

**Queer Newark Oral History Project**  
**Interviewee: Rejean "Tornado" Veal**  
**Interviewer: Naomi Extra**  
**Date: December 11, 2015**  
**Location: Rutgers University-Newark**

Naomi Extra: All right, we're recording. It's Friday, December 11, and do you want to just introduce yourself?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. Hi, my name is Rejean Veal. I go by Tornado. From Newark, New Jersey. I was born and raised—I grew up here. I was born in 1987. Single mom, oldest child. [laughs] Yeah, I'm a proud member of LGBT Community.

Naomi Extra: Great. This is Naomi here, doing interviews. So you mentioned you're from Newark?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes.

Naomi Extra: So tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Newark and in your community. Where did you grow up?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yeah. I grew up kind of like all over Newark. We moved around in like every section of Newark growing up as a kid. So I always had the opportunities of making new friends, meeting new people. Getting different vibes and seeing how different areas work and stuff like that. Being the fact that I was always the oldest child, I had to be like my mom because my mom was always working hard and things like that because she was a single parent. And I there was five of us. So I was always like taking her place when it came to things. But growing up it was always just fun for me. I grew up as a regular child. I didn't know nothing about my sexuality at the time. Of course, I was a child. But I grew up regular. Like I played sports and went outside and played in the dirt, scraped the knees, arms. But I will say about growing up, around the time when I grew up, I didn't really too much focus on crime or that was never like anything I was surrounded around because of which area I was in. Our thing was outside playing chase and hide and go seek and things like that. I had a fun childhood. I really did.

Naomi Extra: That's great. I'm trying to situate you in Newark growing up. Which area?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: I was originally born in the Weequahic section which that there's **where [hospital.]** At the time, I believe my mom was living in East Orange. And probably like when I turned maybe about four or five, that's when we moved to Newark. We moved into Weequahic section and then from Weequahic section to like North Newark and the Ironbound section and just all over.

Naomi Extra: So you've kind of been all over Newark.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: All over Newark. I've been to like maybe about 45 percent of the elementary and middle schools around there. I've like **commuted** everywhere. I met so many new people. Even when I got into high school because I went to Malcolm X Shabazz High School.

Naomi Extra: Okay.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: When I got into high school, I realized that there was so many people that I remembered from like my childhood. Like I was like, "Wow. I remember I went to school with you and look how..." It was fun to be able to see things like that. So you're able to grow and watch other people grow. Let's see what else I could share.

Naomi Extra: I can ask you a question.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Okay.

Naomi Extra: Did you notice any differences because you've been in different areas and different schools in Newark. Growing up did you notice any differences between these areas or schools?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. I noticed that it wasn't so much of – I'm not going to say a war between different sections and boroughs and streets – but there was always a big competition. What I did like about a lot of the areas is that each area taught you something different about them like one area will be known for just like maybe a

lot of people there like you know, they're into a fashion, things like that. Like growing up, kids, girls, it's a Barbie thing. You may have one section where you had the roughneck girls who like to play basketball and stuff like that. Like every area taught you something different. What I always—what I will say that you can compare each area and borough was that regardless whether how bad the streets were or how guys who hang out in the corner, when it came to children in their area, they always made sure to take care of them. We always made sure, you know, summertime. The ice cream cart come, every kid's getting an ice cream. Even though, you know, they're doing something negative as far as like maybe selling drugs or hustlin' but they always—I always will say that even though a lot of male figures in the streets, they may be like they may not take care of their children, but when it comes to territorial things, they take care of their area. That's **what I loved** about it.

Naomi Extra: So it sounds like, and correct me if I'm wrong, that there was a sense of community?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes, it definitely is. It's definitely a sense of community. I love that people do have personal vendettas and things like that, but when it came to community, regardless whether they knew or not, people will always give back to the community. Whether they realize it or not. That's always something that I just loved growing up as a kid. Like now, I don't—I don't really see **none of** that stuff happen now. I think this generation is kind of missing out on just that—just being safe and things like that. Like the community is really missing out on these things.

Naomi Extra: I want to hear more about that later. I want to ask you—so you mentioned like streets and the sense of community, do you remember as a kid kind of knowing the different people like neighbors and having relationships with people on the street or people looking out for you in certain situations?. Can you think of—

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. Actually, when I—I want to say when I got into the Weequahic section. No, matter of fact, I want to say when I got into the South Ward, which was Clinton Avenue area and things like that. That's when I really felt like when it came to the block or the area that I lived in, I felt like everyone communicated like really well. Neighbors, we would all do things together. We would do block parties together. Cookouts together. If we see a neighbor in trouble—anything—things like that, we came to the rescue when it came to things like that. I've never really gotten into altercations. I had, but I haven't really gotten to really harsh altercations but living where I lived at, it never had to get that far.

I always had people who were like—I always had the community that was so over protective of me because I was kind of like the shining star. I didn't know it then but I was just very active as a kid. I loved to dance. I loved—anything gotten to, I put my all into it. And it wasn't because I wanted to be that top dog. I didn't want to do that. I did it for the fun—I felt like it as a challenge. Like I love to sketch. I loved to paint. These were things that—I tested my own limits. So I was always my biggest critic when it came to it. So being the fact that I was like that, the community would see me sit outside. For instance, people they would see me sit outside with a sketch pad and I will be sketching and "Oh my god, you can really draw." Like, "Oh, that's really nice." And as you know, that gets around and everyone in the community knows **I'm an artist**. "Oh, we saw you at the parade. You were dancing." Now I'm a dancer.

So it's like when it comes to stuff like that, when the community really knows you or gets to know you and see that you have potential and they know you can be somewhere, they keep you safe because streets are dangerous. They don't want nothing to happen to you. I used to—I remember one time I had gotten—I think I snuck out the house. I just want to go outside with some of my friends. I had to be eleven or twelve. This had to be a Friday night because I know there wasn't

school because my mom wouldn't have played that but I remember I had decided to stay outside a little later. One of the guys was—actually three of them, they were all standing out in the corner by the store and things like that. Me and my friends were like running around in the middle of the street and playing and running and hiding from each other. I remember they all came and yelled at us like, “**Y'all need to go** in the house [mumbling].” I was just looking like, “Oh my God.” I said, “Wait.” I was like, “I thought y'all be cool with us being out here.” Like, “Now, go in the house. It's not safe out here. Streetlights are on.” Ever since then I always—they always made sure. I can't do nothing. I can't do anything because the guys that I would think didn't care still got me. Like, you know, I'd walk away with my frown on my face because I had to go to the house. But—[laughs]

Naomi Extra: That's good.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yeah. [laughs]

Naomi Extra: That's good. I have so many questions for you. You mentioned you're an artist. **[00:10:00]** You had—at a young age—can you tell me a little bit about how did you get into that? Did you start with drawing and—

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Okay so. This was a really—it was kind of a funny story for me because when I share it with people, people really kind of like, “Are you serious?” Like they don't believe me. But I was in the kindergarten and you know, at the kindergarten, we had little yellow paper where you had to trace out the letters like the A's, the uppercase, lower case. Now, of course you know, being in the kindergarten, I barely know how to hold pencils. The only thing we need is crayons. We want to color. Things like, you know, is fine. So as this pre-school, it's just fun and games, arts and crafts. I remember one day, I think we were on the letter D, uppercase and lower case, we had to do the full entire paper and I finished the paper really quick. I was really sloppy but I remember the teacher, she was seeing me do it. She was looking at me. She was like, “**[unintelligible]**, you're left-handed.” I'm like, “Yeah.” She's like, “That's so

awkward and so weird.” I was like, “It is.” But I never realized that when I wrote, I wrote with my left hand. I never—it wasn’t nothing, I didn’t look at everybody else, okay, I’m doing the wrong hand.

What happened was where I was sitting at, there was a picture of Mickey Mouse. It was out of a coloring book, somebody must have colored it and put it on the wall next to me and I remember since I finished my paper so quick, I decided to turn the paper over and I just looked at the picture and I looked at the picture and I sat and just like drew the picture myself just by looking. And when I finished, I drew Minnie Mouse instead of Mickey Mouse. I gave him a bow and **I did** the lashes and a little dress. I looked down and I was like, “Oh, that looks nice.” I had to kind of congratulate myself and then my teacher came over and was like—she was kind of like wanting to go off and she was like, “What are you doing? You’re supposed to be doing your work?” And I’m like, “I’m finished.” She was like, “No, you’re not. You didn’t do nothing.” She was like, “Did you draw this?” I’m like, “Yes.” She’s like, “No, you didn’t.” I was like, “Yes, I did.” She’s like, “No, you just traced that, put that **[unintelligible]**.” I said, “No, I didn’t.” And she went and took the... took it down and put it next to each other and my picture was so much bigger than the original picture. She was just like, “Wow.” She’s like, “But you still didn’t do your work.” And I said, “**[Unintelligible]**. Yes, I did.” She was like, “Well, that’s kind of sloppy. How did you draw this really good like this, but your letters are sloppy.” I was like, “I don’t know.”

And ever since then, I would like watch cartoons. Like I will watch—I would go home and watch Cartoon Network and see **like Powerpuff** Girls and cow and chicken. I would sit and grab a paper and a pencil and I would draw as the cartoons just flicking past me or moving and things like that. And I would just create the picture. Once everybody started to realize that I had this gift cause I just **thought**—to me it was just a hobby. It was like “Okay I like to draw. When I’m bored, I’m going to do this.” Because I was a quiet kid.

But as I got older, I got more experience. I started to test my own limits. Like I would go to the library and get books of how to draw cats, how to draw faces and noses and things like that to perfect my own craft. Once I did that, once I started to get into that, when I got into middle school, I started to test my limits when it came to painting. I don't know why I've always had—growing up when people ask you what's your favorite color, one year my favorite color will be blue. The next year, it will be green. The next year, it will be red. But it was always those main three colors. And then when I started to get into painting, I realized that these are the primary colors. So it was like, I love—being the fact that I love all three basic colors, I can love these three basic colors but love every color that it blends into which may be getting into wanting to learn how to shade and we call it ombre. Basically like this, like how we would ombre like from a green to like a lime green. Like getting to things like that and then when I realized I was really good at painting, I wanted to learn the history like just go back and get into different painters of things like that who admired me because now I would need to find inspiration. Because to me, I was a hobby.

At some point, I started to look at it as in maybe I should just use it as a hobby. Maybe this should be something I really should get into. In order to do that, I need to take a step back and get into history finding inspiration because sometimes I would—when I got maybe like high school, I would grab a sketching book—I'm bored, I want to draw and I'll do like this. I don't know what I'll do. I don't know what I want to draw. Like I would have like, it's like I would have like writer's block but with sketching, it was like, what's wrong with me. And I realized I had to find the inspiration. Everytime I wanted to grab a pencil and a paper and to find something that would inspire me. Something that—it could be the littlest thing like this pitcher here with the juice. That one little thing—that one little image will inspire me to do something with just something maybe with slavery. Something like that. Add something extra to the image or you know wings, things like that. Like I would do something like that. I wouldn't do the

exact picture anymore like I used to do stuff like that. I won't do the exact picture, I would just take that. I would be inspired by maybe the texture, the color, the body and create my own out of it.

Naomi Extra: So did you have anybody who like kind of done this? Did this run in the family in any way? Or—

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Actually, I haven't found anyone in my family that could draw at all, like at all. My grandmother always used to tell me that our family was talented. For me, we have a lot of talent in our family when it came to like just people who were educated, people that really do things. Dancers and singers, but I was like the only artist. Like the only sketch artist. I was the only one who had the eye for it and would be able to actually envision something and put it on a piece of paper. They can envision it and try to put it on a piece of paper. It was like, okay, it's not as good as yours, but it's okay. Like, you know, things like that. So I was really the only artist. I've still been trying to dig information out of my grandmothers and great grandmothers to find out if someone else had this because to me, I look at things like—I look at talent as it is a genetic thing. It has to be passed down from somewhere. And I still have yet to figure it out. I'm still on my mission. [laughs]

Naomi Extra: That's interesting. So what do you know about your family history? What did your mom kind of do and was family like really supportive of this?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. My family has always been supportive of me with anything. I actually felt like I was a spoiled little brat because I got everything I wanted and I was the oldest. I wasn't even an only child. An only child I could understand getting everything. I was the oldest child and I was spoiled like rotten. I could get any and everything out of anybody. But my mom, she would tell me stories about when she was growing up. Like she was really heavy into dancing. She loved to dance. She told me that my grandmother was the same way. She loved to dance. She loved to step and do her little things and



stuff like that. I actually found out that my great grandmother was a really good swing dancer. Yeah, she was like amazing.

So I always knew that dancing was always something that was definitely passed down throughout the whole family because everybody is really good at it. My mom, sometimes she looks at me and be like “You remind me of me. I—like this is how I was. I **[unintelligible] like** me and my girlfriend, your godmother, we would go out and she’s like, “Remember the movie house **House Party?**” I’m like, “Yeah.” She was like, “Remember how the girl, the light-skinned girl and the dark-skinned girl was in a party and was a battling and then she was like, “That was me and your godmother. I was like, “Really?” She was like, “Yeah.” So we will go out, get our big bamboo earrings and get our hair done and have little matching outfits on and we would go out and just party and dance and do the whop and [mumbling]. That was like, “Oh my God, mom.” [laughs]

Our family, they’re very, very, very, very supportive of everything even when it came to my lifestyle, they’re very supportive. Like I **was** expecting the whole like attack of, “No, this isn’t right.” Because my family isn’t really, really religious but they’re religious. We grew up going to church and things like that. So it was like, to see them be so accepting of this—and I’ve never ever once—even as a kid, never ever once heard them come out their mouth and say anything negative about the LGBT community. Never ever at all.

My mom actually used to be around it a lot. She was like a – you call them fag hags. She was like a fag hag. She had her like gay mom who was like this guy who would wear furs and things like that so she—it just came natural to her. It was like she is used to it so—she was very supportive of it.

Naomi Extra: Is your mom from Newark and your grandparents are they from Newark?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. I believe on my mom’s side of the family, everyone is originally from Newark. I know maybe probably like my great

grandmother was probably from the South and things like that, but I know from my grandmother on down, we're all from Newark, Irvington, Elizabeth area, somewhere. From Essex County.

Naomi Extra: Okay, cool. So you started in kindergarten with drawing.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes.

Naomi Extra: Then at some point, you transitioned into dancing.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. Growing up, I was so in love with Janet Jackson, Michael Jackson, Tina Turner. I was in love with movements. I loved to—I would actually do that as I was drawing. I was sitting like listening to music or I was sitting, rewind like a Michael Jackson tape that I would probably like watched eleven, twelve times. I would sit back and just watch it and draw at the same time. I would be listening to the sounds, the special effects and everything that would go in with the music and watch the dance moves and see how everything connects. **So of course, you know, as a kid** I would always mocked Michael Jackson, have the little jacket on with the glove and I want the gloves and hat and things like that. Maybe when I got about like eleven or twelve, yeah, it had to be like eleven or twelve, I found an inspiration. And my inspiration was Aaliyah. She was my—I saw for the very first time, I saw her—I knew about her because my mom would always play her first album, things like that. As a kid, I was mostly outside. I was in the house watching videos or figure out who the artist is and how they look and things like that. I just always knew the music.

When she came out with the "One In a Million" album, I was watching the video, the "One In a Million" video, and I don't know why I was so glued to that TV. Like I was so in love with the side bang and the bra, the baggy pants and I was like, "Oh my God." I'm so in love with her and then I loved the way she moved because she had this tomboyish swag but it still was sexy but classy. It was just like—I felt like I found my

idol. That was just my one inspiration that I know that I have to follow.

I have to figure out who she is, what she's about. Like how is she in interviews and like what's her personality and as I grew to watch her, I noticed that it was more her just being my idol and I wanted to be her. I felt like I was her. I related so much to her. I loved her personality. I felt like I was the same way. I was very down-to-earth. I stayed out at drama. I was **into any of** those kind of things. I just like to have fun, be around my friends and dance and play around in the mirror, dress up and things like that. So my mom always thought that I was into her and she saw that every time she came out with a video, I was rewinding the tape to figure out every dance move and things like that. Then she started to watch me and noticed that like, "Wow, you can really dance." She's like, "You really kind of like to dance. You kind of take after me." I was like, "Really?" She's like, "Yeah."

You know me, I studied and kind of really understand myself so I was like I was going through the phase of not even knowing that I like guys but I was going through the phase that I thought I wanted to be a girl for a second. Like I thought I really wanted to look and be exactly like her, but eventually of course I understood it later on. When she passed away, it was like I lost my inspiration. Like I lost everything. Like I stepped away from dancing for a while. I don't know. I just needed to gather my thoughts and figure out how was I going to continue to let her inspire me without her being here physically.

There were a lot of things that I didn't get to see like a lot of—making her videos and things like that. Of course, later on down the line, we've got to see YouTube and Internet got so much more popular so I got to see things like that. To this day, she still inspires me to dance and I kind of like sometimes use—I use a lot of—she still inspires me even when it comes to voguing, feels that way.

Naomi Extra: Wow, how is that?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: What I do is—because my name is Tornado. I had got the name from... one of the guys I saw in the scene, he's like legendary. He was like my mentor when it came to voguing. He taught me everything. When I got the name created for myself, I knew that I had to create a whole persona for it. Like everything had to flow when it came to the name Tornado. I needed to make sure that the image fits the name. I needed to make sure the movement fits the name and things like that. So when I used to look up I would look up different types of tornadoes, twisters. All different types of storms and things like that and figure out how they move, how the movements start, how everything is created. I'll watch slow-mo videos of it and see how to move and then I noticed that by me watching it, everything I wanted to do was—every movement I wanted to do was to create a tornado but I didn't want it to be so like demonic or destructive, when it came to it. So I had to find something that was going to keep me subtle.

And Aaliyah was that. She was the one that I would think of—the slow belly winds and just like the way her swag was. I would mash that and tornado together and that's how I created... and then of course, you know, a lot of her image, a lot of the things she would wear and things like that, I kind of recreated in my own way. Like I would do like the crop tops and maybe the baggy jean. We can do those things. I do these like that now. I would do like stuff like eye patch and things. Little things like I make sure that the image that I have of myself, I have to keep it up. And I still use just the tornado and Aaliyah as my inspirations to keep everything flowing and going.

Naomi Extra: I love how Aaliyah has been such an inspiration because that moment, that album, I remember that and I remember Aaliyah and I—but I want to ask you. So Aaliyah was really important and pivotal. How did you then get involved in the ballroom scene in Newark? Or was it in Newark where you began to be involved in the ballroom scene?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. What happened was I had—this had to be my sophomore year. My sophomore year in high school. There was this one guy that was in my class like cool, **we were real cool and cordial**, I knew he was **in the life** but at the time, I knew about myself but I was still hiding it from everyone because it was like I'm so I didn't want to be the stereotypical gay guy who they think everyone has to wear rainbow and tights and I wasn't like that, I was just a regular guy and me and him would hang out a lot. I actually marched in the high school marching band so I was around a lot of openly gay guys who would dance and things like that. That summer going into junior year, I got introduced to a few other guy friends, a guy that was in my **[unintelligible]** I got introduced to a few of his friends. I would see them vogue all the time and I would be doing stuff. I first thought I was just like kind of laughing. I was like, "Oh my God, what are y'all do—did you just drop like that on the ground?" Like I wouldn't to drop in these clothes.

I would laugh at it, but I was like—secretly, I had an interest in it because it was a different style of movement to me. And I was always interested in something that was new. And I remember Kysheif which was the one that did the panel with us, he was around those people, too, at the time. I remember we were at a bus stop and they were playing a little vogue beat and clapping and everybody was like cheering and stuff like that. And I see everybody they go one by one and dancing stuff like that. I was looking around so kind of called me out. I was like, "Oh, I don't know what I'm doing." And I was kind of just moving all over the place, trying to mock what they did and I remember the first thing I did was drop to the ground because that's all I can remember doing.

And when I did it, they said I did it perfect. I did it exactly the way it was supposed to be. I did it at the exact time. I was like, "Yeah, you know, it's not that hard." It doesn't look like it's that hard. I mean I can tell that it's like a lot of technique when it comes to certain things. But I mean, hey, I see most of y'all drop with a beat when it—that beat hits, y'all drop so I just thought I'd drop it. I was just then Kysheif would break

everything down to me. He would say, okay, there's elements to it. There's the five elements and you have to learn each one. You learn the basics of each one and then you take it from there on your own. You create your own thing into it.

At the time I didn't understand it. I would just be like, "Okay, you just show me what you would do and I'll do." I would get better and better and better every day. Then when I learned about the ballroom scene, when I first heard about the ballroom scene, my uncle was originally in the scene at one point, my mom's brother. Growing up, I would see him like all these dark hair and things like that. I didn't understand it then, but me and him had a conversation. Basically once they found out about me and things like that, I told him about voguing and I'm learning how to vogue and he looked at me like, "No. Don't get into the ballroom scene." He told me everything that was so negative about the scene.

He wasn't in the scene for maybe about ten to twelve years before that. So it was like the scene could have completely changed, but him getting it into my head, I looked at it as in I don't want to be at the scene. I just like the style of the dance and I just want to learn it. I didn't really want to get into the scene. So I didn't get into the scene for maybe about four, five years later. Like after high school. I was maybe about like twenty, twenty-one when I got into the scene. I was like they would say I was like the—what would you call it—I can't think of a word to say what it is. It was like—oh, I was like the late bloomer. Should I say, the late bloomer, whatever. Everybody had started the scene early. Even the friends that I had at the time, they would be in the scene and things like that. But I eventually got into it.

Naomi Extra: So you were voguing for a while without being on the scene?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes, like I would do a fashion shows. We would do different type of productions and the whole little outfits we would do. I remember we did a Wizard of Oz theme when I watched the **live** thing, it reminded me of when me and my friends did it. We did it for a fashion show back in high school. Like I was

known for doing you know, all of that. I was at the band, I was voguing on the stage and pep rallies and things like that. It was like I was interested in—I mean at the time these people, the straight community didn't know what they were really looking at. They couldn't critique me because they don't know what the whole basic of it so I just like, okay, I'm just going to wing it and I would just go. But it was fun.

When I entered into the scene, I noticed that they were really harsh, like this but—my first time I remember actually walking they were really harsh on me. It was just like, "Oh no." Like one **[unintelligible]** you're not doing well. And I took that as a lot of people would get discouraged by it. And they would like—they just feel like they wouldn't want to be a part of the scene anymore. But for me, that made me go home and like perfect my craft and let them know like listen, "Oh, no, no. Y'all are not gonna air and tell me that I wasn't good." Like if y'all don't think I'm good, I'm going to go home and show you how much better I can get. So it was a challenge for me.

That's what made me step into the scene. Because I felt like you can't—it was like my mom telling me the drawing you just drew was so ugly and I don't know why you did it. That's how it felt. I was just like, "Oh, no, no, no, no. You're not gonna tell me I'm bad." I know I'm not bad. I've been voguing for maybe four years before I got into the scene so I had enough time to really get it together.

Being the fact that I was from New Jersey, there was always this big separation and big competition between New York and New Jersey. So it was challenging for me because I had to really step it up and make them know it. I had to make them know who I am. I had to make them like me.

Naomi Extra: In New York?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Uh-huh. And then everywhere else, too. It was like I had to make these people like me because I didn't want them to look at it as a state-to-state thing. Just because I'm from New Jersey and just because I have personal beefs with New Jersey does not mean you have to have a personal beef with me as well.

Don't take it out on me because you don't know me. And if you get to know me and trust me and believe you would love me because everybody else does. I just know. That's just my personality. Like I'm lovable. I love to make friends. Like I'm very friendly. I love it.

I made sure I continued to stay humble, but also still show them that I'm a threat. But still be cordial—it's a friendly competition. That's how I looked at it. That's how I stuck to the scene. I wanted to be friendly. It's going to be a friendly—I felt like I could be a part—I can be a part of the change. I didn't like the negative things that was going on. I felt like if I got into it, things would start to change and it did. Things started to change. It got to the point where a team from New York would come out here. We will go out there and people have balls and you would see—it was never—it's no longer New York versus New Jersey anymore. I was happy because I felt like I was a part of that and I look back now and like, what if I would have never gotten into the scene, like how will it be? Because people looked at me—even my own peers, they looked me as a role model and it was like I felt like anything I would do or say, like they're going to follow behind me. So I'll do that—I couldn't be that negative person. I couldn't get into the bad things and things like that because I have people watching me and I have people that were really going to follow me regardless of whether I wanted to be a leader or not. To me, I was still too shy to be like that but I noticed that people follow me. Like even my best friends and things like that. We go out to see the theater, it would never be an argument or if I lose a ball and things like that. It was like it would never be—my peers are all ready to fight and be negative. Just like “Oh you lost a ball. That was shady.” I'm like, “It's okay.” I never do these things with the **wins** I do it to showcase my talent. I do this to just express myself. Sometimes I do this just to get a lot of the anger and things that's built inside of me. This is my way of venting. I don't do it verbally. I just do it through motion, through body and things like that.



My things were never for the wins. It was never for a trophy or for the cash or things like that. I could care less. Then it got to points where the people that I know their movements were way worse than mine. If they win, they win. I mean, "Hey." It may have been they night. I look at it as hey, I just want to get on YouTube and watch myself and see how good I did. That's all I want to do. That's how I was, I was just like a YouTube fiend. I was like, "Listen, I just wanna watch myself. I'm proud of myself. Did you see that?" I've been practicing that all week and I finally got it. Yeah, like. And they'd be like "But you lost." Did you see that? Like do you see this movement I did? I could care less about losing. I wanted to get that out and I'm happy I got it out and it's on camera. Everybody gets to see it. Like that's how I was.

Naomi Extra: That's great. I want to ask you about some of the spaces that you were in during like ballroom competitions or events. Where were these things happening, in New York, in New Jersey? Who was coming with their spaces? Were like a lot of people from New York would show up more often or—what was that like? What was the space like?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: The spaces were—I always loved the venues that they would pick because when it came to New Jersey, when it came to Newark in general, there are a lot of venues out here but they're limited venues for the community's use because things that happened in the past kind of like jeopardized this and stuff like that. So we would only have like the Robert Treat Hotel and the Terrace Ballroom. We had limited spaces but when it came to New York, you had different theaters like Webster Hall and they have a lot of clubs out there so we were able to vogue things like clubs. They will have stuff at—one of the clubs named Warehouse and the Clubhouse and the venues—when it comes to balls, the venue is kind of like the most important part because you have to be able to find a space that is in your price range with at least—the capacity has to be at least maybe about a thousand people.

Like if you can find a place that capacity would not exceed—has a thousand, then you're good. Because a lot of

places won't even let maybe 200 to 300 people in it. And for a ball, like a major ball, you would get people from other countries and all across—we have people that come all across the world to come to balls. We have people that come and walk balls for like we have so many different women now that come from London and Tokyo and things like that. These people travel to come to balls. So it's like, we have to make sure that your venue is something that's going to like just get that extra umf because once you throw a ball like that, people will always support you. Even if you found a space that's just big enough to run out and be able to rent out and get a whole bunch of people in, if you can decorate it and make it like just fabulous—and that's something I love about the scene because it allows you to bring out your creative mind. Like people who are into interior design and things like this. This is your reality. You can use it in this life. You can be able to be free and be colorful in this scene. This is the fantasy world. You're able to express yourself. Things that you wouldn't normally do or wear out on the streets, you can wear here.

I've seen so many different like just amazing effects and props and it's just like watching Lady Gaga and Alexander McQueen like having a fashion show. That's how it would be. Like it would just be so amazing, everybody is so bizarre and wicked and we'd be like, wow, like I wonder like how that process was to like get yourself together for things like that. **And then it's like** you would see them in reality out on the streets and this could be a businessman. This could be somebody who owns a business or someone who just like who you wouldn't expect wear heels and things like this. It's just, it's a fun world. It really is. And to have these balls that started out in New York and branched off from New York to New Jersey and now DC, Philadelphia, Boston. As the scene started to branch out, things started to get very like—just really popular. It was... to me, it's still not an underground scene anymore like it's so well known. Being able to travel to different states and you get to see their venues now, you get to see how people would do things and cathedrals and stuff like that. You would just be like—you would be so amazed that just being able to just travel

to DC for a ball, it is like, "Hey, when I get off the bus, I'm gonna go see the White House." Now you can go and be a tourist for a second and then go to the venue and be like, "Wow, this is really nice." Like, "Oh my God, this is amazing. Maybe we should do something here one year." People are able to branch off and do so many things when it comes to the scene. It's very **fun**.

Naomi Extra:

So you mentioned that people can have completely different things going on, like they could be a businessman in like their outside life. So for you, are there those kinds of divisions for you or do they kind of overlap and also I'm wondering, did your family come out and see you perform? What was that like?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal:

Yes, they definitely do. My mom, she always loved to come and look. My mom is very, very, very, very, very, very, very friendly. She's friends with maybe about 75 percent of my friends. She talks to them on Facebook and things like that. When she come to balls, it's like, "Hey, she's not even my mom." People will just be like—she would be over in her own little corner so we're talking to her friends and some of my friends, so she's walking around. She's just enjoying herself. My mom is like that and when it came to be like to me stepping on the stage, she will make sure she's standing there just watching. She'll become in her face like, "You better do what you gotta do." Like, "You better do good."

Our family, they're very—they're amazing. I couldn't ask for anything better like I feel blessed because I have this family. I have people who are very accepting. I never had to really go to a struggle when it came to family. So I never would know how that feels. Like when people and friends share stuff like that. I would never like—I can't imagine how it feels. I wouldn't want to feel it because—I'm just one of the lucky ones.

But yeah, when it comes to just being with reality and ballroom, I was kind of like, I don't have the reality life of just like, okay, this is me during the daytime and then this is me at night. I don't have like...mine is always surround and around

ballroom, around dance. Everything relates when it comes to my lifestyle. I'm onto dancing, I'm into voguing. These are things that I'm able to make a career off of. Years ago, I wouldn't of—didn't imagine that I would be voguing for celebrities and things like this. So doing art shows and stuff like this. You know, being able to express myself and bring that same creativity from ballroom into reality. I've never imagined that I would be able to do that. That's how I'm doing it now. I love it.

Naomi Extra: That's great. Is there a moment that you remember where you really made that shift, where it became like okay, this is a career.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. I met this guy, he's an artist. His name is Rashaad Newsome. He was so fascinated by voguing and just the whole aspect. He wanted to learn everything about it, like from the basics on down and **learn** about the scene and things like that and he found a way to mix his style of art. He does a lot of like graphic designs and things like that and video editing and stuff. He figured out a way to mix that with a performance when it came to the scene. I met him maybe back in 2000 and—I want to say 2009. Maybe 2009 when he first like, first started out in an art gallery and things like that and me and the house I was in at the time, a few of us, we did a show for him. We did like kind of a flash mob. We all know it came out of nowhere and just vlogged and crazy wilded out and stuff like that. He fell in love with it. Me and him kind of lost contact for maybe about three or four years.

Four years later, he was having a ball and to me that was like the hottest thing to hear that a guy who is not even really in the scene **and really doesn't participate in the scene** and he's more so into the mainstream and art and things like that. That you're collaborating and having a ball with somebody from the scene and then I knew **right then** something is telling me I have to be here, like I have to go. I went and there were like so many celebrities and so many like just people that are into art and things like that. He was the one that mixed the mainstream art and musicians and things like that. He mixed all of that

with the ballroom scene. Like he put all of that under one roof. It was just amazing to be able to walk past a lot of people and be like, “Oh my God, she’s really here. Oh my God. He’s my favorite. He’s my favorite actor. Like I love him.” Doing things like that and I just happened to walk over to him. I actually walked his ball that night.

When I had got finished voguing or whatever on the stage, I walked over and he came over and gave me a hug. He was like, “Oh my God, we’re looking for you.” And I was like, “Really?” He’s like, “Yeah.” He’s like, “I missed you so much.” He was like, “I’m missing you since you did the show,” and things like. He was like, “I want you to take down, take my card.” He’s like, “I want you to call me tomorrow because I’ve been trying to get this project off the ground.” I think I waited—I think maybe I—I don’t know what I did. I think that the next day—I don’t think I called—I don’t think I’m—I mean it’s like a week to call him. I spoke with him. I ended up meeting up with him at his studio in Queen’s and that’s when the magic just happened.

I still just quite didn’t believe. I just thought, “Okay, this is like one of those gigs. We’re just probably going to do something else with him and then I won’t hear from him for another four years. But no, it was like real life. It was like, we’re going to do—he’s like, “I want you to be a part of this video.” We did—when I knew it was really real was the Brooklyn Museum was doing an exhibit based on heels. Just the history on heels, like where did it start from and what style of heels they had. The different actual heels that people wear. They had like a few Alexander McQueens. They actually had—it was really a good history lesson for me because I didn’t even realize that there were so many different types of styles of heels and so many different women that wear heels way back when. I remember they had this one heel. I don’t know why it amazed me so much, but it was like a wooden heel. It was like a platform, but in the actual heel, there were seeds. These were the shoes that women would wear and they would plant seeds in the ground. Like every time they would take a step, the seed

will be planted there. So this was something that farmers would use and things like that amazed me and made me believe like sit back, I will go to each little thing and just read it like, “Oh my God, wait so this isn’t really like a heel that a woman would just like wear and go to a club. No, this is what this was for.” It was really historical.

He asked me and a few people to do the show. He was doing like a live exhibit. He wanted to do like a live flash mob or whatever at the Brooklyn Museum where they were going to basically do the grand opening for that part of the museum. We had to shoot a video. He was creating a video to promote it and he wouldn’t let us know who it was for. We got to the video shoot and we’re looking at all the different heels and I’m like, “Oh my God, I can’t walk in heels.” I can vogue in heels but my foot too long. I’m looking at—I’m like, “Oh my God, I was picking up some of the shoes and okay, this is like a size seven. I can’t fit any of these.” And then he let us know that you know, “I want somebody out like put the boots on your arm. I want y’all to do different movements and poses and things like that.” He’s like, “You know, I’m gonna create like—we’re gonna do like seven to eight. I’m gonna—**when I tell you it took** maybe about nine, ten hours.” It was like just non-stop shooting behind the green screen. It was hectic.

But I had a lot of fun with it. It’s fun doing the makeup and different poses and different angles and putting on props like the green suits so certain parts of our bodies won’t show. After we finished, he was like, “I want each of y’all to pick up any of these shoes.” So we all picked up the shoes to wear there and he’s like, “Look at the bottom of them.” We all looked at the bottom and they were red so I’m like, “Okay, they’re like red bottoms, okay, what’s the thing?” He was like, “This, the day that we’re shooting for is Christian Louboutin.” We all were crazy and fell and was like, “Oh my God. For real? I’m so excited.” [Mumbling] He was like, “Yeah.” Then he let us know about the exhibit. The thing was killed Killer Heels Project.

It was something that him and Christian Louboutin mashed up together and created this whole exhibit. They did the whole going back to history and figuring out what came from it. They was the ones who got the people to ship these certain pieces up there and things like that. It still was kind of unreal to me because there was—okay, we just finished the shoot and I'm looking at the shoes and we're excited and whatever. But we still haven't met anybody. So I'm like, "Okay, whatever." We just did this eight/ten-hour shoot. I know it's going to take him like maybe a couple of months to actually put everything together so it's like, it was like, "Okay, now I'm back to reality. I'm back home and things like that." It was like, "Okay, I got the call about the show." It was like, "Yeah, I need y'all to be ready, we're gonna practice all week and practice for it." When we got to the Brooklyn Museum, that's when I knew it was real. It was just like, I was amazed at everything. I was like, "Oh my God. So many different celebrities. We have to meet so many people." And he was showing us like—he had just come back from shooting a video game, Solange.

What he did was his art work is kind of like royalty. Different artifacts and pieces and colors of like the Royal Family in London and things like that. He remodeled a Lamborghini, like the whole entire outside of the Lamborghini. He did it for Solange, for a video. He was there at the shooting, things like that. We were so amazed that that is so. I'm like, "When are we gonna meet her?" I was like, "Was Beyonce could be with her next time you see her." Like laughing and joking and stuff like that. He was like, "Ohm I met her too." I was like, "You just made a whole lot of people..." We haven't really met **too many** like we met a few people here and there. It was like, I want to meet some stars, stars. Then it got to the point where we would meet like—that's when just everything hit. We would go do shows here, do a show there. We'd meet so many people though. I met a lot of people, it was real. That's when it became real. It has been really an amazing journey. It really has.

Naomi Extra:

So 2009 until like 2015.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes.

Naomi Extra: You'd basically been traveling and doing all different kinds of projects.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Projects, yes, on and off. Everything started from out here of course, at first. In the US, like New Orleans and Miami and just different—just do different projects in different areas. A lot of our work would be in different museums all over. I know I did—one of the videos that I had shot with him is in a museum in San Francisco and I remember a woman, she had hit me up on Facebook and was sending me like a video of her in the museum and she was recording one of the videos. She was like, "Oh my Gosh. Is this you?" I was like, "Oh, yeah. That is me." She was like, "You know you're in a museum, right?" I'm like, "I am." Like what it is. Like yes. Like, "Oh my God you have to go back and make me another video and send it to me," and things like that. I always try to keep a lot of my work. At least it is not on social media and things that I always try to keep to myself and things that. I always try to keep some kind of recording, whatever.

From then, maybe about like 2011 was when I started doing things overseas. Like he would go to Hong Kong and Paris and Russia and things like that. He would only go and probably go to like museums or he would go to different art schools and show them his projects and educate them on stuff like that. That's how a lot of people from overseas got interested into voguing and stuff. So they would like watch us and he's so amazed. Like I have like a whole fan club in Paris. Before I cut my dreads, it will be like maybe six to seven of them that had dreadlocks out there and they will be like, "We're so amazed by you. We really love the way you move." And then I was like, "Oh my God. Am I like a little mini celebrity?"

I really didn't know how to take it but it was fun because it was like now going over there and being able to meet these people and being able to just like—just the environment, the air, everything is so different, it's fun to really be able to



experience stuff like that because a lot of people are so stuck in just this world we live in. Like they're just so stuck in everyday process instead of really actually thinking about the bigger picture like didn't you ever want to go to Paris or go overseas in general. To expand your horizons, be able to travel and do things like this. This is stuff that I've dreamed of doing as a kid. Like I would watch movies and be like, "I have to go there. I need to be able to see that. I wanna see different monuments. I wanna go see the Mona Lisa. I don't care how long the line is in there. I wouldn't be able to see. I don't care if I'm like a half a mile away from the picture. I just want to be able to just be there to say I was there, to be able to just do so many things like that.

So being able to have the opportunity now is just amazing. Still unrealistic to me.

Naomi Extra:

Wow. Is a lot of this work that you're getting freelance, like I'm wondering about like the business aspect of it and how—

Rejean "Tornado" Veal:

Now it's freelance for me because what I'm doing now is I still do projects for him and things like that but I'm more so trying to brand myself. Now I'm trying to find my niche. I'm trying to find what's going to push me out there, what's going to get me to be—just going to get me to where I want to be when it comes to it because growing up I always wanted to dance. I always wanted to do something. I always wanted to be active but now that I'm there, what's the next step for me? That's where I'm at now. I'm trying to figure out what's my next step and I'm slowly but surely figuring out because I see that I have so many different talents and gifts. I'm trying to figure out a way to mash it together. Use my artistic mind and my dance skills and push all this stuff together. I have to find my own projects that's going to make a longevity and continue to just expand and grow from that. I'm slowly, I'm figuring out. I'm working on it.

So now, everything for me is freelance, but I'm also trying to just build... just trying to build myself up so that I can be prepared for the projects that I want to do myself and I'm using

my surroundings because I have so many friends that are into fashion, into makeup, into hair. I have all of supplies and things that I need are surrounding around me. So it's like once that light pops in my head and I get it, everything is going to fall into place.

Naomi Extra: Tell me about what kind of work are you doing in Newark? Because I know you're doing a lot of traveling, is most of it like abroad, or do you find that you're getting called for a lot of things in Newark?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: I have in the beginning getting called a lot in Newark for some things. It used to be like that. But now most everything I do is like branched off everywhere else. I would be traveling more so New York, DC, Philly, things like that. I would travel, I'm also traveling out a lot. And when I travel, it's maybe like weekends, weeks at a time, stuff like that. Newark, I'm really like—I don't know. There's things that cannot be done in Newark but it takes a lot. In order for me to give back to my own community, I have to branch myself off. That's my plan.

Naomi Extra: I want to go back a little bit. Because when you're talking about—it's really interesting to hear about how you kind of came into being an artist. I was wondering what kinds of supports were here for you here in Newark. Was it in school were there are like—were you in art programs? Was there like a teacher? Or somebody, a friend, that kind of—

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: That helped me, yeah. Of course, every school I went to we had art classes. Some teachers were like they were just here just to do the work and go. When I got into middle school, there was this one teacher. Her name was Miss Austin. We used to always say she was Stone Cold Steve Austin's mom because she looked so much like him. But she was a person who helped me when it came to a lot of just technique, she showed me that okay, you're good at being able to look at something and putting on paper, but do you know the process of just doing this on your own. There's step that you have to take. There's a basic structure stick-figure you have start out with and branch out from there. So she would showing me

these things. She would draw out on paper and would look at me. She would be like, "Go home and study it." And I would be looking at her like, "Study it, this is so easy. Okay, I know I go from this to this to this to this."

The first when I went home to do it, I drew the first figure, moved on to the next figure, moved on to the next figure, then I realized I'm lost. Now I have all four figures in one but you can see all four figures on the paper and it's not supposed to be like that. The finished product was supposed to be this last. And I didn't understand it. She said, "The reason why I told you to go home and study it because I wanted to see if you will be able to figure out how do you do the steps without seeing the first three and only having the last one." She's like, "When you draw, the first step has to be sketched very lightly because it has to be easy to erase." I was like, "Okay, now I get it." Because I was trying to do that when I got to the end, I was trying to erase everything and it was like, "Wait, no, it's not coming all right because now I'm erasing the final picture." She's like, "No, you have to... once you take the next step, you erase the basic step. You keep going and going and going. It's like how when we used to do the bubble letters." They would teach you how to do. They would tell you, okay, make the L. Now you can make it into a bubble letter. Or they would do like the E and be like, "Okay, once you do that, trace out the E" and that's how you create the bubble letter. Then you erase the regular E in the middle. I was like, "Okay, I get it."

I had an uncle. He was the only person I knew that can draw but he wasn't a part of my family. He was my brother's and sister's, their father, because we have different fathers. But their father's brother. He went to Arts High School. So everything he would learn, he would come back and teach me. He'll be like, "Oh, I got to show you this what we had to do today. This is called the three-dimensional picture and things like that." I'll be like, "Oh, that's how." I'm not into drawing buildings or like the corner of the building. I mean it's good to learn. And when I got in high school, I would be in the art class and now I got to learn about this stuff. This is the

three-dimensional image that my uncle taught me when I was like ten. I was like oh, I'm about to ace this class. It was like I would go to my teacher like, "Okay, I can't take this art class anymore. Can I get the advanced class next door?" She was like, "Are you serious?" "Yes, I wanna change my elective. It's too basic for me. I know all of this." She was like, "How do you know this?" Like, "I was taught by my uncle. He went to Arts. I was taught at a very young age so this stuff is basic to me. I wanna get into like graphic design now." That was next door. And I was like, "Yeah, I gotta get into it."

I had the teachers to really build me up when it came to just critique and perfection. To me, it just was—it was fun. It was a lot of fun. To me, it would get to points where I would probably be frustrated and I would be balling up paper like crazy, like... I can't get this **finished**. But I always knew that eventually that whatever I wanted to create on paper was going to happen. I would just have that writer's block for a second. But they were the ones—my teachers and my step-uncle, they were the ones who helped me get over that writer's block. Like they would tell me a process that they would do like **woosah** or something. Let me go, take a walk real quick and come back or let me try to eat or do something like when you feel as though you have that writer's block, you have to take your mind off of it. Take your mind off of what you because you're going to **constantly** frustrate yourself and you're not going to—so you're going to waste paper. You're going to waste your color pencils. You're going to be sharpening all crazy and no, it's just too much. You don't want to do that. You're going to waste so much paper that you're going to be asking your mom or us to bring you another sketch pad and I'm like, "You know what, you're right. Okay. I got it." So I would go outside and play.

Then I would get to a point where I'm like, "Okay, now I'm tired." But the funny thing was, she was like, "Whatever you do, when you have the writer's block. After you have that writer's block, whatever you do is going to inspire you to put something on a piece of paper." So when I would go outside

and play, **I'd go outside and shoot some hoops with** my brothers and then like in the backyard or something, then it would just hit me like dang, "I wanna draw like **Michael Jordan** shooting a hoop like stuff like that would just hit you. Or I could just like look up at a tree and see a color. I would be like, "Oh my God. That green is really pretty. I wanna go draw something with that color now." I would just go and just create a picture.

It's like I've had the greatest teachers and didn't even know I had teachers at the time.

Naomi Extra: Right. Are you a member of any of the houses connected to the ballroom scene?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes.

Naomi Extra: How did that happen?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: I'm in the House of Revlon. What happened was—because I've actually been in a few houses since I've been in the scene. But I had—I was a part of the House of Jourdan, which was originally a Jersey built house. They had combined it with another house, a fresh new house that was created in New York. That was kind of like, you know, to build a **bond** bring that, all that drama between New York and New Jersey and try to bind them together to create something new. And we had like a house that was just like a force to be reckon with. We had the most talented people from both states and it was just—we had the best teachers. We had everybody. We had the best legendary people in the house. We had everything.

Eventually, the house kind of like fell apart. It wasn't more so the members because the members eventually—because of course, you know, those are rocky roads in the beginning. People were still like rolling the eyes and not being able to get along. But eventually, everybody combined and then came together and we got together. The leaders at the time, they were kind of like on two different pages and the guy, Bernie, he was the one that—he was the overseer of the house. He

was the one that appointed these two people as the parents and just made the decision to combine the houses. His thing was he wanted to be able to step away and let them take control of it because he has longevity. He's done this so it's was like, "I wanna take my break. I wanna be able to leave my house with people that's going to continue to keep it going." Eventually, it ended up falling apart.

What we did was—when it fell apart, they made the decision to, the horrible decision to decide to close the house. I was so mad because this was my favorite house. I felt like I was finally somewhere with family and it was just like a bond. It was just like amazing and I was around new people, friends. I made new friends. I had a whole little squad, a whole little team and we would all come out together and have matching outfits. Just fun. Like we were actually do like family nights. We would all go to Bernie's house and we would do like probably like a drag show night. Everybody would go around and grab like sheets and blankets and wrap themselves up in dresses, come out and lip synch and we would have fun nights like that. We would have like parties and we would do game nights and some nights we would have the parents and the legendary people come to the house and tell us their back stories, their backgrounds about how they got into the scene and who were their biggest competitions and stuff like that.

We wanted to learn about this stuff because when they were in it, we would only have like ball tapes. We would have actual cassette tapes and they would only be a limited balls up there. You wouldn't get everything that would happen. The people wouldn't tape every single thing so we wouldn't be able to see every single thing. So we would always want to know about this stuff. And when the house closed it was just so heartbreaking to me so I made the decision to move on to another house and I moved on to Revlon. When I moved on to this house, it was kind of rocky and weird because there were a few people in the house that kind of didn't see eye-to-eye with me because I'm already coming into the house as in—I already

made a name for myself. People already know who I am because of the prior house I was in.

Coming into this house, there were a lot of fresh faces. There were a lot of people that were a part of my category who were trying to just get out there so it was like me stepping in. They feel as though they're going to be put off in the back burner. I'm like, "No, it's not. No, I'm here to help. Honestly, like I'm used to having a team so I will want y'all to be a part of my team. I'm not gonna come in and just be like, okay, y'all stand in the back, I got this." I'm not gonna be like—I wasn't like that at all. And that was good because a lot of people that I didn't really know were my worst enemies became my best friends. Maybe for like a few years being in that house, I was always fighting with myself and pretend like I was unhappy because I was so used to that house Jourdan, I was so used to it. I was used to the feeling, the vibe of it. Not realizing that I was getting the same feeling of vibe from this house as well. But I was being too stubborn because it was different faces, but same energy.

When I realized that this is family, this is probably the only place I could be at, I was like, yeah I have to really step it up and stop—just get out my head and this whole ego thing and I'm going to stick with this house because this is the closest thing that I have that's going to remind me of my prior house. And I know if I was to—because I did eventually get in my head and leave and things like that but I realized that that was family. I have to come back to family because by me trying out a different house, I realized that they're not like neither one of the house that I was a part of. They're like no, this isn't me, I'm very family-oriented when it comes to anything. With family, friends, that's how I am. So it's like, to be a part of a house that where they only fend for themselves and think about themselves, it's like, okay, I can't do this. I'm going back home. That's how I was. It was like, okay, I'm not staying the night here, I'm going home.

Once I got back, it was like everything was the same. Everything still was the same. Friends are still there. Still

family. I just still feel that family vibe, that loving vibe. I'm sticking to Revlon.

Naomi Extra: When approximately, if you remember, did you join House of Jourdan and then they ended up closing and then joined—become part of House of Revlon?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: I joined the House of Jourdan in the end of 2008. The house closed in the end of 2010 actually. If I remember, it was the winter. And I joined House of Revlon the next month. I was kind of **bad because I didn't** give myself a chance to really observe other houses and things. **I let** the mom at the time, I let her convince me to come to a meeting and which was like happening like that next month and got to the meeting and walked in there and she just walked up to me, walked **into the middle of the floor and she** like, "Yes, see the new member. This is our new member of the house. I was just like, I was only coming to watch, but hi everybody. Then like, that one meeting and one rehearsal, I was sitting around just observing. I didn't really—I was still shy because even though these are my peers, these aren't the family that I had before. So it's like I'm still shy so I just sat there and I observed to see if I was going to like it.

I actually liked it a little too much at the time. I was like, you know, nah, nah, nah, I'm not supposed to be like that. I'm supposed to be like—You know what, I had to give it some time and think. I'm like, I have to think. I got to tell her that—it was like the next week I'm like, "Hey, I'm here."

Naomi Extra: Can you talk a little bit about how you ended up joining the House of Jourdan to begin with? Did you attend it like that you attended a meeting or was it a ball where you had some kind of conversation?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: What happened was I had a—I had just beginning to walk balls at the time and this was the time when you know they would try me a lot because it's like people didn't know who I was or they didn't want to know who I was. It was just **shade** in general. I remember my first time I would go into to a ball just



to be there to watch it, I met the Jourdans. I got to see them and see how they interact and the woman, her name was Tia, she's my gay mom now. She was the first person I've seen at Jourdan's that vogued. I remember I was in a club and they walked into the middle of the floor, she just walked in the door. I remember somebody came along and grabbed her. They walked her in the middle of the floor into a big circle. And I think what happened is, playing the club music or beats or something so everybody playing around and walked the middle group and the whole circle opened up and I watched her vogue the whole entire time. I was so amazed. I was like, "I love her." I really love her and I kept, "Oh my God. This lady knows how to vogue." Any my friend was looking like, "You know that's not like really a woman, woman. And I was like, "For real?" She's so pretty. I would like the way she—she can vogue like a woman. Like this is how I wouldn't think of a woman voguing and stuff.

Ever since then I was like just so obsessed with her. I was like, oh my God. Then now found out about the whole gay mom and dad thing and I was like, I want her to be my mom and she's going to be the only mom I have. That's it. She's going to be my only gay mom. And when I met Bernie, my best friend used to always—my best friend was always at his house and Bernie was like his mentor basically. I would go and hang out with him at his house and things like that. I would just feel Bernie's **vibe** and it was so lovable. He was so fun. He was a little catty and a little shady but it was all fun and games. It would be like, okay, he's going to read you but then be like, "Oh, yeah Miss thing. You know I will talk about you. Look at them shoes and they're like..." No, it was just fun. **He was very comical.**

I love that about him because he was so down-to-earth and he wasn't like his generation, the people that were trying me at the time. He wasn't like them. Like he was more so hey, I'm **going to be honest, I'm going to be real.** If you looked a mess, you looked a mess. If you did good, you really did good and I'm going to praise you because you did good. I just

happened to go to the Latex Ball, which is one of the biggest balls of the year that they have in New York. That was my first time actually walking a huge, huge, huge ball. And they had the big stage and they had Janet Jackson there and all these different— they had so many. They had maybe about seven to eight models from top that was on seasons of America's Next Top Model. Like they had Teyana Taylor. They had stars everywhere like you would just be walking past stars and didn't even know. Just amazing so. Right then and there I got nervous instantly. It was like, "Oh my God, I'm scared. The stage is huge. It's so hot. So bright light. So long. I don't even think the people are going to be able to see me." And the tightrope that I was walking on at the time was like **Virgin Vogue** which is like the new comers that vogue. I don't know. I sat and I got on that stage and I just went completely ham. I was just like I have to wing it. I was like, "I can't sit up here and just be based off my fears because this is a big event. This is the event that everybody is watching. Everybody is going to talk about. I don't want to be the person that they talk and laugh and joke on. I want to be the person **[unintelligible]** did you see that new little one with the dreds. He was really good. We got to find out who he is. I was like this is the time where I have to make a name for myself.

I got on the stage. I went to ham. I made through like seven or eight battles. I was the final battle. It was me and it was another guy from the House of Jourdan. He was a newcomer. He was the only—me and him, we're the only ones that were really like doing all the battles. We would beat every battle that we had. Made it to the end and of course I was tired. I was like, okay, I'm out of breath. I don't have any more energy in me. Me and him just battle and stuff like that but he just like, went completely **ham on me**. I was just sitting like yeah I know I lost this one, but hey, I made it to the end. I thought I wasn't going to make it through the first battle. I'm excited. When I got off the stage and I remember Bernie came over to me. He was like— came and gave me a hug and he said, "I'm so proud of you. You know I never would have got to see you vogue, vogue before. You did really good." I was like, "Yeah,

I think, we have to steal you. You going to have to call me.” I was like—I just sat down. I go so excited. I was like, “Really?” He’s like, “Yes.” Oh my God. **I think I’m about to be in** my dream house. And I was telling me best friend, he was like, “Yeah, right.” But I was like, “Bernie just told me he wants me to be a part of in his house.” I went to the next meeting, I was in.

And then I remember I was telling him that—I told him about the lady that I saw. I was like, “Yes, Tia was like—I’m so in love with her. I want her to be my gay mom.” He was like, “Oh, you do?” He walked over to her and he was like, “This is your son.” She looked over, she was like, “Hi, son.” I was like—I was so—I was like ah. “Oh my God, she’s hugging me.” I treated her like a celebrity and we exchanged numbers and we talked every single—we would talk every day. We never really talked anything about the scene. Everything would be like just personal life. Like how are you doing and things like that.

I found out that she was a huge Aaliyah a fan. I found out that she could sketch. I found out she was a dancer. So we were like—it was just like a match in heaven. Like you were supposed to be my mom. That’s how it was. It was just amazing. I had the family in Jourdan. I had it. I had the mom. I had the father at the time. He was the one who taught me. He was the one who gave me the name Tornado. I got the name Tornado when I got to the House of Jourdan. I had my gay mom and my mentor, which was to me my gay dad. These two are like the perfect parents for me. Like he’s my teacher and she’s like—me and her relate so much on a personal level. It couldn’t get no better than that. On top of the fact that I still had all my friends that I’ve learned how to vogue and grew up around. They’re all a part of this house as well. So it was family. I just—it was just everything.

Naomi Extra: Wow. Are you still in touch with Tia?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes, definitely still in touch with her. Me and her talk still maybe about every day. We talk on the phone. We laugh. We

joke about so much stuff like—she’s into makeup and things like that so sometimes she would make little videos. Little funny videos on Facebook and stuff like that on her little makeup. She’ll do one thing where she’d have like a whole bunch of crazy stuff on her face, covered thick, come back and face all the nice and pretty and I’ll be laughing and joking with her. Or sometimes, I’ll call her and be like, “Did you see the video I tagged you in?” She’d be like, “What video?” She’s like, “[Unintelligible].”

We still joke around, hang out, always go out, have a good time, drink. Recently, we’ve been like getting together because me and her really used to never like—we would be in a studio together and like vogue around each other but we would never like—really actually critique to each other. So we’re getting to the point where we do that now, we do that a lot now. Which is good because she’s still also my inspiration as well. She’s one of the ones who I admire because of the way she moves. She moved so quirky and different. It was like the odd ball. It was so unique and that was my thing when it came to just movements. Always like something that was unique and something that was different.

She was the one that inspired me to test my limits on different things that I would do. Because I was so stuck on wanting to move like **a tornado and**, we’ll do the different dance moves and have the style like Aaliyah, but then I never realized that I’m flexible. I do a lot of things that normal people can’t do. So why not try those things out when it came to it. Like I would do things like she would do stuff where she would bend her back all the way. And she would be on her tippy toes, bend on her back but her head is really like this close to the ground and she’s not touching the ground. The thing that’s touching the ground is her toes. She would be doing things like that, like matrix poses or something. I was like, “Wow, I can do stuff like that.”

And I would take a lot of things that she would do and recreate them on my own. Little did she know she was teaching me as

well before we got into the studio instead of training each other, but yeah, I still keep in contact with her.

Naomi Extra: Are there any other big influences that you could think of?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. I was influenced by this one woman, her name was [Alora]. She had passed away five or six years ago. But she was one of the people that I watched like the ball tapes and stuff. At the time when I didn't want to be at the scene and just wanted to learn. Just the style. She would be one of the ones who I like because her style of vogue was dramatic. It was so different. It was dramatic but it was still something lady like and sexy about it. It wasn't just off the wall. She was the kind of person who—she did things in the spur of the moment and would make it into a big legendary moment like she would be the type of person who would jump over a crowd of people literally just be like, you know what okay, oh they're doing tens. She'll just be standing way in the back somewhere and next thing you know, you'll see her just takes flight, just run, jump over people and now she's on the floor and everybody's going crazy because this is the moment. This was something nobody was expecting and watching her do things like that and watching her emote and vibrate her body the way she moves it. It was just like, wow, I was so amazed.

I was just like I want to meet her and things like that. I was so happy that I did get the opportunity to meet her and be able to be in the studio with her and she would teach me things and stuff like that and she was the biggest clown ever to like—she made everything fun and funny. That was just her personality. She gave me this nickname. She used to call me Rafiqa because—and I don't know why she gave me the name. I know why but I always looked at her like, "Why would you give me the most **ghettoest** name ever, Rafiqa?" She's like, "Because you like came in the air and you was doing this little spin." I think I must have a dress and ponytail. But as I was spinning, the rubber band was coming out but it only was attached to maybe the bottom of my dreds. So when I stopped, my hair was like this sideways. "Oh, you're like this girl named Rafiqa so that's what I'm gonna call you Rafiqa." I was like, "Okay,

whatever.” She was like, “Come on, Rafiq, you gotta give me this that and the third [mumbling].” She would teach me stuff and I would be like—I could never take her serious. Of course, I would still learn or whatever I couldn’t do in the studio at that time, I would go home and practice it because she would have me in stitches in the studio. I wouldn’t be able to do things. She can’t sit still. She was just like everywhere but she was really a ball of fire. I was so happy that I got to—this is a woman I would watch just tapes of to see her vogue.

Some people like to base people’s personalities off of seeing them on a clip. You can’t really do that because a person can be the most shadiest person while they’re voguing. But could be the most humble person, the nicest person you would ever meet if you ever got to meet them. So to be able to see her personality, like to be able to meet her and just see how she is and the way she acts like—I was just amazed and happy I got to be able to experience that from her because it’s a person I admired, I just looked as and just voguing. To even hear person’s voice, to hear the sound of they’re voice, it’s amazing me, too, because looking at a clip you just see them vogue. You see the move. You see the way they—just their catwalks and the sassiness about them but a lot of people personalities don’t really match the way they move.

It’s like to see somebody like that and then to meet them in person and hear their voice, see their mannerisms just like, “Wow.” I don’t know what I was expecting but I wasn’t expecting you to be like this. It is always a good thing though. It’s always something positive. Like I met a lot of people. There’s this other guy. He’s really kind of like my gay dad too. His name is Bubby. He’s from Philadelphia. He was one of the guys that I admire because his category is like— they call it “Realness With a Twist.” The category is you have the image of a straight man but the secretly behind closed doors, you know how to vogue. To be able to see—like when I met him, he had like this little cuntty outfit on, a little crop top, a little colors and socks and stuff and I was looking. I was like, oh my God, he’s so gay. But like he looks so much like a man, like

dressed up like this and like he's voguing and stuff and the way he was moving was so sassy and sexy and smooth. And I was just looking like, "Oh my God." He's a little more feminine than me the way he moved. That's how he was. It was like the feminality of his movements was just like—

I remember me and him, we spoke that day. He was talking to me. He walked up and he was just like, "Hey, what's going on?" He said, "Aren't you in my house, right?" I was like, "Yeah." "You were just like switching. And now you're like..." I thought it was a front. I'm like, maybe he's trying to like kick it to me, talk. But being around him, I was like, wow, you are really like a masculine man. This is you, this is how you live your life every single day. It's just that you know how to vogue. And I love to see stuff like that in people because you can't believe—just like saying you can't judge a book by it's cover. You cannot at all. You can't see a person and just automatically think okay, she's mean or she's shady because she may have a frown on her face. That could be her natural face or expression. She can be the nicest person you meet and that's how it is with a lot of people one the scene especially like the people that I'm surrounded around. Like you.—not only I can feel good vibes and things like that with some people so I know my surroundings are always like good people I make sure I'm always surrounded by them.

I just love the experience of just seeing just new faces and being able to meet these people because when I came out of the closet, I wouldn't expected that I would have met a million and one gay men and transgenders, transwomen, transmen. These were things that I didn't even think twice of as a kid or—I used to have a big fear on like drag queens and things like that when I was a teenager. So to be able to look at that and how I was and how judgmental I was before and see how accepting I am now shows a lot of growth within me and it shows a lot of growth within a lot of other people as well. That's something that I'm working on as well.

I want to also educate a lot of the youth because a lot of the youth, they have a lot more opportunities than we had. But

they don't have the history and just those mentors to really show them like people that they can really relate to. People that are young... still around their age bracket. They need people like that to be able to educate them and show them that a lot of things that you all are doing... just teach them positive ways about things. Just show them everything because we had that. I had the people to teach me the history on the scene, teach me on the history of the lifestyle and stuff like that. A lot of people don't have those opportunities so I feel like me and my generation, it's time for us to start to give back because if we don't we're going to lose. We're just going to lose out on our youth because our youth is really suffering now. They really are. The lifestyle and generations really suffering, a lot of people not really... it's this rap music and things like that. There's just so much negative stuff that's coming out of just youth now. I've come across a lot of people in the LGBT community. A lot of people there are like 13, 14 years old. These kids are smoking and drinking.

I just got finished playing hide and go seek before I turned 13. I was still a kid at heart. I still watch cartoons. I don't care about cell phones and gadgets and all that. We didn't care about these stuff. We found other ways to have fun. Just like these kids now. These lifestyles, they just start moving too fast, really, really fast. I didn't come out the closet until I was 16. I met a kid who came out at like 11. I was like, are you serious? Do you really know this is the... I understand, some people you know, it's like that. But it's like being the fact that you're so much younger, you need to be educated so much more because there's so many ways your life could go wrong without a person that's really going to help guide you to the right place.

That's what we've been... me and a few of my friends have been working on now. Especially the ones that was sitting on a panel like we do things like that. We do the interviews at different schools and stuff like that. Because when it comes to the LGBT community, like high school and grammar school, they're not going to teach you about safe sex with the same sex.



They can't really educate you on that and even though there is a similarity with it, when it comes to the different infections and things like that, but there's... you compare and contrast it basically when it comes to that. There's things that they can't teach you and there's things that we can't teach you when it comes to that. We try to do things so we go to different schools and educate them. We just educate, just the youth in general, not even just... We don't even separate it from our community and straight community. We just do it all in general because at the end of the day, this is something that can educate straight community, too.

These are people that—we don't really know if there's people in the straight community that aren't really... that **are** still curious and confused about their own sexuality. So it's good to kind of educate them. We may not... some people may not think they're listening, but trust me, a lot of people are listening. When you're talking, a lot of people will listen. It's good to educate just everyone in general. That's why we do have like discussions and stuff like that. We also do a performance when it comes to—just us, with us, us friends and we're doing **Project WOW! and stuff**. We do a **performance** when it comes to LGBT community and I always tell them—it's always a debate when it comes to our community and straight community. It's like I had to get to the point where I had to go like, "Let's stop separating."

Because at the end of the day, we're all human beings. We're all the same. You're male and we're female. It's like taking the LGBT community and calling it their own personal race. It is like it's okay to acknowledge and things like that when it comes to successful things that happens with our community, but it's also a clutch because it's like stop trying to—don't try to belittle the straight community because they try to belittle us. We don't want to stoop to their level. We want to show them that we're equals as well. This isn't a racist thing, a black versus white. We don't want it to be like that. We want to be the change. So in order to be the change, we have to be better for ourselves and stop being a stereotype. Stop being a

stereotypical thing when it comes to us. I always make sure when people talk about stuff that they always say, just say community in general.

Now when there are certain things we want to talk about the LGBT community and it's not pertaining to the straight community, then it's different.

Naomi Extra: Right, well, that's really... that's wonderful. That you're doing that kind of work. I just want to ask you a few more questions. I was wondering about—so you mentioned that when you're 16, you came out and then you graduated from high school. What was that period like between being 16 and graduating and then moving into the adult world?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: I was a very, very popular person in high school once I came out of the closet. I don't know. I just was that person that just **interacted** with everything. I just learned how to vogue and I would do the fashion show. I participated in almost every activity in high school and it was just for fun. It wasn't because I wanted to be Prom King in the future or Mr. Senior. I didn't care about none of those things and things like that. I don't know. I always made sure everything I did was fine. I always made sure my surroundings were fine and even though I came out at 16, I was very respected when it came to the whole movement because at 14, 15 years old, I had straight friends. I had friends who I would go outside and we would play basketball together. I will try out for the basketball team with these guys. It was like that was something that I always felt like I was going to lose a lot of friends because of that but it actually made a lot of my friendships stronger when it came to guys because it was like guys wouldn't look at it and be disgusted. They would just be like, oh it's like... I mean like you're still yourself. We can't say nothing about it. You won't make a pass at me, right? I'm like, "No. Trust me. If I would've made a pass at you, I would've got you." But no, it's not that. I was like, trust me. I don't do that.

When it comes to guys, when it comes to... I had to let a lot of guys know. When it comes to guys, I'm only into guys who

are into guys. I only like gay guys. I can't deal with the whole straight guys and trying to turn them out and trying to—I'm not into that. Me growing up just a regular boy. I'm used to having those... just those male friends. Male friends that I don't like in that way. I may, of course, I may look at certain people certain ways, but it was like that. High school is like—I made a lot more friends, a lot more straight friends. Yeah, I made a lot more straight friends than gay friends because a lot of people in my community were just like, they were kind of like **catty and** haters and it was like, "Y'all know me. You know I'm cool. You know I'm quiet. You know I'm nice. You know I'm very loving and I love to make friends." But of course, this community always loves that competition, they love to battle—be better than the next. Be better than each other. It was always a big competition when it came to them. So, I had more straight friends than anything.

I still would like—me and my friends, they would still do sleepovers and invite me over. They would have parties. Locking parties and I will be the first person everybody is calling. Everybody like, "**Come on, you coming?**" At first, I used to always think, "Hey, they probably only invite me because I know a lot of girls, I'm going to bring girls." But it wasn't even that. It was just like, you coming? "Okay." And I would just go. I would just... was fun so when my senior high school came, it was like... I was just one of the most popular kids in school. I knew everybody. If I didn't know you by name, I knew your face. I spoke to every person in school. I didn't care if you were the biggest nerd in school or the least popular person in school. I spoke with everyone. Lunch time, I sat at every table. Of course, they have the popular tables and things like that. I would probably glance over, speak, hang out for a second. The next thing you know, I was sitting over here. I want to sit over here with y'all today. And they'd be like... a lot of people used to be always be like... looking like, "Oh my God. He's really about to sit with us?" I'm like yeah, I see some of y'all sketching. I want to see. I related to every stereotype in high school. I related to all. I felt like I am—because I was there. Of course at one point in school, I was a

nerd and when I was in the second and third grade, I always hit one of those points of high school where I was one of those tables.

It was like being the fact that I'm not that catty or shitty person, I just mingle with everybody. I'm just friendly. I just can't help it. I love to meet new people. A lot of people that were in high school... a lot of popular people that were in high school, they were the type of people who "I wouldn't sit next to her because she just look like she wore that the other day." Being really mean and nasty to people. But what does her image have to do with her personality? These people will be the most loving people. These people, the funniest people. I'm around funny people. People who would make me laugh and I'd be sitting at the popular table like "Y'all are boring." All y'all want to do is talk about nails, hair, your boyfriends, and all that stuff is boring to me. Okay, sometimes y'all talk about fashion, but hey, that's okay. "But y'all are girls, I don't wanna talk. I'm not gonna talk about heels. I don't wear heels." It just was like I've never related to the popular people. I was my own lane when it came to popularity.

After high school, I wasn't ready to grow up. I really wasn't. I was so stuck on that—just that lifestyle. Like I loved how I was in high school. I loved just my peers. I loved how... I just loved everything about it. My first year after high school, we would do this thing where... because I **marched** in the high school band. We do this thing where alumni—like once you graduate, you're only allowed to do performances with the high school marching band the first year after high school. You can't do every performance. But you can do some of the main ones like competitions, and things like that. Because at the end of the day you're still in the age bracket. I would always go back and still teach. Sometimes do performances here and there, if they did like battle of the bands or something, I would do stuff like that. Eventually, I branched off. I got to the point where I would no longer march. I would come back and just teach. I will be the instructor. That's what I wanted to do. I want to instruct and things like that.

Of course, those first few years after high school was... I would do that, still be dancing, doing art and stuff like that. I still wasn't part of the scene yet. I didn't get into the scene until I was 21. I was still doing so much. I was trying to figure out what I really wanted to do with my life. It was like if I'm going to do anything, it has to be based off one of my talents, one of my gifts. But I thought at the time, I had to pick one to focus on the most and then just eventually work my way with the other ones and I could never figure out if I wanted to be an artist or did I want to be a dancer? Or did I want to be a model? These were things that I was fighting myself with and my grandmother, she told me at the time, she was saying that you're still young, you have a lot of time on your hands... you have so much time to really sit back and think about what you want to do. You're not even 20 yet. You're okay. When you hit 25, that's when you should really be more so trying to figure yourself out the most. That's when you should be like, okay, now I gained this, now **the plan needs to** be in motion.

At the time, I chose dancing over everything. I was like, I'm just focused more on dancing. So I would do like talent shows and competitions and they used to have that thing called Newark Idol, which was like... just a local version of American Idol. They would do like... have everybody coming to audition, things like that. I was helping out with that and I was learning how to be a part of productions like learning the lighting and placements and things like that when it came to theater. Because that was something I was a little fascinated with, too. I just couldn't sing. But I would do the stage plays and be a part of dream girls when they would do it out here, stuff like that. Did so much. I was like, being the fact I had some time, I was like, "You know what? Let me get all this out now because once I hit 23, 24, all this **fun that** I'm having, I need to get in motion. I will work during the daytime, work during the mornings and stuff like that, go back to my old high school, teach a few days, help out with productions and we would do stuff at NJPAC.

I was just everywhere, when it came to it—I was just everywhere when it came to just life. Everywhere I just was doing everything, I was like listen—I don't need a lot of sleep. I'm still young. I could do whatever I want. Now that I'm old enough to be able to hang out and do... once I got to the age where I was able to hang out and do whatever I wanted, I didn't. I was focused on—I'm not going to a party. I'll go to the studio. Or I'll go to a show. If they're having a competition or talent show or all stars or something in New York, I'll go to that. They'd say let's go to the club. No, I don't want to go to the club. Well, now you're old enough to go to—that's fine. I'm okay. I don't want the club. I want to dance but I don't want to dance in the club. I want to be able to just drop it like—I can't do all that in the club. I'm trying to be cute in the club. I don't want to do that.

I did everything backwards when it came to... from 16 and getting out of high school. People, they would... at 16, 17, 18, people, they would sneaking in the clubs and things like that. So they'd gotten to the age where they are able to do it and they would just like... just go party crazy. They would travel to go to parties. Miami, things like that, take trips. I was the type who waited until I was after 25 to decide I want to go out clubbing and then I realized that it was **boring and** it was already too late for me. It was like, "Yes, it's not gonna work for me." I just stuck with dancing.

Naomi Extra: That's great, but it's really interesting to hear your trajectory over time and all the different things, NJPAC and and all of those... I bet there's lots more that you can't even remember.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. It is. I was doing fashion shows since I was nine. That was like actually a hobby. That was more so really a hobby. I didn't start taking that serious until I got into high school. I only took it serious when I came to high school because that's when—fashion shows were like a big deal. All the local designers would do stuff at the Robert Treat like the big bang out shows and hair shows and things like that.

Naomi Extra: So those were—they weren't at school necessarily, they were—

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: They weren't, yeah. They weren't. What happened was what we did—when I got into high school, the vice principal of the school was in charge of the fashion club. What he would do is we would do fundraisers and things like that. We would raise money to be able to pay for a venue to have a fashion show instead of having it at school because nobody really wants to come to high school and sit in the auditorium and watch them walk across. Nobody want to do that. We wanted to be a little more professional, a little more classy. Because we would do the whole skits and themes and stuff like that. We wore big costumes. To me, it was semi-ballroom scene. We would do stuff like that and then still have maybe 10 to 12 designers. They will come and bring their clothing lines and we would walk in their things and in between the skits and shows and stuff that we would do.

We always did. Always did different venues. Doing that... after doing my first fashion show in high school, that was my sophomore year. After I did the first one, that same night, a lot of designers were saying like, "Oh, yeah, you're really slim and tall. Maybe you should come... Take down my number. I'm doing a show at Kean University in a couple of weeks. I want you to walk in it." I was like, "Wow." I started looking at it like, "Wait, can I really be a model?" I was like, "Oh my God. Maybe I should perfect this too. Maybe I should get in to like... How am I supposed to stand? How's my stance? How should I walk? How should I turn? Should I not blink too much like that?" That's when I started to take it a little serious. Okay, **I'm all in** pictures and I'm like—this—I got to make sure in every picture that my eyes are good and put on a sexy face, make sure my hair looks nice.

I took it serious. Like I will go and get manicure, pedicure, stuff like that. I'm okay. I think I want to be a model. So doing that, I got into hair shows and every time I got into a hair show, I would do the—I don't know why for some reason I always do it with the right salon because we will always win. When you win—when we won we won like probably like

\$5000 and then we will win a spot in [Atlanta's] biggest hair show in the world. We would be able to participate in that. We would be able to do so much so—

Naomi Extra: This was in Newark?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: All of this stuff happened in Newark.

Naomi Extra: Were they doing your locs?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yeah. They would do my—depending on the theme that we will go for—the year after we won, we were the special guest salon that did the next competition because since we won last year, we couldn't compete the next year. And the theme of the hair show that year was a jungle theme. We decided to do our skit based off the jungle theme because we're not part of the competition so we don't have to really go all out. Since we're here to represent ourselves and also represent **y'all**, we're going to use y'all theme. So we came up with the whole big African skit and we did like Coming to America. They had my locks all the way up, in this big band and there was like... almost looked like it was like a tree almost. They had the leaves and stuff hanging out of it and I have all this African print on. I was kind of like—dag, what was his name. I was kind of like the witch doctor, basically. We would do stuff like that and everybody would do all different types of stuff. One girl she came like Eve. There was one guy who came like Adam and Eve. They came, Adam and Eve. They had the leaves. She had the leaf bra on with this big wow hair and we just like... we would do stuff like that. We will go all out and it was fun because I started to realize that I had a creative mind when it came to actual visual image of just a person. Like how I would want to look at a person. That's when I started to think that maybe I should be like a fashion designer or things like that.

I just felt like just my mind in general was so creative when it came to stuff because I was giving out ideas so I was helping do the arts and craft and paste the leaves on the bras in certain ways and things like that. Just helping out. It was fun. To me, it was like art class. So many projects I was able to do all at



one time like for the shows and stuff. I was able to use my talents. I was able to mix my personal talents with just the fashions and stuff like that.

Naomi Extra: So all this was happening during high school?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: All these happened during high school. We would... after school, if I'm not the one like the band practice because band practice was like Monday to Friday, from 4:00 to 7:00. Hectic because they were so strict. We did so many performances outside of school. We did everything. But yeah, it would all happen through high school. Maybe even like the summers in between high school. It would just be so much like I still can't believe I had so much time to do so much stuff I did. If I think about it now, wow, maybe that's why I feel I'm so tired and out of energy now. Because I did so much at a young age. Like so much.

Naomi Extra: Right. What high school did you graduate from?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: I graduated from Malcolm X Shabazz High School.

Naomi Extra: Okay and you were there for all four years? So all of this was happening while you were at Malcolm X?

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yeah.

Naomi Extra: So I want to ask you one more question. Just give me a sense of what you're up to now and what performances or shows or what's coming up? What just happened? Either.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Okay. Well, I actually **missed out on a trip, I'm kinda like upset at that one.** But there was a trip that one that guy, Rashaad, he did a show like a couple of days. It was in Miami. Something that's coming up next is we're going to Paris in... sometime in the beginning of next year. I want to say mid January or early February. One of those. To continue to do the project that we... that Rashaad has put together. We're going to continue to do that project. I want to actually expand the project a little more. I want to actually help them out when it comes to that. Right now, I'm kind of like just working on

myself. I'm working on doing branding myself. I'm working on figuring out what's going to get me to that next level that I want to get to. I have a lot of ideas. I'll just put them all together.

Naomi Extra: Is some of this happening on social media or...

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: Yes. What I'm doing now is I'm going to start my own vogue dance group. I want to start it. I was going to do it—I wanted to start it last year but things just wasn't the right timing. But this up and coming year, that's what I'm going to be working on. Working on getting a space for auditions. I want to audition—I want a huge group. I really want a really, really big group. Definitely, if I had to start up small, I will but I feel like it's to the point where I—because I don't want to dance in the group. I just want to manage the group. I want to be able to—but I have a few people that I know that are going to automatically help me out with this and be a part of the group and things like that. But yeah, that's my main focus. And I just recently created the name for the group. It's going to be called Acromatics.

Naomi Extra: I love that.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: It's a mixture of acrobats and dramatic performance. It's like you think about just the different stunts and use just the circus themes, mix it in with voguing and all different styles like tutting and b-boy dancing. I want to like take it and mash everything in one. Because that's something I haven't seen nobody do. I've seen people take and do... maybe they jump from one style to the next. But how about taking and mashing movements together. What if somebody was able to spin from their head into like some type of like ballet movement? Something like that. Like mix the movements and what I want to do is for—also, the next project that I'm going to work on is something I'm working on myself as well. I want to do like not recreate music videos but take music like take a song. Say for instance, for example, Haunted by Beyonce. You know how in the video she was like walking down the hallway and each room she will see like someone being tortured. I had an idea of

me and my gay mom... and I had an idea of her being Maleficent and I'll be like Jaffar somebody. And you will see like maybe her coming down the hallway from one side of me. Just like moving, posing, voguing. As far as like just do walking. But in each room, you will see like... maybe this room, you will see a bit like underwater. You will see like **Ursula torturing** Ariel. Something like that. Like very light dramatic but take—use the theme of the song. Use the song but recreate the video in our own way.

That's something I want to do and that's another reason why I want to start a dance group because I want them to also be a part of that as well. I have a baby sister who is... she just turned seven in May. She's like my little shining star because she is a voguing diva, too. She's a part of DJ Little Man's little group, and stuff like that. So she does like the whole little club dancing and stuff. I'm also working on pushing her out there. Because she—I see a lot of me in her. But she's a lot more experienced when it comes to dancing than I was at seven. Like the movements that she is able to do is like... the way she can freestyle is like amazing. I didn't know how to pop lock or do the worm at seven. This girl can pop lock and turn and move different. She can move her body in so many different ways. She's very flexible.

I'm looking at helping her get herself out there because she's just very talented. She's such a little sweetheart. She's not a fast tail girl. She's very educated. She goes to North Star. This girl comes home and maps her homework out like this. She's very smart. She's very educated. She doesn't run the streets. She just likes to be outside. She likes to be in the house. She's still a kid. That's what I love about her. She still plays the Barbie doll. She's still herself. When that music comes on, she get in the studio. It's like just a whole transformation. It's like her alter ego.

So being in fact that I see so much talent in her now, I want to start her. I want to help her get herself out there early because I want her to get opportunities that I wasn't able to get at that age. A lot of people don't realize that when you see a child and

you see the potential at a young age, it's to get them out there because this is their resume that they're building. When you see these stars like Beyonce and them and you would go and follow their lives and see like how she went from being a kid star to now. This is stuff that you have to keep. This is our own personal archives. This is what it is. This is how you have to build your child and also keep your child humble, keep your child educated. Let your child still also be a child. Don't be too strict to them. That's what I've been doing with my sister, I'll make sure that she—I'm not strict on her. Like when she get to the studio, I don't yell. I don't anything that is like, "Hey, if she wants to run around or go play around for a little while, you get some freedom." I don't want to force it on her because this has to be something that she wants to do. My sister is the type of person that she's looking around like, "I'll play later. I wanna dance. Can we do this again? How you do that?" She's like that. Being that she knows how to... she's already catching on voguing at a young age. I want her to be able to really take that and expand that as well because that's something that she really known for right now. She's known for like the whole voguing and doing the whole DJ Little Man dancing. She's like light skin with big 'ol eyes. Stuff like that. Everybody loves her and stuff.

Those are my main focuses now. Dance group, music videos and my baby sister.

Naomi Extra: That's great. Thank you so much.

Rejean "Tornado" Veal: You're welcome.

Naomi Extra: I'm so glad that you did this. This is Tornado and Naomi on December 11, 2015. I'm going to stop it.