

**Queer Newark Oral History Project**

**Name of interviewee: Kysheif “Scooda” DeGraffenreid**

**Name of interviewer: Naomi Extra**

**Date: March 16, 2016**

**Location: Rutgers-Newark**

NAOMI EXTRA: It's March 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 Naomi here interviewing Scooda at Rutgers Newark as part of the Queer Newark Oral History Project. This is part two of the interview, so just quickly even though you did before, go ahead and just briefly introduce yourself.

SCOODA: So my name is Kysheif DeGraffenreid also known as Scooda Balenciaga, Legendary Scooda Balenciaga in a ballroom scene. Um in the community just as well in the LGBT just known as Scooda, that's primarily who I'm known as, born and raised in uh Newark, New Jersey you know, many hats.

NAOMI EXTRA: Cool, so we—I just want to pick up where we left off and ask you some more about the ballroom scene. Can you tell me a little bit about your status as legendary, how did that come to be?

SCOODA: So just as past October, I was deemed legendary status and for school—for school boy realness that's a category where, it's a realness category where you are perceived as—like a regular boy looking like a straight heterosexual man attending school, college. And that's what they deem me legendary for. It was pretty exciting to be acknowledged with that status usually that's like you—I feel like in a ballroom scene you really know your worth when it comes to being deemed a status. Because that—it's so much controversy around being deemed, whether people see it or not or people want to acknowledge it.

But I was actually really overwhelmed to see that the community was like really, really supporting and behind my, you know legendary status. I mean I think that—the one who most—the people who most made me feel um deserving was the actual people—my peers in my category. Um to have them actually acknowledge and to see like yes he has paved the way for this community, I mean it's good to have other people acknowledge you because they're your fans. And they're your friends and stuff but the people in your category that actually—who you've battled with, who you—who knows your craft. Then you know you've battled and competed against them for them to acknowledge and say yes that's—he's worthy of, he's deserving so that just made me feel like over the top and like really deserving of it so, yes.

NAOMI EXTRA: That's amazing, so can you—how long have you been well how long—can you tell us just how long you've been on the ballroom scene? And then were you always kind of walking the category school boy realness or did you do other—did you do others? How did that—

SCOODA: So primarily when I first um joined the scene um back in 2004 I was debuted as an Evisu and I—the first time I walked the ball, I walked um pretty boy realness. And like a Jack's Rumble Ball and held that Esquelita's NYC, um after that when I joined the House of Balenciaga later that year I primarily stuck with school boy. That was like my prominent dominant category and that was the only thing I really walked in. I really wanted to master that category. During that time it wasn't really a hot category, nobody really—people looked at that category as like an intro category into the scene.

Like a baby, like an entry category and it wasn't really taken serious um but when I actually started walking it, I was attending **Montclair State** University as well. So when I would—when they ask for certain type of

ways to bring it like certain effects, I would go above and beyond. And like make you think like wow you would never think of doing something like this like they would say just bring it and people would come with their book bags and just a regular fitting. I would come with a whole science project [laughs] and that's just being innovative and taking it to the next step. I remember one time I had this—this one particular night. It was at this this awards ball and I actually—it was this long, long extended runway and I came out first. And I was on an actual scooter, it was just like plate on my name and I came down and I rode it all the way from the back of the runway and just like rode it all the way up to the judges.

And I was just like—I was just standing there just like yes I'm ready to battle anybody wants to bring it, bring it. And like it was so happy because like my energy like that night—my presentation was just like wow like he really took this regular category and thought outside the box and was so innovative. Like one thing—another particular moment that stood out was um they had an invite list where um it was school boy realness four, five thousand dollars. And that was held in NYC so it was a special invite list of school boys who were like top contenders and they had to showcase different elements of high school. And my particular main event project was I actually did like this whole Steve Urkel effect where—do you remember when he did the transformation chamber?

NAOMI EXTRA:

Yeah.

SCOODA

Um so I actually had that constructed and it was like crazy, I mean I did not win but I made it to the last battle. And it was like -- the person who actually won, it was either going to be me or him because we were both like going to be—we both **brung it**. He did like this incredible like marching band that was like innovative so it was—you think of different things to—outside the box.

And things that you typically wouldn't think of other than just bringing just a regular—just book bag and making it boring, but it was like really exciting that night. Like we—I think that night the whole school boys like they really made—made noise for the same and was like our category is not just a joke anymore. Like you're going to take us serious and that was like really, really special to me.

NAOMI EXTRA: Why was the category considered a joke prior to that?

SCOODA: It wasn't really considered a—more so it was like people considered it like an intro category like most people don't stay in school where most people advance and grow to other categories. Like they may go to um a performance category, or like another realness category maybe like they eventually evolve into like maybe thug realness. Or eventually like when they see their comfortable spot in the scene by trying different categories, you see what you like.

Um so me particular when I was walking and winning school boy, I was like um I was almost like on an undefeated streak. Like I was like -- when I—I remember for the awards ball I think it was 2007 or eight um I'd gotten of the -- for school boy in New York. I was the liberty and—the Liberty Awards winner for the York New and Jersey, DC awards Virginia so I was like east coast ruler during that time. Um just as because of like the effects and just thinking outside the box, being so innovative with different um ideas and—

NAOMI EXTRA: That is so interesting so you—so you travelled and competed in this category, so um tell me about the balls that you competed in in Newark. Where were these usually held?

SCOODA: So um most of the balls in Newark were um usually held at The Globe and it was like a typical Friday night but it wasn't really um—it was more so

night life, club filled, it wasn't really towards any awards point. But it was just practice, those were considered like just something to do on a Friday night, let's have a ball, but that was like the hang out spot. That was like the place where you go to get your—go get your practice and perfect your craft.

NAOMI EXTRA: And then once you -- so you went there, it was a little more low key and then was New York the place you went where it was like you stepped it up or?

SCOODA Yeah because they had like um each month they had like this um this little mini bar series, called like the **Rumble Ball** Series and that's where you would be able to um go -- showcase how you like your things on a mini ball series like in a mini ball scale.

NAOMI EXTRA: So that's really -- okay that's really interesting so I also want to ask you -- because I know that your role in the ballroom -- on the ballroom scene, in the ballroom community isn't just through [00:10:00] walking can you talk about um what the community has um what it means to you and the different hats that you've kind of worn?

SCOODA: Okay uh is—so—I'm trying to see where to begin, I think me working at the LGBTQ youth centers after graduating college. I think um my involvement—by that time I was really established in the scene by the time I was graduating college that was in around 2009. I had made my name in the ballroom community I was you know well established, I was like a safe comfortable name like I was the household name I was—I had built my brand like **as far as** like you knew who I was like when I came out there was like a certain expectation that you would get from me.

NAOMI EXTRA: Mm-hmm.

SCOODA: Like you—I raised the bar so there was like a certain type of expectation. I actually held the—when I had—I had my own ball I'm trying to figure

out, actually I think that was a while I think that was 2009 I actually had my own ball at, it was hosted in collaboration with Gregg Evisu and we had our ball down at The Globe downtown and it was called “Follow Me Fridays,” it was like this whole play on like social media and stuff where like the grand prize was called YouTube performance where um we wanted, we asked -- we invited all the female figures to come make this grand—come out crazy and well come out innovative and come out dynamic so that way it could be like this great YouTube hits **or something**. I forgot the exact wording, but I remember it was just like the different categories it was just like it was like a play on, like social media and stuff I remember like it was saying something like old way take me back to like black planet or something. [Laughs]

NAOMI EXTRA: Right, that is so cool.

SCOODA: Yeah.

NAOMI EXTRA: So you put that, so you um help put that together?

SCOODA: Correct that was actually um my event. I hosted it with uh Gregg Evisu who was another um household name and Jersey but during that time I think because I was the community trusted me in a ballroom’s sense and then me working -- then me transitioning to work in you know the whole LGBTQ life skills and health development with NJCRI and Project W.O.W and project wow uh them seeing me in that field wearing a different hat you know other than seeing me in a ballroom figure, it was like okay you know I know him, I trust him and you know I think that kind of let people know that they can trust me more than just you know I help you with getting your effect together or I’ll make sure you know, they knew I was more trusted just on a ballroom level. Like they can trust me with you know personal real life issues that was you know going on in their life.

NAOMI EXTRA: Right.

SCOODA: Um, and I think that's because I've made those transitions you know work actually in my favor its you know allow people to want to come and to you know want to learn education to you know help themselves and help their community.

NAOMI EXTRA: So do people, do people come to see you kind of in this multiple ways?

SCOODA: Yeah.

NAOMI EXTRA: That's they knew like they knew they could you know.

SCOODA: Yeah, they know that they could, they know that I was desperate they can reach me that's when they knew that, I could play multiple roles and it was still be you know respectable boundaries in each one.

NAOMI EXTRA: Mm-hmm, mmh, can you talk little bit about mentorship both who may have mentored you like you know and who have you mentored. So um you know especially kind of coming up in the ballroom scene. And becoming somebody that is visible and respected, can you talk a little bit about that?

SCOODA: Um so my gay father is um the icon Jamal Milan and my gay mother is the icon Jaimee Balenciaga.

NAOMI EXTRA: Mm-hmm.

SCOODA: So um I think the prestige is in the um huh what's the word I'm looking for I guess the bar that they are viewed in the ballroom community has helped raise that bar for me. Like I know that this are high, they've raised the high expectations you know far as you know being over achievers as far as winnings of the year as far as being you know not only household leaders but in their personal lives they have also disciplined me to making sure you know saying you can't help nobody unless you've helped yourself first. Okay if your stuff is not together how can you really think that you can help somebody else?

NAOMI EXTRA: Mm-hmm.

SCOODA:

And I think that that's one of the best things that you know that I've learned from normally saying you know like at the end of the this all, this is fantasy this is always going to be here. If you can't get yourself together and you can't think you know which I've been blessed to always you know, you know what I felt, like I felt was deterring that you know I feel like I was getting too you know lost in the [sense] of forgetting what my priority was it was good to know that I have you know a good supportive system of friends and you know family that is there to you know to guide each other and to make sure that we all stay focused and for as people that I love um.

I mean I have so many like different those are like my two, like people who I like um look up to but I could say like another mentor that up to me I mean is my house father Harold icon Harold Balenciaga, icon James, icon **Kiona** Balenciaga I mean these are like just people who are highly viewed with respect in the scene who I know have helped shaped and you know make sure I'm guided on the correct path from Yancey Balenciaga from icon Bernie Jourdan, Ebony.

So this are just you know people that make sure that they don't mind you know knocking me in the head a couple of times saying hey get it together. And now that I have like earned the way and the torch has been passed to me I do find myself you know in a mentorship role especially like um when I was in project W.O.W I felt like that's why I have earned the respect of so much of the new generation. Because they have seen me not only successful in the ballroom community but in the personal, in my personal life. Like they can actually see and they like you know its not the stereotypical person like you have so many

stereotypes about people in the ballroom saying you will feel like they will drug users.

You feel like all they want to do is you know just party and balls and that's all they do, craft steal— you know craft, steal, escort and when they see you know people whom I'm surrounded by and that's in my circle they are like oh it is another side, that's not necessarily true all of the rumors and stuff that we've you know heard **and stuff and whatever because** if Scooda can do it why cant we? And you know I tell them don't fall don't nothing if you have, if something comes too easy It is not worth having because the consequences that you know are not going to really balance out, like what you want something, whatever you really want work hard for it.

You know do the work put it through you know work it I say nothing comes over night and I say I was like I never really thought of myself, I never thought of myself as being someone that will be in a scene to achieve you know legendary status. The other thing that I wanted to be just cute and feel like I just wanted to get my first LSS and when I got that I was like oh wow.

But then you start realizing that you start taking on like this—this I'm not saying that you don't want the role but you start taking on responsibilities and you start feeling like you know people have you know done this for you and so you want to give back and make sure that you know you are teaching people the right things and correcting them like just like somebody has done for you.

NAOMI EXTRA: What kind of responsibilities did you take on or and also I'm curious about what kind of, what kind of situations you find yourself seeking

mentorship in, so what are some of the things you were like okay you know I'm going to call my you know my gay father or my gay mother and talk to them.

SCOODA: Uh-huh.

NAOMI EXTRA: And seek their mentorship about?

SCOODA: Um okay so um I okay during the 2009 awards ball I actually made my first debut of walking **The Old Way Pop Dip and Spin** performance that was the first time I transitioned from —so when I was walking and winning Schoolboy Realness, behind the scenes no one new that I was actually learning the craft of performance, and I thought wanted to—I knew wanted to vogue, I knew it was going to be something more innovative than me just walking realness and I was like okay voguing femme. I'm not really that you know femme but I was always attracted to the whole pop dip and spin, **The Old Way Pop Dip and Spin** performance because it reminded me so much of break dancing and I remember at one point in my life I was really watching break dancing DVDs and YouTube tutorials and I was actually learning it and I'll say okay you know maybe this is, that it mimics I like the clean lines, it feels masculine, it feels uh you know fun. I was leaning how to do that and I made my first um debut at the 2009 awards ball, um actually 2008 awards ball, or 2009 – no 2009.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay and where was that again?

SCOODA: And that was in um, that was held at The Lab at in NYC.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: And its, its actually on YouTube it says Scooda Balenciaga debuts for **The Old Way** and it was so funny because I actually debuted and they didn't know it was me at first and they was like, "Oh my God that's Scooda, that was Scooda." So um and I actually came out and had won and which was like I was at it I was like on a winning path with that too.

So whenever I would—so, okay when it came time for different competitions and I knew I would be by myself or whatever, I would call my gay father up for some inspiration and he'll be like you know, show no fear! Like, you know, you going to serve like you know' just to get you that, that motivation to like yes to boost that confidence that you need like yes, this is the part of my bloodline. You know I'm a champion like you, you just get that , that, that little bit of motivation to spark you up to be like okay you know, I'm going to come up here and do my thing.

NAOMI EXTRA: Mm-hmm.

SCOODA: Um shade, when its shade in the ballroom community and I feel like you know, but um I'm naturally shady. I get it from both of my gay parents and stuff. It's just something that you just, just learn and in essence and stuff, you know just being quick and, witty and stuff whatever. But I've never felt like I was a shady person, it was something that I had to learn but its not like, I mean, some people can perceive it as something negative but it may or not be because sometimes it can be jokingly it can be -- but you got to learn how to play the game if you feel like you want to be a part of the society. I mean I feel like if, I feel like the ballroom it mimics entertainment and mimics the music industry.

Like anything that's going on in entertainment that's what ballroom mimics. And I feel like we are viewed as all celebrities so when you stuff written online and stuff. All celebrities **don't respond** to that stuff but sometime I'm sure they're reading it and flickers them and I mean the exact same thing goes on in ballroom scene. When we have our YouTube clips and you know we have our little **shade boards**, we have our online forms where shade is discussed where people say they don't like this, like

that or they do like this. And you know you got to be able to know if you can handle criticism or not, and you know just like you could be just like somebody can be so quick to give somebody you be like somebody ooh you always getting something right but this is what is going on with you, you feel me?

NAOMI EXTRA: Mm-hmm. I want to ask you about friendships that have emerged through the ballroom scene have you found that you made friendships, close friendships? Um and how did those happen?

SCOODA: Okay so remember my best friend I was telling you about earlier who I first went to The Globe with his name was um Mike. He joined the House of Balenciaga but during that time um he'd actually left House of Balenciaga to go be east coast father of the House of Mizrahi. Now during that time when I was in Balenciaga, Mike and Lola were—we were like close. We were like besties my—that was my family and even though they have transitioned to the House of Mizrahi. Our friendship is still the same, like we can be out and about and is like is nothing, our chemistry is still there.

Even when my competitor, my house member maybe competing against his house member I maybe on my, on my side saying “Balenciaga!” and he may be on his side saying “Mizrahi!” But at the end of the day we know how to respect each other because we know at the end of the day this is all play, play. This is all, you know, it may be for money. It may be for a trophy but we know at the end of the day it's all fantasy, it's all made up, it's all competitive sport but you got to learn to value the friendship and stuff and cultivate those things after these and stuff.

I mean there are people that take these stuff to the heart and its ride or die and like oh my God like you know some people may perceive houses as

gangs and like ride or die to you know to the end of stuff whatever you know. But you know it, I guess it's how far or what you make of it. It's **as far as you** make of anything in life, you feel me?

NAOMI EXTRA: Right. So within the House of um Balenciaga, are there close friendships among folks in the house?

SCOODA: Of course, its, I think we every house has its close niche of um people um that niche together like they maybe certain leaderships that just clinch together just because they know that their focus maybe execute and to make sure the formation of the house **stays** together.

I mean maybe certain twisters of the house may hang together or the fashion people may hang together. But its, you can't really label it, excuse me, or put any dynamics on it because some of my closest friends are in other houses. And, we may—we know how to respect each other's friendship like I don't ask him about his house business. You know, he don't ask us, you know, we may throw a little shade and be like I'll see you the on a runway floor, you know.

But its like at the end of the day we still love each other as you know, we know how to throw shade but we know how to throw it friendly. Like I said, like yes we be like “I'll see you out next month” or “Yes, I'll see you on the floor” or something like you know but its you know. We can still hang out, go to the mall but when its competition time, its competition time. You go on your side and I go on mine [laughs] but afterwards we all hang out and eat afterwards. If I win I may you know give a little you know—I'll treat your way or if you win you may buy me a drink in the club or something. So it's you know, its all about the friendships and that bonds that you grow to cultivate and you know build with.

NAOMI EXTRA: Right. So I know that you had a hand in um the organization of the Fireball. So can you talk about how that hat, you know, and being involved in organizing balls and what's that been like and how did you get into that?

SCOODA: So The first so, lets see, for 2014 um they was planning to um you know I was contacted from several of the older school house leaders and stuff they was telling me about some fireball you, know and I was like I—I had heard about the fireball they were saying it was something that happened in that, you know, mostly in early 2000s and the 90s and stuff and it was planning on bringing it back. And you know, to what that was equivalent to was um the Latex Ball in NYC. So the latex ball was annual um ball that um is raises um money and give it to um different organizations but it, the whole message is HIV awareness. Um that's the whole reason why the event is there for education, literacy um let's you know where community resources are available and Jersey was doing it as well.

With the ballroom scene, I mean with the Fireball, with the, what was being um kind of different was they was a you making sure each house in Jersey had a representative there on the planning committee, which I though was really cute and creative. I thought that was real all inclusive make sure that you know everybody has a say in it because this is a ball for the community So this is being shaped by you know, the ballroom community as ball is the agency as a great collaboration.

Um so they brought me in and around the spring time and when I first came in I was like this is a really you know older generation panel. So I was like I'm going to make sure that you know we don't get stuck in yesterday but still be innovative and respectful of the past. We still highlight those, pay homage too but still put a new school twist on it.

Um the event ended up being really, really successful, over 800 people in attendance. We had like this whole red décor thing, it was the fire, everything was the fire and ice so we had this whole duality on fire and ice through out the thing. One side was red one side was white playing off the ice. We've given out over \$5,000 in prizes. It was a it was a really good because that one was an actual fundraiser for the New York LGBTQ Center which was really successful. Which made lot of buzz, a lot of media, people came out, a lot of people in the community wanted to be they heard about the successful the success it was and how you know all t he different organizations was involved and then meet a lot of people who want to join in and be a apart of for the next year for the following year um—

NAOMI EXTRA: Right, so the Latex bar had kind of like a HIV/AIDS educational piece to it?

SCOODA: Correct.

NAOMI EXTRA: Um so at the Fireball, was there that same piece?

SCOODA: Yes.

NAOMI EXTRA: And have you seen that on like in the ballroom seen that kind of— can you talk about that a little bit?

SCOODA: So what a lot of the um agencies, the community based organization what they do is they have sometimes what they do to attract some of the younger LGBTQ population, what they do is they have um something called the kiki scene and the kiki scene is a an imitation, a mock of the ballroom scene.

So you would have like these houses called like the house of Pepsi the House of like Puma and what it is is the kids interpretation of the ballroom scene see so you would see like their play play, innovativeness. So their

version of them walking fashion but I don't think that the agencies expected that scene to grow and evolve the way it has between the New York and New Jersey um HIV Community Based Organization and LGBTQ Youth Centers through out the New York and New Jersey region, which has been an innovative method to recruiting and getting those you know youth and to you know into life skills classes and you know realistic things like healthcare, job readiness, mental health, food and resources so its been a way to pull the attention cause if you know it so hard to when your younger the thing that got your attention is not going to focus you so that has been like an innovative strategy for us capturing that audience than trying to fuse health education messages with fun. So you're having fun but still learning at the same time and that was one of um one the things that we actually did while I was working at the youth center that was something that was really innovative in teaching the youth and you know life skills and how to take care of themselves and you know how to save a dollar and you know how to budget. And you know just how a bunch of life skills things that you really should learn in high school but you really didn't you know. I feel like high school really should be about.

NAOMI EXTRA: Right. Are you active on the kiki scene or is that a younger?

SCOODA: Yeah, its most so younger. When I was um when I was working I had my own Kiki house um and that's and that's actually how I how I brought in a lot of the youth because I had my own kiki house and it was called the the Kiki house of Ciroq. So it was after the play of the, the liquor Ciroc but we spelled it C-I-R-O-Q but we made it seem like the whole theme around our house was like just just it being fun that's what our was and we'd had this um ooh wow! We had one in like the—I remember we this big Kiki ball **in Newark** downtown and it brought out over like maybe 300 kids and stuff, you know, youth to that down town area for our that's how you know innovative that I knew—

NAOMI EXTRA: When was this?

SCOODA: This was like 2010.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: And what I did was I knew who the young gatekeepers was I knew who was the popular kids and I had them run my house so I was just—I didn't do anything I was like the founder. I just said, "Hey this is your y'all platform. I'm here for referrals. I'm here if ya'll need if ya'll need me to step in, if there is, you know, chaos or miss, you know, what was going on that was the only time I'm needed but I had that let me know that it felt like for me that was kind of practice if I really wanted to take those roles and place them into the real scene. It was kind of letting me know like if I really—could I, you know, handle those next steps of ballroom scene and, and the real scene though. But I can tell you it, it takes a lot of work.  
[laughs]

NAOMI EXTRA: I bet.

SCOODA: It takes a lot of work and detail. But if you have a fantastic great team and everyone does their role, it can happen. So that's what, what successful about ours because I had a lot of community who was popular and they used their name and their fame, you know, to come in and, you know, fill these events and stuff so I knew how top pick out—I mean everybody came because of me but I knew that they had their own separate following outside of mine so that it even more packed when we needed events to be filled and stuff.

NAOMI EXTRA: So how long—how long were you leading the House of Ciroq?

SCOODA: Maybe like two years.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: Yeah, it was, it was a two year thing.

NAOMI EXTRA: It—are those—is that common to have like a like a because I have never heard of a kiki house? So, so there's like the, the houses that you've mentioned

SCOODA: Aha!

NAOMI EXTRA: So, so there's like the, the houses that, you know, you mentioned that you were part of and then there's ones that are just like..

SCOODA: Yes, So—

NAOMI EXTRA: The ones of the kiki scene?

SCOODA: Yes, so like the kiki scene those are its like a sub-community of the ballroom scene, so its not really, I mean it has a lot of attention but not it will never compete to the real ballroom scene. Its more so uh its more so being used as a tool as a strategy for these community organizations to, you know, attract the youth to get them into these you know resources that are available for them.

NAOMI EXTRA: Uh-huh.

SCOODA: I feel like that's the best way to describe-excuse me-what the kiki scene is now. You know, and, I mean for the youth they view it as an entry way, they use it as their practice time. They use it as their way—if they are scared, they are not ready to get into the real scene. They use this as a time to perfect their craft as a chance for them to use their practice spaces that are provided by the community based organization and stuff.

So they use it as a chance to practice their craft before they feel like they have enough confidence to excel to the real ballroom scene. I mean there has been a lot of successful cases of people that have transitioned from the kiki scene to, you know, the real ballroom scene. But lets be clear, the ballroom scene—the kiki scene could never really compete here you know to the mass and scale to the real ballroom scene especially how its has

grown internationally or you know, it's more so a New York New Jersey thing.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay

SCOODA: Yeah.

NAOMI EXTRA: So um do you organized a Kiki ball? And tell me what that was like and did you have a good turn out?

SCOODA: So I just play it so I just think about when I held my own ball with, in-collaboration with Gregg. Me and him did everything because it was just us, we decorated space together we took you know, me and him planned the category together we you know, went out to decoration together. So this time when it came to the kiki, I mean the kiki ball they set it up themselves they went with a theme. They went I mean—I just primarily handled the financial portions for them.

So I went and took care of the venue but they all put in their views they said this is how much the venue is, this is something that we wanted to achieve but to see the initiative and to actually, I mean, I was there to guide them along the way to say, “Hey, this is what you doing right but um” to see the initiative for them actually like planning to work together to um, to do the categories, to pick out the venue, I mean we did it all together so it felt good with everybody participating and taking a role and stuff for or we was like I we knew our thing was like space so every time somebody would find something they would be like we were just like get it you know when somebody was out and they saw something they would just like get it and we were just like store everything, you know, at my house or something and its actually that is all on YouTube as well where we actually had the um a portion of the Ciroq ball that is available on YouTube as well I can actually send you that link as well you, you would love to see that.

NAOMI EXTRA: Um so was there was the Ciroq ball in, at the Globe?

SCOODA: It wasn't at the Globe it was at a venue down town. It was called the Branford Manor at the time.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: But...

NAOMI EXTRA: So where is that?

SCOODA: **It's on Branford Place**

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: So it's no longer in inexistence its in cooperated into I think chop barbeque place or something, yeah its turned into some kind of food venue. But that was like one of the best venues in New Jersey, the last House of **Jourdan** Ball was actually held there.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: Which is Bernie's house, Icon Bernie's, yes, his former house.

NAOMI EXTRA: I just want to ask you two more questions, one is I'm wondering if there is any —because I know that you also have—um you do and are interested in interior design and is there any kind of crossover intersection between, um you know your interest in interior design and also you've been talking about your experience with organizing and putting together balls.

SCOODA: Um well I have some treats in store so -- but then over the past year I actually transitioned from doing the LGBTQ community work, being a program supervisor for our NJCR project W.O.W, as I transitioned from that I started working and developing my own company which is called Cocoon Designs so I'm in the process of building my own brand. And right now I'm freelancing, I'm doing interior design at friends family apartments, as I learn to build my craft as I transition into school, but my primary goal I don't know if it should be a treat or not. But my primary goal is to have a home in garden show in this—in Newark let, me just say in Newark.

And hopefully as it grows and I can look into other spaces but I want it to be Newark, you know I want to start building, investing in other than—I feel like as I am entering my 30's [laughs] I'm looking at things from a different point of view now, I'm looking at things from a larger scope and I'm blessed to have learnt those networking skills that I did in a ballroom scene, and the ballroom scene has taught me a lot of self confidence, stepping outside of my box, stepping outside of my comfort zone, being creative stepping outside of the zone and I feel like if I had enough energy to invest into the ballroom community with my just effects alone just like I enjoyed it. And this is something else that I really am passionate for my interior design so I'm like I want to take those things that I've learned and I want to apply them here and see where it takes me. And I'm like if I can put together a ball and host it with eight hundred people successfully not once but I did it twice in addition to previous smaller events that I had done over the years, I am—that's my primary goal is to have a home and garden show in Newark and see how that goes. So that's in the works.

NAOMI EXTRA: That's really great. My last question that I want to ask you is—so last time as we were wrapping up last time, you mentioned the time you walked for \$5000, can you tell that story?

SCOODA: Okay, that's on—I think that's on YouTube as well I'm going to send it to you. So it was invite list it was held at NYC at The Lab, and it was maybe about like maybe like fifteen competitors, maybe fifteen to eighteen, school boys, who was chosen to walk. There was four rounds. The first round was like what you would wear for like the first day of school, and I remember I had like worn this outfit I was so I don't know I was just so cute like—because I was like okay I've got my freshman book bag, I have my fresh joints, you know I looked really, really cute. Because I was like

because we had to bring it as if you was going—now that I remember like I got to go fresh, you know the first day of school.

The second year was I think like sports or something, I think we had to do sports attire and then it was like freshman, junior year the four rounds was like based on high school, freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. And your junior year you had to do like a show case, like a talent show where you had to show case something innovative. And all I just was like all I remembered was I had came extra, extra early to the event because I knew that the scale of what I was coming to, I was coming to bring it. I was coming. And plus I knew the magnitude of the size of the box so I wanted to make sure my stuff was perfectly propped and when it came time for me to present I could just walk my stuff out.

So I got into the event like maybe like two hours before the doors had opened and they was still setting up and I brung my stuff in there, put it in the corner and I had my little sheet up rolled up covering my stuff or whatever so I was just so happy, like to so then it came time so to the different people—the different people had walked. Now what had made this unique was there was other people who are my team who was my house members, who was invited to walk this event as well, but there could only be one winner.

So we was hoping that we didn't have to battle each other and stuff or whatever, which we really didn't so that was kind of worked in his favor. But when it came time for me to present my show case I had did this whole—my inspiration was Steve Urkel so I had this whole just big transformation inspired chamber, but do you remember the one —you know how he would normally step into the transformation and become Steve

Urkel to Stefan right? So what I did was—in another episode he used the transformation chamber to make things big and small. Do you remember when him and Carl had got shrunk because they had—do you remember that?

NAOMI EXTRA: [laughs] I don't remember that—I remember the transformation to Stefan.

SCOODA: Okay so you remember the transformation chamber, so that was like my whole inspiration and what I did was I had put like a pencil in there and it was like this giant pencil that came out so and then I put like this candy bar inside. And it was like this huge, huge candy bar. Like, the candy bar was probably about—it was like bigger than this. But it was a real candy bar, when you see the production you had to make sense as to—it was the machine was making things bigger but it was already you know the judges was amazed because when I took the candy bar out I gave them the candy bar and they was like hold on we can really eat this and I said yes, it's is a real candy bar.

But it was like this huge it was like I put the regular Hershey's in there, but it was the regular one, of course it was like specialty order somewhere. So the whole concept was my machine was to put food in there and to use the machine to save world hunger or something. Because I put like a piece of corn in there then like a big piece of corn came out, of course I was like I was into making props and all, the gadgets and all that and I did like I ended with this Steve Urkel dance and stuff, it was like so funny, it was like so innovative.

And the other person who was one person who the other person who actually won, which is Pampers Milan, he's also legendary as well. He did like this whole marching band piece, which was like really, really innovative. It was like—I've seen people do the marching band

before but he just made it so classic and unique. He was just like making it—the you know making you feel it in the room and stuff; I'm trying to think of something else that stood out in particular. Some people like came in like mascot and just different. It was just like so good to see somebody else's imagination and stuff, but it was the last battle with me and the other guy, Pampers Milan, and it was like one-one, two-one, so we was like going neck and neck or whatever and he actually won the last votes.

NAOMI EXTRA: So all that Steve Urkel one was the \$5000 competition?

SCOODA: Yes.

NAOMI EXTRA: Oh, I have to watch that video.

SCOODA: Yes.

NAOMI EXTRA: Um a quick follow up question, how do folks get the money to put together this kinds of —

SCOODA: Ah saving.

NAOMI EXTRA: Okay.

SCOODA: In different ways sometimes you could go collect—I mean sometimes balls maybe two people together having it like we could host it together, and split the funds, sometimes they—now that organizations, they may say hey we will sponsor maybe like a grand prize for you as long as you in cooperate some kind of HIV message, or some sort of awareness message, or now that we've started to—now I'm glad to see that we're started to see other cooperate sponsorships starting to want to sponsor balls as well so that's a good thing which I've been wanting to see for the longest.

Because when I look at the ballroom ball community as a sub culture, and I look at—and I compare it to the whole break dancing community and I feel like how some people feel like oh other cultures and other things have been stolen from that whole underground Brooklyn you know b bop thing

and I'm like that's the same thing that has happened to ballroom right now. But let it grow, let it you know, be mainstream. Let it get out there because now we can start to get sponsorship just as well as the annual Red Bull break dancing competition which like has gone international now, not only do they do in the United States they do in Europe and...I forgot. Yeah.

NAOMI EXTRA: In East Asia.

SCOODA: Yeah something over there, yeah Japan or something like that. So it's like pros and cons to it because people feel like oh the culture is being stolen and trust me everybody know a vogue move when they see one. Okay. [laughs] So you've got to give and take, it got to be like an ultimate balance so if you want something you've got to be able to give a little so.

NAOMI EXTRA: Thank you.

SCOODA: No problem.

NAOMI EXTRA: So just to wrap up its March 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 I'm Naomi Extra here with Scooda, doing an interview for the Queer Newark Oral History Project.