

Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Sandra Toby Heath
Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone
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Location: Rutgers University-Newark

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay, today is November 16, 2016. My name is Kristyn Scorsone, and I'm interviewing Sandra Toby Heath at Rutgers-Newark for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. How are you doing?

Sandra Toby Heath: I'm good. I'm still marinating in the events of the past week. I'm trying to stay positive about it.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, I hear you. Same here. I guess, to start things off, I'm just going to ask you when and where you were born, your date of birth, and where.

Sandra Toby Heath: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, Saint Barnabas Hospital, on High Street, August 4, 1953.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you live in Newark all your life?

Sandra Toby Heath: Yes. I lived in Newark until the riots of 1966, I believe it was. Actually, we left Newark a couple of months before the riots. Yeah, before the riots. We went to East Orange. But I was born and raised in Newark. I'm from the projects, actually, Hayes Homes, which is no longer there.

Kristyn Scorsone: Which ward is that?

Sandra Toby Heath: That's the central ward. A lot of fabulous people came out of the central ward, a lot, a lot of great people. It was a great place to grow up in.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was it like?

Saundra Toby Heath: It was community. It was community. We moved in when I was two. They were new. Some years ago, in the Star Ledger, I don't even remember what was being talked about, but there was a black and white photograph of the opening of that particular building, and all the families that were moving in. It was a big group shot. I clipped it out. I still have it. I was looking at the picture, trying to recognize, but that was in 1955. I was two years old. You know what I mean? I couldn't tell you who the people were, but they were my neighbors, is no doubt, because we moved in when I was two.

It was a wonderful—it was a wonderful place to grow up. It was a community. The children had a facility that our summers were busy. We did things. In the winter, they had a area they called the big field. It was just this big open—where you could literally play football and baseball and all of that. In the winter, we'd be out there in the snow, and playing, and just having a—it was just—it was just a wonderful place to—it was a wonderful place to grow up. It really, really, really was a great place.

I can remember each family, on each floor, once a week, one apartment, we were responsible for scrubbing the hallway floor, and waxing it, and making sure that it was kept clean. We had an incinerator. If you didn't put that trash down the chute, and you let it drop on the floor, or for god's sake, don't even think about leaving a bag of trash outside the incinerator, you were in big trouble. It was just—it was just a—it was just a wonderful, wonderful place to grow up.

After the riots, it changed. The complexion changed. Up until then, it was a community. It was a village. It really was a village. If you were caught doing something you shouldn't be doing, the neighbor

could discipline you, or at least say something to you, and then tell your parent, and your parent would, depending on what you were doing, could spank you, or say something to you. It was like that. I didn't just belong to my mother and father. I was my neighbor's child, also.

It was a wonderful—I was very blessed to have come through the projects at that period in time. It wasn't always what it turned out to be. You know what I mean? It wasn't like that, when I was growing up.

Kristyn Scorsone: How many people do you think lived there?

Saundra Toby Heath: Oh, god, I don't know. They were twelve stories high. I think it went from—the apartments went from A to—I think maybe A to F, like 1A to—so, how many, seven, maybe, apartments on the floor, and children. There were children. I grew up with my friends. We went through school together, middle school and high school. It was a community of families. I don't even remember seeing adults that lived there, with no children. Maybe there were, but I don't remember it. Every house had at least one kid in it. It was a very wonderful place.

Even the community, Springfield Avenue, it was a place where you could actually go down and get a live chicken killed. Yeah, it was that. It was a children's store, with Easter. You would go Easter shopping, for your dress and your coat. It was just—when I think about it, it was just a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful place, really.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you have the ice man or the fruit truck come by?

Saundra Toby Heath: Oh, yeah. Right there on West Kenny Street, it was a store, called Johnny's. You go in there and get the penny candy. He'd have the

barrel, with the—pickles don't even taste like that anymore, the kosher dill pickles. It was just—it was a great place. It was a great place to be raised in.

Kristyn Scorsone: Were you raised by two parents, or was it a different family household?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, my parents, very interesting. My mom and dad separated, when I was around five, I think, me and my brother. My brother's two years younger than me. They separated, I think I was around five. My father, oh, my god, what a—I was so blessed to have fabulous parents. Even though they separated, I saw my dad every day. I was telling my son that, both of my sons that. Your grandfather saw me and Oliver, who's my brother, saw us every single day, even though they were separated. It was like we having some issues, but you're my children. That's important to me.

It was wonderful. It was like, depending on what—he was a truck driver, so he had a lot of freedom. It may not have been for a long period of time, depending on what his schedule was like, but he got to look at us every day. Sometimes even, especially in the wintertime, we might come out of school—I went to Cleveland Elementary School, which is still there. It was very—it was very—I don't even know the word I want to use—it was very natural to come outside of school and my dad is sitting there in his truck, waiting for us, me and my brother. We'd get in, and he'd take us home. Sometimes, he might stay with us a little bit, or it'd be like okay, I'll see you tomorrow. Drop us off and keep it moving.

Even though my parents were not together, me and my brother didn't—we didn't suffer for that. My parents were very mature. Yeah, they were very mature. Even though they weren't together, they still had a relationship. My mother had her boyfriend, and my

father had his girlfriend, who he married after my mother passed away—we'll get into that.

Christmas, it was—the understanding was that Christmas morning, when we wake up to get all of our goodies under the tree, my dad would be there. That was something that was very natural to me. No, they weren't together every single day, but Christmas, my father was like, “Listen, I'm going to be—listen, I want to be, and watch my kids open their gifts.”

As an adult, when I think about that, and think about that understanding that they had, I was like wow, that's pretty cool. Sometimes, for whatever reason, you may not be able to stay under the same roof together, but you can still love. You can still love each other, and honor that, and say okay, we can't do this every single day, but see you Christmas Eve or whatever. You know what I'm saying? When I think about that—and I talk to my oldest son about it, in particular, so we laugh about it. He was like, “Wow, my grandfather was something.” I said, “Yeah, he was. He was.”

My mother passed away when I was 12. I turned 13 that August. She passed away in April. I think about that. My wife mentioned it to me the other day, when we were talking about the election, and what have you. I think of Pence wanting to get rid of *Roe v. Wade*, and she talked about that, because that's how I lost my mother.

Kristyn Scorsone: *Roe v. Wade*.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. That's the abortion, right? Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: She had to try—she tried to get an abortion?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, and it wasn't legal. It wasn't legal. When Alicia mentioned that to me the other night, when we were talking about it, she said, "If that happens, then women will go back to doing what took your mother." That was like, just for that moment, I was like no, because that is what happened. Women won't stop doing that, but they won't be safe anymore. That's how I lost my mother.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was she like?

Saundra Toby Heath: She was a Capricorn woman, stern but extremely loving. She was very loving. I'm a big proponent of—I tell all my friends, who have children that they're still raising, that your responsibility, as a parent, is to create memories for your children. I guess I speak so—I speak from my experience, losing my mother when I was twelve, and losing my father when I was eighteen, that that's what—I have memories of my parents, like I had them a long time. I didn't, but they created memories. Of course, they didn't know that they were creating memories. I doubt that they did. I know that I was creating memories for my son. I was conscious about creating memories for my sons. I don't know whether or not my parents were conscious of it, but they did. They created memories.

I can remember—actually, it was the Christmas before my mother passed away that April. That Christmas, I got my first—at the time, they had sweaters that they called shells, the sleeveless, round collar, but it was a shell. That was the hot thing, and straight skirts. My mother, for Christmas, bought me a black shell sweater, and an orange straight skirt. And the newest thing were fishnet stockings. She bought me some fishnet stockings, and these cute—now, I'm remembering. I'm sixty-three, and I'm remembering that like it happened yesterday—and some black suede T-strap shoes.

I was wearing it to school. It was after the holidays, after Christmas. You get to wear one of your new outfits. My mother was—I had my outfit all ready to wear, and she says to me, “Saundra, I want to ask you a question.” I’m standing there. I said, “Okay.” She says to me, “Do you have any hair?” —I’m looking at her. I’m like, “Yes.” She says, “Where?” I says, “A little bit under my arms.” I showed her. She says, “Okay. Do you have any hair anywhere else?” I says, “Yes.” I was so—oh, god, I was just mortified. She asked me—she said, “Where?” I had my wife dying when I tell her. I was like, “Down here.” I was like, “Down here.”

Kristyn Scorsone: (Laughs) What’d she do?

Saundra Toby Heath: She was like, “Okay,” because she didn’t—I was twelve, so she wasn’t in the bathroom with me. She was leaving me to be a preteen. She just smiled, and she said to me—it was one of the things I remember now—she said to me, “You’re very beautiful.” I was like—which I’m still like that now. If my wife tells me that, I get very—I says, “Oh, okay. I’m all right.” I do. She says to me, “You are. You’re very beautiful. You know you’re very beautiful.” I says, “Well, I think that I look okay.” Beautiful, I wouldn’t say that.

My mother, that was one of the last things I remember. She told me how beautiful I was. I went to school with my outfit on, my straight skirt and my sweater.

Kristyn Scorsone: That’s really sweet.

Saundra Toby Heath: She created memories. She didn’t even know it. I can remember another time that I—those two instances. Me and my brother, we shared a bedroom, Because it was just a two-bedroom apartment. We had twin beds. He was in his bed. I was in my bed. It was late

at night. I don't know, my mother was just feeling devilish, for I don't know why. She got on the floor and crawled into the bedroom, and just took her hands, and just cupped my feet with her hands.

I still remember it. She just put both—I didn't scream. I didn't do anything. I just took my feet, and drew them up like this in the bed. I was done. She laughed. She bust out laughing. I said to—I think I might've said, "Mommy, why did you do that? You scared me." I don't know what got into her, but she did. She was on the floor, and crawled in there.

She was quite special. She liked to cook. She could cook really well. Another memory is Christmas, in particular, or even New Year's Day probably more so than Christmas. She would fix all the—cook all the things that we liked, that me and my brother liked. Which, I did that, too. I passed that on, when I became a mother.

She would fix stuff that we really loved. It would just be there, on the table, to just eat as much as we wanted, all day long if we wanted. If any of our friends from the building came, because me and my brother always had—the tree would just be like this, trillions of things, and big, real tree and all of that. She always had a lot of food prepared that me and my brother could eat as much as we wanted, and if our friends came, the food was there, that they could eat as much as they wanted. It was nice.

It was pretty hard losing her, suddenly. One day she's there, and the next morning, your father is telling you. What happened was my mother, I saw her the night she passed. We were in the living room, watching TV, me and my brother. I knew that she was—something was going on with her. Her best friend was with her in

her bedroom. Her best friend, Alma, was helping her get to the bathroom.

I remember sitting on the couch, and looking. My mother, her head wasn't like this, but the weight of it made you think that it was like this. Her head was doing this—

Kristyn Scorsone: Bobbing.

Saundra Toby Heath: —like it was a basketball. It wasn't swollen, but that was—it was the blood. That's what happened. The blood went the other way, instead of coming down. She had had the abortion. Instead of it coming down, it went up. I remember that.

When Alma was helping her in the bathroom, I'm sitting on the couch. I'm like why is mommy's head going like this? Why does it—it looked it's too heavy for her. I didn't know. You know what I mean? I didn't know. I actually didn't know, for a minute. I didn't know, for a minute, that that's what happened, that it had—she had had a stroke. The blood had gone the other way. I didn't know the reason. I knew that it was—the death certificate said hemorrhage of—whatever the wording is.

Oh, I tell you how—ah, it just hit me. I found out what it was that had killed her, when I was pregnant with my son. I was sixteen, and got pregnant. I was one of those—one of those things. Don't ever let anybody tell you that you can't get pregnant the first time. That's not true. I did. I did.

The reason why I know that it was the first time was because it was so awful. That's how I freaking know. It was so awful. I was like is this what everybody's talking about? Really? Come on. I was sixteen. My son's father was seventeen. What the hell? What did we know? I thought it was terrible. I was like oh, my god, if this is

what it is, I'll wait on this. I wouldn't let him touch me anymore. I was like no, that's all right. My period didn't come, so I was—I'm a witness that oh, yeah, it can get you the first time.

I was a good student in school. My father had high hopes for me, and big plans. Folks said to him, "Well, got some"—still wasn't legal. It wasn't safe. "Well, I know somebody who can do it. She'll be all right, whatever." My father went crazy. He was like, "Hell no. Her mother died like that. Oh, no. This is not what I want for her. I want her to go to college." Of course, you can still do those things, but it makes it harder. "Yeah, I would love for her to finish high school and go to college, and all of those things, but you know what, I can't do that, because if I were to lose her, what?"

And that's when I found out that that's how my mother had passed. I didn't know. I just knew it was that stroke. You know what I mean? I was like oh, wow.

Kristyn Scorsone: Were you scared to give birth then?

Saundra Toby Heath: You know what? I wasn't. No, I wasn't necessarily scared. I knew it was going to be pain. You know what I mean? I was a reader. I've always loved to read, so I read. I had a book about being pregnant, and the things that you feel, and what to expect. I knew. I knew that it wouldn't be—it wouldn't be like just sitting down, going to the bathroom.

I went through the pregnancy. I went to—they had school at night, for pregnant mothers, or mothers, or people who just, for whatever reason, couldn't go to school during the day, night school. I went to school at night. Finished my junior and my senior year. I did very well, actually. When we had our graduation, I addressed the—I addressed the class.

Kristyn Scorsone: Like the entire high school class, or just the night school?

Saundra Toby Heath: The night school, the night school, yeah. That was pretty cool. That was one of—that was one of the last things that my dad got to see. He was sitting right there in the front row. I did that. I finished school. I never missed—I never missed any time. When I got pregnant, I went right to—I went right to night school. It was like—

Kristyn Scorsone: Could you have stayed in regular daytime school, or did they have pregnant women—

Saundra Toby Heath: You know what? I believe that they did not, at that time. They didn't, at that time. They would see you. Kids, people that I went to school with—my reunion is coming up, too, now that I think about it. People that I went to school with, they would see me every day. Because you come in. You go in. I had my stomach. I wasn't part of that daytime thing. I didn't miss a—I didn't miss a beat. I got pregnant, unfortunately, but school was still important to me.

The idea of dropping out and all that, that wasn't even a—wasn't even a consideration. First of all, my dad wouldn't have—he wouldn't have had it. He wouldn't have—he would've been like, “You got to be out of your mind, not to—talk about not finishing school.” It was okay.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you have to move out of Hayes Homes to live with him, or did he move in with you?

Saundra Toby Heath: Oh, yeah. Remember, I said we left Hayes Homes, the riots, the year of. We moved to East Orange. You know what I mean? I was out of—I was out of Newark for a long time, actually. I was in the neighboring towns. I came back to Newark. God, we've been in

our house now—I don't even remember when we bought the doggone house. I think we've been in the house now about eighteen or nineteen years. We came back to Newark. Alicia and I bought the house in Newark. I've always loved Newark, always, always, always.

When I became—I had my son in another town or whatever. Coming back to Newark, I'd never really thought about it, for the schools. Trying to keep him in a situation where the schools were a little better. But I've always loved Newark, always had an affinity for Newark. Did a lot of things in Newark, with my children, even though I lived in neighboring towns, of bringing them to—I was big on finding out things that were going on that didn't cost anything, because I was a single mother. You know what I mean. It was just me and Devin, for a while, for nine years.

Kristyn Scorsone: Who's Devin?

Saundra Toby Heath: That's my oldest son, Devin. Then I got pregnant with my second son. Devin was nine when I had his brother. His name is Sabor. I used to bring them down to the museum, a lot of stuff going on there. I always stayed connected with Newark, because that was where—that was where my—that's where my roots were, there. More importantly, for me, that's where my memories of my parents were, in Newark. It was in Newark. So Alicia and I bought a house in Newark.

Kristyn Scorsone: What neighborhood?

Saundra Toby Heath: We're in the—I always get them confused. The south ward, Girard Place. Yeah, I always get the wards confused. The one ward I know, central. I know central. I think it's the south ward, Girard Place. It's funny because, where we live now is literally, by car,

maybe ten minutes or less from where I was raised. The block that we live on is a block that I know from when I was a kid. My father used to bring me—drive me and my brother down Girard Place at Christmastime.

The area I lived in, back in the day, was Jewish, big time. Anytime you see a synagogue, you know that it was heavily populated, because they're not going to live—Jewish people are not going to live anywhere, and not have a place of worship. It's still a very recognized block in Newark, wide street. All the houses on the block are different, because it was—there were ministers, and doctors, and lawyers that lived. When they were building their homes, I guess they were trying to outdo the other. Your house has six rooms, but mine is going to have eight, and a extra bathroom. Every house on the block is different.

I remember that block, from a kid, my father bringing us down, coming down Girard Place, and me and my brother would be just like oh, because the houses would be decorated. I never thought I would live on Girard Place. It's very interesting. A mutual friend of ours was raised on Girard Place. Her parents had passed away and whatever, and she had it. It's a thirteen-room house. It's a little—it could be a little much, to try to keep up and whatever.

After many years of trying to keep it together, as a single woman, she sold it. She sold it. I talked my way up on it. I remember knowing her, me and Alicia both. Alicia knew her longer than me. I remember being invited to a cook-out at the house. At the time, Alicia and I were living a few blocks away, right at the Newark-Irvington line. We were in Irvington, but it was literally right around the corner.

I walked to her house, from where we were living. I'm strolling, and I'm looking, and I was like wow, I remember this area. Daddy used to bring me and Oliver. I'm coming down the block, Girard Place, and I'm looking at the houses. I'm saying wow, it's still pretty. The houses are still beautiful.

I'm walking and walking. Got to her house and went in. Loved the house, big old house. I like old—I like old houses. Big old house. We had a wonderful time there. It was quite a few people there. She's a lesbian, Robinae, so it was family. We had a really good time.

Then, maybe a year later, might not even be a whole year, we were told that she was about to lose the house, actually. I remembered it. I said to Alicia, "I'm interested in it." Alicia was like, "Really?" I was like, "Yeah. I'm tired of paying rent to other people." We always had nice places to live. We're always really funny about that. I wanted my own.

I called her. I called Robinae, because I think one of the neighbors was interested in buying it, buying the house. I think that their intent was to buy it and whatever, and then sell it. Like they say, flip it. I called her and said, "I want to come and talk to you about the house. I heard you're going to sell it." She was like, "Yeah, one of my neighbor"—I said, "So, let me come and talk to you."

I did. I went and talked to her. I did. I talked to her. I said to her, straight up—I said, "Listen, they already have a house. You were raised in this house. You have wonderful memories of your father, with his"—from my understanding, he had a—they had a gorgeous backyard. He had Japanese fish. He had a—he had a pond or something, in the backyard. He had these Japanese fish in it. They were very—I think he was an insurance man, and her mother was a

home ec teacher, so they were—they would like doing things. The house, they entertained a lot, and all of those things. Robinae grew up in that.

I said to her—I said, “Listen, let me buy it. I will love it. I will take care of it. I will keep it. The neighbor, he’s probably going to buy it, and then resell it.” I never forget that. I did. I talked my way into—I did. I talked my way into that house. She was like, “Okay.” I said, “Okay, thank you.” I did. I was like—and when I told Alicia, she was like, “Are you serious? Did you really do?”—I said, “Yes, I did. I told her, ‘Robinae, don’t sell your neighbor that house. Sell it to us. I will take care of it, I promise you. I love this house. I’ll take care of it.’”

That’s how we got—that’s how we got the house. But I’m telling you, when we went back to see it—like I said, about a year had passed, since I had been to a cook-out and had a good time, and liked the house—it looked like it had been to hell and back. It was unbelievable. Alicia was like, “Really? Really, Sandra, really? You really want?”—and I said, “Yeah, I do. I do want it.” It was in—it was in horrid condition. It was in horrid, horrid condition.

We worked on it. We had friends who came and helped us clean. It took some years. What happened was we would do things in the house that, after we did it, it was like we were cleansing the house of the old, so we could do something else. Then we would do something else. I would say to Alicia, “Okay, we got rid of that.” It took us years to do it, because we didn’t have a lot of money. We were doing it on a budget and stuff.

Alicia’ll tell anybody, “My wife had a vision. Honey” —“honey” is my nickname—“Honey had a vision of what the house could be, because I didn’t see it.” It was horrible. It had been not taken care

of, not loved anymore. She'll say, "Honey knew. Honey knew what it could turn out to be."

Kristyn Scorsone: I would think that would make—for myself, I would feel like it was more my own, to put on all that work. I don't know. I think it would be nice to do that, actually, even if it takes a long time.

Saundra Toby Heath: It was very satisfying for me. Even still, after all these years, it's still a work in progress, because we're—contrary to—I think a lot of people who drive down that block assume that everybody in the houses have money, have things going on, have things. Now, don't get me wrong. There probably were, are maybe, people who—most of the—most of the original owners, though, have—I think everybody has passed on. Now, it's being owned by people of my generation, whatever. There may be a few who do have it going on, but most of us, we're working every day. The only difference is we're not paying rent to anybody else. We're paying the mortgage to us. We're building equity on our property. That's the difference.

I'll tell anybody that listen, I'm going to work the same way you're going to work. The only difference is I'm investing back in myself, not helping someone else pay their mortgage. Which, listen, that's how it is. This is my opportunity to build, where, when I'm ready to retire, I can sell my house, recoup money, and be able to go on to my next, to my what's next.

It's pretty satisfying. My feeling, also, about it was that everybody can't leave Newark. That was where I was—where I was. I had to really talk—had to really talk Alicia into buying in. Because she's from New York. She's from Harlem, actually. She doesn't particularly care for Jersey, even after all these years we been together. (Laughs)

Kristyn Scorsone: How come?

Saundra Toby Heath: Of course, it's not New York. Doesn't have that flavor, that energy. It doesn't have—I happen to love Harlem, myself. Yeah, doesn't have that New York thing that she's been used to. But, you know, the same way she loves Harlem, I love Newark.

Kristyn Scorsone: A lot of people you knew moved away from it?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, yeah, actually. The people in my life that I grew up with, the friends—and that's hard to say, because some of my lifelong friends are no longer my lifelong friends. I know them, but a lot of them walked away from me when Alicia and I got together. You know what I mean? I know them. I know where they are. If we see each other, we greet each other, “Hey, good to see you and whatever.” But the closeness. They all, yes, are not in Newark anymore. They're either out of the state, or they're south Jersey way, or like that.

I said to Alicia—I was like, “Listen, everybody can't leave Newark. If everybody leaves Newark, then Newark is going to die.” My thing was I understood if you had children. I got it. You don't want—you want to live in a community where you don't have to pay for private school, in order for them to have a decent—you want them to be able to go to public school and get a decent education. If you're in Newark, that wasn't going to happen. You were going to spend more money, to send them to a Catholic school or whatever. That I get. But I said, if you're an adult, and your children are grown and doing their thing, then you don't have to leave Newark. You can stay and take care of your property, and make it nice, and bring the value of the city back.

That was another thing, for me. I felt like I wanted to be one of those people that stayed here, that didn't—I was always in the neighboring towns, but I was able to get a house that was in a area that I always loved. Listen, I have a—I have a motto that I live by, my whole life. You got lemons, make lemonade. That's really how I live. That is really how I live.

In our house, we have a back porch, a enclosed back porch, right off our kitchen. I fixed that up in the summertime. Alicia and I sit out there. Our backyard is a nice size backyard. We sit out there, and we look at the backyard. I'm like this is it. This is my oasis right here. You come out the door. You go down to the end of each—because the block itself is nice—you go down to the end of each corner, and pray that ain't nobody drag racing down the street, in a stolen car, no shooting go—you know what I mean?

Right now, sitting on my back porch, looking out in my backyard—and once in a while, we'll see a red robin or something in the tree. For me, that's my—you know what I mean? That's my lemonade. You got lemons. This is my lemonade right here. I don't have to—I choose not to, at this point in my life, be somewhere else. Right here in Newark, let's stay right here, and make it a special place, make Newark a special place. People talk about it so badly. It's not. There are some great people here. For me, that's how we came back to Newark.

Kristyn Scorsone: Thinking about Alicia and everything, I want to get to that as well. Before you met her, how would you—or, well, how would you now describe your sexual orientation?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, that is a—that's a good question because, for a long time, I would tell anyone that I cared to share it with, was that I was a straight woman who fell in love with a woman. That was how I—

that's how I felt. Now, I don't have a problem with saying I'm a lesbian, because I'll say it now to anybody, especially at work, if somebody's talking some crap. I be like, "Hold up"—letting my coworkers know—"if you got something to say, you would either want to wait until I walk out of hearing, or don't say it, because if you say it, you're going to have to—you're going to hear it from me." I don't accept that kind of talk, about gay folks. I just don't.

I'll be telling anybody, "Listen, I'm a lesbian. Me and Alicia been together almost 28 years. Yeah, I'm a lesbian." And I've told Alicia. If she should leave before me, transition before me, or if—I'm also a believer that people are in your life for periods of time. It could be a week. It could be two months. It could be five years. It could be fifteen years. It could even be twenty years. It could even maybe be fifty years. Maybe that fifty-first year, something happens, and you just—you don't know. You really don't know.

If that were to happen, that I will probably not marry again, male or female, because marriage is—it's quite a thing. It's quite a thing. It's very different. Being a parent has its difficulties. But marriage, you're not related. You choose each other. Marriage, in a good one, I think, you're going to always consider your mate, in everything that you do. You are. Even if you have an understanding, you got to consider them, in order to have the understanding.

It's a lot of work. It's a lot of work. Twenty-eight years, and counting. We talked about it not too long ago, again. Every once in a while, we talk about it. She looked at me and she was like, "What does that mean? Was it bad for you? Is it not good for you?" I said, "No, it's"—

Kristyn Scorsone: What, the marriage?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yes. When I told her that I would probably not marry again. Quite frankly, I would probably not have a mate again, seriously. She didn't know how to take that. She was like, "Did I not make you happy? Am I not making you happy?" I said, "Yeah, you are. I am happy with you." We have our moments, just like any couple. My life with her, I've experienced adventures with her that I probably never would have experienced. I'm pretty sure of that. Her and I, we have experienced stuff together. We're quite a team, actually.

If she should—like I said, if she should transition before me, or if we reach that point where, "it's been a good run, babe"—you know what I mean—I would take the selfish route. You know what I mean? I really would. I definitely love my own company. Always have. You know what I mean? It's no doubt in my mind—and I said to her, I said, "Sweetie, if I were to make transition before you, or if we were to—you would have somebody else, and it would be fine. It would be fine." That's who she is. I said it would be fine. No, she wouldn't be me. You would have somebody else. No, she wouldn't be me, because she wouldn't be me. The same way I wouldn't—I don't think that I could ever find anybody like Alicia. Really, she knows who I am, good and not so good.

I'm able to—because I'm a really fun—I'm a funny person. I'm the kind of person that I have the—I have the way about myself, where someone can come to me, and they could talk to me, and just let it all—just let everything just hang out. I'll listen, and talk to you. I'm a nurturer. Listen, and we could have conversation. When that person leaves, they leave—they don't know a thing about me. I have perfected that. I perfected that. Not a good thing, really. I'm little bit better. But that's who I have always been. I can draw it all out of you. You walk away saying, "Oh, my god, it was

so great talking to you,” and it is. “It was won”—but I didn’t share anything with you.

Alicia—that hasn’t been such a good thing for me, I guess. That’s the trust—that’s where the—that’s the trust piece, I guess. I know that—so, I think that the person, when you asked me how I identify, I think that that’s—I’m a straight woman, who fell in love with a woman. I think that’s more—that’s the more authentic me.

I identify as a lesbian, too, because I married in a ceremony. Because that’s how I felt about her. I had no problem with sharing that. When Alicia and I got married—it’s funny, we’ve had three—we had three ceremonies, three. The first one was—when we get married, in ’99, the first time? It wasn’t even a consideration, same-sex marriage. It wasn’t even a thought. Alicia and I had been together ten years.

One day, we were in the car. I don’t know where the heck we were going. We said, “Want to get married?” Because we were spending—we were spending so much money. We were spending so much money. It was like—

Kristyn Scorsone: Like you were living in different places and stuff like that?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yes. We were living in different places. She was paying rent in New York. I was blah, blah. Then we joined forces. We lived together. We got a beautiful apartment. We did that for a while. Then, we wanted to—we wanted to, I don’t know, try to protect each other, as much as we could. If it was nothing but emotionally, which really, that’s all it was because it wasn’t recognized anywhere. You know what I mean?

Kristyn Scorsone: The marriage, you mean?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. Wasn't recognized. I think that we wanted to—we wanted to do something that let the people in our lives know that. Because I remember two women that I was very close to, when I worked in the court system, who went on—removed themselves from me, from my life, when I met Alicia. We had gone—we had met—had reconnected briefly, and decided to go to dinner together. We're sitting there, and we're talking. I can't remember, verbatim, now. It's been so many years.

They were talking to me like Alicia and I were just something that happened, and they were waiting for me to meet Mr. Right. They were waiting for me to—and I was hurt by it, because Alicia and I had been together over ten years. I was a little—I was like, “Whoa. Are they really waiting for me and Alicia to split, and for me to meet a man?” Yeah.

I came home, and Alicia asked me, “How was dinner?” I said, “We were having—it was a nice dinner, until they pretty much said, just in so many words, that they were waiting for me to meet Mr. Right.” Alicia was like, “Are you kidding me? We didn't just meet.” I said, “Yeah, I know, I know.” That's the thing that really got me, that, hey, me and this woman have been together longer than two years. How can you—how can you think that it's just a passing fancy, and I'm waiting for—so that made me—so, we did that.

Kristyn Scorsone: What did that ceremony look like?

Saundra Toby Heath: Oh, my god. Of the three that we've had, that one was the one that meant the most to me. That was the one. Alicia and I, we planned our wedding in six months, just the two of us.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was there a proposal, or did you mutually just decide?

Saundra Toby Heath: We mutually, yes. We went and picked out our rings. That's my ring. It's an Ethiopian wedding band.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's beautiful.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. The midwife uses this ring to cut the umbilical cord, that piece right in there.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, wow. That is really cool.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. It was made—Alicia had one in the white gold, which she lost some years ago. We planned that wedding in six months, and it was—Alicia has performed many weddings. We know people who've gotten married, and they almost hate each other by the time they get married—they're trying to—the fighting, and trying to decide on this, that, and the other. For me, it was one of the most wonderful period—that period of time was absolutely wonderful. Alicia and I had so much fun planning it. There were times when she would be like (sigh), but we never fought each other. I was real—because I like decorating, fixing up, and all those things, so I would find things, out of `jacks[A1]`, or just places.

It was just—it was absolutely—that six months of planning was very—oh, it was just wonderful. We got married in our backyard. We had about a hundred people were there. Actually, those two women who I had dinner with, I invited both of them, and they didn't come. Couple of other women that I was close to, younger women that I was close to, didn't come. There were a couple people that didn't—and we ran in—we occasionally see a woman who came to our wedding, and she always—actually, we seen her at two weddings that Alicia officiated. She has said to us, “You know, yours was the first wedding I ever went to.”

It's a reminder, because I forget. Nobody was getting married. When Alicia and I talked about getting married, I'm sure that some people in our community was like, "What? For what?" You know what I mean? For us, it was just letting our family and friends know that we're not just hanging out until we just can't hang out no more. This is a relationship here. You know what I mean? We're building a life here.

Kristyn Scorsone: Symbolic.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. It was quite—it was quite a—it was quite nice. People really enjoyed it. It was about the most personal wedding. Everything was, we planned it. The DJ who did our music, we planned our whole musical program, of all of our favorite songs. He was like—when we exchanged our vows, you know how everything is over, they introduce you to the—what's that, recess, the recessional. We 'cessed out [A2]to Bonnie Raitt, "Let's Give Them Something to Talk About."

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, I love that.

Saundra Toby Heath: People would just—they were screaming. When Naeem started playing that, and we bopping down the—"let's give them something to talk about, how about love." Please, people were screaming Because it was like yeah, that's—yeah, right, you want to talk about something? Talk about some love. Let's talk about some love here, not the other shit. Let's talk about love. It was quite wonderful.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was the second and third marriage?

Saundra Toby Heath: The second one was after the Supreme Court gave the state of New Jersey civil union.

Kristyn Scorsone: It was October 2013.

Saundra Toby Heath: No, October 2006. 2013 was same-sex marriage, recognized, legal. 2006 was after the five-year lawsuit that we were in, with Lambda.

Kristyn Scorsone: I'm interested to hear about that.

Saundra Toby Heath: Five years of our life. That was quite an adventure, for us.

Kristyn Scorsone: How did you get involved?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, Alicia's best woman had heard about it, had heard about this—that Lambda was—I think actually, I think she might've been somewhere, and Lambda—you know how you go to things, and maybe had a table set up, with information about the lawsuit. They were looking for couples. They were looking. We were told—we were told, by this person, who was Alicia's best woman—I won't call her name because I won't—and she told me and Alicia. She said, "Lambda's looking for couples. They're getting ready to sue the state of New Jersey for the right to marry. I just thought that you all would be perfect."

Alicia asked me, "How you feel about it?" I said, "I feel okay about it." Alicia'll tell anybody she doesn't know what the inside of a closet looks like. You know what I mean? I guess knowing me, that straight woman who fell in love with a woman, and Alicia's like that. Her, she's like, "Let's do it." But how do you—how am I?

I was like okay, well, let's talk to them, Because they were interview—they were interviewing couples. We called, and made the appointment. He came to see us, Dave. Oh, god, it's a senior moment here. I can't remember his last name. Shame on me. Wow. I was very fond of him. He's no longer with Lambda. He came to

the house. Alicia wasn't there. I was just home. He told us about the lawsuit, what they were aiming for. I listened.

We talked about it. We had already gotten married now, in our yard. About the right to be able to protect each other, and to provide for each other, and of course, I was there because I understood it. I said, "Well, I think we—I'd like to go for it."

I don't even know how many people they interviewed. He did give me the number. I can't even remember. At least fifty couples. It might've been more. Then, when Alicia came home, I told her about it. She says, "Really?" I said, "Yeah, and I told him we would do it." She was like, "Oh, you just"—I said, "Yeah, because I knew you would do it. You don't know what the inside of a closet looks like. The opportunity to fight, to do this." Of course, she was like, "Yeah, you're right."

They were still interviewing. Then they called us and said, "We would like to invite you to be a part of the lawsuit." It was seven couples. Alicia and I were the only black couple. It was another lesbian couple, who were black and white. Then, the third couple, they were white. Then, the other ones were men.

Wow, what an adventure. Oh, my god.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was it like?

Saundra Toby Heath: It was humbling. It was pretty incredible. Alicia and I were very blessed. We didn't have any children to worry about. Because the other two lesbian couples had kids. I don't think—the men didn't, no, but the women, yeah. Alicia and I got a chance to travel a little bit. It was the coolest thing. I was so blessed, because my manager at work worked with me, so I could use my vacation time. I could spread it out.

We were like the spokeswomen for the—we went to Chicago, to a big thing at some art gallery. They celebrated us. We went to California and did a video. Yeah, it was really cool. We took pictures that were on the cover of their—what are those books called that big companies have that they send the stock stuff? What are those—I can't think of—

Kristyn Scorsone: I don't know.

Saundra Toby Heath: Lambda, it went all over the country. It was about—god, I forget what those books are called.

Kristyn Scorsone: I'm not sure.

Saundra Toby Heath: Every big corporation has it. It tells you, I guess, about the—

Kristyn Scorsone: Like a handbook?

Saundra Toby Heath: —about the company, and what's going on with the stock and all that. We were on the cover of that. It went everywhere. I remember, it was—we had a photo shoot in Brooklyn. We went, and we took a young lesbian that we loved. We adored her. We took her with us. We had a photo shoot, and we just had—just the whole energy, the photographer was shooting us, and we're laughing and talking and taking pictures with **[inaudible 01:17:49]**, and just wonderful.

He chose the picture that he liked, which we happened to like, too. They had this big affair down near the West Side Highway, at the water, somewhere. We went, and when we walk in, the pictures are on these big things. They're all over. They're all over the place. When me and Alicia walk in, I guess people—the waiters are walking around with the hors d'oeuvres and the wine, and blah,

blah, blah. We walk in, and people are like—they look, and then they look, like, “That’s them.”

We’re coming in, and everywhere you see, poster size, on easels, all over the place. People are like—as me and Alicia are coming in, people are like smiling at us, and yeah. I’m mortified. Oh, my god, all these big-ass pictures.

We were on NPR, interviewed, WBGO.

Kristyn Scorsone: Here in Newark?

Saundra Toby Heath: Mm-hmm. That woman who’s on—you know who I’m talking about. She’s on it. It’s a cable show.

Kristyn Scorsone: From Newark or not sure?

Saundra Toby Heath: New York, out of New York. You know who I’m talking—you would know who I was talking about. We did her show. I have all of it. I have all the—on the little things. It was just a—it was just an experience that’s like, wow. We got it—we were blessed to be able to do it, because we didn’t have children that we had to worry about, and we were—

Kristyn Scorsone: They were older, then, I guess?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. They were gone. Yeah, they were gone. Oh, yeah, because my oldest son is forty-six, and my younger son is thirty-seven. They were gone. Oh, yeah. It was quite—it was quite an experience. The wonderful part is my coworkers, they were right—they were hanging right with me. That was pretty cool, really. “Saundra, where you going now?” I would tell them, “We going to California to do a shoot.” There was something. I forget what station did that, on cable, where they came in and did a morning thing with us. Had us, we’re talking, making our bed, and in the

kitchen, fixing something to eat. Just in our daily—in our daily life.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where did you work, at the time?

Saundra Toby Heath: FedEx. I been with FedEx thirty years, so I was with FedEx. I'm still with FedEx. It was like my coworkers were right with me. When we were on the radio, and even on TV, though, they got up and went in the break room, to see it, because it would happen in the morning. When I came to work, they would be like, "We heard you this morning. You sounded great." Or, when I—with that woman that I can't remember her name, we saw you, we saw the show. We were in the breakroom, watching, waiting for you to come on. My coworkers were very supportive.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's nice.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, it was. It really was. It really was. Even my neighbors, the neighbors on my block, when we got married, they were waiting. When we got married, all the guests are in the backyard, waiting for the bride. I come out of my front door, and my oldest son walks me down the driveway, into the backyard. When I come out of the house, across the street, my neighbors are standing outside, in front of their house. I come out my house. They're waving, like, "Oh, you look beautiful," that kind of thing.

After the ceremony, when they had to change stuff around in the backyard, getting ready to eat, there's a little park down my block. So we go. We come out, and we going down the block to take pictures. My neighbors in all the houses are standing there, watching us, and smiling, and, "Congratulations!"

This what happened with the lawsuit. What happened? When they first—when we had the first press conference at the Hilton, to

announce, that was a big deal. Oh, my god, because we're all—all the couples are sitting at the table, and all the cameras and stuff were all set up. I was like over here, click, click, click. All the couples are sitting. All the news people, and blah, blah, blah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you remember how the newspapers reacted?

Saundra Toby Heath: No, I don't remember how they—no, I don't really remember how they reacted, other than that it was a big deal. It was a big deal.

Kristyn Scorsone: It was called *Lewis v. Harris*?

Saundra Toby Heath: That's right, Lewis versus Harris. That particular day, after the news conference and we came home, I forget the newscaster's name from Channel 4, I think it is, came. Some neighbors were outside, because he pulls up and whatever, and they're looking, like, "What the hell is going on? What are they doing now?" He came in and interviewed us in the living room, whatever. Some of my neighbors are like, "Wow." Or, when they saw us on TV, they would be like, "We saw you and Alicia on television. Wow." It was like—

Kristyn Scorsone: That's cool.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, it was pretty—it was pretty cool. Who gets to do something like that? Who gets to do that? I remember when the supreme court made the decision to grant civil union. A friend of mine, who's my—well, she's a personal friend, but she's my business partner in the shop. She called me that morning, and she said, "Do you have—are you sitting down?" I'm like, "No. Should I be?" She said, "Well, you can. I just got a phone call." I said, "Yeah, what?" She said, "You and Alicia are on the front page of the *New York Times*." I said, "No, we're not." She said, "Yeah, you are. I just wanted you to know. When you go—when you're on your way to

work, and you're in Penn Station, stop and get the paper." I was like, "Okay." She was like—she said, "Congratulations. I'm so proud of you." I was like, "Okay, thank you."

I'm like oh, my god. What the hell? I took my shower, got ready for work, got on the bus, went down to Penn Station, and I go to the newsstand. I buy the *Times*, and I look, and there's me and Alicia. The only other picture on the *Times* is George Bush. He's up top, and we're at the bottom. I was like oh, my god. I buy it, and I fold it, put it in my bag.

I'm turning to leave out of the newsstand, and there, in the middle of the floor, is a lesbian, a butch—very clear that she was a butch. She sees me. She's watching me, actually. I look up at her, and she was smiling. She was like—and I just, my eyes got watery, and I'm just like, oh. I guess she—I didn't even know that she was—I didn't pay attention to anybody. I was just walking, and go get the paper. She must've seen me. When I turned, and she's just standing—she's just standing. She wasn't moving. She's just looking at me, and she's just smiling. I just smile. I smile back, and I just walk to my track.

A couple people on the train—I guess people who look at the newspaper—and I'm sitting there, and a couple of people, like I just saw her. Of course, when I got to work, everybody was going crazy. They were like, "Oh, my god. You're on the *New York Times*." I make a joke about it. I said, "I know Bush, he actually looked at me and Alicia's face, because that's what your chief of staff—they bring stuff to you, to let you know what's going on. I know his chief of staff had probably brought the paper, and said look at these fucking lesbians here. Look at this." I said, "Well, George Bush looked at us. He looked at us. He looked at our face

on the front page, with him.” That was funny. Me and Alicia laughed about that one.

I have this bin in my attic that has everything in it. I kept everything. We’ve been on a couple of magazine covers, *Out in New Jersey*, and it’s another one. I forget the other one. All of that I have, for my grandchildren. My grandson, he’s in his—wow, in his third year of college. My son said that, “Terrell talks about you and Alicia, about his grandmothers, who are activists.” The first time I was told that, I was so surprised, because I didn’t know that he paid attention. I really didn’t, but he does.

Kristyn Scorsone: That’s really sweet.

Saundra Toby Heath: It is. I kept all of that stuff. I said they might be interested in it, when they get to college and whatever. They can go through everything. This is what my—Mee-ma is what I’m called. Alicia’s name is Everyday. That came from my daughter-in-law. She actually called Alicia, “You’re everything. You’re just everything.” One of the grands changed it to Everyday. I don’t know. Maybe that was easier for her to say. That’s what they call her. Instead of grandma, they call her Everyday. That’s funny. They can read about Mee-ma and Everyday.

Kristyn Scorsone: You got married again after the—

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, that March. March of 2007. I didn’t particularly want to, and neither did Toby—well, I call her Toby. Neither did Toby, because it wasn’t marriage. It was civil union. You know what I mean? Keeping it real, sometimes you got to go with that, as you still working for the thing that you really want.

Then, people were asking. You going to do it? You going to do it? Alicia really gave me a hard time about it. I said, “You know

what? We've been, as two black lesbians, we gave five years of our life. We need to do this. People, they want to know that we're going to do this." That's what happened. That's why we—that's why we did it, because all the other couples—no, you can't do that.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did they ever have you—did you ever have to go into the court, during this whole thing, or go to the trials, I guess, or is it just—or you don't have to do that sort of work?

Saundra Toby Heath: What did we do? You know what? We had done all of that stuff prior to—we went to the supreme court, and we did all of that. Then, they gave us civil union. There were some things that happened after that. Because what had happened was, like Lambda said, no, this is not what we wanted, but we spent five years working on this. You're not going to say, "you didn't give us marriage. We don't want civil"—no. You do this, and you document why it's not enough. That's what Lambda continued to do, that and Garden State Equality. You know what I mean? Yeah, civil union, but we're going to document why it's not quite enough.

A couple of times we went places, to talk about why it wasn't enough. For me, personally—because I testified at one of the things we went to, and I talked about my job. I talked about my job, when I found out that FedEx had put in their—inserted into their—I want to say contract. It might not be the right word.

Kristyn Scorsone: Like a policy?

Saundra Toby Heath: In there, about DOMA. I didn't know that. Actually, Lambda found—I had gotten them a—I had gotten them some paper—I had gotten them a book from FedEx, which had all this stuff in it. They went through it, and that's when it was discovered that DOMA was

part of FedEx. I was devastated by that, because it was like, really, y'all? All these gay people you got working for you, and you would take protection away? I was done. I was furious with the company that I'd spent so many years with, and loved working for FedEx. I did. I still do. It's not the same. That was my testimony about it.

They continued to fight, fight, fight, until it was real clear that yeah, it helps, but it's not marriage. It's not marriage. That happened.

New York actually had marriage before Jersey. I'm trying to think. I don't remember when the heck it was. Was it '13? I can't remember now, when New York recognized marriage. Whatever year that—I don't remember the year.

Kristyn Scorsone: Well, I got married when New Jersey—

Saundra Toby Heath: Okay. When was that? That was '13, around '13?

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, 2013.

Saundra Toby Heath: Okay. New York was before. I don't remember. I have to look at my doggone—all these freaking dates, all these marriage dates. Alicia was living in Rochester at the time. She was pastoring up there. We said okay, she lives in New York state, and they recognize same-sex marriage. That's when we did it the third time, on my birthday, actually.

When New Jersey recognized it, we had already done it. We had already done it. Because we asked. We were like, okay, do we have to do this again? It was like for god's sake, please. We didn't, because we had done it in New York state.

Like I said, my backyard, that was the one that I remember the most. That's the one that meant the most to me. The one in New York state was special, too. We went in a labyrinth.

Kristyn Scorsone: What's that?

Saundra Toby Heath: A labyrinth is that thing that goes around. You walk it.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, like in a outdoor space, like that?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yes. In Rochester, it's this woman's—I think she's—I think she's clergy. Yeah, I believe her and her husband are clergy. Beautiful old house, but their backyard is a labyrinth. It's really pretty. That's where we got married.

Kristyn Scorsone: Cool.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, it was. We walked the labyrinth together. A friend of Alicia's, who's a pastor, Imani, she officiated. That was nice. It was just Imani, her daughter, who was a young lady, a young kid, and our witness, witness for Alicia. That was it. It was just us. That was special.

Kristyn Scorsone: Intimate.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, and walking the—because I had never walked a labyrinth before. Alicia has. That was nice. That was it.

Kristyn Scorsone: How do your sons like Alicia?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, Devin is my oldest son. I think he—I think he loves Alicia. It's a lot of time. I would venture a guess that he would still, after twenty-eight years, like to see me with a man. My younger son had issues, and is still having issues about it. I didn't know that. I thought that—because he was a—I think, maybe thirteen or

something like that, fourteen, something like that. I would've thought, or I thought that—he's 37 now—that he would—come on. When are you going to—but I was told, by my older son, in a conversation, that—no, I wasn't told by him. I was told by my daughter-in-law that that might be when Alicia really affected him. That was a little hard to hear, after all these years, that it affected him like that. Nothing I can do about it, though.

Kristyn Scorsone: You said Alicia is a pastor?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, she was a pastor in—

Kristyn Scorsone: Are you religious, as well?

Saundra Toby Heath: —Rochester. Well, I don't know if that's the right word. Alicia tells me often that I'm more Christian than she is. I just try to—I just try to live my life as best I can. I give people love. You know what I mean? I'm just who I am, to people. I definitely know that I can't do anything without God in it, in my life. But I don't hang out in church. Actually, before—Alicia and I were very involved in our church.

Kristyn Scorsone: What's your church?

Saundra Toby Heath: That was Unity Fellowship Church in Newark. That was where we went. Alicia went through the ministry, deacon to minister to reverend. Then, when she went to Rochester to be a pastor, she was there for three years. Then she came back home, and we haven't been involved with the church, consistently, like, way not consistently, since she's been back. That's something that we talk about. We talking about it now. I said to her, "We need to find a church."

I would mainly say we need to find a church for her, but it would be good for me, too. I wasn't raised in a church. Alicia was. I know that she misses—I know she misses church. I don't think that we'll go back to Unity, but—

Kristyn Scorsone: How come?

Saundra Toby Heath: A lot of things happened. A lot of things happened, to her, to us. I don't think that we'll go back there. We visit, when we want to, that kind of thing. I did say to her, recently—I said, “We need to find”—and I said to her, “Let's, once a month, pick a church, and go and visit, and see how it feels, see how it feels.” She agreed. She said okay.

I know that she misses church. I just know it. Her heart is heavy, because she misses church. Like I said, I would go, also. I think it would be good for me. I don't have that same feeling about it that she does, but I think that it would be a good thing for both of us, to get back involved with church. I enjoyed it, when I was, cooking for things. It's nice to be in community.

She had said to me—at Thanksgiving, the church feeds the hungry on Thanksgiving, breakfast now. Years ago, it used to be the full Thanksgiving, but that's a lot of work. She said to me yesterday—she said, “Will you come down with me on Thanksgiving to feed folks breakfast?” I haven't done it in a while. I said, “Yeah, I'll come. I'll go with you.” That'll be nice, to be in service, to be in service.

Kristyn Scorsone: How did you—well, other places in Newark that maybe you hung around in, did you ever hang out in any LGBTQ bars or clubs in Newark?

Saundra Toby Heath: Murphy's.

Kristyn Scorsone: Murphy's, yeah. What was that like?

Saundra Toby Heath: Oh, it was—I loved Murphy's. I miss Murphy's. Murphy's was a place to go and see folks, folks from the community. They had the best music. Oh, god.

Kristyn Scorsone: What kind of music?

Saundra Toby Heath: Oh, club music. Oh, yeah, club music. It was a—it was a cool place. I was never—I wasn't a bar person. Alicia was a club person. She could tell you the clubs she used to go to, and blah, blah, blah. Murphy's I enjoyed. You can go in, sit down, and have a nice drink, or two, and see people that you know around, and enjoy the music. For me, it was just enough. It was just enough. When they did Prudential—because it was right on Edison. Murphy's right there on Edison. When Prudential were building, all these places went. That was sad, because it's no place—I'm trying to think. Is there any place in Newark, really? 27 Mix, but 27 Mix doesn't really—it's not welcoming. It's not very, very welcoming.

Kristyn Scorsone: How so?

Saundra Toby Heath: It just isn't. When we had the pride, Newark Pride, they were supposed to—I think June Burton had hooked—because that was her place, where she hung out at—had arranged for people to come, after they left the park. They would have setup and everything. From my understanding, when everybody got there, they closed the kitchen down early. The bartenders weren't welcoming. It was like—I haven't been back in there since. I'm sad about that because it's right next door to the shop.

Kristyn Scorsone: On Halsey.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. I enjoyed going in there, having a drink, having a burger or whatever. I liked that. I didn't do it a lot, but when I want, go right next door. I'm not going in—I'm not going any place, spending my money, and you mistreat us. Are you kidding me? It's not really any place in Newark now that you can go—that you call your own. You can go in there and just be yourself.

Kristyn Scorsone: Is 27 Mix owned by gay people, or is it just the clientele?

Saundra Toby Heath: No. What happens is—it used to be a young lady, Skylar, who was the bartender there, young lesbian. She had such a great personality. She had that place jumping. It would be packed. It would be—and I don't know what the heck happened, but she lost her job there. I don't know what the heck happened. It's just become a different place now. I think it's like three—it's like three owners. One, I think he would be okay about it, but the other two are white guys, and they want a different kind of—

Kristyn Scorsone: Like more snooty, I guess?

Saundra Toby Heath: It's right boring in there now! I mean, so.

Kristyn Scorsone: What do you think of the so-called revitalization or renaissance that Newark is in?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, personally, I like it. Personally, I like it. I don't know. I don't want the—I don't know if I should say disenfranchised, or the people who maybe are not quite as secure, whether it's job or education or whatever. I don't want them to be left out. I don't want them to be left out, but I also don't want Newark to just continue to be that city that's talked about so bad. It is just like we're just like the worst thing since—I want it to be a mix of allowing people that love Newark, and this is their home, a place for them to be able to live, and be comfortable, not just throw—

don't just throw them the scraps. I like it. I do. I think that Newark deserves it.

Kristyn Scorsone: How did you get involved with The Artisan Collective?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, my art I had been doing since 2008. Like I said, I'm a homemaker, so I love decorating and making things nice. I had started with—there was a crack in my wall, from the house is old, shifted. We didn't have money to tear the wall down and fix it and whatever. I was looking at the crack, trying to figure out what can I do to cover this doggone crack. It's getting on my nerves. I love mud cloth. I've loved mud cloth forever. It's like a woven material, fabric, from Mali. It's colored magnificently, with varying degrees of dyes. There are decorations put on it. It's supposed to denote your status in the village, depending on what it's decorated in. Beautiful fabric. I've loved it for forever.

I said let me find a piece of—let me get some mud cloth and make something to cover this crack. Couldn't find the mud cloth, but I found some kente—I went to a fabric store and found some kente cloth, the original, not the print. Because kente is a woven fabric, also, and I found the real deal. I spent a Saturday afternoon making this huge thing to hang.

I showed it to Alicia. She knew I had been working on something. When I finished, I hung it up. I said, "Come downstairs. I want to show you something." She came down and she saw it. She said, "Oh, god, it's beautiful." I had done everything by hand, sewed by hand. That's how I started.

My partner Jae had been after me, every once in a while. She would mention it. "You need to do something. You need to—you need to start working on something. Make it." She remembered

this piece that I had done. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The one thing I know is that you can't do anything until you're ready to do it. Somebody can tell you how great you are and all of that, but if you're not ready to do it, don't even bother.

When was it? Beginning of 2008, I went in the basement, which was pretty empty. It was pretty empty. I looked around and I said maybe it's time. I went and bought—I went into Harlem, actually, to a African brother's shop. He's from Mali, actually, so he has the mud cloth of life. I bought a bunch of mud cloth. I said, well, I got my mud cloth. I don't know what I'm going to do with it yet. Then I went and bought shelves, the standing shelves you put together. I bought some shelves and put it together in the basement, and actually created a work space. It really looked nice. I was like, wow.

I showed Alicia. I said, "Come downstairs. I want to show you something." When she came down, she says, "Oh, my god. What are you—what are you getting ready to do?" I said, "I think I'm getting ready to do something. I'm not sure yet." Then I started trying to figure out what am I going to do with this mud cloth. I started taking it apart, and blah, blah, blah. That was the beginning of 2008.

Our church had—I forget what it's called now—like a conference, but that's not the right word, in North Carolina. At these functions, they have vendors there. Jae had been on me, on me, on me, on me, "You need to do something, you need to do something." I said, you know what, maybe it's now or never. I made six pieces, with the mud cloth, to take to North Carolina.

I think I worked on it maybe almost a month. It was crazy, Because I was up until one o'clock in the morning, sewing. Then I

would go to bed, to get up to go to work. When I come from work, I would go down to the studio, as I call it, and work. I took those six pieces with me to North Carolina, and I sold every piece. One of the—a sister who bought a piece from me, she said to me, “I’m just going to say this to you. Don’t ever sell your work for this price again.”

Kristyn Scorsone: Were you undercharging?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. She said, “Don’t ever do that again. I’m very grateful because I bought one, but really, really, your work is absolutely wonderful. Don’t do it again.” When I came back, I started sewing, over the summer, getting stuff together, not knowing what I was going to do. I just started creating.

The end of the year, in December, I had a—I guess you call it an opening, at the center, at 11 Halsey Street. Jae and Reverend Shonda, they curated it. It was quite wonderful. It was a lot of people that came. I think I might’ve had close to fifty pieces. I’d been working the whole summer. Close to fifty pieces. I sold everything but six pieces. It was pretty special.

It was a gallery setting, the way they curated it. The way my work is, the way I like to see my work hung, it’s hung by bamboo, first of all. If you were to buy a piece from me, I would want you to use the invisible fishing wire to hang it, so that it appears to float. That’s the way I like to see it. That’s how all the work was, all over. It was just like floating. We had music playing. I had food. It was quite a—it was pretty special. Yeah, it was.

That was my introduction to the—I introduced Akirfa Design Studio to the world. I continued to sew. I did a couple of shows. They have a art and craft show in New Hope, Pennsylvania, every

year. It's a pretty big show. You have to—it's a juried show, where you have to present your work, and they judge it, and make a determination if it fits the criteria. Then, you're invited to join. You pay for it whenever, but you have to be chosen. Your work has to be chosen.

I was doing that. This space on Halsey Street had been empty for a long time. Jae is an artist. Reverend Jerry Lee, myself, Chevonne, and Burley. She talked to us about it. She said, "What do you think about us joining together to rent this space?" We knew we couldn't afford it on our own, so we decided okay. That's how we—that's how we did it.

That's been quite wonderful, too, to realize a dream of having a business.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you always want to have a business?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, I don't know—well, once I started with Akirfa, I thought it would be nice, but I didn't know if it would happen.

Kristyn Scorsone: What is Akirfa again?

Saundra Toby Heath: Akirfa Design Studio. Akirfa is Africa backwards, with a K. I thought it would be nice, but I didn't know if it would be a reality. Maybe because you got to pay rent. You got to pay for space, blah, blah, blah. It's been quite—it's been quite wonderful. It's very nice to walk into a shop and see your work. I'm leaving the shop at the end of the year. I'm leaving as a partner. It's time to do something different. I need to—I want to get ready for retirement. Money has to be diverted to that.

The one thing I realize is that my work does not have to be under a roof. It's wonderful to see it, but it doesn't have to be under a roof.

I can do something different with it. I enjoy the art shows. I really do. That costs money, also. Paying the rent in the shop, the mortgage, and then paying for the shows, it's like yo, yo, yo, where's the money.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you think you'll move to using the Internet?

Saundra Toby Heath: I'm thinking about it, but I—I'm thinking about it, but right now, I don't know. My work, I think, is so personal that I like it to be visible to the person that's buying it, as opposed to seeing it online. Quite a few people have said to me you need to be online, but again, that's something that I got to feel—that I got to feel good with. Right now, I would rather do shows, where you can walk up to my piece, and you can see it, or you can touch it. I don't want you to buy it online, and then give me a call. "Well, it's not what I expected, or I didn't"—no. Right now, that's not a big thing for me.

I found a gallery in Allentown, Pennsylvania, that likes my work. After the new year, I'm going to be taking some work up there and putting it in their gallery, and see what that does for me. I got a couple of things that I would like to do.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, I guess. I'm a little—I'm probably not as—I'm probably not as out there as I should be, with what I—Alicia, she gets little frustrated with me about it. She says, "You don't realize how good you are, how beautiful your work is. You just acknowledge it, and just go with it." I'm a little less showy in that. Maybe I am. I don't know. I'm an artisan, and I just love what I do.

Kristyn Scorsone: That would be your first way of describing yourself, then, artisan.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yes. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: I forgot to ask you earlier. What did your mom do?

Saundra Toby Heath: My mom didn't finish high school. She didn't finish high school. She was a crossword puzzle person. That was very interesting, to me. She didn't finish high school. The *Star Ledger* used to have—she used to do the *Star Ledger* crossword. I don't freaking like crossword puzzles. She was a smart woman, who didn't finish high school. Very interesting.

Kristyn Scorsone: She was a—she just was a homemaker, or she didn't have a job?

Saundra Toby Heath: No. She worked in—she used to work for—what's the name of the touring company, Ideal? I remember that. It was another touring company she used to work for. She did factory work, I guess.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was anyone in your family an entrepreneur?

Saundra Toby Heath: No, but my father, my dad, when I started working at a—what was I, eighteen—I was eighteen when my father died. I thought that a ten-hour workday was a regular workday because my father worked ten hours a day. I didn't know that a workday was eight hours. He was a—he was a—he was a smart man. He had a little college. Can you imagine? I'm 63. My father had a little college. He went to St. Peter's in Jersey—

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow, that's big.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. I don't know how many semesters he went, but he did go. He was a photographer. He had a—in my grandmother's house, he had his own darkroom. He also developed his pictures. He was a smart man.

Kristyn Scorsone: He was an artist, then, huh?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yes. He was a shop steward at his job, with the teamsters. It's no doubt that, had he lived, he would've probably gone on to become an officer with the teamsters. He was a—that's how involved he was. Yeah, he was an activist, actually. He was that kind of—he had that kind of energy. When anyone had problems with him, at work—that's my wife—

[Phone conversation 02:13:44 - 02:14:02]

Saundra Toby Heath: He was that kind of person. Anybody had problems at work and whatever—so, he was that. He was also a bartender. I had someone at work laughing about that. He was such a popular person, and so well loved, that he would guest appear at different bars in Newark. It was like they had big things that would let you know that Oliver Jap Heath is going to be bartending, and people would come. He was like a celebrity bartender. It was crazy.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you think you take after him a lot?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, in that way. I'm a little quieter than him, but yeah. My oldest son is like him. My older son is like him.

Kristyn Scorsone: What are the biggest challenges to owning a business, and being in a business partnership like that?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, the biggest challenge—the biggest challenge, for me, has been to promote myself. That's been the biggest challenge, for me, is promoting. I think that a lot of it also comes from the fact that I'm still working, and I'm just tired. I work Monday through Friday, and then I'm in the shop on Saturday. That's hard.

I was telling Alicia it's bittersweet, for me, leaving the shop at the end of the year. It is. I will always love it because it—quite an experience. But I'm tired. I told her—I said right now, I say this

now, but I'm so busy. I'm always doing stuff. I would love to, I know, take January, maybe even February, Saturdays, just to do nothing.

Of course, I say that, and then here comes Saturday. "Oh, I got this to do in the house, or I could do this." Alicia said to me the other day—she said, "I'm going to ask you to try to do that. Try to do nothing, because you've been doing this for almost five years. Saturday mornings, you get up. You're down at the shop. You open up. You're sweeping out the front. You're sweeping. You're doing the glass and getting the shop ready. That's going to affect you, not doing that. You need to be with that. Don't try to get up and clean the house up, trying to be busy. Be with it. Be with whatever it is you're going to be feeling about not doing something that you been doing for almost five years."

I'm going to see if I can do that, if I can just sleep late, if I want to, or if I do something, to do something that I enjoy doing. I love the museums. Maybe get up Saturday, if I feel like I need to move, get up and go into the city, and go to the museum, or go do something that gives you joy. Not stay in the house and clean. You know what I mean?

That's been the hardest part for me, is the promotion. And dealing with personalities. If it's your shop, you're in the—but when everybody's trying to coexist together, and trying to just—just trying to—

Kristyn Scorsone: Work it all out.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, trying to work it all out, and not get on each other's nerves. I think that five women, though, I think we did a pretty incredible job. That's one of the things that people always talked about.

“Wow, five women?” But we’ve known each other for so long. That was a blessing, for us, because we knew each other. We knew each other from church and intimate stuff.

Kristyn Scorsone: From Unity?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: I’ve heard, from other interviewees, that Unity, there’s a spirit of entrepreneurship there. Do you think that’s true?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. I would say it is. Yeah, there are—yeah, pretty much.

Kristyn Scorsone: Is it that it’s an encouraging environment, I guess?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, that it is, very much. Oh, yeah, very encouraging. They come into the shop and shop. Peggy owns Diamonds—

Kristyn Scorsone: Miller?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. People go there to eat. Yeah, so yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Are there any issues, as a business owner, that you deal with that are specific to being a woman, or like your sexual identity, or anything, I guess, dealing with customers, or anything like that?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, you know what, that’s interesting. I haven’t experienced anything like that. I would venture a guess that my partners haven’t, either. That’s the one thing about the Artisan Collective. My daughter-in-law, she works for a place that, I think, deals with cancer patients, and testing, and that kind of stuff. She trains. She does some training, customer service stuff. She said to me, a few months ago—she said, “I talked about you in my training class.” I said, “You did? What’d you say?” She said, “I talked about the shop.” I said, “Oh, okay.” She said, “I told my class my mother-in-

law is a partner in a shop in Newark. When you walk in the door, you feel so welcomed. If they're doing something, they stop and welcome you into the shop. If you just thought you were going in the shop just to look around, see what was in there, you don't feel like you want to walk out the door, without having made a purchase, because you're treated so warmly. That's what good customer service is about."

I was like, "Oh, thank you. That's so nice to hear." She said, "No, I just needed you to know that, that really, when people come in your shop, you all just carry on." She said that is like—she said that's so wonderful. I think that that's what you get. If you would come—first of all, you don't know that you're walking into a shop owned by a group of lesbians. But once you got in there, even—because we're out now. You know what I mean? We're not trying to act—but she said, even when you—I would think that, even when you walk in there, if you didn't know—and once you know, it's a done deal. It's a done deal. We've already established who we are. You're just like, "Wow, what a wonderful group of women."

I don't think that—I don't remember hearing anything negative about anybody coming into the shop. Because that's just not what the shop is. When you come through the door, you coming into a special place. That's really nice. It's always been that way, right from the beginning. I'll miss it.

Kristyn Scorsone: How do you define success for yourself?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, right now, right now, being able to—being able to work and create, at my pace, without any pressure on me. For me, that would be a sign of success. I don't want to—I want to always love what I do. I don't want to feel pressure about the creating process. I just

don't. That's why I'm looking forward to ending my journey with the collective, because I'm starting to feel just a little bit of pressure. Not crazy, but I don't want that, because I know my personality. I won't enjoy it anymore. And I love it. I want to—I want to love it.

This is what I want my retirement to look like, creating, and having the time to find the venues to display my work. That's why the online thing doesn't really appeal to me, because you put it online, then you're dealing with who makes the purchase, getting it mailed out, getting it—I don't want—right now, I don't want that. I want it to be—I want the whole process to be enjoyable.

Kristyn Scorsone: You feel like what you do is more about sharing a piece of yourself than trying to make a lot of money off of a product that you've made, so to speak.

Saundra Toby Heath: Both. I think I should be able to do both. It's like one year, I was at New Hope. That was a really good year, for me. I sold three big pieces. I'm standing there, almost in tears, as the people are—and I talked to a woman who came into my tent. I was saying to her—I was like, "Oh, my god, I feel like I'm losing a child." She said to me—she said, "That's a piece of you that is leaving. It's okay."

The nice thing was those three pieces that I sold, the people that bought them loved them. The festival is two days, Saturday and Sunday. One woman came Saturday, looked at the piece, looked at it, looked at it, looked at it, and she left. Alicia said to me, "She'll be back." I say, "You think?" She said, "Yeah. I don't know if she'll be back today, but you still have tomorrow." She came back the next day, and she said to me—she said, "I had to—I had to just think about it. I had to figure out how I was going to bring it in the house and explain it to my husband." She did. She was like—she

said, “But I just had to have it.” Alicia said to me, “I told you she would be back.”

All three of those people, even though a part of me was leaving, I was delighted that three people bought it, that they loved it. That’s what I want. Quite frankly, you spend \$400 on a piece. I want to think that you love it. You know what I mean? I want to really think that this piece is just like—so, I think I can have—I can have both. You know what I mean? That is what would make me feel successful, that I can take my time and create, when I want to. You know what I mean? Then, have it sold at a venue that makes me feel good. That would be success, for me.

Kristyn Scorsone: Is it all decorative pieces, or are they also functional?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, my heart is in the decorative, the wall art. That’s what I really love. My tell on mud cloth is that everyone should have a little mud in their life. I do the tissue boxes, which, I mean, everybody blows their nose. Nice to have a tissue box. I have purses. I have wine bags, which, if you’re a wine lover, I think you should have your own bag. I always felt that way. I would go into a shop, and buy a wine bag because, if you’re going to visit somebody, you’re taking a bottle of wine, you should have a bag to put in it, and not a plastic bag. I do that. I just started making bags for devices, for your iPad or your—them other things.

Kristyn Scorsone: Like a laptop?

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. I make things that are useable, that you can use, as well as being decorative, either wall art. Oh, every year, I add something new to my collection. This year, I do pillows. I’m a pillow lover. If I go in a Pier One or any—I’m drawn to pillows. I just happen to

like them. I said let me try pillows. I make 20 by 20. I'm like no little teeny tiny—a pillow that's got some—

Kristyn Scorsone: Snuggling.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah. That's what I'm doing this year, and people love them. Everything I do by hand, so my hands are in it. Right now, while they're still good—

Kristyn Scorsone: That must take hours and hours.

Saundra Toby Heath: You know what? It does, but—yeah, to do a pillow, if I start, from start to finish, it may take me three hours to do. I'm one of those, I pre-do a lot. I cut and measure and pin, so that, when I'm ready to sew, I just pick it up and just start. I have to working. What you going to do? If you're working and you're trying to—you got to have some kind of plan. You just can't—well, let me just get this big piece of mud cloth and this—no. Well, let me get this, and line up some pillows, so that, when I want to sew or when I'm ready to sew, I pick up that pillow and I start sewing.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you listen to music or watch television while you do it? What's your process?

Saundra Toby Heath: Both, yeah. I'm downstairs in my studio. I have a TV down there and whatever, so that's what I do. I put the TV on, and I just—and Alicia bought me a sewing machine, and it's sitting downstairs, real nice, but right now I'm not using it. Sewing by hand for me is very soothing. It's very relaxing. My grandmother was a tailor. I used to do her hand work for her. I knew how to use a machine, just basic stuff, but I wasn't interested in learning how to sew. Big mistake. I probably should've learned more.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did she try to teach you?

Saundra Toby Heath: Mm-hmm. I wasn't interested. I used to do all her hand basting. She used to tell me—she said, "You're so neat." Everything is, so it's so funny, because I think that that, I got from her. That came through my—yeah, so it's pretty interesting. That's pretty interesting. A woman came through my tent, when I was in New Hope. She was a quilter, actually. She said, "I would love for you to come to our quilting class, and show the people how you put your pieces together." I was like, "I'm not. I don't quilt." She said, "Yeah, you do." She brought me back into my own tent, to look at a piece she had liked. She said, "You see your stitching? Everything is very tight and very even and very neat. That's quilting." I didn't think of it as quilting because I didn't think I was on a quilter's level. I didn't. I was just like, are you kidding me? Because my great-grandmother was a quilter.

Kristyn Scorsone: There's like different—I didn't know that quilting was a higher level.

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, I think it's a higher level. I just did, because my great-grandmother used to quilt. I grew up with it, but it was nothing that was out of the ordinary. She quilted. Every bed had a quilt on it, a heavy quilt that kept you warm. I grew up with that. I didn't think that—I didn't think that I was—these big, magnificent quilts—I didn't think that I quilted. But what quilting is, is when you're joining fabric together. That's what quilting is.

She said to me—she said, "Your work is a form of quilting. You took these two pieces of material, and you put them together, and you sewed. Your stitching is precise. If somebody's just looking at it, they'll think that it was a machine that did it, when you did it by hand. You do quilt. You do." I was like, okay, but I didn't think of it as that. I love to—that's what I do. When I pick it up, and I just

start, it just melts everything away. It just relaxes me and just puts me somewhere else. I just sew and sew and sew. It's nice.

Kristyn Scorsone: What does your studio look like? How do you have it decorated?

Saundra Toby Heath: Well, right now, we're in the process of doing stuff. I just had two walls put up in it. I'm going to have the ceiling done, sheetrock the ceiling, and paint. It's brick all around. Insulate the brick, that kind of thing. Right now, it's a little crazy looking, but I'm looking forward to the new year.

It was a cool place, though, before that. My table went around, so I sat in the middle. Everything is around me. I bought at a yard sale—you ever see those big suitcases that Singers and whatever? Well, I bought one. It belonged to Whitney Houston. My neighbor across the street from me does all of that for a living. She does flea markets, and big one, big time flea markets. She's up there. She had her whole set for trunks. They were all different. I guess one held her shoes, and one held this. She had all four of them. I bought one. I bought one from her. It opens up like this, and it's all just compartments.

I'm going to roll my mud cloth, because I have a lot of mud cloth, roll it, and put one in each slot. I'm so excited about that, having something that belonged to her in there, with all my work in it. I'm excited about getting my studio, changing the look of it, actually, changing the look of it. That's my place. I go downstairs and put my TV on. I have my music, if I want. I put music on. I put that on. I just sit and sew. My dog comes downstairs sometimes. Her bed is down—she has a bed down there. She'll come down sometimes and join me, and get on the bed.

Kristyn Scorsone: What kind of dog?

Saundra Toby Heath: She is a blue nose pit, Catahoula leopard pit. She's very handsome. She has wolf eyes, blue eyes. She looks like a wolf. Oh, boy, honey. She's here, shoot.

Kristyn Scorsone: Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you'd want to add?

Saundra Toby Heath: I don't know. No, I don't think so.

Kristyn Scorsone: What's your best day look like, your favorite kind of day to have?

Saundra Toby Heath: My favorite day. Well, one of my favorite days is a good Saturday in the shop. I had that two Saturdays ago. It was a—we had three different customers that came in, for the first time. They were all very different, all very different. It was me and Burley in there. It was just me and Burley was in there. I always ask if it's your first time, and what brings you down here. It was one of the nicest Saturdays we had had in a while. Just the conversation, it was a interchange of conversation. Burley was able to give one couple some information that he needed. He's a motivational speaker, young man. She was able to tell him about an organization that might be—can give him some help.

It was another group of young people that came in, white. It was two guys and a woman. One was a couple, the male and the female. Both of the males were from Newark. The couple was living in New York now. The other guy was back in Newark. Lived down there near Teachers' Village somewhere. I forget what he does. Oh, he used to work—he was the assistant to Cory Booker. Said he still does work for him, but he also was looking at properties on Halsey, to open a restaurant. Just to interchange with that, we talking politics. The young lady was very political, and very for Hillary, and that conversation.

Then, another young guy, a white guy, came in. We have albums, vinyl, in there. He's a DJ and a music lover. He was sitting on the floor, going through the albums. There were all three different conversations, but we were able to have it with them. Oh, there was another woman who came in, who was my peer. Had just come from the museum. She's a lifetime member of the Newark Museum, and they had something going on there. She decided she would walk around. She came in the shop, and she's very lively. She stayed with us an hour-and-a-half. She was talking. She spent money with us.

It was just—it was just a wonderful day because what we had been told, when we first opened the shop, was that people would come in, and they wouldn't just come in to shop. They would come in for conversation. They would come in for wisdom, words of wisdom. We had been told that your shop is going to be a place where people just come, just to be nurtured. That's what that Saturday was like. It was so—it was so wonderful. I even posted it in Facebook. I said it's not always about the sale. It's about the connecting with the community. Because you know that they're going to tell somebody about the shop, and they're going to come back, and they're going to bring people with them. For me, that's a great day.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, it sounds like wonderful energy.

Sandra Toby Heath: Yeah. That's a great day. The thing was, that Saturday, I didn't want to go to the shop. I was so tired, when I woke up. I was like oh, god, I'm so tired. I don't feel like getting out the bed. Usually, most of the time, I feel like I don't want to go. Once I get up and get my shower and everything, by the time I walk to the bus, I'm good. That Saturday, it was really hard. I didn't want—I just didn't

want to go. I went and had a wonderful day. It was just me and Burley, just hanging out. That's a good day, for me, when I go down to the shop, and good people come through, and we're able to interact with them. Yeah, that's a good day.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's really awesome.

Saundra Toby Heath: Yeah, that's a good day.

Kristyn Scorsone: Well, thank you so much. I appreciate, again, you doing this with me.

Saundra Toby Heath: You're welcome.

Kristyn Scorsone: This is great.

Saundra Toby Heath: If you need to see me again, let me know.

Kristyn Scorsone: Thank you.

Saundra Toby Heath: If you need to see me again, I'll come back.