

Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Janyce Jackson Jones
Interviewer: Anna Alves
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ANNA ALVES: [00:00:00] Okay. It is Wednesday, March 9th, 2016. This is the interview with Janyce Jackson Jones by Anna Alves. And we are going to begin by starting off with where and when you were born.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I was born in Ocala, Florida, on March 2nd, 1951.

ANNA ALVES: And how long were you there? What was your house hold like growing up, schooling, that kind of stuff?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So I was in Ocala until I was 13. My mother was a singer and wanted to pursue her career as a jazz and blues singer, and so I spent much of my life living with my aunt, her sister, and my great aunt, which is her aunt. My father, I don't -- he wasn't really around. I don't know -- I don't even remember ever living with him. So I don't remember what happened but -- so I grew up in Florida until I was 13, between Ocala where I was born and Miami, because my family had, my great aunt had a business. She had a rooming house in Miami and a store in Ocala where much of the family was, and so she had us, and I have a sister who is three years younger than I am, and we kind of commuted back and forth depending on what was going on until 13 when my aunt told my mother, "You have to come and get them". And so at 13 --

ANNA ALVES: Where was your mother?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: She was in New York. She came to New York to pursue her singing career. [00:02:00] So at 13, we got on a train and came to New York and joined my mother in Brooklyn, New York.

ANNA ALVES: You and your sister?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Me and my sister. That was 1963 or '64. I'm not sure if I was quite 13. So yeah, it was '63 or '64. Something like that.

ANNA ALVES: What was the neighborhood like in Florida as you were growing up and then what was the neighborhood like in Brooklyn? What was that transition like?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So in Florida, we lived on a -- I guess you would call it a dirt road? So our block -- we didn't say block at the time — but our block was family houses, and our house was a corner house, so we had the house and the store on the same property. We even had, at some point during my lifetime there, we had pigs on the side, the pig pen. We had chickens in the yard, a smoke house where you smoked meat and we would go and get eggs...

ANNA ALVES: So it was more rural, growing up.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, and animals and we walked barefoot on the ground. And we had a little store, community store. My great grandmother's name was Wiggins and so this store was called *Miss Wiggins'*. It was like – it's like in two bodegas now, like the small community store? So everybody knew us and knew her and so we sold the little things. The cookies, the candies, the emergency flour and grease and sodas...

ANNA ALVES: Like all-purpose,

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Kerosene – yeah [laughter - 00:04:00]. And it was – so it was open. So we were kind of sheltered, so we didn't really venture off far from there.

ANNA ALVES: Except for school? Like where did you go to school around there?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So we walked to school. You know the old saying, "When I was a kid I walked a mile"? Well that's true! [laughs]

ANNA ALVES: What was the school that you went to?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Oh gosh, I don't remember. I don't remember the name. I remember where it was.

ANNA ALVES: It was walkable.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was walkable. I don't remember the name

ANNA ALVES: Is it the same school that you went to all the way up to 13?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: No, because I went to school sometimes in Ocala and sometimes in Miami. So they were different schools. And then the difference between what they call it here, elementary, the middle school and the high school -- I don't think I got to the middle school in Florida.

ANNA ALVES: So it was more like elementary-ish?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Elementary. Yes.

ANNA ALVES: But you would go between two different cities? What was that like?

Were they different kinds of -- like describe what the schooling environment was like in each of those spots.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I don't remember. I...

ANNA ALVES: And your sister did too?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: My sister did too. What I remember about school in Ocala was that -- well, the cafeteria. Because we knew the woman who was in charge of the cafeteria, and part of that story is that she -- you know, it's the real story. [00:06:00] She was married to my mother's father -- no -- yes, my mother's father. And then she was in the school, she was the person -- but I don't really remember. And I remember the school in Florida -- I mean, in Miami. So Miami was more city-like, so there were sidewalks and the rooming house was a two-story house. We had to go up the stairs, and so walking to school was more like in the streets, I would think? And what I remember about that is the fights that I would have coming home from school -- I know, right? -- coming

home from between the housing developments and the school.

ANNA ALVES: How big were the schools in each place? Do you remember, like in terms of maybe general number of students you were in school with? Or would you consider them small, big, large?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Okay. So the name just came to me. Madison Street School in Ocala, and I would consider it probably small. All the neighborhood people went there. There was no busing or anything like that. So I would— small.

ANNA ALVES: And you knew everybody from around town?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Everybody knew who you were and who your parents or grandparents were.

ANNA ALVES: And then in Miami, was that also similar?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right now – it was bigger. It was two floors.

ANNA ALVES: It was urban.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was more city. That’s where I was when – what year was Kennedy [00:08:00] killed?

ANNA ALVES: ‘63. November 22nd.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That was the last year I was there.

ANNA ALVES: What was that like? Can you describe sort of what...?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I just remember us all being in the auditorium.

ANNA ALVES: And this was in Miami? You were in Miami?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: This was in Miami.

ANNA ALVES: Were you called to the auditorium or were you in the auditorium when the news came to you?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That I don’t remember.

ANNA ALVES: That’s like one of those things where everybody is like “Oh, yeah. This is where I was when...”

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I have to think about that.

ANNA ALVES: Because you must have been very young, yes, at the time? So the detail – you just remember the auditorium?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I just remember the auditorium. And also during that time, we had drills, not fire drills. I forget what they called them, but drills in case there was an atomic bomb or something.

ANNA ALVES: Because of the Cuba embargo – the Cuba...

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I don't know why.

ANNA ALVES: Probably because of the Cuban missile crisis.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Maybe.

ANNA ALVES: Because Miami is so close to Cuba and the missiles would be pointing right there.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So we would come out and know where – what tables to be under, where to walk, and so that kind of thing I remember. But I don't remember a lot about school in Florida.

ANNA ALVES: You just remember a lot of drills and the day that Kennedy was assassinated. Those were big events. That's probably why. And then when you moved to Brooklyn, what was that transition like, the neighborhood there and the schooling there? Can you describe a little bit?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I hated it.

ANNA ALVES: Why?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I swore that when I turned 18, I was going back. First of all, there was so many buildings. They were so tall. We lived on the – I believe we lived on the 5th floor. And you had to walk up and it was an apartment and it was small. **[00:10:00]** And there was so many people all around. This is in – we lived on Sterling Place, I think, like Rochester in Utica in Brooklyn. And the school was maybe – so now I'm in John Marshall 210. What do you call that? That's the middle school.

ANNA ALVES: Middle school.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right, so now I'm in middle school and it was –

ANNA ALVES: And your sister was probably in grade school.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: My sister was – yeah, and I don't remember where her school was. I just remember when she joined me, I was leaving. But yeah, I went to John Marshall 210 and it was big.

ANNA ALVES: Big, as in?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Many floors and staircases...

ANNA ALVES: Lots of people...

REV. JANYCE JACKSON Lots of people, and you can stand on the floor and look down and see people – it was very, very different from what I knew and it was – I didn't like it.

ANNA ALVES Were the makeup of your classmates any different from where – for the two places that you went to school in Florida, in any significant way?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: No, they were all Black. Everybody would – the students were all black. The teachers were— I want to say all white, but I did have one black teacher that I remember. But for the most part, the teachers and the administration was white and the students were black. Yeah, that was in – I forget what they called it. They changed the names of the areas in New York so often. But yeah, that was – it was very, it was, ooof! [laughs] It was a hard time.

ANNA ALVES: Well, what was it like also moving from the household of your great aunt, you said, and then moving to live with your mother, you and your sister. What was that transition like?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Well, I became the caretaker [00:12:00] of my sister. I was the big girl because my mother, she worked at night, so she was actually bartending and singing at night, and she slept during the day. – I made sure we had something to eat, I cooked – I learned to cook in Florida, somewhere in between there.

ANNA ALVES: From your great aunt or just from –?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I think some my mother, because my mother was sort of back and forth. I never – I don't think about these things anymore. I take so many things for granted, but I was – I made sure that we did our chores and we had food and cleaned and my mother was – while we were in school, she would sleep, and when we came home most – sometimes she would cook and – what was – we had the stuff there. It was just the preparation of it. And so I never – I didn't think we didn't have anything, because we had everything as far as I knew, and there'd be money on the dresser— I guess those were her tips. There was always money around and – do you know what a booster is?

ANNA ALVES What is a booster?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So boosters are thieves. I can't think of a word more correct – but they were shoplifters. They would shoplift and then go to the bars and sell the stuff to the people in the bars. And it was really nice stuff, and so my mother would bring home really nice stuff, so we had nice clothes and nice everything, so I didn't – I never felt our economic status – the true [00:14:00] sense of what our economic status was.

ANNA ALVES: “Because we had nice stuff.”

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. [laughter]

ANNA ALVES: Were there adults in your life who shaped your adolescence besides the people that raised you, besides like your great aunt and your mother? And you mentioned the teacher, and other folks that you might have –

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: The other person is also a relative. She's – I call her Mama Ella but she's actually, she was actually my mother's cousin.

ANNA ALVES: And this was in New York? Florida.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: This was in Florida. Right. She was – she until the day she died – I'm going to cry. But she was the one person that I knew loved me, no matter what. So other than her – an adult that helped shaped my life...

ANNA ALVES: Do you have a favorite story with her that you'd like to share?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Oh, too many. [laughter]

ANNA ALVES: That's a whole other interview.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That's – I mean you know what I – what I remember, I remember more as me being an adult, but I also -- so what I neglected to tell, you because I forget, I take so many things for granted — is at three years old, I was diagnosed with a disease called Myasthenia Gravis.

ANNA ALVES: What is that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It's an autoimmune disease that affects the muscles in your body, and with me in particular, it affects — my eyes. So at three years old when I was diagnosed and I would spend time in the hospital, my eyes [00:16:00] drooped very heavily, one more than the other, and Mama Ella was the one that really, like, loved me and held me and didn't treat me differently, so – and she's always been that way. And then she's always been – she's like jolly and laughing, like she would be – they would laugh at her and I think, like – some meant – like now we know about mental illness. At the time for me, it was just – she was just love and friendly and caring. So she would sing, and she would tell jokes, and she would tickle us, and things like that, so– And she was, like, the only one because my family was not affectionate, but she was. So yeah.

ANNA ALVES: And you had her all the way through adulthood?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah.

ANNA ALVES: Good.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: After I moved to New York and the only thing that kind of kept us – well, I wouldn't even say distant — but the difference was she became a Jehovah's Witness, and she taught us that, and then when I came to New York I decided that's not what I wanted to do. And so there was always that – her continued -- she would write me all the time and tell me and encourage me go have lessons and all of that. But the fact that I was not did not stop her from loving me.

ANNA ALVES That's a good segueway into sort of this next question, is like, what role did religion play, sort of, as you were growing up and as you evolved? **[00:18:00]**

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So while I was in – because Mama Ella was Jehovah's Witness and her mother, my great aunt, was Jehovah's Witness – they weren't always Jehovah's Witness because we used to go to the Baptist church, I remember. We'd go to the Baptist church, we'd be there for Easter, we'd be dressed up, they would have – I remember there was a painting of me in my Easter dress and all of that. And then at some point, they all became Jehovah Witnesses. And so we would go with them, and we would study with them, and then when we came to New York, they would tell my mother to make sure we take lessons, and “call us,” and we did it at first, for a little while, but didn't continue.

[00:18:51]

ANNA ALVES: I was going to say, what was your mother -- what did your mother think about all that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, I know. When we would take lessons, she wouldn't be there, she wouldn't participate.

ANNA ALVES: Did she subscribe to any particular kind of religion or spirituality or -- that you knew of?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, Baptist. And -- but when we were younger, she didn't really go to church when we came to New York, but *we* had to go. So there was a church not too far from the house.

ANNA ALVES: And this was in Miami now?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: In Brooklyn. Yeah, this is in Brooklyn with my mother.

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: And we had to go to at least Sunday school, or nothing -- we could do nothing else.

ANNA ALVES: It was Baptist Sunday school?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was Berean Baptist Church. And we either had to go to church or Sunday school, and then we would be able to go a movie or hang out or whatever. We didn't do that; we couldn't do anything. [00:20:00] So we did that for a while, it seemed like forever, but I graduated from Sunday school, sort of. It's "sort of" because graduation was baptism and I didn't want to be baptized. I refused to be baptized. My mother didn't make me be baptized, so the people in church were not that happy but --

ANNA ALVES: But you finished, sort of like, the course?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I went through the class.

ANNA ALVES: And then how did that sort of evolve as you went forward in your life? So you went -- you graduated from high school.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I -- well no... So the evolving of the spiritual and religious part of me?

ANNA ALVES: Okay, let's stay there. I know, like "We are going to move off. Let's stay there."

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So that was middle school, then I went on to high school. We moved from where we were to another area. And—

ANNA ALVES: To another area in Brooklyn?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: In Brooklyn.

ANNA ALVES: Do you remember what area?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, it was Empire Boulevard and Nostrand Avenue.

Very Jewish area and a lot of Hasidic Jews walking around.

It was a smaller house. There were only three families in the house, including ours. It was a better neighborhood, yeah, and then – but my mother was still – she never really had like a nine to five job with retirement kind of thing.

She was still bartending and singing and, you know, whatever comes with that. [00:22:00] At some point during that time, she did work for Transit, but it was so short that I don't remember...

ANNA ALVES: For MTA? New York MTA?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Very, very short time.

ANNA ALVES: What did she do?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: At Transit? The token booth clerk.

ANNA ALVES: And you were just like one day going “Oh, she's doing this and now –”

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, yeah, and so during that time, we would still go back to Berean Baptist church. We would still go back to church. I enjoyed church, particularly the singing. So we would go back and then I think at some point, she started going.

ANNA ALVES: Do you recall why she might maybe started going? Or that what you thought maybe why? Because I mean, often times with the parent you just – when you're a child—

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Most of the black people started good.

ANNA ALVES: You're like, "there's a point..." [laughter]

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: She grew up in church. It was really her upbringing. She worked in church, she learned to sing in church, she sang in church. That was really -- you know, when you hear the stories of the singers that made it, that was her story. So it

was in her to do that. I think that just what she did for a living is what kept her out of it, but I think she was always connected to church and to God in some way. So she – I don't know if she started going back, then. I don't know. You're making me remember stuff that I— [laughs] But high school, so I went to – so we lived in one community, but I went to high school in another. I would take the train and a bus to get to high school [00:24:00]. I wanted to go to high school like five blocks from the house but somehow I didn't get that.

ANNA ALVES: Do you remember which high school it was?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was Thomas Jefferson High School on Pennsylvania Avenue.

ANNA ALVES: Was the one you went to?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Was the one I went to.

ANNA ALVES: What was the one that you wished you went to?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Wingate. Wingate High School was in the neighborhood of where I was. And I think, I think it was somewhat integrated. I think. I'm not sure. Jefferson was not – it was older students – it was in East New York, you know, poor neighborhood. It was still – the kids were still – we were all black. And so I did graduate from high school but I got pregnant in my— eleventh year, twelfth year? It was near the end. I got pregnant and at that time you couldn't go to school and be pregnant. You had to go to a pregnant school — school for girls that were pregnant — or a night school. So I went to night school and I still completed the same time that if I had stayed in school. I got my GED the same time my friends got their diploma. It is just that I wasn't part of the ceremony and all of that. So that was 1970. My daughter was born in '69. And I wasn't really

going to church or anything, so now I'm grown. And I got married. So I got pregnant and then we got married, and—

ANNA ALVES: To the father?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: [00:26:00] To the father. And we got an apartment across the street from the junior high school that I went to. So I wasn't going to church until she got older and then we started going to church. So I would take the kids to church.

ANNA ALVES: And we you going along again with the Baptist?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Uh huh.

ANNA ALVES: And then how is that – what role did that play, I guess, as you were raising your daughter, and then as you moved forward into your young adult life?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I don't think any.

ANNA ALVES: Except that you would just go?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: You know, it was like: this is what you do. This is what you do, this is what you are supposed to do. I didn't – I wasn't really connected in any real way. I always – my connection to God was between me and God and my disease. So it was just – I was just in that. I would go, I would enjoy, but I really – I don't remember being moved or connected or – it was “This is what you are supposed to do.” It was to make sure your kids go to church. So that's what I did for – I did that for a while.

ANNA ALVES: And so when did religion or spirituality actually start to, kind of, become a more significant meaningful thing for you?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So fast forward 19 – so, as an adult, so like the '80s, early '80s — now my mother is really in church. She's really in church, there's a new husband, she's [00:28:00] singing in the choir, they're having concerts, and I'm going to church, I'm really enjoying it. So I become a member of – I wasn't before – member in a way that I know I'm involved. I

know that the building fund is happening, my name is on the wall, you know, that kind of thing, in Berean Baptist church. And in 1987, I fell in love with a woman, and I began to pray more, pray more, go to church more. It was like “Okay, I don’t know what is happening to me, this is how I feel. I don’t think there’s anything wrong, everybody else says it is. So, okay, God I’m – here I am. If it’s wrong please let me know.” And so I started going to church more, really praying more and really paying more attention. And so I sort of— going back and forth feeling good about myself, and, well, it doesn’t feel like God is saying it is wrong, although there’s nobody in this church telling me that God is saying it’s wrong. But there was no one in – from the pulpit, saying that it was wrong. So when you hear the stories of people going to church and hearing all the negativity from the pulpit, I didn’t hear that. I heard it from my mother.

ANNA ALVES: What were some of the things that you were hearing from your mother?

REV. JAYNCE JACKSON: Just that it was not right and that she was angry with the woman, Regina [Shavers], and that I was just doing the wrong thing and that I needed to [00:30:00] not be – because we started out as friends, and hanging out, and she was just against it. And so – but you know now, I’m 35 so – and so I started going to church more, and then I wanted Regina to come to church with me, which she would not, because she also grew up in church. Her family was very connected to church, but she was – she – one of the reasons why she would not go to church with me is because she didn’t wear dresses. She only wore pants and that was not acceptable then. It’s amazing how times change, right? You go to church now, you wear anything no matter who

you are. But at the time, you wore pants and everybody knew who you were then. But I continued to go, and then we went to a conference in Los Angeles.

ANNA ALVES: What was the conference?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was the...

ANNA ALVES: If you remember.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was the Lesbian and Gay Black Summit. It was a leadership conference in L.A. and they ended with a church service in the – oh, you're from L.A.! Yeah, on Jefferson, they were on Jefferson and the conference was in some hotel. I don't remember the hotel.

ANNA ALVES: They have many hotels in downtown.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, and so I'm in church and I'm praying and I'm like “Okay, let's go see what this – they have in church and a lesbian-gay – let's go see what this is all about.” And so we drove to the location, it was – I think it was in a [00:32:00] building that was somewhere to a warehouse on this side, and then on this side it was definitely a warehouse and like a little street, and we drove and we parked on this, like, parked this way and church was there, right. And we sat outside and watched who was going in. And so, there were many people. You know, so she identified as butch. And there were many people who looked butch and had on pants, and the people were pouring in and we were like “Should we go? Should we go?” And finally we decided to go in. We was like part of the last people to go in because I remember sitting in the back, and his message was about God and God loving you the way that you are and it was just new. I had never heard anything like that before. So that was in L.A. and I thought “Wow, we need this in

New York. We could go to church together and pray together and -- because I'm still -- I need God to let me know that is okay because the world is not—" And we came back home and maybe a few-- there were other people from New York that were at the service. I didn't really know them but we-- a few years later, there was a group of people in New York that wrote to the bishop in L.A. and asked that there be a church in New York.

ANNA ALVES: And so then they founded or you all founded...

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Then he came— [00:34:00] The group that played a big part in it was a choir called Lavender Light. Lavender Light People of All Colors Gospel Choir. There's some more words to it. Lavender Light, probably Lavender Light Lesbian and Gay People of All Colors Gospel Choir. So they had a concert in May and we went to the concert and the—

ANNA ALVES: About what year was this?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That was '92, 1992. May of 1992. And the pastor that had been sent to New York was there and did a little sermon there and talked about what was happening, and we said, "Okay." We said we wanted it, it's here, so let's check it out. And we started going, and it was good, and then the summer came -- both of us love the beach. So we went -- so that was May, I think they started in June -- so we went in June, and in July, some Sundays we would go and then we'd go to the beach, and then after one Sunday, like late August, we went and I got to meet him -- not really sit down with him -- but more of a conversation and he remembered that we had been there. And then, I know you don't want to hear "the rest is history" but -- [laughter]

ANNA ALVES: What is this history that you speak of? [laughter]

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: What is the history right? [laughter]

ANNA ALVES: What is this history that you went on to make? [laughter]

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So we started going regularly, and both she and I are organizers and workers in our own right. Like, just if something needed to be done, what can I do to help? [00:36:00] And so we were, like, well here's this church, and we have certain skills, and there's no money, what can we do? And so we began – so we volunteered to do whatever we could do and so we – I think at first, I was like the volunteer coordinator, like stuff was in his house and, you know, so I did the paper work and the bulletins— anything that needed to be done, we were there doing it. And then as it grew, I became a trustee, the treasurer and just all that kind of background footwork. He was new from L.A....

ANNA ALVES: The pastor.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: The pastor.

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: We took him shopping and introduced him to New York, and whatever he needed, if we could make sure it would happen, we did that. We had service in the Lesbian Gay Center in New York.

ANNA ALVES: Where in New York?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: 13th Street and – I forget the address. It was 13th between Sixth and Seventh Avenue or something. It's still there—

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, like in The Village.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, and so that meant that we had to get there early and set it up for church, and then when church was over, set it down and count the money, made sure the money got in the bank. And so we were involved in all of that and that was – and I felt good about it. I mean, that was my role, that was what I was good at, that's what I knew I could do. And

that's what I did. And then one day, the pastor, Bishop Zachary [00:38:00] Jones, I love him to death— we had a real big disagreement.

ANNA ALVES: What was the disagreement about?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was – so looking back, the disagreement was about him questioning my ability to do what I was supposed to do. That was really what it was and I felt like, you know, I'm working so hard and I knew what I was doing and he didn't. And I just didn't like the way that he was talking to me and I got really upset and, you know, we had a big disagreement. I felt very bad about how he responded and so I began to back off and then I quit. We both quit actually. It was August.

ANNA ALVES: And what year was this?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was actually 1994. It seems like it was a long time.

ANNA ALVES: But it was maybe like two years.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was like two years. It was like two years. So there were a lot of things going on.

ANNA ALVES: What were some of these things that were going on?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Some— like sexism. You know, I've got to name it for what it is.

ANNA ALVES: Yes.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Him, being a man, but still he's the pastor and in charge, and 90 percent of the people that worked with him and for him and took care of him were women, and women who were confident about what they did and what they had to offer. So there was that, and I – we just – [00:40:00] there were some other things I'd rather not say on tape, but it got to a point where we said, "You know what, it's August. We can start going back to the beach again."

ANNA ALVES:

Did that impact the population of the church, that kind of -- did it create a bigger rift or was it more sort of -- depending on the circle of who was doing what work? Because what are the -- what were some of those impacts -- was there a larger impact from that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Well, we were not the first ones to leave. So I think there was an impact, but not a huge one, because this was -- the church was two years old. It's the first one for people of color on the East Coast. The attendance was just crazy. It was a need, people needed that space where they could hear that God loves them and that being gay was good, not just okay. So I don't think our leaving at that time had a huge impact. We were -- what I'm thinking about these days, with my sermon, when he was like -- we were like the little rock. Eventually the ripple, you know... So other people had left but people were still coming.

What I've learned today more than anything -- you know, it's like as a parent, I really understand my mother more today than I did then. [00:42:00] So as a pastor now, I understand more, or I understand it in a different way, the things that were happening. But at the time, I was doing -- I was seeing him, as people see me today, which is really-- it's hard, right? You know, "he is the pastor," "he should know better" and "he shouldn't do anything wrong," "he shouldn't make any mistakes" and "listen!", you know-- all of those things. And so-- but he kept at it and other people still worked to make sure that the church happened.

ANNA ALVES: So then how did it impact you guys, or you two, in terms of -- where did you go after that? And then where was the trajectory, the journey to where you are now?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So this happened in August, we put it in our letters, and-- so in the meantime, there's another woman in church who is our friend — I went to school with her — I went to school as an adult, went to college, and—

ANNA ALVES: Where did you go to college?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I went to five colleges. The one that I met her in was Hunter College— City University of New York? And she was his assistant at the time and we were friends, or she was more of a friend with Regina, because they had classes together. I kind of came along after. But we – she was still there, and then maybe three months later or so, she decided she is opening a church in Newark. I'm thinking, Newark!

ANNA ALVES: I was going to ask you, “How did you make your way over to Newark?” [00:44:00]

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: “She's going to Newark. Where did she get Newark from? I don't know. Came to meet her. I needed to leave New York for Newark.” I'm like – and she asked me, not Regina. She asked me to come and help her because she knows the work that I did in New York and so she said -- I said “I'm not going to church in Newark. I'm not traveling to Newark. I don't know anything about Newark. I will come and help you out for a few months but I--” It was far.

ANNA ALVES: Because where were you living at this point?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Brooklyn. So she says “Okay.” She says “I need your help.” So the building part of it – we would meet at Barnes and Nobles in New York because there was other people, there were some people from New Jersey, most of the people were from New York.

ANNA ALVES: The one at Union Square, that Barnes and Noble or –?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: The one, yeah, on 14th Street.

ANNA ALVES: Yes. The one at 14th Street.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes. So we would meet places like that and -- to get the paperwork and the footwork, and she would come over and go to different places to see where the church could be. So I would show up and I would do what I did, like my part is the detail part, paperwork part, and “Did you think of that?” and making the calls. And so we did that for a while and she ended up at Trinity & St. Philips and met Dean Sabune [00:45:46] and he embraced the church as he felt like this was something that the cathedral needed, that we could be a good ministry, and so we could have our services there. [00:46:00] And so that was 1995. April of 1995. So that year also, my mother passed, and she passed the month the church started. And so I left her funeral, and she had moved to Atlanta.

ANNA ALVES: So she went down to Atlanta.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, she went – she moved to Atlanta in the ‘80s. Yeah, ’80-something. And I left her funeral and came to the first service. It was me, Regina, and my youngest daughter, at the Cathedral. And it was packed.

ANNA ALVES: What was that -- describe what that was like to, sort of, I don’t know I guess -- especially coming to Newark and then coming from your mother’s funeral. And was this sort of a Newark-based chapter or a site of what you had been doing in New York or what had started in L.A.?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, it’s called Unity Fellowship Church Movement.

[00:47:22]. So yes it’s all to say –

ANNA ALVES: It’s all interconnected.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes. So what it meant for me, a couple of things. One, was that this was my family, because my mother died saying that I was doing the wrong thing – and I have a small

family. And so, my sister and my mother were like this, and so I felt like I was an outsider. [00:48:00] So when I walked in – because we got there – I don't remember if the church had started but I do remember the room was packed and the three of us standing in the back. I felt like, wow. Wow, this is the way it was in New York.

This is really a need, and I knew it was a need, because I had been on both sides. I had been married – oh, we skipped so much! I had been married.

ANNA ALVES: We should go back to that.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: And so I knew what it was to live that life, and I knew what it was to come out. And then to see all this people in this Cathedral, I felt like wow, okay. But I still wasn't going to come all the time. [00:48:51]. [laughs]

ANNA ALVES: What got you to finally come over to Newark? Like, what is your earliest memory of -- would that be one of your earliest memories of Newark, was walking into that space? Or had you been in Newark before that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Oh, that would be one of my -- yes.

ANNA ALVES: So then how did they get you over to Newark and what was that like?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was the people in church. So I'm still -- so I'm a trustee, I'm the one -- I kept the money, I get the money in the bank, I deal with the bank, I deal with the paperwork, I make sure the bulletins – I'm doing that kind of work. That's who I am. I am -- I was a very, very shy person. I'd work my butt off as long as you're not asking me to look at you, talk to you, stand up in public, oh no. But I would do whatever you wanted me to do and that's who I was. And I was that in church for -- maybe, I did it for two years. I kept coming every Sunday to Newark from Brooklyn.

[00:50:00] I knew one way to come, that would be my –
come over the Pulaski Skyway, come down—

ANNA ALVES: So you would drive out here?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah. I'm not a public transportation person, [laughs] especially over here. I knew one way to get here and one way to leave, and I would come and I would do, and when church was over, I'd go back to Brooklyn. And I did that for a while and then I don't know what happened, but I felt this need to be more connected to people.

ANNA ALVES: To people in general, or people in the Newark community?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: People in church.

ANNA ALVES: And since your church was here--

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: There were a lot of people in church. People were there, they didn't know me. I knew faces, like there was no relationship, there was no connection. Like -- they would see me -- I've heard they would see me, and then I'd be gone.

ANNA ALVES: Like a phantom.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, yeah. And so I began to, you know, slowly talk to more people. I think that we did bowling at the time. I'd go bowling, and so I began to develop relationships with people, and talked to people, hear their stories, you know, and we would have Bible Study. So, I don't know, at some point I felt like I wanted to do more and then she felt like, "You're doing more, you're here, I can see you do more. There's more for you to do, come on!" I can blame it on her, right? And so I went through the process -- the first process of being -- it's [00:52:00] a clergy process being a deacon and, you know --

ANNA ALVES: And what does that entail? Like, describe what that process was like.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So we had classes with her and it was she -- it was classes. So we'd meet with her and she'd give us things to read and

-- because we were a new movement, so we didn't -- we couldn't send out people, you know, "go over to school and get what you need." We got it from her in conversations and I spent the -- and I still do, I ask a lot of questions, "Why?" and "No" and -- but the thing about the Unity Fellowship Church Movement as a whole that drew me in, was this notion that there's not just one way to God. So we're Christians and we believe in Jesus Christ, but we -- I don't believe that that's my only way, like God is-- And so I was trying to get that, you know, like understand it, and so we went through this-- it was like a two-year process. I wasn't the only one. There were a number of us. It was a two-year process--

ANNA ALVES: To become a deacon.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: To become a deacon.

ANNA ALVES: And then what were your responsibilities when you're a deacon?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So, basically, what I was already doing. Plus, then it was more of -- and about more of working with people. And so we visited people in the hospital, we had communion, and we're praying with people. It became more -- that was the beginning of that.

ANNA ALVES: And then how did that move into you journeying into becoming a pastor? And how long did that take?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It didn't take -- it wasn't long. [00:54:00] It was -- so...
How do I, How do I, How do I? [laughs]

ANNA ALVES: "There's so many ways I can give a--" [laughs]

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Because it didn't happen to me. I mean I --

ANNA ALVES: Right. Right. Right.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I was very much involved in agreement to it happening.

ANNA ALVES: I guess what--

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I don't know why though. And, you know, like if I had -- it was not my intention. It was not my goal. It was not my desire. It was -- I never thought I would be here. And so, I just--

ANNA ALVES: Did serving as a deacon maybe -- I don't know, like spark something in you in terms of wanting to do more? Or were there other activities or things you're involved in or working with that made it seem like, "Oh wait, this would be a next step." Or can you see any of that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was a need. It was -- It was --

ANNA ALVES: What was the need that you saw then?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So the -- so it's also, you know, young people living with HIV? Hearing their stories, hearing people in the world talk about gay -- so you don't know I'm lesbian, unless I tell you, right? Because we have -- I was still hearing things and so there was a need to provide, I felt, like a safe space, a safe place. A place to grow and to be and to -- and -- like a lot of the kids, a lot of the people like [00:56:00] -- felt like God was against them because that's what they knew, and I knew different. And so there was that and there was - - I think it was a lot of that. I think it was a lot of that, and then people were dying still, you know? So—

ANNA ALVES: And did most of these interactions come through your deacon work or also in other -- like what other areas -- ?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I think being a deacon put me in different places.

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: To be in it.

ANNA ALVES: So where were you having some of these interactions? Because all of these obviously, it all coalesces.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, yeah. It wasn't necessarily in Newark because Newark, I came to church and then I went home, in the beginning. But it was the people in church. So it was the-- yeah. It was the people in church, people that came to church.

ANNA ALVES: It was just the community that you were within.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, yeah.

ANNA ALVES: And the stories that they would share and the comfort you would give each other, and these were the things you started seeing emerging.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Emerging, yeah. And, you know, and them not being connected to their families and -- so I could relate to that.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: You know, I was like, "Oh yeah, me too. So we could be a family." You know, "We'll be our own family." Yeah, it was that, I think. Like me and God, it's -- I don't have -- my story is not -- like, I can't identify where, you know, God said, "Do this." I don't have that story. [00:58:00] I just -- I don't know, and I said to you that I was involved, and I said that because I had to be involved, but I don't see my involvement. I see I woke up one day and it's like, "Well how'd you get here?" [laughter]

ANNA ALVES: That's part of what we're trying to figure out. "How'd you get here?"

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, I don't -- I just kept showing up. You know, so there's the church work, there's the community work.

ANNA ALVES: Right. Do you want to describe a little bit about the community work now, then?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So this whole movement, right? The Unity Fellowship Church Movement. So their churches -- the churches are growing, they're popping out now, right? So now, it's moved up and it's in New York, now it's in DC and there's this one. And so we're all kind of together at -- once a

year, in L.A. and we're talking about – and meeting people, other people, not just people from Newark, and then -- so there's this whole injustice of how people with HIV-AIDS are being treated and then how we stop our kids from getting positive and -- so I began to get involved in that kind of work. And then in, okay here it is. So in 1998, the State of New Jersey approached us to do HIV prevention work with women.

ANNA ALVES: Approached who exactly?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Approached our church.

ANNA ALVES: The Church. Okay. Got you.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: And she's a bishop now, Bishop Holland who is the pastor. And so the other thing that we were, was the women's church [01:00:00]. The leadership was women. Most of the people that go to any church are women. That's kind of across the board. But our church, the leaders were women, and so I think that because of that we felt that we might be able to outreach to women about HIV prevention. It worked for a while, but most of the women that were coming to our church identified as lesbian. And the heterosexual women would not come to our program and we needed to reach them too. So I was – wow, Anna. We're going to have to do this again, because I also had a job in New York...

ANNA ALVES: Could you explain a little bit about that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I worked for the police department. I was a civilian in the police department.

ANNA ALVES: None of these things happen in a vacuum, so we'll just talk about all of it as it comes up. So what were you doing with the police department?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah. I started working for the police department when I was 22 years old. It was a civilian job where you take a test and you get the job. So I started out as a clerk and then a year later I moved to – at that time we called it 911, it's the Communications Division. It's the place where when you dial 911, I will be one of the people that answered the phone and then later dispatch police cars to you. So I had done that for a number of years. So by the time 1995, 1996, I'm on the job 20-something years.

ANNA ALVES: So you've been with the New York Police Department that long! And where – which department? Were you in Manhattan or was it—?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Manhattan.

ANNA ALVES: [01:02:00] Which precinct?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Police headquarters.

ANNA ALVES: Is that downtown?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right by the Brooklyn Bridge, that big brown building.

[Crosstalk]

ANNA ALVES: So you were 20 years with the police department and then you were also doing community work. Yes, no?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, but on the side.

ANNA ALVES: On the side. And was that related to the church work, the community work?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, the community work related to the church work. My work in the police department was what paid my bills.

ANNA ALVES: Right, your day job.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, and so what made me remember that was something I wanted to tell you. I forgot.

ANNA ALVES: Is it part of the missing part that we didn't get to and so you married your daughter's father and then we sort of skipped forward? Was it part of some of that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: No. I mean that's there -- we still have to -- but there was a point that made me remember that I worked for the Police Department. I don't remember what it was.

ANNA ALVES: We were talking about all the different spaces or work or activities that you were doing that helped you see where the needs were.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right, so that's what happened. So I am working my full-time job. I'm coming up in here for church on Sunday. And then the HIV prevention program for women. It actually started in this building. That's how—

ANNA ALVES: This building? [11 Halsey Street]

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: This building, right here.

ANNA ALVES: That we are sitting in right now?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right here in 1998. So in 1998 and just this side, not the big side, we started out a HIV prevention program for women with a grant from the state of New Jersey.

ANNA ALVES: So how did you guys get into this building then? You said it got started in this building—

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: We rented it.

ANNA ALVES: Okay, so when the state gave you funds to do this work, then some of those funds were to rent [01:04:00] this space?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, our first meeting with a man from the state was in the church. And so we talked about it, and that's very different now, but he said yes, and did the paperwork and then we began to look for a place to live that was nearby that we could use and this – I wasn't even in the finding of this space because I'm in the Police Department nine-to-five and she was over here, and it started here. So here was a place that I could also volunteer. And there were trainings. So in these trainings, now I'm really hearing the numbers of what happens and what it means, and I'm absorbing all of this and I'm like "Oh! I want to do this." [laughter]

ANNA ALVES: And not be at the police department. So then how did that kind of shift over? Because we're in Newark here. And you're over there in New York.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Exactly. I did a lot of running over, and uh-- how did I do it? So as my career grew-- so I went from being a clerk, from an operator to a supervisor. So by now, I'm at one of the higher civilian titles, so I pretty much can make my own day, basically. So I could be on the phone. I did the bulletins. I did the books. I helped write the paperwork for the [01:06:00] program. So actually I did a lot of the administrative stuff.

ANNA ALVES: To set this up.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: To set this up. We probably shouldn't say this out loud, but while I was working [01:06:12]. [laughter] And, but what made that easy was the culture in the police department. So I'm a civilian, I'm a black woman, I'm in the police department, and my supervisor is a white male Lieutenant who -- I had as much skill as he did but, you know, he's a lieutenant, and we'll just stick with the fact that he is in uniform. And so it became a point in my work at the police department were they basically ignored me. And then for me it became, "Okay, I'm not going to fight this anymore. I almost have enough years to retire. If you are going to allow me to come in here every day and get paid, and not let me do what I'm supposed to do, that's fine because I have something to do." And that's really what I did. That's really how I survived the last few years in the police department. Because I began to hate the job. I didn't want to get up in the morning and go. And so I did that for a few years, then I had some back issues, and so I was out of

work for a number of months, maybe six or seven months.
I wasn't doing anything. I was flat on my back.

ANNA ALVES: In Brooklyn?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: In Brooklyn.

ANNA ALVES: At this point, had you left the job, had you left the New York [01:08:00] Police Department job or you were just on leave?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I was on leave. I was on medical leave and then I went back. So this started in 1998. I'm still working for the police department, we're doing the program, the program is going well. We got more money, the program grew, and we rented this place.

ANNA ALVES: Because it started in this space –

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It started in here.

ANNA ALVES: And then you were able to get the space next door.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: And then we were able to get that and put a hole there and make it one space. And then in 2002, the state started this, a program called Drop-In Centers that was still HIV prevention but they wanted to reach out to people who were homeless, HIV-drug— IDU-drug users and sex workers. And we would provide prevention education, the opportunity to take showers, wash a little clothes, get some snacks and we got another space on New Street to do that. So that was in 2002. And I was involved in the writing of the grant and all of the training. So now I'm like, "Okay, I've gotta leave this job."

ANNA ALVES: You're like, "This job's happening over here--" [unintelligible – 01:09:23].

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: "I've got to go! I've got to go! This is something that I wanna to do!" This is making a difference and I don't wanna to be there. And the city of New York had a buy-

out, because I was 50-- in order to retire you had to have, I think 30 years or be 55 years old, and at the time – no, 25 years and be 55 — so I had the years but not the age.

ANNA ALVES: Because as you say, you started at 22, so you definitely had the years.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, I had the years but not the age [01:10:00] but they did a whole city-wide buy out, and I qualified, and so my pension was less, but I was able to get out with the pension. I'm still young, and we're doing that, so it's like, "okay." And so in 2002, I retired from the police department and the Drop in Center opened in 2002.

ANNA ALVES: So then you became the director there?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: No I was...

ANNA ALVES: What became your role?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: She was the director. I was – what did I do?

ANNA ALVES: Wait — who was "she" again?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Jacquelyn Holland

ANNA ALVES: Okay.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: She's now bishop. She was the pastor of the church, so she was the director of the program. It was a church program.

ANNA ALVES: Of the drop-in center?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: And I was her assistant.

ANNA ALVES: But it was a job, like a bonafide job, as an assistant?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I think if it was at first, because that happened in – probably not at first.

ANNA ALVES: But it was funded through the grant?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was funded through the state, right. So I didn't immediately get paid through the – because I was working — but eventually I became a 9 to 5 worker at the program.

ANNA ALVES: At that drop-in center?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: At the drop-in center.

ANNA ALVES: And then how did you end up migrating over to the entire community center to leading – or did that go hand in hand with moving towards being a pastor? How does this trajectory go?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So this— the HIV prevention program in the drop-in center, it's all one HIV prevention program of the Unity Fellowship Church. That's how it started, so it's all HIV prevention, it's all a church program with two different locations.

ANNA ALVES: New Street and here in Halsey.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: New Street and here, right. And so we had programs here as well as the drop-in center [01:12:00] because it was a huge place. If it had been big enough, we would've shut this down and done everything there, but we couldn't find a place that was big enough so that's why we still ended up with the two places. So it's all one with two separate locations and I'm working as her assistant and... Eventually she had to let it go.

ANNA ALVES: For her own health.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, to take care of herself and so she let go of – I got to think about the year. She did it for a while. Right. So in 2004, which is two years later, this is when she retired from pastoring and working with the program.

ANNA ALVES: And then you see a need – let's talk about this part of it now.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I became pastor in 2005.

ANNA ALVES: [01:14:00] Was there a process to doing that or was it more sort of when everyone was collectively supporting her through those two years that there was sort of – at that time everyone was putting into place what was going to evolve or was it [unintelligible - 01:14:20]?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That would've been nice.

ANNA ALVES: That would have coincided so much better. So how did it actually happen?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Kind of sort of what happened – so what really – when we – so there wasn't just me. There were other – I was a minister at that time because I had gotten another – so there were other ministers and other deacons so there was a group of us that were closer to her, and we moved in secrecy and stigma. And so this small group worked to figure out what are we going to do, you know, without telling the world what's really happening and it was all new to us. None of us had been impacted by mental illness so directly, and so all of the stereotypical things that you hear and think, we went through them until 2004 where we brought in the – so the...

ANNA ALVES: The first pastor that came, so he's...

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: A bishop now.

ANNA ALVES: The one that went to New York?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: The one that went to New York and the one that left he's still part of the movement. We brought them and you know this is what's happening and [01:16:00] what are we going to do? And so she decided that she would retire, that that was best and then there were three people that were in the church already that could – in the running if you will, that could be pastor and I was one of them and we went through a process with the bishop and I ended up being selected. I agreed to it. I felt like I was the best I have to say that because I don't – I have to keep telling myself that because I think that “Oh, they picked me”. I feel that I was the best person at that time. I still feel that way.

ANNA ALVES: It felt right.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It felt right, you know, it was – I didn't grow up in the church in the way that some of the others did where they were like in it and they were preaching and they were – I didn't do all that. I had the administrative part and I had a sense of maturity about it that I felt was needed at that time because this woman was sick and she needed more than what was going to happen when [unintelligible - 01:17:19] and so I became pastor in 2005.

ANNA ALVES: And ever since then. And then how did the process of becoming director here evolve alongside of that, if alongside?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So that's the church, so in -- somewhere around 2004 actually, the board – we started the leadership. We started to talk about do we need to separate [01:18:00] the program from the church because there's a committed group of church people but they're not enough funders and stuff to really want to support this program – and so the program is in the drop-in center became its own legal entity.

ANNA ALVES: So they had become its own 501C3?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes.

ANNA ALVES: So you all had a conversation and decided that would be the best way to keep its funding and expand it and then also just let it be its own entity so that the church and the...

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right, would be separate and the church would have its own set of board of directors, trustees and the program would its set of trustees.

ANNA ALVES: And how did that transition go?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It took a while legally because we...

ANNA ALVES: The process.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: We had to do all the – what a process. The paper work and then reaching out the people who were involved in church. We wanted to bring more people involved in it and so we

got some support and did the paperwork, so from that first conversation to actually getting the 501C3, 501C3 is dated 2009.

ANNA ALVES: That's a long process.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was dated 2009, but we changed it in 2004.

ANNA ALVES: What do you mean when you say changed it?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So the church' name was Liberation and Truth Unity Fellowship Church, and in 2004 that remained the same and the program piece was Liberation and Truth [01:20:00] something else. We would go out there a couple of -- Loving and Truth. Loving and Truth was the program name, and then it evolved into Liberation Into Social Justice Center.

ANNA ALVES: And was that the name -- was that the original name of the 501 C3 or did you --?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes, yes. That's the original name of the 501 C3 and so with that they -- the Social Justice Center became the program in the church with its own entity. People didn't really see a difference because I was still in both places.

ANNA ALVES: And were you made -- were you made the executive director of that program?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Uh-huh.

ANNA ALVES: So suddenly you're called the pastor and the executive director, but you're basically wearing two hats but people see one body, right. And how did that -- I don't know, I guess how did that -- describe a little bit of that experience like how that kind of played out as it was transitioning. I mean now -- it's separate -- I guess like that moment to now?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: I don't know how to answer that. Ask me something --.

ANNA ALVES: Yeah, it's kind of a big question. I guess to some degree you said that it is very different but you just said it a second ago that you

don't know if they see that. So maybe the perception still might be similar?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: The perception is that this is still church.

ANNA ALVES: But in terms of how the church and this center operate, it's become more clearly separated, it's sort of like it sounds like --.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That's the goal.

ANNA ALVES: So it's still a goal. [01:22:00] How is it in terms of sort of funding? So you originally got the state funding for the programs. When you became a 501 C3, was it difficult to continue getting that state funding?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: No, no. We were still getting the state funding. We just did the change within the state. So then we got another 501 -- we had a different 501C3, different name. So they just changed the paper work. In that and then so the -- in the beginning, it was more of a legal -- we were still a faith based organization but we could be if we wanted to apply for that kind of funding, but we were not a house worship.

ANNA ALVES: And that's the distinction?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: That's the distinction, and the thing that made us really do it is so crazy. The office of Faith-based Initiative in the state of New Jersey will fund a faith-based organization but not a house of worship. I still to this day can't get that, but that's the way it is and so -- it was separate but I was still, you know, in both places. We hired people from church, people from church working for the organization. And it went -- we did good work, for a while. We did good work --.

ANNA ALVES: Why for a while?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Well until they cut our funding.

ANNA ALVES: Right. I know -- can you explain a little bit about what happened there?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: So there in 2012, the government -- they started the -- it used to be that you have the funding and you met certain requirements and it was almost like an automatic roll [01:24:00] over. In 2011, they changed the -- so that you had to apply for a -- as if you had never applied before, as if they didn't know you.

ANNA ALVES: Even though you had had fund since what was it, 2000 --?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Since 1998.

ANNA ALVES: Since 1998.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right, and so it was -- it's all political.

ANNA ALVES: And that was Chris Kristi who put that?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: It was Chris Kristi -- the director of the state HIV -- everybody has a hand in it, from your program person going up. If you're not a favorite person, they find reasons, you know, and there are several HIV prevention in the city of Newark, some of them with more resources and capacity than us. And so it was very competitive, and I don't want to disparage people, but it became hard to, for us to -- we were like the smaller agency doing the big work, and so our numbers were smaller and so the getting the grants became very competitive and as I said to you before, I was a very shy person and nonprofit was new to me. I didn't know that crazy world.

ANNA ALVES: Yes, it is a crazy world.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Oh my God. You have to go in there -- now I know but I didn't know that and so we were not positioned [01:26:00] in a way that -- I think all of that fell into why we lost our funding. And so when we lost the funding in 2012, we had to let the place go. We lost the funding for the Drop In Center so we let that go and they didn't feel like we need this place also.

ANNA ALVES: Who's they?

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: The state. So they stopped paying for this place which was fine because church had taken it over so they were paying for it and so we weren't doing any more prevention down here.

ANNA ALVES: So then this became sort of a space that the church was like an annex to the church.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, and if we needed that over flow from there we would use it, like when we needed to have an event, we could still use it but we couldn't charge the state for it. And so in 2012, that happened and at the same time, the Board of the Social Justice Center, we were having conversations around doing something other than HIV, not being you know held to just HIV but this – and so they started doing strategic planning, and the focus groups, all that had started but we lost the funding before we came to how we wanted to do all this --.

ANNA ALVES: Then you were in crisis mode.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Right and --.

ANNA ALVES: So then how did you guys work through that, to get to the founding of this particular center? And to get refunded or to get resources?

[AUDIO SILENCE]

ANNA ALVES: Okay, so you were going to continue with the sort of this transition, from the drop-in center and also from the Social Justice Center becoming the LGBTQ community center. Go ahead.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes so the year we lost our funding is the same year we were having a conversation around filling other gaps in the city of Newark for LGBT people. And so we did focus groups, and strategic planning and so we're talking about

you know other health and wellness issues and seniors, and young people and trying to figure all that out. At the same time or in the backdrop, right, in 2003, 15-year-old Sakia Gunn was murdered and community leaders were having this conversation about needing a safe space, wanting a safe space, how are we going to get it, who is going to get it, how are we going to do it. A 10-year conversation. I'm saddened about the whole 10-year thing, but it happened. And in 2012, I'm on the – what do they call it – Advisory Commission of the city of Newark, so in 2009, Cory Booker actually started an advisory commission, LGBT community advisory commission. I was an inaugural member. So in 2011 I'm still on it, 2012. And that year we – the commission decided that our priority was going to be getting a center in the city of Newark. And so having that as our priority – so now we begin to have [01:30:00] more meetings and more conversations and bringing more community people in and trying to figure it out, and while the Liberation and Truth Social Justice Center still exists but not doing the work in New Street, that's closed, but here working and trying to figure out how are we going to do this work, and I'm in all these different rooms, right. And so I had a conversation with the board like “Okay, we need a center, we want a center. We have this place. This is a center. We're doing the same work. At some point we've got to get rid of these labels and titles and who's in charge and come together.” And so the Social Justice Center board agreed, and I approach the commission and the stakeholders with the idea, we have a physical space, we have a 501C3, we're already doing the work. If you say gay in the city of Newark, they're going to point you to us. We're

proposing that we bring community together, take what we already have, and build on it and make it an LGBTQ center. We don't care about the name. We can talk about the name, but it's time that we figure out how we are going to do the work. Community said yes, and we got people from the community, other people to join the existing board of the Social Justice Center and they had conversations, and did paper work and all of that and decided okay, we will work to make 11 Halsey Street and the Liberation and Truth Social Justice Center, doing business as Newark LGBT community center for now, until we figure out how to make it [01:32:00] legally and sustainably the community center. And that happened in 2013.

SPEAKER 1 That sort of intentional establishment.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: An intentional establishment we cut a ribbon, October 3rd, 2013 as the Newark LGBT Community Center. Legally, we were still Liberation and Truth Social Justice Center doing business as, but as of February 2016, we are legally the Newark LGBT Community Center.

ANNA ALVES: So you are legally your own 501C3 entity, singular.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yes. Yeah, so it was a community effort that brought this center and my comment about -- I don't know if people still see the differences because I'm still here.

ANNA ALVES: Did you, are you thinking of transitioning or did you want to -- you see the need to transition out.

REV. JANYCE JACKSON: Yeah, I'm leaving soon.

ANNA ALVES: And we will put a pause on that we will be going to part two at a later date.

[01:33:12] [RECORDING STOPPED]