

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: John

Interviewer: Whitney Strub and Tim Stewart-Winter

Date: March 29, 2017

Location: phone interview

Whit: Okay, I'm recording.

Tim: Okay, and I am too. What's the date? It is March 29th, 2017. I'm Tim Stewart-Winter and I'm here with Whit Strub, and we're interviewing John over the phone. This is our second interview. My first time, Whit's second time, interviewing John for the Queer Newark Oral History Project.

One thing I wanted to ask about is your memories of police; not necessarily in a gay context, but also that. You talked about the police coming into Sam's & Ann's, parking the squad car outside.

John: Yes.

Tim: You talked a little bit about fear of getting caught in places. I just wondered if you could elaborate.

John: About Sam's & Ann's, we were in there because we were underage, not because we were gay—

Tim: - right—[laughs]—

John: - the problem is—wait, I said that wrong. The reason we had to be careful was because we were underage. We weren't being careful because we were gay.

Tim: Got it!

John: Does that make sense?

Tim: Completely, completely.

John: The thing is, we usually got warnings from Sam, or from somebody, that the cops were either on their way or they were there. You just took off. You got out of there. That's as much as I can remember about how we dealt with that.

As far as raids, I know there were raids on Murphy's, but I was never there when it happened, so I don't know about it.

Tim: Got it.

John: That's as much as I can tell you about actually them, the cops, coming into a place. I don't know.

Tim: But you remember hearing about it.

John: I heard about it, yeah.

Tim: What about in public places, like in parks or places you would go to cruise?

John: Yeah, I don't know. I guess I must have been, without knowing it, I guess I was being very discreet [*Tim laughs*], but I never had to deal with a cop.

Tim: Never encountered a cop. Okay.

John: No. Besides, I wasn't exactly scared of cops, 'cuz one of my brothers was a cop, and I had an uncle who was a cop, so I knew that cops were human.

Tim: Ah! Were they cops in the Newark P.D.?

John: Yes, they were.

Tim: Fascinating. Cool. Did they know you were gay?

John: No, I don't think so. My uncle, definitely not; but, my brother, I think, I think he figured it out, but we never talked about it.

Tim: Got it. [*To Whit*] Do you want to—?

Whit: - yeah, sure. Whit here, now. I've got a question for you about the area around Murphy's, actually. We've been fascinated by Murphy's for years here, and we've never had a picture of it. We just have never had a visual. We can't find one anywhere, but we just found—and I can send you this, if you want—it's not a very great photo, but the Newark Public Library just digitized a bunch of random photographs of Newark in the sixties.

John: Wow!

Whit: Then they put searchable metadata on it; and, so, suddenly, we have a picture of Murphy's from 1961. It's right next to a place called the Lafayette Tavern, which I'd never heard about before. I'm just curious, I mean, it's right next to *the* big gay bar in

Newark, whether you have any memory of Lafayette Tavern and what that was like?

John: I'm sorry. I don't. I don't even remember the name; but, that's me, I don't remember everything. I know there was another building on the corner right next to Murphy's, but I don't think I had any awareness of what it was.

Now, we're talking about the Murphy's when it was on Mulberry Street, right?

Whit: Yeah, yeah.

John: Because at a certain point in the sixties, they moved around the corner to Edison Place.

Whit: Yeah, yeah. This is 1961. It's still on Mulberry here.

John: I think it's still on Mulberry. Right, yeah.

Whit: I think it moves when like—

John: - middle sixties, I think, yeah. I'm not sure.

Whit: Okay, sure. Yeah, I was just curious what a bar *next* to the gay bar would be like.

John: I don't know. I wish I could tell you. I'm sorry.

Whit: Oh, yeah. No worries; no worries, I was just curious.

Tim: - um—shall I go on?

Whit: Yeah.

Tim: I wanted to ask a little more—and feel free to answer, or not answer—but I'm interested in, you talked a little bit, but not much, about other people's awareness of your gayness. I wondered, did—I was fascinated by your story about your friend who took you to Artie's; but, ostensibly, you were both just gonna check it out, but he wasn't, sort of, owning up to being gay.

John: Neither was I.

Tim: And neither were you [*laughs*], right. Was it just kind of like, with your family, was it a “don’t ask, don’t tell” kind of thing where you would not mention this part of your life?

John: Yeah, that’s actually true. It was not something you talked about with your family. It was a secret life.

Tim: Got it. Completely secret.

John: Yeah. Any people that you met in the gay life and who became friends with you, were introduced as simply “friends,” and were thought of as friends.

Tim: Right.

John: Now, maybe some of my relatives were putting two and two together, but it was never discussed openly.

Tim: Cool. What about at school? Like in your high school or at [college]? When were you at [college]?

John: I was at [college] from ’56 to ’62.

Tim: Okay.

John: Most of the friends I made at [college] were also gay. The thing is, I was a musician, and [*laughs*] the way people were in those days was, “Well, if he’s a musician, he’s weird!” [*Tim laughs*] So, you expected weird things from him or her.

Tim: Right. What did you play?

John: I was a pianist. Somehow, being a musician, being in the arts gave you, sort of a free pass—

Tim: - [*laughs*] that makes complete sense—

John: - on behavior, on places where you hung out, and stuff like that. They expected musicians to do things that were not—what’s the word, I’m looking for—I’m lost, I don’t know what the word is.

Tim: Not mainstream? Countercultural?

John: No, but I mean just not traditional. Straight guys hung out in certain places and did certain things. And gay guys hung out in certain places and did certain things. But musicians and people in

the arts were expected to just pretty much be “loose cannons” and go wherever they wanted to go.

I don't think I'm explaining this very well. But it's just like, you were given a pass because you were in the arts.

Whit: Well, that makes sense. Actually, can I ask, this is a long shot; but the gospel singer Alex Bradford lived in Newark at the same time as you. Any chance you ever ran into him socially?

John: Alex Bradford. No, I don't know the name.

Whit: Okay, yeah. He was not “out.”

John: I knew Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Whit: Yeah? Hmmm.

John: I knew her through a friend of mine. I didn't know her well, but I met her once. She was, apparently, a very big gospel singer in Newark at the time.

Whit: Mm-hmm.

Tim: What kind of music did you play?

John: Classical. I was a classical pianist.

Tim: Like chamber music? Or solo?

John: I also played pop. I also played in clubs, and things like that.

Tim: Gotcha. What clubs?

John: I'm not gonna say. Okay?

Tim: Okay. *[They all laugh]*

John: I don't want to go into that part of my life.

Whit: Fair enough. Fair enough.

John: The clubs were not in New Jersey.

Tim: Got it.

Whit: Okay. Did you ever cross paths with Andy Bey, the jazz musician?

John: No.

Whit: Okay. He's another gay Newark musician. I'm just—

John: - I'm sorry. I keep disappointing you on this, because you bring up these names, and apparently I wasn't traveling in the right circles because I don't actually know all these people. *[They all laugh]* And it was the same in our previous conversation too. People were bringing up names. You or Kristyn were bringing up names, and I was sorta like, "Wow, I don't know those people!"

Whit: Oh, no, not at all. It's just a matter of like throwing it against the wall and seeing what sticks.

John: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, no worries at all about that *[laughs]*. Do you want to say anything else about coming out to your family or friends? Were there any difficult moments that you remember, or times that you were concerned that someone might have a bad reaction even if they didn't? You know what I mean? And if nothing comes to mind, that's also totally fine.

John: Well, the only thing I can remember is, one time I was up on that bridge that I talked about in our previous conversation, that bridge at Penn Station.

Tim: Yeah.

John: And I was talking to this guy. We were starting to fool around with one another. A security guard started coming down the stairs from the railroad. He said, "Aha," something like that, "The party's over!" Some remark like that. The guy I was with took off. I sort of got nailed, so he comes down—I wasn't really upset, because I knew he was a security guard, not—he wasn't really the police, and it didn't. I mean, yeah I was not happy about it, but I wasn't terrified.

Tim: Got it.

John: So he took my name, he wrote down my name and he asked for my I.D., and he said, "Okay, you'll be hearing from me." When he said that, I knew, then, I *wouldn't* be hearing from him. *[Whit laughs]*

Tim: Why?

John: Because he was powerless. He was a security guy. He obviously wasn't gonna do anything. He just, he caught these couple of guys fooling with one another, and that's his job, but he wasn't really gonna go back to any—

Tim: - he was just sort of showing his authority role.

John: Yeah, right.

Tim: Interesting.

John: This is not to say I wasn't concerned, but I wasn't scared.

Tim: That's fascinating. Do you about when that would have been? What year, or how old you were?

John: Well, I was in my twenties. I guess it was, I'll take a guess, it was around '62 or '63.

Tim: Great, terrific.

John: Security guards weren't people you were particularly scared of, you know?

Tim: [Laughs] Yeah.

Whit: [Laughs] Yeah.

John: I'm sorry I keep coughing. Sorry about that.

Tim and Whit: No worries.

Tim: Did you have other family in law enforcement? How were your— do you want to say anything else about your family, I guess?
[Laughs]

John: Well, it was just those two, my brother and my uncle.

Tim: Got it.

John: During that period of time, I guess the early sixties, my uncle retired from the force. My brother stayed on the force, and he retired from the force, of course many years later.

Tim: Got it. Great. Do you remember hearing about other bad things that happened to other gay people, like even not involving the police, like violence? Or—?

John: Well I heard more about it when I was living in New York years later.

Tim: Interesting.

John: I became more aware of that kind of thing. People getting beaten up in parks, and stuff like that.

Tim: But not so much in Newark.

John: That was more a New York thing. Somehow or other, during my years in New Jersey, I guess I didn't have a lot of awareness of it.

Tim: That sounds pleasant [*laughs*]. Cool.

John: Well, I'm not sure that it *was* pleasant, but as I look back on it from here, it seems like it was pleasant. I mean, like it was not—I had my two lives, my straight life and my gay life, as it were, if you can call it that.

Tim: Sure.

John: You know, I was interested in music. I was interested in the stuff I was doing in school, and stuff I was working on. The sex was something I needed to have, and I went out and got it when I needed to have it, but it wasn't the only thing in my life. But *nothing* was the only thing in my life. That's the thing. There was a lot going on all at the same time. That's part of being young, I think.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. This is a total wild card. Do you have any memory of—there was a scandal in 1964 where Walter Jenkins, who was an aide to LBJ, was arrested in a men's room in Washington—do you remember?

John: Right, I remember that.

Tim: You do?

John: Yeah, 1964. Yeah.

Tim: What do you remember about it? I'm very interested in that scandal?

John: Well, the "Y," where it happened—

Tim: - yeah—

John: - it had a nickname, which was, after that they called it the "Jenkins Memorial Y" after that incident, because it was a very famous incident.

Tim: Wow. Yeah. Holy cow! You heard that from New York? Or you knew people in D.C.?

John: From Washington. I also spent a lot of time in Washington. Yeah, everybody knew about the "Jenkins Memorial," and that's how it was referred to. Afterwards, after this—because it had been, that particular men's room had been pretty active and was well known to all the gay people in D.C. After the Jenkins thing, of course, people stayed away from it.

Tim: *[Laughs]* Right.

John: The best thing about the Jenkins thing was that Lady Byrd Johnson, I think, helped to cover it over.

Tim: She did, yeah. She very nicely cast it as—

John: - that he was overworked—

Tim: - he was overworked. Exactly—

John: Tired, and that things like that happen. She made it okay. For gay people in Washington, I think, it was kind of like a scary moment.

Tim: Yeah, I would think *[laughs]*. Cool.

John: I think everybody I knew had been to that men's room. I had never been in that men's room, but almost everybody I knew had. They knew it very well. It was a popular spot.

Tim: Yeah, so people could imagine this happening to them.

John: Yeah. They could see that that could possibly happen to them as well.

Tim: Great. Thank you so much. Glad I asked that [*laughs*].

Whit: Yeah.

Tim: [*To Whit*] Do you want to go?

John: The thing is, that was 1964. And I think the feeling, in general, was that somebody from the Republican side, Goldwater, that they must have known that Jenkins was gay way ahead of that incident. He must have been getting watched. Maybe they thought that they saw something there that could be used later on. They knew they were gonna need something, 'cause it was gonna be very hard to defeat LBJ in 1964!

Tim: Yeah, totally. Totally. I'm working on either an article or possibly a book about the Jenkins scandal.

John: Aha! Good.

Tim: That's totally aside, unrelated to queer Newark [*Whit laughs*], but I'm really grateful. It's very helpful to hear how people perceived it.

John: Yeah.

Tim: You talked about North Newark being almost exclusively white. We talked about bars and clubs that were predominantly white or that Skippy's had more black folks. Do you have memories of racial issues in general in Newark, either protests or conflicts over neighborhood change, things like that? I mean, this is before the '67 riots.

John: Riots. Well, I don't know that I—[*laughs*]—how do I put it?—I think I knew that within the white community there was a lot of negative feeling toward black people, even though I didn't have negative feelings towards blacks because I had been, as I told you before, I had been exposed to a lot of African Americans when I was pretty young.

Tim: Yeah. Right.

John: And also through high school, and through music, I got to know a lot of kids from Arts High who were black. So I didn't have this feeling that black people were all that different. But I was aware that people from a different—say, people who were not musicians,

people who were not from our family that had business with blacks—that their vision was more narrow, and that—

Tim: - right—

John: they—yeah, I had an awareness of that. As far as the segregation was, the Blue Note, which I mentioned, was a gay bar, but it was strictly black.

Tim: Yeah.

John: You would see blacks at Skippy's. That was something that did happen. I don't remember seeing blacks at Murphy's. It may have happened, but I don't remember it.

There was an incident in Sam's & Ann's where two friends of mine from [college] had—I'd been talking to them about Sam's & Ann's, and they said—they came in from New York, they wanted to see this place. They just came in and sat down, and like—whew, I didn't realize what I had walked into. They were black, and I didn't think anything of it. That shows you where my head was, but it did not go over with a lot of the other patrons in Sam's & Ann's.

Tim: What happened?

John: Well, nothing really happened. This one guy came up to me, and he had been a friend of mine, and he said, "I'm ashamed of you."

Tim: Wow! Well.

Whit: Yeah.

John: Because he had seen me in a booth with these two guys. I had tried to explain to him they were friends of mine. In fact, I wanted to introduce them, and he wouldn't come near me. He said, "I'm ashamed of you."

Tim: Wow, that's awful. That's really interesting. Thanks for sharing.

John: It was—every once in a while, it would hit me between the eyes, but it's just not where I was coming from at the time, and I don't know that I fully grasped it.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. You mentioned Arts High, and you also mentioned it in the previous interview. You went to Catholic school?

John: Yes.

Tim: And Arts High was, I assume, a public magnet school, Newark Public Schools. Is that right?

John: Well, Arts High, you had to audition to get into.

Tim: And you had friends who went there?

John: Yeah, I had friends who went there. I had several friends who went there.

Tim: Were they gay [*laughs*]?

John: One was.

Tim: Did it have a reputation as—I suppose it did have a reputation—it was “musical” [*laughs*].

John: Well, there was music. There were other things going on there. I also had a friend who was in there because of his art, because of painting. Not everybody was gay [*laughs*]. Not everybody in Arts High was gay, in case that’s what you’re asking. I don’t think it had a reputation as being a gay high school.

Tim: Okay [*laughs*].

John: No. I would like to have gone to Arts High, but my mom was against it. She wanted to keep me in Catholic school.

Tim: Ah, in the hope that you would stay Catholic? Or—?

John: - oh, I think that *was* the hope, which got dashed almost as soon as I was out of high school.

Tim: Got it.

John: Probably even before that. You know, just to say this. I was rereading this transcript this morning and I realized there are things in it that don’t quite add up. I was kind of a little bit of a hypocrite, because there was this guy that I said had, a friend of my older brother’s, who had molested me, and I only knew it was wrong after he tried to give me money. But remember, at the same time, I was having a sex life with a classmate of mine. I don’t why those—I don’t know how to explain that, especially since later on I

talk about at the Little Theatre that I took money from older guys. I sort of say that this doesn't fit together, and yet it's true. I know that. I know that this happened, but it doesn't say anything about me that I understand.

Whit: Yeah, that doesn't strike me as hypocritical at all. It just seems to me that everybody's experience is really incoherent in the end, once you approach it through a detached analytical perspective, right? It seems like those are very different situational experiences, as I read it. I didn't feel any tension there when I read the interview back—

Tim: - yeah, and, also, that didn't strike me either. I think going to the Little Theater seems like a very different situation from someone you *know*, um, pursuing you, having sex with you in [*voice trails off*].

John: What I meant was, in my mind, I was thinking of this guy, this friend of my older brother's, in a very negative way. Because he was gay, in my mind he was "queer," and, yet, I was doing the same thing with a classmate, but that was different. Somehow I saw that as two separate things. And I don't know what that was about. I don't know. It wasn't a nice thing about me, that I was doing all this stuff myself and yet looking down on other people who were also gay.

Tim: Huh.

John: Looking down on people who offered me money in the Little Theater; like that somehow or other they were *really* queer!

Tim: Interesting.

John: Whereas, my "queerness" was—well, that was okay. That's what I get from reading this transcript. Like, I was a little hypocrite. I don't think I thought of myself that way at the time. I don't know.

Tim: That's so interesting. Yeah, I don't think either of us had that feeling, but that's fascinating.

John: Well, that's just how I look at it. It seems like when you are that age, a teenager, you've got a lot of people going on in one body. They all have different attitudes about things, and it changes from day to day.

Whit: Yeah, that makes sense to me. Just the sort of inconsistency of behavior at that age, right?

John: Yeah, I didn't know who the hell I was.

Whit: Right, right.

Tim: So when you were at [college], that whole time, were you living in North Newark?

John: Sorry. What time are you talking about?

Tim: When you attended [college], which you said was '56 to '62—

John: - oh, yeah—

Tim: - were you living at home?

John: Yeah, I commuted the first couple of years. Then I started living in New York in—when was that?—in '60, I started living in New York.

Tim: Got it.

John: I was still very connected to Newark. I had friends, and of course I had family. There was still a lot of time being spent in Newark, even though I was actually living in New York, on the Upper West Side.

Tim: Got it. Oh, whereabouts?

John: I was on 86th Street. Wait a minute, no! It was 88th Street, West 88th, between Central Park West and Amsterdam.

Tim: Cool.

John: No, it wasn't cool. [*John and Tim laugh*] It was pretty run down. It's cool now, but it wasn't then. [*Whit laughs*] In those days, it was sort of sleazy. It was cheap.

Tim: How long were you in New York? I wasn't sure if you wanted to get into, um, your leaving Newark, leaving the area.

John: In a way, I felt like I never really left it even after I left it. [*Laughs*] I was going back all the time. During one period of time—when was it?—I think it was maybe '63 or '64, I got mononucleosis. At

that time, I was living with a girl, and we were living in this basement apartment that was really not healthy for somebody who was trying to get over mono, so my mother said, “Well, I think you should come back home.” So the girl I was living with and I agreed that that would be the best thing. I went home and I lived with my mom for a couple of months. Well, maybe it was just one month, I don’t remember. But it was mostly about me trying to get my strength back. Things like that. You just went back to New Jersey; it wasn’t that far away. You could get there pretty easily.

Whit: Once you left in the late sixties, you left pretty decisively, though, it sounded.

John: Yeah. By the late sixties—well, I’d say by 1970, I was living a different life.

Tim: Yeah. Can you tell us anything about that? Do you want to?

John: Um, *[sighs]* there was somebody that I was seeing a lot of. No, I really can’t talk about this. I’m sorry.

Tim: No problem.

Whit: It’s all right.

John: I think the best thing for us would be, rather than to go into the whole story of my life, I mean, I just wanted to talk about Newark. That’s what first attracted me to your website, on your website.

Tim: Perfect. That’s great.

John: I think that’s what I wanted to really share.

Tim: That’s great.

John: I guess I’m not sure that I’m ready, right now at least, to start sharing later developments in my life.

Tim: Absolutely no need.

Whit: This is truly just such a rich history of Newark that you’ve given us. It’s stuff that’s left no paper trail and we haven’t spoken to anybody else, really, with similar experiences. This is really a rich document.

Tim: Oh, I had a question. I'm pretty sure that this is the case, but you didn't actually say. The woman, Nell, who hosted those parties—she was black, right?

John: Yes, she was. She was a large black woman.

Tim: Do you know anything else about her?

John: No. I wish I did. I'm sorry.

Tim: *[Laughs]* No, that's fine.

John: She was a local character. Everybody knew her, but I don't know if anyone knew a lot *about* her, or how she got there.

Tim: Got it.

John: She seemed to know all of the gay boys in Newark, and she seemed particularly to know a lot about the gay black boys.

Tim: Right. Fascinating.

Whit: Yeah.

John: Everybody knew her. She was a Sam's & Ann's regular. She would come in and sit at the bar. I told you, it was three storefronts. The first storefront was where the bar itself was. She would sit on a stool at the bar, and people would just come up and talk to her. Everybody really liked her! She was a very attractive person. She was full of laughter, and full of good spirits, and people just liked her.

Tim: Do you think she was herself queer? Or just liked to be around gay men *[laughs]*?

John: I think she was just one of those women who liked to be around gay men. I don't know, I never saw her with a woman, but maybe that was her secret life. I don't know. I only saw her when she was with gay boys.

Tim: Got it. Were there other women like that around in the bars or at parties?

John: Not that I knew of. There probably were, but I didn't know them.

Tim: Gotcha.

John: Yeah, I remember seeing women at Skippy's, but I don't know what their connection was, or whether they were gay themselves, or whether they were just people who hung around with gay guys. I didn't really know them. I never saw any women at Murphy's.

Tim: Hmmm.

Whit: The women at Skippy's were solo, or in couples or groups, or what?

John: All of the above.

Whit: Oh, okay.

Tim: Lesbian couples, or no?

John: Yeah, I remember two women who were at Skippy's, that were actually a couple.

Tim: Huh. Do you remember, what did they look like?

John: Well, *[laughs]* I didn't spend a lot of time looking at women *[they all laugh]* when I was in Skippy's, but they were young, trim, good-looking women.

Tim: Did you know any other lesbians? Would you say that the gay male world was pretty separate from the lesbian world?

John: Yeah, we were separate in Newark. I got to know lesbians later on in life in other places. But in Newark, I don't think lesbians and gay boys had a lot of contact. That's just my impression.

Tim: No, that makes sense. What was the music like in the gay bars, Sam's & Ann's, and Murphy's and—

John: Well, there was no music in Sam's & Ann's *[laughs]*.

Tim: Oh, not even a jukebox?

John: There may have been a jukebox there. I don't remember. I don't remember any music. The jukebox in Murphy's and the jukebox in Skippy's played all of the pop tunes of that period of time. It was your Top 40.

Tim: Gotcha. No live music? No piano?

John: No. No.

Tim: Okay. This might seem like a funny question, but what did you drink?

John: I don't remember what I drank. I think I drank beer. Yeah, I think that's all I drank was beer.

Tim: Fair enough. Was that what people mostly drank?

John: I think so, 'cause it was cheap. You could buy a half glass of beer at Sam's & Ann's, I think, it was fifteen cents or something like that.

Tim: Cool.

John: I think the reason people drank beer was because it was cheap, cheaper than mixed drinks.

Tim: Gotcha. What about at Artie's, just out of curiosity?

John: I don't remember what I drank while I was at Artie's.

Tim: Got it.

John: And I was only in Artie's twice in my whole life. Artie's was a very well-known bar, but I think it closed down sometime in the early sixties. But it was very popular. I don't remember what I drank.

Tim: Cool. Cool, cool. *[To Whit]* Whit, do you have?

Whit: No, I feel like I covered everything I wanted to ask in the first round, so I don't think I have more. Anything else? I guess just one last, kind of open-ended question, anything else that we haven't thought to ask in all of this interviewing? I guess we've covered all of *our* bases, but...

John: There was a guy that everybody knew from Branch Brook Park. He was a young guy. He was a handsome stud. He was married. He had children and he used to come to the park every day. He was there every day. You could count on seeing him there. There was only thing he was interested in, and that was getting serviced.

The thing is, everybody knew him. At some point or another, almost everybody must have serviced him, because he was a very, very handsome, very masculine, very beautiful body. One day I remember seeing him there with his weights, *[laughs]* showing off. The thing is, he was this guy that everybody seemed to know who he was.

A friend of mine told me this story about him, which was that, one night, somehow or other, he got this guy to come to Skippy's. The guy walked into Skippy's and literally everybody knew him. They gave him a welcome, like, "Oh, finally!" *[Laughs]* It was like everybody in Newark knew him. I think everybody in Newark had blown him. *[Interviewers laughs]*. He was a stud!

So the thing is, in later years he left his wife, and he hooked up with a guy. And I think he was living—I don't where it was—in upper Madison, or someplace like that—and he got very fat and ugly! But in his day, he was the leading sex symbol of North Newark *[laughs]* He was a stud! *[More laughter]*

Tim: Fascinating.

Whit: A guy like that, during his sort of straight-identified era, what was his demeanor like? Is he friendly and congenial? Is he like stiff, macho, and aggressive? I'm just trying to think of how a guy like that interacts. You know what I mean?

John: Well, he was a very macho, very *relaxed* macho. Like that he was very sure of himself, and that made him attractive. That he did seem like your ordinary straight guy, married, with children. He seemed like perfectly ordinary, except very handsome, straight guy. I think everybody was attracted to him.

Tim: Did people worry about syphilis or gonorrhea, or anything like that?

John: I don't think that much. We worried about crabs.

Tim: Crabs.

John: That was a hot issue. I don't remember worrying that much about—well, wait a minute, I think that's not true. Wait, it's coming back to me now. That in the Newark area, people talked about a doctor called Dr. Brown, who was in New York. He was on the East Side somewhere. And that if you ever suspected that you had anything, that that was where you had to go.

Tim: Huh.

John: And that there was nobody in Newark that you could see about that. You couldn't trust any doctor in Newark. You had to go into New York to see this man that they referred to as "Brownie."

Tim: Brownie.

John: At some point or another, every gay person, particularly in those days, you're thinking about, "Wow! This could happen to me!"

Tim: Right.

John: You're extra aware of that kind of thing.

Tim: Someone mentioned him to you at some point?

John: Well, everybody talked about him. A lot of people talked about him.

Tim: What did they say about him? Just that you could—?

John: - well, he was the guy that we'd go to, to get treated, where you want to get treated, if you felt you had anything.

Tim: It was sort of underground advice.

John: Well, it's just that he was gay-friendly. Everybody knew he was gay-friendly—

Tim: - yeah, yeah—

John: - and non-judgmental.

Tim: I'm surprised there would be no one in Newark, or near Newark, closer than—

John: Well, if there was, I never heard about them. If you got in serious trouble, then you had to go over to New York.

Tim: Fascinating.

John: But the crabs thing, that was very real. Everybody had trouble with the crabs at one point or another.

Tim: Yeah.

John: I remember, like, I was pretty young the first time I got them. I had to instruct my mother that all my underwear needed to be boiled and everything like that. She thought I was weird. But I knew. *[Laughs]* I knew I couldn't just say to her, "Look, I have the crabs."

Tim: You didn't, and she didn't figure it out.

John: She probably wouldn't even know what the crabs were.

Tim: She didn't figure it out from your instructions?

John: Well, if she did, she kept silent about it. *[Laughter]* She boiled everything as I requested.

Tim: That's great. You never went to Dr. Brown.

John: No, I never did. No.

Tim: Hmmm. Anything else?

John: No.

Whit: No. All right. I'll stop recording now.

[End of Audio]