

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Renata Hill

Interviewer: Tim Stewart-Winter

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Location: Rutgers University-Newark

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay. It is October 12, 2015. I'm Tim Stewart-Winter and I'm here interviewing Renata Hill. So I guess the first question I wanted to ask is well it says what is your name, you go by Renata Hill.

Renata Hill: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What's your date of birth and where were you born?

Renata Hill: My date of birth is March 8th and I was born in Passaic, New Jersey.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. March 8th?

Renata Hill: 1982.

Tim Stewart-Winter: 1982.

Renata Hill: I'm 33.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. Did you grow up in Passaic or who raised you and where did you...

Renata Hill: My mom raised me. I did grow up in Passaic until I was about 20, 21 actually. Then I moved to Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got you. So that was 12 years ago.

Renata Hill: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: At the time you were born who made up the household where you lived?

Renata Hill: Me, my mom, my little brother's father and my oldest brother.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So you have a younger brother and an older brother?

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: But your little brother didn't live with you?

Renata Hill: He wasn't born at the time.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, little brother.

Renata Hill: Yeah, he came a couple of years after.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. And then who joined or left that household during your childhood and teenage years?

Renata Hill: My little brother joined. He's five years younger than me and his dad ended up leaving and then my mom ended up marrying another person, another guy.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So he joined?

Renata Hill: So he joined.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. Do you recall any events that were transitions or turning points in your early life?

Renata Hill: Turning points like bad or good?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah, I mean if you were telling a story of your childhood what kind of like stands out as?

Renata Hill: I mean I would tell people I grew up in a broken household. My mom was addicted to heroin, as well as the guy that she was married to. I got sexually abused by the guy that she was married to at a really young age and it went on for a few years.

And then she ended up getting incarcerated in my early teens. I think I was about 13 she got incarcerated and then I moved with... me and my little brother moved with my grandmother. My older brother was a hustler so he was out in the street hustling and trying to do what he had to do to take care of himself.

It was a struggle. I think my mom was locked up for like a year in a maximum security prison on a drug charge and she got released a year later and then I ended up going back with her. And my little brother ended up moving with his father because the household we were in with my grandmother wasn't really healthy. My grandmother was a alcoholic and she beat us a lot.

So when my mom got released from prison that's all I can think about was just going back with my mom. So I made it really hard for my grandmother to keep me there until she got to the point where she kicked me out and then the plan was to get my brother out, find a way to get him out, and then she ended up kicking him out and he ended up going with his father.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got you. Was his father nearby?

Renata Hill: Yeah, yeah. We were all living in Passaic at the time.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got you. When your mom was... that year that she was incarcerated was that... did you... how far was she?

Renata Hill: She was in Clinton state prison. It was far. I never got a chance to see her. She was able to call a few times but then my grandmother would always be on the other phone while we talk to her so couldn't really tell her what we were going through., with my grandmother listening in. But she knew I wasn't happy there. So we never got a chance to go see her. But that year in prison actually changed her because she came home and never picked up another drug.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really?

Renata Hill: Yeah. I remember going with her like for the first maybe two years going with her to her NA [Narcotics Anonymous] meetings and then she would take commitments where she would be like be in charge of the coffee and the cookies and I will like help her set everything up.

My main reason for that was just because I wanted to make sure that she wasn't getting high. I was afraid that she was going to get high so I went with her and followed her around everywhere.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This was when you were 13, 14?

Renata Hill: **[00:05:00]** I was about 14 I believe. I was about 14, yeah. I know she got locked up when I was in sixth grade, at the beginning of sixth grade because I remember she missed my... no, that was towards the end of sixth grade because she missed my sixth grade graduation.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh that's rough.

Renata Hill: Yeah. I remember that. Yeah, it was hard. The only graduation she made it to is my high school graduation. Any other graduation she couldn't make it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Did you – were you able to stay in school through... well, let me go back. What was your neighborhood like?

Renata Hill: Oh, it was horrible. I lived on around the corner like literally around the corner from one of the hardest blocks in Passaic which was the drug dealing block where everything happened. The cops constantly rolled up. That's where my brother used to sell drugs at.

And the cops constantly rolled up and I was so scared my brother was going to jail that I remember taking him and his friends stash and then run into the house with it. And then I would come back outside and watch the police pat my brother and his friends down knowing that they weren't going to find anything. And I always felt like I was like this big hero because I saved everybody from going to jail.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Because you would run it inside.

Renata Hill: Yeah. Because their stash was never where they were standing at. So like once the cops were so busy with them they're not paying attention to a little girl. I will go to where the stash is and slickly pick it up and

just take it 'cause I lived like literally right around the corner from... basically like across the street because it was like a triangle. This is where they sold drugs at and then on the other side of the triangle was where my house was.

So it was like a building that connected from one side of the triangle to the other side. So they were standing in front of that building but I knew that the stash was on the other side and I would go through the building, take it, and go across the street into the house knowing that they weren't going to find anything.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The stash was on the other, outside.

Renata Hill: Yeah. I mean it would be outside, or it would be inside.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Somewhere:

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: There were a lot of cops around.

Renata Hill: Yeah. A lot of cops, a lot of drugs, a lot of addicts. It definitely wasn't... I want to say it was a good healthy place.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And grew up in that neighborhood from when you were born?

Renata Hill: No I grew up in that particular neighborhood from the time I was in third grade. I went there, we moved during Christmas break, winter break. So from, right before that I lived on Anne Street which is a really quiet place and then we moved to Montgomery Street which is by the drug infested place. And I was there from third grade up until my mom got arrested when I was a sixth grader.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay. And then that's when you went to your grandmother.

Renata Hill: Yeah

Tim Stewart-Winter: Which was also in Passaic.

Renata Hill: Yeah. My school I still continued to go like in that area because she, my mother got locked up before I was graduated so I still had to finish the sixth grade. This is before my graduation. So I still had to come down to that area to go to school. So it was literally like maybe my grandmother lived maybe like eight blocks up and when you come eight blocks down it's like my school and then... which is also on Monroe Street where all the drugs is being sold and then where my brother stood at on the other side of the triangle was like my house. So it was like I never got away from that place.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it. Were there any other transitions or turning points between, I guess between that year that you spent when your mom was locked up and your high school graduation, say?

Renata Hill: I mean I would say when my grandfather passed away. I was really close to him. That was really hard for me, especially knowing that my grandmother used to always tell me it was my fault because I stressed him out because she was like so mean to us. Me and my grandmother never really had a good relationship. For whatever reason she's always been closer to the older boys in my family. My mother's oldest brother, then my oldest brother and then me and my mom she was mean to us. My little brother she was mean to him.

So that was really hard for me because when she was being mean to me my grandfather was always the nice person. He sees what's going on. So when he left I felt like my mom was in prison, my grandfather is gone I don't have anybody now. I didn't know how I was going to make it. I got really angry. I fought a lot in school, like I got in trouble a lot. I talk back to the teachers. I cursed a lot.

Tim Stewart-Winter: After he died?

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How old were you?

Renata Hill: I was about 16.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay.

Renata Hill: Yeah, so it was hard, I ended up getting in trouble in school and then there were two teachers that really took to me, that, seeing that I have potential and I used to call one of them like my mom. **[00:10:00]** Another one I would call like my aunt. So I kind of always grew up creating families, like looking for a mother in somebody or looking for like... I never really looked for a dad for some reason, but like aunts or something like that. I can honestly say because they cared about me, that was the reason why I graduated junior high school and made it to high school.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Those teachers.

Renata Hill: Yeah. With my graduation... in my junior school graduation my mom had just came home and she had just started a job, so she couldn't take off from work to come to my graduation. So I was like really stressed out about that. And I wrote into my best friend's journal what I had gone through when I was younger 'cause nobody ever knew that I got molested and raped by my stepfather. So I wrote it in her journal and I told her that I wanted to kill myself, that I was going to kill myself. I was really overprotective of my best friend, and I just told her, you're going to be without me but I want you to be strong whatever, whatever.

I knew she wasn't going to read it late at night because we always did this thing we're like switching our journals with each other. I ended up taking a lot of pills. It was the wrong kind of course. When you're young you don't know what pills are going to kill you. So I think I took Ibuprofen or something like that. It's a pill bottle and she ended

up calling me to talk about it and I was like I don't want to talk about it.

And mentally I thought I was dying because I knew that's what was supposed to be. I thought that was what supposed to be happening swallowing all these pills. And what she did was she ended up calling the teacher that I called my mom. She called her and told her and her name is Ms. Woodson. Ms. Woodson called me and she was like what's going on, [unintelligible - 00:11:45] I said I don't want to talk, I don't want to talk. She said I'm going to call you back in half an hour.

So she ended up calling the cops and the cops ended up coming to my house. At this point I'm living with my mom though. Like we had our own apartment and everything with a guy that was loving her for all these years that she kind of ignored. You know, the one good guy that the bad girl ignores until she finally sees the light and gets with him. Like typical Juliet-Romeo story. So. And I loved this guy.

And they were in the room sleeping and the cops came and I opened the door and they were like we had a call from Ms. Woodson saying that... who's Renata Hill and I say I'm Renata Hill. They said we got a call saying that you tried to commit suicide. I'm like no, somebody is playing on the phone, I was like I'm fine. Look at me I'm fine. They ended up leaving before my mom could wake up.

So, I called her back and I went I went off on her, and I was like I can't trust you, and she was crying. You know, you got to get help you can't do this. And then I ended up going to sleep. I thought I was dead. I don't know, I thought I died. My mother... someone was banging on the door early in the morning and we went to the door and it was Division of Family Youth Services. So out in in New York it's called ACS. In Jersey it's called ["DYE-fuss"], and they spilled everything right there at the door, 'cause I'm like how am I going to

get out of this, my mom actually opened the door. I was able to get rid of the cops how am I gonna get rid of them?

And so you know we got a call from Ms. Sheila Woodson stating that Renata Hill tried to commit suicide because she was sexually molested and abused by guy and he said his name and my mother just looked at me. And I just started crying and I was like it's true. That's when we actually like dealt with that and then I started counseling and stuff.

I had to go to the prosecutor's office. And they wanted to know like why after all these years you say something now. And I'm like because he's coming out of jail. He got arrested with my mom but he had more time to do than my mom. So I said because he's coming out of jail and I felt like if he comes out of jail my mom will leave the guy that she's with to go back with him, and throw away all of her recovery because I know she loves him and that was her enabler. So I didn't want him to come home.

And so they were like, so are you doing that because you want him to stay in jail, is it, true accusations, and I'm like yeah. And they questioned me for a long time like different days, different...

Tim Stewart-Winter: The prosecutor?

Renata Hill: Yeah and it was like months process of constantly asking me the same questions over and over again. They thought... they wanted to see if my story was going to change because they couldn't understand how so many years ago I could remember exactly what I had on the first time it ever happened and I'm like you don't forget stuff like that.

I remember it was right before Easter and I remember having... I mean right after Easter and I remember having my Easter outfit still on. So I remembered everything and he ended up pleading guilty. He got five years for pleading guilty.

Tim Stewart-Winter: To sexual assault?

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: He pled guilty, this was after he got out of prison or?

Renata Hill: This was while... I don't know because I didn't keep tabs on him.
[00:15:00] I ended up leaving but I think he was still in jail at the time it happened because when they wanted me to go to court I was like I don't, I can't see him in court, I don't want to go, I don't want to be on the stand, I don't want to do that. Cause they explained to me that whoever would be defending him would try to make me look like I'm a liar. And I couldn't go through that.

So I ended up telling my mom I want to go to Boston to live with her dad, my grandfather. And I left that summer and I just decided to stay, and she let me stay and I told her, I was like I'm scared, that he's going to try to do something to me, if he got off and they find him not guilty or if I make a mistake because they're questioning me all the time and it could be an innocent mistake. Not that I'm lying because I'm not lying. I said and what if he comes home, I knew he was dangerous person. So I was like he's going to try to kill me I don't want to come back and my mother said okay.

So he made it easy about going to court and pleading guilty because had he pleaded not guilty I would have to come back because he would have had to do trial and stuff like that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Renata Hill: And I would have had to testify.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So you did go to Boston.

Renata Hill: Yeah. I went to Boston for a year. My 10th grade year in high school I started it out there in Boston and then I came back a year later during my 11th grade graduation I'm back to Passaic.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So you went before he started his prison term?

Renata Hill: Well, he was still in jail at the moment but yeah before he was...

Tim Stewart-Winter: You were afraid he was going to get out.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And so you left. You wanted to leave before that happened.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: But then you came back because he was...

Renata Hill: He pleaded guilty he had to do five years so I knew that he was going to be there for the next five years.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow. And when you were in Boston you lived with?

Renata Hill: My mother's father. My grandfather, on my mother's side.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got you. The grandfather who died?

Renata Hill: No, that was my mother's stepfather.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Stepfather.

Renata Hill: But I was raised knowing him as my grandfather. So my mom's dad I only met when I was like really, really small and I don't really remember it. But he owns a business out there a restaurant and I think my little brother wanted to go and we went out there for the summer. I don't know if he asked or if he sent for us or whatever but I know we ended up we're going to go out there and I already had it on my head that when I went out there I didn't want to come back.

At the end of the summer we went out there we worked for him on a truck preparing food and stuff like that because they had like a big food truck and a restaurant. At the end of the summer we bring my brother back home and I got some clothes and stuff and I went back with him. My mom allowed me to go back.

Tim Stewart-Winter: To go back with her?

Renata Hill: No, to Boston with my grandfather.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, for the school year, right, okay. So you went to 10th grade there.

Renata Hill: Yeah my 10th grade.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So the next question is, were there adults in your life who shaped your adolescence besides the people who raised you? So Ms. Woodson.

Renata Hill: Ms. Woodson, Ms. Robinson, Ms. Brown and Ms. Austin. Ms. Austin was like, she was in high school. She was like a real mother to me even to this day I still call her mom. She's on my Facebook and everything. Really if it wasn't for her I wouldn't have finished high school definitely because I was just at that point I'm like I don't care anymore. My mom she was clean, she wasn't getting high but it was like I just felt like I didn't matter to anybody.

My father wasn't around. My little brother has his father. My big brother, me and him share a mother and father, but my grandmother gravitates towards him, and then it's like you know who do I have at the end of the day? I felt like I was like my mom's mom, like babysitting her all the time. With her feeling bad and me just me like no it's okay. I felt like I was nurturing her, opposed to anybody like caring about how I was feeling.

So Ms. Austin was that person when I was in school acting up. She would literally like come behind me and smack me in the back of my head and be like you better stop cursing in these hallways and I used to

just like look at her like what the hell I'm going to beat this lady up. But deep down inside it was just like somebody cares. So then I found myself cursing all the time just so I can get in trouble, just so I can feel like she's going to discipline me, and she cares like really care when I think back about it. Who wants to get in trouble, but I did.

I would stay home from school and like she would come and get me. She would literally like come to my house and get me like let's go you're going to school.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That's a dedicated teacher.

Renata Hill: I got in trouble in the cafeteria all the time being loud just like arguing with people. [00:20:00] It got to the point where she ban me from eating my lunch in the cafeteria so I had to get my lunch and go eat with her. I started realizing that I was into poetry so I'm sitting there and her and the other teachers are eating their lunches like I'm writing and realizing that like in 10 minutes I just wrote this deep poem about pain and stuff that I've gone through. So I continue to do that.

Then one day she sat me in the car when she dropped me off from school because I used to hang out at the school late with her and she would give me a ride home and she goes I want to play a song for you. And she played Yolanda Adams Still I Rise and that song to this day means so much to me because of what I was going through at that time. It was like... you know I just felt so much purpose in my life and you know what I have gone through some shit but I'm going to be all right at the end of the day.

I have heard that she believed in me. Like Christmas I have spent with her and her family, her mom, her sisters. She bought my first cell

phone. I used to go to the mall with her, stuff that I wanted to do with my mother but she was so busy at this point now like NA meetings and stuff like that. It was like I did it with Ms. Austin to the point that my mom was jealous of my relationship with Ms. Austin but I felt good about her being jealous. Yeah, I was like, good, you're jealous.

Me and my mom was close though. It was just not what I want. There was still something that was missing and I think it was just that nurturing part and babying me and talking and stuff. We didn't really do that that much. I just felt like we were close because I was always willing to do whatever for my mother to make sure that she was okay.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And you had to take care of her in some ways.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That's so nice. What was the name of your high school?

Renata Hill: Passaic High School.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Passaic High School. Next question is what are some challenges you face in childhood, we've covered that I would say.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Last question before we start getting into Newark. What role, if any, has religion played in your life? You mentioned Easter. Did you go to church?

Renata Hill: I did. I mean I went to church. When I was younger I went to church a lot as an escape from what was going on at home. So that little triangle area I lived in right at the end of the block was a church Mt. Sinai Baptist Church and they used to... they used to have this night where they would feed you food and stuff like that and children bible studying and stuff like that.

Because we didn't really have food, there were a lot of days that we were hungry. I started going just to eat and then I started like... they invited me for the bible study and I started going and like it was interesting like to believe in something that you can't see, you don't know anything about so it was interesting for me and then I found myself praying and looking for answers.

But then I always felt like when the pastor would get up there and talk I just felt like how could somebody so deep and strong that exists that we don't see allow me to go through all the things that I'm going through. So then I found myself being angry with God and I'm just like you know what He is not there or He don't care about me. And then I kind of just like weaned away from it but that was like when I got older. So I went through that for about four years when I was like really into church and then I just like stopped going.

I don't know I was like, I know when I first started going I was about nine or ten years old.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Did you go with your mom?

Renata Hill: No, my mother was getting high. My mother was thinking about no God or no church or nothing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Did you go with anyone?

Renata Hill: My little brother. I raised my little brother. I had to make sure he was okay. Number one I wanted to make sure that the guy that was molesting wasn't touching my brother cause he was real dangerous. So I never spoke about it to anybody because I don't want him to hurt my little brother. I didn't want him to hurt my mom or I didn't want my big brother to go crazy, hurt him, and then he'd go to jail, my brother to go to jail.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Those were your worries.

Renata Hill: Yeah. So it was like I felt like it was my job to protect everybody. So my outlet was like church because I can secretly tell God what I was going through and He can like in a strong, powerful way remove me from that situation. And I think I looked for that answer for so long and it never happened that I just stopped believing at some point or just stop caring or became just really angry.

Now I go to church whenever I feel like it but I just feel like I don't have to go to church in order to pray. Sometimes I find myself saying I think there is a God and sometimes I have my moments where I just feel like I don't understand how God works. Everything that's going on in the world like how could He just sit up there and watch it?

[00:25:00] There's a lot of questions I'll be having sometimes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What's your earliest memory of Newark?

Renata Hill: My earliest memory of Newark is before I moved to Newark when my son was about a couple of months old. Well, when we say Newark are we just like really speaking of Essex County or just Newark in particular? Because the story I'm about to tell you is in Irvington.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Tell me that.

Renata Hill: So I worked at, I met this girl, I started talking to her mom-owned daycare and I got a part-time job there. And on my way at Irvington bus terminal I remember going into the local store there and as I was coming out I didn't hold the door for two guys that were going in. They tried to hurry up and go in the door hit them. So he turned around and started calling me all these names and I'm like whatever, my bad. It's not like I purposely hit you with the door or whatever.

And it was like, oh what, you think you're a boy? This that and the third, and it just got really nasty. Yeah, and they ended up jumping me, and the bus driver and another person end up stopping the fight. They ran off, and I continued to go to work. The bus driver wanted to

call the cops, I was like no I got to go to work. So I went to work and my girlfriend's mom was like oh my God what's wrong with your face and I'm like I got jumped but it's fine. But I was angry but I was like it happens, whatever.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How old were you roughly?

Renata Hill: I was either in my late 20s or, yeah I mean, like 20 going on 21 or either I had just turned 21.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay.

Renata Hill: My eye was swollen, my lip was busted and I was just like damn I ain't safe out here. I still continued to go to work. Then a couple of months later I end up getting into a situation in Jersey where my mom couldn't pay the rent and I got into a program where they pay your rent for you if you find an apartment and the only apartment I ended up finding was in Newark, within that program.

So I moved to Newark, I moved to South Walnut Street. It was just horrible. It was just like... it was just really gangsta. It was almost like living back in Passaic on that little triangle. It was a lot of drugs and I have my son.

You know there was a lot of drugs, even if you come into the building you see people just sitting on crates waiting to make a sale and stuff like that. And I'm like all I could think of that I need to get cool with people so that way I don't have any issues especially with me being gay. There's a lot of guys around and that was my biggest fear was them jumping me or going through something with them.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So you moved, but you moved from Passaic to Newark directly?

Renata Hill: To Newark, yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: But it was a new neighborhood, you didn't know your way around?

Renata Hill: No. That was my first time ever even being in, I want to say in Newark period but I think I went to a party at one point before in Newark but that was my first time like literally being deep in Newark. Where we had to catch like the train and then a bus... my first apartment.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When did you move there?

Renata Hill: My son was born in 2001 in August.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay.

Renata Hill: Probably beginning of like 2002.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And you have one son?

Renata Hill: Yeah, and I have a seven-year-old stepdaughter.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Seven-year-old stepdaughter. Cool. So your son is 14. When you moved to Newark it was you and your son.

Renata Hill: Me, my son and my girlfriend.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And your girlfriend.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So the three of you in this apartment. Did you... and you said it was South Walnut Street?

Renata Hill: Uh-huh.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where is that?

Renata Hill: South Walnut Street is off ... I can't remember which street... I don't remember which street it was. I know I think Grove is like over there in that area.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So south ward?

Renata Hill: South... I don't know. I don't really know much about like borders and stuff like that I just know addresses.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah, yeah. Where else in Newark have you lived and when?

Renata Hill: From South Walnut Street I moved to I think it was North Irvington Parkway with my girlfriend and my mom now at this point. Cause my mom ended coming, right before I moved my mom ended up coming to spend the night with me and then she just never left. So she ended up literally like moving in whatever issues she was having girlfriend at that time. [00:30:00] So like now at this point she has a girlfriend.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really?

Renata Hill: Yeah. Me and my mom came out at the same time to each other and that was when we still lived in Passaic. My son was just born and we both got rid of our men and traded them in for girls [laughter].

Tim Stewart-Winter: At the same time.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In 2001 or so?

Renata Hill: Yeah this happened... yeah like in 2001, yeah. My son was a couple of months old. So probably the end of 2001 or early 2002. She just never left so I ended up getting a bigger apartment on **[Orson][Overton? Irvington]** Parkway and then from there I ended up living on South 19th Street which was like a couple of blocks away from Venice was living at the time and Patrice was living at the time.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is that when you met them?

Renata Hill: Yeah. I met Neesy... Neesy actually stalked me on a chat line for many years. She had a crush on me and I used to tell her she was too young for me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Neesy is Venice.

Renata Hill: Yeah Venice. And then I ended up meeting her at one of Sakia's memorials and I didn't know that she was the same person from the chat line because I would have told her that no you're too young. But I just looked at her and I was like she got pretty eyes. She has pretty eyes. So you know me being flirtatious, I started flirting with her and we just started like talking. I was going through relationship issues with my girlfriend I was with at that time, and me and Neesy was like creeping.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You were what?

Renata Hill: Creeping. Meaning I wasn't supposed to be with her, I think she had a girlfriend at the time, I had a girlfriend at the time. But we all became like really, really close more than anything and we just used to like hang out on South 19th Street.

You know I'd go get something to drink, I'd come over with the car blasting the music, we'd sit out there until we hear something like the gang banger's about to start shooting up like y'all got to go somewhere. Most of the time I would just go because I lived a couple of blocks away and then we go in the house but except for that one night when we decided let's just go to the village. I don't want to go in the house, you know whatever. That's when I met them.

I met Neesy and Patreese that summer of 2006 before we got arrested. Terrain I knew before I knew everybody else.

Tim Stewart-Winter: From Passaic or from...

Renata Hill: No, no, no from when I first came to Newark and I started going to like the Globe which was like this little party where you didn't need no ID to get in. They had a lot of like drags and the queens in there doing these balls and dancing and voguing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah. So the Globe is closed?

Renata Hill: I don't know.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You're not sure.

Renata Hill: Yeah, I don't know. I heard that they still have it but it's not the same location and it's probably much different now. I don't know I haven't...

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where was it?

Renata Hill: It was on Broad Street. It was on Broad somewhere. It was right before you get to - Broad leads into Penn Station right.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Uh-huh.

Renata Hill: So it's like maybe a block or two before you get to like Penn Station, somewhere in that area.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right downtown.

Renata Hill: Yeah. Cause I always used to remember like saying okay which way to go to Penn Station, and then somebody would tell me which way. Like I lived out in Newark and still I'm bad with areas. So I live in New York now since two thousand ten since I came home and I still use GPS to go like five miles away from where I live at. I'm horrible with it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So you met Terrain at The Globe?

Renata Hill: I met Terrain I think at The Globe through mutual friends.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Were there other...tell me more about the Globe. We're very interested in... I mean you probably when you're interviewed normally people want to know about the arrest and...

Renata Hill: Well, it's good to have a different topic to talk about!

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay.

Renata Hill: It's interesting too because I'm like damn I never really talked about this! But the Globe was like I said was a party... you didn't need an ID to get in. It was like an underage spot where you can go, always got drunk. You know because it's like finally a club we could get into, drink without ID, and just have a good time.

And everybody in there was gay! So you had gay guys, you had gay women, you had trans, trans that was transitioning still, trans that has already transitioned. And I mean for me it was like, I was...there was this girl that I was talking to back then at that time, Sabrina. She knew everybody in the gay community like everybody knew her. Cause she like, on the chat line... everybody - I don't know how! I just was like you know what that's my girlfriend. She's like the in for everything. Like I'm going to learn everything I need to know.

[00:35:00] I was new to being in the life, you know, so I didn't understand what it meant to even be an aggressive or a dyke or a stud. I'm like the type of person, I'm not girly but I like to wear, I've always liked to wear boy clothes but I like my nails long, you know, I talk with my hands like a girl, this that and the third, I switch like a girl. So it was like you know going to The Globe, seeing all these different people, different personalities, different appearances, and I'm just like trying to figure out okay now where do I fit in at?

So then I found myself sagging my pants and wearing my hat backwards with a do rag, and you know voice getting deeper when I was around everybody, and stuff like that, and hand in my pants. And I mean I guess the Globe is where you can just do whatever. You could actually have your hand in your pants, or this is a place you could go to try to figure out how you want to be and nobody looks at you any different.

But it was really interesting. I fell in love with this trans, her name was **[Dasha][DAY-zha]** oh she was fucking absolutely beautiful. And I had to like ask people like am I allowed to love a trans? I mean like why not? I'm like because like she's really a man and I'm a woman so if I get with her that's like a man and a woman that means I'm not gay like this is like stuff that I really literally used to ask. Especially I used to ask my mom about stuff like that and it came down to like, gay life or lesbian life my mom was like always open with me about everything. That's when our relationship really got extra tight.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It sounds like she knew more about it?

Renata Hill: Yeah, she dealt with women in the past. I never knew about it. Like my godmother is actually her ex-girlfriend. People used to tell me that growing up. You know your mother and your godmother used to date, right. I'm like bullshit cause my godmother is like a butch. I put it all together after my mom came out and I started having questions and I'm like did you ever date my godmother and she started laughing like here you go with the personal questions. She was like for your information yes I did.

Another person that was my godmother she actually dated her too and I'm like all my godmothers are like your ex-girlfriends, so like that was your way of keeping them in your life, and she was like yeah. But she fell in love with my father. My father was a professional boxer at one point and he knows how to sway women. He was a handsome guy, Jheri curl back then, **you know a woman wanted a man with Jheri curls** for whatever reason. But she ended up being with him.

So after she had my brother and then she had me it was like she knew she couldn't like... she dealt with women for a period of time while she had my brother but once she got pregnant with me she knew she

had to stop. She said she just was like she didn't want to be with women no more.

She had my little brother and it was like she always felt like if she was going to go back to women it was going to be at a point where we was older. Old enough to understand. And she did.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Why, why would she not want to until you were older?

Renata Hill: I mean I guess because back then it really wasn't accepted at all in your family. I know my grandmother like despised it. And it was not like, when she was dealing with my godmother, either one of them, it was not like she was really out, out. It was more like they're friends. They were never like we're in a relationship or nothing like that. So I guess it was like easier and it was probably because she just couldn't get out as much because now she got kids and you know.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right. When you went to the Globe where did your son...

Renata Hill: My son would be with my mom.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your son would be with your mom.

Renata Hill: Uh-huh. My son would be with my mom because at the beginning that's when I was living with my mom and her girlfriend and it's all crazy because it all like happened within like eleven months. My son was 11 months when I moved to Newark. He wasn't even a year old cause I remember saying he's just started taking steps and I put the pull-ups on him and he learned how to use the potty when we moved to Newark into our apartment.

But for that short amount of time we were living in the same house together before I moved into Newark and she was like the best grandmother ever. She was a better grandmother than she was parent. And I loved to see her in that form. It was good for me because I was stressed out and I'm like oh my God this kid.

My son was like real [unintelligible]. he don't like to lay down, he wants to be bouncing all the time. He's like a really hyper little kid but he never really cried. It was to the point I just thought about the single parent life and I started to get depressed and my mom was always right there. Give me my baby. And then it got to the point I'm like listen this is not your kid, all right, you know, but they were good together. They were really close.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When you came out did you think of yourself as gay? How do you identify? I guess let's start with that.

Renata Hill: [00:40:00] Right now I just like, I'm a lesbian. You know I don't put no title, no AG, no stud, aggressive, dyke, femme, femme aggress. Like I don't really... for me I don't respect them. I don't like to feel like I have to commit to one label because then at - I think the problem with the LGBT community is that they put out there, they make it seem like there's rules and regulations on how to fit into each label.

So if you a femme aggress that means you got to be having the hat, you got to have aggressive ways, feminine ways, like no, I like the freedom to just be how I want to be. I don't wear girl clothes but if I decided that I want to wear girl clothes I don't want people like oh but you call yourself a dyke, no I don't call myself anything. I'm just a lesbian and I like...

Tim Stewart-Winter: But you do call yourself a lesbian?

Renata Hill: Yeah, a lesbian, yeah. But that's it. A lesbian is just like an open label. Just a lesbian.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right. Has that always been how you felt?

Renata Hill: No. When I first was coming out and trying to find myself, yeah it was like I was extra macho with it. Like no I'm a dyke, I'm an AG, don't fucking disrespect me. I was mad hard with everything. I had to walk

down, packed, like I was really, really extra boyish because I thought that that's how you were supposed to be, like every stud or aggressive I've seen, they were mad hardcore. They just, I really identified as like being a boy.

So it was like no call me a bro, say him and that was like... I felt like I was living a double life, because then I would go home to my son and I would be all motherly and girly with him. It was like, you know what it was stressful. So I was like I just want to be free to be me, however way, and I find myself being attracted as far as in a friend type of form to people that are just comfortable with just being, and not saying like this is how you identify with me like. If you are a dyke you got to have dreds or braids or a short haircut. Like right now I'm like stud-ish kind of, but you know, I have my moments when I just go like this, and then if I go like this I'm mad girly. **But Terrain and them** won't think nothing of it. Other people would be like wait a minute is she a dyke or is she a femme like which one is she?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Renata Hill: And that irritates me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Other people like where?

Renata Hill: Anywhere. Anywhere literally like anywhere. I've been at places where a couple of my friends like even when I was in prison I had a couple of my friends would just be like they would talk about somebody else though but I knew that in any given chance they're saying the same thing about me because I switch it up from time to time.

Tim Stewart-Winter: They would say that you're...

Renata Hill: Yeah that I don't know what... I'm confused. I don't know what I am. But I'm okay with that. I had a problem with it at first but I'm like you know whatever way that I show up whatever day that's how it is.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What places in Newark do you associate with LGBTQ people?

Renata Hill: The Globe and like she used to say in the G corner. And the G corner was on Broad and Market and that's where you would go and see like, especially like after school hours, all gay people would be down there. It would just be like flooded, like you would think it's a march going on or something. Like everybody gravitate towards that corner and just be out there talking to each other, chilling, hanging out whatever.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The G corner where... G for gay, G for...?

Renata Hill: I never even, I think so, but I never asked why we called it the G corner. But I think so, I don't know if it's because like mostly everybody from the Globe was there like the Globe corner or like the Gay corner. I really think it was the gay corner. We just called it the G corner, like oh let's meet at the G corner.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And non-gay people didn't call that.

Renata Hill: I don't know what they called it. At that point I never really, I didn't really hang around non-gay people because most the cousins that I grew up with, those are a lot, I didn't have friends growing up because of the situation I was in. Broken household, dirty little kid, hungry little kid like people was really mean and so as I grew up I just didn't hang out with anybody except for my cousins and all of them are lesbians.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really? All of them or just those you hang out?

Renata Hill: No just, all of the female cousins that I have are lesbians. Yeah. All of them. Are lesbians.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Did you know that before you came out?

Renata Hill: Yeah. Because I was like so against it!

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really.

Renata Hill: I was like y'all nasty. I'm was like I wanna get me some dick. I was like so straight but I love them. You know what I'm saying? I was just like... they used to talk about it I didn't want to hear about it like details and my cousin would always talk about it. I would just be like please that is so gross I don't want to hear about it. But I love to see two women together like when my cousin would be with her girlfriend and hanging out I would think that it was interesting. That is so cute but it's not for me. I can't see myself being with a female.

Tim Stewart-Winter: **[00:45:00]** But when you said earlier I think you said that being gay wasn't accepted in your family.

Renata Hill: No, my grandmother. She just didn't like it. But she's old.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Would you say that you were not accepting of your cousins?

Renata Hill: Yeah. I mean I never made them feel uncomfortable about being who they were, like loving women. I never made anybody feel unwelcome because I love them. They were my cousins but as far as like wanting to hear details it was so awkward and I think as I got older I think I started to believe that it was so awkward for me because I was afraid to move forward with that.

You know what I'm saying? It was like when I used to watch girls together or like my cousins with their girlfriends just hanging out or giving each other a kiss or whatever it was like it was cute to me but I didn't want to do it. But I think deep down inside I think it was like a sense of comfortableness like that. I think that's where I need to be. I don't know.

But I know like after I had my son like a couple of months later I started being attracted to women out of nowhere. I was never attracted to women at all. Out of nowhere I just started. At first I thought it was just a phase because you know there was that the postpartum depression and all that but then I was like once I got with my first girlfriend I was so comfortable. I was like wow this is what I've missed all my life. My heart was just like feeling different. I didn't care like... I don't know.

I felt awkward around straight people though. Especially like straight family members. But then it's like you know I've always been a real rebellious, kid like I like to piss people off and do stuff that I know everybody hates, especially when it's something that I'm so comfortable with. So like my grandmother never liked me wearing boys' clothes cause I've always been a tomboy growing up. But I always felt like that came from being the only girl and having two brothers, and then being poor, and hand-me-down clothes, it was just like I got comfortable with it.

I always hang around like my brothers like boys and stuff like that. But I always made them, I never made them feel uncomfortable but I do think that looking back on it, mentally I was being real biased. With just saying that's not... uh-uh...the same way I felt about other people that are kind of like homophobic. Like how do you ill on something that you know nothing about?

You don't have to like it but you just respect it. I wasn't kind of respecting it because I just like shut them down when it came down to certain conversations I didn't want to talk about it or I would constantly say I'm going to get you some dick like y'all don't know what you're missing. Shit like that.

So I don't know. Maybe I did make them feel a little uncomfortable with that but it was funny to them. Like we always had this bond so

they never like... they knew I wasn't doing it intentionally. When I first thought it started fucking with girls my cousin was like I knew it was only a matter of time. You're the only one oh I'm going to get some dick and I'm mad straight and she's like I knew. You talk too much. I already knew you're going to end up being gay. I was like please. I was like it's only for a little while. I'll be back.

Here it is 14 years later!

Tim Stewart-Winter: So places. We have the G Corner.

Renata Hill: The G corner and the Globe.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Anywhere else?

Renata Hill: Nope, just those.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You mentioned Sakia's memorial and that you met Venice there.

Renata Hill: That's where I met Venice and Patreese that day.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The same year that you got arrested.

Renata Hill: This was in... did I meet them that same year? Yeah, this was in May.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Of 2006?

Renata Hill: Uh-huh.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The memorial of her death, did you know... did you go to a previous memorial? What was Sakia...

Renata Hill: No, no.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This was your first. Did you know about Sakia Gunn when you first moved here?

Renata Hill: Yeah. Sakia Gunn, that actually happened while I was living in on Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In Newark, right.

Renata Hill: That's when I was going to the Globe and stuff like that and people used to always say because I was really, really, really skinny and I first started my dreds it was like this short. They used to always say you look like this girl Sakia. You look like this girl Sakia. That's your twin. That could be your twin. And I'm like I don't look like no fuckin body. I'm outta here, I was real cocky, I don't [look like] nobody. Then one time they showed me a picture of her I think it was on MySpace or BlackPlanet.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Black pan?

Renata Hill: BlackPlanet.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh BlackPlanet.

Renata Hill: And I was like oh yeah she do kind of favor me a little bit. I was like well she's mad light skinned so we don't look alike. And then I met her a few times after they showed me the picture and I knew what she looked like. I met her a few times at The Globe. She was sweet.
[00:50:00] She was like a sweet little girl.

At first it's like... back then it's like you fightin to be like the best dyke back then. Like if somebody say you look like her, somebody, I don't fucking look like her. And it's like you meet them you throw shade, it's like it's just watch her in a club a couple of times and she always spoke to me. We got like cool. We weren't the best of friends, we never hang out but like it was in the club like where we spoke. We had conversations or whatever. She was a little girl. She was young, a teenager and I was grown at that time. So it's like wow, you know.

When that happened it was just like I was really in shock. It hit me hard. There's no way... it hit me really hard not because I got a chance to meet her also but just knowing that at one point on my way

to work like these two guys decided they wanted to fight me and say shit to me. Oh you think you're a man and I just thought about like damn how I could have died that night.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Are you talking about the at the bus station?

Renata Hill: Yeah. After the situation happened with Sakia I thought back about that night at the bus station. Or that morning that early morning on my way to work I just realized how dangerous it is in Newark for us.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Have you been harassed other times in Newark?

Renata Hill: Oh yeah, plenty of times. I was at my girlfriend's house on Alexander I think that was in... I think that's Newark, Alexander Street, and I went to go get her... I was going to get me some ice cream and her mom some ice cream and there were guys standing on the sidewalk. As I was walking I've seen that they were kind of spreading themselves out so I would have to either go through them or walk around them.

So if I had to go through them it would have been like a tight squeeze so I decided to go around them. And they were saying shit to me as I was walking like oh you dyke bitch. I just ignored them and I was like oh boy. When I was coming back... someone told me to call my girlfriend and tell her about it. I didn't want her to come outside and her to be harassed.

So when I was coming back they did the same thing and I walked around them one time. It was like before I got the chance to get all the way around them one them turned around and swung on me and they ended up jumping me. I was swinging the ice cream and I'm just like and I'm running back to the house or whatever.

When I got back to the house... and it was the same girl that I was with, her mom that owned the day care. So I was still with her at the

time and I went... they're like why does this keep happening to you? I'm like I don't know. I don't understand. It's really hard out here in Essex County like it's crazy.

But I made a joke about it. It was almost like I was used to it. I was like expecting it to happen. I know it's going to happen. I know that this... when a guy feels some type of way about me being gay this is the consequence. This is what's going to happen, like if I was wrong, like I had to accept that this is part of being gay, is being harassed by men.

So I made a joke about it and I was like well I still got the ice cream. I still had the ice cream! So I was like that's what I was in the store for so I didn't go for nothing. They were like this shit is not funny. Where are they at? I was like please don't go back out there because those were like real gangsta dudes. They were throwing some really hard blows and I was just like because I was moving so much it wasn't impacting me as hard as hard it would if I was like to just stand there and really try to fight head on.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Renata Hill: Newark was nothing good to me at all. I mean it was not good for me at all being a lesbian or masculine identified in the eyes of other people. Like it was not cool.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I mean part of me wants to say New York wasn't exactly good to you in the sense that you were treated so horribly by the criminal justice system. But that's not the same as everyday life I guess.

Renata Hill: Right. When New York criminal justice system, New York.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right, right. That's when... yeah.

Renata Hill: Definitely.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I mean it seems - I've always felt about your case that it's sort of ironic because New York is supposed to be the like liberated zone or the place you can go to be yourself. We probably have two or three more minutes. Is there anything else that... I wish we could go another hour but what have I... in terms of Newark and gay life in Newark what are the most important things that I haven't asked or that you think would add to the picture?

Renata Hill: **[00:55:00]** I mean I think what's missing in Newark as far as the LGBT community is support. I know they just opened a... well not just but not too long ago opened up an LGBT center. That's *one* LGBT Center. We don't... we need more. We need more support, when hate crimes happen it needs to be acknowledged and there need to be harder consequences for those that are committing these hate crimes against LGBT community. Then maybe we don't have to stay in the G corner or go to some places like the Globe where you don't need ID or you can get drunk, under age and - at the end of the day, think of it, it's not safe. We don't think about that at the moment, we just think about a safe haven.

So like this is where we can go to party and have fun amongst each other then you know what let's go let's drink, let's have fun or whatever. But if anything was to happen in those environments it's like okay we weren't kind of supposed to be there anyway, because it's not like a legal establishment. You don't need ID to get in there so it's almost like... so will the law be on our side or will they throw it in our face, like well, you know you're not supposed to be going in there, you're underage drinking - become where you will get criminalized!

Tim Stewart-Winter: You become vulnerable

Renata Hill: Right right. Yeah I think they need more support around LGBT community. A lot more.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is the G spot unsafe also?

Renata Hill: Not really because there will be so many of us and it's on the outside. It's just standing on the corner it's just like four corners there like...

Tim Stewart-Winter: In the afternoon, evening, all night?

Renata Hill: Usually night. Usually it's like after school hours.

Tim Stewart-Winter: After school hours.

Renata Hill: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: But you weren't in school.

Renata Hill: No, but everybody comes out...

Tim Stewart-Winter: The tone is set by high school kids?

Renata Hill: Yeah the high school kids and then like everybody else comes down there. This is like the spot to go like everybody knows. I don't know about now. Like I don't really come out here no more that much. I really don't. Like the furthest I'll go is like Passaic to see my grandmother but and Paterson and see my cousins but really I don't come out here to hang out. I don't have time. I got two kids. My life is in New York now and I don't hang out in New York so I guess I'm just like over hanging out.

But yeah it might, I'm pretty sure it hasn't changed.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Do you have... I lost my train of thought. Yeah, we should get going.

Renata Hill: All right. Cool.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay. Great. This was wonderful. Thank you so, so much.

Renata Hill: Thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Anything else before I turn?

Renata Hill:

No. /AT/rj/