Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Aleix Martinez
Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone
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Kristyn: Today is September 6, 2017. My name is Kristyn Scorsone and I'm interviewing Aleix Martinez in the Queer Newark Office at Rutgers Newark. First off, thank you for doing this.

Aleix: Thank you so much for having me.

Kristyn: The first question is when and where were you born?

Aleix: I was born just outside of Barcelona, Spain on July 20th, 1978, which is the day of the moon landing but not the same year.

[Laughter]

I lived there in the Barcelona area until April 1984, which is when I first came to Newark.

Kristyn: Who raised you?

Aleix: I was raised by my mother and father, but like most kids of my generation I was a latchkey kid, so I'd be home alone until 8:00 at night so I wanna say I also raised me *[laughter]* part of the time.

Kristyn: What did your parents do for a living?

Aleix: My mom at the time was working retail here in Newark in Ironbound at a Spanish clothing store and my dad worked in Kearny at a water purifying plant called Spectraserv. My mom eventually started working at Port Newark as a security guard.

Kristyn: What's an early memory that stands out to you?

Aleix: Of Newark?

Kristyn: Well, in general.

Aleix: I remember the first day that I landed in the United States is a huge memory for me. I remember that the Empire State Building was yellow and I remember driving over the Verrazano and I remember telling my mom I was like, "Is this New York?" and she was like, "Yeah, this is New York." I was like, "I don't like it. I wanna go back to Barcelona." The first place we went to was Elm Street in

the Ironbound. There's a restaurant there that's now called PortuCale which used to be a bar called Escorial that was kind of like a lot of the Spanish people congregated there.

I remember in the back they had this yard that just had a bunch of junk, almost like a mini junk yard so me and all the kids would play there and I was kind of from a suburb of Barcelona that was a valley town, surrounded by trees so it was really shocking to go from Barcelona to Newark and I always remember that first day of seeing the Empire State Building, the Verrazano Bridge and just the scale of everything being so much taller and beyond anything I had ever seen before.

Kristyn: You moved to the Ironbound?

Aleix: No, but my parents always—the first years of my life was back and forth between Kearny and Newark because I went to school in Newark but we had a one room in an apartment in Kearny. Both my parents worked in Newark at the time at first. I was here pretty much if I wasn't at school and the whole weekends I was always here so kind of split my time.

Kristyn: Did you have family here too?

Aleix: Yeah, so I had one of my dad's brothers already lived in Kearny. He had fallen in love with a Spanish woman but in Spain who happened to already live here. They came over first and then eventually my parents came afterwards. They're the only family I have here still.

Kristyn: Do you have siblings too?

Aleix: I did, so when me and my mom came here in April '84, she was like six months pregnant with my sister, so she was born here in Newark at St. James Hospital in July that year, my sister Jessica, my younger sister. Then I have—both my parents are remarried so I have two stepbrothers and then an adopted sister as well.

Kristyn: What schools did you go to when you were younger?

Aleix: I went to Franklin school in Kearny and then here in Newark I went to a school called Lope de Vega which is set up by the Spanish government. I think you have to prove that one of your grandparents was born in Spain at least or have some connection because they kind of teach Spanish literature and language and culture. I'd go on Wednesdays and Saturdays, I'd go to school

there. After one school I'd go to the Spanish schools and then Saturday in the morning into the early afternoon.

Kristyn: Did you like it?

Aleix: As a kid I didn't because I wanted to watch Glow and cartoons and Soul Train and watch my TV shows on Saturday. The Wednesday didn't really bother me. As a teenager when it would get in the way of my concert calendar it would bother me a little bit but I actually really loved it. The teaching style was very different. We spoke to all our teachers, we called them by their first name. I remember when the Gulf War started in '91 and my teachers in Kearny at Franklin school, which were great too, I felt like I had a good education, but I remember how they either said nothing or very patriotic things but no one really talked about that we're at war or anything like that.

I remember that day, I guess when it started, it must have been a Wednesday because I remember I had Spanish school and my teacher at the time, Rita, was openly sobbing. Just like crying and then she kind of explained to us that we were at war and just kind of like honestly very liberal to be honest and not trying to hide it. Just this really anti war stance this really about compassion and asking people to give your opinions on and it was so different from "everything America does is right" and, so you know, don't question it.

I loved it and I also think that maybe kids in Spain have a more informal relationship with their teachers, teachers, especially when I was in high school, asked me if I wanted to go out for a drink or things that your teacher would never do which is totally illegal, I mean really. Just openly talk about their politics and things. I love the movies of Pedro Almodovar.

Kristyn: What kind of movies does he do?

Aleix: So he's kind of like, he's probably one of the most important queer filmmakers but he had this breakthrough movie called *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* in the late '80s that kind of gave him a platform here in the States when they started showing his movies here, but they all had trans and queer characters and they'll have like drug addicted nuns. It's very that view of the world of almost like, the lives of women and queer people are champions and then the villains tend to be people from the other side of life, military people or teachers and things like that.

I remember telling one of my teachers, Amparo, how much I loved his movies and I think—she probably understood already but she knew that as a queer culture and that's also identifying with something very gay and she really nurtured it and really encouraged me and talked to me a lot about kind of like—there was a dictatorship in Spain that ended right before I was born. Maybe like a year or two before I was born in the mid '70s and afterwards in the early '80s in Madrid, there was a big boom of alternative culture and queer culture because they had been so repressed.

They had never been able to express it in any way, shape, or form that then the pendulum swung the whole other way and even kids TV shows would have queer people on them and things like that. She talked to me a lot about that moment and I guess it probably impacted her. At that time, it probably hadn't even been 10 years since it happened. It was the recent past but it was really cool for me to connect to both Spanish people but also to feel like I had that relationship with adults where they would tell me about culture and queer culture and art and encourage that because in my schools here, my American schools, I was always 100 percent discouraged all throughout high school about all of that.

Any attempt to express any of it always had a serious consequence. Most people I feel like drop out of this Spanish school even though you got a diploma from the Spanish government at the end because I think they just lose interest and think it's worth nothing but I always felt so connected to them and that way of life that those teachers that I stuck with it and I graduated from it. I went for 12 years.

Kristyn: How old were you when you were talking to that teacher?

Aleix: I was probably about 13 years old.

Kristyn: Did you know your sexual identity at that point?

Aleix: Yeah, it's weird. Mmm, I knew it at that point but I think it took another year until I was 14 for me to realize that it was gay and not bisexual because I remember having a crush on this girl in seventh grade and her mom was a Tejano singer and she had big red hair and I just thought she was the coolest person in town and I think I had this admiration and she was charismatic, I was just drawn to her.

Because I felt like, oh you're supposed to like someone I thought

maybe this is what liking someone feels like but really it was just admiration mixed with jealousy mixed with thinking someone is just so much cooler than you and wanting some of their magic.

I remember kissing her at spin the bottle at her birthday party one year and not really questioning like oh, maybe this is what it's like, but then right after the summer of eighth grade, I guess I met the first guy that I had a crush on and that's not like your friend you think is kind of cute, you really this crush. It was so different from that that that's when I knew oh no, I've never felt this, never felt about a woman, never thought that. I knew that I was queer but I didn't know the extent of it at that time.

Kristyn: Did the boy you had a crush on, did he reciprocate?

Aleix: Absolutely not but I still wrote him tortured love letters and I remember it really freaked him out. He was like two years older than me. It really freaked him out but I guess he was not an aggressive person, I guess lucky me, so I didn't really understand it at first because he loved Morrissey and I took that almost as code because at that time I think the music that you liked or the things that you like that you told someone, another guy, how much you loved Madonna, that meant something.

I just assumed that he was at least open to it from someone who presents such a queer version of life but no, it was one of those unrequited love things and then I showed up at his job at the mall one day to confront him. It was teen drama. I don't know. It definitely served a purpose. I think about it fondly because even though it was unreciprocated, at least I was happy that I've got it figured it out pretty young. I knew this is me and that same year, I guess it was 1992, I came out to all my close friends.

Kristyn: How did they react?

Aleix: I've always, in a—I've always had, I guess, straight interests culturally that evolved—I thought they were but I always loved punk bands and really extreme music and dressed in all black and goth culture. I kind of hung out with a crew of punk kids from the surrounding areas like Kearny and Newark and North Arlington.

And most of them were fine but I think some of the more like straight guy ones were pretty freaked out by it so they stopped talking to me and I kind of became this big joke around the punk kids in Kearny. They had nicknames for me and I remember one day, which at the time really hurt me and now I think it's genius

and wish I had it when Richard Bey wasn't a national syndicated talk show and was just a New Jersey talk show, they called up impersonating me as me talking about being gay and things like that.

Kristyn: They called the Richard Bey show?

Aleix: Yeah, absolutely. I guess it did separate my groups of friends but I think when you enter high school at that time that that probably happens to anyone that you realize that some of your friendships were more childhood friendships and they're not gonna really serve you in that next part of your life.

That wasn't especially traumatic to me. I was kind of sad about losing some friends but at the same time because of high school I was meeting different people who I guess were more like me so it didn't really devastate me the way it might have if I was still in school with these people and didn't know other people.

Kristyn: Did you go to high school in Kearny or Newark?

Aleix: I didn't, I went to high school in North Arlington. I guess like many queer kids, at least with me, I was one of those kids that the outside world saw it before I really understood it inside. I'm a very peaceful person, I was very studious but I was a lightning rod for negative attention. I lived directly in front of the grammar school that I went to in Kearny so I was easy to find and easy to harass after school. [*Laughter*]

I just attracted—and I was that kid who wore Morrissey shirts in seventh grade already kind of had those interests and things that people, I guess everybody gets called gay at that age, but when it's true or you think it might be, it resonates differently inside of you.

I always had a foul mouth. [*Laughter*] Even though I wasn't physically violent, I would always stand up for myself and curse someone out and actually that just caused me a lot of problems all throughout high school too because I was always like I'm not gonna back down, I'm not gonna deny it, I never felt the need, I guess to tell everyone I was gay but I also refused to ever deny it.

So I never had this big coming out but when people would muster the nerve of, "Oh, you're a faggot," "Yeah, and so what? You're white trash. You're whatever." Whatever hurtful thing I could think of in that moment that I thought to be true I would pick the

most hurtful thing I could say back and be like yes, this is true but so is this. And then these confrontations would ensue. *[Laughter]*.

Kristyn: When did you first become aware of other queer people? Was it through that film maker or before that?

Aleix: No, I guess to a lot of people of my generation, sadly I think the first time I really became aware of gay people was through the AIDs crisis, was through seeing stories on the news and then hearing adults say things about gay people and AIDs.

So the first representations I saw of gay people was absolutely of them dying and of hearing negative comments about them. The first positive one, for me, was Madonna Truth or Dare was the first time I saw queer friendships and gay guys. I can't say I identified with it because I was a lot younger and I never saw myself as a dancer or this but I saw gay people having fun and traveling the world and you know what I mean, loving each other. That was monumental to me. And then shortly after as I got more and more into music, I kind of started seeking out queer musicians.

Kristyn: Did learning about AIDs, did that give you anxiety at all?

Aleix: I think when I first heard it in relation to gay people I didn't really understand it. I was probably maybe nine, ten years old. So I knew that people were dying and I knew that to my family and the people around me being gay was a bad thing and that it was this traumatic and tragic thing and something that you didn't want.

Kristyn: Did you come out to your family, like your mom and dad?

Aleix: I did, but not at the same time as my friends. It took a couple years for me to come out to my family. I felt like once I went to high school I made friends not from my school but just randomly on the bus. You hear about that other person who likes The Cure or the other person who wears all black and this and that and through mutual friends these friend dates come together and two of my first friends, and to this day, my best friends were trans.

So actually, at the time, we didn't use that term but—I felt really empowered when I had this crew of badass women and trans people and at that time, there were probably like 15 of us that would go and do things together. So I really felt emboldened and I didn't feel scared because I would always stick up for myself but still be really scared something was gonna happen to me and that

gives you that teenage "I run the streets, I dare you to say something to me and my friends" feeling.

Kristyn: What did you guys do together, your friends?

Aleix: One of the places we mostly hung out at was the General Kearny Apartments on Bellgrove Drive which are the projects in Kearny, where one of them lived. We would just do the silliest things like make a movie in an afternoon on a camcorder and write really bad punk songs and I guess I started learning how to take the PATH train by myself when I was about 13 years old, which is probably the most life changing thing that ever happened to me.

We'd start going into the city. Some of them had already been going, some of them started going with me but we all knew that we had to find a life in Manhattan and that there was very, very limited options for us here and that we were really devalued.

Then it was a whole other experience once you find other queer people in Manhattan but at the time, we were in search of this utopia and Deee-Lite had a big hit with "Groove is in the Heart" so you saw these expressions of New York club culture and all them were like queer and diverse and everything. You're like I want that. That's what I want. That's what I'm looking for. That's my life. Really we were just trying to chase that and find that.

I heard of this place—it's pre-internet again, early '90s, I heard of this, and we'd just get on the train together and go and a lot of times just start walking the streets to see if we would find something because we didn't know anyone older to ask or to guide us. There really wasn't that older generation of people like us around us to be mentors.

Kristyn: Do you have any favorite memories of that time?

Aleix: I have this one day that I go back to a lot which is also the first time I ever went to a gay bar. Again, I was I think 15 at that time. Yeah, I must have been 15, 14, 15. We went to go see this all female punk band the Lunachicks at Tramps on 21st Street and it was still too early to try to go to Limelight, which I hadn't done yet at that time either but we went to Splash in Chelsea.

I walked by this bar and I just remember thinking that everyone was just so much more attractive, so much richer and so much older than me that I'm like wow, I don't get it. It was actually pride so then we went and walked to the pier and saw the fireworks and

just sat on the old piers before they redid them. I just have this memory of what a special day to see a punk band and then go to your first gay bar and you go to first pride and you see fireworks on the pier with your friends.

At the time, it felt magical when I would go to New York because I couldn't do everyday yet, so I'd be depressed the next day. It's almost like you'd get this rush and it would come down but that day was just this real rush where I felt like I was really starting to kind of have this life that I've dreamt about that wasn't in New Jersey that wasn't dominated by straight people who didn't like me.

Kristyn: Did you have relationships in high school?

Aleix: No I didn't. Again, I think of two things, one is the AIDs paranoia that I felt very, very strongly and I just didn't have anyone to talk to me about it or be rational. Obviously we'd all been drilled with the safe sex message but we'd also all been drilled with the gay sex is gonna make you die message.

In my high school, I remember there was one person who was kind of out that was two years older than me then they left but there was no other out person than me in my whole high school. I was the target of all homophobia and the only person who wouldn't deny it. Of course, later on you found out a bunch of other people were gay but at the time no one did it.

I think for me, again, going back to when people in the outside world see queerness in you before you see it, specifically I want to say femininity in boys, or femininity in general. People think it is there for you to use. I actually had someone masturbate in a car next to me on Schuyler Avenue in Kearny and had two offers of money for sex years before anyone tried to kiss me or ask me out on a date.

As a kid you see those things early so I think for me I was also a very obese at the time. You feel poor and fat and then any kind of romantic interaction you've had has been unrequited love or these real sketchy moments with someone who is a lot older than you. At the time you don't realize that it's abusive or that it's what but it took me a long time to kind of be self possessed and come into my own power about feeling attractive.

I guess more so about being an aggressor and approaching people because the fear of physical violence at that time, and I don't know

if it's now because I'm older or because our world is different, but I felt it a lot more intensely. It wasn't uncommon for me and my friends to have bottles thrown at us, to be threatened, to get chased down the street. I always felt sex and danger were very, very, very linked hand in hand to me.

Coupled with when you finally find other queer people in the city. At first, to me, I felt like there were two kinds. There were older people who lived on the pier who had been thrown out of their house and lived on the streets and you know, most of them were street prostitutes and many had substance issues. Then there were the really well off gay people that you could tell were like professional or had made some money for themselves that you've seen maybe at some bar or at pride and I didn't feel like either one of them. I guess my tribe that I found before gay men, again, was a feminist punk scene, and then a handful of trans friends from this area that were always obviously for those reasons much more visible.

Kristyn: Just to put a point out, you identify as gay, right?

Aleix: Yes.

Kristyn: How would you describe your gender identity then?

Aleix: I guess as a little boy, I'm not that kid who played with Barbies. I loved GI Joe, I loved soldiers, I loved weapons, I loved war, so many things that I hate now but as a child I was really drawn to them. The one interest that I guess I had was pop music. Because I loved, when I came here I didn't speak English so I didn't like watching the TV. There really wasn't much children's programming on *[inaudible 00:23:11]* Telemundo so I was a radio person. I was already used to listening to music in English from my childhood and it was 1984 so it was the year of "Like a Virgin" and "Thriller" and "She's so Unusual" and "What's Love Got to do With It." So I was pop music obsessed as a kid but I always felt very male.

Kristyn: Has that shifted at all, like lately now I've noticed a lot of queer people are thinking about gender identity so much because trans people are getting more notice. I guess in this now space, do you ever feel like you question that about yourself or you feel firmly about it?

Aleix: I feel firmly about it. The one thing that I personally don't think of is the same as being trans is that I really appreciate the feminine

aspects of me and I really value the femininity that I have and I see it as powerful. I don't think I'm embarrassed of it anymore. I used to really be so that's something's that's really evolved, just valuing femininity and not being that person that's like what's giving me away? Is it the way that I'm moving, is it the way that I'm dancing, is it the way that I'm talking? Then just feeling the power in that and just I do feel like it unites me to women in some way, or to anyone who feels the power of femininity.

Kristyn: Have your racial or religious identities affected your LGBTQ identity?

Aleix: One thing that's interesting is I was actually raised very strict atheist. One of the main, main, main rules of my childhood was I was forbidden from stepping foot in a church. My parents had both grown up in a religious dictatorship. They had inaccurate books in school, so they were always terrified that a church or anything like that would try to brainwash me. You know, because they had lived through it.

Despite the fact that my parents weren't, my grandparents are Spanish Catholics, but that was because never, there was never a moral issue about religion in my house religion was very looked down upon which I think maybe helped me. Now that I realize, even though my parents would express negative things about gay people, my dad would absolutely tell gay jokes, I never had that like Catholic guilt or anything and I always was raised to be suspicious of nuns and priests and everything.

I feel like I'm more open to—I don't believe in an afterlife but I am more open to spiritual ideas at this time in my life and feeling connected to other people and to life on earth. I don't feel like this separate being. I feel connected to nature. To me I really think it was just more than religion, it was just the society at the time and with AIDs that really just made me think it was something I had to hide or definitely something that I knew or I felt at the time wasn't a good thing.

Like, this is true and you have to make the best of it but at the time I felt like it was a shitty hand that life had dealt me. Especially because when you deal with unrequited love and all those teenage things that now seem unimportant, but you're just like why me? Why do I have to be like the lonely fag in town, the gay island surrounded by water with nothing on it? Those things I feel like were really hard to overcome.

Kristyn: What do you like the best about being queer?

Aleix: Honestly, to me it's almost like if you like your family. I love my family and I'm so proud of the people that came before me and even someone like my grandmother who made the transition from illiterate farm worker to finding her life in the city and building this life that I've greatly benefited from.

To me, I feel like the lineage. I feel like I'm part of the most beautiful people in this world, that have made the most amazing artistic contributions, that have made incredible social contributions. I would say the vast majority of people I admire are in some way queer. Just feeling that, feeling a part of that. Just seeing how beautiful queer people are and always have been and what they've always done.

We've kind of always been the silver lining to the dark cloud. That makes me incredibly proud. I guess just as someone who loves art and has worked in the arts and makes art, I gravitate towards those people. But even in times like now when you see who's everyone turning to, the writings of James Baldwin. It's always a queer person. Obviously there's an intersection of a lot of things there, but really to me that's what I feel the most proud about is being that lineage and claiming it but also wanting to contribute to it. Wanting to add something and leave something there to elevate my people.

Kristyn: Did you go to college?

Aleix: I did, I went to Kean University, in Union. It was a really heartbreaking thing for me because I was that kid who had always had my nose in the books and got really good grades because I knew I was gonna go to NYU, because that's the only way I could think of to move to New York, honestly, was to go to school there.

I knew I had to have a life in New York and that I needed to leave New Jersey because I needed to be around queer people and art and music and all the things that I loved. I was completely discouraged in school. I was constantly told by my guidance counselors, principals, everyone that I wasn't smart enough, that I wasn't this enough then the moment comes and I get in and I get in with an $8,000.00 scholarship, but no one ever told me I was too poor to go to NYU.

I moved here illegally in 1984 and I became legal in 1996, which is the same time I was gonna enter college, so there was even a while

where I didn't know how easy it was gonna be for me to go to college. My parents didn't know how to navigate the American system, so I didn't understand the world of loans and in a way I'm glad because I don't have debt, but it was a tough pill to swallow to be like, no, I'm still stuck in New Jersey, I'm still stuck around all these things when you work so hard to leave them and you're like how am I gonna transcend them? How am I gonna live this life that seems so far away? Even though when you grow up right over the Hudson, you can physically see New York all the time but it doesn't feel like being there.

Kristyn: What was it like, you mentioned that you became legal in 1996? What was that like?

Aleix: To me, by the time I was in high school, I was already so concerned with my adulthood and this other part of my life that I didn't think about that as much, because I knew that my dad had already become legal, and me and my mom were in the process. My parents had kind of been scammed at some point during it, so it just took a really long time.

But my childhood is when that was really tough. My sister was born here, she was an American citizen, and then my two cousins who were my only family here, were also born here. In the summer, they could travel and they could go back to Spain and see our family, and I spent all summer by myself.

I was a latchkey kid, so literally all summer by myself from like 9:00 in the morning to 7:30-8:00 at night. As a kid, that's just kind of a tough pill to swallow and, I have, to this day, I feel like I don't love summer, because I have these memories. The other day I was thinking about when I would fill water balloons up and throw them in the sky and try to get them to fall on me—

[Laughter]

—because I don't have anyone to throw water balloon at me. This is really a solitary childhood that being illegal just kind of informs, but also it's that combination of being from a working poor family and being illegal. But by high school, I felt like I'm gonna make this happen. I'm a little engine that could. I'm going to make it.

Kristyn: That's awesome. In college at Kean, what did you study?

Aleix: I studied Communications, because I know I wanted to work in music PR which is what I've done my entire adult life. I had met

this guy who was a drummer in an indie band, and I remember their list for the show was full or something. I had a big crush on him, and he's, "Well, just tell them you're my publicist if anyone asked you when we walk in."

I was like, "A publicist, what's that?" because you certainly don't grow up around music business in New Jersey, let alone, at that time with no internet, with this awareness of the different careers in it, so I started exploring it. I was like, oh, the music magazines and TV and the media and artists are something that I love, so I very purposely studied Communications there. Then I had a minor women's studies. As negative as I felt about having to be there, I actually had some really great educators.

Kristyn: Did you live there or commute?

Aleix: No, I commuted, which was part of it too. If you're living in Newark, that's the cheapest state school. All of that time in my life was completely dictated by financial realities. I lived in Newark because I had to. I went to Kean University, because I couldn't afford to go anywhere else.

I worked two jobs in Newark actually, like renting TVs and phones at St. James Hospital, and then cleaning the same bar that I played in as a child, Escorial. I worked two jobs seven days a week to put myself through college, and my mom.

Kristyn: Where in Newark did you live at that time?

Aleix: I lived on Elm Street right off Van Buren, 306 Elm Street. This was still, I guess towards the end of the crack boom, so it was still a very, very different Newark.

Kristyn: What happened after college?

Aleix: After college, I had this really deep depression in my last year of college, because I felt again that I had just spent another four years studying. I had worked seven days a week. I started cleaning the bar at 4:30 in the morning, and at around 7:30, I would go to school from 8:00 to 2:00, and then from 3:30 until 8:00 or so, I'd rent TVs and phones at the hospitals, at St. James and also at West Hudson.

Again, I felt like I've done everything the right way. It was a hard lesson if you do everything right and it still not get any results. I just felt it in this deep way and I also felt—because you have

friends that didn't have the same situation as you. They did go away at school and they did do these other things, kind of like left behind.

I, at that time thought it was suicidal, but now I realize that it wasn't that kind of depression. It was more where you just want any other life to be any other person. I was just determined. I knew that the only shot I had was to kind of intern somewhere and try it.

It was actually really hard for me to get an internship, but I eventually did at this PR firm called Girlie Action Media that still exists and works with a lot of great artists. I still kept my cleaning jobs. I would clean the bar from 4:30 to 7:30 in the morning and then go intern in New York from 10:00 to 7:00. [34:35]

As much as I put up with so many degrading things and people talking down to me at first, not at the company I worked at, but with people you worked for and things like that, it was all worth it. I never questioned it for a second. That was the real start of the life that I thought I was going to have when I was 18, really started happening when I was 22.

Kristyn: Twenty-two, yeah, I was gonna ask. What year was that?

Aleix: That was in 2001. I got hired two months before 9/11.

Kristyn: Wow. Were you there then for that?

Aleix: Yes. Coincidentally, right? Albums used to come out on Tuesdays. Now they release on Fridays worldwide, but at the time, it came out on Tuesdays. Mondays, when people would have record release parties, I remember on 9/10 being at this music industry party, and there were free drinks, and I was hanging out with my coworkers, and I had a really big crush on this guy.

We're kind of dating. It was, I think I met him on AOL Personals. Internet dating was relatively new at the time still. That night, at Bowery Ballroom, we were at this party, and then we left, and we were just on the streets. I remember walking to World Trade Center, and it was probably about 3:00 in the morning and feeling like I don't really wanna go home.

He was in Spanish Harlem, and he's like, "Well, don't. Walk back to City Hall with me and we'll take the 6 up to my house." That's what we did. It was my first time spending the night at this guy's house, and a couple hours later, we woke up, and it was 9/11.

Kristyn: Wow. That's crazy. So in your jobs and stuff like your early jobs, did you ever suffer discrimination either for your sexual or ethnicity or anything?

Aleix: I don't wanna say I hid it, but it just kind of was a non-issue, like at nights my phone and TV rental shop, I couldn't get people to call me Aleix. People would refuse to even pronounce my name right. They'd call me like Al or do things. I learned very early on that I want nothing to do with these people.

I'm here collect this check and I don't care. They were all a lot older than me and nothing like me. I worked very independently, because it was only one person at a time at that job. My cleaning job I did by myself in the middle of the night. The only discrimination I feel I've experienced was more about being illegal immigrant.

Where the first job I had, they stole my paycheck, because I couldn't get working papers, but I said this to them ahead of time. They let me work three weeks and never paid me. In those early working class jobs that I had, I worked at the airport at Aer Lingus for a while where everyone is gay at the airport.

It was later on when I started working with major record companies and the people who ran them which tend to be straight people of privilege that I would notice things like people talking down to you or calling you honey and sweetie, and you want to say, "I'm a grown man in a professional situation. You really don't get to call me honey at this moment. You definitely don't know me like that."

I was kind of shocked because you think the music business as a place where that doesn't happen, but even then, it's still really lucky because it happened just in those kind of passive-aggressive coded ways. I've never lost a job for being gay, ever.

Kristyn: That's cool. You've been living in Newark since back around college—

Aleix: In 1996. Yeah.

Kristyn: How has the area changed since then?

Aleix: I mean, to me, the main change is that it's a lot safer. In my early childhood here in the early 80's, the Macy's was still open. People

still shopped downtown and it was Bamburgers and big department stores. So it hadn't changed. It hadn't gotten as dismal as it would by the end of the 80's and throughout at least the first half of the 90's. So I definitely have this feeling of safety.

I felt for a long time that I was the only gay thing around me, and I don't feel that I see out gay people all the time in Newark now. Sadly, that's being coupled with, there's this construction boom and the prices are going up. It's skyrocketed, so I definitely, in Ironbound at least, see there has been a population change. Much like with Manhattan, the safety's come at a big price of a lot of other things that you value like affordability, and a certain kind of diversity, I think is starting to be threatened here.

Kristyn: Do you feel like it's gentrifying?

Aleix: My hope was always that people like me would change Newark, that there's so many children of immigrants or people who are the first ones in their family to go to college here, that they would stay and just make things better. When I got to a place where living in Newark became a choice and not a necessity, I very consciously decided to stay here and not move to New York even though it had always been my dream.

Both because you could own something here, but also because by that time I felt like if everyone here who's counter-cultural leaves, like what's left here? What happens? There's nothing. You can't really lose many people like us because there's not many of us here to begin with. It felt that way.

Kristyn: Are there any places in Newark that you specifically associate with gay people?

Aleix: Sadly, on the west side of Penn Station, I see a lot of trans prostitutes. I had always seen group of trans kids work in the street. Again, like I said, they were always identifiable. At QXT or any of the places or I guess—yeah, I would say QXT or The Edge at any time in its history, you always felt like there was a queer undercurrent to it.

In those clubs, you felt like it was okay to be getting at the other gay people there. I never seemed to find any, but I also never attracted any negative attention for it either. I think that that's what I associate with, but again I truly, truly felt for a very long time that I didn't see any out gay people in Newark.

When you discover this history later on, it kind of blows your mind because I felt so completely separate from it. I really felt like the only gay thing at school, the only gay thing on the street—even on Ferry Street, I remember people throwing things at me and my best friends.

This same guy who I'd spent 9/11 with, I also had that experience with him, and that's already in the year 2001. I remember being harassed on Ferry Street, and I don't even think we were holding hands or anything, so I actually always identified Newark as a dangerous place for queer people.

Kristyn: Being a publicist now in the music industry, do you get to choose who you represent or does whoever you're working for, like Girlie Action, let's say?

Aleix: Yeah. When I was working at a firm, you could say I want this, and you were certainly encouraged to pursue artists that you like, but you'd be assigned things. I worked for myself for four years, so I say yes and no. When you have financial constraints, sometimes you don't have the power of no.

It's actually, to me, that also was one of the turning points as a gay person, because I noticed that I sort of been able to work with a lot of queer artists, and that they loved working with me because I was another queer person and I understood them, and I knew how not to misrepresent them, and how to stick up for them when someone's like that.

Especially in the early 2000's, I worked with Antony and the Johnsons, the Gossip, the Scissor Sisters and so many queer and trans artists that ended up having international careers. I was just over the moon about it. I felt like it's—even when I would get to do photo shoots with lifestyle and fashion magazines, as much as people criticize the fashion world, and there's a lot to criticize about it, it's one of the only industries where I feel like you walk in and almost everyone is a creative queer person.

It was so liberating to me to be like I'm paying my rent and hanging out with other gay people. I believe in this and I can champion this in a legitimate way because I really believe in queer art and queer artists and the things that these people are saying and their visibility. I don't mind working unpaid overtime to try and help someone get a bigger platform for these ideas because I'm benefiting from it.

I remember with Antony and the Johnsons, the first time I booked them on Letterman, I think we booked them three times. I remember sitting backstage with him and crying in each other's arms and just realizing there's a transperson on network television right now. To people of my generation, you had Boy George, and that's it. Boy George at the time was not out. Boy George would be coy about it but he wasn't laying it all out there for you.

It was a very powerful image for me, so I don't want to take anything away from him, but to see people singing songs about a trans experience and presenting themselves that they want to have a platform on late night TV which I think is very mainstream culture in the United States. I really felt like the luckiest person in the world. It kind of erased so much of the trauma and the sadness from those years before everything I had to do to get to that point.

Kristyn: Did you get to meet anybody that you admired?

Aleix: Yeah. I met Boy George. Actually, yeah I remember being at Bowery Ballroom at a Scissor Sisters show because they drew up every gay, Anderson Cooper and Fred Schneider who was born in Newark, from The B-52's, they'd be there.

Like I said, so many of those people just really inspired me personally and I ended up working with Morrissey for ten years and with Courtney Love for three years and Tori Amos for a long time, and Grace Jones. They were all, some were great experiences and some weren't so great. But to me, having come from here and having been convinced not only—

I always, I think one of the things that makes a lot of queer people wanna be stars, have a face in the public eye is because when the whole world is telling you that you're worthless or that you're shit. You can either believe it or convince yourself that the opposite is true and that everyone is jealous of you and that you deserve, it's your turn to rule. It's your time to take that throne and do that. And I was very much that kid.

That went purely like, "You're fat, and you're a faggot and you're this and that." I was that kid who'd be like, "One day, you're gonna be sweeping the train stations. The magazines are gonna flaunt me. My fucking face on the cover, and you're gonna be so pissed and won't even know about it because my life would be so different by then."

I believed in that fantasy 100 percent. Now I realize, it's kinda like

a survival thing, but yeah, having positive feedback around you, having other queer people around you, seeing other queer people who are successful and living their dreams, makes you think, "Oh, I can do that." I never felt empowered to call myself an artist or to do those things. It had a great effect on me.

Kristyn: Why didn't you feel empowered to call yourself an artist?

Aleix: Well, I think because, I think a lot of us wait for something else to make us legitimate, for that magic wand of legitimacy to be waived over your head of "you get to do this now, because these people have anointed you." So I was always waiting for that positive feedback from the world, because everything around me was negative.

Also, I'm from a working poor family in Spain, too. Not just here, but I didn't realize it until I moved here, because the class separation is felt so much stronger in the United States than here, that I always felt that people like me and for my background, don't get to do that.

And the sad reality is, they usually don't, because you don't get the instruction, you don't get the training, you don't get that Virginia Woolf *A Room of One's Own*, where your parents pay your rent for a year while you figure out your music career and buy you music equipment. To buy my first guitar, I had a part-time job being the snowman at Macy's and Herald Square in New York over one Christmas.

To do anything, to get any kind of—I couldn't afford music lessons. I couldn't afford painting lessons. I certainly couldn't go to art school, and that was my dream. How do you do that? I could barely go to college. The reality of, I have to feed myself. I need to do something viable that's gonna pay my rent, because I don't have anyone who can help me.

My parents live paycheck to paycheck too. I think it was a combination of those things, and of just feeling like you didn't have the support or the talent. Then once I was around it, I had the opposite problem where I felt like not eclipsed but in awe of just like, "Look. This person's a genius. This person is amazing and I'm not, and I could never do that."

It's just like holding yourself to the standard of people who are doing things at the highest level. Playing at Carnegie Hall and doing that and not thinking about there's a lot of other things to do.

Realistically, I'll say, 95 percent of the people that are already in the music business are from upper-middle class family, at the least. Also, realizing the money that it takes, the things that it takes and knowing that, I do anything I can to make ends meet in Newark.

Kristyn: In a way, you've really been able to embody or find a way to give back to the core community. Like you said, you wanted to leave a legacy.

Aleix: Yeah. Like I said, I feel so proud of that. I feel so proud of those things. When the gossip, when standing in the way of control, or these songs before they're even legalized, they come out and you're like, "I put that out into the world. I helped introduce that and navigate it. I got it on national television. I fought really hard. I fought with my boss to lower the rate of the company just to even take on those groups as a client."

In many cases did work, which I still do pro bono for free for queer people, because I thought that they deserved it. So I felt like I gave back. I feel I've given back and tried to. I also feel like what's exciting about the time we live now, is that everyone has a platform for their voice. The means of production are so much cheaper that you can do so many things at home and teach yourself so many things. That was impossible before. There were no YouTube tutorials. It was really, really hard to learn something on your own.

Kristyn: Has that made it harder for you to do your work as a freelance person then?

Aleix: Well, one of the reasons I went freelance is to kind of buy myself some time in order to develop this other side of myself. New York is a competitive job market and when you're working at a firm and for someone else, and with major league, because I worked with Warner Bros, Sony and Universal. I've never worked the 40 hour work week.

I would be so mentally exhausted at the end of the day. Sometimes I'd lose my reading comprehension skills on the train. I'd read a magazine article and not remember what I read. In that sense, it made it difficult. Going on my own was really to nurture this other side of myself.

I was like, I wanna acquire these skills. I wanna make these things. I wanna learn how to make films. Learn how to play music better

and paint and just explore these ideas. I finally felt like these are valid. I have to put my own ideas out into the world and not worry about how they're gonna be received or how much of an audience they're gonna find.

Kristyn: Have you been able to put anything out?

Aleix: Yes. Actually, a week and a half ago, I've been doing different projects, but I've done a series of short video projects. Very inspired by Derek Jarman, a queer filmmaker from England. This one video, kind of about consumption in the New York area called *Insatiable*. I'd been trying to find a home for it and it just premiered at Manchester Pride, in the UK—

Kristyn: Congrats.

Aleix: Thank you. This month at Manchester Metropolitan University and it was part of—they screen and the course of studies, they have this part of Manchester Park called Manchester Noir, which tries to include people with even more fringe identities and people of color. I was just really happy for it to be anywhere. Really proud that it was shown for other queer people. I don't know, it's kinda crazy that it got turned down so many times locally, you know.

So many other queer artists, you had to find your audience somewhere else *[laughter]*. It's kind of like those first steps of how do I make a film? How do I edit a film? How do I record this? How do I do that? My public relations business, it pays my mortgage and those things. But it certainly doesn't fund the budget that a lot of things are made with. It's just in that process of figuring it out, but I have the mental space now at least.

Kristyn: You are a homeowner in Newark area?

Aleix: Yeah. I am. I have a house on, a loft on Hamilton and New Jersey Railroad. There's this building called the Button Factory. There's a lot of queer people. Before I wouldn't see queer people on the streets, there's at least seven other gay people in my building now. Some people are sculptors. There's a poet. So it's crazy.

I'm the only person in it that's grown up here in Newark. It's exciting to live around queer people and artists, and to feel like that's a very visible force in Newark now. Definitely the arts community, it's a very, very visible force, and I love that.

Kristyn: You used to be in a band, right?

Aleix: Yeah. I've played in a punk bands throughout my life and DJ'ed. That's what I mean too, just like exploring all these forms of expression but trying to take them to the next level. I always played in bands. We played shows with, we had punk spaces, like The Cake Shop on Lower East Side, and Dumba in Brooklyn.

My best friend Ray who's trans, he's the one who I was referring to earlier, we always had some kind of incarnation or project or harebrained idea. Sometimes they work out great, and sometimes they don't. When I think about everything we dreamed about in the General Kearny apartments, and of all these things, they don't happen that way, but he is in John Cameron Mitchell movie *Shortbus* and he's in a Bright Eyes video, and I'm in a La Tigre video.

Just these things happening, and we played with some of our heroes. It makes me feel so much more optimistic about the future, than I felt as a teen or in my early 20's growing up here, because you proved yourself wrong. You've made some things happen. You're like, how many can I make them happen? Now, that you feel the world is more receptive to you than it ever has been.

On the one hand you're like, well, does that make me boring? Are there are too many voices like mine? But more than anything, I'm just happy that there's so many voices, when I always struggled so hard to find any. Struggled so hard to say, hear anyone say, that I might say, "I am gay and I do this."

Even when, I don't know, you know, that's very recent in history. Even in pop culture and in things like music. I think when Alternative America exploded in 1991 or '92, with the rise of Nirvana, the rise of Grunge. I feel like it was definitely more socially progressive time than now, where people were more involved. It was cool to care about things, and to not discriminate, and to have these values. I don't know how we lost it.

But even then, with the American bands, I can't think of any out person in grunge bangs, any out gay person in grunge bands. I gravitated more towards British music at the time like Britpop because there were out gay people in the main bands in England. So I always you know, I guess that just leads to the sentiment, "It's better for gay people over there, in New York and London, and anywhere, I gotta get me to a real city."

Kristyn: Do you have a favorite song?

Aleix: Oh yeah. I remember this band called Suede. It was in 1992, right around the same time as I'm liking the first boy and everything. They came out with this song called "The Drowners." And in England, they became the number one debut album, which is a cultural craze. Here, I don't think they ever got past playing, like 1500 people in New York, at Supper Club, or the Manhattan Center.

I remember this song called "The Drowners" where the singer is male and he's singing "We kissed in his room." He's very openly singing a love song to a man and it's even naughty. It was like, "Do you believe in love there?" and in the video he had "Do you believe in love there?" written right down his spine.

He was shirtless and this queer imagery, and there was a woman with a penciled in mustache, which I'd seen in a Justify My Love video. I think people my age liked Madonna. As much as we want to talk about appropriation, I'm like, "Look, I never saw queer culture if she didn't put it out there. People like me had no access to it." I will always have love for her for that.

But I always knew that she was a straight woman though. The singer from Suede is straight. The drummer wasn't, but to hear a love song to a man, just rocked my world. Oh my God. What is he singing? It felt more dangerous than NWA tape that I had in seventh grade. It just felt so radical to me.

At that time, I discovered Riot Girl feminist punk in the United States and in the UK. The big band here is Bikini Kill but in England it was Huggy Bear. They had a song on their first album where he's screaming about "My boyfriend, my boyfriend," and I was like, "Wow! That's a man screaming about my boyfriend," and just being desperate to meet these people.

I would wait outside of shows. If the concert was at 7:00 or 8:00 at night, I'd probably be there by 2:00 in the afternoon already, sitting on the sidewalk, just trying to get any glimpse of this other world. So many people I've met in the music business fell into it. For me, it was so on purpose. I was literally sleeping out on the streets, and waiting on the streets for any connection to it.

Kristyn: It must've been sort of surreal on some level to now be doing like once you started doing that for a living.

Aleix: Yeah. It was surreal. It's strange because you know how it is. Nothing is the way that you imagine it. Some things about it are better, but it's absolutely different. It's been a mixed bag of experiences, but again, I felt having the reputation of working with queer artists always kept me around people who I really loved and things I really believed in.

I feel, I don't know, ridiculously lucky. I can't say I did nothing to deserve it. I tried really hard for it. But I still feel that there's a giant element of luck for it to work out that way. It definitely not only it makes you feel less alone in the world, but again, it's almost like that same feeling as having a big crew of friends. Like I'm powerful. There's a lot of me. There's a lot of me with big voices. There's a lot of me with a platform.

Kristyn: How did you feel about gay marriage passing, and things like that?

Aleix: Yeah, so to me, it's, I've never had, well, in my adult life I was absolute—I had so much internalized homophobia. Without even realizing that that's what it was. Femmephobia as a teen. What gives it away? Why do I talk funny? Why do I move this way? You hear your cousins or anyone say that, that you'd start to despise that in you.

Then you project that onto other queer people that are more liberated than you or just more feminine. You're like, "If it wasn't people like that, people like me wouldn't get harassed." It took me a second to realize that that's bullshit, and how much damage I was doing to those people and to myself by perpetuating that. And um, I lost my train. I'm such a rambler.

Kristyn: Oh, that's okay. I had asked you about gay marriage.

Aleix: Oh yeah. For me, I think one of the most, if not the most amazing part about being a queer person is that there is this infinite amount of ways to be one. I don't consider any of them, other than the Republicans, to be less valid than others. I personally have a very negative view on marriage now. I always have. I don't believe in it for straight people, let alone for queer people, but I marched for it. I felt that was important. I was so happy. I remember the day that it passed thinking that everybody's gonna be out on the pier, but it's the new New York so they weren't.

I remember walking down to the pier, crying from where the Whitney Museum is now on 14th, down to the pier and just tears in my eyes of just this moment, of that did that really happen?

Because it felt so backwards—in Spain, gay marriage was passed over ten years before it was here.

I thought it was just really backwards and it just felt so—the tide turning of something happened. Even though there really weren't many people on the pier at all, I was just so happy cuz to me that's what I associated with being gay. You always go the pier, Christopher Street. I remember the first time I got off at Christopher Street PATH looking for gay people, and I was this is where—I don't know, ground zero for gay people like me, quite literally.

I need to be here and I need to be amongst my people and happy. Despite the fact that is something I personally am not interested, I'm completely against the military too, but it's not hard for me to separate those personal decisions from other people's lives.

Kristyn: How do you feel now with Trump being in office?

Aleix: I think that it's the way that anyone who's not excited by it feels where it's like this is hopefully the last gasp of White supremacy trying to exert itself, trying to bring back all those things that oppressed me and so many other people for all these years, and that there's a reaction to it.

I personally didn't think the Obama years were so hyper-liberal that such a strong reaction merited a backlash, it felt a lot more moderate. It didn't feel like you were from this extreme leftism to extreme right. It felt like we went from kind of the middle to the right, but at the same time I feel a solidarity with so many people.

I think so many people have found a platform now that I will never see it as a positive. I'll be like, "Maybe it's this great thing that unifies us." It will always be one of the most horrible and disgusting things that I've lived through, but I do feel that maybe as queer people some of us might have felt we had it good that it's brought out the warrior in people. It's brought about a lot of conversations about Black people in our country, and about a lot of other people in our country, and the intersection of where you've had multiple marginalized identities and how at risk that puts you.

I'd like to think that we're looking out for each other more, but what I really wanna believe is that we're gonna make the opposite thing happen next, and that's happening. And I've, my boyfriend is in Washington DC, so I split my time between Newark and DC. I've seen so many people on the streets, like the gay, queer dance

parties outside of Mike Pence's house, and just all the different marches. I see how big the resistance is, how much of it there is, how unafraid it is that it's not that "I'm the lone queer person on the street" feeling.

That's probably why it's so scary to those people, that's why there's a Donald Trump, because we're all so visible, our voices are so accessible. Our voices are everywhere that they're realizing and we're realizing, some of us, just how many dissenting voices and different lives there are in this country. Even I realize that because growing up in Newark, obviously, I've always been around Black people and there's always been a big Muslim community around me.

Even when I lived in Spain there was a big Muslim community where I grew up. Sometimes, to me, it just gives you a perspective of people in other parts of America to think about, because we're from probably the most diverse part of it. Unlike other cities where it's segregated, here it's you have to take the bus with everyone, you have to take the train with everyone, you have to use the same post office as everyone.

We live on top of each other literally and share our lives. So I feel in a sense it's given me an education about the rest of America and what other people think like. Because to me, this has always been the most normal because it's all that I knew. I thought New Jersey was so conservative and repressed and was waiting for this magical life in Manhattan, and it never occurred to me that New Jersey was actually like a pretty great place for someone like me that it could be far, far worse. My boyfriend grew up in Oklahoma and my life is radically different.

Kristyn: How did you meet?

Aleix: From his—online, which is the other thing, that's what I mean. I'm from that generation that I still met my friends on the street, my best friends on the bus, and people wait for me outside my house. By the time I started—I had a professional job, when I finished college I already worked on a computer, so I lived that digital divide. But the social digital divide was huge for me. Like I said, I stand on the sidewalk for hours trying to meet someone, quite literally, throughout the 90s.

Being able to connect with someone that I didn't know before, as much as we felt the negative aspects of it, at first it was so freeing. I'm like, "Wait, there's a hundred gay people around my age.

There are some right by here who liked the same music that I do, who do all these things. How did that happen?" Going back to love and high school and all that, that actually started becoming really possible for me with the internet.

Both because of social anxiety and just because of meeting people, because I felt the spaces that I would inhabit there was always a lot of lesbians, and just from growing up here I had trans friends, but I had a lot of trouble meeting gay men that I could relate to.

Kristyn: Yeah?

Aleix: Yeah, absolutely. I had a lot of trouble meeting gay men that I could relate to until the internet happened—until the internet was accessible to me. It happened long before I had it *[laughter]* but—

Kristyn: How long have you and your current partner been together?

Aleix: Just over seven years.

Kristyn: It's like a long distance relationship?

Aleix: Well, he telecommutes, so every other week he's in Newark for four days, so he's here about eight days a month. Then I spend about ten days a month or so in DC. We don't spend too many days apart. I'd say we probably spend a week or so a month away from each other between one thing and the other.

Kristyn: You said you got to marches in DC, did you go, so you went to the Women's March, right? [1:06:32]

Aleix: Absolutely, the Women's March, the Inauguration Day. I had it clear to me, I was one of those people like so many of us who foolishly believed it would never happen, it would never—I was very realistic about it in the sense that I supported Bernie 100 percent until he lost the primary. Then I was like, "No, this is about Hillary," because when you grow up around Newark you're no stranger to marginalized people who are in real danger.

My neighborhood to this day is full of illegal people, just like me and my parents were—just so many queer people of color here. There's so many trans people of color here. If people here are over the poverty line they're not that far above it for the most part. I, unlike I guess most of America, never had blinders on about that because I had lived my own marginalization and seen people who dealt with things that I didn't deal with, intimately.

I really didn't think the moment would happen, and then when it did I—I think maybe it's because we're queer people, we just have the legacy of fighters from having to be, but there was no question to me that I was going to be on the streets constantly. I started going to protests probably in 1992, around the same time that I was gay and I started when pride was the march, and do the AIDS Walk, but also things like the Mumia Abu-Jamal and that generation.

Aleix: Sure. He's also someone who is, I guess, a correlation with Leonard Peltier, the Native American, and people who—most people believe that they have a trumped up murder charge and that they're serving these sentences. They were just a big movement to raise awareness about him and to have his case looked at and things. I remember revolution books on 19th Street where—I don't subscribe to the communist party and it's not my own problem with revolution books, but that seemed to be the hub at the time.

The first place where I saw this intersection of queer people and people of color, and working people and poor people and how they had to work together—that's the first place that really made me very conscious of that. They were always information there about protests and things coming in. Even after I became legal, I've always gone to the immigration protests and things.

But I feel like, even when I think about the first protests, they try to shut down the Spanish school I went to here in Newark. I remember protesting outside of City Hall. I've seen my parents do it as a kid.

Kristyn: Oh yeah, they protested too?

Aleix: Yeah, absolutely. They were very active against the Fascist government in Spain, too. I had *[inaudible 01:09:59]*, but I think it's generational. I think people who were teens in the '90s were very encouraged by everything to vote, to be involved in things like Amnesty International, about the national organization for women. And I didn't, my perception of those things was also it seemed so juvenile but as cool.

To me, part of being like lame people, like those other people was being apathetic was not caring about, about not empathizing. Also about not participating, like not signing petitions, not showing your face somewhere, and not speaking out about something.

Kristyn: Before we started taping, you said that in Kearny you saw a White Power thing?

Aleix: Yeah. I remember it was in the mid-80s. I dunno, it was sometime between 1987, 1989, and there were maybe 15, 20 men, but there was a Straight White and Proud parade and they had blue shirts and it said Straight, White and Proud in white letters. I remember them very, very, very clearly. I was walking down the street—and I usually speak Spanish with my parents, and I was speaking Spanish with my mom and my aunt who lives here, and just getting screamed about the typical go back to your country and those things, which I had heard my whole entire life, honestly, even in Kearny, as a six, seven year old.

When I don't speak English or that, that's, I feel very common, but that was the first time I'd encountered it on the street. I also was used to it from kids—I think that's the first time I got that attention from an adult too, so it was really scary to me. It was really traumatizing. But you know, I think that that's—I dunno if that's changed or not. I think I'd have to ask people who are younger than me but I remember being kicked out of many businesses in this area for being queer. From BBQ's on Kearny Avenue, Baliza's on Kearny Avenue.

Just so many—I absolutely remember being thrown out of places, being denied entry in places. That's for being perceived as queer, that's not for kissing a man or something like it, which obviously would still be wrong—but that's for just looking gay. For just walking through the door with your friends, being like, "No absolutely not." Like, "You cannot come in here." Like, "You need to leave right now."

I think that that's also why everyone just dreamt about New York and going to that, because I don't know if it would be different if there were older gay people to kind of teach you the way or show you. I'm sure they had to be around and they had to identify us, but no one ever talked to us. I also think about the generation right before me is the one that got decimated by AIDS.

People were dealing with a real struggle and taking care of themselves or of loved ones or doing things. They weren't worried about some kids. So the people who, I think that you had to go seek it out, but you didn't know the person in town. You'd see these things, like you see Riot Girls who'd be like, "Okay, there's these feminist punks. This is absolutely queer positive."

One of the other big things like I mentioned about Dee-Lite is the New York club culture at the time, the Club Kids. Which is something that people really look down on now.

Kristyn: Like Michael Alig and all?

Aleix: Sure. Because of Michael Alig having murdered someone, but, and because it was absolutely drug fueled. There's a negative side to thinking about nightclubs that allow 15-year-olds in. It doesn't happen now. I feel sad for people that can't do that. But there were still creative gay people and they valued you for it. That was the revolutionary thing.

Not only would they tell you to question society and tell you, "Wait, this is all a joke. All these things that are telling you that you're worthless, and that things aren't for you. This is a joke and you can laugh at it. Those people have no real importance to you. You're amazing and you're gay, and I can tell that you're gay. That's why you get to come into this club for free and not wait online and not do that."

And that made you feel amazing, and people don't really talk about that. About how, now because of the rent in New York, the Wall Street crowd and tourists are prioritized over everyone because they buy bottles or spend this money. People need to make rent, so I understand the practicality of it. But before that was a financial reality, those people always came second to the weirdoes and the queer people, because that was your space, they were your values.

In a sense, other people were paying money to be around you and to experience you. I didn't get that at the time. I just thought, oh, wow, other gay people are favoritism, favoritism finally working my way. So that, I think to me, I always feel like growing up around here is like winning the lottery. It's something amazing to happen to me. I did absolutely nothing to deserve it. I didn't earn it, I didn't move here, I didn't work for it.

I just kind of grew up around here and it's isolating as New Jersey could be. I was on a 24-hour train line to Manhattan that only cost a dollar, and you really only have to pay one way cuz it's very easy to hop at Harrison because almost no one ever worked there.

[Laughter]

So many days I would really have a dollar and I would go to New York. I'd walk to school to save the bus money, and I used that

same dollar to go on the PATH and go to New York. At that time, at least, downtown still existed in a physical sense, not just in this concept. So there was this place of discovery and this place where at least I felt like there was some escape. It wasn't as isolating as somewhere where you don't see it.

I knew there was a place I could go, I just didn't know how to stay there, and I didn't know how to really build a life there. I knew I could at least go there and be myself on the street and try to meet other people. In a pre-internet world, you can't really ask for more. That is so hyper-privileged compared to someone in a rural area, or who's not around a city like that.

Kristyn: Do you feel successful now?

Aleix: Yes and no, I guess. I mean, I feel successful in the sense that I feel I've realized a lot of dreams of my parents. My grandma learned to read late in life. She was an illiterate farm worker and then a maid. Neither one of my parents was able to finish high school for financial reasons. They just had to do other things. I have a full education, I have a Bachelor's degree. In my mom's family I'm the first person to ever do that.

I feel successful in that sense, and that I've managed to buy a house—even though it's so hard to hang on to, so whoever knows how long you'll have that. But that I've been able to feed myself and have a place to live by championing art. The whole time that I figured—I hadn't been able to do it as an artist which is the big dream, but I've been able to do it as a champion for art, and specifically, for queer art. And that people that I believed in, when only 20 people go to see them, are now nominated for Oscars.

I've known them for 10, 15 years. That feels like a success, but I don't know, you know what I mean? Like I said, when you have those childhood ambitions, you have stars in your eyes, it never feels that there's always something else that you want to do. There's always another dream, there's always something else. What makes me feel successful, I guess, is that I was so convinced I was gonna have this really depressing dark life of things that didn't interest me.

That when you prove yourself wrong once, you make it happen, it makes you believe so much stronger that you can keep doing it and keep making it happen again. So that to me is really successful, is to not feel defeated and to not to do that, and to feel like—to go back to generational things. Being your authentic self and not

trading parts of you away, and not selling out as we would call it, was a primary thing in my generation and definitely the counterculture.

It's completely devalued now. Now people line up to sell out. Now people want those two dollars from Apple, they want everything. That's completely, completely lost in our culture. People are dying because no one has money but brands. People want brand money in any way shape or form they can get it. I feel really successful that I've been an independent person. As an adult, I've never worked on something I don't believe in.

I've championed a million things that I do. I've never had to, in my opinion, trade a significant part of myself. Or, not only that it didn't hinder me, but that being an authentic self as an adult, actually made me money. It got me business, it got me clients. Kind of specializing in public relations set me apart from other publicists that do what I do.

Kristyn: Where do you see yourself in five, ten years?

Aleix: Having a publicist instead of being one. No, I would do my own press, I wouldn't trust anyone.

[Laughter]

I think that this time that we're living, for people like me, is the time of the hustle, the time of trying to find money from the four corners of the earth and put it together to make it happen. Because everything, particularly New York, it's such a different world. Is it okay if I ramble a little?

Kristyn: Yeah, of course.

Aleix: For me, 9/11 is this monumental—not for me, obviously it's a monumental moment, but I'm talking about personally for people who live here—like what it represents culturally that you couldn't see on that day. You knew something happened, but you didn't see everything after coming. That day happened only to us, everything after happened to the whole world. The death of that lifestyle of those ideas of countercultural, of that generation of countercultural America and of the new New York emerging, where the new New York values, the dollar—it's a Bloomberg's New York, it's Giuliani's New York.

It's not Club Kid New York, it's not Danceteria, you know '80s

artsy New York. It's not Warhol, New York. I think of it almost like Havana before Castro, or Berlin before the Nazis were there. There were these moments in history where these cities had these explosions of culture and identities that were great for queer people and art, and then something happens that totally decimates it. I personally believe that we've lived the most recent one of those examples here.

It's really hard to reconcile your values from those generational things you held with the reality of living in this new world that's hyper-capitalist and hyper-gentrified. That if you wanna to be anywhere around here you need X amount of money and you got to make it somehow, and that every little thing is competitive. You have to fight for every scrap and every crumb. Reconciling those things, but, and I think that's one of the reasons why there's been this mass exodus of people from New York—especially creative people from New York to Los Angeles in the last 10, 15 years.

I guess I think that the old New York isn't dead—it's dead as a physical place but it's kind of like when you get enough people from it together, even if it's at a party or a conversation or anything, it still feels like that it's just passed on to people. I feel that responsibility of just keeping those ideas alive, and keeping the most beautiful parts of that intact, and putting it out in the world.

Currently, I make art, I make video art. I've been writing a script. I don't know if it's a movie script or a TV script, but just writing ideas based on this generation, on that generation that lived the digital divide. That's the last group of teens to grow up in New York City before 9/11, because we're gonna be the last people who remember it on earth. At some point we're gonna be those, the last people who remember the pre-digital world and pre-9/11 New York City.

In recent years I've felt the need to document it and to make work about that before it becomes so distant in memory that it's harder to conjure or harder to be accurate about it. Then it's like your memory of your memory of those things. I know that in some way in five, ten years, I'm gonna keep putting those things forward, and I'm open to whatever avenue they may take. I always think about it would be great to have a shop where people have these records and books, or a cafe, or something to preserve that and do that.

I still DJ around New York City and I try to create events and take part in events that I feel still have that energy or still do that—I

really wanna keep pushing that forward throughout my life. I don't want it to be lost. I feel it's this amazing gift that was given to me of seeing that world and seeing that life and seeing those ways of––kind of like you believe and make something out of nothing. To triumph against all odds or anything does and to help other people do that.

And that when you do, it creates these communities and creates these really interesting things. I just wanna be fostering that somewhere. I'd love for it to be here, but I also feel the reality of it is at some point you gotta take that somewhere else. It's like are we still battling for the soul of a place or is it just one of the changes in history. I often hear people, middle-aged people, talk about how their world has disappeared or the world is disappearing.

I'm like, my world disappeared by the time I was 30. By the time I was 30, I could count on two hands the places that existed in New York still that I went to as a teen. It looked radically different and everything, and I'm 39 now, nothing, there's nothing. That lifestyle, that life physically and in, I guess, just the value system, the moment of it is completely gone.

I guess, I don't know if it's responsibility or just this love for it, but I constantly wanna keep pushing that forward in my life in any way I can, whether it's as a publicist, as an artist, as a business owner. I think that that's my contribution is moving that forward. At this point in my life I've accepted never making a fortune or those things. I'm fine with that. I actually go back to when I cleaned floors in Newark everyday and rented TVs and phones, and I think to myself that really wasn't so bad. It was like no one bothered me, I did it on my own.

One of those jobs was totally under the table, so it was good money. If it goes back to that, it goes back to that, and once you've done it, it's really liberating. You're like, well, I can do anything and I don't need to sell myself out, and I don't need to trade this. Because I can go without, because I haven't had that much. I have more things now than I ever had in my whole entire life, and I could go without plenty of them.

Kristyn: Right, yeah. Is there a motto or quote that you go by that inspires you?

Aleix: I guess there's one. *[Laughter]* This is so funny, right, I'm going to bring it back to Madonna, just to be extra, just to be that way. One

thing that I go back to, and this is something about—feeling this world is not for you, the opportunities aren't out there for you, both for financial reasons and identity reasons is—

I remember when the nude pictures leaked of her, and it was just this big scandal and everyone was talking about it. Because back then, people command the attention of the whole country in a way you can't now, because everyone now is just so scatterbrained. I remember all the newspaper covers and people saying—it just so offended that she was like, "I'm not ashamed." I remember just the newspaper that said "I'm not ashamed," with her picture next to it and that.

That's something that I repeat to myself all the time. It's almost like a mantra, I think about it like, I'm not ashamed. I'm not because I've felt—I've definitely, the world has always tried to shame me, and I have internalized that shame in different ways throughout my life and worked so hard to overcome it. It's just such a simple liberating thing that it's saying, no, I'm not ashamed. I'm not ashamed of any of it or none of it.

Kristyn: I love that. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you wished I had, or anything that you wanna talk about that I didn't bring up or anything like that?

Aleix: Umm, I guess, the one thing that I wanna say is just more about my generation. Later on in life I've learned about all the amazing things that happened in Newark before me and the people. That I would love for people to remember queer people in Newark of the 90s, like the loose ones of us as, I guess the people right after the plague who no one could look—kind of like the latchkey children generation of who kind of raised ourselves in a certain way.

That it was really dangerous that when the streets—that even when the streets were really dangerous and Newark would still burn out and at its worse, that there were still people dreaming here and wanted it to be a different place and make things happen. Even though we've been disconnected from our history and had been filled with all this fear and we live in this reality of violence and crack and AIDS and all these things at the same time, that there were still people here doing amazing things.

I think about my friends, about my trans friends, who walked all the streets here in daylight and all time, and I was always so scared about violence. I never really thought about how brave that was, or how much that empowered me or how much other people's

struggle were already empowering me at that time and being visibility. Even in that really dark and extremely violent time that seems unimaginable to me in Newark today, that people were really unafraid and taking care of each other.

Really beautiful things were happening that might not be monumental things, but there were beautiful friendships and there were people being visible on the streets. I think that that's a beautiful part of that generation of the 90s in Newark and in New York. There wasn't this materialism associated with queer people. I guess no one's chasing the pink dollar yet. I would just love for that to be passed on, that we've always been brave people on the streets and warriors.

The people thought that the rose that grows out of concrete. We've always been that rose that grows out of concrete in any time. I just hope that when people look back on the pre-digital world, or the things right after AIDS, that people can remember that about New York club culture, this moment of alternative America and how that really intersects with queer people and with our power.

Kristyn: That's awesome. I guess then my last question would be what does your favorite kind of day look like?

Aleix: My favorite kind of day—it's definitely a little overcast,

[Laughter]

and it's absolutely not humid. *[Laughter]* So it's not July or August in Newark, but I love—I'm that person, I think that something that's great about New York that seeing anything new is always exciting. Experiencing something for the first time. It's almost like it's Diane Arbus or someone like that who says just seeing something for the first time is always my favorite thing. It's seeing that unexpected thing on the street that fills you with wonder.

It's a nice crisp day with cool air, maybe in the mid-60s, and I'm seeing something that I've never seen before. Yeah, I guess, to me that's something about New York and this area is the discovery of seeing something, encountering something, the unpredictability of it. It's completely unpredictable.

It's not like town life or like my life was like in Spain, where it's you're in the same town with the same thousand people and you see everyone. It's running into something. I was walking down the

High Line the other day, and this vogueing frenzy erupted. I don't even know how or where, off of someone's phone. There were just like ten kids vogueing, another person joined in. It's seeing something like that, seeing something just come together and spontaneous, and it's fun and exciting and artistic and semi-legal.

Kristyn: Queer magic.

Aleix: Yeah, absolutely. My favorite day is full of unexpected things and queer magic and it's definitely out on the streets. It's not indoors, so people being out on the streets together. Because I'm, again generation who's just a big believer in being physically present with other people and physically out on the streets and not just chatting with someone. My favorite day is wandering the streets, and running into characters and all the things you couldn't imagine when it started.

[Laughter]

Kristyn: Thank you so much. This is awesome.

Aleix: Thank you.

[End of Audio]