

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: John

Interviewer: Whitney Strub and Kristyn Scorsone

Date: August 3, 2016

Location: phone interview

Whit: Okay. We are now recording. This is Whitney Strub and Kristyn Scorsone with the Queer Newark Oral History Project speaking by phone with John from Ohio on August 3, 2016. John, thank you so much for doing this. Just to get the ball rolling, we usually ask a little bit about your background, about your family, about ethnic heritage, religious traditions, just the sort of background factors that went into your life.

John: Well, let's see. I was from Newark, from the north end of Newark. Well, yeah, I was raised by the Catholic—the family—my parents were—or at least my mother anyway, was Catholic. I drifted away from that. I have very different feelings about religion nowadays. Newark is not someplace that I continue to live in. I think I told you that in my emails. I left Newark in the middle sixties. Actually, I haven't really been back. I've been back in New Jersey visiting family or I had family that was having some health crises that brought me back here for periods of time. I can't really say I know Newark today. I have pretty vivid memories of the Newark that I knew when I was growing up and when I was a teenager. But I don't know much about Newark right now.

Whit: Yeah, no that's great. It's definitely that earlier period that we have not documented so well. When exactly were you born?

John: 1938. I'm 78 years old. I turned 78 last May.

Whit: Okay, great. Tell us a little about north Newark back in the '40's as you were going through childhood. What was it like?

John: Actually, my memories of it are really great. I think it was a great place to grow up. I'm still in touch with a lot of the people I went to grammar school with. We all sort of agree what a great place it was to grow up. One of the great things about Newark—and I'm sure that's still true today—is the easy access to New York, particularly say with my family. My family were theater goers. They were really into going to the theater. You just got on a bus, and went to New York, and there was nothing to it. Of course, we took all of that for granted. We lived in a very rich cultural atmosphere. We assumed that the whole rest of the country was experiencing what we were experiencing. Well, I found out later in life that we actually had been kind of privileged without knowing it. But it was a very good place to grow up. That's what I think.

Whit: Yeah. What about local culture? Was there theater in Newark, or movies, or sports? What kind of marked Newark culturally for you?

John: I'm not sure what you mean. Can you say that again?

Whit: Well, I'm thinking about the world of Broadway in New York City, which is so iconic. I'm just wondering if there was a local counterpart to that. You know, what the sort of cultural world of Newark was like for you?

John: As far as the cultural world of Newark, I'd say going downtown was always pretty exciting. Because that's where the movie theaters were. There were neighborhood movie theaters, as well. The first run movie theaters were downtown. It was Loew's State on Broad Street, and then RKO Proctor's [on Market Street west of Broad], the Paramount [on Market Street east of Broad], Adams [on Branford Place] and the Warner's Branford [also on Branford Place]. They were the big movie palaces. The Paramount was especially—I think we qualified it as a movie palace. But I mean, you didn't go into downtown Newark for theater. Theater was someplace you went to New York for. If you want to see movies, if you want to do some shopping, or if you just wanted to be in a place where there were a lot of people having a lot of fun, that was downtown Newark, at least in the '40's. It was pretty much like that. I don't know if that answers your question.

Whit: Yeah, yeah, totally. One thing I forgot to press you on was your parents, just sort of for careers and work, what did they do?

John: Well, my mom was a stay-at-home mom. My father, actually he was really a mechanic, but he did really a lot of things. There was no family business if that's what you're asking me about. There was nothing like that.

Whit: Okay. Yeah, yeah. No, we just wanted a sense of background. One other thing just about childhood that I wanted to ask you is what was your take on the race relations of Newark at the time? Was north Newark exclusively white? Was it racially integrated? What's your sense of that?

John: Well, yes. North Newark was exclusively white. Well, I think pretty much exclusively white. The thing was through my family, we had contact with African-Americans. That was because of my aunt. My aunt had—what do you call that—not a rooming house,

but—yeah, I guess it was a rooming house. She was a very broadminded person. She insisted on renting to other people that she knew who were African-American. I know it sounds like that shouldn't have anything to do with me, but as a matter of fact it did, because I spent a lot of time with my aunt. My aunt had friends who were African-American. But on the other hand, North Newark, you would not really get to know a lot of African-Americans from that neighborhood. I got to know African-Americans who went to Arts High. That gave me a little bit of a sense of other people. North Newark itself was a mixture of Irish, Italian, and Jewish. All of those three things were a big part of my growing up, even though I was also heavily exposed to African-Americans, thank God.

Kristyn: Where was your aunt's rooming house? Was that in North Newark, also?

John: I'm sorry?

Kristyn: Oh, I'm sorry. Where was your aunt's boarding house?

John: It was in East Orange.

Whit: Okay. And so you went to high school where?

John: In Newark.

Whit: Which high school, though?

John: Which one?

Whit: Yeah.

John: I went to Good Counsel.

Whit: Okay. Is that a Catholic school?

John: Yeah, it was then. I don't know what it is now.

Whit: Okay. Gotcha.

John: And it was coed.

Whit: Oh, really? Was that unusual for the time?

John: No, it was very usual.

Whit: Oh, okay. I didn't realize. When did you begin thinking about sexual identity or sexuality? Was that something that you had been aware of as a child, or as an adolescent? When does that enter your life consciously?

John: Eighth grade. Eighth grade was when I started to have a sex life. It was with a classmate. We continued having sex—we went to the same high school after grammar school. We continued having sex right up to high school graduation. I mean, I don't know whether I was typical. I probably wasn't. I was actually having a sex life starting in eighth grade.

Whit: Would you say was it just a sexual relationship, or romantic, as well?

John: No, it was just purely sexual. As a matter of fact, we weren't even particularly friendly in school, but we would get together pretty regularly.

Whit: Yeah. How did he deal with it? Was it something you discussed or it just sort of fell into a rhythm? How should we understand the nature of it?

John: I don't know. I didn't – I hate to say this, but I didn't think much about it. It felt natural to me. It didn't seem like—I didn't feel I was doing anything wrong. I don't think he did, either. It was part of—I don't know. I think I'm being truthful in saying this is I don't think I made a big thing out of it when I was a teenager. I didn't have a lot of shame or anything.

Whit: Yeah? No, that's great. How did you fit into the social world, though, of your middle school and high school? Did people read you as gay, or not, or how'd that work?

John: I don't know. I guess some people did and some people didn't. I don't know. I was very popular, and I think I was forgiven a lot of things, because I was popular. You know what I mean? There are groups that you go to school with, and you know what your standing is in that group. I don't know. I hope I'm not kidding myself, but I think I was pretty popular. If people thought I was gay or not gay, I don't know. I didn't worry about it. I don't know how much thinking about it they did. They may have had some strong opinions. They may really have disliked me because of it. I didn't know about it.

Whit: Yeah, did you go through the motions of dating women socially or having dates for prom, or homecoming, or things like that, or no?

John: Yeah, of course I did. Yeah. Yeah. I was actually—yeah. I went to all of the dances not only at my own school, but at Our Lady of the Valley in Orange. Yeah, I did a lot of dating. I didn't see that I—that that was a contradiction.

Whit: Sorry to press you on intimate details, but I think it's very historically interesting and important to get these lines clear. Were you sexually active with women, as well, or did the dating not go more intimate than events?

John: No, I did get sexually intimate later on. After I was out of high school, after I was at college, I did start to have sex with women. During high school the only sex I had was the same sex. Incidentally, another thing happened. I guess I was around freshman or sophomore year. I guess you'd call it I was molested. It was a friend of my older brother's who just came up to me one day and started talking to me. He told me how he felt about my older brother and how much I reminded him of him. He sold me a bill of goods. He had me come to the park with him. I didn't do anything. I just stood there while he did everything. I didn't feel bad about it until afterwards. When we were walking away from the park he gave me money. That's when I knew there was something wrong. I realized that he was giving me money to shut me up so that I wouldn't tell my family. But my family thought the world of him. They thought he was the greatest guy ever. Even if I had told them, they wouldn't have believed me, because—at least that's how I felt at the time is that if I said anything about him, they wouldn't believe anything bad about him.

Whit: And then how old were you at the time?

John: Let me see. Well, I would've been—I was 14 I think. Wait, let me think about that. No, I was 15. Okay, I was 15. Again, it was sort of like it rolled off my back. In some ways I guess I had some odd feelings about it. When I would hear other members of the family talk about him and always talk about him in such glowing terms. I would think to myself, I wonder if they know he's queer. I don't think they ever did know. Of course I never told them.

Whit: Is that something you ever discussed with your brother?

John: No, I did not. I tried to discuss it years later with my sister. My sister had a really strange reaction to it. She really didn't want to

believe it. She just said, "Listen, this is the first I've heard of this," direct quote. That's what she said. "This is the first I ever heard of it." I said, "I know. This is the first time I'm telling you." But she just didn't want to talk about it.

Whit: Sure. Sure. I should've asked earlier. How large was your family? How many siblings did you have?

John: I was the youngest of five.

Whit: Okay. Brothers, sisters, what was the breakdown?

John: We were four boys and one girl. My sister was in the middle. There were two guys, then my sister, then the other two guys came at the end.

Whit: Okay. What were your relationships with your brothers like?

John: I think I had a good relationship with my closest brother. We stayed close right up until his death a few years ago. But my two older brothers, yeah, I had an okay relationship with them, but it was a little bit distant because they were so much older than me. I came along late. I think my mom was in her 40's when I was born. So I had two older brothers who were already in service. They were in the Second World War while I was still basically a kid. So when they came back from service and the Second World War, they got on with their lives. They weren't at home anymore. So I never developed the kid of closeness with them that I had with my sister and my other brother.

Whit: Yeah. Did your siblings turn out to be straight, or any gay or lesbian siblings?

John: Oh, they were boringly straight. I mean, it was unbelievable. Yeah, I searched through my family for one other person who might possibly be gay, and no. I was definitely the only one that I know of.

Whit: Yeah. I want to ask you, you sent so many great descriptions of different places in Newark in your emails. I want to work through those with you if you don't mind. One other thing I want to ask first is just was there any public conversation about homosexuality during that era in, say, the '40's and the '50's, or was it an unspoken topic?

John: Well, in the '40's I don't know. There may have been. I was unaware of it because I was a child. But I was a teenager in the '50's. And yeah, there was a lot of talk about it. I think I said in one of my emails that there was an expression that we used about somebody belonging in the Village, or somebody being from the Village. And that was sort of a hint that somebody was either gay or was acting gay.

Whit: And it was just sort of understood. It was a coded language that didn't need explanation?

John: Yeah, it didn't need explanation.

Whit: No, that's fascinating.

John: In those days, when I say we I mean everybody. We thought of Greenwich Village as, first of all, loaded with gay people, not just artists but that it was gay, and it was also very political. What you never did was you never said Greenwich Village. You called it the Village, because it was uncool to say Greenwich Village.

Whit: Right, make you sound like a tourist.

John: Right.

Whit: As an historian, when I read the scholarship on the 1950's, there's the discussions of the lavender scare, and Joe McCarthy equating homosexuality with communism, and J. Edgar Hoover describing homosexuals as sex perverts. Was that rhetoric anything that you picked up as an adolescent in your life, or did that not float into your world?

John: Well, of course it did. It was in everybody's world. There was always the implication that communists were homosexual, and all homosexuals were communist. [...]

John: The thing is during the McCarthy era, my family, the grownups in my family, the older people in my family were really very strongly anti-McCarthy. Both my oldest brother and his wife worked at Fort Monmouth, which is that was when McCarthy, the signal corps. McCarthy went after the signal corps in Fort Monmouth. My brother and his wife knew a lot of the people that he was going after. The dentist—I can't remember his name right now, but there was a dentist that was singled out that McCarthy went after. They knew him. I don't know. I don't know what other families were talking about, but what my family was talking about was very

negative about McCarthy. But you're right. I think in general there was a feeling that anything *other* was communistic. [...]

John: My father was from Ireland. He came from a family that was very political. The communist party was very helpful to people who were fighting for independence. He began to associate with a lot of communists. He had very good feelings about communists. He felt that that was a good thing, and it was the wave of the future. He left Ireland to go to England. Came back, and then decided to go to America. But of course, he never liked America. He stayed I think because of my mom. After living in America for a lot of years, it was a very soft communism. It wasn't like he was an activist. He wasn't out there fighting for it. He was just someone who, in his own mind he felt that communism was the right thing.

Whit: As a teenager, would you say that you picked up on a sort of leftist consciousness, or not?

John: Big time. Big time. Yeah, I was very sympathetic to any kind of leftist views because that came from my family, and I know that I was probably farther left than most of the people I went to school with.

Whit: Were you open about that?

John: Oh, yeah.

Whit: Oh, okay. Did that have any consequences in the 1950's?

John: Yeah. They actually called me a commi, and things like that. In fact, by the way, it's really interesting. I recently got in touch again with an old, old friend of mine. We hadn't talked in years and years. The first question he asks me was, "Are you still a communist?" Wow, well, I didn't remember that most people thought of me that way.

Whit: Wow, and I guess I have to ask for the record, are you?

John: Am I now?

Whit: Sure.

John: No, but that's a whole long story, too, about how I started changing my mind about communism in my later adult life. That's

because I was living in Europe. That's a whole other telephone conversation. I don't even want to go there right now.

Whit: Okay, fair enough. That's a good transition point then. Let me read you a quote from your own email just to put it on the record, and then let you elaborate if you will. You wrote, "Believe it or not, it was a great place to be gay, lots of cruising spots. Since the drinking age was 21, a lot of us weren't able to get into the bars until we were older. In the meantime there was plenty of cruising at Penn Station, Central Station on Broad Street, the Globe Theater also on Broad Street, the Penthouse Theater of the RKO Proctors on Market Street, the Bickford Cafeteria on Broad Street near Market, and most sensationally the north end of Branch Brook Park." There's a ton there to unpack. I don't know how you even want to begin or go about it, but could you elaborate on any or all of that?

John: Okay. It's hard for me to do that, but I have to say that the first cruising spot that I became aware of as a teenager was Branch Brook Park.

Whit: Okay. How? How'd you learn about that?

John: I wish I could remember. I don't know. I don't know. Maybe I found it out on my own just by walking through the park. I don't know. It's possible that I just stumbled on it. Maybe somebody told me. I don't know how I got there. There was a lot going on on the north end of Branch Brook Park. That would be the area around Bloomfield Avenue. It would be from Bloomfield Avenue to Ballantine Parkway, that part of Branch Brook Park. There was a lot going on. There would be people driving through, or there'd be people walking around. At that time, there was an island. I know they've since gotten rid of the island. There was an island that was out in the middle of the pond. You cross the bridge into that island. On the island there was a lot of stuff going on.

Kristyn: Did you ever hear it referred to as the fairy loop?

John: No, I never heard that term.

Whit: Okay. Yeah, we had one narrator that was a little younger than you who—that was the phrase he used growing up. Could you tell us a little about just sort of reconstruct what it would entail to cruise Branch Brook Park? How did you signal to one another? As graphically or clinically as you're willing to go, what exactly were people doing on the island?

John: Well, okay, they were not doing—what they were doing was mostly oral sex. Well, they were probably doing other things, as well. I don't know. I didn't engage in anal sex out of doors. That's something I didn't do. There was also oral sex going on in that area of the park. That was up closer to the—what do you call that—we called it a trolley car, but that's not what I mean. It's was like a subway car, but it ran on tracks outside.

Whit: Oh, sure.

John: Well, the bushes around there inside the fence were also very active. The way it happened was you would just walk into the park and probably you sort of assumed that all of the other people you were seeing there were there for the same reason you were. And I think mostly that was true. But contact was made in the usual way. I mean, you saw somebody that you liked. And you went after them.

Whit: Yeah, so what did going after them mean? Was there a coded language, or just smiles and nods?

John: I don't know. I guess it was—I don't think there *had* to be a coded language. I think it was if you were there in the park, everyone knew why you were there.

Whit: Okay, okay.

John: It was kind of like let's get it on.

Whit: Yeah. Yeah.

John: I guess there are people who played games. There are always people playing games. But by and large it was pretty much if you're here I think I know what you're interested in.

Whit: Okay. Was it young and old, all ages?

John: Yeah, it was all ages. Yeah, it was.

Whit: Still predominantly white, or was it more of a melting—

John: I would say that it was predominantly white. I think later on it may have changed but not that much. By the time I left Newark it was still predominantly white.

Whit: Okay, gotcha. What about then the downtown spots that you mentioned? Tell me a little about that, especially say Penn Station, just because it's so central in Newark and still there. What was that like?

John: That was jumping. There was actually sex going on in the men's room. There was a kind of a bridge that came out over the bus lanes. I don't know if it's still there. Is it? I don't know. When you come out of Penn Station there was a ramp leading to a bridge. That bridge crossed over the bus lanes.

Whit: Okay, that goes over Market Street, basically?

John: No, it wasn't Market Street. The other end of the building, it was going over Raymond Boulevard.

Whit: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's still there.

John: Yeah, well that's where a lot of stuff was going on.

Whit: Okay. How did that work? I assume you had to be a little more discerning since you couldn't make the same presumption of availability that you could in Branch Brook Park.

John: Yeah. But it was still pretty obvious. I mean if you saw someone walking along there and they went down and got on their bus, okay. If someone who was walking along there and didn't get down on a bus, didn't go down the stairs and take the bus, well you sort of knew.

Whit: Okay. Okay. The bathrooms were the place you'd generally retire to, or were there other places to hide?

John: Well, just to go back here a little bit, one of the things about Newark—and I think this is probably true of most other cities other than New York—was we, the young people, mostly lived with their families. If you lived with your family that meant you didn't really have a place to go. You used what was available, or you'd do it in the car or something like that. Most of us were still living with our families so you couldn't just say, "Let's go back to my place."

Whit: Yeah, okay. Sure. Sure. Central Station on Broad Street probably same dynamic as Penn Station, I assume? I just want to be sure.

John: Yeah, I loved Central Station, but it—I don't know. Most of the traffic was at Penn Station. Central wasn't as active as Penn Station.

Whit: Yeah? Okay. How about the Globe Theater that you mentioned?

John: Oh, that was great. It was a scandal, actually. They showed movies all night.

Whit: Oh wow.

John: It was just known. Everybody knew the club. I don't even know who it was that told me about the Globe. You could go in there, go to the upper balcony, and there was stuff going on in corridors. There was stuff going on in the seats. That's mostly what the Globe was about. In those days, nobody talked about it. You could get away with a lot in those days simply because the general public didn't have any awareness of this going on. Or if they were aware of it they were in denial. I think if you had told most of the straight people that what was going on in the Globe was, like, actually a lot of sex, they would've been really surprised. I don't think that people knew. The two parks, Military Park and Washington Park also were very active. Military Park was active because it was near Public Service, Public Service bus terminal I mean. I think I told you about that in an email.

Whit: Yeah. You described the men's room there as infamous with a coffee shop where gays could make contact. Could you say a little bit more about that? Who was it infamous to and why?

John: You went downtown one night and you decided well, I don't know where I'll cruise. I think I'll cruise the men's room at Public Service. And so you get in there and there didn't seem to be anybody around. Oh, okay. I'll go sit in the coffee shop, and have a cup of coffee, and I'll wait around. But in the meanwhile somebody might come in that you might know, or that would be—or somebody might interest you that comes in. You wait around to see whether they go into the men's room.

Whit: Okay. Where was the Public Service bus terminal? It's not there anymore, so I'm not sure where in regard to Military Park it was.

John: Oh, wow. Okay. Well, let me see. Well, you know where Raymond Boulevard is?

Whit: Yeah. Yeah.

John: Okay. Public Service bus terminal had one entrance that was on Raymond Boulevard, and it had another entrance that was on a street called Park Place.

Whit: Okay.

John: Along Park Place there was a hotel called the Robert Treat Hotel. I don't know if it's still there or not.

Whit: Yeah, it is actually.

John: It was a big place for weddings and stuff like that. And Public Service Bus Terminal was on that street. And so then if you cross Park Place, then you came to the tip of Military Park. I don't know if I'm describing this well.

Whit: Yeah. No, no, that is very clear to me. Actually, I think Kristen was going to ask something about the Robert Treat. No?

Kristyn: Yeah, I was just curious if you ever had heard of drag balls going on at the Robert Treat Hotel in the fifties.

John: Oh, no. I never did, Kristyn. They may have been, but I didn't know about them.

Whit: Okay.

John: I was young. When I was going to these cruising spots I was—it was because I was still under age. I couldn't go to most of the bars in Newark. The thing is the first gay bar I was ever in in my life was in New York, and that was a place called Artie's. It was on West 44th Street. It was a very famous gay bar. I assumed that there weren't any gay bars in Newark. I didn't know. It was by going into New York and hanging out with friends of mine, friends from high school actually, going, and the place down in the Village called the Grapevine, that we found out about the bars in Newark.

Whit: Oh, that's interesting. From New Yorkers or from other Newarkers who were in New York?

John: People talking that they—people in New York who had been to Newark, who had gone to Newark, and had gone to Murphy's and Skippy's. Yeah, that's how we heard about it.

Whit: No, that is fascinating. Before we go to the bars, I just want to finish up a few of these spaces that you mentioned if you don't mind, just to sort of get this all documented. You also mentioned the Penthouse Theater of RKO Proctor's on Market Street. Is that the same story as the Globe, basically? I just want to be sure.

John: No. No, that was a little bit more secret. The Penthouse Theater in RKO Proctor's showed mostly foreign films and art films. So the crowd that drifted upstairs into the Penthouse was—they were going to see an Antonioni movie. And then while they were there they would visit the men's room. It wasn't like the Globe where you went to the Globe and you didn't care about the movies. You were there for sex, whereas the Penthouse was a different kind of situation. It had the semblance of being an art house. Yeah, maybe that's what it was.

Whit: Oh, that's fascinating. I guess Antonioni's perfect for that, right? The films are long enough to take a quick break.

John: That was the first place I saw *L'Avventura*. It was at the Penthouse. There were other films like that. Yeah, that's where they would show, because they wouldn't show in the bigger theaters.

Whit: Right. Just so I'm clear, the Globe was then showing mainstream Hollywood movies or like B movies?

John: There was always three pictures. One of them would be a western. One of them would be a gangster film. The third one I don't know. That was up for grabs. None of them were new. They weren't in their first release. They were old. They showed three films. And they just ran it all day long.

Whit: Okay, gotcha, sort of classic grind house style.

John: Kind of like on the old 42nd Street in New York. It was the same sort of thing.

Whit: Okay. That makes sense. One other place that you mentioned was the Bickford Cafeteria on Broad Street. I don't know anything about that. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

John: That was, I'm not sure where it was. It was on Broad just in from Market. It wasn't on the corner. It was in a ways from Market. And that was one of the places where whites and blacks could make contact.

Whit: Okay. Why is that? Is it just because it was downtown, or was there something unique about it?

John: I don't know. No, I really don't know. I don't have an answer to that. It's just my memories of Bickford's is that it was black and white.

Whit: Okay At this point were you hooking up with white and black? How racially integrated was your own sex life?

John: It was pretty racially integrated. I can tell you that. I don't know how to put this, cuz this is gonna sound terrible. But I was a very attractive kid and I knew it. I knew that a slim, good looking white boy was catnip. I took advantage of that. I hate talking about myself that way, but that was actually the truth. I always felt that I was—that people found me attractive, and that black guys particularly found me attractive.

Whit: Yeah? In these encounters, how intimate would you describe them? Was it sort of just sex and then you're out, or hanging out and chatting?

John: Oh, I should explain that Bickford's wasn't a place where people had sex. It was just a place where people met.

Whit: Okay.

John: They would go someplace else. One of the places they would go up on the north end of Military Park, there used to be a church. I think it was called Trinity. It was an Episcopal church.

Whit: Yeah, that's still there.

John: Okay. Well, in the park behind the church.

Whit: Okay. Actually, that's near the Little Theater which is still around. Any memories of that?

John: Well, we went there in high school, the friend I was talking about and I. We'd go there in high school. Yeah, I do have memories of that. We sort of knew that being young, being high school kids and everything that the older guys would probably want to have sex with us, and they might give us some money. The contact there, it was almost always made in the men's room. Although in the theater, you could walk around the theater and you knew that everybody in there was looking for something. If you were a high

school kid and you were wearing tight Levi's, somebody was gonna approach you. Then you'd say, well, you weren't sure. You didn't know. You played the innocent game. And they would offer you money. [...]

Whit I hope you don't mind a few more questions about places, just a few, and then we can talk bars if that's all right. You had mentioned the parks, Military Park and Washington Park. You said Washington Park, incidentally was known as Martha's Park.

John: Yeah, that's how people referred to it. Yeah.

Whit: Was that a coded joke that feminized it, or was that just how everybody referred to it? I'm not clear on that.

John: Oh, just gay people, just gay people.

Whit: Okay, so it was a sort of in joke.

John: Yeah, right.

Whit: Okay. Gotcha.

John: Like calling Raymond Boulevard Miss Raymond.

Whit: Yeah, which I was going to get to, as well. Miss Raymond, and you said also known as the Road to Ruin.

John: Yeah. Well, because there was so much activity. People were commuting between their two favorite cruising spots, which was Penn Station and Public Service bus terminal. You were in one and you decided before you went home you wanted to check the other one, or maybe you would go back and forth. It's hard to explain.

Whit: No, that makes sense. You wrote that at the time you kind of hated that stuff, because it feminized everything, and I assume created—

John: I hated people saying Miss Raymond. I hated people referring to each other as Miss something. That's what I hated.

Whit: Because of the feminizing stereotype?

John: I guess it was just—I don't know. To me it was unpleasant that somebody would refer to you as belonging to the other gender. They did it in reverse with gay women.

Whit: Right. What was the—did you have a lingo that you used? What were the words that you would've used at that point in time? What sort of language to describe yourself, your scene, or any kind of slang that we might not be familiar with today?

John: I don't think there was anything special. I'm sure it's the same today. It's just like people just—I don't know. People made contact and they made it known what they were interested in, and how it was done, I don't know. I can't recreate the language.

Whit: Okay. Yeah, I was just curious. Let me go back to the question I asked a few minutes ago that we didn't quite follow through on, though, about the kinds of relationships, even if they were very short-term that you had with the men you'd hook up with, and just the nature of that intimacy? Would these become long-standing friendships, or sexual relationships, or one-offs? I'm assuming there was probably a little of all of the above. Could you just talk about that a little about the kinds of bonds that you would forge with the men you met?

John: I didn't forge any. I was pretty fickle. I tended not to repeat. So if I met somebody, had sex with them, then I tried to avoid that person in the future after that. As I got older that changed. At first it was mostly just about the one-night stand.

Whit: Okay, gotcha. I want to go back to the race question, just because Newark is such a racially divided city. I just wonder if you could give any more detail about black men that you met and what that was like for you or as you understood it for them. That really is crossing multiple social lines at once.

John: Well, let me see. I told you that earlier in my life I had been exposed to a lot of black people, so I didn't have a lot of stereotypes of blacks. I knew too many people through my aunt that were the same as we were. So I didn't have any feelings about that, but as far as sexual encounters with blacks, that didn't start until I started going downtown. I was at the end of my teens by the first time I had sex with someone who was black. That was someone I met at Bickford's Cafeteria.

Whit: Who would be the black men that would be there who might be interested in white men? That's also crossing the line for them racially. Was that common? Was there a lot of racial mixing?

John: Yeah, there was. There was a lot of—I don't know how to put it. The black guys, they had a bar called the Blue Note, which was on

Branford Place. It was pretty strictly black just as I think Murphy's and Skippy's were sort of strictly white. But Sam's and Anne's was mixed. That's as far as the bars go. Anyway, I want to get back to Bickford's Cafeteria. Because that was where black guys and white guys would meet after the bars closed.

Whit: Okay, so late at night.

John: Late. Yeah, very late.

Whit: Just so I'm clear on this, the Blue Note was a predominantly gay black bar, or not?

John: I think it was predominantly gay.

Whit: Oh, interesting.

John: I can't talk with a lot of assurance about that because first of all, I was under age. I couldn't have gotten served. But my feeling was that it was exclusively black.

Whit: Okay. Then the last question I had before maybe talking about the bars was just the kind of question of your friends and community. I know you alluded to a sort of—you were less cautious than most of your friends. But clearly you're suggesting here that you had a gay social network. Could you talk about that a little? Who were your friends who were also part of the gay world? Where are they coming from?

John: In the beginning it was friends from high school. We were a group of four. There were four of us. Anyway, there was—well, the guy who took me to Artie's was a guy I knew from Newark. He said, "I heard about this gay bar. I think we ought to check it out see what it's like," even though he was telling me that he was straight. Well, we were both playing a game with one another. Anyway, we went to Artie's and there was no longer any question about it. He was someone I knew from high school. The four friends I'm talking about that I traveled with, we—I don't know. One of us discovered Sam's and Anne's. And what we discovered about Sam's and Anne's is you could get served there.

Whit: As underage?

John: Underage, yeah.

Whit: Okay. Well, why don't you tell us about that, because like I told you by email, we had never heard of Sam's and Anne's, and it sounds fascinating? Could you walk us through that?

John: Well, I told you where it was. It was on Mulberry Street. It was on the other side of Market Street. It was north of Market Street by a few steps, and it was on the east side of the street. By east I mean toward Penn Station. Mulberry Street was weird. I don't know if it still is. That particular block that Sam's and Anne's was on was between—I think the street was called Clinton and Market Street. The street had a funny shape. It started to get wider and wider as it got closer to Market Street, but just on the east side, in other words, the side Sam's and Anne's was on. I don't know why that happens. That's the way I guess the street was built. Once you cross Market Street, then Mulberry Street became a normal street again.

Whit: Okay.

John: But it wasn't normal at Sam's and Anne's. That's where it was much wider.

Whit: Okay, so it was built on an irregular block?

John: Yeah. As I told you in the email, it was three storefronts. The first storefront closest to Market Street was where the bar was. Then the second and third storefront were—there were like booths and just people standing around. I mean, this was really skid row. That's why it was so attractive to us, because the way we felt about our contemporaries, the kind of life that they were gonna have, it wasn't just that they were straight. It's that they were square. We used that word square. That they were, in other words, uncool. They were people who were gonna live in a house with a picket fence around it and have barbecues in the back. And we didn't want that. We wanted to be something different. We wanted something livelier. And Sam's and Anne's, because of that, had great appeal to us.

Whit: Okay. It was kind of would you say dingy and rundown then? Is that—

John: Yeah, kind of. Yeah.

Whit: Okay, gotcha.

John: It smelled of beer. In fact, the smell was so strong you could smell it before you even got to Sam's and Anne's. It pervaded that whole block. A lot of the people who came in there were skid row types. There were a couple of ex-burlesque queens that used to come in regularly to get a drink. They would raise their dresses and let you look at them if you bought them a drink. Also, the guys from the Newark Evening News used to go in there. The printers would come in to Sam's and Anne's. It was a weird mixture, but it was friendly to gays because nobody gave a shit.

Whit: Yeah, and straight and gay all kind of mingled you suggested?

John: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, they did.

Whit: I'm just curious here. Do you, did you know anything about the ex-burlesque queens who came in?

John: No, that's what people said they were. There was a woman named Edna. She apparently had worked for Minsky's when she was younger, but at this point she was older. She was in her 70's. She obviously had alcohol problems. She would just come in and walk around the place and ask guys if they wanted to see her pussy.

Whit: Wow, and then they would buy a drink?

John: Buy her a drink. A lot of the guys that would buy her a drink didn't really want to see her pussy. They just wanted to have a joke. You know?

Whit: Sure. Sure. Wow. Do you know how long Sam's and Anne's stayed there? Cause that whole block is redeveloped today and leveled.

John: Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. I'm trying to think. By the middle '60's I think I have a feeling it was gone or closed. Because by then I was going to Murphy's and Skippy's. I could go there because I was of age now. I don't think I went to Sam's and Anne's that much anymore. Maybe it was because it was closed. I don't know.

Whit: Okay. You did mention in an email Sam tended to look the other way except when cops were around, which they sometimes were. Could you say a little more about that?

John: Yeah. The cops would usually come in. The cops would come in and have a drink. The squad car would pull up in front of Sam's

and Anne's, and they'd come in and have a drink, and then in which case we were sort of expected to either get out of there or at least lay low.

Whit: Okay, gotcha. Who were Sam and Anne?

John: I don't know. They were a married couple. He was an older guy. I guess he was in those days in his '50's, bald, white haired guy. He knew everybody, and everybody knew him. I don't remember too much about Anne. I don't remember her, but I remember Sam very vividly.

Whit: Okay. What about you mentioned another place that I've never heard of called Promenade on Park Avenue.

John: Yeah, that was a little bit upscale gay bar. It was on Park Avenue near the park.

Whit: Near Branch Brook Park?

John: Yeah, Branch Brook Park. Yeah, around the area around—not the cruising area, which was over by Bloomfield Avenue. This was around the gazebo. I don't know. Do they still have a gazebo?

Whit: Okay, yeah.

John: That's where the band concerts used to happen.

Whit: Okay. Right. Right.

John: The promenade was there on Park Avenue on the north side of the street.

Whit: Okay. You said it had an art deco décor, but not a great cruising spot. Then why is that?

John: It was mostly where people would meet or something, or it was the kind of place where let's say you had gone to the movies and you just wanted to stop in for a drink someplace after the movie, you knew that you might meet people there and you might not. It was still okay to be there.

Whit: Okay, gotcha. Okay. Well, then the other two places you mentioned, Murphy's and Skippy's were right near one another and right near Sam's and Anne's. Why don't you tell us about those?

John: Well, like I said, I couldn't go to Murphy's and Skippy's until I was of age. I preferred Skippy's to Murphy's because Skippy's had more room. Skippy's was just more spacious, whereas at Murphy's the bar took up [nearly] the whole space.

Whit: Okay.

John: It got really crowded, and it got so crowded that you really couldn't do any cruising because it was like the place was mobbed, whereas with Skippy's you could get your drink and then walk around a little bit. Skippy's was a little bit more relaxed than Murphy's, but Murphy's was unquestionably the most popular of all of the bars in that area.

Whit: Yeah. You said at Skippy's sometimes there was dancing, but that did not happen at Murphy's, or did it?

John: No, there was no dancing at Murphy's. There was no room for dancing in Murphy's. Is that what you mean?

Whit: Yeah, exactly.

John: Oh no, Skippy's had a kind of a back room that had tables in it and things like that, and a jukebox. People would dance in there. Sometimes they didn't. A lot of it had to do with I guess Skippy's relationship with the cops.

Whit: Yeah? Do you mean payoffs? Can you be specific about what that means?

John: I don't know what it means. Sometimes there was dancing and sometimes there wasn't. So I assumed—this isn't based on anything I know for a fact. I'm assuming that at certain times it was okay with the cops and at other times it wasn't.

Whit: Okay, gotcha. What did it feel like to dance in a bar in the '60's? Did it feel dangerous, or rebellious, or was it casual? I'm just trying to sort of picture historically.

John: It was actually pretty casual. It was pretty friendly. I don't know. I don't think there was—I think it was nice. There was maybe a little bit of excitement since it's not something that went on in a lot of places. Yeah, it was nice.

Whit: Yeah? Who were the men who would hang out at Murphy's and Skippy's?

John: Mostly young. Again, Skippy's had mixed race. I mean there were, I'm not saying that it was 50/50, but blacks would come in to Skippy's and hang out there. That was like accepted and pretty much—nobody made any big thing out of it.

Whit: Yeah, but not to Murphy's?

John: You didn't often see blacks in Murphy's in those days.

Whit: Yeah. Did you have a sense of why that was?

John: No, I never thought about it even. You'd be amazed. There were an awful lot of things that got past me that I didn't—I never sat down and thought about.

Whit: Sure. What about during this era, the '50's and the '60's? This is kind of the homophile movement is going on with the Mattachine Society. Is that something that at the time you were aware of or not?

John: I was aware of the Mattachine Society, but I didn't—I don't know. I didn't want to get involved with it because even though I was pretty casual about what was going on in my life, I still didn't want to get that public.

Whit: Sure.

John: I was being more discreet. Now looking back on that, I realize that was probably not—that was stupid of me, but I had my prejudices, too.

Whit: Yeah.

John: To me, guys who were in the Mattachine Society were braver than I was.

Whit: Yeah. Did you know guys who were in the Mattachine Society at the time?

John: Yes, I did.

Whit: In Newark?

John: Yeah.

Whit: Oh really? Could you say a little about that?

John: Well, I don't know much about it except that I had this one friend who was trying to get me into it, and he would talk it up to me and try to get me interested. But I pulled away from it. I don't know where their headquarters was. I don't know.

Whit: Yeah, there was a branch in New York that would've been active at that point. I just know from the archival record.

John: This probably was connected. Whatever was going on in Newark was probably connected to New York.

Whit: Yeah. You mentioned, actually, people from New York used to come in on the 118 bus to check out Murphy's and Skippy's. That's interesting. Could you elaborate on that at all?

John: Does the 118 bus still exist?

Whit: I don't know. I feel like I take the PATH train and the New Jersey Transit. I never take the bus to New York.

John: Okay. The 118 bus ran between Public Service terminal and Port Authority bus terminal. I don't know. Maybe people came in other ways. The last stop on the 118 was the corner of Raymond Boulevard and Military Park, Park Place. That was the last stop. By the way, that was the cruisiest bus line I was ever on in my life. There was all kinds of stuff going on there in the back of the bus.

Whit: Wow.

John: That was then. It probably is not now.

Whit: Yeah, there's probably cameras pointing at you now.

John: We could get away with things like that back then because the general public, it didn't have an awareness of gay people.

Whit: Right. Yeah, that is fascinating.

John: But anyway, yeah, they came in on the 118 or maybe they came in on the Hudson Tubes, as we called it then. It's now called—what's it called?

Whit: The PATH train?

John: What do you call that line—

Whit: The PATH?

John: - that goes from Hoboken to Jersey City?

Whit: Yeah, it's the PATH. What does that stand for? Port—

John: PATH. That used to be called the Tube, the Hudson Tubes. Maybe they came in that way. Maybe they came in on a train, but I shouldn't have said that it was just the 118. There may have been other ways of coming in, but they came in. They would check out Murphy's and Skippy's, and then there was a baths that they would go to.

Whit: In Newark?

John: Yeah, it was on Broadway. It was up on the north end of—was that Broadway? I don't know. Say, if you're coming down Bloomfield Avenue heading toward downtown, that street right at the end before it actually hits Broad Street, that's where the baths were.

Whit: Okay. Did you ever go there?

John: Yeah, I went there.

Whit: Oh, could you tell us about that? I'm not familiar with that one. What was that like?

John: Actually, it was kind of nice. It was kind of nice. It was very relaxed there, people sitting around in their towels watching TV and things like that, and then somebody occasionally having sex. It wasn't the liveliest baths you've ever been at, but I think at that time it was considered pretty safe.

Whit: That's interesting. That wouldn't be—later in the '70's there was a chain called the Club Bath chain that had a branch at 49 Broadway in Newark. It wouldn't be that, would it?

John: Maybe they took it over. It had existed before that. I don't really know. Cause, once we get into the '70's I really don't know what was going on.

Whit: Oh sure. Sure. You don't remember the precise name of the bath house, do you?

John: I'm sorry, I don't.

Whit: Okay. No, that's something I don't think I'd realized was there that early. But you were not a regular there?

John: No, I was not.

Whit: Okay.

John: I just went in a few times.

Whit: Then I think the one other place you mentioned, and then I'll cede the floor to Kristyn who I know has some questions for you about a few other things. You mentioned a place on Mulberry Street further to the south called the Hub. I've never heard of that either. Could you say a little about that?

John: I'm not sure what street that was. That was like on Mulberry, and I'm not sure what the other street was. It might have been Lafayette. I'm not sure. It was far down. You know how Mulberry Street goes down on a diagonal toward McCarter Highway?

Whit: Yeah. Yeah

John: Well, it was farther down away from Murphy's. It was called the Hub. Apparently, at one time it had been jumping. Apparently it was a really very popular cruising spot [back in the 1940s]. By the time I went there, it wasn't that interesting.

Whit: Okay.

John: I was only there maybe one or two times. I don't remember.

Whit: And what do you mean by not interesting? Just sort of—

John: If you were really cruising, you'd be better off at Skippy's and Murphy's because there were a lot of people around there. There weren't that many people in the Hub.

Whit: Okay. Gotcha.

John: Still you could go in there maybe and meet the love of your life. That's possible. It didn't look like there was a lot of possibilities.

Whit: Yeah.

John: Hell, we used to travel around. We'd go to different places. Here's something, though, about Mulberry Street. There was a woman who hung out in Sam's and Anne's. I can't remember her name. I think it was Nell. I can't remember, but she was like the mother of all the gay black boys. She had an apartment down there off—not on Mulberry Street, but it was off Mulberry Street. She would invite all the white kids to come down to her parties, which we did. Her parties were sensational. She was kind of like this big mother of all these gay boys. These gay boys hung out in her apartment. Of course, I guess to give it more excitement she invited some of the white kids to come down.

Whit: Wow. What were the parties like? Would you pay admission?

John: No. No, you didn't pay admission. I don't remember that we paid admission. Maybe it was kind of like a rent party where you contributed something. But the first room was like all about liquor and everything like that. Farther back in her apartment there was actually sex going on. But I mean I wasn't doing drugs at the time. I know drugs were going on there, too.

Whit: Are we talking the mid '60's by now, or what time period was it?

John: Again, about '59, '60.

Whit: Okay. Wow. Yeah, nobody's ever mentioned that story before. That's new. Did they keep going on? Was that something that just sort of came and went? What was your sense of that? Was it a long standing thing?

John: It sort of came and went. Because Nell sort of came and went. She was a very popular figure in Sam's and Anne's for a while. And then people stopped seeing her. Or maybe I lost interest. I don't know. There was a lot of other things going on in my life. Believe it or not, at this time in my life I was actually going to college. I was living at home but commuting. I did occasionally have other things to do. I make it sound in my emails like that was all I did in my life at that time. But there was more going on, actually. [...]

Whit: Oh, okay. Okay. Were you working, too? You had mentioned a job I think maybe in high school at Bond's on Broad and Raymond.

John: Yes. That was just a part-time job in high school. Yeah, right. That wasn't a career. That was how I found out about Public Service Bus Terminal men's room, was one of the guys I worked with in Bond's told me about that. I was just a junior in high school. Yeah, he told me about that so I checked it out. I had a tendency in those days, if I heard anything, even if somebody said, "Do you know what they're doing over there?" I would be like, "Oh, no, not that." Then I'd go check it out.

Whit: I just want to put on the record that you mentioned Bonds was famous for their two trouser suits at the time.

John: That was the big advertisement for them. It was right on the corner of Raymond Boulevard and Market, and Broad Street next to Kresge's Department Store. They had this big sign, Bond's two trouser suits in big letters. Yeah, it was a mostly men's store, men's clothing store.

Whit: Okay, gotcha. Did you want to—t

Kristyn: Yeah. I just had a couple of questions for you, too, but, some of these things might have been before you started hanging out, because you were a teenager in the '50's, so I don't know if these things might be too early. But just if you've—I just want to throw some names and places at you, and if you maybe even heard of people mentioning them or anything like that. Had you heard of Black Tavern, Black's Tavern?

John: No. No, I haven't. No, I'm sorry.

Whit: That's okay. Did you ever hear of Reese LaRue, the name Reese LaRue, a performer?

John: Yeah, I heard of that, but I'm not sure where I heard of it. But yeah, it rings a bell. [...]

Kristyn: Oh, that's cool. Have you ever heard of Manhattan Paul?

John: No, I haven't.

Kristyn: Or Willy Dukes?

John: No, I'm sorry.

Kristyn: Oh, that's okay. I was just curious if you were aware of the fight between the Alcoholic Beverage Commission and Murphy's Tavern?

John: I mean, yes and no. I know something happened. Something happened that made Murphy's move apparently to a different location. I don't know. I guess I wasn't thinking too much about stuff like that then.

Kristyn: Okay.

John: That's a terrible thing to admit, isn't it? That's really it. First of all, I was very self-involved. I was into my own stuff. I didn't have a lot of awareness of things going on around me, or whatever the situation like that—I wouldn't probably pay too much attention to it. Don't interrupt me. I'm out here cruising. I don't know. That was sort of like, that's where I was.

Kristyn: Oh yeah, I think that was more actually thinking about it was the '30's and '40's, but probably not.

Whit: Was the Kinney Club still around?

John: That name sounds familiar, but I don't think I was ever there.

Whit: Yeah, okay.

Kristyn: No, I'm good.

Whit: I mean we've been talking a while. I don't want to keep you beyond your comfort zone. You had mentioned some East Orange places, and then you mentioned leaving Newark in 1966. I wonder if you want to talk about any of that.

John: I don't want to talk about leaving or coming back. I really don't want to talk about that, but Redmond's was a bar in East Orange. It was very popular, and it was very crowded, particularly on weekends. It was a nice bar. It was very popular. Bars would pop up and they might not last that long. Maybe just cuz I remember them from a particular period doesn't mean that they had been there a long time or that they were going to survive a long time. I don't know. That was a place that you would go in that period of my life, the late '50's, early '60's.

Whit: Yeah. You also mentioned at the East Orange Brick Church Railroad Station what you referred to as the meat rack.

John: Yeah, that was wild. Yeah, that was wild. The boys would sit on the fence and the cars would drive around.

Whit: Wow.

John: Which is pretty much what happened down in Washington Park. It was pretty much the same thing, except the meat rack [at Brick Church] was pretty open. There was a whole big open space. It was a parking lot right next to the Brick Church Station. And consequently it didn't—there were no trees or bushes or anything around there. It was just a wide open parking lot. The people would drive around. I mean, obviously, nobody was going to have sex around there. Someone who picked you up probably had a place to go.

Whit: Right. Right. Well, tell you what, are there other questions we should be asking you about Newark, things that we haven't raised that you think are worth entering into the record or other thoughts, topics, etc.?

John: You asked me about personal relationships. I didn't have any in those days. There was nothing romantic going on with me. It was mostly sexual experimentation and things like that until Sam's and Anne's. At Sam's and Anne's I met somebody. He was older than I was. At that time I was, what—I think I was 18 or maybe 19. He was in his 20's. [...] he had a really good job. So he had a pretty nice apartment up in north Newark. We got together. That was the first time I met somebody that I really cared about. And I know he also cared about me. That was like a first. I met him at Sam's and Anne's. So obviously because of that I have pretty good memories of Sam's and Anne's.

Whit: Yeah. How did that relationship work out?

John: Well, it couldn't have worked out because I was too fickle. It wasn't that I didn't care about this guy. It was that I still wanted to go on with the other stuff. That became a problem.

Whit: Yeah, so he was aspiring toward a more traditional monogamous relationship, basically?

John: Yeah, you could put it that way. He wanted someone, and after we split up he tried to get back. By that time I figured like no, this isn't gonna work. He finally did meet somebody else. He did have a very long-term relationship with that person. It ended up being

okay for him. I didn't want to get tied down with one person. I could still care about somebody and not want to get tied down.

Whit: Sure. Sure. Any other Newark historical facets that we didn't think to ask about or areas of your life that we didn't think to ask about during this period?

John: Well, I met a guy in Skippy's. This was long afterwards. This would've been around sometime in the '60's, who was a drug dealer and he was a very famous drug dealer. I won't even mention his name, cuz everybody knew who he was. Everybody knew him. But we got into a thing. And I was crazy about him. We really got it off. He was murdered.

Whit: Oh, God.

John: And I found out about that by accident through my brother, cuz we sort of had a thing going. And then he got killed. Somebody broke into his apartment and shot him. The interesting thing there was one time—I would hear conversations about him long after that, people talking about him. He was a very well-known drug pusher.

Whit: Wow. I guess one thing, I'm sorry for your loss there. That's terrible.

John: No, it wasn't like that. It wasn't like my—the reason he and I got along so well is cuz he was as fickle as I was. He had a lot of things going on with other people and so did I. It was really nice because he was a black guy. He had girlfriends, and he had boyfriends. He sort of could have anybody he wanted cuz he was a really good looking black guy, and of course he had money.

Whit: Sure. Sure. That does raise the question. Were drugs prominent in the gay scene in this era?

John: Yeah, they were becoming prominent, I'd say by—I don't know. I started becoming aware of it when we'd go down to that apartment for that woman. I think her name was Nell. That's when I first started to become aware of drugs. I became more and more aware of them after that.

Whit: Was it mostly marijuana at this point, or harder stuff, or what?

John: I think it was coke. There were also a lot of pills. Somebody would put pills out at a party, and put signs on them, ups, uppers, and

downers. But the most popular drug was Dexamyl, and Dexamyl was both upper and downer. That was a nice ride, actually.

Whit: Yeah, I believe it. You know, I'm just throwing a couple of random questions here, but during that era, were you reading gay literature? Did you know John Rechy's novels?

John: Yes, I read *City of Night* and something else. I can't remember. *City of Night*, yeah, that was very popular.

Whit: Yeah. Did you relate to it? Does that describe the Newark scene or not? It's a very cold novel in a lot of ways. I just wonder—

John: Well, it definitely describes the New York scene. I read that book and I know it's about 42nd Street. Whether it would describe Newark or not, I'm not so sure.

Whit: Yeah. Okay, I was just curious. I'm kind of throwing that one out in the blue here. I'm trying to think. Other questions we should be asking you or things you want to add on to the record? We've covered a lot of ground.

John: I'll probably think of a bunch of them afterwards. But right at the moment I can't think of too much. I think I would like to edit out a lot of that stuff about my family.

Whit: Sure, sure, absolutely.

John: Otherwise I'd be okay. I'm trying to think about things that were happening. There were bars in Paterson. Paterson was a very popular city for people from Newark. People used to drive up to Paterson, particularly on a Saturday night, Friday night or Saturday night. I don't remember the names of the bars. There were two of them. They were both very popular. The thing that was interesting was at both Murphy's and Skippy's I guess if the right signal came along you could start finding your way into S&M.

Whit: Yeah?

John: That was when I first got into S&M was at Murphy's, not that it happened at Murphy's, but people I met there were into S&M. I think more and more what was going on was S&M was becoming the rage. This was the early '60's, and people were discovering that it was okay—that kink was okay. Yeah, it was popular stuff. Skippy's and Murphy's were kind of like that. Sam's and Anne's was not about that kind of stuff at all. Sam's and Anne's was just a

neighborhood bar. Murphy's and Skippy's was a little—had a reputation as being a little bit more interesting as far as the kinky stuff.

Whit: Were people in Newark dressing in leather?

John: No, I don't think you'd see that. I think you'd have to go into New York to see that. Without the costume, people were still getting into humiliation scenes. They were getting into water sports. They were getting into bondage, a lot of stuff like that.

Whit: Oh, interesting.

John: And even if it was only happening in the car, it was still, that's what the scene was.

Whit: Yeah. I guess I would associate that in my mind with a decade later in a lot of ways. So that is interesting.

John: No, that started in the '60's. I had my first S&M experience in the early '60's. I can't give you the date, but it was in the early '60's.

Kristyn: Do you remember in the '60's when they had the Newark mansion that was raided with the Von Cleefs? That was a sadism—

John: I do remember that. I remember because that was in the neighborhood where my family lived. My family was so shocked that this was going on right—it was on Degraw Avenue, which was right in the heart of North Newark. They were so shocked about that going on. My brother was a cop. He was one of the cops who raided the place. He was talking to the family about it. My aunt was listening to this, and she said, "I don't understand why someone would pay to be tortured." I thought that was kind of funny, because I couldn't say anything. I knew perfectly well why people would pay to be tortured. Yeah, most people were uninformed.

Whit: Wow. No, that's fascinating. Were you ever at the place?

John: No, I was never at the place. No, I only heard about it. That wasn't my scene. That wasn't my scene. I didn't want to pay for sex. I wanted to get paid for sex. The thing is I could get paid for sex because as I said, I was a good looking guy.

Whit: Yeah, no. That makes sense. Wow. Anything else?

John: No, the only reason I thought of that is because that Kristyn asked me about the mansion. I did know about that. I think it was probably a lot of that going on. I don't know. I don't know how much I was aware of it. I'm just saying that there was a strain of S&M in a lot of the people that you would meet at Murphy's and Skippy's. In other words, let's say you met somebody at Skippy's. You would feel safe bringing up to them some kind of kink thing that maybe you were into. You would feel safe about that.

Whit: Okay.

John: Because people were getting more sophisticated.

Whit: Gotcha. So I don't want to press you here. You suggested you don't really want to talk about leaving Newark, coming back, etcetera. Just to throw that your way, anything you want to say on that topic or no?

John: Well, I don't know. No, I think I don't. Can I pass on that?

Whit: Yeah, no, absolutely. Of course.

John: Yeah, I'm gonna pass on that.

Kristyn: Have you ever heard—

John: Maybe in some other future interview, maybe I'll go into that, but I don't think I want to do that right now.

Whit: Alright. Yeah, totally fair.

Kristyn: Did you ever meet or hear of Donald Dust?

John: No.

Whit: Okay. Yeah, he's a gay man from Newark who was murdered in the I think 1990s that we were interested in but haven't been able to document his life very well yet.

John: Could you hold on one second? I've got a call coming in and I have to take it just for one second.

Whit: Absolutely, of course.

John: Hello? Hello?

Whit: You're still on our line here.

John: Yeah. Could you mind? I have to take this call.

Whit: Yeah. Yeah, go ahead.

John: Okay.

[Pause 01:33:04-01:33:35]

John: Hello, did I lose you?

Whit: No. No, I'm here. Things alright on the other call? You're good?

John: I just had to pick it up. We just had to say one thing to one another and that was all.

Whit: Gotcha.

John: I'm back.

Whit: Okay. Well, I didn't know if you wanted to wrap this session up we could always do a second round once Tim has a chance to read the transcript. He might have follow up questions. That might be a way to go if that's alright with you.

John: Yeah. That would be alright with me. I think I just want to say that Newark was—I don't know, I have such good memories of Newark. I'm sure bad things must've happened along the line, but as I think back on it, both the cruising and in the bars, I had a very good time. Of course I was young then. And it's always good to be young. It's always good to be young. As far as cruising goes, I knew a lot of spots. I probably didn't know all the spots, but I knew a lot of them.

Whit: Oh yeah, this is an amazing wealth of detail. I can't even begin to express how grateful we are for this. So many of these places we've never even heard of. You gave such vivid descriptions. This really, really adds a lot to the histories we're trying to put together here, so thank you.

Kristyn: Yeah, thank you.

John: Oh well, you're welcome. I hope I've been helpful. I want to be helpful because I think what you're doing is good. I'm not so sure that I've always been coherent.

Whit: Oh no, believe me. This is unspeakably helpful. Truly, there is just so much here that as far as I know there's no other documentation of some of these places. We've really been scouring the paper trails, and people's memories. As you know, this is a really elusive history to document, because so little of it left available paper trails, which are often the only way to recover it. This is a one-of-a-kind source that you're providing really.

John: The people I knew in those days who were either my age or older. Most of them are probably gone. Those who are left maybe don't even know how to use a computer. So I don't know that they would ever stumble on your website.

Whit: Oh yeah, I meant to ask. How did you find your way to it?

John: That's really interesting. I was talking to an old high school friend of mine who is also gay. We were talking about old Newark. He said, "There's a website you can go to and it's called Old Newark." He said, "A lot of people put in memories there and things like that, but most of it from the Vailsburg section." He said, "It's not that interesting but you might want to look at it." Then I said, "I wonder if there's an old gay Newark website." He said, "Oh, I doubt it." So I just Googled old gay Newark, and that's how I got your website.

Whit: Oh, that's fascinating. I'm so glad that you did.

John: Of course, as soon as I started reading it and seeing what was going on. I realized oh wow, this is great. This is terrific. So I got very excited about it. I called back my friend. The friend and I had—I said, "There *is* an old gay Newark website, by the way." I think you should look it up. I don't know whether he has or not, because he also has memories of different memories than mine. I think he should contribute them, but I don't know how he feels about this.

Whit: Sure, sure.

John: He knows about a couple of places I never knew anything about.

Whit: Oh my. Well, please do refer him to us.

John: I'll get back to him about it. I think he's a little bit—he's sort of like a very—what's the word—I don't want to say closeted. He's careful.

Whit: Sure. I totally—we completely understand. As you know from our correspondence, please do let him know that we are happy to do interviews with people who use pseudonyms or anonymity. We'd love to chat with him if he's willing to under whatever conditions work for him.

John: Well, I can't promise it of course, but I'll keep after him. I just think this is a good thing to do, because that's a big chunk of our lives back there. It's nice to know that somebody wants to make a record and sees it as maybe part of history, the evolving of gay history, because we lived in a different world back then.

Whit: Oh, yeah. I can promise you that we—that not just us, but other people, friends of ours who teach, they'll use these histories in their curriculum so students today listen to these and it gives them an entirely new window into the past.

John: Yeah, it does. I think it does, because I'm really glad that we have—I don't know. What's the word—evolved to where we are today. In some ways I'm kind of jealous of young people today is that they don't have to live as much in the shadows as we did. I'm a little bit jealous but at the same time I think we had more fun, because I was a slut and so being a slut was fun. Nowadays I don't think people are slutty. I think people just want to get married. And that's probably how I would be today, too.

Whit: Yeah, I think young people today are very jealous of your generation and even generations that followed. I think it's mutual.

John: Here's the thing. I've lived in Europe. And in Rome, when gay sex was against the law, Rome was a jumping city. The worst thing that happened to gay Rome was that they made it legal. Cause that was the end of the good times. That's also true of Stockholm, because there was a period in Sweden back I guess in the '30's or '40's where homosexuality was still considered illegal. By the time I was living there it was perfectly legal. When I would meet someone older than myself, he would be very nostalgic for the old days when they had to go into the bushes. So the changes are really good. They're very positive, that people now are free to get married and be openly affectionate toward one another in public. That's terrific, but back in those days there was a little bit of danger and the danger added to the mystery.

Whit: Yeah, the thrill of the forbidden, right, the frisson of danger.

John: Particularly in a men's room in a public place, like in a theater or something like that, there was always the danger of being caught. And that was part of the excitement, wasn't it?

Whit: Yeah. Well, I will say this. I don't know if you're familiar with online pornography streaming sites, but if you look at X-Tube or X-Hamster, there's a guy, a young African-American man who does make videos on his cell phones of his hook-ups in the bathroom at Newark Penn Station.

John: Oh, you're kidding. Really?

Whit: No.

John: You mean, nowadays?

Whit: Yeah. Yeah, nowadays. I can send you a link if you're not easily offended by graphic sexual content.

John: No, of course not.

Whit: Somebody's keeping the tradition alive.

John: I'm not usually offended by anything, actually. Yeah, sure. Please, send me that link it'd be great. Oh by the way, there's one other place I want to talk about.

Whit: Oh yeah, please.

John: You may have heard of it, and it may still be active today. It's South Mountain Reservation.

Whit: No.

Kristyn: South Mountain, that sounds familiar.

Whit: It's new to me.

John: I'm sorry?

Whit: No, please elaborate.

John: It's on South Orange Avenue. It's up the hill. I'm not sure if that's Orange or South Orange. I guess it's South Orange. Anyway, the name of the place is South Mountain Reservation. And that also was a very big, big cruisy spot. There was a period of time where

the cops started clearing up Branch Brook Park. Branch Brook Park had become kind of dangerous, so everybody went to South Mountain.

Whit: Okay. This would've been, what, mid-60's would you say, or?

John: Early to mid-60's, yeah. That was really good, because there was—you could drive in there, but there were lots and lots of woods, lots of places to go in the woods.

Whit: Okay. Yeah, that's new to me, as well. Thank you.

John: That was really famous in its time. Like I said, everything may be different now.

Whit: Yeah. Yeah.

John: I'd like to go back to New Jersey just to look and see what it's like. That's gonna have to wait a while.

Whit: Yeah. Newark has changed a lot. I will say the more I learn about the history the more you see the built environment having changed pretty radically downtown in a lot of ways.

John: You're not from Newark are you?

Whit: Oh, no. No. Kristyn, you're from Kearny, right?

Kristyn: Yeah, my family's from Newark. My mom lived in I guess the Ironbound section.

John: Yeah, I know the Ironbound section. That's where my mom was from. You know. You're from Alaska, Whit?

Whit: Yeah. I grew up kind of all over the place, but the Midwest and Alaska, yeah.

John: It's none of my business, but how did you end up in Rutgers?

Whit: I don't know how much you know about the academic job market these days, but it's a tight job market. You sort of take the jobs you're offered. I had been at Temple in Philadelphia and got the tenure track job here. That's just the forces of the market are what brought me here. I came to care very deeply about the city and this project is partly the outgrowth of that.

John: Yeah, I'm really looking forward to reading your book. I ordered it from Amazon, as I told you.

Whit: Oh, thank you.

John: I just read the introduction, and I was hooked.

Whit: Wow. I'm flattered. I hope you enjoy it.

John: Now I want to read the rest of the book, because yeah, it really rang a lot of bells with me what you were saying. The things that I've seen change over the years, especially since I spent a lot of time living in Europe and working in Europe. The differences in cultures, the gay cultures in different places, I'm very aware of that. So much of what you said about the right wing in this country using this sudden preponderance of sexual material for their own profit, to me that's—well, I don't have to tell you about it, because you already wrote a book about it, so I'll just shut up.

Whit: No. Well, you know, actually—well, thank you for that. Before we stop recording I will say one thing in Newark that I think hasn't changed much is the Little Theater, which is actually still around and showing porn movies. I wrote a piece about that for Vice Magazine the other month. I can send you that link, too, if you're interested. You might be surprised to see the sexual subculture that's still very much alive there.

John: Really? Yeah, that's interesting.

Whit: Yeah, it's amazing.

John: Yeah, that would be interesting. Along Broad Street there was also a theater called, believe it or not, the Broad.

Whit: Okay.

John: It was near the Little Theater. That also was active. I just remembered that when you started talking about the Little Theater. I can't tell you too much about that except I know there was a lot going on there.

Whit: Gotcha. It's astonishing how hopping Newark was on that level back in the '60's and '50's.

John: The thing that changed it was the riots of '67, because I think a lot of people started feeling they didn't want to go downtown

anymore, because they didn't know what was gonna happen. It probably was still safe, but what started to emerge was that image in the city of "you gotta be careful now because the blacks are on the move." Of course, I knew enough black people that I wasn't worried about it. But I think in general, there was a feeling of fear.

Whit: Yeah, absolutely. White flight and economic disinvestment really changed the city in pretty dramatic ways, I think.

John: I'll tell you something about a lot of the kids I went to school with. By school I mean high school. They moved to the Jersey Shore. They raised their families at the Jersey Shore. These people are, they all turned out to be Republicans. I can't figure that out, but they—I think it was their reaction to white flight, because in the days of John Kennedy they were still Democrats. But then something happened in the Nixon era that changed everybody's heart. All of a sudden now you've got a bunch of guys my age and women my age who are dyed in the wool Republicans. I think it came about because of what you called white flight. They felt that their old neighborhoods were being taken away from them.

Whit: Right, and basically created the Reagan Democrat, right?

John: Yeah. It's spooky to talk to them, for me anyway, because how did you get there? Back when we were in school, we were all Democrats.

Whit: Right. Right. I'll probably cut this out of the transcript, but my father is a perfect example. He was raised on a farm in Iowa, was a die-hard Democrat, and then became a Reagan Democrat, voted for Reagan, and both Bushes, and then was so horrified by what happened to the country that he came back into the fold and voted for Obama.

John: Oh, really?

Whit: Yeah.

John: Good for him.

Whit: Yeah. He's only precariously liberal, but he votes Democrat now, so you can't ask for too much more than that, I guess.

John: Yeah, well, the kids in my—the kids that I went to school with who were—we were all pretty much on the same economic level, either you were a Democrat or in my case you were even farther

left than that. But we were all big on Adlai Stevenson. Adlai Stevenson was our hero.

Whit: Wow.

John: Yeah, cuz Adlai Stevenson was appealed to just your everyday Democrat and then to sort of pinkos like me.

Whit: Oh, that's good. I hope we can leave that in. That's a good line.

John: Yeah, but that it's, Adlai was our hero. I don't know what happened because now these same people that I went to school with, I'm as far from them politically as it's possible to be.

Whit: Right. Yeah.

Kristyn: Yeah, my parents are in their 70's, and a lot of my relatives that are their age moved down the Shore and same thing, went from Democrat to Republican.

John: Yeah, it seems to be common. So you know about that, too, then.

Kristyn: Oh yeah.

John: Well, anyway, I don't know. I'm sorry. I shouldn't keep talking like this cuz I know we're going on too long. Anyway, it was fun to talk to you. It was fun to talk about this stuff. I'll probably start thinking about other things after we hang up.

Whit: Yeah. If you're up for a second round after this sinks in and we get the transcript and Tim can participate, I'm sure Tim will have follow up questions, too, and would love to chat. If that works for you I think that would be a great plan.

John: Oh yeah, that works for me. Yeah, the thing I just want to make clear. I really want to contribute to this project. I'm not even sure why I wanted to, but somehow or other this feels important.

Whit: I'm glad. I think we're all very glad you feel that way, and we obviously completely agree. Thank you.

Whit: Yeah, thank you.

John: I will try to get other people that I know to go to the website and see how they react to it.

Whit: Yeah. Yeah, please do.

John: I think what you're doing is worthwhile.

Whit: Thank you. Do tell them even if they don't want to record an interview, we'd still love to chat off the record or informally with them.

John: Okay, I'll tell them.

Whit: That might be a way to sort of test the waters and get comfortable.

John: Yeah. I'm sure there are—a lot of people are gone, but I'm sure there are still some people left.

Whit: Yeah. No, we'd love to chat with anyone about anything. Yeah, I will let you go. Thank you so much for chatting for almost two full hours with us. We really appreciate it.

John: Is that how long we were on? Oh, wow.

Whit: Yeah. Yeah, pretty much.

John: I didn't realize. Time goes by.

Whit: No, it really does.

John: Listen, thank you, Whit, and thank you Kristyn. Thank you for calling me, and thank you for listening to all this stuff.

Whit: Oh, our pleasure. Thank you so much for sharing it. I'll send you an email with these links I mentioned. It'll take us a few weeks probably to get the transcript ready, but as soon as we've got it I'll send it your way and maybe—

John: It's gonna be two hours? Wow.

Whit: Oh, no. I'm sorry—oh, the transcript? Yeah, it'll be a bit to dig through for you.

John: Nobody's gonna listen to that. They'll fall asleep in the middle.

Whit: Oh, I doubt that. I doubt that. Anyway, yeah. We will definitely have a transcript for you in the fairly near future.

John: Okay, good. Yeah, well, just keep me posted, and I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Whit: Alright, cool. Well, good talking with you and we will talk again soon. Thanks again so much.

Kristyn: Thank you so much.

John: Whit, thank you, Kristyn. Bye-bye. Have a good afternoon.

Whit: You, too.

Kristyn: You, too.

Whit: Bye.

[End of Audio]