

Kristyn Scorsone (KS): Hello and welcome to the Queer Newark Oral History podcast. I'm Kristyn Scorsone, your host and a PhD student in American Studies at Rutgers University Newark. This podcast is a part of the Queer Newark Oral History Project, a community-based and community-driven initiative supported by Rutgers Newark. Hi, Aaron. Welcome to the Queer Newark Oral History podcast. So Aaron was born and raised in Newark. He is one of our Queer Newark Oral History Project interviewees, so you can listen to his oral history on our website at queer.newark.rutgers.edu, and he has just published his book of poetry entitled *Tears of a Poet*. Congrats, Aaron.

Aaron Frazier (AF): Thank you. Thank you.

KS: Aaron, would you mind saying a little bit more about yourself and how you identify and the work you do in the community?

AF: Well, I identify as a gay male. It doesn't bother me. My—my other name is Una, I'm the mother of the House of Divine, part of the ballroom community. So I'm kind of good. I'm—I'm not doing balls currently, but if someone say, "oh, hey, Una" or "hey Aaron," it doesn't bother me because a lot of people in the boroughs, then they call me by my drag name.

KS: Oh yeah.

AF: Yes.

KS: How—how did you think of it?

AF: Actually, my designer did because most of the time I would—even though I had leadership qualities, but I mostly traveled alone, so Una came out of being Spanish, but the female version of Uno.

KS: Oh, cool. So how do you identify? You identify as gay?

AF: Yes. It doesn't bother me. I—I really don't—the pronouns that everybody's going through, I'm like, "oh, no, as long as you're respectful, we're cool."

KS: Right. When did you realize you were queer?

AF: In all honesty, as a young person, I'm talking about, like, age of 8 and 9. I knew I was different and I didn't gel well, or get along with other people who didn't kind of act like me or—not that I was out or flamboyant, it's just I didn't get some of the things that people did, you know. As I grew older, I would say, coming into my sexuality, accepting myself, I had

experimented, you know, with guys and different things. I mean, never been with a woman, got close but, like, ugh, ran.

KS: So you have your gold star.

AF: But when I actually—I would say between 18, 19, that's when I really came to terms with it. I had—was messing around with a guy and then the guy actually—most of the guys never even asked, "are you gay" or any of that, and this one particular guy said, "are you gay?" And I'm like—I just—and we was sexually active, but I didn't—I didn't—it just did something to me, something, like, in the back of my head I thought about but never really dealt with it. I did—I say I didn't come to terms with it till 19 when I went away to school to Virginia Union University, for whatever reason, the people in the southern region, because I was from Newark, they—people would try to pop stuff, to start trouble. I got into it with this—some guy from the South, they ended up changing me with roommates. They changed the room cause we didn't get along cause he threw my stuff out because I was gay.

KS: Wow, what year was this?

AF: And I—all I know—I—I can't even think of the year. It had to be like 81, 82.

KS: Okay.

AF: When I went down there and it was—after the incident occurred where he was throwing out my—throwing my clothes and stuff out the window, it was really—did—took a lot out me not to just beat him up and that later on that night when they removed him from the room and I was basically there by myself and lost in thought, the ugliness, and that's when I took a whole bunch of pills and tried to commit suicide.

KS: Wow.

AF: And woke up, I'm like, I'm here, I'm still, you know, I'm still here. And I went to their psychiatrist, told them what happened. I don't remember a lot of it because I think I blocked a lot of it out, but when I came to terms as surviving the suicide attempt, I realized that I was here for a purpose. What that particular purpose was, I really wasn't too sure. It wasn't clear. I kind—I don't—I'm not a bully and I—the first thing I did when I came back to Newark was kind of look out for the couple of people that I treated badly who were flamboyant and just trying to make amends with—within them as well as myself because you're not supposed to do that. And one of the guys, we end up at Murphy's one night and he said—

KS: What's Murphy's?

AF: Murphy's used to be that one gay club that everybody in Newark, anybody out of state, they would come to Murphy's for a Murphy's drink. The drink was really potent. You paid \$5. If you weren't a drinker, most people, after the first one, they done, and, you know, whereas they drunk, whereas for me, it's like, at least three of them. But the young man I went to school with and he—he caught me and he said, "you no different than I am," I—and I thought, and I really told him, I said, "I apologize. I didn't know myself then. I didn't know what was what, you know?" And I'm saying, "I'm glad I had, you know, really to see you, to make amends, at least for my part, I don't care if we accept it or not, but I needed to do that for myself." And then I started, kind of got into the ballroom scene at that particular time. I didn't like some of the things, but just seeing some of my friends, a lot of them into it. So I would, you know, I would admire it, but I didn't go. I didn't. I don't think—I didn't go to my first ball when I came back to Newark, it was at the Terrace Ballroom. It was about girlfriends, people who were popular within the community, like Bobby White, Pattie PenDavis LaBelle, and even Harmonica and people like that would give balls. You know, sometimes they weren't affiliated with the houses. That didn't happen till later on, specifically from Jersey.

KS: Harmonica Sunbeam?

AF: Yes.

KS: And could you explain, like, what balls are, in case people don't know?

AF: Balls are a safe space for community to express themselves, whether or not they vogue, whether or not they are transitioning from male to female or female to male. It has really evolved to—they have categories for each particular circle or pronouns or identifiers for people in ballroom, from femme queen to butch queen to banjie cunt to DL of the whole nine.

KS: What is banjie cunt?

AF: Banjie cunt is generally a young—a young lady who is not necessarily a femme queen, but like to dress up. Some of them, you could call them crossdressers, but a lot of times they live their life until they actually come to terms and want to transition into becoming a woman. Then it's a whole different ball game.

KS: Oh, okay. You said that there were some aspects that you didn't care for?

AF: When I say didn't care for is—from—I would say from when I came out, even when I wasn't even out, from the 70s up to about the 80s, if you lived in a community, you were gay, regardless of which aspect, you had to earn your respect from your community in order for your community

to respect you. Some people get beat up, some people beat others up. However which way it go, it creates a level of respect from the community and they—when you get the level of respect from your community, they can be themselves and walk through. The problem becomes when people who are not from a particular hood just come in here and totally disrespect the community, disrespect the elders, kids and things of that nature.

KS: Do you mean like people outside of Newark come in?

AF: Yes. And they could be trans. They could be, you know, gay, but that, you know, however which way they carry on in their community, you don't take that into other people's community because it's a—it's just a unwritten word, but it's still a level of respect and you just—you have to always do that.

KS: Did you—so you competed in the balls too?

AF: Yes, when I—at the time, mothers of the balls had to be a femme queen, so I could no—I no longer walked when I became mother, I no longer walked butch queen in drag. I just walked femme queen categories, mostly like high fashion and evening wear, runway, big girls runway, mother/daughter runway, or, you know, a group type category.

KS: What was that like for you?

AF: I worked for a bank. Horrible, horrible situation. It's just that the—on the ballroom scene, I can actually live in my illusion of what I want to be, what I would like to be, in the grandeur of it all, even though I knew the ballroom scene was just what it was, is extra active, extra curriculum, it's also developed and evolved into a very diverse community as of right now from—you got Pose. Well, from Paris is Burning to—we have Pose. It's—it was another one that was out of LA. I can't even think of the name of that one.

KS: Right.

AF: But it would—it all—it all talks about the different aspect of trials and tribulations of being a gay person and the ballroom community accepts all people because a lot of us are just, you know, some is just misfits but we find other misfits and we get along and this is what happened.

KS: That's awesome. Does Pose, like, and Paris is Burning, do they live up to the reality?

AF: And I would say, it has grown. One of the things that wasn't talked about in Paris is Burning, a lot of those kids back then, even though they walked a particular category or they was part of the house, a lot of them weren't and ballroom in the beginning got a bad rep and it wasn't

always—it wasn't about that. People actually who wanted to get the reality or the notoriety within the ballroom scene, they worked legitimate jobs and they paid for stuff. They, you know, they did things legitimately, where some girls actually did craft, but at the same time there was—you had both right and wrong doing things for the greater good to help the younger people.

KS: What do you mean by did craft?

AF: Craft is when the person will write bad checks, knowing that there's no money there.

KS: Okay.

AF: Credit card scams. Identity thefts. Literally boosting, stealing garments or items from a store.

KS: Right. Yeah. Well, a lot of these—I guess the community is often—it's often like marginalized, like, people in poverty, right, or—

AF: Yes, yes.

KS: You said that you became house mother. How did—how did that—how did you—like, what does house mother entail and how did that happen?

AF: Well, I was—when I was part of the House of LaBelle under Patti PenDavis LaBelle, I was the Duchess. My position was the Duchess of the House. Basically, last on the totem pole to become mother in the House of LaBelle. But when Patti got sick and was really doing bad, I asked her, I said, "do you want me to succeed you as mother?" And she said no, she said when she died my—the House of LaBelle has to die too. So that's what happened. She—when she was—said what she said, I started my own house, people who wanted to work with me and I had a sponsor and everything, so it was pretty decent, pretty decent.

KS: Who was your sponsor?

AF: My sponsor was Dr. Larry Bailey. He was one of my good friends and we were just talking and he would just—whenever monies was needed, that was my person.

KS: Oh, that's cool. I didn't know you could do—like, have a sponsor.

AF: Well, everybody—you do things differently. Like, Pose give some of the back end, you have some people who, regardless of how they live, they have people that likes them and that covers some of their expenses, same situation, or you find a friend who don't want to be out in that

particular community, but see what you're doing as something great so they'll support you in any aspect. Back then, I had two, actually, three house designers that anytime I call for them, they did what they had to do for us.

KS: Wow, they designed, like, costumes?

AF: Yes.

KS: That's really cool. Oh, your house is House of Divine, right?

AF: Yes.

KS: How did you, like—

AF: It actually came from Miss Divine because most of us was big people and, you know, just wanted to put a positive spin on it.

KS: Like John Waters Divine?

AF: Yes.

KS: Didn't you see her perform once?

AF: Yes, I just have—when I—after I came out in Richmond, I was in Richmond, VA, and my friend sent me to this club and I'm looking up there, I'm like, "oh, my God. It's a big person up there" and—and had the flag, you know, sequence and everything. And I was like, "Okay," and I was like, look, walked around and then—then I left and it wasn't till years later that I realized who it was.

KS: That's—that's awesome. I love—I love divine.

AF: Yes.

KS: That's really cool. What is Fireball?

AF: The fireball was actually created out of Project Fire, which was a prevention program that was created—I can't even think of the—it's a group of people. James Credle, Don Ransom, Patrick Kelly, actually, through Patti and Angel, saw, you know, cause Angel and Patti was on the ballroom scene.

KS: Angel was a designer too, right?

AF: Yes, Angel Claudio. They actually came to the ballroom community and presented themselves. In the beginning, it was like safer sex parties to kind of educate the community about HIV and safe sex practices. They would have, say, just a fellowship of food with their families and friends and you know, just sharing the information. Back then they—they would use—the term was "each one teach one," and then someone else in that group who has another group of friends can do a safe sex party and, you know, again passing the education. One of the things—unfortunately, Project Fire was—when it was created as a prevention program, to deal with the MSM population, men who sleep with men on the ballroom scene. It—we realized that at that particular time, it goes further than just the MSM. The ballroom community deals with women, men, children, elders and the whole nine.

KS: Wow.

AF: So project fire was actually supposed to become its own entity, but we had people who came in it and just disrupted the growth for the event, evolution of Project Fire, what was supposed to occur. The Fireball is actually an extension of Project Fire with the two work going in. It helped with some of the funding programs, activities within Project Fire. It's—it was just a great particular time.

KS: Yeah, it started in the 80s?

AF: Yes.

KS: Cool. And you—you have been living with the AIDS virus for—for 38 years, is that right?

AF: Yes. Yes.

KS: What's that been like for you?

AF: The challenge has been—difficult. I won't even say difficult. It's just living on life's term. Some of the things that were—that is a problem for me, I would say going back, people were dying, and when I say you could go to the club, 10—every other week, 10 to 15 or more people have passed on—

KS: Wow.

AF: From the virus back then and I—in my first diagnosis, they gave—they determined it was AIDS-related complex, ARC, and it was—that was so stigmatized and even then, I remember

going to—I'm not going to say the place, but I went to a particular hospital. I would say the setting was almost similar to this, except it was another desk over here, maybe two more, and it was real dark and the person gave me a sheet of paper, basically letting me know what my diagnosis, what was the result from me taking the test, it just was really weird for me.

KS: That's pretty cold.

AF: Yeah. Back then, they were cold. They didn't care.

KS: Wow.

AF: And as—at the time, being a 19 year old, still kind of young, I just didn't know what to do, so I just kind of put it in the back of my mind and paid it.

KS: Wow. So you were 19, so this was right when you were figuring out your sexuality too, that you got this diagnosis.

AF: Yes.

KS: Wow.

AF: Yes.

KS: That's tough. How did you deal with it from there?

AF: Basically not. I just kept on doing what I was doing, except I would, you know, use more condoms. Always had condoms on my person and or in my bag and being just cautious. Cautious. When James and them came to us, it was—I was really defiant cause we were still at that particular time getting over the fact that we let some outsiders into the community to record what should have been a documentary or record just the ball. They were—the woman who did Paris is Burning, she made money on it, but the people in the movie, in the documentary, didn't make a dime.

KS: Oh wow. Jennie Livingston.

AF: And—right. And they didn't even get their notoriety till after the movie became so popular, and then that's when they started reaching out to those who were still around and doing the interviews with Pepper LaBeija, Dorian Corey. They didn't—I know—I know they showed a picture of Avis, but they did mostly in New York and there was a lot of Jersey people there. It

was—one of the people—persons in Paris is Burning is coming from under the curtain stage on his back doing performance the old way. That was Legendary Mother Grace from Jersey.

KS: Wow.

AF: You know. Two of the other young people, they're talking, the one is thin and the other one is short, that was Hakeem and Portia. They was also from Jersey.

KS: From Newark?

AF: From Newark.

KS: Wow.

AF: Hakeem was the mother of the House of Jordan. So it's like, it's been around, but some of—a lot of the New York depiction of the ballroom excluded that particular piece.

KS: Right.

AF: Tracy Africa.

KS: Right.

AF: From Jersey, from Newark, but didn't get the notoriety and there was others, just as fab as Tracy back then, and it just—it is what it is, but the notoriety, the history, Jersey is included in a lot of it now.

KS: Yeah. What—what was Newark like in—in the 70s for—for queer people, where—there was, like, clubs, right?

AF: There was a lot of clubs. I—I'm gonna be real honest, for me, I had no clue. I just heard about it, whether or not it was to my cousins or one of my friends, but I'm like, "Okay," you know, because I wasn't even clear about me then.

KS: Right.

AF: So it didn't bother me. And my cousin—me and my cousin, me and him talk a lot and he talked about all the clubs that used to be up Clinton Avenue and Elizabeth, and I was like, "I had no clue." And it wasn't until later-later, one of my friends, he was best friends with the guy, had a bar that was on Bergen Street which was a gay club. Bergen and Clinton Avenue.

KS: Wow.

AF: So it was like—I got to meet a lot of good people in the, you know, transitioning way after that but I would say it was—Newark was the place to be.

KS: Wow. So was Murphy's, then, the first bar that you hung out in Newark that was exclusively gay?

AF: Murphy—Murphy's was the first bar my—how did I get there? My best friend, when I came back to Newark, he was an older gentleman. James Beverett. He took to me and gave me little odd jobs in his house and stuff and he eventually died. When he died, it was like, "Oh my God, I'm living this all over again" cause when my older brother had died, I was just like—just too through. I said—somebody, like, actually—he has allowed me as a person and during that time, his friends took me to this bar, and that was Murphy's. That's where I met Cornel and a bunch of the whole crew, and Cornel, for whatever reason, he was the number one bartender, also did drag, helped out a lot of people in community.

KS: What was it—what was it like walking into Murphy's for the first time? Do you remember?

AF: I—I just—I would say it just reminded me just of a bar, but being a young person, it was like everybody—the new piece on the block. So a lot of people were sending drinks and sending drinks, and I'm like, "what's this all about?" And, you know, and then I was still adjusting, but Cornel a lot of times would invite me out down there to Murphy's, even to his house. We just became good friends. And I just transition like everybody else, got used to it and paid it.

KS: Right.

AF: Some of them say hi to you, if you don't feel like talking, you don't feel like talking.

KS: Murphy's is gone now. It's where Prudential is, right?

AF: Yes.

KS: And you also—in your oral history with us, you talk about the Dollhouse. Can you tell me about that?

AF: The Dollhouse—

KS: Yeah.

AF: Was my first club. My friend Sonya Adams took me there, AKA Rady, and I'm like, looking and it was—it was—it was different. It was similar to that of Magoo's back in the day, which—Magoo's was a small gay club that was off of Main Street in East Orange. We would go there, like, if Murphy's wasn't open, just, you know, just to hang out or, like, if Harmonica or Patti was doing a show there, we would go there. They had, like, a lounge area, a stage area, and the dance floor, so it was really nice, but the Dollhouse had the same atmosphere, a lounge area, a dance floor, and a stage area, and I remember coming in there and just looking. I was just so amazed. And the people—I remember when Love Sensation would come on, Love Sensation, Miss Pucci That's where I met—first saw Miss Pucci, she was dancing and when that Love Sensation, she just stomped the floor and shook the whole building.

KS: Wow.

AF: Yeah, it was really a nice time.

KS: She was performing or just hanging out?

AF: No, just—just dancing and partying.

KS: Yeah, that's really cool. She's another person we—we've interviewed for the project and she is—she's really great. So that was in—that was in the 70s, mid-70s?

AF: I would say early 80s.

KS: Oh, early 80s. Wow.

AF: Yeah. Cause you know how it—70s, I'm—I'm—I'm—it wasn't till '79—no, '79 was—yeah, that's more like it.

KS: Okay, right.

AF: '79 was when I went to the Dollhouse. It wasn't until I would say roughly around '80 that I went to Murphy's.

KS: And they put a lot of shows on at the Dollhouse, right?

AF: Yes, they—when it was on William Street and Halsey over top of Jay's, it moved from there to Branford Street, Branford Place, and it was on the second floor. Didn't do too well there, so

then they moved from there to Elizabeth Avenue and it just—it was a bigger space and it was nicer. It's just the area. If you didn't—again with the respect, they would always try you.

KS: I heard they put on the—like, The Wiz, like, a version of The Wiz there.

AF: Oh, I couldn't tell you that.

KS: Yeah, I think that's—Miss Pucci Revlon talks about that, maybe, where they had like flying monkeys on roller skates, like, people playing the flying monkeys and,, you know, of course, Dorothy and—and that was owned by Bobby White—

AF: Yes.

KS: And Dorian Paris.

AF: Yes.

KS: What were they like?

AF: Just the kindest people. I, far as a gay person still coming into my own, they just was nurturing, always care. If they liked you, they always looked out for you. Even if you may have been short coming into the club and things of that nature, they was very good with community. They didn't—very seldom they turned people away.

KS: Wow. What was the crowd like there?

AF: I would—you—back then, it was a lot of, I would say, gay people, whether—that's when the lesbians—we all would—everybody came under that umbrella of being gay and—and like I said, I think right after that, and we was doing the clubs and everybody going to Zanzibar and called the song—"I'm Happy, Carefree, and Gay" was the theme song for everybody. So go to the Village and have a good time. Didn't matter who was who. We all hung out. And then all of a sudden one day, one of my girlfriends is talking about "I'm a lipstick lesbian." I was like "what?" And then it started changing and different—different groups started merging and I'm up there going like, I—I had to ask one of my friends. I asked one of my lesbian friends, I said, "girl, did I miss something? Did that—did the world change overnight?" and she was like, "I don't get it either." You know, because I'm like, yeah, you know, I know she's a butch, you know, and she knows I'm a gay man, but we respect each other. You know, it wasn't no real big thing. And it still changed.

KS: So you see the community as kind of like separating a bit at that time, like after that or shortly after?

AF: Yes, because the whole thing, when you separate an entity and create microscopics divisions, soon you—you know, you—you're so separated, you don't have the strength of the whole and we kind of lose out on that, saying this particular—it affects all of it. It all comes under the umbrella of being gay. And without that particular structure—you never heard of—today, for instance, you know a lot of transgenders being murdered. That didn't happen back then. If it happened, it—the one key thing that puts themselves at risk, when you don't tell who you are. Not that men had a problem dealing with the fact that they're sleeping with another man, but if he isn't on that order and you weren't up front, you put yourself at risk and then the outcome is unfortunate, you know, for some of them. And if you're going to do that, at least be able to defend yourself, take some self-defense classes, do something, and it's just sad when I hear that today, and it's like they're targeting—they got a mark on their chest because they got a lot of people—I've been in situations or in circles where, okay, they'll say, "okay, I don't have a problem with you," but then, "okay, my girlfriend over here, she's trans," but then you're gonna treat her differently? No. If you treat her wrong, that means you some way feel the same way about me and a lot of our trans, specifically, I would say the younger ones think everybody that smiles at them is their friend. No, they're not. And that's where the deception comes in. That's when the business of what they're trying to do within their lives, they become a victim because that person who they thought was their friend was deceive—deceptive and now spreading your business and now you at risk. It's just sad and—and it's no different for gay men too, who are not yet comfortable with disclosing, "oh, I'm a gay man" to someone else until he or that individual, she—let them tell it. Nobody else should be telling other people's stories—stories.

KS: Back in the day, there was an area in Newark called the Stroll too, where there was sex work going on. Was it, like, safe? Was it relatively safe for people to do it?

AF: Washington Street, Washington Park. Well, originally the drags was on the other side of the street. They would be going around 500 Broad Street and 540, that was their stroll the butch queens had, that Washington Park and Halsey..

KS: OK.

AF: I don't—I forget what actually happened, that they moved it from then to West Kinney Street. Well, in all honesty, all of that whole strip was a—a stroll, from a car on the highway, on—depending on how the person conducted themselves or carried themselves.

KS: Did police bother them at all?

AF: Well, they would if they were being disruptive to traffic or to—in an area that was disruptive to the community, yes, they would get them then. But if, you know, a lot of times, well, that's why they moved to where it would more—be more secluded. People go there and do what they do and go by their way.

KS: That's like kind of where Zanzibar used to be?

AF: Yes, yes.

KS: And that's where the Lincoln Motel was too?

AF: Yeah. The Lincoln Motel. And then from the Lincoln Hotel where the Bear Stadium, there was a—like a Lincoln Motel annex that used to have a music store, actually where the—the kind of 494, that building, well, that road that comes out was where that was—was at back then, along with the pianos, was a instrument store.

KS: Cool. What was Zanzibar like? Did you go there at all?

AF: Zanzibar to me was—no. I—I went with my cousin and I literally fell asleep on the—on the speaker, because I wasn't used to it, you know, it was just crowded and I just didn't like being in a small space crowded with people.

KS: Yeah. Was it, like, just, like, too much?

AF: Yeah. For me, it was.

KS: Yeah.

AF: Yeah.

KS: That's—that's interesting. Yeah, so and then now—so now you've—you've recently published your—your book of poetry, correct? Did you publish it through La Raine Magazine, through—?

AF: Yes, Angie has been pushing me. I—I have to give kudos to my sister. She came through.

KS: And—and Angie is Angie La Raine. And so La Raine Magazine is the first trans-owned and published magazine in New Jersey, right?

AF: Yes.

KS: So she—Angie puts out a—I guess—what, is it monthly or?

AF: She's supposed to do monthly. She's—you know, well, oh, I can't even say that because she said not to say that. But she's working on some things and she's—her magazine should be coming out, I would say she'd be finishing that up, hopefully before the end of the month. We're—we're—we're working hand in hand. I've also decided that I would help with some more of getting her more out there marketing-wise so I'm going to use the downtime that was used for—volunteer for somebody else and help them. I'm gonna do something and help somebody to do what they need to do to get where they need to go who appreciate it.

KS: Right. And she publishes it locally, like, you can get it at the—the Newark LGBTQ Center, right?

AF: Yes, AAOGC will always have some. We're going to work on a couple of other places. I'm also on the research CAB for Rutgers, so it's things that's coming out. It's a whole lot of this stuff.

KS: How long have you been working on your book for?

AF: The book was actually supposed to have been finished in 2003. I—at that particular time, I had a lot of stuff going on. They foreclosed on my house in 2003. I got laid off from First—well, I took the package, the exit package from First Union. When First Union took over, I saw a lot of things that just wasn't going to work to my benefit at that particular time. I was forced in the situation. I—when I took the package, I held onto the condo for as long as I could. Think it was around 1998. And during that process, my father died.

KS: Oh wow.

AF: Dealing with, you know, robbing Peter to pay Paul.

KS: Right.

AF: And it—it just became—this went on the back burner.

KS: Yeah, I could see how ahah would happen for sure. That's a lot.

AF: And—and just trying to just keep it going. You know, I write regardless of what—it wasn't until Angie was—oh, we've been talking after her magazine. And I submit stuff to her on the regular and she was just like, "you're gonna do the magazine. You're gonna do your own book"

and dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, and when I say to you, she been on me from point A. We was trying to have it ready by the Fireball. It actually was ready. It's just that I said "no, I didn't put enough."

KS: Right.

AF: Time and prepar—to promote it there.

KS: The Fireball event that just happened?

AF: Yes.

KS: Was it like a month ago, two months ago?

AF: Yes.

KS: How did you—how did you meet Angie?

AF: Me and Angie been friends since high school. We met—I'm not—I'm not going to say her other name, but I met her when she was the drum major for Central High School.

KS: Oh cool.

AF: And we was both—well, before she became the drum major, we both was in training to become drum majors, but I always chickened out and she went on and just—and with her fierceness, and she showed out and she did it.

KS: That's really cool. She performed at Dollhouse, too, right?

AF: Yes, yes.

KS: What was her—she was, like, really into performing as Grace Jones?

AF: Yes, she was known as Grace Jones.

KS: Wow.

AF: And most of the people between the Dollhouse, just around, because there was another club, I went there once, that was on Main Street. I don't know that—this is G's or D's or whatever, would let them have shows there too.

KS: That's really cool. Did you write for La Raine Magazine too?

AF: Yes.

KS: What did you write for them?

AF: Anything and everything.

KS: Yeah.

AF: Whatever I felt like writing, she went on and published it. Then on—put it in her book and at the same time, I was like, "child. You're getting on my nerves," so I had a whole bunch of stuff that I had written. I said "here, now you can just take whatever, it's alright."

KS: What's in the magazine? Is it like different columns or like current events or?

AF: It's informational, dealing with transgender issues, gay issues, community issues. She tried to put everything and anything that is relevant to current events and local information.

KS: That's cool. When did she start publishing or writing it or putting it out there?

AF: I want to say, oh God, we're gonna go with 19—18—wait a minute, 1997, I believe.

KS: Yeah, that's cool. That's really cool. Do you want to read one of your—one of your poems?

AF: Okay. Which one you want me to read?

KS: I don't know. What—do you have a favorite?

AF: Some of everything is good for me.

KS: Yeah, yeah, let's hear it. I love that you have the illustrations in there too. Who did you say drew them again?

AF: Hassan Love. He did the actual cover. He took what I said was going for and he did—this is what he came back with.

KS: That's cool.

AF: And then I took—I wanted some more illustrations and Hassan Glenn, also known as Glenn Hamilton, he did—what I showed him and gave him the poem, and he brought back. I hadn't had no problems with. I loved it all.

KS: Yeah, that's really cool.

AF: I'm gonna read "I Am Tired." "I am tired of those obstacles curtailing me from my destiny. I am tired of phony people who claim to know me, to know the problem, situation yet run to take the lead, forgetting about the reason why we are involved. I am tired of people always crying the blues, not to help one another, but imprison each other, not allowing or giving choices a chance, crabs in barrel, not one even realize that it's easier to work together towards a common goal to achieve the American dream. But if I or you are continually selfish, we'll leave others out. I'm tired of that old slave mentality, Ebonics hooked on something that looks like phonics, creating a language which limits the transition. We can make a change. A difference. I'm tired of being so lost, forgotten, egos gone astray, unlike personality rises to cause more confusion, a transfusion of possibilities, loss to so many maybes. I am tired of street politics, which helped no one but, except those who benefit from the actual transaction, the individuals involved claiming to care or be concerned only for personal gain until their house is on fire or they're caught up in not knowing nor wanting to know the truth, a solution to their self imprisonment."

KS: Wow, that's really great. That's really awesome.

AF: Thank you.

KS: What inspired you to write that?

AF: During that particular time, I was part of a group called Community Planning Group. It was the state prevention program. It was the people who made decision on prevention programs in the state, the grant—approving the grants that came from CDC for all prevention programs. From participating at that particular time, we—the group actually introduced where young people can go get tested without parental consent, and that was part of the initiative. We were doing a lot of things that benefited sexually active kids that parents was like, "I don't know, not my child" till they find out they're pregnant or have an STD or HIV. That's the sad part. And it was important that young people who wanted to know, go, be able to go into a safe space. So after that, things started changing. Back then they were saying that they wanted the prevention and the treatment to kind of co-collaborate, to work together, and a lot of it was force-fed because treatment, in their own personality, if you got a person who is HIV positive know with a particular struggle, he or she are going to do the right thing. When you got some people who are book-smart toward and have the degrees, but have no sense of common sense in dealing with people, they kind of wanted to be in control of something, and you exclude the community. So

that's what actually happened in that process. You have people who work for different agencies. They get paid to be at a meeting for 8 hours to that particular day, and they only doing 6, but they're still getting paid for 8. But me as a person who is disabled coming on my own dime, and the only thing I, you know, they would give me a little stipend. They took that away. So you didn't want those of us as clients and consumers to participate. So it was different things to that nature that was occurring, and that's when this came out.

KS: Wow.

AF: That's what—what inspired this poem.

KS: What else do you write about in there?

AF: I actually talked about the—the first poem on here is actually when my mother, we had to pack my mother up, move her out of the home that we've been in for the past 50 years, and just so happen, as I'm packing up stuff and I never really looked at my father's obituary.

KS: Oh.

AF: So I'm looking at it, I'm like, "oh, this is so nice" and that's—and then I read the poem on it and didn't even remember I wrote the poem.

KS: Wow.

AF: And I said, "Oh my God, you could tell I was in it" and, you know, so I, you know, I said it has to go in.

KS: Yeah.

AF: I told Angie, I said, "it has to go in." And some things—I write about current events, hoping to kind of jog people into getting involved, kind of sparking something within them. A lot of my inspiration from writing comes from Langston Hughes. Even though he's well known, he died a poor man, but his—his theory was given away. He gave away most of his poetry. He gave it away and that's what got him the notoriety. It didn't help his pockets, but it did get him the notoriety and putting his stuff out there. And I kind of used that as my mantra. Early on, people used to call me the newer version of him, but I was like, "I just—I am inspired by him" and I kind of fell off, but I'm getting back into it.

KS: You said you want people to get involved. Like, what kind of issues do you want people to care about?

AF: Stepping up to the table. It's easier to be the complainer across the street, around the corner, but when it affects you, your neighbors, or if it's not affecting you or your neighbors, eventually it will. And the more that you stand over there and not be at the table giving some type of an opinion, objective to other people's hidden agendas, those hidden agendas get through because the community is not at the table. And that's what's going on, whether it's HIV, diabetes, regardless, school board election, current elections, people need to be at the table so that you know what's going on and too many of our community have become complacent. We have a lot of people migrating here with their own intentions and their intentions is not what's the best for the community. As a matter of fact, they're not even from the community. So those hidden agendas get pushed and the community who's been here suffering and staying gets pushed to the side and that's why people need to get involved.

KS: Yeah, for sure. Seriously. So your—your book is available the same way as La Raine Magazine is available locally, is that right?

AF: We haven't worked that out. I—actually, because I'm on a research CAB, I'm so appreciative of the LGBTQ Resource Center hosting the book signing. The research CAB want to do one up there as well.

KS: Cool, when is that going to be?

AF: We haven't worked on that yet.

KS: Oh, awesome.

AF: Yeah.

KS: Very cool. Well, we'll try to announce it on our, like, Facebook and Twitter and everything. So let me know.

AF: Okay.

KS: Thank you so, so much and best of luck with everything and thank you for doing this.

AF: Thank you for having me.

KS: The Queer Newark Oral History podcast is produced by me, Kristyn Scorsone. This episode was recorded in the Queer Newark office, located in Conklin Hall at Rutgers University in Newark. Our theme music was remixed by DJ JustLove, an amazing local Newark DJ, and is

from an original song by K. Sparks. The title is "Music" and you can find more from K. Sparks on freemusicarchive.org. As for DJ JustLove you can find her on Twitter [@DJJustLove](https://twitter.com/DJJustLove) and on Facebook. Thank you so much for listening, and we'll see you next time.