

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: James Credle

Interviewer: Whitney Strub

Date: May 3, 2014

Location: Rutgers University-Newark

Whitney Strub: Alright, so we are recording. This is Whitney Strub with James Credle at Rutgers-Newark, May 3, 2014, and James can I have your consent to circulate this and put it up on the website if we need to?

James Credle: Yes, fine, it's great.

Whitney Strub: The idea is, I'm going to ask you about clubs in queer Newark history, that's the theme for our Sanctuary, obviously. And what I did was print some things off and I wondered if you might respond to them. So the first one, I believe you mentioned the Other World Disco as a place that you were familiar with. So could you talk about it, I mean, when were you going there, who went there, what was it like? Any memories at all (0:42)

James Credle: Well, this brings back not so good memories. I only went there a couple times, and I went there with my first partner, who I met at the university. We actually met here at Rutgers, and we had a relationship for eleven years and during that time after I left Rutgers, we used to go out dancing and the Other World was one of the places. I only went there a couple a times because what I remember most about it was going there and my partner who was Italian, and white, this was a mostly white neighborhood. And when we came out of the club there was a- I forget the context under which some altercation was going on between- some words or whatnot, between my partner and somebody else, one of the folks who were at the club, outside the club or whatnot, some derogatory stuff. And so we got in the car and proceeded to drive off and didn't realize until we got home that there was a little bullet hole in the windshield of the car. (2:03)

Whitney Strub: Jesus.

James Credle: And apparently someone had shot, it was like a bb gun or something, it wasn't substantial. But they had shot at us, and so, of course I never went back there. (2:15)

Whitney Strub: Wow.

James Credle: But what I remember most about it was that it was a mostly white neighborhood, 3rd, 73, 3, 9 and North 5th street, during that time that was what we call Imperiale country. And I guess I went there and I think one of the reasons why I got in was because I was with a white man, that's one of the typical things about clubs no matter where they're at, here in Newark or New York, across the nation. If you go to a predominately white club, generally if you went as a group of, or with another black man, or you a man of color, they would ask you for IDs and all that other nonsense. However, if you were with a white man or if you were white, and went in

there, they would, you know, just, “come on in,” let you through. So that’s what I know about the Other World. (3:08) Not a good experience.

Whitney Strub: And when did that happen, roughly? (3:13)

James Credle: Roughly must have been, we broke up in ’79 so that must have been a little bit earlier than that, maybe ‘72, ‘73, sometime then. (3:23)

Whitney Strub: Oh! Ok. So in the early 70s?

James Credle: In the early 70s, I would say, ‘75 at the latest. (3:27)

Whitney Strub: Ok, so in the ad, there are some names, do they ring a bell? “Michael and Jerry present.” Do you remember who they were? (3:37)

James Credle: Not at all.

Whitney Strub: And there are a few other names down here. I don’t know if you-

James Credle: Jerry, Dee, Sammy, Matt, and Ray? Nope, none of those I knew.

Whitney Strub: Ok

James Credle: I didn’t know any of these people. Yeah, I didn’t really hang out much in NJ. My partner and I were an interracial couple and most of the people that we knew and, even though we lived at- we lived at the Colonnade, and most of our lives were spent in New York. (4:07)

Whitney Strub: Ok.

James Credle: I’m not as familiar as some other people were with the Newark scene. I did go to some places in Newark. That’s one of them. I went to places in Newark and in New Jersey, but not very often. (4:19)

Whitney Strub: Ok, gotcha. This might not ring a bell then, but I’ve got an ad here that says, “Your passport to ultimate pleasure. BC - Baltimore, Boston, Camden, East Hartford, and Newark.” Do you know what this is? There is no other context. It’s from a New Jersey gay periodical in the mid-seventies

James Credle: Oh, really?

Whitney Strub: and I don’t know what club or bathhouse or institution it’s even advertising. (4:47)

James Credle: Nope

Whitney Strub: No?

James Credle: No...I don't know anything about this. (4:53)

Whitney Strub: Alright, I just thought I'd try- I'm curious, I mean it's an interesting-

James Credle: There was a bathhouse in Newark, right down the street from where we lived. (5:00)

Whitney Strub: Oh, yeah? Hey, tell me about this. So where was that?

James Credle: Right down on the corner of, I lived on 7th Avenue and Clifton. It was on the corner of 7th Avenue and Broadway. So it was right down the street from me. It was a place and it was even there, I don't know, 15, 10 years ago? I forgot, I don't know. I only went there once. It was one dinky place. (5:30) [Laughs]

Whitney Strub: Oh, so this is like, this is 21st century? This is recent history, 10 years ago?

James Credle: No, no, I'm talking about, it was there then.

Whitney Strub: Ok

James Credle: It's been around for a while. I'm just thinking that maybe that was- people don't think of Newark as having a bath-clubhouse, but we did have one. That's all I'm saying. There was a bathhouse in Newark that was there for a long time. (5:48)

Whitney Strub: What was the name?

James Credle: I don't even know, all I knew it was a bath- I didn't even know it was there to tell you the truth until someone told me about it.

Whitney Strub: [Laughs]

James Credle: And we went there, and I went to the bathhouse, but usually I went with friends, not with my lover, but with friends. And we would go [Laughs] holding each other's hands as we looked through the dark to see what was going on. (6:08)

Whitney Strub: [Laughs] Oh, sorry- I mean, if you need to do these-

James Credle: Let me stop you for a moment

Whitney Strub: Sure. (6:19) [Pause] Alright, so, picking back up. Here is an ad from Inside the Gay Activist Alliance of New Jersey magazine in 1977, a place called The Ram nearby in Elizabeth. Does that ring a bell? It's the only reference I've seen to this place. (6:36)

James Credle: No, I've never been to it. I never went to Elizabeth, to the 'burbs.

Whitney Strub: Yeah (6:41)

James Credle: Been to further down, Sayerville. And Teaneck, I think it was. Not Teaneck - what's the town over Passaic in that area? There was a park up over there we used to go to more often than any other place. And Montclair, I think there was a place we went to. But not Elizabeth. (7:05)

Whitney Strub: Alright, well what about back in Newark, Zanzibar?

James Credle: Oh, yeah, Zanzibar. That was a hot place. And I didn't go there very often because at the time Zanzibar was hot, for me it was Paradise Garage, so I was hanging out at the Paradise Garage. I went to Zanzibar a couple of times but it was a hot place both for gay and straight. (7:28) And it was hot for a long time, I mean, it was. You know where it was located, right?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah

James Credle: Ok, over near the Newark Bears Stadium. And this [photo Whitney Strub is holding] don't look like- (7:42)

Whitney Strub: This was taken late in the game, this was in 1988, I think?

James Credle: Ok.

[Pause] (7:50)

Whitney Strub: But ok, well then, tell me about Paradise Garage then. (7:54) I'm trying to get a sense of the various clubs and the social-

James Credle: [Laughs] Well, Paradise Garage was in New York, I mean it was-

Whitney Strub: Oh, ok! Right, right. (8:02)

James Credle: It wasn't here in Newark, but everybody went there. I know a lot of folks hung out at Paradise Garage because that was the place to go, to go dancing, so...

Whitney Strub: Ok, well, so were there other Newark clubs you would go to?

James Credle: Newark Clubs, I'm sure- it wasn't necessarily a dance place, although people did go there to hang out and dance. You know Murphy's, of course.

Whitney Strub: Ok, that was on my agenda

James Credle: So Murphys, and the other place, that people went to was the First Choice. First Choice was mostly lesbian, it was in East Newark, so it was down the neck, we called it, Ironbound section of the city. (8:36)

Whitney Strub: Ok, and when was that?

James Credle: Again, That was during the time of my first partner, and we were together until 1979, and then occasionally I would go there when friends would visit from Amsterdam in the 80s. And so Murphy's was a lot more long period than any place, as far as my going to it. Because that would be the place when people came from Amsterdam and I wanted to take them out in Newark, I would take them to Murphy's to show them there was a gay place in Newark, basically. [Laughs] (9:21)

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

James Credle: And the other, the First Choice, as I said, was lesbian. It was more of a dance place. Murphy's was a place, what was interesting about it I learned later, I didn't realize at the time what was happening at Murphys. But during the day Murphy's, at lunch time you'd go, there were mostly white business people who were there having their lunch and what not and then in the late afternoon-early evening it transitioned to a gay bar – black gay bar, mostly gay men, some lesbians, and their friends hanging out. (9:52)

Whitney Strub: Ok, so wait, just to be clear, sorry, I'm trying to get concrete dates here. So First Choice we're talking like late 70s into the 80s?

James Credle: Right

Whitney Strub: Ok, gotcha

James Credle: That was both of those places for me. (10:02)

Whitney Strub: Yeah, and at First Choice, are we talking...mixed group? White? Black Lesbians?

James Credle: White, mostly Hispanic and lesbian, mostly, and some males, but not that many, not white but mostly males of color. (10:22)

Whitney Strub: Ok

James Credle: So it was mostly, mostly of color people there.

Whitney Strub: No, this is great, thank you, what time is it? So I know, I know you've got things to do so I don't want to keep you. Now I'm hoping we can pick this conversation up another time because I've got a bunch of follow-ups.

James Credle: Ok

Whitney Strub: But let me just ask a couple quick ending questions here for now. One thing we're trying to do is compile a sort of list of further, you know, kind of a snowball effect, of other people we might interview. Any suggestions of people who might be able to speak to some of this, I mean, especially, one thing that's underrepresented-

James Credle: Berdon?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah, we know Bernie

James Credle: Ok...Aaron Frasier

Whitney Strub: Aaron Fraiser? That's a new name to me.

James Credle: Rodney

Whitney Strub: Yeah, definitely Rodney (11:00)

James Credle: Armonn Genesis. Who else can I think of that I would know?

Whitney Strub: Do you remember anybody from First Choice? One thing that's underrepresented right now is women. We've got way more men than women.

James Credle: Yeah, I didn't know, I didn't go there usually with women. I went there with [inaudible] men, so I didn't - my lesbian friends at that time, we didn't hang out there. Most of the lesbian friends I had was in the city and other places.

Whitney Strub: Right, right

James Credle: Don might, no Don wouldn't know, Don was in Paris. Oh, yeah, I could have seen- [Laughs] You know places in Newark back in the 80s? Gay bars? Bon Soir? Well, I'll stay with you first [inaudible].

Whitney Strub: I'll come speak with you in a moment, thank you. [Laughs]

James Credle: That's Kaseem but we know him better as Empress Vizcaya. (12:17)

Whitney Strub: So, ok, one final question for you then and I'll let you go now because I know you've got things to do. We're also looking for images, either memorabilia, photos, any, you know, just documents from any of these clubs. Is that something you might have? Because we're really looking to compile.

James Credle: I don't have any

Whitney Strub: No

James Credle: I never took any pictures. (12:34)

Whitney Strub: Ah, that's too bad.

[Inaudible]

Whitney Strub: Did they, like, any- just documents they might have given out or, fliers for events, things like that? (12:43)

James Credle: Nah, I don't have anything like that.

Whitney Strub: Ok

James Credle: And if I do...I don't know where it is, so...

Whitney Strub: I got you, totally understand. Yeah, no they are sort of ephemeral things. Anyway, I will let you-

James Credle: Alright

Whitney Strub: go, but thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

James Credle: Ok. (13:00)