

Queer Newark Oral History Project  
Interviewee: Janyce Jackson Jones  
Interviewer: Anna Alves  
Date: May 13, 2016  
Location: Newark LGBTQ Community Center

ANNA ALVES: Today is Friday May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016. My name is Anna Alves and I am interviewing Janyce Jackson-Jones as the Pt. 2 from an initial interview. We are at the LGBTQ Community Center, and we're in Newark, New Jersey. This is for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. So we're going to go ahead and jump into, sort of a little bit of your personal history let's start like -- just take me through to from, I guess college, through to your marriage, and sort of setting up your family life.

JANYCE JACKSON: Okay. So my life is not in that order. [Shared laughter] So I'll start from after high school. I don't know if I mentioned to you that, when I was three years old, I was diagnosed with a disease called Myasthenia Gravis, I did, okay. My life has been --

ANNA ALVES: Then let's talk a little bit about that experience too, then.

JANYCE JACKSON: Okay. So, well see that's what happens because if when I get— I will, I will.

ANNA ALVES: [Laughter] We will get there.

JANYCE JACKSON: Because it weaves in who I am, and how I became who I am, and the things that I did, right? So, I bring it up now because my life expectancy was not -- when I was nine years old, my great-grandmother Engried, said that -- well, actually I was not nine, I don't know how old I was. She said that the doctor said I would not live to be nine. So, from nine up until, I will say about 19, I expected to die, even though my health was pretty good. I went to school, I did all those things, but just knowing that I had this disease. [00:02:00] So, in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I got pregnant before the end of the year, and back then when you were pregnant, you had to leave school.

So, I left school and went to a night school, and got my diploma. I got married, during that— I think I was like six months pregnant when I got married, and my daughter was born December of 1969. And so I sepa-

rated from my husband, that husband. So that was 1969. I worked different jobs— we were together, and in 1973, I got called for a Civil Service job at the New York City Police Department. So my daughter was four. And sometime that year or shortly after, he and I separated and -- so, I raised her -- I was raising her by myself.

ANNA ALVES: In Brooklyn?

JANYCE JACKSON: In Brooklyn, yes. Brooklyn, New York, and I worked for New York City Police Department. I started out as a clerk and then I moved to another unit, which was the Communication Section where they answered 911 calls. So I was on the job for 30 years and I worked— I just worked. And I think it was -- I did various things with the union. I was a shop steward with the union. I planned trips. Working in a police department, I worked nights, weekends and holidays at -- all of us did. So I was with the first class of civilians and we were 100 percent African American young women. [00:04:00] And so, we formed a bond. Most of us had children, and we had to work nights, weekends, and holidays and so we planned trips and did things together to accommodate our schedule and take care of ourselves and our kids.

ANNA ALVES: Ooh, that's great.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, it was great. It was really -- that's how we survived as young, black, single— most of us were single, some of them were not. So I did that for... up until, I guess about maybe seven or eight years before I -- actually no -- nine years, from 1973 to '82— I remarried. And at the time of this marriage, my Myasthenia Gravis was not doing that well. And I was taking steroids, and so, I had a whole— steroids, they change the structure of your body and especially your face. So I was on a high dosage, because I had been in the hospital, my eye was very drooping, and so this high dosage of steroids would, you know. So it made me feel better, my eye popped up, but I did not look like the person that I knew and did not feel good about myself at all. It was—

looking back, I know that more than I did then, but it was during this time that I married him because --

ANNA ALVES: Where did you meet?

JANYCE JACKSON: We met— ooh, how did we meet? That’s a good question. I don’t remember right now— ooh my God! Where did I meet this man?

ANNA ALVES: We can always circle back.

[CROSS TALK]

[00:06:00]

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, I’m gonna have to come back to that.

ANNA ALVES: Because you obviously met him!

JANYVE JACKSON: Right! I don’t remember how I met him... It might have been in a bowling alley because that’s what he did a lot. But I’ll come back to that, wow! Yeah -- so, yeah, we used to talk a lot on the phone and then it developed and we got married, and then a year later I had my second daughter. So the two of them were 13 years apart, actually. So that was 1982 when Shatema was born, and we were together— he was a wonderful guy, he was a good guy, he gave me money, he paid bills, I had -- I kept my own money for my own— so, it was good, but at some point, I grew and realized I was just not into him in that way. And so, at the police department, I met the first woman that ended up being my first partner— who by the way, today is her birthday. May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941. Regina Shavers. [00:07:22]. So I met her at work. I was actually one of her supervisors. She was a very arrogant person and we had lots of interesting conversations and she used to invite me to different places in the city, which I realized that I led a very sheltered life— there were lots of things that I didn’t know about, so I was excited. I had also started going to college at College of New Rochelle through my Union.

[00:08:00]

ANNA ALVES: They were subsidizing it or...?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, the Union was subsidizing it, and the College of New Rochelle, the Campus was at the Union so it was catered towards adults, particularly

adults who had not been to school. So, it was perfect for me to do my first introduction to the environment of college. And what I forgot to say before was, I never thought about going to college because I wasn't going to live anyway. I didn't have any encouragement to go to college, no one in my family went to college and in high school, we -- and I was an A student in high school before I left pregnant — and a Guidance Counselor told me that I should concentrate on going to a vocational school. College wasn't for me, I don't know why, but that wasn't -- it just wasn't something that I thought about until I was an adult. And so, Regina and I got to know each other better and I fell in love with her and essentially left John, which was my second husband. We were still together, living together, with just -- just living together. So we separated and then I think maybe two years later, I started to go out with Regina. which was very, very scary for me. It was very new for me. I just never even like -- we all have our own story and people say, "Ooh, you were like that all the time, you didn't know." I don't know that. Like, I don't recall that. I recall falling in love and thinking, "What in the world? This can't be. This is a woman!" [00:10:00].

And my first letter to her actually was, "If you were a man, I would know that I'm in love with you, but because you're a woman, I have no idea what's going on with me." And so it developed and five years later, we moved in with each other.

ANNA ALVES: In Brooklyn?

JANYCE JACKSON: In Brooklyn.

ANNA ALVES: And how old was your oldest daughter at this point?

JANYCE JACKSON: She was -- my oldest daughter? Was, like, eighteen, nineteen? Because she didn't live with us. She was out on her own. I have my own story about her. But the youngest one, so the youngest one had to be -- she was still in middle school. So I think she was like seven or eight— yeah. I have to get the numbers— she was born in '82, this happened in like -- no, she was still -- she was just going to middle school.

So they have what they used to call grade school, then middle school and -- so, she was just leaving grade school, because when she left, is when I moved, because I didn't want to take her out of where she was. And then I still transported her back to the neighborhood, because the neighborhood that I lived in originally, the schools were better than where I was moving to. So that was very interesting. Nobody was happy [laughter] but me. Nobody was happy. So, you know, I did it and we stayed together. We were together 23 years before she died.

**[00:12:00]**

She died in 2008 and we had a great life together. We lived in her parents' brownstone— her mother lived downstairs, her brother lived on the second floor, and we lived on the top floor. So they became my family and eventually, my daughters— we made it happen. It took some time, but we made it happen. And throughout that time, I went back to school. But I went, and I stopped, and I went and I stopped, and so I went to -- I had the number at one time — at least five different colleges? Trying to -- because I was still working, I still had her — and tried to figure it all out. And I realized I'm not the most disciplined person either.

So I went to -- and the college... not the one I graduated from, but the one that had I think the most influence on me — was Hunter College. So, Regina was also in Hunter College, and then I went to Hunter College, and it's also where I met Jacquelyn Holland and I got involved in the Audre Lorde Club, **[13:27]**, the Returning Woman Club so, it was -- I had all of the support that was very different so— they were all women and they were adults. I met teachers who were interested in adults succeeding in college. I don't remember why I left though, but I left. I forgot why I left.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, you had a pretty demanding job too, it sounds like.

JANYCE JACKSON: I did, yes.

ANNA ALVES: So that might be part of it.

**[00:14:00]**

JANYCE JACKSON: I did, I did, and so then I went back— because I was determined to graduate. It took me 17 years to get my undergraduate degree. I went back to Queens College City University Adult Campus on 43<sup>rd</sup> [Street] and Fifth [Avenue]. And I graduated from there, in 2002, with a Bachelor's of Arts in Urban Studies. I should hang that thing up.

And how I really made it happen was by then, my youngest is in college. And so, I was like, “Okay, I have to graduate before her!” [laughs] She entered college in 2000 and so that was the motivation to get me to graduate. So, that's college, that's the two husbands, that's the two daughters. We can kind of shift, if you want.

ANNA ALVES: Now, around that time— because I remember last time we talked a lot about your trajectory through church— and so, around— this is 2002— where were you in that trajectory, so that you know, how that emerged?

JANYCE JACKSON: So, it actually— you mean church, in terms of church. Okay, so I missed that part, so go all the way back. Regina and I got together '87, '88 and I started going back to -- I've always gone to church, but not here, so I really -- I started going back with a passion [00:16:00] to get an answer from God about, “Is this right or wrong,” right? I got baptized, actually, for the first time in 1990, because I'm like, “Okay, this is not right, God!” And so, in 1991, we went to a conference in California.

ANNA ALVES: Right, I remember we talked about that. You went to Los Angeles and then started a -- after seeing sort of how that was — sort of talking with them about starting a branch in New York, and then it evolved into starting a branch in Newark.

JANYCE JACKSON: Right, so the one in New York, Jacquelyn was the assistant in, and she left New York and came to Newark.

ANNA ALVES: And started the one here, I remember that now and then --

JANYCE JACKSON: So, I did say, and then I -- that's right because I said I was going back and forth, just to offer assistance.

ANNA ALVES: Right. And that's when you were like, "Oh wait, there's this whole other thing!" And we got— we put that in right here. So around 2002 then, you were sort of already in the swing of—

JANYCE JACKSON: Church.

ANNA ALVES: —that sort of journey.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes.

ANNA ALVES: Right. And then -- I'm trying to think how we move -- because at that point, I remember we had a discussion about how you started, I guess, as a deacon and then moved into becoming a pastor, and then how you ended up sort of over here. So, that was like a lot of that. So, I guess what we can move into now is sort of how you get to Newark. Like what is your earliest memory of Newark?

JANYCE JACKSON: So it was actually within all of that. It was when she came to start the church and I came to help her. That was my introduction to Newark. [00:18:00] I had never been. Had never thought about coming. And didn't, even for the first few years, didn't know a lot about Newark, because we came on Sunday. And back then, downtown Newark was dead. There was nowhere to eat. There was nothing open. NJPAC was lots of wire. The foundation --

ANNA ALVES: Oh the scaffoldings? [00:18:28]

JANYCE JACKSON: Not even scaffolding -- like those --

ANNA ALVES: All those wire poles.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, that's what that was. I don't know when NJPAC, when they came back, but that's what that was and so— But church was -- it was lively, it was full. It was like the Cathedral was like two, three hundred people on a Sunday. So, it was definitely a need and that's what kept me coming back.

The fact that so many people needed a place and people were interested and, so out of that, how I got here, we were -- we had an AIDS Ministry. And we were approached— I wasn't on the inside. I think we were approached? Or maybe we approached the State?— and we were funded to

do HIV prevention for women. And I started to work with that. So I started to take their classes, and I began to learn more, even— and I was still working in New York. So I would do that.

ANNA ALVES: Right. At the Police Department, right?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, at the Police Department. And I also took some classes at New Theology School and just begun to do— I attach more to the work of the program, [00:20:00] HIV prevention program— which, you know, it was this space right here actually. Not even the big one when we first started. But even then, like this... it was dead. All the stores that are on Halsey Street now were not there.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, that was the next question, was sort of how has Newark changed since then?

JANYCE JACKSON: Oh, tremendously.

ANNA ALVES: And a lot of it has to do with this new development? How has that impacted, also I guess the traffic that goes through here as well?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, a lot of it has -- so NJPAC finally began their work and it seemed like it happened overnight once they came back — so NJPAC was here.

ANNA ALVES: In what year?

JANYCE JACKSON: I don't remember.

ANNA ALVES: Around -- would that be the early 2000s?

JANYCE JACKSON: It had to be, because we started in '95 and it had to look like that at least three years.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, that makes sense, because it seems like there was a - like a big investment into developing this area right around 2000, if I remember right, and so NJPAC was probably a pretty big part of that.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, probably was the first.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

JANYCE JACKSON: So that came within a couple of, uh— small businesses, you know, began to open up, but it was still kind of slow like, nothing happened around here on Saturday and Sunday, do you know? But during the week, it was really like our program began to -- it was a lot of outreach. So we had to



be off premises to talk about the program and to get people to come in. Next door was Labor Ready. That's the first thing I remember.

**[00:22:00]**

ANNA ALVES: What's Labor Ready?

JANYCE JACKSON: Labor Ready was an organization where people could come in and be placed on jobs the same day. And so that was the traffic that we had essentially. And then when Labor Ready moved, it was Youth Build. So it was the young people that went to Youth Build and the staff. I don't even know when—I don't remember if Kilkenny [Alehouse] was always there, which I don't think it was. Central was always there. Central Diner was always there. They would not open as often as they are now, but they were always there. So my venturing out into Newark really happened through the work of the program and the job incentive. Yeah, and then— and traveling back and forth.

ANNA ALVES: When did you -- did you -- I don't remember if we ever talked about if you ever actually moved here. When did that happen, if that happened?

JANYCE JACKSON: So Regina never wanted to live in New Jersey. After I realized that this is where I was going to be doing my work, and I used to say to her, and she was "No. I don't even want New Jersey by my name. I'm not moving to New Jersey." I wanted to get out of that house. Like by now, my daughter is, you know, she is in college and I was like, "Let's move. Let's get our own—" She didn't want to come. I thought, "New Jersey, because this is where I am most of the time." She didn't want to come. So we moved, and by some accident, we found this place in upstate New York. In Orange County. Nice area by a lake. Both of us love water. We were up there for something else and we ended up seeing it, and buying there. But that was still not New Jersey. And she died in 2008 while we lived there. So it's like an hour, or an hour and ten-minute commute. So I had to do that. **[00:24:00]**

ANNA ALVES: Both ways, every day?

JANYCE JACKSON: By myself now. And then 2009, I have a friend, Julie, who had broken up with her wife, and they have a daughter. They lived in Brooklyn. The wife moved to Maplewood and took the daughter. And so Julie, who was retired—she’s an older woman, she’s about 10 years older than me—Julie could afford it, said, “I want a place in Maplewood, close to Mari” because my visiting, I think, was like every other week.

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

JANYCE JACKSON: So she has a house in Brooklyn, but she wanted to rent a place closer to her daughter. And she’s a close friend, so she was there, you know, when Regina died she helped me move. And so one day, we talked about renting together. It was like, “Okay, the commuting is too much. I want to be closer. We’re both in mourning because – why don’t we take care of each other for a little while and live together?” And I was like, “Yeah, because I’m ready to sell this house.” And so we rented a house in Maplewood. That was in 2000—.

ANNA ALVES: That’s how you came over?

JANYCE JACKSON: That’s how I came to New Jersey. That was in 2009 and we were there for two years. And then I met Valerie, who lived in Brooklyn, but loved New Jersey.

ANNA ALVES: Brooklyn!

JANYCE JACKSON: [00:26:00] She loved New Jersey. She loved where we lived. She—you know, I used to take her— because by now I know a few things about New Jersey— take her to different restaurants and parks and beach and she loved it. And so when we got serious, we -- Julie and I broke up. Julie got her own apartment by herself, for her and her daughter. And Valerie and I rented an apartment in Maplewood for a year and— or maybe it was two years. It seems like a lot of years. I think it was two years. And then we decided, “This is crazy! This rent is crazy.” And I said, “We can live in Newark for almost half of what we’re paying here, because we have a plan to retire.” And so she agreed and we moved to Newark. So now we’ve been in Newark a year and a half.

ANNA ALVES           Year and a half. In which neighborhood?

JANYCE JACKSON: In North Newark.

ANNA ALVES:           North Newark.

JANYCE JACKSON: Right by Branch Brook Park's light rail station.

ANNA ALVES:           Oh, that's nice.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES:           And so the cherry blossoms must be really nice every year.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, yes. And it's a fairly new building. So the building and the apartment is very similar to where we were in Maplewood. Maplewood is just different — and this is off the record: she hates Newark.

ANNA ALVES:           You need to cut that part out. Make sure to strike that out.

JANYCE JACKSON: Oh God! So that's my struggle.

ANNA ALVES:           And that's where you're still, right now...

JANYCE JACKSON: We are in Newark, yes.

ANNA ALVES:           Even with all the changes? She's sort of... she likes New Jersey... with the changes. [00:28:00]

JANYCE JACKSON: And she likes Maplewood. So Newark is like Brooklyn, in a sense. You know, it's a lot of concrete, it's a lot of buildings, it's a lot of people. You know, she wants trees, and birds to wake her up in the morning, not the people on the way to the train—like the woman that was standing out here, [referring to a woman standing on the street, just outside the Newark LGBTQ Center earlier in the interview that was talking loudly on her cell phone] that's what I hear in the morning, so yeah.

ANNA ALVES:           Are there any ways that Newark has changed that you don't think that people are aware of maybe? Things that you might have seen for good or ill, especially since you've moved here?

JANYCE JACKSON: See, so I came from Brooklyn, right? And so Newark was fine for me. Like, there wasn't a whole lot of difference between Brooklyn and Newark. I mean, it all depends on where you lived, that's the other thing. So I lived in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. I mean, it was fine, where there were

lots of buildings, lots of people, you know, lots of parties... I wasn't going to walk the street late at night by myself and the same thing here in Newark. So I think what has changed is— and this is where I spend most of my time— is downtown Newark, is what I know.

I don't really know, other than where I am now, I don't know a lot about, you know, other parts of Brooklyn. Downtown has changed a lot. It's more lit. There's more activity. There are just more people. So you don't feel – I don't feel alone walking the street. And walking the street at night, years ago, it was so quiet down here [00:30:00] because nobody was down here. I don't know where they were. I didn't even know they had apartments in these buildings down here because you never saw people. Where are they?

ANNA ALVES: So it's a lot more active now?

JANYCE JACKSON: It's a lot more populated and a lot more active. More people are out and about. A lot more businesses down Halsey and downtown and, you know, having the Prudential Center they're in the way— like, the buildings were all boarded up.

Right? So we had church at Trinity and St. Philips, across from the Haynes Building— and I'd never seen that building open— so from the Haynes Building all the way down, almost to Raymond [Avenue], on Broad [Street], all those buildings were boarded up.

ANNA ALVES: Those are the ones that they're building out now.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes. That's where Prudential is, where Nike and Starbucks and all those— they were all boarded up buildings.

ANNA ALVES: And now here they are.

JANYCE JACKSON: And here they are. And a parking lot— there was a parking lot across— who's there now? Well, they're still working on that building. Next to Haynes, there was a parking lot. So it was very— not interesting-looking. And, you know, nothing to do, so we came in, we did church, and we were out.

ANNA ALVES: Has this build-out also impacted how much traffic comes through here?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, yes.

ANNA ALVES: In what ways?

JANYCE JACKSON: We never had to worry about a parking space. So they put meters— we never had meters. [laughter] There were no meters, and no worry about parking. Now there's meters, you get tickets, there's nowhere to park. There's traffic. There's walking traffic. There's cars all the time. You know, so Kilkenny's active, there's another bar here, the barber shop, and at the Hookah Lounge. [00:32:00]

I have to say it right because I was first saying “Hookah.” Hookah, right, you know, all of that. It's like something is always going on. So it's very- - it's active and it's people, it's exciting... I like that. You know, I like being awakened by the birds and I like quiet, but I also like to be able to come to excitement.

So like the times that— you know I grew up in New York— it's strange to say this, but when I visit New York, like I was there the other day? Like there is an excitement that kind of get— you know with all the people, and new different things, and I was like, “Wow! I missed this!” Until I got tired of all the people and then I wanted to come back.

ANNA ALVES: Just want it in doses.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES: Has it impacted sort of how, I guess, the numbers of folks that you're able to sort of outreach to as well? Or that find the Center?[00:33:14] Or has it been pretty steady throughout?

JANYCE JACKSON: Well, so here is the thing, right? The people that we -- so there's been an evolution of what this Center is. In the beginning, the people that we outreached to were homeless, drug users and sex workers. Those were the people we were looking for to come into... the Center was on New Street.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: And so our neighbors were okay with us, but you know they— in the beginning, they were not really happy that they... let's put it this way: they paid very close attention to our behavior as neighbors.

**[00:34:00]** And so whenever, like for example, we didn't open until nine. And the shelters closed, I believe, at eight. And some of the people would come to us because they could wash their clothes, they could get a snack— laundry, snack and there was a third thing that I cannot think of— but they would line up outside, you know, so I had to hear about that. So we changed our hours. And you know, so that population is the population that now, because Newark is the way it is, that they run them all away. Like they don't get to move around freely like they did before. We used to be able to go to Penn Station and do outreach. You can't even go there now. You have to have a permit and talk to the—oh yeah.

ANNA ALVES: So it's regulated?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, yeah. So the population has changed and we don't have that program anymore, anyway, so the -- what we do now, is we don't have that Drop-In Center program. We can't give them showers and snacks. It's a different kind of programming, so outreach is to a different kind of people, and those are the kind of people that walk by.

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

JANYCE JACKSON: Long story, you see.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah. What would that demographic look like now?

JANYCE JACKSON: **[00:36:00]** So now, it's actually everybody. I mean, homeless people are still included in that, but less so. We had a whole group of homeless people at the time, but now it's— **[00:36:01]** it runs the gamut. I mean I had a man -- being in this spot is just like perfect. I had a man walk by yesterday, he came in, and he says, "Can you tell me what the 'Q' means [in LGBTQ]? So we started this conversation -- I don't know if he's straight or gay — but he began to tell me about his daughters, and how his daughters are involved in a LGBT club, and that they just went and they made new friends, and we showed the Sakia Gunn film last night, and I told

him about that, and he came. So we attract all kind of people, which is good.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

JANYCE JACKSON: Which is good because --

ANNA ALVES: I noticed a large youth contingent too at the dance-a-thon.

JANYCE JACKSON: We have to...

ANNA ALVES: Lots of energy.

JANYCE JACKSON: Lots of energy. And they come— see, they have options now, which is different in Newark. When we were here, there were no options. We were it. And so we were it for gay people, unless it was a club. But now there are other options and other programs, and so that's also a difference of what has happened.

ANNA ALVES: Probably in beneficial way?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, variety is always good. We always need more than one because one is not going to satisfy everybody's need.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: Absolutely.

ANNA ALVES: What, if anything, do you find appealing about living in Newark? Besides, you said, you like the urbanness, because you came from Brooklyn, anything else besides that? Or challenges?

JANYCE JACKSON: [00:38:00] I like -- so I've been here a long time. It feels good to walk down the street and have somebody call my name— my new name, my old name, pastor, whatever.

I like being, in and a part of the people that I serve. That gives me joy. So most of the time, because you know there are some people that I serve that I don't know if I should be seeing them on the street, but for the most part, I like that, you know. That's what I like about Newark. And I also like the fact that I can walk around and feel like there... it's community, like there are other people that I don't even know, but it's not like it was before, you know. So I like to walk, so I walk from, you know, here to Penn Station when the weather is nice. I don't like the cold.

ANNA ALVES: It's raining, snowing.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, I like that. What I don't like is the politics.

ANNA ALVES: What about it? You don't have to give the specific details, but in general, I suppose, unless you want to get specific, of course.

JANYCE JACKSON: I think it's just my nature, it's just who I am. It's a nasty world and I'm not a nasty person. And I think it spills over, especially if you have a business, a nonprofit, it spills over into the work that I do because I have to have relationship, and it's very hard.

ANNA ALVES: And those are the challenges.

JANYCE JACKSON: Those are the challenges.

ANNA ALVES: It's almost like a necessary challenge, it seems.

JANYCE JACKSON: [00:40:00] It's very necessary. I have to.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

JANYCE JACKSON: I have to. I don't think I do it very well because of how I feel, but I've pushed myself and some of it has been rewarding. I think the more I learn and the more I know. It's very challenging.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

JANYCE JACKSON: It's very challenging.

ANNA ALVES: So what's your perspective on Newark's connection or relationship to other places, like nearby places— surrounding cities, suburbs or New York oftentimes there's—?

JANYCE JACKSON: None!

ANNA ALVES: None?

JANYCE JACKSON: None.

ANNA ALVES: You've no perspective on any of those connections?

JANYCE JACKSON: I have no perspective. Actually, what I mean is, there's no connections. I think, some of the places that I've been in -- so, I am... I consider myself, like— I don't know what I am now. What's my social status? I'm above the poverty line, right? And so I find myself in rooms of people like me, in terms of social, economic. And some of them are in Newark,



so, that's fine. Most of them are not. And when I say, "I'm from Newark," they're fascinated, they're interested.

They're interested because they don't know anything about Newark. And they don't want to come to Newark. They know what they have heard about Newark. which I don't really know all of it, but I can tell it's not positive, right?

**[00:42:00]**

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: So it's like, "Oh you have a -- you have a Center in Newark? Oh, what's that like?" They don't want to come to Newark. So even when I lived in Maplewood, I still worked in Newark, and I would approach people that I met in various circles, about supporting Newark and coming down, like, "No way." At first I was like, "Really?"

ANNA ALVES: "Dude, you won't even come?"

JANYCE JACKSON: So, um—

ANNA ALVES: You don't see that shifting at all, even with all the new development?

JANYCE JACKSON: Nope.

ANNA ALVES: Wow.

JANYCE JACKSON: I don't see it shifting. So there are lots of people that work in Newark. When they get off work, what I see, is they go home. They don't stay. They go home. And it's not...

ANNA ALVES: That's seems like a challenge too...

JANYCE JACKSON: It is a challenge because it's... they're part of the fabric of the daytime activities, but they're not involved after dark. Or on the weekends, unless they're working. That's my experience. I'm sure there's some, but for the most part, no. So we're able to have a North Jersey Pride that does not include Newark in the sense... so Newark is part of North Jersey, but in the sense of the work that they do, Newark is not the demographic that's involved in what they do and where they do it.

**[00:44:00]**

ANNA ALVES: Very interesting. Actually, that leads into this next question which is, what places in Newark do you associate with LGBTQ people?

JANYCE JACKSON: Halsey Street.

ANNA ALVES: Halsey Street.

JANYVE JACKSON: Did I associate with LGBTQ people... What places? Wow. I first have to think of organizations, right? So there's the African American Office of Gay Concerns. And then there's NJCRI and there's the Newark LGBTQ Community Center, of course. There's the church, Unity Fellowship Church. [pause] There must be another one, right? Halsey Street businesses. [pause] Rutgers!

ANNA ALVES: That's true.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, Rutgers.

ANNA ALVES: A lot of it, too, is because this is where you've concentrated most of your work and time and your communities, yes?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES: **[00:45:33]** And this space, or this site [the LGTBQ Community Center] seems to come up a lot, actually, in a lot of the interviews.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah? Good.

ANNA ALVES: Especially this space. Moving into these more specific questions about identity, how would you describe your sexual orientation or gender identity?

**[00:46:00]**

JANYCE JACKSON: I have taken on lesbian because some years ago I decided that I had to pick one. I didn't want to, because I didn't know. I fell in love with a woman, I was happy, but what did that mean? I really didn't know. You know, and another part of my story is that— like I said, nobody was happy about it but me? I was also— I went to this group, this support group — the Black Women's Health Project in Brooklyn. And we used to have— we met. And some of them were lesbians and some of them were not. And that was when I came of age, if you will. So I got to explore

some of that, and some of them were actually not very happy with me because there is this distrust of straight women who have these first-time relationship with lesbians. They don't trust us at all. I didn't know that. So at the time, I didn't know. For a long time, I had conversations with people who were very close to me, but no one else, but if I had to put on paper, I would put lesbian but I wasn't sure, and because I thought, "Who knows if Regina—" [00:47:34] guys, I may go back to men. I am not attracted to them, I'm not interested, but who knew I would be with her?

[00:48:00]

So I know there were bets going on when she did die, like, what am I going to do? Where am I going to go? [laughter] Since I ended up with another woman, I say lesbian. But I'm like these young people. You know, I think it's just fluid, right? It's like, "Why you gotta pick one?" Why can't I...? In terms of gender, okay, in terms of gender— that I know, right? Female. In terms of sexuality and all of that...why do...why do—? But, we can say lesbian.

ANNA ALVES:

This next question is, how did you first become aware of that aspect of yourself? But I think you talked a little bit about that already, but the second part of that question is, how did you first learn about the existence of LGBTQ people? Like, when was the first time you were aware of it in your consciousness, even going back to childhood, I guess. Yeah, or this idea of --

JANYCE JACKSON: So here's the funny story: my mother, who was a singer, used to bring her friends around, and they were gay. These were gay men! And one of— a few of— The Jewel Box Review, have you ever heard of that? So the Jewel Box Review was an act... a show that was held in Harlem, I think annually, and they were drag queens. They were gay men dressed in drag, except for one person, and her name was Stony— oh, what's her name? I got to get it for you because it's history. Stony— I'll get it. [00:49:35]. She was the only woman and she looked like a man. And the Jewel Box Review. So my mother knew a lot of them that were in it. She had

friends who were gay. I'd see them, and I would be around them. So that was my first introduction. And then, when she saw that Regina and I were gonna be more than friends, she freaked out. Freaked out.

**[00:50:00]**

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, like, "My heavens."

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, like, "Really?"

ANNA ALVES: This next one is how did other people in your life become aware of it? But it sounds like that your mother had always been aware of it.

JANYCE JACKSON: Of gay people.

ANNA ALVES: But then in terms of your own sexuality, it was a different context for her or a different reaction.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES: How about with the rest of your family?

JANYCE JACKSON: In terms of what, me and...? Give me that again. What question...

ANNA ALVES: I guess in terms of you, let's go with you. Like, in terms of you and your own sexuality.

JANYCE JACKSON: They were not happy. They were not happy. I have a small family, so it's mainly my mother and my sister and my two daughters, of course. My oldest daughter was not happy, and neither was the younger one, but she was just... her expression of it was different. Her expression actually came a few years later, when we questioned her about bringing her friends home and stuff. She said she would, if Regina took the plaques down off the wall. Because Regina was very active in the community, so she had plaques and different gay stuff on the wall.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: Who else in my family? It was just them... they were the only ones that mattered to me, actually.

ANNA ALVES: But then eventually...

JANYCE JACKSON: No, my mother died not being happy. She was not mean to me or -- so she lived in Atlanta, and when I would go to visit we would stay in a hotel. She had big house, lots of rooms but... she actually never said I

couldn't come, but I knew she didn't want me to. And when she died, she had some half-sisters? And one of them at the funeral said something to me that made me know that she had been talking about me to them. But other than that, I didn't have anybody else.

**[00:52:00]**

ANNA ALVES: Right. And then with your daughters and everyone else, that eventually improved, or evolved, I guess is the word.

JANYCE JACKSON: They grew up and got out of the house, and lived, and realized— my youngest daughter told me— maybe five years ago, she said to me that she's so sorry that she did not— and it was about Regina— she didn't realize how much Regina loved her and what our relationship was really about, and like. She feels like, she says that, "I missed it because I was so just ready to get out of the house." With her friends, you know, we talk about having— so, they learn.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, as they grow.

JANYCE JACKSON: As they grow. So now my youngest daughter has more gay friends than I do.

ANNA ALVES: Irony.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah. She has a very diverse group of people. She's married to a white man, so she has white friends, she has Asian friends, she has gay friends, and I feel like my life helped her see that. The oldest one is a little different, she's grown to— I still think she is homophobic, but she's still good with it. Like, we're part of the family, right?

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: She works in an environment where being around me, she just come to church and being around— she works in corrections. So she's had some experience with transgender people and everything, and so, I have been a resource to her. So "we're all really one big, happy family." In quotes.

**[00:54:00]**

ANNA ALVES: So how have your racial and religious identities affected your LGBTQ identity, if they have?

JANYCE JACKSON: Racial and religious. [long question]

ANNA ALVES: A big question, I know.

JANYCE JACKSON: So my religious identity, my— I'll start— this is the easy one...

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

JANYCE JACKSON: ...because my real work with the church started in a church that was founded by a gay man. It started because that's what I wanted to be— I wanted to be closer to God so that I could know that what I was doing was all right. So my religious identity— I don't— that question doesn't really— it's like, I think other religions or denominations kinda don't count us? Don't include us because of who we are. We're very different and we got it right, so... [laughter]

In terms of my race, that's a real big question. It's a real big question because it also touches on who I am as a black woman, right? And I did lead a sheltered life. Like, I came to New York when I was 13, and I grew up in a segregated neighborhood, but that's what I knew, that's what it was supposed to be, right? The white people that came were the insurance people.

**[00:56:00]**

And so when I came to New York, that's really when I got to— I actually came to New York the same year as the March on Washington, and I wasn't really— sometimes I'm ashamed to say this, but it is what it is, and I think that we have to realize that not everybody has the same information, the same access, and the same thoughts and knowledge about what's happening in the world.

So Regina who grew up— she knew all about the March and I think her mother was there and everything. I didn't know anything. My mother was in the bar. She was a barmaid, she was singing at night. I was thinking we were leaving Florida, we were coming to New York, the buildings are so tall! That's what I knew. I was not aware of racism where I lived.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: We were black people, people of color, when I did— it was when I got older— in the Police Department, actually, is when it really became personal for me.

ANNA ALVES: Because of what you had seen there or just in terms of the environment?  
[00:57:40]?

JANYCE JACKSON: Because of how I was treated. How we were treated as black women especially. Ss black people.

[00:58:00]

So there were two levels. There were— we were civilians and they were uniform. And we were black women and they were white men. That was really my first real understanding. And so today— and you know, I am a late bloomer, so I've had to learn and have conversations with people and have people say to me, “That’s not right. Didn’t you find that...?” And I was like, “No...” And it kind of threw people off, but it wasn’t automatic to me. Now I get it.

ANNA ALVES: So how has being lesbian made your life different from the way it would be if you did not have this identity?

JANYCE JACKSON: I wouldn’t be as happy, but I’d probably have less gray hair.  
[Laughter]

ANNA ALVES: How has your perception of that identity changed over time? Besides in your hair?

JANYCE JACKSON: How has that perception changed? I can be more open about who I am and who I love than then. So because I was married to men, and then I got with Regina, I remember clearly, we went on vacation, and we were in the pool and I wanted to respond to her like I would with my lover in the open, and she was like, “Okay, we can't do that here.” And I was like— that was like my first realization that you can't be the same with women as you can with men.

[00:60:00]

And so I'm aware of that now, but it's also different now, and I have more -- I want to be safe, but I don't care.

ANNA ALVES: It's sort of just working that line.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, so, unless I feel like you're gonna to hurt me, because of who I am or what I'm doing, I'm just going to be who I am.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: So that's how -- I'm more relaxed. My relationship is more relaxed. We can walk down most streets, most places that we go to. Because we don't go to places...

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: ...that— unless we happen, have to be there for something else.

ANNA ALVES: Right, so for the most part you will be in spaces where you can feel like you can be yourselves?

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES: And let's see what -- how do you find— or have you found community or support from other people in Newark or elsewhere?

JANYCE JACKSON: Support?

ANNA ALVES: Mhmm.

JANYCE JACKSON: I have received some support. Let me start off by saying that.

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

JANYCE JACKSON: I personally, as an organization, as a church, even from politicians. My fantasy, my wish is that those of us who have done this work -- what is this work? [01:02:00] This work of being and providing and giving and serving and standing up.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: If we could just— Jesus, if we could just be supportive of one another in a tangible way— because it's one thing to say, “Oh yeah, the Center. I support the Center. I support AAOGC.” That's one thing. But if I don't see your face, if we're not sharing information, if I hear that -- I don't know, I'll make something up. I'm some place and I hear that they're trying to take the building from AAOGC, and I don't have that conversation with AAOGC.

ANNA ALVES: Right.



JANYCE JACKSON: What— who am I? What do I -- so I think I don't -- I know I'm not alone in that thinking, but I also believe that's inherently who I am. Not just in the LGBT community. It's just -- there's a naiveté about me that feels like, "We can do this."

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

JANYCE JACKSON: We don't have to like everything that we all do. We don't have to like each other like that. But we're all -- they're tearing us down. This community is small, there are a small number of us, [01:04:00] there are smart people who are paying attention and they know who to talk to, when to get what they want, that will not bring us all together. That's awful. And that wasn't even your question, But in terms of support --.

ANNA ALVES: It factors in there, most definitely.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, in terms of support, there's not enough. And not just because of where you came from, but I'm so grateful for Rutgers right now. I don't even think they realize what they're doing to weave us together. Because the number of us depend on Rutgers. And so there's a connection that's happening...

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: ...without us even knowing it. And I'm like, "Yay!" Because I can't get you. Maybe that's what will happen, is that the so-called "outside people" will bring another perspective...

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: ...that we can all buy into...

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: ...and not feel threatened. And not worry about our labels.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: If I'm the first this or if I founded that.

ANNA ALVES: It's like a third party convener, maybe. And this might actually be a good spot to drop in a little bit about coming back to Jacquelyn? And I guess her role, or your roles together, in trying to build or establish or maintain and sustain a community here. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

JANYCE JACKSON: It makes me want to cry. And she's also my best friend.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

JANYCE JACKSON: So I want to be clear about that. So I have a whole lot of information, [01:06:00] so it's very near and dear to my heart. So, why it makes me want to cry is because, we could not do better, because we didn't know better, right? So, I'll tell you what I mean. So, Jacqueline founding the Unity Fellowship Church in Newark, was the first. She was the first person that brought people together to say, *gay* out loud and definitely *gay in God*. So, she was -- I don't know what was happening in small rooms because there were other people, you know, as I've met— but she was the first one to stand up loudly and say *gay* and *gay in God*, right? And she — a black woman preacher in Newark, had no support, other than those of us that came with her. And we came with what we knew, right?

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: And so she led it from 1995 'til 2005. Not by herself, in a sense, but she led it. She taught us and she brought us along and she helped us to do more and get into places to help shape this work... And I can say it, because she says it now. [01:08:00] So it's -- before and what made me say that was — we were in the secret mode. “Don't tell anybody.” You know, “She's the pastor.” “She's the elder.” She's the black woman.” “She's in charge of all these things.” ... And so she resigned as pastor, but the reality of— she was sick. And because of her and what happened, is how I got to where I am. Because there were three people who were possible -- oh, what's the word? I'm being -- what comes is exessors?

ANNA ALVES: [laughter] Successors! We got there. We got there!

JANYCE JACKSON: There was three of us, and I was the chosen one. And so that's how I became pastor, and that's how I became director of the program, is because I followed her lead and her example.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: And I was close to her and I could still learn from her because I didn't know anything about a nonprofit.

ANNA ALVES: Right.

JANYCE JACKSON: I didn't know anything about running a church! I knew about business and management and so -- and I knew it well — so I could bring that piece.

**[00:70:00]**

JANYCE JACKSON: So yeah. I get lost in the story.

ANNA ALVES: No, that's fine.

JANYCE JACKSON: Oh, I don't wanna get a ticket— **[01:10:08]** but yeah, so that's how and the people -- and so what happened was like there were other movements and other organizations and other things started, but then we did not do it as a group. So it was like, "Oh, okay, so the church is there, so let's start this, and let's start that." Same as it is today. It'll come together. Did I answer your question? Probably not.

ANNA ALVES: No, no. Yeah, because these are just prompting questions and then wherever we go with it, is where we go with it.

JANYCE JACKSON: Okay.

ANNA ALVES: Now it's just basically like, do you have like any other future goals or plans that you're looking forward to, because we are pretty much near the end?

JANYCE JACKSON: So the reason I brought up Jacquelyn first -- that was like the first thing I said to you — is because it has been on my mind, watching and listening— you know, so all the Prides are coming up. So, we're seeing the -- you know, "I'm the founder of this" and "I started that" and "I did this." And I thought, "Well, where is her name?" Now, I don't even, you know, talk about her and so I'm really -- so one of my goals is to make sure that that history is written. Because the other thing that has happened, which also made me think about it, is that our church— the church that she founded— from that church, people left that church and founded another Unity Fellowship Church in New Brunswick. We were still part of the same movement. And what happened in 2013 is that church and our church came back together and we changed our name.

**[01:12:00]**

ANNA ALVES: To?

JANYCE JACKSON: To Unity Fellowship Church Newark. But what it looks like: "Where's the old church?" I was reading something and then I'm like, "Where?" So that's one of my goals before I retire because I am retiring, end of this year.

ANNA ALVES: Wow.

JANYCE JACKSON: And I'm hoping to get someone, or someones, who are really interested and feel like this is a needed community and that will help it to grow. The fundraiser was really, really really good. We raised \$25,000. That's nothing, but it was a lot in terms of how much money it was for us, but more importantly, the support.

We reached people who had never heard of us, or maybe heard of us and got more interested, and got to see another side. So I'm excited about that. And I'll still be connected, I hope. But I got married, three years, I feel like this is another life for me and I want to do it differently. I want it more relaxed.

ANNA ALVES: Moving into the next phase.

JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES: Is there anything else you would like to add?

JANYCE JACKSON: I should have written down those things that I thought about, that's the only one I remember, was Jacqueline.

**[01:14:00]**

Just that— and I may have said it— but just that, this is 2013— 2016 keeps coming in my head— where are we?

ANNA ALVES: We are in 2016.

JANYCE JACKSON: Oh my God, 2013 keeps coming to my head. Thank you. This is 2016 and it has been a long road, a lot has happened. A lot has happened in Newark. There have been many incidents and organizations and people that have stood up, that have been shot down, and not just with a gun, but

like beat up emotionally and pushed aside because of, you know, a number of reasons.

What they were saying, how they were saying it, how they were received— you know, all those things— but they still play a big part in, to who we are today. Like, there are people— I think about Al Sharpton, right? I don't know if you know him from years ago, Al Sharpton in New York? But he was like the -- I don't know — he would just make noise. He was the disrupt stuff. But it was necessary. It was necessary for people to hear something different, you know, to look at it in different ways. There have been a number of those people in the city of Newark, and I think that everybody is vying to be recognized and honored, as we should be. But I think that's real, but it's like it's gotten in— for some reason, it keeps us from doing it.

**[01:16:00]**

I'm sad about that, I really am. When I think about today, and all the various factions of us, it's just sad. Because there are so many different agendas. Now it's cute to be gay. It's in, to be gay. It's like, you know, it's where the funding is, in some places, and it's -- and so we forget that it was not always so and that there's still people who are having a hard time. There's still young people who -- I said that my family didn't like it, but I was 35 years old.

I was an adult with a job. These young people are young. They're still in school. They don't have jobs. They don't even know who they are – they're still there. You know, we have come a long way, but there's a lot to do and if we don't -- Newark is not that big. It's not that big. And we're very different from North Jersey, you know, so— not that there are not white people in Newark and people with money, but there are not as many stepping forward as there are in other communities, you know, that can have those things. And so, there's still a lot of work to do. We have a lot of work to do in working with each other.

ANNA ALVES: Thank you for sitting with us today. I don't know why I said us— us is the project.

JANYCE JACKSON: I get it. Thank you. /AT/ /lb/