

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Aaron Frazier

Interviewer: Whitney Strub

Date: November 21, 2017

Location: Newark LGBTQ Community Center

Whitney Strub:

This is Whitney Strub recording here with Aaron Frazier, at the Newark LGTBQ Community Center, on November 21st, 2017. This is our third round. Last time we spoke about clubs, and bars in Newark, and there was so much material that we didn't get through it all. So we're gonna dedicate this round to talking a little bit more about clubs and bars, and then we're gonna check the time and see where we're at, and we'll either continue recording, and talk about the AIDS crisis in Newark, or we'll save that for a separate pre-standing interview, depending on how we feel. Thanks Aaron, for being here, again, and taking the time.

Aaron Frazier:

No problem, thanks for having me.

Whitney Strub:

It's a pleasure. You know so much about these bars and clubs. I don't even know where to start, but I've got a list jotted down of the places that we didn't really talk about last time. I think my plan is maybe just to work through that name by name, and you tell what memories you've got, and then see where that leads.

Aaron Frazier:

That'll work.

Whitney Strub:

I think the 177 Club is a place, maybe you didn't know personally?

Aaron Frazier:

I didn't know personally. My cousin and a lot of their crew went there. You could say I came out afterwards, but I was not privy to the, how would you say, the down-low, or the very secretive part of that.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah, what do you mean by that?

Aaron Frazier:

I was younger, even though me and my cousin, we about, maybe four years difference in age. When I say he had a lot more freedom than I did.

Whitney Strub:

Okay. That was in the South Ward.

Aaron Frazier:

Yes.

Whitney Strub:

Did it stay open into the '80s, or did it close by the time that you did come of age? Do you know?

Aaron Frazier:

I don't even remember it. I only remember hearing of it, and that's it.

Whitney Strub: Did you have a sense of it, any stories you heard about it, or no?

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: Okay, all right.

Aaron Frazier: That was really before my time.

Whitney Strub: Gotcha. Okay well then, the next place I was gonna ask you about, was the lesbian bar on Market street, Majestics.

Aaron Frazier: The Majestics definitely was a lesbian bar. They had their things that they do, played pool, play cards. It was funny, one of my older cousins, she and her friends was there a lot of times. I met a lot of Newark—you might as well say Newark's finest as far as lesbians, back during that time. I can actually say, even though this was my cousin, and these were her friends. They treated me with respect. I come in here, I forgot the lady's name, who was the owner, but she was a DJ also, back then, and she did a lot of parties, private parties, and stuff of that nature.

It was really friendly, a big difference from when Carl Bean song came out, "I'm happy, carefree and gay". We all chanting this song and everybody knew who they were, and we was all under the same umbrella, but then all of a sudden, I don't know, I still ask people to this day, where was I when the fragmentation occurred, and we became segregated? I didn't know. It just happened like overnight, and we're all goin' like this, and some of the lesbians, Tiney and—one of 'em, was one, I think you would call them butch, or dyke, or whatever those particular names that they would use back then, but it was done with respect. At the same time, we all respected one another. It didn't matter what, there was no comingling of that nature, but people respected one another.

Whitney Strub: It was a lesbian bar, but men were welcomed there, and it was a mixed crowd—

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, but most men, if you're a gay man, why would you go into a fuckin' lesbian bar for? *[Laughter]* I only went because my cousin hung there.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: I went there to be sociable, to know who these other people were. I wanna say, I can't say, I was gettin' ready to say, Margarita I met there, but no I meant Margarita at Broad and Market.

Whitney Strub: Okay. When was this? When was Majestics around?

Aaron Frazier: Oh God, I wanna' —

Whitney Strub: Even like a ballpark.

Aaron Frazier: I'll say from early '80s to about the '90s.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: That's when it—maybe a little bit before, it might've just—'cuz they put new houses there.

Whitney Strub: Where was it exactly?

Aaron Frazier: Right on Market Street, once you cross the bridge, in the first row of houses. That's where the Majestics used to be.

Whitney Strub: Wait, so you mean past High Street or Market—

Aaron Frazier: Past High Street, past the new school that they're building on Market Street.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay.

Aaron Frazier: Once you cross that bridge, and you goin' into the next block is three new, well relatively new, they've been there well over 20 years, new homes that they put there. The Majestics used to sit right there.

Whitney Strub: Okay. What do you remember about the woman who ran it?

Aaron Frazier: She was a very kind person, a DJ. She did parties. A lot of the gay gatherings were co-mingle. You know, We all, even though there was a lesbian bar, and there was a gay bar, most times when she gave a party, everybody co-mingled, 'cuz it was the same with the guys. If they had a party of Cornel the bartender gave a party, but Cornel really didn't do too many parties. He entertained, and he helped a lot of people out, but we all just enjoyed one another's company, basically.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Who was that you just mentioned?

- Aaron Frazier:* Cornel used to be the bartender at Murphy's.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah, Cornel—
- Whitney Strub:* How do you spell that?
- Aaron Frazier:* Don't start me lyin'. I wanna' say C-o-r-n-e-l, but also known as Carlotta Ross.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* One of the pioneers for, you could say performance, as far as lip-sync performance. He was good at doing that, and had an entourage of people that would come and see him perform. He performed at First—I never know for sure First Choice, but I do know Murphy's. He's performed at Murphy's. He's performed at Peter Rabbit's, and there was a couple of other bars that he performed at.
- Whitney Strub:* Is he still around?
- Aaron Frazier:* No, Cornel died.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* That's also Bernie's cousin. They were first cousins.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, okay. That's interesting, any other Majestic's memories?
- Aaron Frazier:* No, I just went there because my cousin was there with her friends and sometimes I just—at the time, I was just longing for family camaraderie. When I found out I had a cousin who, I can't even say she was in the life, 'cuz I really didn't know, but a lot of her friends were, and irregardless of whether or not she took on a title or not, I can't say, but she treated me as her cousin, you know, family, and that's what I enjoyed.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, well then the next place I have written down is SRO.
- Aaron Frazier:* SRO was a little bar on Branford, and Halsey Street. If you go on Branford, I mean on Halsey Street now, it's a jewelry store, something pawn shop, I don't know the particulars. It's a little hotdog, a little restaurant on the corner, and then that's where the

SRO was. I actually went there with a friend of mine's who used to— just was the hangout spot.

When you first came into SRO, when I went to SRO, it was a picture of Marc Sadane, who just had released his album, or his single. Don't ask me what it was, cuz I wasn't at the end, but it was doing well, I knew that. Then, come to find out, oh my God, how can I say it? We had a lot of friends that knew one another, but I did not know Marc at that particular time, then I had gotten to know him. He sung back-up for Stephanie Mills, went over to Europe, and has a remarkable voice. He's actually in the process, right now—

Whitney Strub:

Oh boy, I'm sorry. We are at the community center, where I'm volunteering, so I have to pick up the phone here, quickly. You can actually, if you can keep narrating. All right, well, disregard that, it was a spam phone call, so sorry, keep going about Marc.

Aaron Frazier:

Marc was, just an entertainer. I wasn't into the fur, and all of that, but Marc was one of them, he had a fur, and very ritzy, and all the snooty girls would wear. We met on another level, and just simplicity. He's a simple, down-home person. He's about family, and just trying to help out in the community. From that point, come to find out, me and his nephews are good friends. Several of his other family members, we're good friends. I'm not sayin' we call one another, "Hey, how are you doin'?" No, but most times his cousin will say, "Oh child, Marc doin' a show, you comin' with me?" That's what would end up happening. We end up going, supporting 'em and he really was nice, 'cuz it's a new—

Whitney Strub:

Oh, sorry. I'm just gonna pause here for one second. Okay, so we're talking about SRO on Halsey Street. I've got a business card that I found from it. It says Proprietor's, Nelson and Scotty. Does that mean anything to you? I don't know who they are. No?

Aaron Frazier:

I don't know who they were.

Whitney Strub:

Okay, I'm just curious. I found a flyer from 1984, I believe, that mentions—sorry I'm pulling it up as I speak, here. It mentions the gig of the year, Cissy Houston, did she play at SRO? What does that mean? It's hard to picture her playing at a gay bar.

Aaron Frazier:

It wasn't that big, but it could be, 'because I'm telling you, Newark was the melting pot for all music genres. When I went into SRO, a lot of the people that I met were definitely theatrics into entertainment. Murphy's, a lot of the gospel singers, any jazz

singers, all came through Murphy's. They also—the other bars that weren't really quote/unquote gay bars, that was at Broad and Market, it was one, two, three, with the Chicken Shack. It was that club that was over—I don't know the name of that club, but it was a club at Market, Broad and Market, that was upstairs. Docks.

That was supposed to be a gay night, or a gay center. It didn't last long, 'cuz if the kids didn't go there, they would go to Club Sensations, and then they had one at, right over here where the Rutger's School of Business, there used to be a club there. Harmonica did her stand-up, during the beginning there, and host a couple of mini-balls there.

Whitney Strub: What was the club called?

Aaron Frazier: Don't start me to lyin'.

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]* all right. Is that the same place that there was, there was a porn theatre there. Was that the Treat Theatre?

Aaron Frazier: No, you're talking about the Cameo. The Cameo, the building—

Whitney Strub: No, I know the Cameo. There was one other porn theatre in Newark, the Treat Theatre. I don't know if that rings a bell.

Aaron Frazier: Hm-mmm.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Maybe it was earlier. Anyway, I said 1984, sorry, just for the record, it was a 1981 flyer, but it says, "Show of the year, Cissy Houston at SRO." I'm just kind of curious about that, but then—

Aaron Frazier: Yes. I'm down by the park.

Whitney Strub: Okay, we were talking about SRO.

Aaron Frazier: Yes. I had just came home from Virginia Union. I was just walking through the neighborhood, trying to see any major changes. My mother and them was talkin' about this person that lived up the street, named James Beverett. I went up there to be nosey, and I end up meeting him, actually through one of my friends that I used to call my cousin, 'cuz we would always be together, young guy's name's Alan Jackson, he died earlier part of this year. He's actually, even though he's much younger than me, that's how I got to the Village.

The young man was just a person ahead of his time. He eventually introduced me to James, and then me and James got along, and just started hanging out. We hung out at the—I guess he didn't know how to feel. He took me—well, even though I'd already been to Chester Club, I was cool with the owner. How can I say? When I won youth—well, initially I won boy of the year, at the Boy's Club in North Newark. Deli Michael who was the executive director at North Ward Boy's Club—they're a family-owned Chester Club. When I went into Chester Club, I kind of knew everybody, because they knew I was community person, from the area board, which is part of United Community Corporation.

They had a center on Oraton Street in North Newark. We was doin' a lot of community stuff. They had—I'm tryin' to remember, bring everybody into play. Deli Michael, his family, they had a trophy shop in East Orange, and in Newark. One on Central Avenue, up the street from NJCRI, where they're located, is actually the place, what used to be a trophy place, is now the Domino's over there. I went into the Chester Club, we had a few—

Whitney Strub: What was the Chester Club?

Aaron Frazier: Chester Club, in North Newark. It's a bar.

Whitney Strub: Okay, a gay bar, or just a regular?

Aaron Frazier: Just a regular gay bar, but the tee is, the current owner, Archie, he's gay, but he wasn't one of them out there gays, but he was just one of the gay people. He demands respect, coming in for all his patrons, and he pour a good drink. When you wanna go, go have a good drink, you know.

Whitney Strub: Gotcha.

Aaron Frazier: His drinks were equivalent, if not stronger, than that of Murphy's.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: I went there, had a cute time. Then me and James started hangin' out, and he would kind of give me little odd jobs to do on the weekends. I forget where he worked at—no he worked somewhere in the World Trade Center, way before the craziness. He actually even took—now James took me and showed me the New York side of things that I only heard of, about them goin' into the bathrooms, and people standing there at the stalls—I said, "Really?" I went in there, and I went like this. I said, "Really?" I

was like 19, 20, so it was like, oh this is interesting, but I didn't have the guts to do any of that. It just was too public.

Whitney Strub: There's people getting it on at the urinals?

Aaron Frazier: At the urinal, or the stalls—

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: - or contouring them to leave from the—I've been there a couple of times where's they actually arrested a couple people, but I'm like, how are you gonna arrest them, he got his dick sucked, and you know. He was carrying on. You're gonna arrest him after he done climax? What kind of shit is that? That was funny to me. Then he took me to SRO. SRO were—I would actually say the more snootier girls. The upper echelon of gay community in the city of Newark, because most of the people that came into the SRO were, from the little bit that I remember, they wore the furs, and just out there. I just look like, oh no, I can't do that.

I said, that bar is about a bit much for me. The first thing you saw going in was this, like a picture or marquee of Marc Sadane in a fur. I think he was in a fur or something, whatever, or that little hat he had of his album, which was doing well. From there, I eventually got to meet Marc Sadane, and I was like, really? All that? For me, I don't get into all that. I'm a very simple type of child. Marc was, I can actually say, over the years, we became respectful and good friends to one another. Marc was definitely a remarkable entertainer. We've had some bad things happen to him, but he's had some good too. He sung backup for Stephanie Mills. He was almost, you can almost say, from a Newarker's perspective, he was almost equal to Luther Vandross.

Whitney Strub: Wow. Okay.

Aaron Frazier: Him, right now, he has several cuts out that is doin' well, over in Europe and stuff right now, so he's travelin' and he's doin' his thing.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah, I see him on Facebook traveling.

Aaron Frazier: Mm-hmm, so that, from SRO, I then—James took me to Murphy's.

- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so hold—I wanna go, Murphy's I definitely wanna hear about, but just one quick thing, James, that you're telling me about, what's the last name again?
- Aaron Frazier:* I don't know if I should say his last name, 'cuz he's dead.
- Whitney Strub:* It's up to you I mean—
- Aaron Frazier:* Well, James Beverett, he—
- Whitney Strub:* Beverett?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yes.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, how do you spell that?
- Aaron Frazier:* Oh, I couldn't tell—it's been so long.
- Whitney Strub:* Is he the same guy you had mentioned—and I don't think we had been recording, a guy who lived on Halsey, and had a loft, and had parties there?
- Aaron Frazier:* No, no, no, no. That's Shelton Hayes.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, right, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* Shelton Hayes, was—oh God, now you're gonna' have me go back.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah, yeah, can you tell me about both of them?
- Aaron Frazier:* Okay, Shelton Hayes was the, how do you say? He came after Al Murphy. Al Murphy was the host of gay culture in the area. I'm talking about, compatible to that of, okay you have Bobby White who does Las Vegas showgirl type of entertainment. You have Al Murphy who does fashion icon entertainment, from whether or not it was from entertaining in the fashion show, hosting a fashion show, but he was primarily the host of Zanzibar. Shelton came under him. Shelton had just as much connection to the entertainment field, as much as Al Murphy's, if not more.
- When I got to, you could say become friends with Shelton—Shelton was friends with Melba Moore, all of them. Melba Moore sung at his funeral. He was very well-known. The sad part was he should've been, if anybody could've brought gay culture to the

point of the magnitude that it is in New York, as far as clubs, that was Shelton.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Aaron Frazier: Definitely, I would say Shelton, Bobby White; I'd even say Bob and Al, for a first choice.

Whitney Strub: Okay. I wanna come back to them, but just for the moment, Shelton lived on Halsey?

Aaron Frazier: Shelton lived on Halsey. You know where the fabric store is?

Whitney Strub: Okay, so right down here by Rutgers - Newark.

Aaron Frazier: Right.

Whitney Strub: Like, by Warren?

Aaron Frazier: Before—no, no, after Warren, it has a little—

Whitney Strub: Okay, yeah, between Warren and Raymond?

Aaron Frazier: No, no, no, no, you're goin' too far. You're coming back to that street before Warren, but after Bleeker.

Whitney Strub: Okay, I know what you mean, yeah I guess, listeners are probably—

Aaron Frazier: It's a actual; one of those stores is a tattoo shop.

Whitney Strub: Mm-hmm.

Aaron Frazier: He lived upstairs.

Whitney Strub: Okay, I think they've renamed that street, Prudential, didn't they, when Prudential put their headquarters there?

Aaron Frazier: Something like that, yeah. He used to have parties there. Before he moved there—child, he lived on Fulton Street, he lived on Broad, he lived over the top of the doggon'—what is this place? The Chicken joint that's right there on Broad Street? He lived over top of there.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay.

Aaron Frazier: He's always lived in the downtown area, since I've known him, but he always wanted to do parties, like have the club atmosphere. When I say he gave them \$10.00, you got open bar 'til the liquor ran out, food 'til the food ran out, entertainment. He gave you a bang for your buck.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Aaron Frazier: People just didn't get it. Also, I know that he was dealing with consistency, 'cuz if he could've been consistent with it, he would've definitely made a big change here.

Whitney Strub: How big was his loft?

Aaron Frazier: It could hold close to anywhere, 100-150.

Whitney Strub: Oh, okay, wow. Was it just a big, open space that he lived in?

Aaron Frazier: It was a big, open space that he used for—he also did antique. He sold antiques and stuff like that, and collected them, so he had space for that. He had his living quarters. He had closed off a portion of it, far as where he was living at.

Whitney Strub: But so, ground level, or walk-up?

Aaron Frazier: Walk-up.

Whitney Strub: Okay, when he had these parties, did he have a name for it, or was it just kind of party at Shelton's, or did he have a branding?

Aaron Frazier: Nah.

Whitney Strub: No, okay.

Aaron Frazier: No, people knew Shelton was givin' somethin', he would—oh God, who would perform when I was here? Well, Leslie. Oh God. Leslie, you have me look, well she's a pastor of a church. She used to be part of Unity Newark. She went down to North Carolina.

Whitney Strub: Oh, is this DJ Jasmina?

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: Yes, yes. Okay. Who is it, Intense, her group?

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

- Whitney Strub:* Okay, oh that's cool. When is this, you're talking, like late '80's, early '90's?
- Aaron Frazier:* I would say—
- Whitney Strub:* Earlier?
- Aaron Frazier:* Mid-'90's.
- Whitney Strub:* Mid-'90's, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* Mid-'90's, 'cuz I was livin' up in Society Hill. I walked down the street and workin' at the bank.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* It didn't bother me, it was just something to do, and Shelton hired me and put me on the door. Mind you, if I didn't like him, I had more than opportunity, I was taking in his money, but every time he came, I wasn't short. Here's your money. I would let him know if I let somebody in. I said, you can deduct that from my fee, whatever. I was straight-up with him, with his money. I don't play that. I don't have no time for it.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* A few dollars? Please. I made more than that at the bank.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah. What was—I'm just curious, what was he like? What was his personality like?
- Aaron Frazier:* Personality wise, I would say, outgoing person. He gave everybody the benefit of the doubt. He would give you a chance 'til you showed him otherwise. He was old school, but he never looked down on people. He always was tryin' to help some way, somehow. Before he died, I don't even know if any of them finished his book. He was in the process of writing a book.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh really, about what?
- Aaron Frazier:* About his life—
- Whitney Strub:* Really?
- Aaron Frazier:* - his journey. I don't know if that ever got finished.

Whitney Strub: Huh. I'm not aware of it existing, so did he have a next-of-kin? If he left it—

Aaron Frazier: Oh yeah, he had kids. He was married. He was from—

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: - that's why I said the older group of gay people who believe that in order to persevere in the entertainment field; you had to follow the model. You had to have a wife, and whatever, husband with kids, so that they can look at you in a certain way, and respect you and left it there, so professionally, that's how he conducted himself.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so the wife and family were there all along?

Aaron Frazier: They didn't live together, but they were active in this part of his life. I didn't find out 'til, I would say, at one of the parties, I came early, and I was like, "Who 'dat?" "Oh, that's my son." I was like, "Really? You have a son?" It's like different things, just like, Angie and I have been friends since junior high. I didn't find out 'til maybe five years ago, the bitch got a child.

Whitney Strub: [Laughter] all right.

Aaron Frazier: You know.

Whitney Strub: You wouldn't say he was in the closet? He just—

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: - had something of a double life, but it was out in the open?

Aaron Frazier: It was a double life, but it was like professionally. I heard that from several of those who, as far as gay-Newark prominent, if you wanna succeed, yes, you have to look a certain way. You have to appear a certain way for the societal piece, so that they could do their dreams.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Aaron Frazier: They had to do that.

Whitney Strub: Okay. That's intriguing. I have to say, just thinking like an historian now. I'm just wondering where his unpublished book would be, because that'd be a real resource.

Aaron Frazier: Mm-hmm, and you know, I'm tryin' to think, 'cuz Susu [Stewart], came on the scene well after, but somehow the two of them connected. I don't know whether or not she may have info on it, or the follow-up, or what. Aaron, his nephew, who is also a local DJ—good too, he was in Jersey, but then he moved back to New York.

Whitney Strub: Okay, all right. We can follow-up on this another time. I'm just curious. I think that would be a really fascinating document.

Aaron Frazier: Oh yeah.

Whitney Strub: Before we talk about Murphy's, tell me a little about James. It sounds like he helped you navigate Newark's LGBT scene.

Aaron Frazier: James wasn't from Newark. He was from down in South Jersey somewhere, Asbury Park. We just met. In all honesty, I took to him because he reminded me of my older brother, Ricky, who had died. He lived in California, in Oakland, came home from Vietnam, my mother and them told me that they tried to make it seem like he committed suicide, for being gay, he also stuttered. Me and James became friends out of missing my brother, but at the same time, he became my older brother, just somebody who I could talk to about different things that I normally wouldn't have an opportunity about. That's how we became friends.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay, but he knew his way around, like LGBT Newark, pretty well.

Aaron Frazier: He was not from Newark. He just introduced me, 'cuz he still hung out with the straight folks at Chester Club. It wasn't until I went with him down to Murphy's, but it wasn't until, I would say his death, that I began hangin' at Murphy's, and that's where Allen came in. I just said, okay, it was me, Allen, then Burt. Oh God, I remember that night like it was yesterday. My first time I came in—I was introduced to Cornel with the bartender, Bernie's first cousin. I finally get there to the bar, and me and my friends is there. I'm like, okay, I paid their way in. I said, child, all I wanna' do is just dance with 'em.

We commenced to dancin', and during the course of the night, I think we may have got there like 12, maybe 12:30. It was closin',

but they still took my money. I said, wait a minute, I haven't even used my drink ticket. Got into it with some girl 'cuz I said, excuse me, could you let me by? She standing around, I said, "Witch move outta' my way." Lo and behold, whoever she was, well the girl at the time was Bernie's sister, Greta, trying to shine, and all this other craziness. When I tried to, just to find out clarification for my \$15.00, because we didn't drink, and what was gonna' happen, they end up rectifying it. Greta stirred up shit, I called her a witch, she told her—

Whitney Strub: I'm assuming witch was not the word you used.

Aaron Frazier: No, witch.

Whitney Strub: Oh really?

Aaron Frazier: 'cuz during that particular period of my life, I refused to call a woman the "B" word, I would call her a witch.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: She told her brother I called her the "B" word, and I said, "I did not call you a "B". I called you a witch." He called his self going to jump me. I looked at him, and what he didn't realize, was me and his cousin became friends when James had died, so I would come down there, kinda' often, just sit around, I didn't know nothin'. Bernie comes out there, says somethin' to me about, "You sayin' you called my sister..." I said, "Yes I called her a witch, not a bitch." He was talkin' about, well, "You gonna' jump him?" Bernie turns around to say to Cornel, "Cornel, let's jump this bitch." Cornel said, "Oh no, if anything, I'm gonna' help my friend jump you." He said, "What." That's how me and Bernie became friends.

Whitney Strub: Wow, okay. When would this have been? Is this the early 1980s, or mid-'80s?

Aaron Frazier: Mid-'80s.

Whitney Strub: Mid-'80s, okay. You mentioned a few times that James passed away around then.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: What happened with him?

Aaron Frazier: In all honesty? Nobody ever knew. No one talked about it. James was, at the time, was dating some reverend who was the owner of the house. It went real deep and I was like, oh my God. Then when he had me go with him to this church, and I'm lookin', and the man who's preachin' is the lover. I'm like, okay, just a bit much for me.

Whitney Strub: The preacher, I'm assuming, was not pro-gay.

Aaron Frazier: No, yeah, he said a few derogatory things from the pulpit, and I looked at him, and I say, "How you gonna' say that? You're sleepin' with him, and I know you slept with this other child, because that's how..." somehow in the midst of me meeting this reverend, I knew—well I was trickin', so I knew who the other party was, but I never told my friend, James, to kinda create the ugliness.

The other person was an associate from the stroll. I said, "Oh my God, you're doin' this to my friend." I kept tellin' James, you should just pay it, child. Let it go. The wife knew, and the whole nine. The reverend had a wife, and the organist had a wife, but they all used to mess around. During that particular period, for me, I was too afraid, because I didn't know them, and I was not putting myself in that kind of scenario. I just was aware of things.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. I assume you don't wanna name names here, but do you remember the denomination of the church? I'm just curious.

Aaron Frazier: Oh, it was Baptist.

Whitney Strub: Baptist, okay.

Aaron Frazier: It was on Broadway, actually right next to the White Castle. It was a little, whatcha' call it? Storefront church, 'cuz right now the place that's there is a refrigeration, something, across from Broadway Junior High.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay. Tell me more about Murphy's, then.

Aaron Frazier: Murphy's was interesting for me, because during the beginning, I guess when I was young, just new to the, whatcha' call it? A new piece of meat at that particular time, because one of the guys that I kinda'—he caught my eye, he was older, I don't remember his name. I knew he, during that particular time, he was in the play, The Wiz, that was on Broadway. He played the lion. Also, during

that period, I started dating Mr. T. Scott, who was an up and coming singer.

Then I just got bored of them. I wasn't really accustomed to their behavior, because they would act one way with me, but then when we in public, it'd be something totally different. I just didn't feel comfortable, even though T. Scott had the top apartment in Hallmark, on the top floor, which was supposed to be the penthouse, but it wasn't all that grand to me. I went up there, I was like, really? Wow. That's the way I looked at it. It was okay for a moment, and it didn't even last. It didn't last two weeks, 'cuz I was on to the next one and paid.

Whitney Strub:

At this point—what I understand about Murphy's is that, at least historically, it was like a straight bar by day, for the business crowd, and then became a gay bar at night. Is that how you remember it?

Aaron Frazier:

They're saying straight during the day, that most of the staff, who were bartenders at night, worked there during the day. Whether or not they were bus boys, or the cook, or whatever, they worked there. A lot of the patrons during the day were straight, but it was also mixed. You had gay people that have lunch there, you could get a good lunch there. That was the whole thing. I'm talkin' about an affordable, decent lunch, for not that—it wasn't that expensive. I don't remember it being no more than, you could feed two people with \$10.00. Then you talk about drinks on top of that? Yeah, so it was very much that, it wasn't totally exclusive gay during the day. It's just that they had a patronage. They had a lot of the business people who were looking for just to have a decent lunch.

Whitney Strub:

Mm-hmm. Okay. Was the staff mostly gay, or were they just straight people working jobs?

Aaron Frazier:

The staff was mostly gay.

Whitney Strub:

Okay.

Aaron Frazier:

There may've been a couple of pieces of trade, but like I said, mostly gay. Everybody from Cornel, I would say Cornel would be the only one, well Cornel, yeah. Cornel was about the only one that didn't work during the day.

Whitney Strub:

Okay. By this point, racially, was it a mixed place, or was it mostly black, or what?

- Aaron Frazier:* What do you mean?
- Whitney Strub:* Well, the patrons and the gay crowd that went in there.
- Aaron Frazier:* I would actually say it would be mostly white during that particular period.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh yeah, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* You're talkin' about Mulberry Street, but also with Mulberry Street, at that particular time, it was a marketplace, so it didn't necessarily have to be just a white patron's, people just doin' their weekend, or week shopping, wanted to pick up some food, some fish, some fresh meat, cut meat from the place that was there. It was definitely diverse, I would say.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay. I have this memory, I don't think we recorded it, but you told me once about playing, I think, kickball out behind Murphy's.
- Aaron Frazier:* No, not behind Murphy's.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh no, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* We played kickball where the new Prudential Center sit. It used to be a parking lot across the street. We played over there.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, gotcha', but it was like a Murphy's-based group?
- Aaron Frazier:* Murphy's-based group. Bernie would actually get the girls to come up from Pennington Court. They would come up there, and we would have kickball games out there. It would be on a Sunday, sometimes a Saturday, but mostly Sundays. Sometimes they'd cook out in the parking lot, in the midst of the games. That's what we did. That was our weekend. That really was our Pride, because a lot of us didn't wanna' trudge over to New York, only to be trudgin' back, so we started our own little thing there.
- Whitney Strub:* Huh, that's really interesting. I don't have a mental image of that area before they built Prudential, actually. Can you describe the layout a little?
- Aaron Frazier:* Okay, initially, let me—
- Whitney Strub:* I know this is gonna' sound complicated for people listening, but I think it's worthwhile, getting a sense of it.

- Aaron Frazier:* I'm gonna' say this is Murphy's, F Linden's. That was the meat market was there. There's a little driveway there. This is the parking lot where Murphy's is, and then you have all of that area, where we had the actual kickball games.
- Whitney Strub:* Where the Prudential arena is today, that whole area was a big, open lot?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yes. I'll put it to you this way, before the Prudential Center, Whitney was putting a mall with her father and them, a mall was supposed to go there. The mall, they started building the shell of the mall, then they tore down the mall. We were in the space in between that.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, and at that point, Murphy's had moved in the '60's once.
- Aaron Frazier:* Where I'm talkin' about, this is Edison Place—
- Whitney Strub:* Murphy's is on Edison at this point, facing what today is the Prudential?
- Aaron Frazier:* Right.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* Actually where that space, it's that brown stone building, it's a loft, whatever.
- Whitney Strub:* On the backside of Dinosaur Barbeque?
- Aaron Frazier:* Right, now if you take away Dinosaur Barbeque would be the back part of Murphy's.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, I didn't have a concrete sense of that, until right now.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Whitney Strub:* That's interesting. Did Murphy's go all the way back?
- Aaron Frazier:* Murphy's—no, where the back of that other bar is at—
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so that would've been Murphy's.
- Aaron Frazier:* No, no, no. The back—it's about this much space back there, that's how much space was in the back of Murphy's.

- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* I'll say you walk from where that new place is, say at least 20—I'll say give it 30 feet. You count 30 feet from there, 30 feet to probably 40 or 50 to the back. That was Murphy's.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, gotcha'. That makes sense. Let's see. You mentioned the stroll. For people who don't know what that means, could you define the stroll?
- Aaron Frazier:* The stroll. The stroll for the MSM's, for the men who have sex with men, was Halsey Street. From, you can actually say, Washington Park perimeter, 500 Broad Street all around, and I'm talkin' about McCarter Highway, all the way, as an ex-stroll person. Bernie and them was teasin' me about this a couple of weeks ago—"Bitch, we will see you anywhere," because if it was a spot that I thought that was conducive to contouring a date, yes, I was there.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so wait, so you're going down Halsey around Washington Park, down to McCarter, and then what, over to loop back around, where do you go?
- Aaron Frazier:* That's my perimeter. You could say Halsey Street, all the way down Halsey Street, to Clinton Avenue—
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* - to the drag stroll, which is on West Kinney Street. Now mind you, for a short period, the drag stroll was across the street.
- Whitney Strub:* Across the street from where?
- Aaron Frazier:* From—
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, from here.
- Aaron Frazier:* From here, because when I worked at the bank, we used to have problems with the girls, they used to be out there. They was there, then the females was on the other end by Zanzibar.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, okay, and the drag stroll is trans-women—this is sex work, not just cruising.
- Aaron Frazier:* Correct.

- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* This is cruisin'. The stroll was all about crusin'. Nine times out of ten you could pick up a date, and it wasn't always a pay date. Those who was out there paying, you knew who they were.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah, and so this was just kind of understood, when you're saying the stroll, like people in the scene in Newark would know what you meant—
- Aaron Frazier:* Yes.
- Whitney Strub:* - and know where you meant.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yes, all around here was a hotspot.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah, so when did that end? That's not what Halsey feels like anymore.
- Aaron Frazier:* I would say part of the gentrification process.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah? When did that begin?
- Aaron Frazier:* When Rutgers became the new, making Newark a college town.
- Whitney Strub:* Really? Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* The other incident would've been when Dana Rone, who was an out lesbian council woman, nephew got pulled over on the stroll, and she came, and from that point, that's when it changed, because Rutgers Police were very nasty to people on the stroll.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah, okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* If they knew you on the regular, they would say, just like the cop, Ah, get up out of here, okay, I'm gonna' let you go, you're gonna' get, give you a warning now, but I catch you back out here, I'm lockin' you up. Shit like that.
- Whitney Strub:* This is on Halsey?
- Aaron Frazier:* All of this.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so Rutgers Police would only be on Rutgers territory, or they would go further in to the city?

Aaron Frazier: They came from James Street all around. We're talkin' about all the perimeter. All of, in all honesty, far as the stroll, even though this is the particular perimeter, you could go up on High Street, and snatch up a date. It all depends where you at.

Whitney Strub: We're talking like early 21st century here, when this kind of crack-down began, or earlier? Is this like the George W. Bush years, or before that, after that?

Aaron Frazier: I wanna say, I gave up, that was in 1992, gave up the condo, 2000, 2003.

Whitney Strub: 2003? Okay. Why do you remember that date?

Aaron Frazier: That was when they foreclosed on me.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: Sometimes at night, I don't care what time it is, if I felt like going for a walk, my walk would include coming down this way to walk back up the hill.

Whitney Strub: I wanna come back to the foreclosure thing for sure, 'cuz I don't think we talked about that before, but just to ride this out a bit. On the stroll, would there be regulars, you'd recognize one another?

Aaron Frazier: Oh yeah, quite a few.

Whitney Strub: Oh, we have a delivery here. I'm just gonna leave this recording for a second.

[Extraneous Conversation 55:36-55:56]

Whitney Strub: All right, sorry about that. I figure it's easier just leave the recorder going.

Aaron Frazier: No problem.

Whitney Strub: Anyway, so the folks on the stroll knew one another.

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Whitney Strub: I'm just wondering, would you hook up with regulars, or would regulars be kinda competing with one another, to hook up with people who were fresh, or unfamiliar?

Aaron Frazier: Me personally, I didn't wanna know 'em. Some of the people were just ugly, somewhat. I'm tryin' to think exactly the date, back early '80s—you're gonna' have to hold that. I need to hit the bathroom.

Whitney Strub: Sure, I'll pause the recording here for a sec. Okay, here's a question for you. As the police—basically what you were saying is, the police made this a little more hostile, to discourage people from bein' out on the stroll.

Aaron Frazier: Part of what was occurring, was if the white tricks came through, they were being robbed, they were being targeted.

Whitney Strub: Not by police, but—

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, some people just lookin' for a quick whatever the case may be, they tarnish what was out here. They even was a few times that people came through looking for a specific tricks to harm 'em. I remember being out here one day, and these guys—there was like 20 of 'em, lookin' for specific people to hurt. I said, oh my God, this is gonna' be one of them nights that I gotta' fight. They didn't do nothing to me, they just said, "You need to leave the area." I said, "Oh okay."

Whitney Strub: Wait, you mean the police said that, or the people who were threatening?

Aaron Frazier: The people who were threatening.

Whitney Strub: Okay, okay.

Aaron Frazier: They just advised me to leave, and I did. Sometimes you didn't get those warnings. I had, I think maybe out here, maybe two fights. I would always, when I came out here, and I was trickin', I didn't like the corner action. I didn't like that, so I kinda' developed a rapport with those who I was trickin' on with. You called *me*, child, because I can't deal with this 'cuz I had, by that time when I started, just developing, getting my tricks on a regular, I had been—one guy, when I learned how to discern whether or not the person got a gun on 'em, and I'm in the car and a friend of mine showed me what to do, and I had did that, after learning how.

I went like that. I said, "Oh my God, guy got a gun. What I'm gonna do?" I'm on this road, side road where really, they could've just shot me, and left me there to die. I was so glad my acting paid off, 'cuz I acted like, screamin' like he was hurtin' me, child it didn't do—it didn't even faze me. I put on enough show that it got

him off, and he left me there. I was like, okay, I lived to talk about this another day.

Whitney Strub: He was just getting off on threatening you—

Aaron Frazier: No.

Whitney Strub: - or you freaked him out? Sorry, I just didn't—

Aaron Frazier: I think he just wanted to be dominating.

Whitney Strub: Gotcha'.

Aaron Frazier: In all honesty, it really wasn't. His dick was not all that—it was small, and it, 'cuz usually I'm a size-type person. During that particular period, specifically if I'm doin' it for free, it's gonna' be somethin' I wanna' do. I was like, child, this is it? When I realized he had the gun, I had to go along with the scenario.

Whitney Strub: Okay, gotcha.

Aaron Frazier: The next one, which made me come to terms with not doin' the, standin' on the corner, was when the guy put the knife to my throat. After I done did the deed, and he put the knife to the throat to rob me.

Whitney Strub: Wow.

Aaron Frazier: That was when I said I can't do the corner thing too much anymore, now.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I mean how traumatic was that? Was that something that you shook off, or was that deeply traumatizing?

Aaron Frazier: Oh, I shook it off. I was mad as hell, because little did he know; had uh—I was mad. The only thing—I'm tryin' to think, that was before I actually got into it on Halsey Street with some child, I don't even know. That's when I got stabbed in my face.

Whitney Strub: Oh God. What happened?

Aaron Frazier: Come to find out child, I done slept with some child's man, who I didn't know was her man, and I'm like, well miss thing, don't get upset with me, you need to check him. She came at me. When that bitch—when we first connected, she kept followin' me, and I wasn't likin' that. I had just turned two tricks, and I'm like, this

bitch is still followin' me. Then I followed her, and I check to say, come to find out, that's what it was. She pulled out the knife, but I boxed her, 'cuz during that time, I was boxin'. She threw the knife, when the knife went one way, and I was like, okay, she threw it. I went back and commenced to whoppin' ass some more.

Whitney Strub: Whoa.

Aaron Frazier: In the midst of us fighting, and we had to fight, say from this block on, and I had a lot of built up shit inside. Somehow we ended up back by the fuckin' knife. I didn't even know I was stabbed. I just felt somethin' runnin' down my face, and I went like this, and then that was traumatizing. Some homeless man walked up to me, he say, "You all right?" I said, "No." He said, "What you want me to do?" He said, "You want me to call the ambulance?" I said, "No, call this number." It was Murphy's.

I called Cornel before calling my mother, because I needed to be prepared to deal with my mother. I called Cornel, and Cornel, and half the bar came around to where I was at, and made sure I was all right. Cornel stayed with me 'til my mother got up to the hospital. The people at the hospital said it's a good thing you're not—'cuz I had been drinkin', and they had said it's a good thing that you was, 'cuz had you not, you wouldn't be here.

Whitney Strub: Because something about the blood?

Aaron Frazier: The adrenaline, I was bleeding enough to the point, the adrenaline was flowing, it was comin' out like water. Mind you, it happened in front of the state building, but I ended up on Broad and—the nearest phone booth was at Broad and Raymond Boulevard.

Whitney Strub: Wow, that's intense. The person who stabbed you, you're saying "she", are you talking about—

Aaron Frazier: It was a queen. I didn't see them for a minute, then when I did see them, every time I saw them, wherever I saw them, I commenced to fighting them again. I saw them at Broad and Market, they ran to a cop. I still got a 2x4, and commenced to wearin' on that ass.

Whitney Strub: Alright. Two more quick follow-up questions here, you mentioned the white tricks getting targeted on the stroll, at a certain point. Would they just get straight up accosted and mugged, or are we talkin' kinda' like what you went through, like somebody would hook up with them, and then mug them?

- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah, very, very that.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so the—
- Aaron Frazier:* They wouldn't—you can't quote me on this.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah, do you want me to turn the recording off?
- Aaron Frazier:* You can.
- Whitney Strub:* Hang on. Did you know the guys who were doin' the shake-downs at all, or where did they come from?
- Aaron Frazier:* I didn't know them, know them. I just knew them from down here. I didn't try to get to know them—
- Whitney Strub:* Sure, sure.
- Aaron Frazier:* - 'cuz I didn't want some of them, I didn't like. A couple of them used to come through Murphy's. There was one who was a twin, and all while he was at Murphy's, I would—
- Whitney Strub:* Sorry. Okay, so we're back recording, we are joined by Don Ransom, the Reverend Don Ransom, with whom I do intend to do a future full-on interview, but I've just got a few more places, maybe we can work through these quick, and then we can wrap up this particular chapter. I have one more question about the increased policing of this area that you mentioned. I just wondered if you had any run-ins with police while you were out and about, that you wanna' talk about.
- Aaron Frazier:* It don't bother—child, when I worked at 500 Broad Street, and my lunch, and my break was walking the stroll, or picking up a piece of trade, one night this piece of trade was taking so long, and I kept sayin', "Hurry up, hurry up." The damn cops rolled up on me with my pants down, and I'm laid there, and I'm goin' like this, oh my God, but I was able to pull 'em up before they really—but I couldn't—
- Whitney Strub:* So what, you're in an alley, or in the car?
- Aaron Frazier:* I'm at Halsey Street and Market, in that—actually on the side of SRO, that parking lot, it's a little—
- Whitney Strub:* This is not nighttime, it's during your lunch break?

Aaron Frazier: Yes it is, 3:00 in the morning, is my lunch break.

Whitney Strub: Oh, okay, okay, gotcha.

Don Ransom: He was working the nightshift.

Aaron Frazier: At the time— me and my father has the same name, even though my name is Edwards, his is Elders, the cop was bein' nasty. He even pulled out a knife, said, "I should cut you." Or somethin' shit. I just looked at him, paid it. He said, "They let the other guy go, because he didn't have a record." My father's tickets came up, they kept me—that's when they started doin' the little, had the little security booth at Broad and Market, took me there. I had to be there for two hours 'til they finally said, we just gonna' let him go. When I got back to the job, I told the boss, I said, "Girl, the cops got me on my father's tickets, I hadn't made up that kind of excuse." I say, "Give me five minutes to take a breather, and I'll knock that work right on out." That was my run-in with them. It was a very homophobic officer.

Whitney Strub: He said explicitly homophobic stuff to you?

Aaron Frazier: Oh yeah, very much so. A lot of stuff I never really talked about. Just because I'm gay, yes I should've known a little bit better, but the person I was with—for me, it shouldn't take five minutes, like a hour.

Don Ransom: For me, the run in that I had with a Newark cop, I was actually coming out of Penn Station, I can't remember where I was going, but I was talking to his brother, who I didn't know that was the cop's brother. He used to be a client of mine at Straight and Narrow where I worked. When he came up, and he said, "Don't give my brother any money, 'cuz he's only gonna' buy drugs." I said, "I don't think so." He said, "Well, how do you know?" I said, "One, he's still in with drug court. I'm still his counselor, and I haven't signed off on it." He went, "Oh, you're Don. You're the guy my brother talks about. How did you get him to straighten up?" I said, "One, we talked about his momma coming down to see him all the time, since you all wouldn't bring her." Momma would go down to Rahway to see him and all.

I said, "Second, he's a jailhouse lawyer, where he made one mistake. If he leaves their program, he gets an escape charge. That's five years, plus the eight that he has to do." He didn't believe me. When we got in front of the judge, he said, "If people

leave the program, what do you consider that?" She said, "Oh, that's an escape charge, that's five years, plus your sentence."

When we got back to the program, he went, "Wow, you didn't lie to me." I said, "No, I told you what was up." From then on, whenever I saw him, "I'm clean, I'm clean, I'm clean." Then I said to his brother, I said, "What he really needs is a chance. You all keep bringing up what he did. We know that, he paid for it. Just like, I'm sure there's some guys that you work with that drink and drug responsible, or if they don't, we don't know about it. Your brother made a promise to his mother before she passed, that he would be clean and sober."

He looked at me and said, "How'd you know that?" I said, "I got him permission to go to the hospital to see her, 'cuz I knew how sick she was. He got to talk to his mother, being clean, being sober, and not being handcuffed. Momma didn't have to come to jail and be almost stripped naked, or searched." He went, "Wow." I said to him, "You wanna' know anything else? Your brother was in jail for five years, he got out, but if I were straight, would that make a problem?" He said, "No, whoever you were, you got my brother clean. That's all I'm worried about." That was it. Even when I see him now, he says, "My brother's doin' okay, my brother's doin' okay."

Whitney Strub: Huh. No, that's great. I've got four establishments I wanna' ask about, and I think that can clear out this round of the interview. The first one is First Choice.

Aaron Frazier: First Choice, now for me, those were another bunch of snooty girls. I didn't do well with them. I went a couple of times, because friends of mine was going. Cornel, actually to be honest, I don't ever recall while she was livin' there, we went to First Choice. Her thing would be, once Murphy's closed, we would hit Peter Rabbit's, then the Nickle Bar.

Whitney Strub: Where are they? I don't know—

Aaron Frazier: In New York.

Whitney Strub: Oh. Okay.

Don Ransom: In New York. I didn't like First Choice because they didn't really want that many women in there, and I have always had women in my life, whether straight, or whatever. You'd come in and they'd

be, and I'm sittin' there goin', "Who are these bitches with the Budweiser bottle, with a straw in it?"

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, what was the bar that was in Jersey City?

Don Ransom: The one off Newark Avenue?

Aaron Frazier: Right, right, right. That's the other bar that they used to go to.

Whitney Strub: Oh, okay, you know I had thought First Choice was mostly a lesbian bar, but you're saying, no.

Aaron Frazier: No, it became more lesbian—

Don Ransom: When the men stopped going there.

Aaron Frazier: No.

Don Ransom: No, what is it?

Aaron Frazier: When Bob's mother, Tilly got involved. That's when it became more lesbian.

Whitney Strub: When would that have been, roughly?

Aaron Frazier: Oh, I would say around mid-'90s.

Whitney Strub: I think you mentioned the owners were Bob and Hal?

Aaron Frazier: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Who are they?

Aaron Frazier: Child, just two gay couples, honey. Bob was no—well, I'm a dishin' the dirt that was told from the street. Bob was said to have had 12 inches. I never got to see it. That was the only thing—

Don Ransom : One of them worked for the city, or the county.

Aaron Frazier: Al works for the board.

Don Ransom: Board of Ed?

Aaron Frazier: The Board of Ed.

Don Ransom : Oh.

Aaron Frazier: I knew Bob, but I didn't know him on that particular level. We became okay, because Ms. Toni was good with him. I'll hook you up with—Ms. Blunt was one of them, Chaz.

Whitney Strub: Craig, yeah, I know Craig.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, he was with Bob and them, during that particular period.

Whitney Strub: Are Bob and Al still around?

Aaron Frazier: Bob is dead. Al is still around.

Don Ransom: Yeah, but Craig could fit in there because Craig was the type, nothin' bothered Craig. Craig would walk around like, it's okay, it's fine. The building's on fire. I didn't like First Choice, because for me to go in there, I knew a lot of the clients. I had did a lot of counseling, and testing with them, and it bothered me. I couldn't say anything, because they're sittin' there talkin', tellin' everyone, I took my HIV test, and I'm negative. I'm sittin' there wantin' to scream, bitch, no you're not negative, you are positive, and you're not using condoms.

I'm sittin' there thinking, and then you're talking to someone that I like, but now I'm afraid to go with them, because if you two have had unprotected sex, God knows who you're spreading it to. It just bothered me. Then a lot of folks would see me, I would tell them—'cuz you see me talking to someone, don't assume that they're positive and don't assume that they're gay.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, that makes sense. Are Bob and Al white, black? Just to get a sense of who's running a bar in the Ironbound.

Aaron Frazier: Say that again.

Whitney Strub: Oh, racially, Bob and Al, are they white, black?

Aaron Frazier: Black.

Whitney Strub: Oh really? Okay, so why then, did they put the bar in the Ironbound, which seems like [crosstalk 01:16:32]

Aaron Frazier: They owned the building.

Don Ransom: They owned the building, yeah.

- Aaron Frazier:* Tilly, the mother, lived upstairs. Bob and Al had a townhouse in Society Hill. They lived up the street from me.
- Whitney Strub:* Were the patrons mostly black, or was it mixed?
- Aaron Frazier:* I would say black. No, you can say mixed, 'cuz they had Spanish—
- Don Ransom:* Mixed.
- Aaron Frazier:* - people there too.
- Don Ransom :* I guess it was whoever was around the neighborhood. For me, there was never a problem, because I know friends of mine had said they got harassed, or somethin'. Whenever I went down there, I never got called names, or had looks or whatever.
- Whitney Strub:* You mean homophobically harassed, or racially harassed?
- Don Ransom :* People would call you the “N” word, or the “F” word, or whatever. I would tell my friends, I would say, “How did you carry yourself, or what was going on?” To me, it was like the Ironbound is like, they don’t think they are a part of Newark.
- Whitney Strub:* Right, right.
- Aaron Frazier:* Right.
- Don Ransom:* My thing is, I’m sorry, I pay taxes, I live in Newark, so my taxes provide you with city services, so *bump* you all.
- Whitney Strub:* How did the mother, Tilly, make it more of a lesbian bar?
- Aaron Frazier:* She was, I’m gonna’ say like a butch.
- Don Ransom :* AG.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah, and to be real honest, to be truthful, I got along better with Tilly, then I did Bob and Al. That also could be because my cousin, during that particular period, was friends with her.
- Don Ransom :* I also think the mother was a business woman, and she knew that when customer comes in, you treat the customer right. If the customer comes in, and they feel comfortable, what are they gonna’ do? They’re gonna’ say, let’s go to First Choice. Tilly is there, Tilly is wonderful. She knew who to give free drinks too,

and she knew who, if you had had too much, good-bye, or cut you off. She had no problem tellin' bartender...

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, she was totally different. I would actually say she looked out more for the patrons, than they really realized. She died too.

Don Ransom : Yeah, yeah. It was just so difficult because I know that we want—we're askin' for equal rights, we want all of this, but yet, I know some of the men would come into the bar, and they'd be goin' like, "Why are they here?" Then the women would be lookin' and goin', "Why are they here?" Then you get the crowd that's in the middle that feels like, I want my sisters here, I want my brothers here, let's all just have fun. That's why I stopped going, because I wanna be able to go out and dance, and party, and have a good time.

We were there one night, and, I don't know, this one girl was sayin'—I was dancin' with her girlfriend, and she got jealous, or whatever. I said, honey, "I don't even eat fish on Friday, okay?" I didn't tell her partner, but I knew her partner, because she was in our program in Paterson. Then when she said, "Honey, this is Don, the guy that, the program in Paterson." She went, "Oh." She said, "I need to talk to you." I said, "Well, whatever happened between your girlfriend and I when she was at the program, or in counseling, I can't tell you."

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Don Ransom : What I wanted to tell her was she was probable drinkin' and druggin' because of you.

Whitney Strub: Okay, so three more places, but I think these are gonna' go fast, because I think Aaron, you've said you didn't really have much to do with them, but the Globe in downtown Newark.

Don Ransom : The book store, the movie theatre.

Aaron Frazier: No, right, but they had moved from there. They was right next—

Whitney Strub: Wait, they moved from where?

Aaron Frazier: It was on Broad Street, right next to Symphony Hall. The problem that I had—I went when Bernie, he had a ball at the Globe, Jourdan function, I showed up, just to be supportive, and hang out, and drink, and get drunk.

- Don Ransom :* Did they fight?
- Aaron Frazier:* They fought.
- Aaron Frazier:* That was the norm at the Jourdan ball.
- Aaron Frazier:* Also at the Globe, because—
- Don Ransom :* Then the Globe moved up here by, didn't it move up here by Orange Street?
- Aaron Frazier:* Something like that.
- Whitney Strub:* By like on Broad?
- Don Ransom :* Yeah, Orange and Broad. No that was the Little Theatre, the Little Theatre is down closer to where—
- Whitney Strub:* The Little Theatre, the porn theater?
- Don Ransom :* Yeah, that's down by where, what bank is there? Chase and Wells Fargo. That's the Little Theatre. The Globe had moved up there by Orange Street.
- Aaron Frazier:* Somewhere on Orange Street.
- Don Ransom :* Orange Street, yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* It was transitional, but it also, it was a lot of drama. It was a lot of young people, and chaos, even with—
- Don Ransom :* A lot of wanna' be heterosexuals coming in, men.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah, and then actually a recent-- 'cuz he tried to make, like reintroduce it. Somebody got shot at one of the mini-balls there.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* I never did her, except for when Bernie had that ball there, and if it wasn't somebody who I know, I didn't go.
- Don Ransom :* That was when—'cuz when we did the '93, was it, the first fire ball?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.

Don Ransom : Because we had a friend of ours that knew someone in City Hall we had 15 off-duty Newark cops, because we said come in peace, or don't come at all. We needed to get out \$3500.00 back from the Robert Treat Hotel. We said there'll be no fighting. Even though there was drama at the door, I said to Korim, and that's all we had to tell him, and they quieted down. The other balls and things that they were having, people were trying to tear the place up.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Don Ransom : That's why it was limited as to where people could have balls, so then they would need to go into New York, or go into Philly, or somewhere. We won't wanna' talk about Philly.

Aaron Frazier: No, no, no, no. I'm gonna' just say this, part of, even though me and Bernie are cordial today, when I was in the house in LaBelle, and we had our first house ball at Irvington Manor. I don't know what happened between Bernie and Patty. All I know is, something occurred, and next thing I know, Bernie said, "Tear it up." I'm like, "Bitch, she ain't the only one that put money in this fucking ball." I'm cussin' at her. I'm up in drag, and Big Sheila's throwin' chairs, tryin' to hit Miss Cocoa. I'm catching chairs, and I invited my co-workers from the bank. I was like, oh my God.

I felt so bad, because they wanted—Patty and Cocoa, they were tryin' to pull Cocoa off the stage. I'm like, oh, no, no, no, no. It was a ugly scene. My reason for saying that, none of them take ownership for what is today. Ballroom was actually in Newark, and in New Jersey, a growing thing. It had a lot of creative people, but the majority of the creative people didn't wanna' deal with that craziness, so the ballroom scene died in Newark.

Don Ransom : I know, because when we did the fire ball, we had the \$2,000.00 grand prize, but then we had separate judges. Our thing was, we would bring judges and things in, and we would sit and say, "This is how it's going to be, no shade, no whatever." When we say grand march at 8:00, we meant that, because the hotel would tell us, ball ends at 1:00. You all have to be out of here by 2:00. When they said we're not losing \$3500. One of the things was a lot of folks would come, and we would tell them, yes this is a ball, but all that, I ain't speakin' to this one, I ain't speakin' to that one, I'm not doin'—no, you're not doing that.

We even had security in the back so that people wouldn't come back, and try and mess up someone's grand prize, or whatever, or take someone's costume, or something, or roam the hotel, because

they'd be in the backroom, and then that meant they could go to the kitchen. We would tell them—my whole thing was yes, we're throwing the ball, but I'm not in the house.

The only thing we're gonna' ask is that when we do grand prize, because the message had to be very specific on HIV prevention, that we had people that worked in the field. If you were wrong, plain and simple. All this that we're gonna' come up on the stage, and we're gon—no, no, no, no honey. No, no, no. I'm about to lose my job, okay I love you all dearly, but ya'll ain't threatenin' nobody. Everyone thought that we favored the house of Vizcaya, or the house of Richards. We didn't favor them, they just bought grand prize, trust me, they bought it.

[Extraneous Conversation 01:26:57-01:27:04]

Don Ransom : And Then it got into this thing, old school, new school, what's real, what's not real, and this. The one category that used to get me was labels. They would say labels, not Canal Street, because people would be down shopping on Canal Street, and it's not Gucci, it's not Michael Kors, it's not whatever. You had to bring the real thing.

Aaron Frazier: We had people—one of the things, far as a lot of people who did not know Newark, we had a lot of people who actually worked for a livin', had their own side businesses, who literally did not booze or steal, they bought their labels, and they could show you the receipt.

Don Ransom : And I had a friend of mine that had a Blackglama mink, and someone ask him if it was off of Canal Street. And He just walked over, and just draped it on 'em and say, "Feel it."

Whitney Strub: *[Laughter]* all right. I'll try to wrap this up, and get out of your hair. I've just got two more places I'm gonna' ask you about, so Café Euphoria.

Aaron Frazier: Euphoria. That was around for about, maybe, I'll say every bit of 50 cents.

Whitney Strub: Oh, okay.

Don Ransom : A hot minute

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, because they did open mic, Ms. Teresa was hosting there.

- Don Ransom :* Is that the place down on Washington?
- Aaron Frazier:* No, that's on Academy Street.
- Don Ransom :* Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* Academy Street. Quick as it came, it left.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh, okay, when was that, about? Do you—?
- Aaron Frazier:* Oh don't show me lyin'. I would say well around 2000.
- Don Ransom :* It grew up '98', '99', 2000, but it was boom, boom, boom.
- Aaron Frazier:* It was, actually, I would say about—this is givin' it too much room.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh really, so it's pretty small?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Whitney Strub:* Then was it mostly lesbian focused, or not?
- Aaron Frazier:* In actuality, the lesbians were the ones who kept it as long as it did.
- Don Ransom:* It did because we men didn't like it, when it was too small.
- Whitney Strub:* Yeah, and was Ms. Teresa the driving force, or was she just like the MC? Who ran it?
- Don Ransom:* Was she a bar maid or something, or—
- Aaron Frazier:* Teresa, she had nice [*crosstalk 01:29:29*]
- Don Ransom:* She was a party promoter, or somethin'—
- Aaron Frazier:* Right, right.
- Don Ransom :* She was one of the promoters.
- Whitney Strub:* She wasn't the owner of the club?
- Aaron Frazier:* No, no.
- Whitney Strub:* Do you know who was?

- Aaron Frazier:* No.
- Whitney Strub:* All right, I guess I can ask her. Okay, then final place I wanna' ask you guys about, is the Armory.
- Aaron Frazier:* Chime in, chime in.
- Whitney Strub:* Join in, join in. We have a third interviewee!
- [new figure]:* I only went there one time in my life, and it was too much for me.
- Whitney Strub:* Too much, how so?
- [new figure]:* It was another generation. It was another generation.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Don Ransom:* It was the youngin's.
- Aaron Frazier:* Youngin's, and they had a lot of fights. We're old school. We're not about the fight. We like to have a good time, even if I have a problem with you, it's like child, please, pay it-
- Don Ransom :* Most of those young ones there, I think they were looking, either for sugar daddy's, or sugar momma's, or whatever. Their whole thing is, I'm pretty, look at me, I got hair, I got teeth, I got whatever, but that still don't make you attractive. Their music, when the music changed, that's what bothered me.
- Whitney Strub:* What was the change, what did it change from, and to?
- Don Ransom:* I would say the hip-hop, to rap, or whatever. We're used to having these where you could dance and whatever, you could hold someone close, and feel the body, but now these kids, their dancing, and they ain't touched in 200 years.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so there's a real generation gap, here.
- Don Ransom :* Oh yeah, oh yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so where was the Armory exactly?

- Aaron Frazier:* Now, Sussex Avenue. I don't know that side of the street, but they built a new school right in front of it. That's Norfork, if you come down one block—
- Don Ransom :* Right there by New Hope, across from New Hope.
- Aaron Frazier:* That's Newark School.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Don Ransom :* Newark to Charter School, Mary and somebody Charter School.
- Aaron Frazier:* I just don't know that street, the name.
- Don Ransom :* Newark.
- Whitney Strub:* How long was it open?
- Don Ransom:* Is that Newark Avenue?
- Aaron Frazier:* That might be, yeah, Newark.
- Don Ransom :* Yeah, it's Newark Avenue.
- Whitney Strub:* How long did the Armory stay open?
- Aaron Frazier:* Armory, that was a regular bar.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh. Okay.
- Aaron Frazier:* It was a regular bar, and it was a heterosexual bar.
- Aaron Frazier:* It was straight during the weekdays, wasn't it?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yes.
- Don Ransom :* Yes, straight during the weekdays, gay, Friday, Saturday, Sunday brunch.
- Aaron Frazier:* Right.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, for how long? How long was it—?
- Don Ransom :* I don't think a lot of people went to it, because the church was across the street.

- Don Ransom* That's one reason why I didn't like goin'.
- Aaron Frazier:* That big Catholic church?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Don Ransom* No, no, no, no, New Hope.
- Aaron Frazier:* New Hope wasn't across the street. That was down the street.
- Aaron Frazier:* Right.
- Aaron Frazier:* That was a garage, and then a empty warehouse, or somethin'.
- Aaron Frazier:* Right, and the liquor store right on the corner, 'cuz it's the only—
- Don Ransom* Newhouse owned it, New Hope owned it, right? 101 Sussex Ave. That four-story building.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Don Ransom* They tore that down to make the school, right?
- Aaron Frazier:* You're talkin' about across the street from the church.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah, New Hope owned that property, 'cuz we used it for parking. I was goin' to New Hope at that time.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Don Ransom* I know there's a parking lot, they had a four-story building, and then they built the Charter School.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, well, any concluding thoughts, places I didn't ask about, or things you wanna' add here? I think we've covered my agenda here for this interview, but anything you wanna' throw in, I'll record it.

Aaron Frazier: I just say, Newark kids always had, unfortunately, a history of not being supportive of gay establishments. That has occurred from Al Murphy, to Shelton, to even right now, only I will say when George Laughton owned the Black Box, and that was a affiliate, where there was no drinks, and stuff. When I had my function there, I drank.

Don Ransom BYOB.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah, but it wasn't like an establishment like Murphy's, or SRO, any of them. No liquor was supposed to be on the premises.

Don Ransom The other pseudo thing was always, the Lincoln Park Music Festival. You could go and see gay men and women you ain't seen in 200 years. Those three days, we owned Lincoln Park.

Aaron Frazier: Yes.

Don Ransom I'd say from Friday night 'til Sunday.

Whitney Strub: How far back does that go? When did that start?

Aaron Frazier: It's 11 year.

Don Ransom Eleven years.

Aaron Frazier: Eleven years. Because I know a couple of nights, I left, and I had—'cuz my cousin, Stanley, his friends, they'd come in from New York. When we walked from there, by the time we got to Bro—I said, "Oh, this is so nice. I felt so much like a lady. I smashed up a piece of trade that didn't even know I was lookin'." *[Laughter]*

Don Ransom The reason why I loved it 'cuz, first time I went to Lincoln Park, that's when I met Rodney Gilbert. I knew him, and I heard, blah, blah, blah. Then he came, and he was wearing this fabulous sari. I'm looking at everyone else being whatever, and I said, "This mother fucker is on." He walked over, he said, "Oh, how do I look?" I said, "Oh, I want that." Then we became personal friends. Everybody else, I think, lookin' like they were dressed whatever, when he walked through with that turban on, and that sari, and I said, "If he can walk in, if he can park like that, I can too." Everybody was there.

Aaron Frazier: One of the things I will say that will be missed, and everybody that goes to Lincoln Park, if you were associated with him, 'cuz my

cousin was associated with him. She said, "Come on bitch, they're gonna' have food." I said, "Food? Okay." We at Lincoln Park, and I kid you not, I was already—I hate the Lincoln, so I was goin' for a second round. We said we gonna' get somethin' to eat, and then go get the second round. Went right up in Miss Rodney's house and I was like, oh, I saw everybody.

Don Ransom

Everybody in creation was there. Let me tell you, when you went there, you knew you were gonna' get good food, and good liquor, and good music, and good company.

Aaron Frazier:

Oh, no, no, no, no. When I went, these were the NA girls.

Don Ransom

Oh, okay, yeah.

Aaron Frazier:

There was no liquor, but they didn't shun me, because I told them, I said, "I'm gonna' go get a drink." I left, 'cuz the one, she come to church every Sunday, the light-skinned one, that's her Judy. I met her there.

Don Ransom

I just gave Rodney his 24-year medallion, but he was able to be in that world, and the other world. It's like I said, the people—I can go to a bar and have a good time. People said to me, "I'll buy you a drink, but I'm not gonna' buy you a soda." I just tell them, "Fuck it, I'll buy my own." I don't drink. Sometimes people find that very difficult when—I'm sittin' in a bar and I order a bottle of water, and it's \$5.00, and a drink is 6. You get tempted to say, give me a shot on the side, but I don't. The thing is, Newark, while we have this wonderful, amazing—I know when the police commissioner was sayin' he knew there were two openly gay cops. I had to laugh at him. I said, "Listen, I know more police women, and I can't tell you the number of guy—they may not be openly gay, but I know that they are."

Aaron Frazier:

Sho 'nuff. Look, I'm not gonna' mention no names, but I just go like this, Mm-hmm.

Don Ransom

We won't even go into the Sheriff's department.

Aaron Frazier:

Or better yet, the ones that used to only come to the drag stroll. Yes.

Don Ransom

Well, see, I never did that. I never did the drag thing, okay? No problem.

Aaron Frazier:

I'm not sayin' I got up in drag and did the stroll, but a lot of time when I first went to the drag stroll, I was with Ms. Hoochi. I say,

"Yeah bitch, I'm gonna' go get my 40, I'll walk you down there." That's the night I met Ms. Tracy, and then after that, I used to go down there, holler at Angie when she would be there.

Aaron Frazier: What Angie?

Aaron Frazier: Angie. *[Laughter]*

Aaron Frazier: I just am used to them looking at me like, this is really amazing.

Don Ransom I used to go up and pay with condoms too, just in case you all needed 'em.

Aaron Frazier: Their stroll is different—

Aaron Frazier: Right.

Aaron Frazier: - than this.

Aaron Frazier: That was before I came down here.

Don Ransom I would just go down and give 'em condoms, and tell "em, "If you all need to come down to the project and get—741 Broadway, come down get tested." Whatever.

Whitney Strub: Wait, wait, wait, the drag stroll is different from the gay, male stroll.

Aaron Frazier: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: What do you mean by that?

Aaron Frazier: Some of the girls who was out there during that particular time, their men, or what do you call 'em, pimp, or whatever?

Don Ransom Their pimp, yeah.

Aaron Frazier: Will be watching their back while they—

Don Ransom Watching their back.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Aaron Frazier: That didn't happen out here.

- Whitney Strub:* Okay, so I mean you're saying they actually were safer in some way, because they had that?
- Aaron Frazier:* Yeah.
- Don Ransom* Creepy, as long as the pimp wasn't crazy.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay, okay.
- Don Ransom* Some pimps, if you tryin' to sit there, and they're tryin' to negotiate something, then a pimp would come over and go, "It's 50, or." Because I know one of the projects that we did in D.C. was the girls there learned how to put condoms on with their mouth, because the guys would say, "Okay, we'll give you \$40.00 for straight-up, raw blow-job." Otherwise, the girls would be chargin' 25, but then they learned to put the condom on, boom, boom, boom, they got the extra 15.
- Whitney Strub:* Okay.
- Don Ransom* And That's how they were protecting themselves.
- Whitney Strub:* Oh wow, that's an important trick.
- Don Ransom* 14th and Kay in D.C. whoops.
- Aaron Frazier:* 14th Street.
- Whitney Strub:* All right, well I will stop recording for this session, but thank you all. I appreciate it.

[End of Audio]