

Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Pucci Revlon
Interviewer: Whitney Strub/Craig Blunt
May 12, 2017

Whitney Strub: All right. We are recording. Whitney Strub here for a second round with Miss Pucci Revlon, May 12, 2017 at Miss Pucci's house in Newark. Thank you again for doing this. I wanted to start off with a series of follow-up questions from the first interview because there was so much that you sort of threw out there. My mind is just kind of exploding.

First, I just want to walk through the geography of Bobby White's clubs to make sure I've got this right. So, tell me if this is accurate. Somewhere around the mid 60's, he runs a club at 12th and Springfield

Pucci Revlon: No, that was in the mid 70's.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay, so it's not until the mid 70's that he really get started.

Pucci Revlon: It was the mid 70's, yeah.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay, but the first one is at 12th and Springfield.

Pucci Revlon: Twelfth and Springfield.

Whitney Strub: Okay, and so, and you don't remember the name of it?

Pucci Revlon: No, but I went through there the other day and still couldn't. I've tried to figure out the name of that club and couldn't remember the name of the bar. It was a bar that sat on the corner of 12th, and the club was in the back of it.

Whitney Strub: Okay, and so, and after that one—so we talked about that last time—and then the Majestic comes next.

Pucci Revlon: The Majestic was the one on West Market off —

Whitney Strub: I found this. I was digging around in the Newark Public Library digitized collections. Do you remember a guy named Tiny Prince? Who wrote a column about Newark Nightlife?

Pucci Revlon: No.

Whitney Strub: I'll show this to you. Let me just read this into the thing. He writes, "Eddy Burton, owner of 570 Club, congenial, smiling, and gay." Does that ring a bell?

Pucci Revlon: It sounds, yes, it sounds familiar.

Whitney Strub: Is Eddy Burton somebody you remember?

Pucci Revlon: Probably. Probably a different name.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, okay—and I’ll hand this over to you in a second—and the other thing that Tiny Prince writes is, “Bessie Mae and her friends from the Majestic Beauty Bar. Boy, what a session.” Is that the same as the Majestic? The Majestic Beauty Bar?

Pucci Revlon: It probably is. That’s probably after Erma took over.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Is Bessie Mae someone you remember? There’s no other real description there or like a last name?

Pucci Revlon: No, I remember Erma and—

Whitney Strub: is that Armour?

Pucci Revlon: Erma.

Whitney Strub: Erma, oh, okay.

Pucci Revlon: And her sister-in-law.

Whitney Strub: Yes, so who is she?

Pucci Revlon: They were friends of Bobby White, but then they separated and went their own different way. I don’t—where does this say—this is all supposed to be in Newark?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I don’t know when it’s from. There’s no date on it. It’s just a clipping, so it really could be anytime. *[Pause 02:50 – 02:56]*. Is the Majestic Beauty Bar, you know, is that the name you would have used or is that a different place?

Pucci Revlon: I think it was just—I’m not sure if it was the Majestic Beauty Bar.

Whitney Strub: Okay. I wasn’t sure about this.

Pucci Revlon: I think it was the Majestic Club.

Whitney Strub: Okay. I was just digging around.

Pucci Revlon: Just up on West Market, yeah.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I wasn't sure if that is the same. And so, after the Majestic, that's when Bobby White opens The Doll House.

Pucci Revlon: The Doll House, yeah.

Whitney Strub: Okay. We talked about that quite a bit last time, so I don't need to rehash all of that. Let me just ask you this. Bobby White's partner, Paris. So-

Pucci Revlon: They were friends; that wasn't her partner.

Whitney Strub: Oh right, sorry. Yeah, I meant like business partner. Is that the same as Dorian Paris?

Pucci Revlon: No. Dorian Paris is from New York.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, Dorian Paris was the entertainer over there in New York.

Whitney Strub: Dorian Paris is the same person as Dorian Corey?

Pucci Revlon: One minute. No, no, no. That is Dorian Paris.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so—

Pucci Revlon: - Dorian Paris is the one from over here. Dorian Corey is the one from New York.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so they're different.

Pucci Revlon: They're different.

Whitney Strub: Okay, I wasn't sure about that. Could you tell me just a little bit more about Dorian Paris, 'cause I've come across the name.

Pucci Revlon: Dorian Paris is also Dorian Smith. Yeah, the Smith Family. That's the one I was talking about. The Smith Family in the—he left home to keep the Brothers from finding out he was gay, and when he came back he found out that like five of them were. Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Okay, that helps.

Pucci Revlon: Four.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I remember that from last time. I just wanted to clarify.

Pucci Revlon: Dorian Corey, oooooohhhh.

Whitney Strub: Yeah?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, that was a piece of work back in the late 90's.

Whitney Strub: Yeah?

Pucci Revlon: Yes, she killed somebody. They found the body in the closet.

Whitney Strub: Yea, I remember. That was a sensationalized case.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. They found the body mummified.

Whitney Strub: Right; but so Dorian Corey didn't have any Newark connection?

Pucci Revlon: No.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Not that I know of.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Let me just ask you about a few other clubs around downtown. 'Cause you had suggested that like, Branford Place was a kind of gay little strip for a while.

Pucci Revlon: No, there were straight clubs.

Whitney Strub: Really, Gay friendly.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, Sensations was, and the bars were, but the Gay Club was on William Street. That was the Doll House.

Whitney Strub: Okay, and that was at the corner of Branford and William?

Pucci Revlon: What?

Whitney Strub: The Doll House. I couldn't figure out if these—

Pucci Revlon: - it was on the corner of Halsey and William.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Branford and William run the same way. They run parallel.

Whitney Strub: Right, okay, yeah, William. I couldn't remember. Which corner was it on. I'm just trying to visualize where it is.

Pucci Revlon: What, the Doll House?

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: It was on top of Sparky J's which is on the corner of William and Halsey, but it was on the left-hand side. When you got to the corner of William and Halsey on the left-hand side, you just looked upstairs. It was upstairs above the bar.

Whitney Strub: Which left-hand side? So the side—?

Pucci Revlon: If you're coming down from Broad Street; 'cause William is a one-way going up.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: When you turn on to William and you go down to Halsey, on the left-hand side on the corner of William and Halsey, right upstairs was the Doll House.

Whitney Strub: Okay, on the Broad Street side or the far side?

Pucci Revlon: William only goes one way. It's the one-way coming off of Broad Street. Broad Street runs this way, William goes that way. When you turn into William and Broad, and you go down to the next corner, on the left-hand side is Sparky J's, which was on the corner. Above that was the Doll House.

Whitney Strub: Gotcha.

Pucci Revlon: It's a beige color building.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so do you have to cross over to here or it's on the close side?

Pucci Revlon: Uh?

Whitney Strub: You have to cross over here or it's on the close side?

Pucci Revlon: It's on the close side.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Gotcha. I just could not picture where it was. Sorry. Let me ask you about a few other places in Downtown Newark. There's a

club on Halsey. It only lasted a few years, called SRO. Does that ring a bell?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Tell me about that.

Pucci Revlon: Okay, well I've never been in that club, but I heard of—but now it's a Police hangout.

Whitney Strub: Oh, really?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. That's what it was. I heard about that club but I never—by that time, I was probably working a lot. 'Cause I worked a lot. By then when I think I was work-oriented, I barely went to the clubs, for a while. I didn't know too much about the SRO, but I knew it was a club that most of the girls hung out in.

Whitney Strub: The girls. Like, lesbians or trans women?

Pucci Revlon: Lesbians, yeah.

Whitney Strub: Okay. What about Le Joc? Does that ring a bell?

Pucci Revlon: That don't ring a bell at all.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Docks? Which I think was on Broad, right off Market.

Pucci Revlon: That sounds familiar. Docks?

Whitney Strub: Which was in the late 70's or like mid-to-late 70's.

Pucci Revlon: Docks?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, like D-O-C-K-S.

Pucci Revlon: No. I would have to confer with Bernie or somebody else 'cause I don't know about Docks.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I get it. How about Zanzibar then?

Pucci Revlon: Zanzibar was down by— it was in the Lincoln Hotel.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, so did you hang out there?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, I've been in there a few times. It was a nice club. It was kind of big, spacious. It was, well that's another thing. It wasn't just Gay Club. They were mixed clubs. We didn't have a problem with the people over here [*laughter*] in these types of clubs. If you had a Gay Club, you'd better believe half of it was straight. That's the way the clubs were back then.

Whitney Strub: And so, who were the straight people? I men, they must have been—

Pucci Revlon: Regular neighborhood kids.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, and they were cool with like a gay crowd.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. They all hang in the same place.

Whitney Strub: Is Zanzibar mostly Black, Black and White, Latino? I mean, who visited there?

Pucci Revlon: It was mixed.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so mixed. Mixed sexually?

Pucci Revlon: It was mixed crowd.

Whitney Strub: Mixed racially?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, mixed sexually, mixed racially, yeah. As a matter of fact, most of the clubs now were mixed sexually and—. There were many Black and Latino. There was lot of Black and Latino. There was some White people but it wasn't a lot.

Whitney Strub: Was there ever tension around sexuality or race?

Pucci Revlon: No. Certainly not at the Zanzibar because see, outside of the Zanzibar is where a lot of the prostitutes hung out. And back then the pimps that was vending the prostitutes, they wasn't having no trouble down there.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Anything that went on outside there, they were definitely on it. 'Cause they didn't want the heat of the Police on the place. Yep.

Whitney Strub: Okay. And there were also, at the time, some porn theatres down there too. The Treat, The Cameo, and the Little Theatre.

Pucci Revlon: *Love through the Stairway [laughter].*

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah. So, any memories of those places?

Pucci Revlon: I never been in those places.

Whitney Strub: No.

Pucci Revlon: I had a couple friend, they were straight. They wanted to go watch the movies and they was—a matter of fact, they came back and was telling everything they saw. They said there were so many men in there masturbating at the movies. It was, yeah. I don't remember. Yeah, I kinda think it was it was Freddie and Wolf that came back and told us those stories. Mm-hmm. 'Cause I know we kept saying, "We're gonna go down there. We're gonna go down there." We never did.

Whitney Strub: No? Why not?

Pucci Revlon: Really wasn't interested.

Whitney Strub: All right. Let me see. Okay, so that's kind of the back stuff I just wanted to catch up on. So, when we left off last time, you were at Essex County College in the late 70's; so maybe pick up there and tell me a little about your professional life. So, you finished there and then what?

Pucci Revlon: No, I never finished there.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so what happened?

Pucci Revlon: I went to trade school.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: For nursing. Then my first job was over at Martland Hospital. I have a whole- oooohhh. You're gonna put all that in there?

Whitney Strub: Oh, anything you want we can skip over, of course. You know, whatever detail you wanna talk about.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, I went to trade school. Then I went there and I started working over at the Martland Hospital. That was '79/'80. Then we transferred to the College Hospital during a winter storm; and all I did was nursing from there on out.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Until I stopped in '96.

Whitney Strub: Okay. You would have been working in the hospital when AIDS first emerged.

Pucci Revlon: No, I was working in a nursing home.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, I think that was—AIDS came out—well, we found out about it, what? The middle 80's? Yeah, I was doing nursing home work then. It was easy and less drama.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Shoulda stayed in the state place though [*laughter*].

Whitney Strub: Yeah, why is that?

Pucci Revlon: Huh?

Whitney Strub: Why is that?

Pucci Revlon: I think with the state you made, um, you got better retirement and benefits if you stayed with the state instead of—. 'Cause when I went to the nursing home that's like going with the agencies. This cigarette bother you?

Whitney Strub: No, I'm all right.

Pucci Revlon: Okay. Yeah, the state was better for employment in the long haul.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Than working for the agencies, but the agencies paid you a little bit more money back then.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so kind of a trade-off.

Pucci Revlon: Mm-hmm.

Whitney Strub: Did you have any problems on the job being trans? Or was it--?

Pucci Revlon: No.

Whitney Strub: Never?

Pucci Revlon: Why?

Whitney Strub: I'm just curious. I mean, because it seems like society as a whole, you know, has been pretty hostile to Trans people historically.

Pucci Revlon: Me, no. I don't know why, but I always found that hard to believe, because I never had no problem at all. I haven't had no—the only problem I had with my employers and people in my job is my mouth.

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]* Yeah. Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, because if they say something to me—then they'll never say nothing gayish or anything like that. Or any derogatory on my sexuality. Even if there's something they said that was just stupid and I corrected them on it and they didn't like it. Then we got into a heated argument over it. But I never had no problem with that.

Whitney Strub: What about your friends in your social world? Did they have—?

Pucci Revlon: No.

Whitney Strub: Uh. Never?

Pucci Revlon: Never. I never had that problem. I have never had that problem. In a heated argument, I probably was called something out of it with my friends growing up as kids, but as I got grown I never had that problem.

Whitney Strub: That's really interesting. I mean, it challenges a lot of conventional narratives.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, because I walked all over the streets of Newark; and I've always walked all over the streets of Newark. I walked through all these neighborhoods. I remember back in the 80's there was—when there was the problems in the South what with the Wild Bunch, but that was in the South Ward. But, I lived in the Central Ward and the North Ward and I walked through here and the East Ward. I never had none of those problems.

Whitney Strub: That's great. What about your dating life then? What do you want to say about that?

Pucci Revlon: Ugh.

Whitney Strub: [Laughter]

Pucci Revlon: I dated a bunch of idiots. Let's see. Let me go back to—well, the first boy I really fell for, he died in a fire in '77 in New York.

Whitney Strub: Oh God, I'm sorry.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. We sort of fooled around, but he was just a Ho. He was fooling around with a lot of people and he went to—as a matter of fact, it was a bath house in 1977. He died of smoke inhalation.

Whitney Strub: Wow, really? Was this in New York?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, I think it was in May. I think it was this time of year, in May of '77. I was devastated for a few.

Whitney Strub: Sure, yeah, that's horrible.

Pucci Revlon: That was really, really—Man that messed me up for a couple of months. Yeah, mm-hmm. Then I became a slut. I was sleeping around with Tom, Dick, and Harry for a moment. That's when work came into play and everything slowed down. Then I dated different guys for a few months and all they had this—my intelligence is not that small.

Whitney Strub: Sure.

Pucci Revlon: And when they say something stupid, or anything that's racially motive, or just a little ignorant, and it irks me that they actually believe some of the stuff that came out of they mouth. I just moved on.

Whitney Strub: Racially, you mean, we're talking White guys here?

Pucci Revlon: No. No, no, no. If I was dating a White guy, and he has something negative to say about a Spanish guy, or a Jewish guy. I never had that problem growing up with racial things in my household because my family would never talk like that. I never heard nothing about Black men this, or the White man that, or the Spanish man that, or the Chinese man that, because we lived in a diverse neighborhood.

You see I grew on Avon Avenue in the early and late 60's, and as I was saying before, up in that neighborhood, there was Spanish people, Polish people, German people, Black people, Haitian people, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans. That's what I went to school with.

When I went to school in West Side, we had Chinese. Haitian. There were some White people. There was Puerto Rican. There was Dominicans. There was Cubans, and Blacks. We had a big, diverse culture there. They had Spanish Clubs, and French Clubs, and stuff like that. You know things like that where people went in and talked about different things. It was just coming out in a way I guess because of that.

When I looked at some of the schoolbooks, most of the kids in there were White. When they just started mixing in the races, then there was a lot of Black kids; but there was also other races still there. I never thought about it, just think of them as people, even though they did have different color skins. I don't think we went through no problems like this, especially not at West Side. West Side was one of them great schools back then.

Whitney Strub: That's interesting. These guys, the men in your life, are they straight guys? Is that—?

Pucci Revlon: They thought they were *[laughter]*.

Whitney Strub: Tell me about that. That's what I'm curious about. How-

Pucci Revlon: They thought they were. There was a lot of them that were dating women. Well there was this one particular guy, and I'm not gonna mention his name because I know he passed, but his wife is still alive and I think they had about five kids.

Whitney Strub: Mm-hmm.

Pucci Revlon: We were together from I think I was about 14 to about 17. He was always- My sister caught him in the house with me once. We were in the middle of sex. My sister came in the door and caught it. He went on—he was just into me that way. And the next thing I know he was marrying a girl down the hill, and they had kids together. Every time he saw me he just thought about the old days. After he married that girl I just couldn't. I mean, I didn't do things like that to people. That's just wrong.

Let's see. After him, there was—I think that's when I start spinning around a lot until I got into work. Then I hung out. There was a few Black—well, then I was a weekend whore. I would go to New York, pick up a guy and bring him home. He would stay from Saturday to Sunday. Sunday he had to leave 'cause I had to go to work or school on Monday, so he had to get out. That's when I had my first apartment over on 2nd and Central Avenue. Yeah. There was a different guy every weekend. They went from Black to White. Most of the time it was a White guy. Or a light-skinned guy.

Whitney Strub: Did they talk about you being trans? Or there was cool with, or I mean, is that like a conversation you would have?

Pucci Revlon: No, we would have—

Whitney Strub: Or just kinda like—

Pucci Revlon: Normal [*laughter*].

Whitney Strub: Yeah? Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Just normal conversation. We came in that night from the club, probably had sex. Got up that morning, fix breakfast, ate lunch, dinner, hung out that Saturday. I don't know if we went back to a club or not. We could probably just went across the street to the bar or something. Hang out there Sunday. I made sure they had to go home.

Whitney Strub: [*Laughter*] yeah. How're you getting in and out of the city? Did you drive or was it—?

Pucci Revlon: No, I was taking—I took the PATH back then, and mainly the E Train. Sometimes I would take New Jersey Transit, 'cause it would put me close to the clubs. 'Cause most of the clubs I went to back then were on 43rd Street, 8th Avenue, and 48th Street, right in that area. The New Jersey Transit would leave you down at Penn Station, which is like about 10 blocks, so I just take the PATH to the E Train and take the E Train up to 8th Avenue and get off at one of those.

Whitney Strub: Okay, and so this is like the late 70's we're talking about here.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, this is the late 70's, mid 80's.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so you'd rather hang in New York than in Newark for the weekend? Or the clubs were better? Or I mean, what?

Pucci Revlon: No, the guys were better.

Whitney Strub: Ah, okay, okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, after hanging in Newark I started going over there finding guys.

Whitney Strub: Okay, gotcha. So most of these are kind of like short weekend-long relationships? Or do you have longer relationships in that area?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. I had one for a couple years, until he got a phone call and he hit me.

Whitney Strub: Oh, yeah?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, that was the bouncer.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. Once that hit came in that was it. Yeah, 'cause somebody called the house looking for me. They first said I gave him the number and I never did. His brother answered the phone, and before I can get—somehow to get the number, so I'm trying to find out where did he get the number. I found out another friend gave him the number. A friend of his brother's gave him the number to call me at the house and before I got out, next thing I know I had a knot on my head.

That was the end of that relation 'cause I was about to burn that motherfucker up. He was about to be set on fire 'cause that's when *The Burning Bed* just came out. I don't know when that movie was, *The Burning Bed*, but it had just—it had been out maybe two years. That movie with Farah Fawcett? I bought a can of gasoline. I was gonna set his ass on fire.

Whitney Strub: Wow.

Pucci Revlon: Oh, yeah. Because he wasn't a real big guy, but he was just strong, and he had a dynamic punch. That's why all the clubs wanted him to work in the clubs at night. 'Cause he was a good bouncer. I wasn't having any of that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. You know, he act like he did it all the time, but it never happened, until that one time, and that made me, yeah. Mm-hmm, but that's the day I figured out why the clubs wanted him.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, so you just kind of—you were gonna get revenge, but you just kind of stopped yourself.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. I damn sure was. The next damn couple of weeks, every time I went to sleep his leg went on top of me. I got up to go to the bathroom, he woke up, "Where you going?" 'Cause he thought he was gonna die that night.

Whitney Strub: Wow. So during that era, as far as getting hormones go, did that change? You had said last time when you were young you would go to Harlem and get like a paper bag with everything in it for a month. Did that change over time? Or did you have the same hook-up?

Pucci Revlon: Oh, no. That I started getting from my doctors.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so when did you—when did you start seeing a real doctor?

Pucci Revlon: Who was the first? Okay. I think I was around 20, so it had to be somewhere—around the time I started working.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, and going to school. Matter of fact, I think I was over here when I first started to get them. I was getting them from a doctor at a Primary Care over on Clinton Avenue. I got it from him.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Was he friendly, and was he like a doctor that is recognized in the trans community as being—

Pucci Revlon: No, he was just a regular physician. As a matter of fact, one of my friends recommend him as a Primary Care Physician. He was the doctor down the street from everybody. Everybody went to him.

Whitney Strub: He was cool about things?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. Actually, I didn't have that kind of problems growing up.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, no, no. I know. I'm surprised because there's a long history of doctors—having to find a friendly doctor because not every doctor is supportive, you now.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, then when I stopped going when he retired and sold his practice. He had a doctor come in there and I went there a couple of times, but then I started going to the doctor over at United Hospital and they were—they had a clinic over—. I started going to United Hospital but the clinic was on Clinton Avenue and Astor Street, between Astor and I think it was Ryan, and it was a United Hospital Clinic down there and I went there. The doctor who I met, Dr. Brown, and she started giving them to me.

Whitney Strub: That's great.

Pucci Revlon: She was my doctor for about 12 maybe 14 years until—now she's Administrator inside of one of the hospitals.

Whitney Strub: All right. Well then, to shift gears a little, tell me about when you first became aware of the AIDS epidemic and what that looked like in your life.

Pucci Revlon: Whooo.

Whitney Strub: It's a heavy topic but I think it's important.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. In the mid 80's, friends start dropping. Or associates, I can't say they were friends. People we knew. People I knew, and some people aren't around. What made this so bad, one of the persons I knew, was over down at College Hospital, and she had passed over there and she didn't even know she was sick.

What happened was she was in a room. She was in there sick and didn't know why, and one of our friends went and took the sign off the door and showed her what they'd put on the door. Her parents had found out. They knew when she went in there and the doctors had talked to the parents but they didn't tell the person until later on, but by that time the friend had already told the person.

Back then sissies couldn't hold they mouth. They spread everything like rumors—and so did I [*laughter*]. That's just the way we were back then. We talked about everything. We just spread it. If that person had it, this person had it. If you had it, before the end of the day half the neighborhood knew. Well, half the gay community knew 'cause they'd done got on the phone, or they'd called somebody and told somebody about it. Just the way it is.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. I lost a lot of friends behind that. Or a lot of associates. They all- It was tragic in the beginning, but then it became like the norm. ‘Cause so many people—‘cause in the first, you know, like one or three people went, a couple of them in Newark and a few from New York. Then the next thing you know, every time you turn around somebody passed.

There was so many, that at one point in time when they used to do Balls, they used to give out plaques with all the people’s names that had gone. Because at that time they were giving half their proceeds to some kind of foundation. It was a sad time. Now medicines have gotten better so less and less people pass.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: What effect did all that have on *you* at the time? What was it like to live through that?

Pucci Revlon: It was scary. It was really scary. ‘Cause all you thought about if you got it here you go. That was it. It was really scary. But, being that I was in the medical community, I took more—I think it was just being more cautioned about things. Yeah. There’s a package up there. Now I don’t even know why I have them condoms in here. It’s not like I’m having sex. *[Laughter]*

Whitney Strub: When did condoms enter the scene for you? I mean, is that something like in the 70’s. Did people use them?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, we would use them. Condoms wasn’t so good back then. We all just—we used to go through the Health Clinic and get condoms, and they still didn’t work back then because—

Whitney Strub: What do you mean?

Pucci Revlon: I don’t think they was making them pure outta latex like they do now. Yeah, back then there was lambskins and some other materials, and semen seems to get through them.

Whitney Strub: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Pucci Revlon: A lot of people are still affected. Because I remember a lot of people having condoms. Just to keep the semen from running out of them and running down their legs. It still didn’t work, because a

lot of those people—because I had a lot girlfriends that were—a matter of fact, most of my girlfriends was prostitutes, and they all caught it. Most of them passed from it, and I know they all used condoms.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah.

Pucci Revlon:

‘Cause we used to get them from the Health Clinic on William Street, or wherever they were—. They had clinics. Whenever you go to a clinic, they used to pass them out in regular clinics and doctors’ offices back then. Mm-hmm

Whitney Strub:

Wow. Was it only—only with the emergence of AIDS did people began using condoms though or?

Pucci Revlon:

No, they was using condoms before that.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah, and just for like STDs basically, or—?

Pucci Revlon:

Yeah, for STDs. When AIDS came, they would start eating through the condoms [*laughter*]. Feet going numb.

Whitney Strub:

Oh, really. Yeah, if you need a break or anything just let me know.

Pucci Revlon:

[*Inaudible 34:56*].

Whitney Strub:

Did that affect your own sex life? I mean, when AIDS emerged did that change your own behavior or...?

Pucci Revlon:

Not really. Because, actually, back when it really got started, my main thing was working.

Whitney Strub:

Okay, so you—

Pucci Revlon:

I was thinking about the American green dollar.

[*Laughter*]

Whitney Strub:

Okay, and then it was right around that period that the ballroom scene really emerged because like—tell me about that. Tell me—

Pucci Revlon:

Okay. The ballroom scene was—. Okay, there was balls here in New Jersey, but there was just a few people that can actually do a ball. You need to have money to rent a club. You need to have money to buy the trophies. You need to have money to print up the flyers and then have them distribute and then you need to have

tickets. ‘Cause most balls have tickets and stuff like that, and that’s how they did it.

But, only several people could have started—had balls back in the 70’s in New Jersey. That’s when we started branching out to New York, ‘cause the ballroom scene started to get bigger. It had bigger categories, and they have more categories over there than they did over here at the time. ‘Cause back then they had some—we had Femme Queen Face, Butch Queen Face, Model’s Effect, Femme Queen Models Effect, Mod Boy on the Butch Queen side. Then you had Business Woman, Housewife. Yeah, like about, maybe, 14 categories on this side. When you got to New York, they start expanding categories.

Whitney Strub: What was your role in the scene? How did you participate?

Pucci Revlon: Most of the time I just wanted to look.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Be nosey and see what was going on. I walked—I started walking in the 80’s. Most of the time back then, I walked for legs. I have very thinning legs, back then in a pair of heels. Then I started, well I did Model’s Effect. What else did I walk? I did Face twice, three times. Big Girl’s Model’s Effect. I Walked Body. I was big, but voluptuous and curvy. Yeah, that was mainly what I did.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: So, I feel like the New York scene is pretty well known, but the New Jersey scene before it, I know much less about. Can you flesh that out a little? I mean, what was going in New Jersey before kind of moving to New York and making things bigger? ‘Cause I think you suggested it was like kind of a more “do it yourself approach” or a smaller scale.

Pucci Revlon: It was a smaller scale.

Whitney Strub: What did it look like?

Pucci Revlon: Okay, let’s see, well, there was some people had balls back in—but I won’t mention these people’s names.

Whitney Strub: That’s all right. You can talk around names.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, there were some—like certain people that could actually afford to have these balls was having these balls in these clubs. Matter of fact, most of the time it was in Bobby White's club. It was on a smaller scale. Grand Prize could have been no more than about \$250 for the Grand Prize. They used to have Evening Gown Wears and stuff like that, and we also had a 500-pound stripper. Yeah, La Contessa De Francisca com Bella Ce Soir. This child was wide. That butt had to be about that big, in a bikini, more or less, and will strip down. Yeah. I know she's in a nursing home now.

Whitney Strub: Yeah?

Pucci Revlon: Mm-hmm, in Newark. She doesn't, Boy, if you got her to talk, but she doesn't speak anymore.

Whitney Strub: Oh, really?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, tell you a lot about the ballroom scenes. She was- It was a good thing back then. We had fun when we did go to the balls. Then Donna came, Lady Donna. She started having the ballrooms and she started with \$500, the next day you know it's \$1000, and all the kids from New York started coming.

Whitney Strub: Where would she do this at?

Pucci Revlon: The first one was at the Irvington Manor.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: In Irvington. Then they used to have some—then some of the New York kids would start coming to the ones in the little bars. It depends on what the prize money was, and we had one—well, we didn't have one. They had one at Sunny Oliver's, what used to be on High Street and Clayton Avenue. Well now, High Street is now Martin Luther King. Used to be a little bar. Sit there with a—upstairs they had a little ballroom in it. Les Shoverman, and he used to have it there.

Whitney Strub: Sunny Alexander's?

Pucci Revlon: Sunny Oliver's.

Whitney Strub: Sunny Oliver's. That was the name of the bar?

Pucci Revlon: That was the name of the bar. Matter of fact, I think that was one of Bobby White's balls.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. 'Cause I remember the child from New York, Paris won. Paris is in those pictures there. Paris is also was an entertainer, but on the caliber of Bobby White. Paris was very good at entertaining in New York. That child was on—that's one picture of Paris.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: I got a better picture. I saw it here. I saw it here earlier. Paris was a very good entertainer and- Paris was, yeah. That was in the 90's. That was Whitney Houston's song, "*Don't close one more door.*"

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yes. She really did that show. I got a closer picture and I just saw it just as moment ago. That's the same picture.

Whitney Strub: Okay, yeah, a different angle.

Pucci Revlon: Mm-hmm.

Whitney Strub: Wow.

Pucci Revlon: Now, this picture that you—remember that girl you was asking about that was in the bathing suit?

Whitney Strub: Mm-hmm.

Pucci Revlon: Same person.

Whitney Strub: Okay. I see.

Pucci Revlon: I just saw this picture of Paris. Where is that? This is Paris Duprée.

Whitney Strub: Nice, yeah, that's great.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, that's a female impersonator too.

Whitney Strub: Okay, from New York?

Pucci Revlon: From New York. Mm-hmm. That's the one that won one of the Grand Prizes over here, and that started the people from over in

New York coming over here to the little balls. Because Paris came over here. I remember, somehow Paris was in a cocoon or something for the ball. They rolled it out this door and came out in a butterfly costume that lit up.

Whitney Strub: Wow. That's pretty extravagant.

Pucci Revlon: Oh, Man. When it came to the Grand Prize, they went all the way out. Dorian Corey, Avis Pendavis, Paris, Pepper LaBeija. They will come out of the most elaborate costumes back then.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Let me ask you this. One quick thing, how long was Bobby White active in Newark? How long did that go for, the places he ran?

Pucci Revlon: Okay, I gotta figure out when Bobby passed, 'cause Bobby was about 79. I was active a lot, 'cause Bobby was here for awhile. Before Bobby start open the clubs—Bobby White was a legend when I was a child 'cause they all talked about—. 'Cause my parents used to go to clubs and see Bobby White and perform in certain places.

Whitney Strub: Like in Newark?

Pucci Revlon: In Newark.

Whitney Strub: Like where?

Pucci Revlon: Bobby White played all the straight clubs. Bobby White played shows over at the People's Choice, at Midas Gold. Wherever they wanted Bobby White to perform.

Whitney Strub: Performing as a female impersonator?

Pucci Revlon: Yep. It just said, "*Here, performing tonight Mr. Bobby White, female impersonator.*"

Whitney Strub: Uh.

Pucci Revlon: The straight people loved Bobby White here.

Whitney Strub: Yeah?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. Bobby White was a florist at Shelby's? I think it was Shelby's on Bergen Street, for years. Worked up there. Bobby White was a Female Impersonator Extraordinaire.

Whitney Strub: That's interesting.

Pucci Revlon: It was way out.

Whitney Strub: Did your parents ever say anything about his performances? Do you remember?

Pucci Revlon: No, I just remember the tickets they used to have to go see these shows. Matter of fact, my mother, all her friends, they had a little Ladies Club and they would go to different places and hang out and stuff like that. 'Cause you heard about Bobby White. I heard a lot about Bobby White when I was in high school, especially the ninth and tenth grade. Most of the kids, we used to sneak in the shows and they come back and tell the teachers about it in class.

Whitney Strub: Which shows, I mean, were they risqué. Was it—?

Pucci Revlon: No, it just female impersonating. You know back then they did a lot of Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, Nina Simone, Nancy Sinatra—not Nancy—Nancy Wilson, and stuff, and Nancy Sinatra. They did things like that.

Whitney Strub: Okay, that makes sense. So he was still active in Newark in the 80's?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Then—

Pucci Revlon: Eighties. I think up until the 90's. I think Bobby passed in—no, Bobby passed in 2000 or something.

Whitney Strub: Oh, really? Okay. Okay.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. Bobby White used to be booked all over the state.

Whitney Strub: Yeah? Was he still running clubs in Newark into the 90's?

Pucci Revlon: No.

Whitney Strub: When did that stop?

Pucci Revlon: Okay, I know—

Whitney Strub: Or even just roughly?

Pucci Revlon: Probably somewhere in the early 90's, or the mid 90's.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Okay. Let me ask you this. I wanna ask you a minute about the movie *Paris is Burning*. But before asking about that, when things were going on in Newark, did anybody film the ballroom scene at all? Do you know of anybody who videotaped it? I'm just curious about it.

Pucci Revlon: They probably did, but I don't know who did it.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, okay. That's too bad. I'd love to find out.

Pucci Revlon: 'Cause I remember there were some—one guy used to be a photographer that came to all the events, but I don't know where he's at. Matter of fact, Bernie should know who he is.

Whitney Strub: Okay, I'll hit Bernie up about that. You don't remember the name though?

Pucci Revlon: No, that's the guy who used to take pictures. Matter of fact, he used to take pictures of the Jordan Ball when they used to have it down at the Robert Treat back then.

Whitney Strub: Okay. I'd love to find video footage of some of these things. What about *Paris is Burning*? 'Cause that kind of really put the ballroom scene in the public eye. Tell me your thoughts on that.

Pucci Revlon: That was a mess. Matter of fact, I was in Paris' house when that thing came to concept. Because Jennie Livingston and her little lying white ass was at Paris' house and I was over there to give tickets to that particular ball. I asked her not to put my picture in that movie, and I didn't want to see it. Matter of fact, I brought the first ten tickets from Paris after Paris just got back from picking up the tickets. That ball was in 1988? *Paris is Burning* came out in 1988?

Whitney Strub: I think it came out the next year, so it makes sense that they'd be shooting in '88.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, okay. It was in 1988 I brought the first tickets then Jennie wanted to film me and I said I don't wanna be in this film because I had to go to work. I didn't have no problems at work and I did not want them seeing my picture up there causing no problems. 'Cause I worked over here [*laughter*], and I had no problems all that time and I didn't want to start no mess.

We were in Paris' house and I brought the tickets. Jennie was there making things, then Paris did the flyer. Went and got it copied, then I took copies of the flyer. It was good. We got to the ballroom, cameras were set up, wires, everything. They had the paper there for you to sign stating so your face will be—so that you know that you're gonna be in this movie and stuff in the images. 'Cause I came out in that picture I think a couple of times, and I'm in that movie.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, so where do you show up in the movie?

Pucci Revlon: Probably walking through there. Just walking through there with Paris. 'Cause Me and Paris was good friends.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, but you didn't want to be in the film.

Pucci Revlon: I didn't want to be in the film.

Whitney Strub: Did you discuss that with her?

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. What happened, when it came out—who was it? Phil Donahue? It came out on TV. I think it was on—I think it was Phil Donahue, 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon. My father got about 15 phone calls [*laughter*]. My face went across that screen and my father—yeah, my parents got about 15 phone calls about me in that movie. I didn't even know I was supposed to be in that movie. That's how I found out. My parents told me.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. So, how did you react?

Pucci Revlon: Well if I could have found Jennie Livingston I would have choked her. I would have really hit her Yeah, I would have choked her for sure. 'Cause that's the one thing I asked her not to do. Make sure they do not take pictures of me and put me in that film. I guess the shots she had was so clear she used them.

Whitney Strub: Did you ever get a chance to discuss that with her after the fact?

Pucci Revlon: No, I haven't seen her ever since. When I saw her, she was on TV discussing it with Phil Donahue and some of the people from the film. 'Cause they replayed that thing several times [*laughter*].

Whitney Strub: Yeah, it was widely seen, the film.

Pucci Revlon: They replayed that several times.

Whitney Strub: What did the other people from the scene think?

Pucci Revlon: Uh?

Whitney Strub: You were a critic. Were other people critical of the film?

Pucci Revlon: Oh please, they were loving it!

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Pucci Revlon: They had a showing down in the Village. Everybody went. It was a little theatre, I think it's on Christopher Street somewhere down there. They all went hopping down there. Please, I was going—I think I was at work. But they all talked about it. Came back told me they all saw me across the screen. Mm-hmm. Yep, they all went. 'Cause I think I worked 11 to 7 that night. I was working in West Orange, I think at the time. Mm-hmm

Whitney Strub: Were other people upset by it or was it just you?

Pucci Revlon: That was just me.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: No, I told you they loved it. They loved that movie back then. Yeah, that was a thing back then. I think it ran down here for several weeks.

Whitney Strub: Have your feelings changed over time or not?

Pucci Revlon: I just don't care no more.

Whitney Strub: I mean, it is—it's an important film, you know. Film history.

Pucci Revlon: Mm-hmm, it's a documentary. I just don't care no more.

Whitney Strub: I mean you are a part of film history there.

Pucci Revlon: My cousin Denis showed it on Showtime. Then a lot of my relatives saw it and they start calling me Miss Showtime.

[Laughter]

Especially my cousin Jean. 'Cause she stayed up—Jean was one of those people she wouldn't go to sleep until everybody was in the

house. Her boyfriend at the time worked in a bar, so she would stay up late watching TV. She was a homemaker. She worked outside the house, but home came first. She was that—she was gone when her husband—when he came home from work at night she had his dinner ready.

Whitney Strub:

Wow, that's—

Pucci Revlon:

He'd come home at 3:00 in the morning and she got dinner ready for him. She was a big influence on me too, 'cause she'd want to keep me straight about stuff.

Whitney Strub:

Was she excited to see you on TV?

Pucci Revlon:

Oh, please. She was loving every minute of it.

Whitney Strub:

[Laughter], yeah. Tell all the relatives.

Whitney Strub:

Was your family in general, were they impressed? It's like, woah, you're famous.

Pucci Revlon:

Yeah. That was, yeah.

Whitney Strub:

Okay.

Pucci Revlon:

That's the way *[laughter]*, they were impressed. I wasn't, but they were.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah. It's right around that time that some new, like radical AIDS activism begins; so Queer Nation and Act Up. Were you involved in any of that scene as far as activism goes?

Pucci Revlon:

No. I got along with straight people. I had a lot of gay friends, 'cause I worked with a lot of straight people back then. I did the gay things, but then I had to do the straight things 'cause that—I hung out with anybody. I just hung out with people. I wasn't classifying them as gay and straight. It was just the way they were. They were just people. Same way anyone would—I couldn't, let's see, well back in the 80's, I met a lot of people down out in Cranford, and there's a lot of White people out that way *[laughter]*.

Whitney Strub:

What was your social life like there, like in that circle? What would you do?

Pucci Revlon: While I was working in the nursing home, we would go into—we'd go to bars for lunch on the week—I better not say that 'cause they might still be working.

[Laughter]

You know, we would work during—we had like, we would work on the weekends and go to bars for lunch. We used to go get hot dogs in a certain bar and get—that's when they introduced me to that coconut rum – Malibu! – with orange juice. Oh Man, I used to come back to the work lit!

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]*

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. Then there's a guy and a straight guy in the kitchen. Back then, I had a car. He used to come and get me, and we would go to the bar and get hot dogs and then go to the liquor store and get a six-pack and sit in the car and drink.

We'd just sit there talking about anything and everything. Mainly he talked about his girlfriend, and we just- I just sit there listening. We come back in the job. I came to the job one day with him and the Head Nurse snatched him up. She said, "You better never, ever take her to lunch again. Never. She ain't ging nowhere with you. Look at her eyes." Yeah, 'cause I was really lit—"She only get like that when she's running around with you." Yeah, the nurse was going off on him.

She never wrote him up, but she went off on him. Yeah, I couldn't go to the—we couldn't go to lunch no more together. Yeah, 'cause I was—I came back one time really red eyed and glassy from drinking beer. We sat in the car, not where the nursing home was, but in the next lot and sat there and drank till the time to go back to work. Yeah, and got busted. The nurse's name was Mrs. Howard. I remember her. She was like a—she was everybody's mother at the job. She took care of everybody. She was very strict but she was very pleasant.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, so what happens in your life then; so we're kind of in the 90's now, I guess. I mean, so how long—how long do you stay involved in the ballroom scene?

Pucci Revlon: Off and on, I still, well I went to the last Fireball.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay. I was there.

Pucci Revlon: Huh?

Whitney Strub: I was there.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, I was there. I went to the one before then too.

Whitney Strub: Did you walk?

Pucci Revlon: The first one, Bernie called me up. Yeah, Bernie credits me for making sure the New York kids come to New Jersey, but it was mainly Paris. Once Paris start walking—when Paris came over here and start walking the Jersey Balls, that brought the New York kids over here, especially after Paris won the Grand Prize. That's on Paris Duprée.

I can actually say that for sure because now that you made me remember and I remember Sunny Oliver's when it happened 'cause I was there. Because I think that—matter of fact, I think me and my mother went. To that Sunny Oliver's and Paris brought them here.

Then I started going over there, and you would start coming back and forth. If I had Fly Smokey I would take them over there and bring them back over here, and the kids started going back and forth. Yeah, so Bernie credit me for bringing, getting involved and getting the kids from over here to go to the ballrooms over there, and that's what made the balls over here grow bigger.

Whitney Strub: Right. Right.

Pucci Revlon: With the Grand Prizes going up a lot of kids are coming, and some of the categories which I've seen in the past—'cause I went to a ballroom in New York. Was that this past summer? Yeah, I think it was this past—last summer I was in—. Yeah, it had to be somewhere in like June or something. I went to Andre Mizrahi Ball, Andre and Jack's Ball. A lot of the categories got cash in them, so that's what's making the kids go back and forth, across the water to here. You know, trophy is good, but cash is a little better.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, sure.

Pucci Revlon: As long as they're giving out cash they're gonna show up. Some of the kids are still- they're slow. Like in New York. In some clubs, sometimes, like at the Elk's Lodge, the Elk's Lodge opened at

10:00 at night for a ball. The ball didn't begin till like 3:00 in the morning.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Pucci Revlon: Now over here, most of the clubs open up—I think the Robert Treat is the only thing that goes past 4 o'clock, so you have to be on time.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah, like in Andre's new Ball that ball start at 12:00 in the afternoon. It was from 12:00 to 10:00. If it's starting at 12:00 try to get there at 2:00. These kids they come until 7:00 that night. Then they wonder why Grand Prize never got to it. Seven hours and there's nothing going on.

Whitney Strub: [Laughter]

Pucci Revlon: That's the way it was, yeah.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Pucci Revlon: They never showed up on time. But, here, back then the ballrooms closed at 2:00 a.m. 'cause most of the places that they had balls had liquor licenses.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Pucci Revlon: And the liquor licenses don't play over here. This is not like New York. Now the Elk's Lodge had a liquor license, but their bar was downstairs and that bar closed, at I guess 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock. That's why the balls can go on till 12:00 o'clock in the afternoon. You can't do that over here [laughter]. No, no, no. The ABC in this state is very strict. It ain't like that lax one over there in New York [laughter] that got away with it.

Whitney Strub: Uh, that's interesting. So that's just a matter of like the local Police.

Pucci Revlon: Yeah. Then in New York, they start having balls inside the clubs. Like they had in Kilimanjaro's and oh Man, what was the—Sound Factory, and stuff like that. When they had them in things like that it was a different story. 'Cause those clubs they closed at 12:00 or something the next afternoon. 'Cause we used to go to clubs and leave the club and go have breakfast. We go in a club, it's dark,

come out the sun is high in the sky. You can't do that in Newark. Hmm-mm, I think the Robert Treat gave you an extra two hours but that's about it. Yeah 4:00 o'clock everybody gotta be closed.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I guess you can't compete with New York on that one back then.

Pucci Revlon: Mm-hmm.

Whitney Strub: Let me see what time it is.

Pucci Revlon: It's 2:18.

Whitney Strub: Yikes. I may have to run. I'm sorry. I have to get back to work. I'm gonna stop recording here—

[End of Audio]