

**Kristyn Scorsone (KS):** Hello all and welcome to season 2 of the Queer Newark podcast. This episode is a tough one. On April 28th of this year, we lost one of Newark's dearest LGBTQ+ leaders, James Credle. A memorial was held for James at Rutgers University Newark in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, the same building where James, a former Dean at Rutgers, once organized Newark Pride Alliance meetings to fight for safe spaces in Newark for LGBTQ+ youth. James grew up in the Jim Crow era in North Carolina. He was one of 14 children, and in order to help his parents, he and his siblings worked throughout high school to supplement the family income. He worked in fields picking cotton, potatoes, corn, cabbage. He even worked at a crab factory. And after he graduated from an all-Black Pamlico County Training School in 1962, he moved to Newark and began working at a Veteran's Administration hospital. He served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 as a medic for the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, where he was significantly wounded. He continued to help other soldiers evacuate while they were still under enemy fire. When he returned home in 1968, he enrolled out in Rutgers Newark and joined the Black Organization of Students. Along with other BOS members, James Credle participated in a 72-hour protest in which students occupied Rutgers' Conklin Hall. They were demanding increased opportunities and access to the university for minority students, staff, and faculty. In 1976, James became assistant dean of student affairs, and he spent 37 years at Rutgers before retiring in 2005. James really did so much for the world in his 78 years of life. He fought for services for veterans, including veterans in prison. He was an AIDS activist. He was a founding member of National Association of Black and White Men Together and the New York Men of All Colors Together. He was a founding member of the Newark Pride Alliance and a member of the Newark Commission on LGBTQ Concerns. He was an integral member and supporter of Newark's ballroom community and the progenitor of the iconic Newark Fire and Ice Ball. He also continued his care for students and was a founder of the Circle of Friends Awards, which is a nonprofit that provides financial support to college students committed to promoting diversity, and I am grateful to have been a past recipient of one of those awards. James married his husband, Pierre DuFresne, on the morning of October 21st, 2013 at Newark City Hall with Cory Booker officiating, the then mayor of Newark. It was the first day New Jersey allowed same sex marriage in the state. Now what I'm going to play for you is James being interviewed by Candace Bradsher on February 15th, 2015. At that time, Candace was an undergraduate student intern with women's and gender studies and working with Rutgers LGBT and Diversity Center. Take a listen.

**Candace Bradsher (CB):** Today is Friday, February 15th, 2015. I'm Candace Bradsher, and I'm interviewing James Credle for the Queer Newark Oral History Project, Rutgers Newark, Conklin Hall, Room 246. How does your immediate family feel about your gay lifestyle?

**James Credle (JC):** My family, I have never had to sit down and talk with them about my being gay. But as I've gotten older and I had my first relationship, which actually was with a—a man that I played basketball with here at Rutgers and we were together for several years and my

mother and father came to visit and they had—we had two bedrooms. They slept in one bedroom, we slept in the other. And whenever I went home with anyone, my mother always said "well, that bedroom is for James and his—his partner, or his friend, James and his friend, not partner his friend" but we never talked about it. But my mother did tell me at one point that "I feel that God gave you to me as someone special" and I know the reason why she said that was because I was the one in the family who could help out. Because all my other brothers and sisters were either married or were having kids and I was the one who—when I was in Vietnam I bought a home for my family because I knew that that was what they needed and so I made arrangements that I would—that my payment from the military would include the payment for the house that they—I wrote a letter to them and asked them to do that, so they worked out all of the paperwork and everything and I signed for it. And so I bought a home for them and they lived in that home until they passed, so. And I was the one who organized things for the family, we had.

**CB:** What can you tell me about your childhood, teen and adult years?

**JC:** They were growing in lots of ways. As I said early on, it was being challenged by this idea of this feeling that I had with no one that I could talk about and what to do about it, and it wasn't as if I planned that I would be the best basketball player or be the best student. That just seemed to me to be the thing to do and—and I think it had more to do with the fact that I—I had—I was instinctual about knowing that if I did these things, then people would appreciate my skills, would appreciate me as an athlete and would appreciate me as a scholar, and in that way, rather than dealing with my—this side of me, that it would—it would be—that would enhance their feelings about me in such a way that all that other stuff wouldn't matter. And of course it was—also covered up the fact that I could be around the guys and, you know, be around folks, you know, and—and be this—this person that they saw in one light. But I—they never—it's kind of interesting though because growing up, I used to hang out with my sisters and we'd talk about how cute the basketball team, captain of the basketball team was and they—they never said "What? Why are you around here talking about that for?" You know, we never had that kind of conversation. It was sort of natural for them that I would talk, you know, feel that. That's why I said, it's kind of interesting when we talk about acceptance that they accepted that part of me growing up and they never, you know, criticized or never called me on it and it was—it wasn't—it was—it was as if it was natural that I would be that way. You know what I'm saying? But obviously it was—in the church it was wrong or in other kinds of environments, there was something about it that was bad or wrong, but—and they may have had their own issues about it, but they never confronted me because they appreciated the other things about me. That I was, you know, a decent person, they know they—they loved me and cared for me so being gay was—was something that—that was a natural part of me and why they couldn't condemn that, if you see what I mean. So when I look back on it, that was—that was a major part of the growing up process, and that's why I say growing because it was growing to my understanding of life for

me and—and—and growing for them to understand who I was in the context of this person that they knew as a scholar, or as an athlete, and this other side of me that they may have some religious or some spiritual or some problem with, but they were never confronting me about it in that way because obviously I would always have something smart to say to them about it, so they wouldn't challenge me in that way, I did—you dare not. I'm, you know—they just accepted it, so, and never condemned it.

**CB:** Let's see. What was your favorite childhood game to play and why?

**JC:** It was football, of course.

**CB:** It was football?

**JC:** Because then I could throw the guys down and jump on top of them and they could jump on top of me. Always the thing to play, football. Chile, let me—yeah, okay, let's play some football.

**BC:** So you said that you were struggling with what it—what it was that you were feeling. And was the—what did you use as an outlet for those feelings or did you have anything or was it just the sports or?

**JC:** It was the sports and it was obviously doing well in school because, you know, I had to—it was challenging. It was also challenging to, you know, to go to—go to school and be on the bus and wonder why it is that we would be put on a bus and drive past the white school into the Black school. Or we go to the—go to the city, which I didn't do very often, but when we did, there was always 'whites only' at the water—at the water fountain or 'whites only'—excuse me—at the counter for eating and the issue was why? For me, it was, what's wrong with me? You know, why is my color so inhibiting that I can't be a true human being in terms of, I can't even drink water from a fountain? That whites and Blacks are—and then go to the white home of the people who lived actually practically next door to us, but always around the back, but when I saw they had white visitors they would go in the front door, but we would always follow the lead of my family and we would go in the back door. So those kinds of issues is—is—and then go to church and see this picture of this white God and then in some ways be told, and that—that's was what I was hearing, and obviously wasn't necessarily what was being said all the time, but what I was hearing is, "Well, you have to suffer this part of your life while you're here and you'll get your reward in heaven." And I was saying well, if I got to wait until then, why do white folks have theirs now and they get theirs later too? What's wrong with this? You know, what's wrong with this picture? So, you know, all of that stuff was very challenging in growing up, you know, to try to find a—a—a—a place that—to feel comfortable about and to, you know, and—and to not stop you from—from doing the right thing or doing the good—or trying to be a good person. So that was the challenge, but I tried to meet that challenge, you know, although there were lots

of conflicts about that and particularly around this notion of—of white supremacy that, I mean, you know, driving, you know, the buses, we, as I said, drive past from the white high school to the Black training school and the counter where you go and, you know, you pay the same price. You got clothes on the—you know, you got jeans or whatever or pants on the—and you go pay and the whites go buy those same jeans and then they can go eat at the counter. But if you want, you got to go in the back and if you want a sandwich or something, they give you a paper bag and you gotta go out or find some place down the street to eat and you can't sit at the counter, so it was very problematic. But at the same time, there was no sense that we needed—should challenge those things and I guess that was what is problematic to me. There was no sense of challenge to those at that time and because there was always the issue that if you did, something would happen to you and your family.

**CB:** Did you have role models – queer or not—that you modeled yourself on?

**JC:** Growing up, I think it probably was my mother because she was such a strong personality for me. And then later on, the first role model that I really had that I would call a role model was actually James Baldwin. I really—like, when I read “Giovanni’s Room” and then I read “The Source” and actually “The Source” wasn’t by Baldwin, it was some other—I forget who that author was. But Baldwin, when I began to read Baldwin, that’s when he became a very strong role model for me. But prior to then it was—I suppose my role model was mostly my mother growing up because I—I—it was her strength and her—her sense of fairness among her children. And she was always the person the kids in the neighborhood would go to if they had any problems or issues and—and they could talk to her about anything. And so I appreciated that about her. So if there was anyone in my—in my—and my grandmother, who was a very caring voice of reason. I guess that would be the two people I would think as role models growing up and then when I read Baldwin, and that was by the time I got to Vietnam and—and all of that. So that was very much later in life that he became a role model.

**CB:** What was a typical outfit for you as a teen?

**JC:** Typical outfit was tight pants and—and t-shirts. Yeah, t-shirts, but not—yeah, tight to show my body. But, yeah, that was it. Not—not—not—what should I say, not—nothing that would uncover my body, you know, like, you know, to be shirtless or, you know, skimpy bathing suit or something like that, but tight pants and—and maybe tight shorts, but that was it.

**CB:** Growing up, was there an outfit that enabled you to tell you who was queer and who wasn’t, do you think?

**JC:** Well, I think that there is always the queer meter. But I think one gets that instinct very early on. There were several guys who I felt were—were gay even in Vietnam, going to Vietnam and

knowing that. But I never actually confirmed that, but there was a sense that there were. Although I did have my first sexual experiences in Vietnam and on R&R from Vietnam. Well, not in Vietnam, but on my way to Vietnam. So, yeah, there was some sense of that, but never to the point of—always being careful of showing that to others because you could be, you know, ostracized and actually be given a bad discharge in the military. So I was always conscious of that. So I really never allowed myself to get too involved in that sense. Although, as I said, there was very intimate things that happened between quietness of the late hours of the night on the boat to Vietnam. And then a friend of mine who—and I became very close, and we went on R&R together to Tokyo and we had a sexual experience there and he wanted to have sexual experience back on the base in Vietnam, but I wouldn't. So he decided he should go to another unit to get out of—getaway from what was going on so that's what we did.

**CB:** You were drafted into the military.

**JC:** Yeah.

**CB:** How long did you serve?

**JC:** Two years.

**CB:** And what was that time like in your life, being in the military?

**JC:** Well, in the military, it was first the training and first being very leery of the idea of someone finding out that my feelings toward some of the men that I met there, but on the other hand having a very intimate and close relationship with one person in particular who was my buddy. And he's the one that I—I—as I said, later on, we were very close from the very first—almost the first time we were—we met at Fort Dix and went to Vietnam by boat and ended up, as I said, going to Tokyo. That's when we had our first—I think of him as my first lover, actually, although he was married, had a wife back in Buffalo. And he wanted me to move to Buffalo when we got back so that I kind of could be his on the side and I—no. No way I would do that. I was too proud of myself to be in that kind of—allow myself to get in that situation. But yeah, that was—being leery of that, but also, more than anything it was, like, you know, a lot of that stuff went out the window when you're being shot at, you know, in Vietnam and you—I was a combat medic. We went on—went on S&D, search and destroy missions, and a lot of the times it was—and being a medic it was taking care of people when they were hit and that was my deal with my unit was that you guys—I didn't worry about killing people or being—shooting at people. I said "well, you know, I am going to be here for you, so you guys do your job, I'll do mine, and my job is to take care of you if something should happen" and so that was—became what I did, you know, took care of my guys.

**CB:** Describe the experience of coming home after Vietnam.

**JC:** It was—coming home from Vietnam, it was like—I was in—actually, on an S&D mission in Chu Lai area, Chu Lai projects—province of Vietnam and we had—we had a—what we called a newbie, a new fresh lieutenant, and I was a medic and we were with the radioman and with him, and we had—we had already been told that the thing that the enemy would try to do would—to knock out either the medic, the radioman, or the head of your unit, which was the lieutenant, in order to disable a unit. And I found myself separated from the unit and with these three. The three of us ended up going into a base camp that luckily had been evacuated a long time before we got there. And I always remember that because that was—the next day I was on—from there I went back to the base camp, I got on the plane being shipped out of—got—got rid of everything that I had in terms of the—getting new stuff rather than the old stuff that I was using when I was out in combat, for the trip home on a plane. We went over by boat, but I flew back into the San Francisco Bay area. And as the plane was landing, I will never forget looking over that area, looked like—it looked like rice fields back in Vietnam. I said, "are they playing a game with me? We went all this way and look like we're, you know, we're—we're flying over, landing what looked like rice fields, you know, with the shape of the land, the landscaping and all of that." And I got into the area there and the next day I was in—meeting my sister at the airport in Newark. So all of that happened within a 48-hour period, being on the front lines of Vietnam, being—being taken out of the military and on the streets of Newark in 48 hours. So that was my—if there was a welcome home, that was it.

**CB:** So no—did you get counseling? Just from Vietnam straight to the streets of Newark?

**JC:** Yeah.

**CB:** So is that what fuels you to work with veterans today?

**JC:** That's what fuels me to do the work that I do.

**CB:** Do you feel that Black officers got treatment the way they should have or was it a long time coming for black officers to get treatment or do you know if white officers got treatment whenever they came back from Vietnam?

**JC:** No, no, none of us got treatment. We had to—we actually had to—the—the whole movement for treatment, post-treatment, post-Vietnam syndrome, actually came about as a result of Vietnam veterans themselves, we ourselves work—working with—with guys that I know from across the nation. We came together to talk about, with Robert Lipton, Dr. Robert Lipton out of New York, who was meeting with veterans and finding out this thing that was going on and if you look back in history, you can read stories of armies, of people coming back during

the—either in war, even during war, after war, certain forms of behavior that was happening in the French army, in the—you know, whatever army you want to talk about. World War II, go back to Napoleon, when you read stories about the army in terms of the things that those guys were doing, it is all post traumatic stress related. So this was—it was a new phenomena in the sense of naming it, but it was—they used to call it a lot of other things, like—what was the word they used to call? Shell shock and all of that. And what happened, though, during World War II, there was less of it, less of it, because you have to remember that these guys were in Germany, Italy, and in the European theater, and it was not this flight back, there was the boat back and it took months on the boat. So they could talk with each other, play cards, and really decompress from the war. But as I described to you, what happened to me, too many of us were on the front line one day and 48 hours, 24 hours later, we were on the streets of our cities that we lived in or in the country towns that we came from and we didn't have any time to talk that out or to work through some of this stuff around just decompressing from this. I don't know if you have ever seen "Platoon."

**CB:** Mhm.

**JC:** Okay. Then that's—the one very important thing that he captured in that film was the idea that the soldier is out there and you see him stepping on a piece of wood and it cracks and that's the only sound you hear and—and—and it sounds like a—a—a bullet thing and then that happened, but then he keeps on and it may goes on—it looks—it—it went on for, you know, several minutes that way but just think of that in several days that you're out doing that and you're waiting for the next step might be the step that you are in a fire fight where someone is shooting at you. So all that tension and stuff is something that that movie captured a lot. But that is the kind of tension that the veterans were dealing with and still dealing with in war time around—that's what causes a lot of stress that they—they need to come down from and how you come down from it is through talking with other people who have been through those similar things that you have been through. That's the best way to get it done, obviously, or with someone who is knowledgeable of it and will help you work your way through it, plus also the guilt of being—of killing or the idea that you—someone is shooting at you or you are shooting at them or even a friend that you are standing next to you they get blown away and their blood. Like, for instance, when I was in my office one day, I was actually over in—my office was in Blumenthal Hall, the office of the—the Director of the Office of Veteran's Affairs, and actually I been—I had gotten my deanship position by then. But there was a—an—on Halloween, or near Halloween, I had left my office and when I came back, my secretary told me there was some guy in my office who needed to talk with me. And my office, the door was open, but the lights were out and—and I looked around and I was wondering, you know, who was in my office, you know, because I didn't notice that there would be anyone in there and she said there was someone in there. But when I turned the light on, there was this student curled up in the corner in the fetal position and weeping. And so I went over and talked with him, and it turned out that he was a veteran in

combat but he was in a class and a student walked in dressed up with—like someone had been shot with stuff coming out of his—his system as if—like you're in a war situation. And what had happened was that he was standing next to his buddy who has been blown away and what he was doing was trying to push and wash the blood and guts and everything else, brains, everything that was on his body, he was trying to wash it away from him because that moment he saw that, it brought it right back to that point, but luckily he was able to collect himself enough to get to my office so that we could talk. And I was able to get him to what they had, the Vet Center Program at that time, which we went around creating that would be—there was a vet center in most of the major cities and a lot of major areas where veterans could go where they would have someone, a counselor and others in that center who would help them with the issue of post traumatic stress and other issues related to being a veteran.

**CB:** Wow.

**JC:** And so that was the program that grew out of our post traumatic stress work over the years. But most of that work was done by veterans to actually make it happen, you know. A lot of veterans that I met in—particularly in San Francisco were working very hard with trying to create a public forum where we could demand for such things to help us deal with post traumatic stress. And they—they were able to—we were able to get a lot of that work done through the vet centers and they're still around today.

**CB:** I was going to ask that question.

**JC:** Some of them are still around, but there are not as—not as—they're not as—the large number of them, some of them have—have closed, but there's still one in this area. I'm not sure where it's at, but there's still one for Newark and for the greater Newark area but I'm—I'm not sure where it's at right now.

**CB:** What do you think about gays and lesbians serving openly in the military?

**JC:** About time! They've been there the whole time, so, you know, it's kind of stupid when you think. And even, you know, the idea of women in combat was stupid. You know, when you have what is essentially a civil war, there is no front line and back line, you know, there is no being in the—in the front or being in the back line. That—there is a—a line there that all the enemies are on the other side. so once you get to that line you know you are going to the other side. That don't happen in civil war. Civil war means it's internal. It's all around you, so—and women were serving in areas where civil war was happening, so, you know, it's stupid to not think of them as combat. They were in combat all the time. So we have a lot of growing up to do in terms of dealing with those issues, but luckily we have been moving forward and, yeah, and it's about



time. All of it—all of it is much later than it should have been, but we're hopefully getting it together.

**CB:** What do you think about the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy?

**JC:** Stupid! I mean, it was, all of it takes growth, I think. Because, you know, the—the irony of it is, when you really think about it, is all of the allies that we have, Israel, the European countries, all of them already have. I mean, if we—if we have joint—if we—during those times where we didn't, and now it's different, obviously, but before then, prior to then, if we had joint operations with any of our major European allies, it would not have been unusual that a woman would be there or a gay person would be there. But, you know, that was just some stupidity on the part of our military, and particularly with Israel, I mean, they have—their whole society have to be ready for war given the nature of where they are at and what they have to do, and so it's kind of stupid that we've taken so long to move to this.

**CB:** You talked about your arrival in Newark and working in the—that store. What else are—is an early memory of your—your time in Newark?

**JC:** Well, I can tell you it certainly was not about being gay. It was like—my early—early—talking about Newark, what I remember most about Newark growing up, at that point, was actually that I found it to be up south. You know, it's amazing, even now, when you look at Newark and you look at the major cities in America or major area, urban areas of America, it is all up south, meaning that it's as separated as it's ever been. Our society is still a separated society and most of it is based on race and then, obviously, the other major thing is economic conditions, but first begin with race and for a lot of people it ends there. You know, that's far as it goes because even people, well-off Black people, don't live in well-off white neighborhood. A lot of times they are in well-off areas by themselves or, you know, so. I don't know. I don't—I—I'm not—I don't think that—as a society I don't think we talk about that enough, to work through some of the stuff that we need to work through in order to make this more of a society that is accepting of difference. And it seems that even with the—even though the election of the president, one would think that it has—it would make a big difference, but I think what it has shown is the entrenched desire for separation that still exists in our society. It still dominates everything and I think the—what's going on with, I mean, we have people who are willing for our economy and everything else to go to pot because they hate the fact that we have a Black president. I mean, that's amazing. That's amazing, when our society was built on the nature of capitalism. That's amazing if you really think about it, that we have that—that much entrenched hatred. And—and—but the other side of it is, I think, ultimately what you—what gets me to understand it—it is—when you really look at the essence of it, it's not the hatred of Blacks necessarily, it is really the love of white supremacy. That's what the struggle is about. It is a way—how can we make—ensure that we as white men, and I say that specifically,

white men stay in power? That's what it ultimately is about for them because they don't—when you look at the policies and all of that, they're stepping, shit, over the women while they're on their way. You know, when you look at stuff, you know, it's amazing, but.

**CB:** How has Rutgers-Newark interacted with—

**JC:** I didn't include you in that, by the way.

**CB:** How has the Rutgers - Newark interacted with its gay community when you worked here?

**JC:** Well, I tried my best. It was—it was hard, but I did have a—a lot of support among people who knew me and that included faculty, staff and students who knew me and knew of the work that we were trying to get done. And I think we—we tried to make it a—a safe space and at some level it was a safe space, but I think it's very difficult for it to be a safe space in an environment where you have—first and second generation people who are not out in their high schools, but come here and they find their family, cousin, friends, schoolmates in the same school, they're—and they are still not out to their family or out in high school and coming here and we say "you can be out here." I found that to be a contradictory kind of situation for them and how do—how do you negotiate that? And so at one point, for instance, we had a—the GALA group. And its not called GALA now, ut back then it was, I forget. What did we call it? But anyway, the gay group. We had about forty members and I would say that maybe fifteen of them were straight Latina women who were friends of their gay buddies, but they were in the group to help them because they, you know, it was that kind of situation where they could come to the meetings but their gay buddies couldn't or wouldn't come to the meetings. So they were there to, you know, to be there for them. So it was very interesting, but we tried. We—we—we did some things to try to open up the campus and I think at some level we were successful, but I think it's—it's getting better. You know, all of that stuff takes time and—and the more people are out or more gay people themselves are out, the better it is, you know, on campus and in the communities.

**CB:** Do you think there is anything that—different that Rutgers can do to make it more comfortable for people to be out?

**JC:** I think they did that when they opened the office across the street. I think that was the thing to do. We had—we had always wanted that kind of resource to be available and for that—for most of the time that I was here, I was very conscious of being—of walking into a classroom and making sure that I would tell the students that when I walk into this classroom, I don't come in here and say to you, "hey, I'm your gay dean." You know, that's not what it's about. What is it—what it's really about is your looking around you and not making assumptions about people and when you do find out that they are gay, appreciate them as individuals and as another human

being. That's what it's really about, not about me coming in, because there are so many out there among you, and they didn't look at each other, who are gay or lesbian and are not open about it, so you don't know, you know, who you're dealing with in that sense, so don't make the assumptions that we often make.

**CB:** Was there particular—a particular music that spoke to you as a young queer person?

**JC:** Oh, I love music. I—I thought I—the other—my—in my other life if you had asked me I would have been a dancer. I love dancing. So yeah, and music I love. I mean, back in—I love all kinds of music. Right now I can't get enough of Adele, "Adele 21." Ah, let me tell you. I played it this morning before I came here. That was my exercise, "Rolling in the Deep." But back in those days it was Elvis, I mean the twisting and turning, I mean, we loved that back in those days. But it was also, you know, the bee bop, and we had the—the typical shack, you may call it. You know, the corner place where people go in and play their music and it was the sound of Motown and Memphis and, you know, all of those sounds that came out of music. So, yes, it was always a part of my growing up experiences. And—and then when I got of age it was nothing like going to the Garage. You know about the Garage? Girlfriend, can we talk? Larry Levan?

**CB:** Oh!

**JC:** Oh, you came to the right place, then. So yeah.

**CB:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. But that—those were after I got older, but yeah, growing up it was—I loved all kinds of music and dancing was the thing to do. In fact, I take claim and rightfully so that I taught my community how to do that Cha Cha Cha.

**CB:** Alright.

**JC:** When it first came out years ago, I was teaching everybody how to do the Cha Cha Cha. One, two, Cha Cha Cha. One, two.

**CB:** What is your favorite song and why?

**JC:** Right now my favorite song is "Rolling in the Deep" with Adele, but prior to that, what is my favorite song? That's, oh—nothing is more like Adele right now so I'll leave it at that.

**CB:** Alright. When did you come out and why?

**JC:** I don't—I don't know if I ever had what you may said "come out" as far as it goes as saying I'm coming out. I've always—I shouldn't say always, but I've never—let me—let me put this another way. I feel as though I'm always coming out because I'm always meeting new people who don't know all of who I am. So I think coming out is a lifelong process, let me begin there. But as far as coming out, I think I have always tried to live my life in such a way that people know all of who I am. And I'm very open about my relationships, in particular, my relationship with a significant other and I talk about it and I live my life in such a way that people quickly begin to understand that I am gay or I am a gay man. And so, in that way, I, you know, am always trying let people know all of who I am. Although I don't necessarily walk in and say, as I said, I'm your gay dean, or I'm your gay neighbor, or I am your gay James Credle, no. You know, there are so many aspects of—of—of who I am that I feel can be appreciated that being gay is—is—is another part, you know.

**CB:** What was your sense of Newark? Were there places you could go, socially, as a gay person? Where were they? Can you describe them?

**JC:** Well, that was very limited. There used to be some bars around, particularly Murphy's. You know about Murphy's? Did anyone tell you about Murphy's?

**CB:** In reading.

**JC:** Yeah, okay.

**CB:** In readings.

**JC:** Yeah, that used to be—and First Choice used to be down in the—down the neck, that was another place, and then there used to be a place over on the—in North Ward near Belleville that people used to go to and I used to go to. But for me, my first partner and I when I came—when I was—my first, yeah, my first partner Nick and I, we lived at the Colonnades and we had very close friends there, but New York was the place to go. And so—and I came out in a relationship. So it wasn't—when—when I—I was in a relationship when I was out in the gay community and when I learned about the gay community,, and I think that makes a big difference in terms of being out in a relationship. When you have in your private life, you have friends who are gay and you have places to go with your friends in that gay kind of environment then you don't go to bars or go to places necessarily looking for dates because dating is—is—is a very complicated and very, in some ways compromising, kind of—of place to be. And I have never been in that place for long. Most of my relationships have been long-term. I was with Nick for eleven years, I was with JanHerman for fifteen years, and now I have been with Pierre for six years. So most of my dating life as far as being in a—being in a relationship with someone as a special other and so I haven't had the need to go out looking. And I found MACT New York when I—when Nick

and I broke up in 1979, in 1980 I found MACT New York and I used to—and I was there, used to go there every Friday night for—until 1990 and so having friends, and having people that I could be with in that kind of environment I think is, you know, what's—what kept me going. But as far as having a special place in Newark, it was, you know, it was the Murphy's from time to time, other gay spots, but never as far as going out to try to meet people for dating.

**CB:** You mentioned it was complicated to be in a—in a—single, in what way was it complicated?

**JC:** I think its complicated when there is not so many obvious places that one could go like in Newark, but also complicated because of the HIV situation that I became aware of and I think that so many other people may or may not be aware of it, but even when they are, tend not to take it as seriously as they should. Even now, I mean, the rates among people of color is just outrageous, particularly Blacks right now, men and women, is outrageous when you think about all of the information that's out there. And—and that was the reason why in 1990, as I said, I was going to New York, but in 1990 I came to Newark to work in Newark because of that. Did I—I didn't tell that story, did I? That we got a call from Pattie PenDavis? I just told it to someone else the other day, that's why I was thinking I told it to you. But anyway, I was going to New York to be a part of Men of All Colors Together. It was—Men of—Men of All Colors Together was created as Black and White Men Together in 1980. It's now Men of All Colors Together, but there is national association called the National Association of Black and White Men Together. That in—this was in—I said 1980, 1979 was when I first went to MACT New York, but it was 1980 when we all got together from various parts of the nation and we all went to San Francisco and created the National Association of Black and White Men Together. It was started out as the international association, but once we applied for 501c3 designation, it—it was determined that that was too complicated, that indeed we would have to be a national association, not an international association. And that group is—was—des—desig—committed to the concept of supporting men in cross-cultural or diverse relationships and the issue of fighting against racism, sexism, and homophobia in our community and in our lives. So that's part of our preamble, part of our constitution. And I began that work through BWMT New York. We used to have, and it still does, it's still around, this year marks the 33rd year and I've attended—I am one of two people who've attended all of those conventions. And this year's convention will be in Columbus, Ohio and let me tell you that I have decided that I want to have the 2015 convention in Newark.

**CB:** Wow.

**JC:** Which will be the 35th year of the association. So I'm working on that now. Just got support from the Commission, the LGBT Commission. Anyway, so tell you this story, let me get back to telling this story. I'm—I gotta watch my hands here. The group, we—we—we did our work

through CR sessions. CR session is consciousness raising where we talk about the—a topic. It could be on the issue of racism, it could be race and racism, it could be on the issue of sex and sexuality, it could be on the issue of gender and, you know, working with women and all that kind of stuff and it could be on a multitude of issues, but the idea was to have intimate discussions of—over these issues and we would have people, very good writers, who would come together and write about what those discussions contained and then we would meet at the end of the month on Mondays and Tuesdays in New York and we would do our newsletter. We would share that newsletter with people like James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, Adrienne Rich, Cheryl Clark, Judge Bruce Wright, Essex Hemphill was one of our members at one time. Joseph Bean was a member. He was a San Francisco member. Joseph Bean was a Philadelphia member, Phil Wilson is an LA member, Marlon Riggs is a San Francisco member. All of those people have at one point been a part of or talked to our group in one way or the other. In fact, James Baldwin made his first presentation to a gay group in—that was us in New York, MACT New York. And our strategy was to share the—those discussions, those intimate discussions across those—with those people and with the community at large and with each other and the idea was that when we reached out to them, they would come, Barbara Smith, they would come and speak without charging us anything because they knew we were, you know, the group that was trying—about doing some work on these issues. And so that was in 1990 when I—1980 when I became a part of Black and White Men Together and then in 1990 we got a call from Pattie PenDavis here in Newark calling MACT New York because she knew of the work that we were doing around HIV and she said that we were not getting—she was not—there were too many people in the community of Newark who were dying and they were not getting the information around HIV. And the group decided that Eric Perez and I—Eric is a Hispanic brother, and I, who were members of the group at the time, that we would come and do a workshop at—at a local bar that Pattie organized. And so, at that point, in 1990 I decided I needed to move back to Newark, that I didn't need to be going over on that subway, that there was too many people in Newark getting sick and dying. So I worked with Barbara Ford to write a grant to the state that was monies coming from Washington, the CDC, where we—we did what we called home health parties with people, teaching them about how to be safe and doing safe sex practices. And that project was called Project Fire. It started around 1992 and it went for ten years until the federal bureaucracy told us that our way of doing the work in terms of our home health party was not getting enough feedback, that we actually could show that we were having people change their behavior. So they were doing more quantitatively looking at how people were changing their behavior. So the funding ceased to be available to us for our work. But we were written up in the Trenton Times because they claimed that we were buying wigs and stiletto heels for our group and actually what we were doing, we started balls. We used to have a thousand people who came to our balls. And our balls, we would ask people, the houses, do you know houses? You know the house community? Well, the houses would be in competition around a safer sex message and we would provide money for them in terms of who did the best safer sex message in terms of a presentation by a house at a ball. And—but the point was that

none of those—the money came from ticket sales and came from money that we had raised. We never used a dime of any monies that—from the—that we got from the federal bureaucracy to do that work. But, of course, it gets all caught up. They don't want to have—the—the health department and the state didn't want to have anything to do with us after then in terms of balls, of H—HIV. And so it was very successful and if you ever want to see, I still have tapes from the balls, a whole list of tapes. But, yeah, we had some great things done during those times and so that's how I came back to Newark and started my work in the gay community.

**CB:** A good lead-in question would be, then, were you impacted by the AIDS crisis? How, who?

**JC:** Well, luckily I—I have never tested positive and for ten years I was part of a study group, and back in 1982 while I was a member of—while I was actively involved with MACT New York. Dr. Goudart, who was the husband of the friend of the girlfriend of a buddy that I knew from the veterans movement, who knew I was with this group in New York of gay men and so he—his girlfriend, who was the girlfriend of the Dr. Goudart, got in—got in touch with me to see if I could set up a—I would work with them because they wanted to do a cohort study of men in New York, gay men in New York, around this, at that point it wasn't HIV, we didn't know it was. All we know was that people were dying and all of that. So in 1982 I worked with that and we had sixteen guys from MAC—well, it was still Black and White Men Together at that time and I was one of the sixteen who consented to coming in, meeting with Dr. Goudart, going through our tests and then reporting back to him and—and any questions that he had around our sexual behavior, we had to answer. So, to tell you the truth, I think that that's what helped me stay negative because that—that was about the same time that I was sort of free in a way. Because Nick and I had broken up, I was with this new group, I was meeting new people, I wasn't necessarily dating as—one man in—at that time. But I—knowing I had to report my sexual behavior, of course, honey, I was not going—I was not going to be a ho. So I was going to be—you know, I'm going to report and I'm going to tell him the truth and actually I think that that may have helped me stay. Because at that point, we didn't know. We didn't—we—we didn't know that, “in me”—no. “On me, not in me unless you in me with a condom.” We didn't know all of that. All we knew was that this disease, it was coming, probably from sexual behavior, but we weren't sure, maybe even just kissing would give it to you. We didn't know at that time. So anyway, I—at that—that's how I got involved with HIV. And then, as I told you later, I worked with the—came to Newark and started the Project—Project Fire. Again it was working with HIV, but why the tears I shed is so deep is that the memories is not only of so many young men in particular that was lost in Vietnam, but also the young men and women and all of that that got lost to HIV over the years. That's—that's why it's so deep. I feel that I'm the survivor of a generation, two generations, three generations of people who died needless death to stupid shit that was going on in our society. Sending us to a war that we didn't need to fight, being part of a people who had a disease and because of who we were, we could not get help from our government cause supposedly the disease was coming from us and was limited to us. So, on the

one hand, I feel elated that I have survived, but on the other hand I feel so pained by the losses. We can't bring those people back! They had so much to contribute to our world. But we can't bring them back!

**CB:** What issues do you think are important to the gay community now in mind?

**JC:** I think there is—there—there certainly is a difference between what is important to the white gay community and what is important to the people of color community. It would be great if it was more cohesive but it's never been cohesive so I don't see that happening anywhere in the near future. To the white gay community, I feel—still think that their primary stuff is the notion of marriage equality and equality perhaps in other arenas. But for the people of color community, it is issues like poverty, jobs, although jobs perhaps also here as well, but jobs more crucially for people of color, HIV, health issues, immigrant gay community, immigrants and what's going to happen with that. I'm going to also push hard for us and the people of color community as—who are in our gay organizations to begin to acknowledge in more concrete form the fact that the Congressional Black Caucus has consistently supported issues around LGBT concerns over time and have never been given credit for that. Although we—we tend to now look to Obama, but if you look to the history of the Congressional Black Caucus, you will find that it has consistently supported the issue of human—human rights versus gay rights for gay people and gay people have never acknowledged that on the other hand and I think that that's why I'm separating this and I think as—as people of color, we have to acknowledge that for those who have done that work even if the larger gay community never does.

**CB:** If you had your life to do all over again, would you change anything?

**JC:** Oh, there is so much I would change. I don't know. If I had—see, see, that—that's complicated because you know changed life for me would eliminating the reasons for the pain that I feel, so that's kind of a—avery tall order. Because it means not having the wars we had, not having people treat HIV and, you know, as a disease of a particular group of people rather than a—a healthcare concern for all Americans, that kind of thing. So, yeah, those—those things to me is what I would change, I mean, because—mainly because they have left so many dead and dying. You know, I mean, if we could change that, oh, child, we talking about—we talking about a whole new life for all of us because those people would be here now contributing. Can you imagine if we still had Essex Hemphill and Marlon Riggs and James, you know, well, not—James Baldwin didn't pass from HIV, but, you know, all those people who passed, you know, all those brothers and sisters who in the—in—died in Vietnam? Oh, boy, that would— life would be so different if they were here. So, yeah, that would be kind of a very tall order for me. As far as my personal life, is, yeah, that was—I wouldn't change it because I appreciate what it has done to help me understand the world in the way that I understand it and to be able to share that in ways with others who I felt along the way who have appreciated it in terms of feeling that



they have learned something from my experiences that they could share with others and help them personally, as well as helping others. So in that sense, I—I wouldn't change it because I think I've learned so much despite—I think you—you—pain helps you learn a lot. What can I say, pain, elements of pain help you learn a lot. And that's not even counting, you know, the personal pain of the loss of—of people like JanHerman Veenker, my husband. I mean, he was a great man, he really was, who did a lot. I mean, he was the person who was the voice of the International Lesbian & Gay Association for such a long time. He was such a gentle, caring man. I mean, he didn't—I didn't even know he was Dr. until after he was—we were preparing the obituary, you know.

**CB:** Wow.

**JC:** Because he never expressed that, you know. He was—he had gotten his doctorate degree and, I mean, he was well known in the—in the Netherlands for his work. The Queen had given him this, in fact I got it. I don't know, I should pull that out. Had given him what is equal to a knightship for England, and they gave it to me, but in case I pass I got to make sure it goes back to the Queen. That's how they handle stuff like that. So, it's been interesting, interesting world. You know, I should say something about that too. Jan—for a long time gay—gay people had decided that they would not—there was no reason to—to be tested because it didn't help to know. You know, we decide that we wouldn't—I mean, what—what was the thing that you could do? People—the only thing basically to—you could do was you could—they would give you this medication that would kill you so why even do that? But one of the reasons why JanHerman and I also felt we didn't want to marry was because that, and—and that's one of the reasons why I won't marry in the US, is that I don't feel that marrying in the US, and that may be an answer to part of the question that you asked me before, is that I will never marry in the US because why marry in one state when you go across, you know, 200 miles, 300 miles, in another state and you're not—that's not recognized? I mean, who wants—so if I marry again, I would marry, you know, my partner Pierre who is Canadian. And when I married JanHerman, we married for—specifically he felt that that would clear up any issues around what he wanted to happen to his—anything that he wanted to leave in life, he wanted to make sure that there wouldn't be any problem with that. So we got married. Part of that reason we got married. The other thing was that we thought it was time because we had been together like seven years? Yeah, 1990. No, more than that, we had been together 1990 to 19—2003. Thirteen years. And so we had decided that it was time. But my point though is that I am now receiving his pension, but I pay American taxes on his pension, although my marriage to him is not legally recognized in the US.

**CB:** Okay.

**JC:** So take a deep breath.

**CB:** Do you have any words of wisdom—

**JC:** I've been going again.

**CB:** Yeah. Do you have any words of wisdom for the next generation?

**JC:** For—six words. Don't ever forget the struggle continues. I think if people, if they keep that in mind, what it infers is that they have a sense of their roots, to have a sense of their history, and they should have a sense that no matter how many battles you fight, you may have to fight that same battle again because the war isn't over. And one great example of that is voting. Who ever thought that this time in our history that we would have a 102-year-old woman having to stand in line for eight hours to vote? The struggle continues.

**CB:** What would your dream or aspiration be for the LGBT community in the future?

**JC:** My dream and aspiration would be that we would have a great—a greater understanding of it's never been about lesbian and gay rights, it's been about human rights. Once we have achieved and gotten a level of commitment and involvement for being better at human rights, then the natural flow would be lesbian and gay issues would be a part of that struggle as well, rather than the other way around. Cause it never could be the other way around, because when you talk about lesbian and gay rights, you're only talking about a specific segment of the population and when we have so much of our population who don't really know at any particular in time that they are gay or lesbian, then you are always going to leave them outside of that struggle. And we need everybody in the struggle so if you struggling for human rights, then all of the other will be subsumed under that.

**CB:** And lastly, is there any last comment you would like to make that we haven't covered?

**JC:** Well, we're covered. You talk about your dad.

**CB:** I'm interviewing you.

**JC:** I know, I know. I know. Nothing comes to mind. I think we hit the—we hit the major highlights, that's for sure. That's for sure. Yeah. And we had a lot of stuff. Stuff that brought back lots of memories that are still embedded there. I didn't realize that I would be so emotional today. But it flows and I allow it to flow and that's how I've survived. And that's been my—my savior, my joy is to be able to let it flow. Life is too short to hold it in, particularly emotions around stuff that pains you. You have to let it go. So thank you.

**CB:** Thank you.

**JC:** Yeah.

**CB:** Thank you very much.

**KS:** I hope you enjoyed listening to James tell his story. We truly all stand on his shoulders. Thank you to Two Tears, who allowed us to use their song "One Black Glove" for our theme music, which the band dedicates in honor of our mutual friend and queer Newarker who passed away, Ray Rivas. We also use the song "Follow Me Home" by Aurelio 350. And I want to say thank you to the Newark. LGBTQ+ community, the Queer Newark team, and Rutgers University Newark.