

## Queer Newark Oral History Project

**Interviewee:** Bernard McAllister

**Interviewer:** Esperanza Santos

**Date:** October 2, 2019

**Location:** Rutgers University-Newark

Esperanza Santos: So good morning, everyone. My name is Esperanza Santos, and I'm here with Bernie McAllister. It's October 2, 2019, at about 11:10 in the morning. And so thank you, Bernie, for being willing to be interviewed.

Bernard McAllister: You're more than welcome.

Esperanza Santos: Thank you.

Bernard McAllister: Thank you for having me.

Esperanza Santos: All right. So we're just gonna go through some of these questions as to like, you know, get an idea. And so, when and where were you born?

Bernard McAllister: I was born—when, in the 60s. The exact date is not necessary. I'm a Pisces, and I was born here in Newark. Newark, New Jersey.

Esperanza Santos: Beautiful. And who raised you as you grew up?

Bernard McAllister: Well, I was raised by a single mother. It was just me and my sister. But my maternal grandparents raised, we went there every summer to North Carolina, to be with them for at least thirteen summers. And by my extended family, my sister had her best girlfriend, my aunt Ethel. And they kind of raised all the children together.

Esperanza Santos: Hmm.

Bernard McAllister: So we all—we had extended cousins and aunts and uncles, so it was like a village raised us.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, it was like a party in the house all the time.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, yeah. To a certain extent it was a good time. Me and my little cousin recently went out to dinner. And we took discussed that, what a great childhood we had. So it was cool.

Esperanza Santos: Awesome.

Esperanza Santos: And when you grew up, was it always in Newark? Because you were also saying that you also had family in North Carolina?

Bernard McAllister: Well, 75% of my raising was in Newark. But again, my grandparents were in, moved to North Carolina when I was maybe like five years old, they moved back to North Carolina. So my mother being single, you know, during the summer, she didn't want us up not having anybody on watch over us. And this is before we moved to the Ironbound section. We just lived in Newark.

Esperanza Santos: Like by what streets in Newark?

Bernard McAllister: And the Ironbound section is when the gay shit started the gay stuff.

Esperanza Santos: In Ironbound?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah in the Ironbound, and that's where I became of age at.  
[00:02:12]

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: My younger years was Irvington, Newark. And every summer, we would go to North Carolina, and from the age of six to maybe the age of thirteen or fourteen, we spent every summer in North Carolina. It was the best thing for me ever. [00:02:30]

Esperanza Santos: Beautiful childhood. To be surrounded by family. [00:02:32]

Bernard McAllister: I had a beautiful childhood. I had great role models, and it was just a good time. It was a good time. You know, some people look back on their childhood and like, Oh, it was horrible and everything. Mine wasn't, mine was, was great. And even with teenage angst and you know, feeling less than and feeling different. It didn't make a difference in my family.

Esperanza Santos: Like you, you still felt a part of it, like you belonged.

Bernard McAllister: Oh, yeah, we definitely were a part. Yeah, we definitely were a part. It wasn't. It was never—itt was never—any sadness I felt never came from the family itself.

Esperanza Santos: No, like they didn't cause you trouble. Like, if anything, they helped you provide solutions.

Bernard McAllister: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Cuz I had my grandfather was like, was like, he was such a strong Black man. You know, he and you know, my father wasn't in the picture. But my uncle was a strong Black man. My grandfather was a strong Black man, and had other uncles that substituted for that. I mean, they don't really substitute for, but they were—they—they played their role.

Esperanza Santos: Exactly. When you say strong Black man, is it like they provided, they were present? They held your tears? Like what?

Bernard McAllister: No, no, no, no, I think when I say strong Black man, I'm thinking of strong Black men during the 60s in the 70s as a child in the 80s. In my family, there was not a lot of lovey, lovey, huggy, huggy. But there was a lot of support. And if something popped off, say, within the neighborhood or in life, they were there for me, you know, I never—

Esperanza Santos: They showed up.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, Always. Always. My family was always. Yeah, because growing up I was a very timid child. Very quiet, you know, to myself, I was a mama's boy. You know, my sister was more outgoing. She was more everything. And she was a year older, two years, maybe two years older. And we were always together, you know, there was very night—very few nights where I would spend a night or she would spend the night out.[00:04:43] So we were almost like twins to a certain extent up until like maybe ten or twelve. Cause we was always together. So.

Esperanza Santos: She was your buddy?

Bernard McAllister: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. I know that you talked about, you had a beautiful childhood, you were able to depend on your family. And you were talking

about coming of age. Like, around like, when and where did that happen? And what does that mean to you?

Bernard McAllister: Um, I was, you know, as I look back I was pretty lucky, there was a gay bar in Newark called Murphy's at one time, years ago.

Esperanza Santos: Oh yeah, Murphy's.

Bernard McAllister: and Murphy, my cousin Carnell [00:05:29] worked at Murphy's. And we didn't know, I didn't know he was gay, but I always knew he was just so much fun.

Esperanza Santos: Awww

Bernard McAllister: He was so much fun. He was like, maybe four or five years older than me. He was also my cousin. And he was my godbrother.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, your godbrother.

Bernard McAllister: So I took a lot of instruction from him. And I never forget when he used to have us drop him off at this straight club, where he's supposed to have been bartending at [00:05:58]. And one day I said oh, there go Carnell to my aunt who dropped him off. She said, "Why is he going there, I just dropped him off there." So we followed him.

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)*

Bernard McAllister: And we followed him to Murphy's, we followed him to Murphy's. And eventually, I was like, you work at the gay bar. And he was like—

Esperanza Santos: How old were you when that happened?

Bernard McAllister: I was like, twelve or thirteen.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And he was like, Yeah. I was like okay, cool. Can I come?

Esperanza Santos: Oh, uh huh.

Bernard McAllister: And he was the first person who took me to The Village. He was the first person—

Esperanza Santos: N-Y-C Village?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, NYC Village in the village was a much different place then.

Esperanza Santos: Like what?

Bernard McAllister: It was more of a stomping ground for gay people. At that time, of apartments— It wasn't all rich white people, like it is now with \$3,000 rents for studios, it was just The Village and the pier was not fixed up. It was, um, it was abandoned, actually—

Esperanza Santos: The pier was abandoned?

Bernard McAllister: The pier was abandoned, because that's where the boats used to come in at.

Esperanza Santos: The vultures?

Bernard McAllister: The boats

Esperanza Santos: The boats, okay.

Bernard McAllister: The boats, and they hadn't done, they had not been redone. They hadn't done anything to them. And when people just go down to the pier, they used to vogue and hang out. And there were people in the pier, that would go in the pier and have sex and shit like that. But for us, for me, at fourteen years old, it was just the most. It was like, Oz, like from Wizard of Oz, it was everything. You know, the first time I ever saw two men kiss was in The Village. The first time I ever seen two gay guys fight was in The Village.

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)*

Bernard McAllister: The first time I knew that I was really attractive was in The Village because a man came up to me and told me. All my—

Esperanza Santos: You were validated.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, validated and also too it was, it was way before social media. And it was way before you know, it was our world then, it was our world. And it was Black and Spanish. And there, of course, there was whites that lived in the neighborhood. But it wasn't as ritzy as it is now. Right now, they've gotten so many rules and regulations. We used to hang on the corners. The girls would be voguing outside,

Esperanza Santos: Working it.

Bernard McAllister: You know, I met my first tran, transsexual. I was gonna say tranny, but I don't think that's a good word no more.

Esperanza Santos: Not anymore. If you're friends it's cute, but if not—

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, well, I met my—they were my sisters. So I met my first trannys. Yeah, um, I remember my first time going to The Village on my own without Carnell. And—

Esperanza Santos: So he took you?

Bernard McAllister: He took me to The Village.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: He taught me everything I need to know. He taught me how to be gay. He told— and not in a physical sense, but in the mental sense, of how you sit at the bar, how you carry yourself, you know, you tell people your business. Don't try to hide it because you know, nothing to be ashamed of really, all these things. And the day he took, the night he took me, he was Miss Village that year. So he was like in drag, and he was gonna be in drag the next day, and boom, boom, boom. And that's how it all started.

Esperanza Santos: Aww. When— so it sounds like he really made sure that, like, even your family is still making you feel like you belong. And like teaching you the ropes.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, you know, in my family, there was so much going on. And we were so fractured. We didn't know we were fractured. We were just like, it is what it is. You know, and I hate, I hate to say this, but you know, this generation now the millennials, they're so easy to break. We weren't, we didn't have time to break. Because you had to live you had to survive. You know, it was nothing to fight straight dudes because you was gay. It was nothing for people to try to laugh at you. And, you know, back then it was okay to make fun of people.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: You know.

Esperanza Santos: Cause, it was what it was.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, it was what it was. And so, you know, Carnell taught me the ropes on how you handle yourself. And then with family support, like I remember a uncle saying I was gay. And the whole family is like, so?

Bernard McAllister: Okay.

Esperanza Santos: What?

Bernard McAllister: What's the argument about?

Esperanza Santos: Like, Okay? Thank you for your observation.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, like, so? It was never, it was never condemned. And again, I mentioned that I was raised in North Carolina. And you know, and when they found out I was like, fifteen No, I was like, fifteen, sixteen. And it wasn't even a big thing to my grandmother and grandfather.

Esperanza Santos: When you were fifteen? And what, what, [00:10:34] it was like what, like, 1980? 1975?

Bernard McAllister: No, I was born. [inaudible counting] So we're talking '80, '81, '79, '81.

Esperanza Santos: So like '81.

Bernard McAllister: And I always hung with older people. Always hung with older women. And it was usually straight women I hung with. I went with some lesbians too, but I would be like this seventeen-year-old with thirty year old people.

Esperanza Santos: Hmm.

Bernard McAllister: You know, the funny— I was so, so mature at that—at a young age. Or, I hung around older people, that when my friends would come home from school, I'd be sitting in their house drinking beer with they mother. People the same age as me. I'd be sixteen, seventeen years old sitting at the table with their mother and they come home from school talking about, "Hey, ma—Oh, hi Bernie."  
[00:11:24]

Esperanza Santos: Oh hi Bernie (*Laughter*)

Bernard McAllister: I'd be like, "Hey!"

Esperanza Santos: What's good? (*Laughter*)

Bernard McAllister: Like, yeah, and they're like "You're hanging with my mother?"  
[00:11:31] Yeah. Your mother's cool.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, she got stories.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah. And usually they will usually have addictions and stuff like that. So I usually, I just hung, I was, just gravitated towards that. Yeah. And I need to put some emphasis on my mother, that my mother was a single mother. [00:11:50] Me and my sister had different dads, but in my family that really didn't make a difference. It didn't make a difference.

Esperanza Santos: You were still a family.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah. And she had a very strong work ethic. You know, she never received welfare. Never got food stamps. She—

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like she was probably prideful.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, yeah. She worked at the post office for forty-five years.

Esperanza Santos: Good job.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, she's always, she's always been that way. So addiction skipped her. So she never had that. But my dad. Well, my stepdad, he who was my stepdad, from the age I was one. He had addiction and his family. And that's where I learned the ropes of the streets.

Esperanza Santos: From his side of the family.

Bernard McAllister: Oh, yes. From his side of the family. Yes. I learned how to make it out in the streets, the hustle, and do what you need to do. And the whole time, like for example of the type of child I was, in the tenth grade, I quit school and got my GED.

Esperanza Santos: At like, what eighteen? '82 or something?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, like '81, '82. And I didn't tell my mother till I was, I was supposed to be graduating as a senior in high school. So it was like



three years later. And she thought for all this [00:12:58] time I was in school, she didn't know I already had my GED.

Esperanza Santos:

So then where were you?

Bernard McAllister:

Walk out the door when she walked out and walk around the corner and go back and get into bed for like three years. And you know, and when she found out she was so hurt, “Oh, I can't believe you quit school. You didn't tell me [Inaudible [00:13:17].” So I went back. And of course, I'm going back to get my degrees, because I have degrees now.

Esperanza Santos:

Work!!

Bernard McAllister:

I have an Associate's, a Bachelor's, and a Master's.

Esperanza Santos:

Shut up! Congratulations. That's beautiful.

Bernard McAllister:

Thank you. So, when I was out there, I was out there. But I was a— I know everybody says they were unique, [00:13:43] but I was, it was a unique situation for me. Um, I grew up in the crack age when it was crack and drugs and new jack city type shit, you know, and I got clean. In the midst of, like, the crack epidemic.

Esperanza Santos:

What?

Bernard McAllister:

Yeah, cuz I started getting stoned at a very early age.

Esperanza Santos:

Like, what? Eleven?

Bernard McAllister:

Eleven. You know, I started, I started drinking. And then I started doing pills. And then doing coke. Really wasn't big on crack. Because it was too much work. See, I was a very lazy addict.

Esperanza Santos:

You were, you were into the downers, not the uppers.

Bernard McAllister:

I was into downers. But also I wasn't into like, I didn't need to be up for forty-eight hours to get, get the full maximum of what [00:14:32 I'm stoned off. When I was sleepy, I went to bed. I didn't stay out at night. I didn't want to hang with the crackheads. So, like my sister took a different turn. You know, she got caught up in the drug thing. And it was rough for her. And she just recently passed away.

Esperanza Santos: Oh.

Bernard McAllister: My sister—

Esperanza Santos: May she rest in peace.

Bernard McAllister: Thank you. And yeah, it was, it was that childhood. It was like, people there was no cell phones for your parents to call you. So you got home, you got home. It wasn't like it is now. It wasn't like, "Oh, my child needs their phone in school."

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)* Deadpan stare, you're like, "Excuse me?"

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, there was there was no—there was none of that parents went to work, you came home, they came home, you went to school, you did your part. And when I dropped out of school, you know, it really bothered my mom. You know, she wasn't happy with it.

Esperanza Santos: In your senior year, when she found out.

Bernard McAllister: She found out in the senior year.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: But I graduated in my ninth-grade year. Now. It's, yeah, no, my ninth-grade year. And so I had like three years of free, you know, hanging out and everything

Esperanza Santos: And getting to like, know life.

Bernard McAllister: Know life. And plus too, I always felt I didn't have a lot to relate to with the people in high school, because I was always more mature than them. You know, I knew about prostitution, I knew about drugs, I knew. Because again, my stepdad was from that life. And he married my mom, who was a goody two shoes. So you know, and we spent a couple years staying down there with his family in the Ironbound section.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, so his family was in the Ironbound section?

Bernard McAllister: Yes, yes.

Esperanza Santos: And your mom stayed in Newark?

Bernard McAllister: And [00:16:13]my mother was up the hill, as they say. And my mother met my sister's father, and he was from the Ironbound

section. And she met my Aunt Ethel when she was seventeen. And they were best friends. They're still best friends. They're sisters, you might as well say that, but one is seventy-seven and one is seventy-six. So my **Aunt Ethel** has been in my life from the day, I believe, even before I was conceived. And, between her and my mom and my grandfather, is who I pretty much emulate to this day of how I do things.

Esperanza Santos: **Ethel**, mom, and grandpa.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: My grandfather was a very handsome, stern man. And what he said was what he meant. And I remember being in the south, and I used to see a lot of white people say, when white people come around, they would say, "Yes, sir. No, sir," to the people. And my grandfather would be like, "Yes. No." And he didn't answer questions twice. If he said this was what it was. He wasn't changing his mind. It was exactly that. And he was very, and he was respected. Because he took care of his own. He always said, "these are my, this is my family. You don't have to do anything for us. I take care of me. And mine." And I have that same belief today. But with my sister's children, I raised them. They're mine. They don't have to ask anybody else for anything. We handle our situations like that.

Esperanza Santos: Like I take care of myself, and I take care of my own.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, well, my family is my family. And I don't, like I raised my sister's children. I think I'm getting ahead of myself. Okay, so. So that was how it was for me in the Ironbound section. And you know, of course, you go through your angst, you know, you don't know why you're gay, how you're gay. Where did this come from? But it was such a beautiful transition with having Carnell there. And then my sister was bisexual.

Esperanza Santos: Work!

Bernard McAllister: And it was never, and like Carnell was very popular. And he was not the type of person that you would call names cause he probably beat you up.

Esperanza Santos: Like he knew how to defend himself. And he was respected.

Bernard McAllister: Oh, fuck defending himself. [00:18:24]

Esperanza Santos: He was like respected, like you don't like you don't mess with him.

Bernard McAllister: No, you don't, you didn't mess with him. And my sister was a force to be reckoned with. She fought a lot.

Esperanza Santos: Why?

Bernard McAllister: And I wasn't the greatest fighter, but I started to understand how you had to be in the streets. So I became smart and tough at the same time. You know, I always knew when to leave the party. You didn't have to say "Well, you know, we should leave now." No, baby. I'm already gone, I'm home.

Esperanza Santos: You're like, I'm calling like, you call me from home?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, I'm not that, I was never the person have to be the last person at the party. I never had to be. I don't know. I was just, I was just a little strange kid cause I was old and young at the same time. And as time went on, you know, um, I went to the army, Army Reserve.

Esperanza Santos: When did you go to the Army Reserve?

Bernard McAllister: Right after my mother found that I had quit?

Esperanza Santos: Oh so like, right when you were eighteen. When you were supposed to be graduating, you went to— wait. So, before we go into the Army Reserves, um, so it sounds like your mom, Ethel and Grandpa, were big influences?

Bernard McAllister: Oh, yeah.

Bernard McAllister: They were the most influential. Now there have been others usually be to be honest with you. Black women. Strong women have been the, my backbone. They are the ones who I'm built after.

Esperanza Santos: Hmm.

Bernard McAllister: I'm built like that. Like in my family when I say something, the whole family listens. It's not "Oh, gay Uncle Bernie." It's, "Uncle Bernie saying," Like, you know, I raised over seven, eight kids that weren't mine. I take care of cousins, I make sure aunts eat. I make sure kids go to school. I try to show by example. And it's been like that, for as long as I can remember. There was a time when I kind of, in my early 20s, when I shrugged away from all that, like, "Oh, I don't want to be bothered with my sister and them kids." And I don't have a responsibility, but was when it came down to it and it was my turn to lead the family, that's what I did.

Esperanza Santos: You stepped up.

Bernard McAllister: I stepped up and I'm still stepping up.

Esperanza Santos: You're still in that position?

Bernard McAllister: Yes. Yes.

Esperanza Santos: We've talked about your grandma in North Carolina, Ironbound. Is there any role that religion had in your life or in your family?

Bernard McAllister: No.

Esperanza Santos: No.

Bernard McAllister: But, because you know, my mother, like I said, my mother was a single mother. And she worked at the post office and she worked nights.

Esperanza Santos: She worked nights at the post office?

Bernard McAllister: Yes, she was the, she worked nights for most of my life. So that means we would be home at seven, eight, seven, ten, seven, nine years old while my mother was at work, and our rule was don't open the door for nobody.

Esperanza Santos: Ohhh, okay.

Bernard McAllister: And it was an easy rule for me. You can't come in, my mother's not home. There's a fire. Well, we have to burn up, my mother's not home, no, no.

Esperanza Santos: Sorry! (*Laughter*)

Bernard McAllister: But this was one how children were raised then, so much different from how children are raised now. And it was not necessarily. It may made me a stronger person. It made me well rounded in the sense that my mom was was very, very open minded. She didn't believe in—

Bernard McAllister: So, um, well, where were we at? [00:22:36]

Esperanza Santos: We were talking about religion, and that your, your mom worked nights. And

Bernard McAllister: There was there was, um ... religion to me has always been something that I always looked at, um ... suspiciously.

Esperanza Santos: Okay, good.

Bernard McAllister: It was, I was always suspicious of religion. Because if things could be so, be that way, why aren't they? If people were all good, why aren't they good all the time? And, and this is when I was young. And I was blessed in the sense that it didn't have that effect on me. My cousin Carnell was very religious. I would go to church with him and fall asleep. Oh, but no, no, there's more. I'm sorry. When my mother was raising us, we had my grandmother's sister, my aunt's sister, my mother's aunt, my grandmother's sister. She was Jehovah Witness.

Esperanza Santos: Can you to help track me that again?

Bernard McAllister: Okay. When we were in from, say, third grade to maybe seventh grade, eighth grade, we would go to my aunt, um Aunt Bissa? [00:23:58] because her name is Ethel but we call the Aunt Bissa? I have another aunt, Ethel. So Aunt Bissa would come and take us to Jehovah, to the, to the Kingdom Hall and we would have Bible studies on Tuesday. And don't ask me why, but for some reason, I would get so sleepy.

Esperanza Santos; *(Laughter)*

Bernard McAllister: Every time they came, I could be running around the house, outside playing ball [00:24:24] ... as soon as I saw my Aunt Bissa

Esperanza Santos: Uh-huh

Bernard McAllister: [00:24:30] I'd be like, "Oh, I'm so tired, oh God," and she used to pop us to wake us up. And a Bible study nation and we moved to Kingdom Hall, so I associated candy with religion, because every time I went to the Kingdom Hall, they would give me candy to stay awake.

Esperanza Santos: Uh-huh.

Bernard McAllister: And when I would go to the thing with [00:24:48]Carnell, he would give me candy so I wouldn't fall asleep.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, because he was Jovah Witness too then, huh? [00:24:54]

Bernard McAllister: No, no, he was a Baptist baby. Oh, he was a gospel singer.

Esperanza Santos: Oh.

Bernard McAllister: He was like Sylvester.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: Sylvester is a big 70s gay disco singer. So anyway, so I had religion by osmosis by other people.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. By those around you.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, yeah. It came at me in different forms it wasn't like [00:25:16], "Help me Lord." It was like, hey, they got it. So I guess it's rubbing off on me. And that was cool. That was cool. And then when we went to North Carolina, this is the strange part, my grandmother who was the sweetest soul on the planet. Very seldom did she go to church, my grandfather would go to church.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. Oh, that's normally the reverse.

Bernard McAllister: Yep. He would go to church on Sundays. And she would cook on Sundays.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And that was our thing. And even though she, she read the Bible and all that stuff, but she rarely, seldom went [00:25:53]. So that was, again, it was by osmosis. I've never had a problem with religion, but I don't trust it.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: Because I think people who are close to the God, the more religious you become, the more bigoted you become, the more small minded you become, and more powerful you think you are, because you're closer to God. And I don't know if God really goes by who's first in line. The God of my understanding, um, when I did get into religion, I think I became more spiritual than religious when I came into NA, I came into NA when I was twenty-one, twenty-two.

Esperanza Santos: Beautiful.

Bernard McAllister: So, when I heard there was a God of my understanding.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah

Bernard McAllister: That blew my mind.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah like–

Bernard McAllister: Oh, so, me and you, we good. [00:26:40]

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: And that was how it was for me. Now, I did join the church. Um, it was cool. It was all right, you know, but I just found it to be, I couldn't get with – I was fascinated by how people caught the Holy Ghost and, and how they shouted, and it just, it just, it just like, I remember this girl. She was so beautiful. I just saw her a couple weeks ago, too. And she was shouting. And she went back. And she, she, and almost like, like a dancer. And God had filled up so much that when she was shouting, she'd bend forward. And when she bent back, and I was at the perfect angle to watch out, she looked like it was just beautiful to me.

Esperanza Santos: It was like, angelic.

Bernard McAllister: Almost angelic. But it's, it's, it was, it was just her being free. I've never seen anybody so free. And when she shouted, she went all the way back, she leaned back, she was standing up. And she almost, she [00:27:47]didn't go all the way back. But she would



lean so far back, that she was just beautiful. It was beautiful. And that touched me and I cried. So I was never a person to understand how they when they say “Oh, thank you, Jesus,” and all that. I was more or less my thank you was me crying, being in touch with my spirit, and things of that nature. And I learned that I didn't go to church til after I had been clean maybe ten, fifteen years.

Esperanza Santos: So like to thirty-one or something? [00:28:13]

Bernard McAllister: Thirty-three, Thirty-four, something like that. And this was right before I got my children. My kids, my sister's children, I got full custody of them. So it was a little, it was different for me because again, Muslims didn't trust because the closer you got to God the more bigger that you were. Christians, closer to God you were the more close minded you were and, and force things down people's throat. Jehovah Witness, never got it. Never got it. I tried to get it. I just be like ... so y'all don't do no Christmas? [00:28:49]

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)* No birthdays.

Bernard McAllister: Being a young, young kid. I'm like, “Well, bitch I wanna have a birthday party!”

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)*

Bernard McAllister: I never had until I was an adult. But it was cool. But I just, I didn't get it.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: I didn't get the need of it. If I'm making sense. I didn't ... I just didn't get it.

Eperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: You know, my aunt Bissa, loved her to death. She taught me how to drive. She was another strong influence. Again, I tell you there was strong women that influenced me. You know, my style of dress. I dress very nice. Um, can't tell from today, but I dress very nice. [00:29:29]

Esperanza Santos: You're hustling, you're good.

Bernard McAllister: And what happened was, I learned style from my mother and my aunt, Ethel. And from grandmothers and aunts and watching people, that was my learning, and style, all those things came from those people that I told you were very influential. And when I look back on my life, I look back on my life as in seasons, like season one, season two, season three. Now each year doesn't have a season. But it was cool to what I was doing at that time who I was hanging around. That would be my season. So, early on, it was my mother and my grandparents – maternal. Um, everything was cool. You know, I understood my sister was the favorite grandchild.

Esperanza Santos: Your sister, the bisexual one?

Bernard McAllister: Oh, yeah. The older ones. Yeah, she was the favorite grandchild. She was the first. And my grandfather was enamored, in awe [00:30:28] of her, he thought she was a gorgeous girl. And she was a bitch.

Esperanzas Santos: *(Laughter)* 00:30:30

Bernard McAllister: She was my sister. So you accept. I mean, like—

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, it is what it is. And you know, yeah.

Bernard McAllister: But yeah. So again, we would, that was, that was chapter one. Chapter two was, say, from fifth grade to sixth grade when we moved to Irvington. And my mother was truly on her own. And that's when we started having the Bible studies things with Jehovah Witness.

Esperanza Santos: When you were in third grade, right? [00:31:00]

Bernard McAllister: Third or fourth grade. Um, let's say in fifth grade, fifth grade, um, I just got a warm feeling [00:31:04] in my heart cause my Aunt Bissa and Sister, sister, um, Mildred. And she used to always be with my Aunt Bissa. And she would read so slow. Oh, this lady could just say what? And I swear to God it would [00:31:20] feel like six hours, it'd be one hour. Oh, we would die. Like I would cry. Oh, my Aunt Bissa didn't care if you cry or not, but thank God

because what she did was, she opened me to things outside my scope.

Esperanza Santos:

Hmm.

Bernard McAllister:

And it made me a smarter person. Because again, like I said, my mother, we weren't allowed to use the word nigga. We couldn't call people honkies and whities and stuff like that. They were Caucasian, you had called your peen, your dick a penis. A pussy was a vagina, you know, you had to use the terms that's in the dictionary. And my mother also liked all kinds of music. So with her liking all types of music, it opened me up to so all types of things. Like, she loved, pop, she loves some Spanish songs whatever she loved, we absorbed. You know, I don't think my sister absorbed [00:32:18] it as much as I did. But yeah, that was my thing. So my mother was the well-rounded one. My aunt Ethel was the one who took no shit. And my grandfather was the stone who took care of the family.

Esperanza Santos:

And that was the family.

Bernard McAllister:

And that was how things went. And that's how things rolled. And that was that. Now, up until when we moved to the Ironbound section, that was me being in the seventh, eighth grade, when it was—

Esperanza Santos:

From Irvington to Ironbound?

Bernard McAllister:

To Ironbound, and that was seventh, eighth grade. And—

Esperanza Santos:

That was like what eleven, thirteen, that was when Carnell started taking you to Murphy's.

Bernard McAllister:

No, right around that time, I was not right away. Maybe got to Murphy's on fifteen I think, I may, I think because as I'm saying the story as I'm, things fall into place. But he was so outgoing. He was so funny. You know, um—

Esperanza Santos:

Carnell?

Bernard McAllister: Carnell, yeah. And he had, and he was just like fun. And we will play office, [00:33:20] and we would just, we sit around watch TV, we laugh. And that was my thing. So when I went through that awkward stage and not fitting in, like if I went down – I was raised [00:33:32] down the street from Nottingham Court [00:33:34] Projects – if I went down there and they acted funny to me, I could always come home and be safe. And not be “Oh, I have no one,” that was never, I was–

Esperanza Santos: You, you never felt isolated. You always had something.

Bernard McAllister: I had something, cause again. It's like a lot of gays were like I was never molested. I used to be mad about that. Well, what, I wasn't attractive?

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)* You're like, I can't believe that like no ever found me attractive enough. [00:34:02]

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, nobody ever touched me. But now, but we, I spoke with my cousin the other day, my Aunt Ethel's daughter.

Esperanza Santos: What's her name?

Bernard McAllister: Her name is Constance. We call her Bree.

Esperanza Santos: Bree. Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And it was always me. It was always [00:34:16] Bree is the youngest, then me, then my sister, Gretta, and my cousin, Carnell. We lived upstairs from each other. And Bree was adopted. She was my cousin already, but she was my cousin Rosemarie's daughter. And Rosemarie was on drugs real bad. So when Rosemarie died, no when, when Bree's grandmother, Aunt Gussey, died, she asked Ethel to take her. So it was always us. And it was never a choice. This is your family. Y'all stick together. That's it. So it was always us and we were the main house in the family that everybody came to. We had all the barbecues at my house, the Christmases at my house. The repasts were at my house usually, or something like that. And my Aunt Ethel was the head of the crew,

was like maybe a crew of ten women and all their kids were our cousins. But Aunt Ethel was the head of the, of the family, the matriarch. And remember this is and also too, I need to say too, my mother was never really close to my maternal grandparents' family. She knew they were her cousins, like the ones in North Carolina, and things of that nature. But my mother basically picked her family.

Esperanza Santos:

Hmm.

Bernard McAllister:

You're gonna be my sister, you're gonna be my sister, you're gonna be my sister. And my Grandma Dot, Aunt Ethel's mother, dopted my mother as her daughter. Even in her obituary, she mentioned my mother and me and my sister are mentioned in it. So, that was the adopted family. But in our eyes, we didn't come from adopted it, but they weren't adopted. They were. They were family.

Esperanza Santos:

It was family.

Bernard McAllister:

It was like when I went down south I talked about Ethel to my grandma, like, "Oh, Ethel [00:36:04]r this," my grandma loved Ethel. And that was it. You know, now were there issues? Yeah, there were issues like me and my sister were really, really bad kids. Like my sister was really bad. [00:36:14]

Esperanza Santos:

What? What do you mean, you two?

Bernard McAllister:

My sister – well, not – more, more [00:36:15]my sister. Because I told you, I was very shy. My sister was never shy. She would punch you in your face. And she was the type of person, like, I never forget. She came home one day, someone beat her up bad. I'm like, "What happened?" I was in the eighth grade. And she was in ninth grade.

Esperanza Santos:

In Irvington?

Bernard McAllister:

Irvington. I was in seventh grade. Because she was in high school because she's two years older than me. And they said, "Oh, they jumped your sister [Da, da, da at 0:36:45]," and I was like, "What

happened?” And they said, “No, they said, your sister stole something.” So cause had [00:36:54] remembered my sister had all these nice clothes all of a sudden. I said, “Oh, you look cute, where you get your – where you get that from?” [00:36:56] And she was like, “None of your business, punk.” That was our relationship.

Esperanza Santos:

Yeah.

Bernard McAllister:

You know, like teens. Little young, you know, like brother and sister thing. And I remember they jumping her. And I was like, “Oh, what you, you going to school tomorrow?” She's like, “Yeah.” I said, “Did you steal it?” She said, “Yeah.” Did you give it back? She said “no.”

Esperanza Santos:

Then what?

Bernard McAllister:

They just had to whoop my ass. They're not getting anything back. And that was, she was also a big influence for me. So that was going on. And that was like chapter three, because that was the end of chapter two because that's when we left Irvington. When we went to Irvington, my sister was in high school, Eastside, and I was still going to school in Irvington, Mount Vernon Avenue. I graduated eighth grade. And that was a strange situation too because I was dressed so, my mother dress me so nice. I had a Yves Saint Laurent suit on.

Esperanza Santos:

You had an Yves Saint Laurent suit?

Bernard McAllister:

Yeah, Yves Saint Laurent suit. And I had these fabulous shoes that cost like \$200.

Esperanza Santos:

Oh, my goodness.

Bernard McAllister:

[00:38:03] And this was, we talking 80s.

Esperanza Santos:

You were stuntin’.

Bernard McAllister:

Yeah, I was stuntin’. And I just, that was my thing. And so as time went on, I just liked fashion. And the funny part is my sister could never dress.

Esperanza Santos: She couldn't, she couldn't dress but she got nice clothes.

Bernard McAllister: Oh, gosh. She couldn't dress at all, she couldn't dress at all. It was horrible. And we used to laugh about how she ain't had no style. But it was cool. Because everybody played they role. Everybody [00:38:30] had a role. And then when we, life really changed when we moved to the Ironbound section. That's when drugs came into play. That's when hustling came into play, making money—

Esperanza Santos: Drugs, like what?

Bernard McAllister: Like, first of all, it was marijuana. Then it went, it was liquor first, marijuana, then it went to coke, and all these other drugs, but my main drug was pills. I would take pills, these, they don't even make them anymore. Like this is called siebers and codeines. Siebers—they still make codeine, but they don't make siebers. They used to make them in Philadelphia, they had a big pharmacy, whatever. And that's when I started getting high and I stopped going to school.

Esperanza Santos: So you were like, what, fourteen, or was that—? [00:39:11]

Bernard McAllister: fourteen, fifteen, I stopped going to school. And I had to find my way. I didn't know which way to go. I didn't know who I was, what was I supposed to be doing? All I know is that my grandmother said to me one day, and I never forget this. She told me that I was special, that I was meant to do great things. And I didn't get it. At the time, I heard, I received it but I didn't know what to do with it. So now I'm like, I'm doing what I'm doing, all this other shit, like I'm hanging out getting stoned, hanging in New York, Brooklyn and Harlem. I'm sixteen, seventeen years old. Like blah blah blah blah, [00:39:55] I'm fabulous, and oh girl, and I read the girls, and you know was I was a little asshole sometimes.

Esperanza Santos: You think so?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, a little bit, a little bit. And what happened was I was learning I was absorbing what to do and what not to do. Most people

absorb, oh, I learned this. And I'm going to do this. But I also learned what not to do.

Esperanza Santos:

Safety.

Bernard McAllister:

And that's what got me, compelled me because, oh I did bank frauds and all that, oh it was a mess, bank fraud, voting fraud, I just carry, I just carried [00:40:33]

Esperanza Santos:

For like fun, for like money, for like what?

Bernard McAllister:

For money, it [00:40:37] was just in the streets. Because again, I don't know if anybody can identify with this, but the streets would call me. I will be in my bed minding my business. And I would hear the street saying, "Bernie, are you coming out?" And I lived in the Ironbound section, so I only lived like a few blocks from Penn Station. So New York was my gateway to whatever. And I remember when things took a turn for me. This is chapter three, in the Ironbound section. And I was doing the stunt with the bank, with a check. And it was on Halsey Street, at this big old great building. And I went in there with the man's check. Lady said, "Hold on one second." So this man walks up to me, next to me. He says, "Hello, do I know you?" I said, "No, do I know you?" Like, go on, get out of here. Come to find out it was his check. And I got locked up. My mother was away in North Carolina visiting my grandparents.

Esperanza Santos:

You were fourteen, what?

Bernard McAllister:

I was—no, I was grown [00:41:40]. I was Eighteen.

Esperanza Santos:

Eighteen

Bernard McAllister:

Eighteen. And my sister got me out of jail. She was pregnant with my nephew.

Esperanza Santos:

How long were you in jail for? Like, what? Two days? One day?

Bernard McAllister:

Two days.

Esperanza Santos:

Okay.

Bernard McAllister:

And I knew it wasn't for me. And that's when shit started changing.



Esperanza Santos: Oh.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, it was real simple. See, I told you I'm not the type of person you got to keep hitting in the head.

Esperanza Santos: You're not, you're not hard headed. You're not, you're not a knucklehead.

Bernard McAllister: No! Oh, if this chair seems weak, oh, I'm not sitting here. I'm not going to test it. And that's when the growing up started. And right after that. I remember smoking crack with Tyrone. Tyrone was staying with us at the time, he was my ex-boyfriend. But we became best friends. You know, when you're [00:42:25] young. And my friend Eric, who since has passed away.

Esperanza Santos: May he rest in peace.

Bernard McAllister: Yes. And we were smoking crack in his apartment, stuff like that. And I was smoking, I said, "I don't think Imma do this no more." And they all stoned, said, "Oh, shut up. Yes, you are. Take a hit." [00:42:44] So I took the hit. I said, "I think this the last time I'm doing this." And me and Tyrone was walking home. And I felt like shit because my mother was short on money. And I told her I needed a bus card. And I told her the bus car costs almost \$180 dollars.

Esperanza Santos: And she bought that?!

Bernard McAllister: Oh, my mother bought everything I said, both of us.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, she trusted you.

Bernard McAllister: Both of us, me and my sister, and we were always slick. And if we couldn't get what we wanted, we would call my grandmother to say that mother wouldn't give it to us, and my grandmother would get on the phone and chastise my mother. I remember [00: 43:15] my mother coming in, very dramatic, "Just take everything! [00:43:18] I don't want anything! I don't deserve anything cause y'all just want everything from me!" I said, "Well, Grandma said you're supposed to give me \$30 and this is only 25."

Esperanza Santos: *(Laughter)*

Bernard McAllister: “You know what you little bastards!” and that was, that was that. And, after getting locked up with that it took a different turn because I just didn't want to be that, I wasn't for that. I wasn't built like that. And I knew it. I remember. And when I first started trying to get clean *(Laughter)*, I went down to projects and I've got all the crack, all the crackheads together.

Esperanza Santos: Wait wait wait, which projects?

Bernard McAllister: Pennington, Pennington Court.

Esperanza Santos: Okay, cool.

Bernard McAllister: And I walked in, I said, “Oh, we're going to get clean, y'all! Y'all comin with me!” [00:44:00] So I took like, seven or eight of us.

Esperanza Santos: You, you were the, the addict shepherd.

Bernard McAllister: Yes, I was the addict shepherd, the addict whisperer. That's what I was. I was the addict whisperer.

Esperanza Santos: You're gonna make me choke my water.

Bernard McAllister: Oh don't choke your water. [00:44:14] And so when we were leaving, I said, “We ain't coming back here! We ain't gettin high no more! And I never forget one of the drug dealer said, “You'll be baaaaaack!” [00:44:21] .

Esperanza Santos: Oh my god!

Bernard McAllister: And we all end up relapsing at different times. But it was also, it was just telling me I wasn't happy.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And you know, and during this time was when the eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, my mother had, I gave up the apartment.

Esperanza Santos: Wait, pause. So I thought you went to the military? Eighteen, graduated – sort of graduated – but your mom was sad. You went to the military, and now you're back from the military, and you're back home.

Bernard McAllister: Make sure I got it right. Boom, boom, boom, boom. I wasn't clean when I was going to the military cause [00:44:55] I was still getting high. I went there and I went to the military about eighteen.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And it was only the Army Reserve, so it was only like a six month stint. [00:45:05]

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: You go to basic training, then you do whatever job they give, you go for training, and then you out. And I was coming home, I was doing the same thing, but I wasn't doing like I wasn't, I didn't have that hustle in me to be out in the streets and like, selling drugs. I just didn't have that, that wasn't in me. So I got stoned when I could and when I, when I did, and it just became not – it wasn't a good feeling anymore. And then it wasn't a good feeling. Because I knew that my grandmother had said that I was special. And it hung in there somewhere. And it was a nagging, nagging responsibility on me because I couldn't get stoned successfully.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, like you couldn't, like you couldn't enjoy the high for what it was there was always that back little thing.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah because this old lady had told me that I was going to be great. So I didn't understand like, this wasn't for me and my sister on the other hand, she was for it. She was for the streets. I just wasn't. And it was a different time then. And also, too, remember–

Esperanza Santos: What do you mean by, it was a different time?

Bernard McAllister: Remember, I came out pre-AIDS.

Esperanza Santos: Yes, like '81, right?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, no, no, like, '79, '81 out even when I wasn't having sex, I was always around the gay lifestyle. I would be there. Like I knew the lesbians, I knew the [00:46:31] trans women–

Esperanza Santos: You were connected.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, I was connected. My sister was bi and you know, we hung with, with everybody. I never when I even went to Pennington Court, this girl named Sherry and her sister Bunkie. They were lesbians. And they were my sister's best friends. They were older than me. And I always hung with Sherry and them. I met Sherry when I was fifteen years old. And we're still friends today and I'm fifty-three. We're still friends, and, and at my sister's service – Sherry can't even, Sherry was so close to my sister that she can't even mention my sister's name to this day. Because it takes her to a place.

Esperanza Santos: Yes.

Bernard McAllister: You know, so. I did that, then I did, I did I remember the day that a friend of ours had shot himself playing Russian roulette. I was going to the service. I was going to the service.

Esperanza Santos: How old were you then?

Bernard McAllister: I'm about twenty-one. Was I twenty-one? Man, I did [00:47:20] a lot. All this happened in the span of seventeen to twenty-three. Okay, me going to the service. Me moving to Charlotte, North Carolina to be on my own. Still doing drugs. The first – matter of fact, yes, I was young because the first time I ever did crack was in North Carolina. And the first time I did it, I never forget it. You smoked it. And I said to the girl next to me, “Oh, this is too good to be true.”

Esperanza Santos: Oh, yeah.

Bernard McAllister: This is too good to be true.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: This ain't normal. [00:47:52] I said, “This, this, this ain't right.” And she said, “Why are you saying that?” I said, “Baby, nothing's supposed to feel like this.” Because I was a pessimist by nature. Baby. Nothing is supposed to feel like this.

Esperanza Santos: You were already suspicious.

Bernard McAllister: I knew it. I knew it. Because it made, it made me – I've never felt that great my life. I knew it couldn't, I knew I couldn't sustain this. I knew it from the first time I did it. So I didn't do it again for like two, three years.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, that's when you were back in Newark.

Bernard McAllister: Um, I came back to Newark, you know, um, and everything and went out. When I came home from school, I was still getting stoned. But I wasn't getting stoned like that, you know, I was the one cousin that could take some pills, be good the next day, always had a job, trying to find a job, or getting fired from a job and all that. But I was always motivated. I was always taking two steps forward, three steps back. You know, some people don't move forward at all. They're stuck in their surrounding. I was always trying to get away and coming back. But I was never deterred, because I kept feeling like I was getting somewhere, you know, um, and at this time I was introduced to ballroom and all these things are starting to come into play.

Esperanza Santos: What age, twenty-one, twenty-two?

Bernard McAllister: twenty-one, twenty-two

Esperanza Santos: So right as you were getting sober?

Bernard McAllister: Well, I became a leader when I got clean, because when I got clean (*Laughter*) the founder of the House of Jourdan was my girlfriend, Miss Hakeem.

Esperanza Santos: The Jourdans?!

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, we were the House of Jourdan. And he said I'm gonna throw you a party for getting clean, but he threw me a party at a bar. (*Laughter*) But it was a beautiful party.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: You know, um–

Esperanza Santos: Where was the bar, which bar was it at?

Bernard McAllister: Sensations, and it was on I think 18th Avenue, 18th Street.  
[00:49:47] Something like that.

Esperanza Santos: In Newark?

Bernard McAllister: In Newark

Esperanza Santos: Sensations.

Bernard McAllister: And I thanked him and everything and I joined the house. I joined the house—

Esperanza Santos: The House of Jourdan? [00:49:55]

Bernard McAllister: No, I was a Revlon first, I joined Revlon first cause they were a New York house. [00:49:58]

Esperanza Santos: You were a Revlon?

Bernard McAllister: Yes, yes.

Esperanza Santos: With Miss Pucci?

Bernard McAllister: [00:50:00] With Miss Pucci, yes. Miss Pucci's my mother.

Esperanza Santos: Shut up!

Bernard McAllister: I was one who got her into the oral thing that we're doing now.

Esperanza Santos: Oh my goodness, may she rest in peace.

Bernard McAllister: Pucci was one of the few people that kind of had me, that taught me like the ropes like, this is how you carry yourself. And this is how you, you live. You know? It ain't about being gay. It's about living. Like, do you, nobody can tell you what, child when I met Pucci, she was a big, she was six feet. Big, big titties, woman—

Esperanza Santos: She was voluptuous.

Bernard McAllister: And I was like, whoa, this is crazy. Like, who the hell does this? So anyway, Pucci was one of those women, that when I came out, I was fourteen years old, and I'm looking at her like, I could tell that she was a man. But her spirit said Black woman, honey.  
[00:51:17]. That she was a, she was a woman, she raised, she raised her family's children. Pucci was a preschool teacher. Like she always had the kids. And I always respect the Pucci.

Bernard McAllister: And—

Esperanza Santos: So when you were when you came in at thirteen, you found her at The Village, or here in Newark? [00:51:33]

Bernard McAllister: No, in Newark, in Newark, in Newark, I met Pucci in Newark. I'll never forget meeting her. And I was like, "Oh." And she found me, she said, "Well, what's your name?" My name is Bernie. And she's like, "Oh." And that was our relationship. Actually, before Pucci died, I took her shopping because she wanted to get oxtails—

Esperanza Santos: Delicious. Yum.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, but a pound oxtail. I [00:51:57] could have went and got it for her, but she wanted to go, but that's when the cancer was starting to kick in real hard. And she wasn't feeling good. But she, she you know, she kept a great front, kept a smile and stuff. And we went to eat, and she wanted an Italian hot dog, which is a hot dog with peppers and onions and potatoes [00:52:15]. It's a big thing in Jersey, and three days later, four days later, she died. And when I went to the funeral, the family knew of me. She had told them what, how good I was to her. So that was really cool. Because as I got older once I got into the House of when I was in the House of Revlon, you know, I was getting stoned and all this other shit, fighting and all that. And I went to rehab in house. I would, they had, they had a big ball in Baltimore. And they said everybody had to give \$100, if you didn't get \$100, they was gonna attack you. So girl, I didn't get \$100 because I was getting stoned. They're not gettin my money. And I went to rehab. The day that was the same, around the same time I told Tyrone and Eric that I'm not getting stoned no more. So I was going off the scene for like a year or so.

Esperanza Santos:: Oh, to get stable and to get clean. [00:53:12]

Bernard McAllister: As I was getting cleaned.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. So—

Bernard McAllister: Cause I got cleaned at East Orange General, they used to have a detox and the drug program now.

Esperanza Santos: Shut up.

Bernard McAllister: It was called Pride. Okay, and many of the people that are still clean, and Newark big, lot of work at city hall, got [00:53:28] great jobs. They all came through that, through that program.

Esperanza Santos: I had no idea that there was a program here like that.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, um, so after that, um, I joined the House of Jourdan when I cut out of the program. And it was so funny—

Esperanza Santos: Wait, how old are you?

Bernard McAllister: So I'm like twenty-two, twenty-three now.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: twenty-two, twenty-three. Right. Um, I had a bad reputation for fighting. I had a bad reputation for shit starting, but I knew there was more for me. I knew it. I don't ask me how I knew it. I just knew this was not it for me. I just knew it with the drugs. So I got clean. And I, nobody heard from me [00:54:13] except my best friend Robert House, who I think you'll be interviewing him.

Esperanza Santos: Oh my gosh, you know, you? What?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah.

Esperanza Santos: Okay, cool.

Bernard McAllister: I'm like the mayor of Newark [00:54:20] .

Esperanza Santos: Hey!

Bernard McAllister: I'm like the most well known gay person in Newark.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: I think, and me, me and Tracey Africa.

Esperanza Santos: Tracey, yes! Okay.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: So what happened? Um, Hakeem said, “Well, Bernie, I want you to be in Jourdan.” Went to the house, me and Hakeem was in the hospital. He had AIDS, one of the first ones I had gotten close with because I skipped a part because I never forget me and Dude going to The Village, I was—



Esperanza Santos: You and Dude?  
Bernard McAllister: Robert House.  
Esperanza Santos: Okay.  
Bernard McAllister: We call him Dude. And his friend Vause, Miss Peewee. So we was at Penn Station or we was coming from New York, or somewhere, and she—  
Esperanza Santos: Penn Station Newark or Penn Station New York?  
Bernard McAllister: Penn station Newark. She had this [00:55:00] big old, she wore these big old shoulder pads. It was very dynasty time then. Oh, she's like, “Hey, y'all!” She liked me, but I wasn't very sexually active. I didn't care cause I was, I just was getting stoned. I just thought, you know, gotten clean and I wasn't horny. And then I just was like, eh, so she told us that, “Child, be careful, because, you know, they say everybody’s catching AIDS from broccoli. You can't eat the broccoli.  
Esperanza Santos: What?!  
Bernard McAllister: So me and dude stopped eating broccoli for a year! [00:55:30]  
Esperanza Santos: Oh, no! (*Laughter*)  
Bernard McAllister: This was, this was before I went to rehab. This was, yeah, I was really stupid.  
Esperanza Santos: I mean you just didn't know, you know? [00:55:39],  
Bernard McAllister: No, I didn't know. And me and dude we laugh about that to this day. And so what happened after that was that we go forward, I get clean. I didn't understand about the God of my understanding. That God is a personal situation. And he could be whatever you make it to be, but it's a personal situation.  
Esperanza Santos: [00:56:00]That's right.  
Bernard McAllister: And we just, I just started growing. And for the first six, seven years, I didn't really help my sister out with her kids. She had them, she, my mother was, my mother was doing this, she was doing it. And I really didn't want to be bothered. So um, I was in

the House of Jourdan, the House Jourdan had become a very A-tier house in the sense that we were winning trophies, we were doing things, we were in Jersey—say I was there. What you're seeing on Pose is me. That was my era. That was me. That the breaking, and throwing bricks [00:56:41] through the windows. Um, everything, everything about Pose was me. And the House, as the House of Jourdan grew, I became more responsible. Because for some reason, oh Hakeem, oh, I go to the house, meet me at the house Jourdan. I get into an argument with a couple of the members like, “Girl, I don’t even know.” I said, I remember saying this to them, I said, [00:57:05] “I don't even know why I'm sitting here.” Because I'm already in the House. Hakeem told me I was already in the House. And I'm just here to listen to y'all bitched talk? [00:57:13] I'm out anyway.” So I left and I went to the hospital to see Hakeem to curse him out. To tell him like, “Bitch, why you take me? Why these fags askin me questions?” I get there, and as I'm walking into the room, I'm hearing people tell Hakeem, “He can't come here. He's always fighting. He was rude at the meeting.” [00:57:34]

Esperanza Santos:

Oh, so they beat you to the punch, they arrived.

Bernard McAllister:

And Hakeem, I never forget Hakeem saying, “No, he'll be fine. He'll be fine. He'll be fine.” So when I get in there I said, “Well, bitch, ain’t have to vote me in anyway!” And this is this this and that. [00:57:49] Boom, boom, boom. Now, mind you, I’m clean, but I'm clean but I’m crazy because I have—

Esperanza Santos:

Clean and crazy, that’s a thing. You know that? That's the thing.

Bernard McAllister:

Yeah, cuz remember, I was, I wasn't getting high, but that didn't mean nothing changed. No attitude change.

Esperanza Santos:

No spiritual change, no emotional change.

Bernard McAllister:

But fuck the sponsor child, all that. So my sponsor was like in awe of me.

Esperanza Santos:

Because?

Bernard McAllister: But, but I don't know. I don't know cause he just thought I was so fabulous. And he's like, you he saw something I didn't see too, [00:58:17] like my grandmother. So, um, as time went on Hakeem, um, Hakeem gets very, very sick.

Esperanza Santos: What like, what time is this at?

Bernard McAllister: This is, I was twenty-three, maybe twenty-two.

Esperanza Santos: So like, what like '87?,

Bernard McAllister: '85, maybe '86, something [00:58:38] like that. And Hakeem dies at twenty.

Esperanza Santos: Wait, twenty years old?

Bernard McAllister: He was twenty years old when he died from the virus. And I end up being the mother of the House of Jourdan.

Esperanza Santos: Right after he passes?

Bernard McAllister: Well, there was some battle—

Esperanza Santos: Like some sequence, some whatever—

Bernard McAllister: Some of the girls couldn't take it and didn't understand that it was inevitable. But I became the face of the House of Jourdan. And I was, then had the responsibility to keep this House going for Hakeem because he was one of my dearest friends. But it also allowed me to gain confidence. Cause remember, I was shy. Because inside I'm always, I'm always a coward. I'm always scared inside. But the bravado comes out. Even now I'm, I'm a very, I'm very cautious. But you never know it. Cause in fact, [00:59:31] say you come in here, right? And somebody jumped in your face. I would be like, "Get the fuck out my face!" I was, you see? But inside I'm like, "What if he slapped me back?" But, and I would just have to deal with that. But as time went on, it allowed me to grow, I understood what responsibility was, I understood what competition was, I understood what family was, because again, my grandfather said, I take care of me and mine. So when I got the House of Jourdan, and I was in control of it, I took care of who?

Me and mine. That meant we were the first house to feed the homeless in all of ball creation [01:00:08]. I was the first one to go to the state assembly and speak in front of the state assembly, about needle exchanges and HIV.

Esperanza Santos: What?!

Bernard McAllister: I was the first, is, there's a lot of firsts, there was a lot of firsts.

Esperanza Santos: Keep telling me, I'm here to learn.

Bernard McAllister: The first one to speak with the senate, the state assembly. I was the first one to speak to the city of Newark. We were the first one to feed the homeless. We were the first ones, House to give the card helping the girls get their bodies, their titties and stuff. Me and William because I was the mother and he was the father. And I was a waiter. So I had money every day. And William always had money, I don't know, he worked at Home Depot. Now we didn't do any craft. We didn't do any of the illegal stuff on. We were just a House with who had imagination made things happen. And people who came to the House to Jourdan, remember, we were in Jersey, so we were at a disadvantage than the New York Houses.

Esperanza Santos: Yes.

Bernard McAllister: And that's just who we became and the House of Jourdan. And with that came responsibility. Now I could have easily, and at this time I was clean. So everything I did from the time I got the House of Jourdan has always been clean for me.

Esperanza Santos: Like '85 on?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, '85 on, I was clean. I went to my meetings, and I never—

Esperanza Santos: That's a lot to balance, like working, being a mother. Like getting sober.

Bernard McAllister: But let me tell you what happened. And when I got to NA, I wasn't very popular. I was really like, because my sister was trying to get clean at the same time, so she would go to meetings too, you know.

Esperanza Santos: It was a family affair.

Bernard McAllister: Well, I wouldn't call it a family affair. My sister's a, that's a story. So anyway, um, I get clean. And they have a fashion show. So I walked the fashion show. And that's when everything exploded for me. Because I wasn't really popular in NA, you know, and when I did the fashion show, everybody wanted to know me. And remember that was my category anyway, runway is my category.

Esperanza Santos: Oh.

Bernard McAllister: And I became, like, very popular in NA and had a lot of responsibilities and started becoming entertainment chair and in all these other chairs and then dealing with [01:02:29]the House of Jourdan, then working. Remember, I put my family on the back burner, my sister and her children. At this time—

Esperanza Santos: Your genetic family over here, your chosen family right here.

Bernard McAllister: Yes. And they all know each other, you know, because it was Newark. It was my sister, everybody knew my sister like “Oh, Lord, your sister was downtown fighting,” and that type of thing. And, um, I had had like, some people have stayed with me like, maybe fifteen people at this time had lived with me off and on. And at this particular time when my mother came to me, her my uncle Roger, her brother, and his wife, Helen, my Uncle Rogers, my mother's, she has two brothers, but they're like thirteen years younger than her. So she was basically raised as the only child. And they asked me to take custody of the kids, my sister's children. And I was like, “What? Me?” She said, “Yeah, Bernie, I'll take, I'll take Jayson, which was the boy and you could take the girls.” And I ended up having the girls for ten years. And having the girls is what really made me the man I am today. Because I had the responsibility. And he's when we're not. And of course, I had responsibility with the young gay people. But some of them were like, you know, how can you even know in the ballroom scene we say, oh, these are my children. But baby, if they, if they're

prostituting, and they hoeing and writing checks, I don't care if they eighteen or what, bitch. They grown. But my sister's children were young. And I'd got the baby first. She was three. She wasn't even three cause I had to potty train her. And she went back to my sister. And eventually—

Esperanza Santos: Because you had the two girls, right?

Bernard McAllister: The two girls, but, but this was off and on it was like, I didn't take them right away. Way my mother could, cause my mother had kind of [01:04:30]— “Here, you take Zeynah now. And then Gretta got better. So Zeynah went back. Then I had Greer. And then Greer went back. I never had Jasyson on his own. But I was always in their life. And I was the uncle like Uncle Bernie got it, and he'll do it. And this is and that responsibility, basically, it made me the man that I was born to be. And when my grandmother said about greatness, and the greatness did not come from necessarily what I am going to do. The greatness came in for me setting up the children so they can be great. So my greatness was in my ability to raise and inspire people. And with the House of Jourdan, um like, there's been, theres certain kids like, I met one kid, he's actually my roommate now, Pudgy, Aaron. And when I met him, he was just so short, fat and feminine. I said, Oh, look at you like a little pudgy.

Esperanza Santos: Uh huh.

Bernard McAllister: Name became Pudgy.

Esperanza Santos: Uh huh.

Bernard McAllister: And I remember he was in tenth grade, and I had my nieces at the time.

Esperanza Santos: Wait, so you were twenty-five, house mother, taking care of – with Pudgy, and these two girls? [01:05:35]

Bernard McAllister: No, I didn't, now remember I didn't get the girls till I was thirty-five. Now, I've been in the House of Jourdan for like twenty-five years'. All right. So it's been a long span.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: But by this time, I, the girls were on their way to, one girl was on their way to, bout to go to high school. And the other one was like in sixth grade or something like that. And Pudgy came into my house, I said, "Look at you, you [01:06:00] little pudgy." And Pudgy became my daughter. And in the interim of this, my sister got clean. And she asked could have a children back? And why, why shouldn't she get her children back, they're her children. And I made the, I always made the conscious decision never to talk badly about my sister in front of my, her kids. I never did.

Esperanza Santos: Yes.

Bernard McAllister: I would yoke her up when they wasn't looking, like, "Girl, bitch, if you don't get yourself together, I will beat the shit out you." [01:06:24]. And when over its, I'm hugging her, "Awwwww!" And she'd be like this. But that's what it was. And I remember Pudgy was in, I met Pudgy he was in the ninth ortenth grade. And he's about to graduate.

Esperanza Santos: He's a baby.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah. And he, and his, and his mother was on drugs, still is, and he, and she had spent the money or something like that. But even better. One day Pudgy spent the night at [01:06:50]my house and I dropped him off at school. And something said, "Bernie, you should go back around this corner."

Esperanza Santos: Huh?

Bernard McAllister: Go back around the corner, I catch Miss Pudgy sneaking out of school.

Bernard McAllister: And I scream, "Take your ass back to fucking school! Or I will slap the shit out you, Pudgy! He runs back in school. Boom. How about he ends up graduating?"

Esperanza Santos: Oh my goodness.

Bernard McAllister: Catch this! [01:07:11] I bought a suit, helped buy a suit. Got his hair cut, borrowed a car. And I chauffeured him on his to his prom.

Esperanza Santos: What?!

Bernard McAllister: And I got him his first real job. At University Hospital.

Esperanza Santos: Oh my goodness! [01:07:27]

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, he's about to be a nurse in another year or two

Esperanza Santos: Oh my goodness!

Esperanza Santos: Oh, look at you, settin' up your babies for success.

Bernard McAllister: And I did that with dozens of people, with dozens of people. And by this time, by that time, I had really realized what my role was. My role was to make sure things stayed in order. If there was a you know, I was the type of person like, "Oh, you're not working again? What happened to you?" "Oh, my manager doesn't like me." So you're saying to me, and all the employees, she picked you? Not to like. She didn't change nobody else's schedule? "Well she changes everybody's schedule, but mine was the worst." How did you notice? Did you look at everybody's schedule? Did you ask them? Everyone did a survey what's best for them? Oh, no, you didn't, you just all of a sudden just think like she's out to get you. What makes you that special that she wants you?

Esperanza Santos: Hmm

Bernard McAllister: That she wants to hurt you? And that's how it started. And so you know, I'm Bernie, I'm Bernie Jourdan, and I've been What's [01:08:40] that thing when you're in charge of the parade? Master of ceremonies, something like that?

Esperanza Santos: Oh, MC, the, oh, I know what you're talking about. The name is eluding me, um-

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, me also, but anyway, I was that, um, a lot of the things that-

Esperanza Santos: For Newark or for what? Or just in general?

Bernard McAllister: For Newark Pride.

Esperanza Santos: What year? [01:08:55]



Bernard McAllister: About five years ago.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. So it's 2019 now, so like 2015.

Bernard McAllister: So and then I don't know if you heard of Dean Credle [01:09:07]. Dean Credle, used to be the Dean of African American Affairs here at Rutgers. And they started this thing called Oh, my God, the Fireball. And they would come, they were the first ones that ever come to the ballroom scene people. This was before New York even started doing it, and talked about safer sex. And it would have these safer sex parties, and you would get \$50 for each party. I had twenty kids and you only needed four people at a party. So we kept having parties [01:09:33] over and over and over and over and over again. And it was with Dean Credle cause at first we didn't trusting credo No, cuz the ballroom scene was so, this was the '80s and early '90s. We didn't trust those people, because again—

Esperanza Santos: They were outside.

Bernard McAllister: Outsiders, and nobody took care of us but us. And—

Esperanza Santos: Like we take care of our family and right now we don't see you as family.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, and eventually they were the ones who got us to go to the state assembly, they got it, was the one for us.

Esperanza Santos: Dean Credle.

Bernard McAllister: Dean Credle and Don Ransom. Um, they got us to be more political. And New York noticed what we were doing here in New Jersey because they had the Latex Ball in New Jersey, in New York, but it was nothing like the Fireball. The Fireball was money, we were elaborate, and remember Jersey is so much smaller than New York. And so it was a big deal, cause South Jersey and North Jersey are basically two separate states, okay? How they feel in South Jersey is not how they feel in North Jersey, and vice versa. And I remember me being on the cover of a newspaper in South Jersey, saying, “This is what they do with our money?”

Esperanza Santos: (gasps) Shut up!

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, that was, I was part of that controversy. I was also a controversy where this [01:10:50] straight guy ends up getting killed at a bar, at a club.

Esperanza Santos: What club was this?

Bernard McAllister: This was Sensations after they moved, not Sensations. Oh, my! What club was that? [Pause 01:11:00] Well, I forget the club. But what it was in, it was over there on Branford Place. And we were at this party. And—

Esperanza Santos: What year was this?

Bernard McAllister: This was '95, maybe '96. By this time I'm already a legend.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: I'm a legend in ballroom at this point.

Esperanza Santos: Beautiful.

Bernard McAllister: I'm the shit, right?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, you got your you got your trophies.

Bernard McAllister: My trophies, and all this other shit. I didn't care. And we were at the party. And I remember when the fight broke out. And I remember hearing something saying pow pow pow. But I didn't know quite what it was. Because again, there are a lot of the Houses were envious of the House of Jourdan because we only hung with each other.

Esperanza Santos: So that made them jealous?

Bernard McAllister: Yeah. Because, because we were winning a lot of stuff. And we have we are we this is one of the lessons I learned after the House Jourdan closed is that ... I kept, I was such a leader that I didn't prepare nobody else to be the next leader.

Esperanza Santos: Ah, you were, you were owning that position, but then, but then, what happened next? [01:12:05]

Bernard McAllister: And there was no room for nothing, nobody to grow with, honey. I was Bernie, and this was it. What happened was that I grew, I

raised some very fantastic talented, opinionated, young, hungry kids and they wanted to see the world on their own. So what eventually ended up happening is the House Jourdan closed, because the House of Balenciaga took all my kids.

Esperanza Santos: Was that, is the Balenciaga House in Atlanta, or—?

Bernard McAllister: It was in Atlanta, they came from Rock Hill.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And they were really from DC. Okay, it was half Mugler, House of Miyake-Mugler, [01:12:45] and most of the House of Jourdan, they came together and they formed the House of Balenciaga.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Bernard McAllister: And in the forming of the House of Balenciaga, that's when I got my kids, all this stuff happened at one time, you understand what I'm saying? [01:13:00] So when I when the House was falling apart, I got custody of my kids.

Esperanza Santos: Oh your sister's kids?

Bernard McAllister: My sister's kids.

Esperanza Santos: Um, and I remember going to church and saying to God, you know, we were beefing with the House. You know, I was feeling like, betrayed, I felt like, how could y'all do this to me, I've given you my whole life, and everything. And I never forget, somebody said, "But we didn't ask you to." And it broke my heart. Because they were right. I did all these things because I didn't want to deal with me and my issues. So it's easily easier for me to lift you up and chest chastise you and train you to be the greatest. It's almost [01:13:45] like Professor X with the X-men. I don't know if you follow the X-men in the comic books, but, but what happened was, the X-men got sick of Professor X. After what, we're no longer kids, Professor X. We're adults and we get to make our own decisions. We may go by, you know what you consider this is how

we will keep our standards of what you taught us. But we don't need you to lead us. So—

Esperanza Santos: Like we can, we can fly out of this nest and we're gonna be okay.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah. And that's what happened and I didn't know how to accept it. I didn't know how to accept it at all, it was a very dark time for me. And I remember going to church because I told you I didn't really join church until I was like, thirty-five.

Esperanza Santos: And oh, so around the same time that House of Jourdan was falling. You got your sister's kids, and then you started going to church?

Bernard McAllister: Yes. And, um, [inaudible 01:14:31] The House Jourdan I started failing first, then I got the kids. Cause they were my life, excuse me, my lifesavers. And in the interim of [01:14:41 that I'm going to church I have to like I felt abandoned. I curse people out. I was so nasty to them. I was really, really a mean person because I was mad at me.

Esperanza Santos: You were hurting.

Bernard McAllister: I was hurt and the House of my best friend Yancy Edwards. He was a Mugler and he knew that they were forming the House of Balenciaga and he never told me. So I felt extra betrayed. So for like about a five or six year period, I was just bitter.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Bernard McAllister: And I was struggling to keep the House Jourdan together. But, but in his incarnation, some great things still happened. You know, cause there's all kinds of that was the first generation to the House of Jourdan, that I took over. And then four generations later, is when everything went it went to hell. And then as I kept going, great things happen. I don't know if you Diva Davanna [01:15:37]. She's a big, she's up, she walks ball. She was the youngest legend in ballroom. She's a legend at twelve. So a woman's runway, fantastic looker. But she's eighteen now.

Esperanza Santos: Wait, did she walk at the ball in July?

Bernard McAllister: I think she did.

Esperanza Santos: Was she really skinny?

Bernard McAllister: Very skinny.

Esperanza Santos: Did she have that clean, sleek, bob? That was her? [01:15:58]

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, that was her.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, everyone went crazy when she went on.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, she um, I met her.

Esperanza Santos: What's her name again?

Bernard McAllister: Davanna.

Bernard McAllister: And she's a Mizrahi now

Esperanza Santos: Mizrahi, oh, House of Mizrahi, okay.

Bernard McAllister: Yeah. And I was, I felt like I was losing everybody's going to these different Houses and I did all this for them and they're not appreciative of what I did. And I don't know if it was the Houseman but somebody said, "But they didn't ask you." You chose to do that [01:16:25]. Because remember, I'm still in recovery. So I have a sponsor and shit now and

Esperanza Santos: Oh, and they'll slap the truth into you, oh no! [01:16:28]

Bernard McAllister: You know, like, yo, yo, you gonna have to get past this, you're gonna have to get past this.

Esperanza Santos: Past this resentment.

Bernard McAllister: And I was at church, I said, God remove anybody who was not in favor of me. I gotta sneeze, excuse me. But in an intro, that, that's when I got the kids. They saved my life. Because they gave me, they gave me a purpose. You know, they gave me a purpose. Um, I was at PTA and I had little girls that know how to do their hair. And I had to deal with Greer gettin' her period. And I had to deal with making sure they were good women, they were going to be good women, and they weren't going to be up, grow to be sluts. And you know, and it just fell into place. So after that, um the kids,

I kept rising to the occasion. You know, um, and then I rose to my occasion. One day, I was at work–

Esperanza Santos: Real quick pause. Right now it's about 12:37.

Bernard McAllister: Want to come back? Can I come back at another time?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. So I think what we can do is set up for the next interview. And we can do that over a phone. That's that sounds, that sounds good. Cause I think I'm, obviously there's a lot–

Bernard McAllister: There's seasons, my life, my life is in seasons. Yeah, my life is in seasons and in songs. Like, when I think of the younger me, I hear certain songs in my head, and it triggers certain memories. And those times, and I've had about nine seasons ... in my life, where things change, people change, and situations come about there's death, there's birth. So all those things changed me into the person I am like, real quick. I was at UMDMJ and I was a clerk in the Radiology Department. And they set me up to work in nuclear, nuclear radiation. Now mind you, I'm, I'm smart. You know, boom boom, I get so hot. I only have a GED. And one day this this Indian guy, I fucking hated him, I can't even think of [01:18:45] his name, he was such an asshole. And I think he was intimidated by my gayness. And not that I was very flamboyant cause I'm a little masculine, really. But how I didn't give a fuck. I really, cause it wasn't an issue for me. If it was an issue for you, you got to write and tell me because I'm moving. I'm doing my thing. I'm not even thinking about how it's affecting you. And me and this older woman, Vivian. God bless her. She just passed. And a doctor says something to her, says something, I thought he was being very nasty and condescending. And I said to him, "Who are you talking to?" "I'm talking to her." I said, "Good, cause I'm sure wasn't talking to me, cause if you was talking to me, we'd have a problem." And I turned around, you know, that little bitch. So I'm sitting there and Vivian, me and Vivian get into an argument. She

told me that I was wrong and I was disrespectful to the doctor. But baby he was disrespectful to you. "No, he wasn't." Okay. And it turned into a big argument me and her were [01:19:53] having, it was loud. And the manager of the department came to me and he said to us, he said, "I hear what you guys are, you guys are arguing and people were complaining. And then the doctor said, I said, "Well wait a minute, the doctor said? He was one who started the whole thing because he was rude." He said, "Bernard, do not blame me, cause you chose this to be your life. This is your lot in life. And I was crushed. He crushed me. And I was in recovery and he crushed me. Like, basically, this is what you chose in life. You're a clerk. So what the fuck is you mad about? This is what you chose, this your lot in life. And Vivian is sittin' there agreein' with him. So by this time, I'm holding back tears. I'm just fucked up now. So I said, Oh, and it was a lady named Mary Mathis-Floyd. She's my friend Martin's mother, but she was on the Board of Directors for the hospital. She made it all the way to the top, baby. And she was the shit. Right? So I said, "You know what? I'm gonna go see Mary." Mary wasn't there. And as she came in, I just started crying. I was on my lunch. And I was like, Oh, my God. And he said, he had the nerve to tell [01:21:00] me this is my lot in life. She said, "He said what?!" Like, I chose this. And I might as well accept it if this is what I chose. My hand to God. This is when fax machines was really big. And they used to send [01:21:14] the commercials to the fax machine restaurants and stuff. And you would get like a printout. And this thing came through. She said, "You know what? This just came through, you should look at this." It was St. Peter's College. And it said, "Are you ready to change your life?" Oh, my hand to God! It said, "Are you ready to change your life?" And I was like, "Whoa, get the fuck out of here." So me and a friend of mine, Mike, we went

there. And I didn't get in. And it was an accelerated course. It was like, it was three years instead of four. And the degree was in Urban Studies, Public Policy. And that was it. And that was, that was the beginning of the education piece. That's, we is, that was season six, season seven. And that's what we're gonna end. So I know when we come back, we can go from that. Yeah.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Oh, Bernie, thank you so much.

Bernard McAllister: You're more than welcome.

Esperanza Santos: It's been a pleasure.

Bernard McAllister: My pleasure. Please. Anybody who's interested in the story, if it can help one person, why not?

Esperanza Santos: Thank you. Yeah, I'm gonna end these devices and then we'll be all set.

Bernard McAllister: Okay.