

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Aaron Frazier

Interviewer: Whitney Strub

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Location: Rutgers University, Newark, NJ

Whitney Strub: All right. This is Whitney Strub with Aaron Frazier on June 7, 2017 at Rutgers-Newark and we're recording a second round interview to the one you did with Naomi. We have somewhat limited time so we're going to focus today on the history of clubs and bars and places in Newark. But right before I hit record, we were just talking about Bobby White and Dorian Paris. Could you pick that story up a little and tell me your experience of them and what you know about them. Whatever.

Aaron Frazier: Bobby White and Dorian Paris are and was the pioneers of Las Vegas showgirls. That's the way that they—it was explained to me. I never had the opportunity to see one of the shows, but I had the opportunity to meet Bobby and Dorian personally.

When I went to—I guess you could say—I'm going to say around 1981, '82, I came back to Newark. I went away to school and also during that same process, that's when I came out of the closet. My friend took me to my first gay club, which was Bobby White's, and it was called the Doll House. The Doll House was on William Street. William, you might as well say William and Halsey Street, over top of Jay's Soul Food Diner.

When I say I was—well, it wasn't my first club. Let me rephrase that. It was probably my second. Maybe—yeah, second. I just looked around and I was like, “Wow.” There's other people just like me. It was interesting. It really was interesting. Bobby was the host and initially, the concept of it—something happened. Because the Doll House moved I want to say three times because it was there for a moment, but then, I think the city really didn't want to see us carrying on on William Street and that close to City Hall. Then, all of a sudden, moved from William Street to Elizabeth Avenue over top of the Holme's Liquor. It was over top of there on Elizabeth Avenue.

Then, the kids, I guess, was getting into trouble around here, fights, stickups, whatever the case. Then they moved from there and then they put it on Branford Place. I forget the name of the bar that used to be there, but it was upstairs, again. That's—Bobby just was hosting. He was trying to keep—give the kids something that was tangible, something that they could go to where you had entertainment, you had a safe space to go to.

At this particular time, I would say he wasn't really doing the shows aspect of it because he started getting ill, but he just wanted to keep places open. Between him, the other—I just remember his name as being Bob. Bob owned the liquor store on Broadway in North Newark and he opened up the Blue Swan, which was on, I want to say, 16th or 17th.

Whitney Strub: I actually looked it up in the phonebook the other day from the seventies and found the address. I think it was 19th, if I'm not mistaken.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah. Because it was in a very good, nice area. I'll put it to you like this. If you didn't live in that hood—and I remember Patti had gave a ball that—at this place. We all flocked up there and whatnot, but it was like we left. It's like, if it was 100 people that came to the mini ball, we all left together. If we wasn't in a ride, the rest of us, we walked down whatever that street is coming downtown together. Whereas you mess with one, you got about 50 people to deal with. So we didn't have any problems with that, coming down there, coming from down there, but that course of the evening, somebody's car had been broken into, during the course of the night. It just wasn't a nice space.

We went. We showed up and they showed up in droves. It was interesting and just like Bobby, along with Bob, they wanted the kids to have a place to call their own and it was another bar on Bergen Street. I'm going to have to call Alan up to ask him what was the name of that bar because this was his friends.

Alan is one of my older friends. He's—well, let me say it correctly. I'm calling him Alan, but his name is Gregory Davis. He's the lead—what do you call them? The lead child study team in Paterson and he's been doing that for quite some time. He's getting ready to retire, I think in the next year or so. This was friends of his who had this other bar that was on Bergen Street and that's how I got to be there.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Wait. So hang on. We've been recording for six minutes and you've already told me a ton of amazing stuff. Can I slow you down—

Aaron Frazier: Sure.

Whitney Strub: - and hit specific points, just to sort of flesh them out?

Aaron Frazier: Oh, no problem.

Whitney Strub: Let me go back to Bobby White and Dorian and then move into those places you just mentioned. I mean, just describe Bobby White for the record.

Aaron Frazier: I would describe Bobby White as—

[Pause 00:06:19- 00:06:25]

Aaron Frazier: - the older sibling. I guess how everybody has that older brother or sister who almost acts like your mother, but they're not your mother. This is was Bobby with everybody who came into contact with him. He didn't know me from a can of paint, but he treated me as if he'd known me my whole life. Every time I got to see him, it was always a pleasure, it was always a loving nurturing type of sense that I—what I can remember.

Personally, it hurt me to my core when I finally get to meet him, proper introduction. He turns out to be one of my cousins' best friends and we're at Gay Pride. She said—my cousin Suge said, "Oh, Aaron, come over here. I want you to meet my friend." Oh, that's Bobby White. I'm, like, "Wait a minute. You telling me you got me coming over here to meet this bitch and she's—" And I'm cussing and I'm not being—meaning to be disrespectful, but I'm, like, "Dang. I've always admired you, always heard good things about—"

But I also need to say from the era, even though Bobby White was out and doing things in the community, he'd done a lot for the community, the community didn't talk about gayness. It didn't talk about people who were gay. If they were even in your family, it was, like, "Yes, that's your cousin," but it was no real informational exchange. The reason I say is because come to find out I had two other cousins who were older who were also friends with Bobby White and I got pissed. Because I said, "All this time, I was going through all this shit trying to find my own way and the ones who knew could have helped me wasn't there."

Then, I also need to say it was the era. The one cousin of mine who was also from the Bobby White era, he was different. He was out, but he did his thing and he worked for St. Michael's and it just was—he showed me how to be gay from a different perspective and still be respectful. Because they didn't—they seemed to all had issue with the drag queen or the people who get up in drag. I didn't get a chance to talk about it with nobody.

Too, I would say Bobby White—but even with Bobby, I didn't get the opportunity to talk about the drag scenario, the drag persona. I do know before he got sick, something happened with him and Ms. Chipper. Ms. Chipper was disrespectful or did something that was unforgivable because he got blackballed from the performance area of doing drag, as well as trying to hit the ballroom scene.

When I say they went after him, they went after him. He was in—I remember at the Exotique Ball, Chipper was performing doing his version of Patti and one of the kids came out from New York and her name was Ms. Frankie, known as Ms. Jasmine Wiles now, and she served Ms. Chipper to the point that Ms. Chipper was so embarrassed he walked off the stage. Because the other child was better trained in practice that where she knew all Patti's gimmicks. Whatever the particular niche was, she had it down to a T and she served it. There was nothing Chipper could do because the crowd went up for the other child. They did not go up for Chipper.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah. So Bobby White is kind of a power broker?

Aaron Frazier:

Yes. He wasn't violent, nothing of that nature. It's just that you could kind of say you know how on *Friends*—was it *Friends*? No. Oh God. *Will & Grace* and they say, quiet as cap, “Elton John is part of the gay mafia.” [laughter]. So you could say Bobby White was part of the Newark mafia, gay mafia, aspect of things. Not that he pushed it, but other people who held him in respect and regards, yes, they was going to step to him.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah. I've seen pictures of him from the seventies. Did he still have really long hair?

Aaron Frazier:

Yes. They—Bobby and his brothers had long hair. They were light-skinned. As a matter of fact, I'm going to have to introduce you—I'm trying to think. Again, Leslie Maus, who is another person whom I'm always talking about from her doing the fashion shows, she's from that era. So she's definitely someone who can elaborate a bit more and she probably have pictures.

I had already reached out to Christine Hamlet, which also come up under Leslie; Angela Raine, also comes under Leslie; and what would be cute as far as dynamic, I think either Anastasia or maybe one of the other girls would be a cute transition. Because you have three generations to be kind of—chime in on the interview. That would be cute because not too many transgenders talk about it. [Coughing] Along with unfortunately a lot of the girls—the

transgender girls—who was doing that era, like Ms. Lisa Brown, Jackie Brown. Gone Tiffani. Oh God. Kelly. It's so many of them.

I could even think back because with one of my other cousins, he's more of a play cousin, but we've been friends for so long we call each other cousins, because it turns out his cousin married my first cousin and me and his cousin were best of friends. So we just claim each other as cousins.

Whitney Strub: [Laughter] Yeah.

Aaron Frazier: Even they come up—and he's only maybe a couple years older than me, but he was on another era of being with the transgender girls, which, they all didn't mesh. They all didn't get along or I want to say they weren't all in the same circle. They knew of one another, but they weren't in the same circle, and that's what I get because even with a couple of the girls who—they're older. They no longer do drag. Their whole persona when I talk with them about the younger girls, they—it's almost like envy, almost spitting fire when you start. I'm just looking at them and saying, "You're not doing it no more."

Then I said to one of them, "Girl, why don't you tell the history? Why don't you at least express, tell what's going on?" I said, "Child, that means I'm going to have to deal with this child." I really separate myself from it because I think he has a lot of knowledge that is definitely pertinent to informational queer Newark, but it's just too much drama to contend with him and trying to get it. That's my issue. I just go, "Okay."

Whitney Strub: Yeah. No. I understand. As usual, I have eight million follow-up questions. Let me try and follow the main through line, which is you mentioned Bobby White getting sick. Let me follow that through and then I want to return to the Doll House. When did he start getting sick and what did that look like?

Aaron Frazier: I want to say—No. I'm not going to—I can't pinpoint the year. I would have to speak to my other cousin to ask the year. I was in touch for a while with one of the people who was Bobby's security on his different shows and whatever he was doing. I have lost touch with them. I'll have to get back to you on that.

Whitney Strub: That's fine. What about Dorian Paris, then? Tell me a little about him before you talk about the Doll House. You said this is Bobby's brother?

Aaron Frazier: If I'm not—hold that question. Hold that thought. Let me see if he'll answer *[laughter]*.

Whitney Strub: All right. We are recording a live phone conversation in the middle of the interview, for the record.

[Pause 00:16:33- 00:16:40]

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: Oh, no? We can pick that thread up another time.

Aaron Frazier: But he's not the only one that I know.

Whitney Strub: No? All right *[laughter]*.

Aaron Frazier: Believe me.

[Pause 00:16:50- 00:16:59]

Aaron Frazier: Wait a minute. She—I'm going to give it one more go.

Whitney Strub: All right. Cool.

Aaron Frazier: I know she's going to gag. This is my aunt *[laughter]*.

[Pause 00:17:11- 00:17:25]

Aunt: Hello?

Aaron Frazier: Hey, Aunt *Edie* 00:17:26.

Aunt: Mm-hmm.

Aaron Frazier: I have a quick question for you. Did you know Bobby White?

Aunt: Who?

Aaron Frazier: Bobby White.

Aunt: Is that a girl?

Aaron Frazier: Bobby White that used to do the Las Vegas showgirl up in drag.

Aunt: No.

Aaron Frazier: Okay. All right. I'll call you back.

Aunt: *[Inaudible]*

Aaron Frazier: No. It's just I wanted to ask a quick question, but no. You don't know him. I'm going to call you back.

Aunt: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: All right.

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]* Hold that —

Aaron Frazier: So that means I got to—I'll have it before you—for the next time.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Totally. But just then describe Dorian Paris for me a little because I know less about—

Aaron Frazier: To me, in all honesty, if you looked at one, you're almost looking at a twin. They were always together. They were hosts. Most of the time, as far as for me, I come in the club, "Hey girls," whatever. I just want to get to the dance floor and shake my thing. Actually, when I first hit the club and—you know what? The one to ask is Pucci because when I first went to the Doll House, I remember just looking at Ms. Pucci going like this. Because every time "Love Sensation" come on and there was a part that go, "love sensation," and the drums and the bass be going ba-doom. Then Ms. Pucci would do something that shook the whole floor. I said, "Look at her." *[Laughter]*

I just kept looking at her. Then, we finally—me and Pucci actually connected at the club and then I would go get my little 40-ounce of beer and walk with those girls, walk her back to the Strobe because they was going to go to the Strobe. I'd be, like, "Okay, girl," and then I'd go to Murphy's. That was my routine.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Okay. Let me then ask. You said the Doll House was the first gay-friendly place in Newark that you had found.

Aaron Frazier: That I went to.

Whitney Strub: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Aaron Frazier: That I went to because I was unaware of it. That's why I was saying you definitely need to speak to a couple other people, because there were—they talk about some clubs, 77. I do

remember Laurel Gardens, which used to be at Clinton Avenue and High Street. If you go past Clinton Avenue and High Street, that corner where it used to sit is still vacant since they tore it down.

I'm going to go back as far as—I want to say—I started Central about Science High in '74. I'm going to go as far as saying 1970, I think that was torn down.

Whitney Strub: Okay. That would be of interest. I want to walk through the Doll House a little bit. Just to ask a precursor question, before you went to the Doll House, did you have a sense of gay-friendly places in Newark or places that you thought of as gay?

Aaron Frazier: For me, no. I was just coming out of the closet.

Whitney Strub: Okay. This is really your entrance.

Aaron Frazier: I was just coming out of the closet. When I went away to school, I went to Virginia Union University. I had my—I came out of the closet basically down here from a suicide attempt and I met some people from New York, D.C., Maryland, and even some people in Richmond. They took me to my first gay club. In Richmond. I was, “Wow. I never been to one.”

Who do I see when I first—I don't even know the name of the club. I didn't even know what the street was. All I know is the person who was performing was Ms. Divine.

Whitney Strub: From the John Waters movies?

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]* Wow.

Aaron Frazier: She was performing and she had that red, white, and blue thing and she—in one of the documentary. I said, “I saw that bitch. I was there for—” I was like that. I was looking at her like this. In all honesty, for—that's where my house name come from, is from her.

Whitney Strub: Really?

Aaron Frazier: Yes. From Divine. The name of my house is Divine.

Whitney Strub: Wow. That's amazing.

Aaron Frazier:

Yeah. From that point on, it's like, "Okay. It's doable." Then, from there, I end up joining I thought was a church and it turned out my mother and them thought I joined in a cult. I moved in with these people. They prayed over me to call themselves doing an exorcism. They got on my nerves so bad my friends was saying, "Aaron, we're going to D.C. for the weekend. We're going to hit a club." I said, "I want to go. I want to see what it's like."

I went to my first club. I went to the Brass Rail and this other club was—all I know is I showed up in the club and I went to order me a drink and all I hear was—and I'm, like, "What the hell is that?" I turned to the right and the man is there having sex at the—I was, like, "Wow." That was—this is interesting.

The next thing I know, while he's sucking, somebody else is doing him. I was, "All this is going on in a bar?" Then, when I finally get the heart to walk into the back room and they said what goes on, I goes in the back room. As I finally get the heart to go in there and then I went to touch somebody, the light come on. They say, "Oh, it's time to go." I said, "Wow."

I thought about it and in all honesty, from that, I guess, was the start of the AIDS epidemic. Had I probably carried on, who knows. I might not have been here [*laughter*]. It's just weird, but when I came back, I was a whole different person. I was more cautious, leery about things. I was—I'm being real honest. I was terrified of New York. But then—

Whitney Strub:

Why?

Aaron Frazier:

I just was terrified. It's just, when I went away, some crazed person had shot up Sneakers for people being gay. I'm, like, "I ain't got time for that." That's my pet peeve. I said, "If I'm going to contend with shit, I rather contend with it in my community." [*Coughing*] Excuse me. As opposed to out of my community and then be in limbo. I can contend with what goes on here. I can maneuver with what goes on here.

If I don't want to go on, say, Broad Street again, I don't have to. Because it's a choice. But in New York, it's just—they took the fun away from it with all the stuff and they always—it's the innocent people that get hurt out there. That's what scared me from that. 9/11. I used to do the Village quite frequently, but since 9/11 and then how they changed. The last time I was over in the Village, the young kids were so disrespectful. They fighting over nothing and I'm just looking at them. I'm, like, "Oh my God. What in the world

happened?" Then I step into—I may even go—I'm going to go even further back than that.

Going back to when Zanzibar was opened, Carl Bean's song "I'm happy, carefree, and gay," was the theme song for all people. Then, all of a sudden, I end up at the club and I said, "Well, everybody is gay." "Oh, no. I'm a lesbian. I'm a lipstick lesbian." I said, "Huh? When did I miss the memo? I'm at the club every day. I'm at Murphy's every day" I was at Murphy's—when I say every day, it was only two days that I missed because there was a snowstorm and there was no transportation to get downtown. Most times—and the snow was so high you couldn't walk in it, because I have done that too.

So I'm, like, "When did I miss?" It's like we became separate and then it's like—that's when I started really seeing a difference in our community. Nobody—if you talk to some of the other people, they'll say the same thing. Because Jersey has always been inclusive. There were very seldom parties. If you was considered a social person, it was very few parties that was excluded—you was excluded from.

I don't care if it was, say, [Ms.] Theresa. She's the diva of the women. You still got an invite. Bernie being the socialite, Bernie still invited [Ms.] Theresa and vice-versa. We did with no exclusions.

Whitney Strub: You mean gay men and lesbians parted ways socially?

Aaron Frazier: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: When did that happen, would you say?

Aaron Frazier: Somewhere around the eighties, the early eighties. It's like it went separate. Specifically, oh God. We talked about—because they had a lesbian bar—

Whitney Strub: First Choice?

Aaron Frazier: No. The lesbian bar used to be on Market Street.

Whitney Strub: Really?

Aaron Frazier: Yes. Oh my God. You've got to—

Whitney Strub: Who would remember that?

Aaron Frazier: I'm also getting ready to use some of your electricity to charge my phone.

Whitney Strub: Oh, sure. Yeah. I don't know if there's a charger around. I can plug you over here, I think.

Aaron Frazier: Oh, this is fine.

Whitney Strub: Oh, you got one? Okay.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Wait. Do you remember the name of the lesbian bar or not?

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: Okay. I'll follow up with you on that after we're done recording. Let me pause for a second to go back all the way to the Doll House since we never actually talked through this yet. Tell me about your first experience there and just the physical layout. I mean, walking up. You said it's over—is it Sparky Jay's? Is that right? Or just Jay's?

Aaron Frazier: It used to be J's. I need a piece of paper because I'm also remembering stuff too.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Just walk me through the physical experience of going into the Doll House.

Aaron Frazier: Okay. The Doll House, you went up the stairs.

Whitney Strub: Was it marked? Was there a marquee or a name?

Aaron Frazier: No. No marquee.

Whitney Strub: It's kind of underground?

Aaron Frazier: It's very, very underground. But you went up the stairs. You paid your little \$5.00. You go in. They gave you a ticket or whatever, and then you went through what looked like, say, almost like a place where they could do performance. Then, they had another space where it's just like a lounge area. You could sit there. You could conversate with whomever. Then, you had the dance floor, which was really nice.

That place, I want to say, for some odd reason, the Doll House and Magoo's, which was in East Orange, which was the other gay club, off of Main Street—I just don't know what that other street is, but, again, the same layout. The difference with Magoo's and the Doll House, Magoo's had an outside roof or a patio that you could go sit on where a lot of the kids went and smoked their stuff.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Magoo's like M-A-G-O-O?

Aaron Frazier: Yes. That was in East Orange. We would be—between the two—That's where you—well, no. Magoo's was later. Doll House—

Whitney Strub: It's '81 or so that you're going there for the first time? Is that right?

Aaron Frazier: Yeah. More of '80.

Whitney Strub: You're about 20?

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: Who's hanging out the Doll House? Describe the crowd.

Aaron Frazier: Oh, the crowd is very diverse because— for me, my best friend, Sonya Adams, she too me there. She was also—she's a gay person. She didn't go with the lesbian stuff. She's just a gay person and she and I was best friends. We used to play basketball and stuff together. She played for Barringer, took them to several titles.

When I came home, she was, like, "I want you to go to this club with me." I was, "Okay, girl. I'll go." She actually took me to my first club, which was the Doll House, and she took me to my first ball, which was at the Terrace Ballroom. I was floored. I was like, "Wow." I couldn't believe it because all of them, back then, dressed up. It was a spectator thing, but the kids—when I say—the houses didn't exist in Newark yet. Most of that was a New York thing. Jersey, it was a girlfriend thing.

I can't tell you the names, because they—well before my time, but they showed out and the kids—the productions that they would do for grand prize—grand prize was always Butch Queen Fantasy. Butch Queen Fantasy could be anything from "It's Raining Men" to "Flowers Under the Sea." Believe me, when—they came with a production.

Ms. Chipper, she served "It's Raining Men," because she had all the male dancers coming out there and they carried her on stage.

Her production was really that, but because of what she did to Bobby, they chopped her.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Okay. Hold that. Let's come back to ballroom. It's a whole separate subject in itself. That's a big topic. At the Doll House, did you see any of Bobby White's productions?

Aaron Frazier: No. My main thing when I went to the club, have a drink, dance, be on. I didn't get into the social dynamics of it, even though it was going on. I just—I went with a specific idea of release because a lot of—during that particular period for me, I had different goals. It was a stress reliever for me to go there, and I didn't get into the social aspect of it. I didn't even really try to befriend any of them. I went there with my friend, and she's very territorial.

Sometimes, she get on my nerves because she acts like a—she's a guardian. Even though I'm actually a year older than her, but she acts more like she's the older sibling. "I got to get you up out here. You're not going to get in no trouble." Very protective. I admired that with her. She always looked out for me, but, no, I didn't get into that till I started venturing away from her and going to things on my own.

Whitney Strub: At the Doll House, was there the same kind of sex going on that there was in the club down by D.C.?

Aaron Frazier: No. That, you got afterwards. I would definitely say that is afterward. You might have—you may have seen somebody that you want to get with and if they're there afterwards, you may try to curtail one another, try to do a hookup, but 9 times out of 10, no. Because for me, there was only one person there I wanted to get with and this was somebody that I went to school with. When I saw him outside, I said, "Wow." I also noticed while being outside that he was into the drag queens. I was, "Oh, well, that knocks me out." I just left it alone.

Whitney Strub: Did any of the bars or clubs in Newark ever have that kind of sex going on in the club kind of thing that you described?

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: Not a Newark thing?

Aaron Frazier: No. That's not a Newark thing. Do you also know that there was a bathhouse on Broadway?

Whitney Strub: Yeah. I don't know much about it.

Aaron Frazier: In all honesty, it was an upper scale white place. The place where—oh, God. We would have to—

Whitney Strub: Club Baths, right? I think I have some ads for it I'll pull up while we talk.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah. It was on Broadway, but the fierce part about it, you just saw it. You never saw nobody go in or out. Outside—but in the other place that they did go, as far as the sex, would be either the Cameo or the Little Theater, between the two of them.

For me, it was the park. All of this was my stomping ground.

Whitney Strub: Even Military Park?

Aaron Frazier: All of this was my stomping ground. No shade. Even some of the property of Rutgers were where I carried on.

Whitney Strub: Where on Rutgers?

Aaron Frazier: In between—wherever there was bushes and if it was enough camouflage, yeah. *[Laughter]* Military Park, under the doggone statue. I remember one weekend, I literally got lost in Military Park sub-basements from the dates I met. I spent the night with somebody who turned out—turned one of the—what is supposed to be the stairwells into an apartment.

Whitney Strub: Wow.

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: Some creative living going on.

Aaron Frazier: Oh, yes. Before they put the NJPAC there, all in back of it, because that whole stroll used to be—they had—what would you call them? Executive housing was on that strip going—when—coming out of—say you come in right out of whatever that street is that comes where the bus turns in front of the PAC, it went all the way through to McCarter Highway. It was a row of apartment efficiencies that was over there. Go in back of it, which was where the old hotel used to be, I forget which president came, and from that day, they closed it, but that was the cruise stop back there. Yeah.

Whitney Strub: There's a pretty buzzing geography then of sex around here. Did you ever go in the bath house on Broadway?

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: Never? Okay.

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: What about the Cameo and Little Theater?

Aaron Frazier: I went in the Cameo with some friends of mine primarily because they were there and I was hanging out with them. When I say to you those girls was carrying, they were carrying. My friend—oh God bless—was running around and they was having—I actually tried and I said, "Girl, this is not my tea." I just sat there watching that stuff while they running from room to room to room. I sat there drinking a beer like this looking at them going like this. "I can't believe they doing this."

Whitney Strub: How big was the Cameo? I never saw the inside of it and looks very small from the outside.

Aaron Frazier: It actually has, I would say, two theaters. One which is supposed to be for the straight and one which is supposed to be for the gay, but they both intermingle. People who said they were straight still was interacting with gay people and I just looked at them and just shook my head. I couldn't do it because it's too dark. I like to see what's coming my way. I like to see what's what. Even with me cruising, *[coughs]* I was having the different dates, I would be out there and I'd be looking at them. I carried a little flashlight *[laughter]* for the longest to make sure that I'm examining the piece, even though we whatever. I wouldn't put myself in harm's way.

Whitney Strub: The Cameo, things were just going on in the seats and aisle?

Aaron Frazier: Oh, yeah.

Whitney Strub: All over the place basically?

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: What about the Little Theater? Let me just ask that because I—

Aaron Frazier: Little Theater, to me, was primarily for white people. When I went in there, that's all I saw and the element was different from the Cameo. It was totally different. It was more of, I would say, snooty, white queens going to get them some trade and that was it. Even today, you could actually stand outside and you'll see the caliber of men that goes in there. Snooty, older white queens and go in there and they—same shit.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. When would this have been, that you experienced it? The early eighties, mid-eighties, nineties?

Aaron Frazier: I would say early eighties, because I just finished high school. That building that's right next to the Little Theater used to be where Newark Housing was, and that's where I had to go put an application in that never responded to. Yeah. That's how long ago it was.

Whitney Strub: The white guys who hung out there, were they the 9:00 to 5:00 business crowd?

Aaron Frazier: I would say it could vary because it still varies. I wouldn't all the—I wouldn't really say business crowd. A lot of them are very just snooty people that in the area—it's not—I'll just say it's not the same.

There was a time where I found out later that it was in Branch Brook Park, there was a portion of Branch Brook Park where the elderly, the white crowd went and they picked up their dates. Black folks weren't really permitted over there and I said, "Really?" Because one of my friends were—even though he's black, he's still Italian and he was seeing an Italian and that's how I found that out. His friend that he was seeing was a cop.

Whitney Strub: Wow. Okay.

Aaron Frazier: It was just, "Wow. Really?" Then, I actually went through there. I said, "Okay." You could actually see the difference. With us no longer—they used to have a bookstore—actually, it was a bookstore, an adult bookstore on Broad Street, for a short period, across from the Y. Then it just was gone.

Whitney Strub: Do you remember the name of it?

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: That's interesting. I didn't know about that either.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: I know we don't have a ton of time because it's 3:36 right now. Let me ask a couple quick questions and then we can pick this all up on another round. What about two bars that may have predated you, Le Joc and the Docks. Are those places you ever went or were they earlier?

Aaron Frazier: Say that again.

Whitney Strub: One was called Le Joc, L-E, and then, J-O-C. I think Bobby White may have run it, but I need to do some research on it.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, you may. Because it sounds like you mean Docks.

Whitney Strub: Well, Docks is the other place I'm asking about.

Aaron Frazier: That was a club that was at Broad and Market. That was upstairs. That was just a disco place we'd go listen to music and dance.

Whitney Strub: A gay place specifically or straight and gay?

Aaron Frazier: I would say it was universal. In all honesty, most clubs in Newark, specifically those that, if it's good music, it's going to be universal. The problem becomes when straight people who know gay people love to party and some of them misconstrue things and a person could be dancing, he or she, whatever the case may be, but I'm not trying to come on to you. Sometimes, it could be vice-versa. But in most cases, the straight person is the one who gets more offended than anybody else because the gay person is going to be, "Child please. I'm here to get my dance on."

That was part of the problem. When you're trying to intermingle and a lot of straight people who don't know nothing about gay people are the ones who have most of the issues.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Did that happen at the Doll House too, or is that more exclusively gay?

Aaron Frazier: I would say it was exclusively gay, but if you brought somebody straight, long as they knew to respect everybody in there, there was no problem. Because Murphy's was traditionally a gay bar, but straight people came in there on the regular, along with First Choice, SRO. You do know about SRO?

Whitney Strub: Yeah. It's on the long list of places I want to ask you about. I should have asked you about demographics too. The Doll House, was that a mostly black crowd or was that black and white?

Aaron Frazier: Mostly black.

Whitney Strub: Yeah? Okay. Let's see. Do we have time to ask about one more place?

Aaron Frazier: Sure.

Whitney Strub: How about the Black Box? Because I know almost nothing about that.

Aaron Frazier: The Black Box—okay. That was George Lawton. He owned that. He was a gay man. He now lives in D.C., but George, I don't know who his co-owners was, it was—that was on Miller Street.
[Coughing] Black Box was primarily an NA spot for those who were in NA. You could listen to good music, but George actually opened it up to—

Whitney Strub: NA? Narcotics Anonymous?

Aaron Frazier: Yes. George allowed it to—for us gay people to utilize this space if—I had my ball there. Harmonica Sunbeam done balls there. Patti Pendavis Labelle done balls there. We were able to—he worked with the community to have a safe space to have a ball, an alternative, and it was always nice.

Whitney Strub: Where was it exactly?

Aaron Frazier: Miller Street off of McCarter Highway down by the end of Broad Street before you get on the highway.

Whitney Strub: Gotcha. This would have been, what, the early to mid-eighties?

Aaron Frazier: Yes. Yes. I would say yes. Most definite. Because I think it might have went up until the early nineties, a little bit past it.

Whitney Strub: What was it like?

Aaron Frazier: Again, a mixed crowd. We came to dance and that's what it was about. You came to dance and enjoy yourself. It was non-alcoholic except when we we'd do the balls. It would be what it is, but most times, it was just about people having a spot to go to.

Whitney Strub: It wasn't a bar? It was a club?

Aaron Frazier: Right. Yes.

Whitney Strub: Do you have to run?

Aaron Frazier: Oh, no. We're good.

Whitney Strub: I'll keep asking questions. Let me know. You've got this long list of places. Let me hit—the Blue Swan, to go back to. You had mentioned it being in a sort of somewhat threatening neighborhood. Tell me a little bit more about the Blue Swan because I also don't know much about that.

Aaron Frazier: The Blue Swan is—how could I say? The Blue Swan is—was a spot that—

[Pause 00:48:38- 00:48:43]

Aaron Frazier: Outside of where it was at demographically, the perfect bar. The perfect gay venue. They served food. They had nice drinks. It was affordable. Unfortunately, the damn area was the worst space—spot to be in.

Whitney Strub: Why is that?

Aaron Frazier: Because the neighborhood was dangerous. It was known for stick-ups. It was known for drive-bys. It was known for cars being broken into, vandalizing, and you didn't just have to, how you say, just be coming into the bar. You could have been just visiting a friend in the neighborhood.

Whitney Strub: It wasn't specifically anti-gay, it was just dangerous in general?

Aaron Frazier: In general. It would not be the ideal spot I would want to be in, but we went—actually, Bernie, he made me go because he was—him and Hakim were good friends. He said, "You always—" I forget how he said, but he said, "You always got a beef with somebody." I said, "No, I don't."

He said he really wanted me to get to know this child, Hakim, and I was, like, "Oh, child. Okay." I went. We had a good time. I said, "Oh, thank you for that." Because it was like I had judged this child because—I said, "She's Snooty Judy," but we had a good time, and it was because of Bernie made me step out of my comfort zone. Because a lot of times, I'm very kind of, "Oh no. I

don't want to go that route.” Or if I'm cautious about something, hmm, but Bernie got me to hang out with this child. I had a fabulous time.

Then, all of a sudden, I hear about the child dying. I was just so upset. I was, "She was a nice person," from what I could gather. We didn't have no real intimate moment or nothing of that nature, but it was a good moment, where we enjoyed the night. We was at the bar and everything having a good time.

It changed a lot of how I dealt with people. I tried not to be [*coughing*] too judgmental of people. That, I guess you would say, is my caution [*laughter*].

Whitney Strub: You got to be safe.

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: Who owned the Blue Swan? Do you know?

Aaron Frazier: All I know is his name was Bob.

Whitney Strub: The same Bob related to Bobby White or a different guy?

Aaron Frazier: No, different. This Bob had the liquor store on Broadway. That's all I know. I want to say Broadway and Webster. That's the—it's Landmark Liquors liquor store that he owned initially and he opened up the bar. I haven't heard from him since and people are still asking.

Whitney Strub: What did the Blue Swan look like?

Aaron Frazier: It wasn't nothing spectacular. It just was a regular bar. It literally was a bar, but it had enough space whereas I would say about, without the furniture in it, the length of this was the dance floor.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so, the size of my office.

Aaron Frazier: Right. But it was big enough to hold a mini ball that, I mean, you're talking about 100 people. It was accommodating enough. It was bigger than First Choice. I'll tell you that.

Whitney Strub: What kind of music would they play at a place like the Blue Swan?

Aaron Frazier: Mostly it was club. Traditional R&B, but club mostly, and it's kind of hard to discern because when you say R&B and you say club, to

me, it's music. But a lot of it can be related to, say, house music, but then, they played a lot Mary J Blige. Then they played a lot of Patti Labelle. R&B and club.

Whitney Strub: Is it the same dynamic that you're talking about other places, where it's not just a gay bar, but a mixed place? Or is this a specifically gay bar?

Aaron Frazier: Mix. Definitely mix. Because Bob didn't turn away money.

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]* Okay. Gotcha. People, same dynamic you described? The straight people got along well for the most part?

Aaron Frazier: If they came to the bar, 95 percent of the time everybody got along. It was everybody cohabitated and sometimes you'll see—in all honesty, when Bob did it, and probably it was the same particular dynamics with Bobby, is just that because I was fresh to it, I couldn't understand it. But with Bob, I can actually say if you hung out with Bob, you definitely was going to get a date with somebody that came up in there. That I can say. But because I wasn't one of Bob's friends, I just went to show support. That wasn't what I was looking for either, because I didn't ever want to be obligated to any of them for anything. So I never went that far with them.

Whitney Strub: How long did the place stay open?

Aaron Frazier: If a year. Because I think after some ball—it didn't last long because we went through hell getting from there and all this stuff that was going on at that particular time. Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Do you want me to keep asking questions?

Aaron Frazier: You can.

Whitney Strub: All right. Then, tell me about one more place I've never heard of, the Honey Hole.

Aaron Frazier: The Honey Hole was a space that's on Broad Street, is— you know where AAOGC is at?

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Right near St. Paul.

Aaron Frazier: Okay. If you go to the little chicken joint that sits right on the same side where they're at, and there's a little store on the side, little barber shop, and in the middle is just a door. If you go through that

door and go down the stairs, it's a space that's big enough to hold at least 200 people.

Whitney Strub:

Oh, really?

Aaron Frazier:

Yes. Harmonica Sunbeam was the one who would have functions there and that's how it became the Honey Hole.

Whitney Strub:

Okay. When would this have been?

Aaron Frazier:

During the same time, around mid-eighties, going into the nineties, maybe even a little bit past '90. It has to go past '92, '93 because I moved into Society Hill in '92. I would walk down the hill so around '92, '93.

Whitney Strub:

Is this another underground place? Do you have a sign up there?

Aaron Frazier:

No. It was definitely underground, because how she got it, I don't know *[laughter]* and it was no more functions there after that.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah. Was it a place that would be open every night or just for specific events.

Aaron Frazier:

No. Just for specific events. Harmonica had a mini ball there. Several people had mini balls there, but mostly, it was Harmonica.

Whitney Strub:

You'd really just have to know through word of mouth to go there because it was before the Internet?

Aaron Frazier:

Mm-hmm. Because right where that little parking lot is that's right next to the bank, that used to be the Midas Gold, which was a bar that used to be on Broad Street.

Whitney Strub:

I've got to walk by there and get a visual now, because I know exactly the block you're talking about, but I can't picture this. Is there anything there now or is it just unused?

Aaron Frazier:

Unused.

Whitney Strub:

That's fascinating. Yeah. Okay. Let's see. Well, I mean, I want to ask you about Murphy's, but that's going to be way longer so I don't want to ask you that now. I want to save that because I want to hear all about—all kinds of stuff you've already alluded to. Laurel Gardens or Laurel's Garden?

Aaron Frazier: Laurel Garden, which used to be—it was a florist, but there was a part of the building that hosted—it was like a hall rental, where they would do balls and could be a bar mitzvah, whatever the case may be. It was one of those. But then, it kind of ran—it was running down or the people didn't upkeep it well. That's why it got closed. It used to be mini balls and stuff there too.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Let me see. I think—I'll just hit you with one more place for today and then we can leave it. How about a place on Branford called Sensations in the eighties?

Aaron Frazier: I wasn't a Sensations head, but that was—yeah. Sensations is definitely a club spot, but that was a straight joint, but a lot of the gay kids went there because they enjoyed the music and they loved to dance. Nine times out of 10, if you was a club head, you went and it was acceptable. There was no real ugliness. The gays and the straight got along, just like at Zanzibar.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Okay. I think that's probably a good place to end for today, because I don't want to hit any of these big topics that are going to take a whole lot of time.

Aaron Frazier: Okay.

Whitney Strub: I will stop recording. Thank you for this round. We will do more whenever you are ready.

Aaron Frazier: I mean, all you got to do is just give me a head's up.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. I will definitely do that. All right.

Aaron Frazier: No, because I know you busy.

Whitney Strub: I'm going to stop recording.

[End of Audio]