and how Pride was and how awesome Pride was and everything like that I feel like sometimes in this push for marriage equality young people are kind of like yes we're flamboyant, we're out there. Debauchery reigns in our circles and stuff like that and now with this push for marriage equality it's like we kind of... I'm trying to look as respectful and as normal as possible so we can get right and everything. However, I just won't, debauchery, it's kind of a hard thing in our community. It's kind of one of those things like we're known for with straight people too. Straight people don't go to Pride to support us. They go because they get to wear as little as they want and look at naked women and men and freaking... you know what I'm saying? Be a little flamboyant, rambunctious and then they go home to their regular lives. Debauchery is okay. I like to say that. I would also like to say elders for the ones that are out here continuing to strive for the mentors that are out here, for doing work in the community there are four or five other elders that aren't doing shit. So check your friends because

it's hard to respect... you know what I'm saying a group of positive elders when you know they hang out with the elders that you kind of slept with last year when you weren't of age. Just saying.

So I'm just saying snap, snap are we being for real, are we not? I'm trying to talk to you all so we can get some things done in our community. If you don't want to hear it put on Lady Gaga.

But I say all that and I'll also say that in the midst of all that, in the midst of all the fuckery that the youth kind of bring upon us and everything like that please just continue to be available and continue to tell your stories because how are we ever suppose to transition and reach to the heights that you've reached if we don't know that like you were hanging out at a similar Globe of your generation doing... you know I'm saying, interesting drugs of your generation and that you had to go through steps to get to the place where you are now.

You know a lot of times I feel like that story is not necessarily told by elders. The story of what you really went through, the fuckery that you had to overcome to be the awesome elder that you are today. I feel like we often times don't get into those conversations due to kind of boundaries and where you want to place things. And if you're mentoring someone you don't necessarily want to jump to that part because you're like ethics and rules and everything like that. However, I feel like those are the things and those are the true stories that are really going to start making positive and powerful impacts and change in our community especially when I see like swaggy lesbian that's like in a three-piece suit. But I know that like 20, 30 years ago she was dressing

in like skinny jeans and like acid-wild stuff and she was just a hot mess, you know what I'm saying? But she did everything that she needed to so she can get to this point of comfort where she can be whoever she wants to be and walk strong in her spot.

We just need to know the path that you took so that ours isn't as hard. So we need to know you guys, period.

Tynesha McHarris:

So we're going to end on that note. Let's give an enthusiastic applause.

Beryl Satter:

Thank you all for being here and sharing history with us and making history together. I just want to remind you again there is a reception downstairs in the art gallery. Just go down the stairs and to the right you'll see it. Again you can stop by the "e-zibit," you could stop into the booth there if you want to add your voices. The booth is up there and ready to record you. If you parked in deck one stop at registration for the parking coupon and do fill out your exit surveys, okay? The purple slip is going to really help us out. Okay, bye everybody see you in the reception. And 6:00 tonight Coffee Cave 45 Halsey Street, okay, for the final party celebration and performance of the evening. Okay, 6:00 tonight.