

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Bernard McAllister

Interviewer: Whitney Strub, Brendan Fox

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Location: Zoom

Whitney Strub: Okay. Should be recording. If everybody just wants to go around and introduce themselves, this is Whitney Strub with the Queer Newark Oral History Project. It's April 23, 2021 and we're recording over Zoom. Do you just wanna say hello for the transcript?

Bernard McAllister: Hey, everybody, my name is Bernie Jourdan Ebony, I'm Bernard McAllister in the real world. Hello.

Whitney Strub: Brendan, do you wanna jump on?

Brendan Fox: I'm Brendan Fox 0:00:32, I volunteer with the Queer Newark Oral History Project.

Whitney Strub: Cool. Well, yeah, and thanks for doing this, Bernie, I know you've taken a lot of time to commit to this project and we really appreciate it. I'll just jump in with a first question and then let Brendan take over from there. Basically, how have you handled the pandemic? Do you wanna just bring us up to speed on what it's been like for you and how it's affected you, and your family, and loved ones?

Bernard McAllister: Well, it's been interesting because there's been some introspect where you sit back and you get to know yourself, and reevaluate things 'cause there's nothin' else to do in the beginning. Then it becomes a little burdensome and like, "Oh god, how much longer is this gonna last?" Then it gets to the point where it starts to bother you immensely. I have a great therapist, so she brought it to my attention that maybe it might be wearing on me, it became very heavy. Then you get some acceptance and realize some things are just beyond your control. I got the vaccine.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Were people in your orbit affected? I know we've been north of Jersey in general— [*crosstalk 0:01:46*].

Bernard McAllister: I worked at University Hospital for seventeen years, when I left, I was a manager of a department. I lost two former employees, I lost a cousin—or two cousins, they were brothers, they were older, and my mother's next brother next to her. He was in a coma for five weeks and he's in rehab now just learning how to breathe and walk, and talk. I don't think people quite understand, I think the Trump train really put such a question mark on it that he really helped murder a lot of people. He really—for political stupid reasons. This should've never

been political at all, wearing masks and things of that nature, but [00:02:40] I think they were lookin' for a reason and whenever you look for a reason, you usually find it.

Who else did I lose? There was Anthony, George, Uncle Roger, Ms. Simon, and there were maybe six people at the hospital that I knew of. Now, there's friends who've lost family members and it's just terrible.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I know, I'm sorry about the losses that you've experienced. Just one quick follow-up there and then I think Brenden can take over with some detailed questions from the past. What about just the effect on Newark's LGBTQ community? Do you think there's anything specific to LGBTQ Newark that the pandemic has affected or is it just the same general things that the broader public has experienced?

Bernard McAllister: Well, you know what? One thing about the gay and lesbian community here in—'cause I can't remember all the alphabet, so I just go with the G&L, that's the things that I know the most. Newark is a strange place when it comes to communication, i.e., the black church, i.e., city hall, i.e., the politics of the gay and lesbians here. It seems like everybody wants to have their own tent. Nobody wants to—not that they don't want to, but I'm gonna gather they don't have initiative because they never seem to be able to gel well. If they gel well for one year, then we'll have two off years and then we'll gel again.

I think everybody means well, but what happens that people tend to bargain for what they need and not what's best for the community all the time. You'll have some people who aren't really understanding of prostitution with the trannies, the trans-women. Some people come from a different background, which should not really make a difference, but it does. Something like a caste system like in India, it has a little caste system to it. That's what tends to happen in Newark.

Whitney Strub: Okay. No, that makes sense. Let's shift gears because I know you don't have a ton of time and Brenden's got some really good questions. Do you wanna just start lobbing them, Brenden?

Brendan Fox: Yeah, I think I can start asking them. I guess my first question that I thought—well, I don't know. What was it like growing up gay in North Carolina? When you were younger, you said you went back and forth between North Carolina and Newark, and the Ironbound I guess at that moment. In New Jersey, how was that growing up?

Bernard McAllister: Very good question because I never really think about that. I was in the closet in North Carolina and I was a different kid and Brendan,

hopefully you can identify with this. They would go outside and, "Let's play sports." "No, I'm not playing sports, honey, I'm not doing that." "Go out in the field with your grandmother and pick tomatoes." "I'm not pickin' tomatoes, it's hot outside and there's bugs."

Once they got with that acceptance of who I was, I didn't think it would be a big step when I came out. My first—my early years of coming out, I spent a couple summers in North Carolina still. It was pretty fun, but you could feel there was not room for maneuvering. There was, this is what we did, you didn't bring it to your grandparents, you didn't bring it to your cousins because durin' that time, I'm fifty-something and they were still using butt plug thing and, "Oh, you're a fag," thing.

I used to look at them like—I was never offended because I'm not easy to offend. I just found that it was really daunting at the time to be there, especially as I got older. When you're young and gay—especially for men—yeah, I guess for the lesbians, too. You wanna go out there, you wanna hear the beat, you wanna be part of the streets, you wanna be part of the village. I was down there and I was thinkin' about Christopher Street. I was thinkin' about Pride. I was thinkin' about how free it was.

The lesson I did learn from North Carolina was about conform—not conforming, but bein' free and not bein' free. I consider North Carolina was very, very—as I grew, it would choke me. When up here, the sky was the limit 'cause there was nothin' that you couldn't do in the New York/New Jersey area. That was cool, but my grandparents, they went to church a lot, and my uncle told my grandparents that this boy said I was tryin' to mess with him, and in actuality, I did mess with him. They tell me like, "You tried," "No, you enjoyed it."

I remember my grandmother sayin' to me, "Yeah, Arnold came here talkin' 'bout some stuff about this boy, said you like him." I was goin' to North Carolina State at the time in Fayetteville. I was like, "What? Who said that? Why would he say that?" I was just panicking, but as soon as I started panicking, I remembered like, "Okay, who cares?" My grandfather on his deathbed, I went to visit him maybe four days before he passed away and we were talkin', and I said, "I know you heard what Arnold was sayin' about me," and I was about to lie to him and he said, "Oh, I don't care what he's talkin' about. You're here now, that's what matters."

That was my—he signed my application for me to be free. I have good memories, but I do remember feeling different. I was ostracized,

but I was different from most boys down there because I was definitely not interested in any fieldwork, I wasn't ridin' anybody's horses, I would just sit around and read Vogue Magazine and stuff. My grandmother and them didn't know what it was, I would read Essence Magazine, they didn't know what the hell was goin' on, as long as he's bein' quiet. That's how it was for me, so there was a difference. I think North Carolina prepared me and Newark raised me.

Brendan Fox: All right. You answered my second question, which was what was the dynamic between North Carolina and Newark and you answered that with Newark raise and North Carolina prepared you. I guess this is a little intensive question, but I just wanted to ask is, what kind of drugs did you see popular in Newark versus New York City? I feel like it's a bit different.

Bernard McAllister: Oh, in New York City?

Brendan Fox: Yeah. What was popular in New York City and then what was popular in Newark, New Jersey? I don't know if it's the same thing, maybe people—

Bernard McAllister: Well, did you say drugs or did you just say what's the difference?

Brendan Fox: Drugs 'cause I know you were [*crosstalk 0:10:30*] background.

Bernard McAllister: Yes, baby, now you're talkin' my language. Okay. Well, Newark put a lot of emphasis on not necessarily followin' a trend, Jersey followed its own trend. See, in New York there was the Limelight, The Garage, everything was up, the girls wanted to be up all night for three and four days, so coke was really popular. Coke in Jersey was crack. It was crack, but in New York, people were sniffin' coke and puttin' coke in their cigarettes. You're in the club, you're done, you [*unintelligible 0:11:11*] or somethin'. That was in.

Newark has this—Newark is a strange place and I don't think we get enough—more people should write about Newark. Newark has this thing where we—it was almost like we followed the tradition of gettin' high. First it was heroin that was very big—well, no, first it was pills for me. I took these pills called siebers and codeines 0:11:39 when I started when I was fourteen years old, and I always hung with older people until I got old. Now I hang with young people. When I was comin' up, I always hung with women that were thirty years, forty years old, and I'm sixteen.

Let me tell you a story. Kids would come home from school and I would be sittin' in the house smokin' a joint with their mother. They'd be like, "Hey, ma," and they'd walk in and they was like, "Hi, Bernie." I was like, "Hey." 'Cause I was always—I was more worldly when I was growin' up, I wanted to know, I wanted experience, I wanted to smell it, I wanted to see the world. When I got to New York, I noticed that takin' a down drug in New York was not the look because gay people, we all—if nothin' else, our appearance at that time was everything. You had to be up, you couldn't be caught slipping.

Wherever I was at is what the drug I did, so when I was in New York, that was a completely different, different, different situation. When you were in Newark, it was like you hung around in Newark and you hung in neighborhoods, and there was dope, and there were pills. What happened was sibras and codeines were very, very big, there was a company that made them in Philadelphia and they stopped making them. That's why dope or heroin became very, very big in Newark and it has been ever since. Dope was a substitute drug, much like today when people take prescription drugs and they can no longer get them, they go to heroin.

That was the same here for Newark. For New York, you didn't hear about really much of the heroin. That would be in Brooklyn and Harlem, but midtown, everybody was doin' coke, everybody wanted to be up and look fabulous. Even though they both dealt with addiction and they were both horrible drugs for you, but one was upbeat and I'm here or you got to fake it with the coke. When you're on pills in Newark or dope in Newark, you're in the gritty city of Newark and there's no shining lights, you can't say, "Oh, I feel like walkin' down—let's go see Broadway." There's none of that. It was just Newark and you're stoned, and depressed, and everything. I got clean in Newark. I got clean.

Whit Strub: When was that?

Bernard McAllister: Twenty-seven, twenty-eight years ago. I went to the East Orange Pride program.

Whit Strub: Okay. Early '90's?

Bernard McAllister: No, I think it was about '89 or somethin' like that, I forget. Well, okay, this is the story, this is the story. I was smokin' crack with two friends of mine, one is clean today, the other's passed on from the virus. We were gettin' high and I said to them—we were sittin' there in the circle, nothin' spectacular. I said, "I don't think I'm gonna be doin' this no more," and they busted out laughin'. Now, I didn't know how I was

gonna not use it anymore, I just kept sayin', "I don't think I wanna do this, this ain't really fun. Y'all are boring."

The one that's still living, he was stayin' with me and my mom, and my sister at the time, we were best friends. We were walkin' home and I said, "Nah, I'm done," and he busted out laughin'. I remember callin' East Orange—well, this was one—and Brendan, you might appreciate this. I was at a party and everybody was at the party. When you're twenty-one and twenty-two, everybody has to be at the party and I was one of the 'it' girls so I was at the party. The girls started bein' shady and started readin' each other, and I was always one who always could read everybody.

There was this kid there and I will not make him famous, but I was readin' him and he said, "Well, whatever you say doesn't make a difference because everybody knows you're like cracked out," in front of everybody. When he stunned me, he put his hand up to my face, he said, "Matter of fact, kiss the hand of the House of Revlon." He put it like that and I was so humiliated and I tried to say somethin' back, but he was tellin' the truth. He said, "Those aren't even your clothes, you're wearin' your best friend's clothes." I went home and I cried. I cried, I cried, I cried because goin' back to North Carolina, my grandmother would always tell me that there was somethin' special about me.

She always said, she said, "There's somethin' about you. You're special." She said, "You're gonna help a lot of people." I was like, "Who me, grandma? Please. Can you hand me the magazine?" I didn't wanna—I didn't know what she was talkin' about really, but she saw somethin'. When I got clean, she actually came to me in my dreams in reference to me gettin' clean.

Gettin' back to the story, after the party, I called East Orange General, I went up there, they said, "In two days, you gotta come up." I had a trench coat, which wasn't mine, it was my best friend's, and an Indiana Jones-like hat, and the collar up. Back then when you went to the rehab, it was part of the hospital, so you had to sit in the emergency room. I sat in the emergency room like this for ninety minutes like nobody could see me. I was calm, cool, and collected. When you get up on the floor, right? They have the people who have been there for a while greet you, they say, "Welcome."

There was this lady named Joann, she was a little lady, but she looked like she had been through hell in life. She lookin' so fierce, I was like, "Ooh," and she smiled and she had no teeth. She said, "It's okay, you home now." I looked at her, I looked around and I just bust out cryin'.

I was like, "Oh my god, I'm a junkie. What is wrong with me?" Then she was like, "No, no, calm down, you're good." Even years after I would see her around at the NA meetin's and I would still tell the story about how I looked at them and bust out cryin'. I said, "This is how I knew it was real, right, Joann?" She be like, "Yeah. "Because when I saw your ass, I said I knew I was in some trouble. I was in bad company." I said, "Whoa, I didn't know it was this deep."

That's how I got clean. I think I had tried to get clean on my own, but never be successful with it. This time, for some reason, I didn't even think about it. It just didn't come to my mind. It was just because I knew my time was up. I think everybody goes through a certain—we have spans, not a lifespan, but there's—to me, life isn't a lifespan, there's spans, there's parts to your life. Who I was at twenty is nowhere near the same person or the beliefs at thirty-five or forty when I took my sister's children and I raised them for fifteen years.

During that time, I didn't have no therapy, I didn't know anythin' about me not lovin' myself, I didn't know about me feelin' less than, or any of those things, all I knew is I was tired of gettin' high. When I did, it brought me back to the Ballroom because I left 'cause I was doin' drugs so badly. They was more like a pimp that I used to stay clean. I wasn't an NA guru type person, I didn't work all the steps that some people do. I went to step three and I've been on step three for twenty-seven years, I know there's nine more, but who needs them? I'm good now and in therapy, you work through them anyway.

Yeah. When I got clean, it was a burden taken off me. Not because of just necessarily using and how people look at you for using, it just felt so heavy to me. It was so much work. Who can do this all day? "Hey, we're walkin' up the street," I said, "But it's cold outside." I said, "Could you bring me somethin'?" They was like, "No, you have to get out there like we get out there." Well, baby, I found a way where I didn't have to get out there, I just left it alone. That's how it's been.

Brendan Fox:

I guess that leads into my next question is, in the interview that I went over and listened to, you called yourself the mayor— LGBTQ mayor of Newark. I thought that was really cool because like you said, you're going to the party and you're the 'it' girl, so everyone knows you. I just wanted to ask, how does it feel?

Bernard McAllister:

You know what? That's a great question, too 'cause that's a great segue. What happened with me gettin' clean, I was the only one out my generation on my close friends that got clean, I didn't get clean with a group of people. I got clean by myself. When I went to rehab, I went to rehab like, "There's not another damn [0:21:08] gay person

that—I don't know none of these gay people. Who the fuck is these people?" I'd be like, "You're from Newark?" They'd be like, "Yeah, we know you, Bernie." "Oh."

I think getting clean gave me a voice in a whole different way. I met Dean Credle and them and I had maybe nine, eight years clean. Did I have—yeah, I had a good bit of clean time. I found my voice that in a voice where my grandmother said that you were gonna help people. I found that Ballroom bein' the Mother of a House at that time because I've been the Mother and the Father. It gave me a voice to help because when you're in charge of a House and you know you have people under you, and you know that they depend on you for guidance, and you're clean, it gives you inspiration. It motivates you.

I didn't even know I was a community activist, I know when I was gettin' high, I didn't like to litter. I know when I was gettin' stoned, I would see somebody homeless and I would give them a dollar. I was raised not to make fun of people. You understand what I'm sayin'? When I got clean, it became exaggerated 120 percent, so I just started givin' homeless people food. It wasn't no biggie, I just did. It felt good and I had forty kids under my wing, ten of them lived with me, and I knew I had to set an example. Not that I had to set an example, I was the example. Is that a better [00:22:49]—I was the example, I didn't have to set it for them, I set it for me and it just worked for me.

A lot of my kids were gettin' high and I allowed them to do what they needed to do, but I always let them know there was another way. Like, "You don't have to be clean, but you don't have to smoke crack. You don't have to be clean and you don't have to spend all your last money on weed." There's a middle ground in there, so I think I was the example for people for many, many years. A lot of their parents did drugs and they were followin' the same pattern as their parents, and I guess I would be that second family parent that didn't do any of that.

I remember they would go home and tell their mothers, "Well, Ms. Bernie don't do that," and they mothers were like, "Who the fuck is this Ms. Bernie? And who gives a shit what she do?" Then I started meeting the parents and the parents would come to me, and thank me for lookin' out for their children. I wasn't the type of gay person who slept with their kids. That didn't really get me, you couldn't—if we fucked, I wasn't your mother. That's just the way it is, I'm not. I'm not even an uncle, I'm like, "No," that wasn't cool.

I think I set the example for me so—I left footprints for them to follow. I didn't necessarily tell you, you had to follow my footsteps.

The pattern was there if you chose to and that's what happened, and most of them—I've had parents still to this day who call me and thank me. Literally thank me for—I've had parents who've been in tears about their trans daughters and everything. Everything. I'd be like, "Thank you," and it wasn't until I got into therapy in the last about probably twelve years that I could accept the thank you and understand it, and I'd just be like, "Oh, you're welcome," and not even receive it. Now I can receive it and digest it, and be all right with it, and not feel like, "Oh my god, I'm a god," no.

I just did what I was supposed to do. I was just part of that span of their life. I'm just part of that journey, I'm not the journey. I'm not Martin Luther King, I'm not any of those things, or Coretta Scott King, all I was, was somebody who set myself up for what I wanted to be and anybody who followed me was more than free to follow me. Those who didn't was fine, too. Do you understand what I'm sayin'? If you were young on crack, I was like, "Well, are you really happy, girl? You look a mess. Why don't you try—girl, come here and take a bath. Sleep for two days, get it together." Like, "Girl, look at ya and that wig."

I used to say stuff like that, but I didn't say it like, "Oh, drugs will kill ya," I didn't push the envelope, I didn't push them to do anythin' but be an example. I was an example. That's, I think, was really, really good for me. That was good for me 'cause I also used that in gettin' jobs and everythin' 'cause I had a GED when I was gettin' stoned. I have my master's and I'll probably be workin' on my PhD in September.

Whitney Strub: Nice.

Bernard McAllister: The journey—like my grandmother always told me, she said—I knew I was special, I just didn't know at what. I had no clue. No clue. When I quit school and I was sniffin' coke and doin' all that shit in the tenth grade 'cause I quit school in the tenth grade and my mother never knew. Every day she walked out the door, I walked out the door right with her. She went to work, I walked around the corner, unlocked the door and got back in bed. For two and a half years. One day, the—and this was like I had this inner thing for me and people say, "Oh, Bernie, you saved me," and all these things, but they saved me, too because by lookin' what they were goin' through, I didn't have to repeat the same shit no more.

Bein' a Pisces, we're dreamers. We fantasize a lot. I would always remember they said, "Don't think about gettin' high again, think about the first time—because that'll come easy, but think about all the shit

you gotta go through with gettin' high." That was the thing that I was like, "Uh-uh. Hm-mm, I'm not doin' that no more," because I was lucky. I was never homeless, I never stayed—you know what I'm sayin'? I never shot drugs. I was a recreational drug user who just couldn't stop.

Whitney Strub:

Yeah, that's really great vivid detail. Can I jump in with two quick follow-up questions and then I'll turn it back over Brendan? I just wanted to ask—this is a really quick detail question, but I was curious where in the Ironbound your family lived while they were there while you were growing up. Then secondly, you mentioned hanging out with older people. I'm just curious, when you first entered the gay world and the gay scene, were your romantic and sexual partners your peer group or were they older, or was it a combination of the two? I'm just curious how that played out.

Bernard McAllister:

Well, in the beginning, when I was down South, I hung with some gay guys and they were cool, and none of them did drugs but me. It was cool, I was a hero in North Carolina the last couple years before I got my GED and went to college, and all that stuff. Here, I had no interest in sex for many, many years. Of course, I was gay, honey, but I would maybe have a date every nine months or somethin' like that because I was so more into the streets and gettin' stoned, and lookin' fabulous. That was the era right after disco when things were fabulous. We had Diana Ross, we had Cher, everybody was done.

That's when I first found about Yves Saint Laurent and—not that I could afford these things, but those are the things I dreamt about. You understand what I'm sayin'? Those were the things that I wanted to do. I would look at people who were like—I had family members who was just really caught up in it and even my sister, god bless her, she passed two years ago, and it was drug related 'cause her heart was—all her—everything was messed up from so many years of usin' drugs that she had a heart attack. I always tell people that I didn't have the hunger for it, I just couldn't see it. "No, girl, it's cold outside. I'm not goin'—no."

The last time I got high, I was in a fuckin' snow storm over there on Orange Street and me and Altese 0:29:57 who works—I can mention his name 'cause he's clean. That's one of my dearest, dearest friends, he's like a brother to me. We walked all over north lookin' for these pills and when we got there, the man had quadrupled the price. I said, "You know what? I'm gettin' a little tired of this." 'Cause I would always say it no matter when we were stoned, I said, "Tsss, man, I'm gettin' tired of this, this is boring." I remember when I got clean and for some reason, God is so beautiful that he took all of the diversions

away. I was focused. All the people that I got stoned with, for some reason, I would never see them.

As I was goin' to meetin'—we're talkin' years, I was in the same house, it was an apartment with my mom and them, but I just didn't see them for some reason. I was so busy just wantin' to stay clean. Then by that time, I had found my voice and—what'd you ask me? Oh, you were askin' about the older people. I don't know why I got goin' with that, but I felt like my spirit was tellin' me to say all that.

With the older ones, I always felt more comfortable with the older women because my mother was a single mother and my aunts and them, when they hung out, they always dressed up. They always looked fabulous. They was hardworking women and you know I'm—wait, how old are you?

Whitney Strub: Me? I'm forty-two.

Bernard McAllister: Okay. You're a few years behind me. But, at that time, parents weren't really love-dovey. You had working-class parents, you had everythin' you needed, you didn't want for anythin', except a hug and say, 'I love you.' I didn't even notice I was missing that because we never had that. I was always attracted to those women that were like my mother, but wasn't, my mother never used drugs or anythin' like that, and she worked at the post office for fifty years. I was one of the few kids that mother always worked. I just felt like kids were beneath me. I didn't quit school to hang with people in school.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Bernard McAllister: So, I hung with their parents who was shootin' drugs. [00:32:09] What that taught me was how I learnt the streets, I learned how to carry myself, I knew how to defend myself, not necessarily even bein' physical with. When you're fifteen and you're hangin' around people who are thirty-five and forty, and they have children, and they tell you, "Yeah," and they would school me on things. I was schooled. I was so lucky I was schooled on what the streets were, what do you do? I was lucky that when I came out the closet fully, my Cousin Carnell, God bless him, he was a bartender at Murphy's, he was the first one to take me to The Village. I saw two men kiss, I lost my goddamned mind, I couldn't believe it.

I said, "Oh, wow," and he pulled me away, I was this close to them and I was like, "His tongue is in his mouth, what?" Carnell pulled me by my collar sayin', "Will you come on?" I said, "I never saw it." He also taught me who to sleep with, not to give it to everybody. I think

that was one of the reasons that I didn't become infected. I've done all the things to be a great candidate to be HIV-positive, don't get me wrong, I've done everything. It was really, really strange because I was taught.

When you see young people out there and it could be twenty young people, all of us hanging together, and they're sayin', "Well, we're gonna go break the window and rob the store." "I'm not robbin' no store. I'm goin' back to New Jersey where I can lay my head." Because I was around the older people, they told me the things that I didn't have to follow other teenagers. When you get a group of teenagers together, you know how you can have the mean group of people like the Heathers, and the mean girls, I never had that because I always hung with older people. When they would try to be mean to me and say, "Look at you, you're this, you're that," I said, "Yeah, but I hang with your mother. What is she doin', babe?" I'd say, "Well, I'm goin' in the house with your mother to get stoned."

Again, that gave me that upper hand over the people that would try to make fun of me. When I got clean, I went back to all of those women and they was still in my life. Some have passed on—a lot have passed on, but one lady is seventy-somethin'. She said—then she called me Bern G, she said, "You remember you used to be at my house when I was gettin' high and you was drinkin' beer?" I hate beer. I never liked beer. When it's that span, you've gotta go through—you gotta try things. Yeah, that's why my—I was always attracted to—especially women. Women were my go-to.

Whitney Strub: Okay. No, that makes sense. I think Brenden had questions about Carnell, actually, who I'd actually like to hear more about. I think the one thing you didn't hit was just geographically thinking in the story here, where in the Ironbound did you—

Bernard McAllister: Oh, okay. Okay. I lived on Chestnut and Pacific. Okay. I was in the Ironbound section, but I was right behind Symphony Hall, maybe six blocks under—three blocks past McCarter Highway. It was a wonderful time for me because my mother had always raised us by herself and our grandparents helped. We had cousins, but we were never around them because my mother was—we just—we weren't. When I hit thirteen—how old are you when you're in 7th grade? About thirteen, right?

Whitney Strub: I think so.

Bernard McAllister: Okay. Around thirteen, my aunt said there's an apartment downstairs, Lisa, you should come here and the Ironbound changed my life

forever. My mother was a pretty intelligent woman, so we weren't allowed to say, "Oh, so-and-so is a white cracker or they're Puerto Rican," and my sister would be like, "Everybody's Puerto Rican?" My mom said, "No, they're not—your neighbors are Brazilian, and next door to us, they're Portuguese, and down the street, they're Ecuadorians." My mother wouldn't let you slide with things like that, she just felt like you should know these things, duh.

What happened was, it opened me up to all these different types of people, and then hangin' with older women, I'm fifteen and they're forty. I'm seein' them goin' food shoppin' and they're bein' diverse, you know what I'm sayin'? I'm like, "Oh." When I got around people my age, I act like their mother like, "Oh, Bernie, we're goin' down there to fight so-and-so," "Well, y'all have a good time, but I'm not goin' down there," and I can fight. I wasn't a follower due to the fact that I had followed these women who had already been through the ringer and was comin' out of it.

I was like, "Oh, this is how you do it." That's how I somehow became 'Bernie' in the projects. They're like, "Oh," now don't get me wrong, I've had incidents in the projects, I even had an incident once where I had to move away from Newark for about—it was about two years maybe. I had to move to Brooklyn because I knocked this boy out. Even in that, I wasn't like, "Oh," I just knew that this wasn't safe for me to be at and let things die down because I was always—when I started hangin' with older women, what I find with women—especially black mothers, they always have to have two or three steps ahead, do you understand what I'm sayin'?

It could be Monday night, but they're thinkin' about what they're goin' to feed their children on Thursday. It could be the 25th, they'll think about when the check come, how they're gonna pay all the bills. I would go with them to pay their bills, so I got it from them and that's how I became that person. I never lived in the projects, which people always ask me where I'm from, I always say Pennington Court, which I'm not, I was from Chestnut and Pacific, which is maybe three blocks away.

Even people that lived in the projects thought I lived in the projects, I was there so much. That's was my location, my locale.

Whitney Strub: Okay. No, thanks for that. Yeah, Brenden, if you wanna jump on.

Brendan Fox: I wanted to ask this before we end because we're almost close there. You were a clerk at a hospital and then you had an incident, and then you went back to get your—because there was a [*crossstalk 0:38:47*].

I just wanted to know, how did it feel to go back to school and you also had the House of Jourdan, and you built that up. Is there a correlation in your head where you're like, "Oh, I can do successful things when I put all my limit to it," because you had the House of Jourdan and you built so up, and then you—

Bernard McAllister: Yeah, and I'm glad you're sayin' that, too because let me say this to you because I don't know if I've ever said it in the last interviews. Everythin' I learned about an interview, I learned from ballroom [00:39:17]. I learned how to enter a room, I knew when to turn my head a certain way because I knew the reaction you would have because when you're judged by ten queens, honey, you gotta know the ropes and you gotta get thick skin. I walked runway, so my idol was Naomi Campbell, Iman, again, women, but I remembered the men that would walk with them.

I would carry—one time this guy said to me, he said, "You know, you walk like you're a king." That didn't come from me havin' all this self-confidence, it came from me watchin' models and see how they walk with their head up because I was good at fakin' it. "Oh, that's what you do?" Most jobs I did well in as far as interview wise because I would always go in dressed to the nines. I could even get somethin' from VIM and make it look fabulous because that's what their models did.

You're a baby [00:40:20]—you wouldn't know and I'm sure you didn't watch it either, but they used to have this thing on CNN that started years ago, it was called Elsa Klensch and she went to all the fashions all over the world. She would go to the shows and she would interview Linda Evangelista, Christy Turlington, and all the people. I was like, "Ah," every Saturday, all the fags watched Elsa Klensch at 10:30 and then we'd go to the Village and be like, "Oh, girl, Elsa Klensch, ah." That was the thing then, big shoulder pads and all that shit.

That's how I understood. When I went to job interviews, I would forget I was me, I would act like I was walkin' down the runway and I always, when I left, always wanted to leave a nice impression, so when I walked away, I even faked my walk because I was in character because Ballroom calls for you to be a character when you're on the floor. If you're walkin' performance, if you're walkin' realness for trans men, trans—they all have to put on a persona.

Remember back then, most of the people in Ballroom were poor, we didn't have no endorsements for Coca-Cola, no Pose 0:41:34, no Legendary, we didn't have any of that. We were just—we were in

Ballroom because we loved it. A lot of people were in Ballroom because they had no place else to go. There were no fightin' for your rights, but actually, I came out even pre-AIDS, I was twelve, thirteen hangin' out. Pre-AIDS.

Ballroom gave me the confidence, the ability to act. My grandmother gave me the edge for tellin' me I was special. My mother always gave me the edge by treatin' me like a young adult 'cause I would have to go to the store and get her cigarettes, I had to go get her tampons, and stuff like that. They would laugh at me talkin' 'bout, "You had to go get your mother's tampons. Eww." "Well, baby, she needs them. What am I supposed to do say no?" I said, "Who cares what you think?"

I didn't really come out—the way I'm actin' now is pretty much how I acted, maybe not as—wouldn't put so much accent on it, but this is how I acted as a straight boy. I was always outgoing and talking, even when I was shy on the inside because I told you I was an actor. You never showed them what's goin' on, on the inside. I remember when I first started thinkin' boys were cute and then one day, I noticed that all the boys I hung with that were my best friends were fine.

"Todd is cute. Tracy is fine. Ooh, Malik is gorgeous." I was like, "Bitch, you is really gay." As I got older, I would look at it, I was like, "Oh, an ugly boy is—" and when I say 'ugly', well, ugly physically because I was young. Also people who had ugly energy, I didn't—hm-mm, hm-mm. If you weren't just a good guy and fine, I didn't wanna—I didn't have many words for you. I wasn't raised with my father, my father was in jail most of my life, so everythin'—my grandfather was a big influence in my life, my father when he was home, or just his energy was a big influence.

My Cousin Carnell were the men in my life. Well, my Uncle Roger and them, too, but they were straight, playin' basketball. Carnell was the first older gay person, he's my cousin and my god-brother. He was the first one to say like, "Come on, child, we gonna go to so-and-so." He looked like Sylvester, the singer. He had the Jheri Curl (*laughs*) and he would do drag, and he didn't give a fuck. I was like, "Where you goin'?" "With Carnell. [00:44:20]" My mother always told me even as a baby, I would follow him. I would follow him. Not knowing he was gay, but I knew he had this—you ever have these friends that seem to be able who they are no matter where they at? That was Carnell.

Carnell didn't give—he didn't pretend to be straight, he was like, "What? Child," and I was like—and they used to say, "Carnell gay." I said, "Is he? I never noticed." That's why the way I'm actin' now just

bein'—not having the burden of having to be gay. Now, don't get me wrong, I do sometimes be like—not now, but when I was younger, I'd be like, "Oh god, I don't have to explain I'm gay," and then when the girls like you. People don't notice and I say this to this day, women can be very cruel, especially young girls. Those were the ones who would taunt us because they would get the boys to taunt us. You gotta be careful of the little girls, honey, especially little straight ones.

I found that it was like, "Well, Carnell's able to be his-self so I can be myself." Yeah, and plus, he lived upstairs, and he was so much fun. He was really fun, really fuckin' crazy. We used to play Mary Tyler Moore office. Oh yeah, and I'd be like, "I'm Mary," he said, "No, you can't be Mary, I'm Mary, bitch. You can be Betty White or Rhoda." See, that's the kind of household we were in because we laughed a lot. I had friends who didn't have that, they weren't lucky enough to have that. I never suffered as a child in my—on behalf of my mother not giving. My suffering came from growing up, having insecurities, some things your parents just can't help you with, and that was my struggle. It was never a struggle.

Did I ever tell you guys the story about how I came out to my mother?

Brendan Fox: I don't think so.

Bernard McAllister: Okay, real quick story. I'm gonna keep talkin' 'til they knock on the door, so anyway. I had got drunk—well, Carnell got me drunk and we were smokin' weed in the backyard. Him and my sister—well, my sister was bisexual—and she said, "I bet you won't go in there and tell mamma you're gay." I said, "What?" Here go Carnell, "I dare you." I said, "No, I can't do that." "Here, have another drink." This was a life lesson for me, this was one of the moments that changed my life. My mother was cookin' chicken and we lived in a row house, so you had to go through her room to our room to get to the kitchen.

Even though it was a small apartment [00:47:31], it was my greatest, favorite apartment we ever lived in because there was just so much love there. It was always somethin' with us. I went in the house and she was fryin' chicken, and I was drunk, and I sat down behind her on the chair. I said, "Ma, I got somethin' to tell you." She looked at me and she said, "What is it?" Because my mother [00:47:50] was really naïve a lot because she didn't know about drug use and stuff like that. If I was drunk, she wouldn't know.

I said, "I think I'm gay." She said, "Oh," she never turned around, she kept fryin' the chicken. She waited about fifteen seconds, she said,

"Oh, it's probably a phase." I said, "I don't know, ma, I'm pretty good at it. I don't know if it's a phase." She said, "Oh, okay." She said, "Well, you know gay people are never happy, honey." I looked at her—I looked at the back of her head, she never turned around. She said, "They're not happy and they live a lonely life sometimes." I think that's what made [00:48:32] me want to have the Jourdans around me because I didn't want to have that lonely life. I did not want to be alone.

She never told me not to do it, she didn't endorse it, and that was the last full conversation we ever had. I'm fifty-three and we've never discussed it again, it's just it is what it is. She's met boyfriends, dates, probably a couple of her coworkers, who knows. But, we never had that conversation. My mother, by her not turnin' around, I know it's gonna sound crazy, but she gave me what the world would be like because she never turned around to hug me or explain, you know what I'm sayin'? Her answer was it never happened.

That stayed in my head. Until maybe this last ten years of therapy, I got with that, you feel what I'm sayin'? That was one of my issues. That was a issue for me because I was doin' things, especially in relationship areas that I was pickin' people that I knew that couldn't be there because I was gonna be alone anyway. I was gonna be unhappy. That set that tone and I never forget gettin' up and walkin' out and I felt somethin'. I didn't feel shame for tellin' her, I just felt that whatever she [00:50:02] said, it stuck with me. Almost like a piece of lint on the shirt that you sent to the cleaners over and over, but that one spot won't go away. And that stayed with me and that changed my life, and not necessarily for the better, but it changed it. [00:50:13]

And I'm grateful that it changed it. [00:50:20] Because I didn't go into this like, "Oh, the world's gonna love me," you know what I'm sayin'? When I went to certain hoods, I knew I could only act a certain way, you understand what I'm sayin'? Without gettin' jumped. I knew how to put it on and how to take it off. Now, I was free all the time, but if you had a conversation with me in the hood and the projects, you would know I'm gay, but I wasn't the gay that was fragile. Fuck that. You're not gonna do that to me. I already know it's gonna be a horrible life, what the fuck, I need you to fuck me up, too? Get outta here.

That's how it was for me. It was quite—I never thought about it as deep as I'm—for some reason it's just hittin' me today. Usually, I discuss it with my therapist on several occasions, but for some reason, I can almost remember what she was wearin'. I can hear the grease

fryin' the chicken and it seemed like the world just stopped, and it was just me and her. And she never turned around. Now as an adult, I can tell it's because she didn't wanna deal. I was the only son, my sister was a nut, and I was the only one that was sane, so she was like, "Oh my god, I got this nut and him, now I've got the queen. What's gonna happen?"

Today, I'm the head of my family, everybody listens to me. When I walk in the room, everybody stops. I've clothe, bathe, raise my nieces and my nephews. I'm helpin' them with their children, I've raised cousins, I've gone to school for more kids than I can count. I've bought more Christmas gifts [00:52:11], over at least a thousand for at least 300 different kids, and still maintaining my children that I had custody of. All that had to do with those particular moments in my life that—like I said, those spans.

The Chestnut Street was a span, the years in the South were a span, they had no correlation except for me. Each span, I was lucky enough to grow and learn, and accept making mistakes. When you're around older women, you learn things like, "Oh yeah, I have to fake it with Fred, oh my god, he can't fuck." [0:52:51] I'm fifteen years old, I'm like, "What the hell? What the hell? Oh, that's what you do."

You don't have to—every battle ain't mine, you can fake some shit. One day you want—my aunt was like this, "Child, freakin' every goddamn time he come around." I said, "You don't like just having sex with him?" She says, "Some days I do, some days I don't. I don't have to like it. As long as he's doin' what he supposed to do for me." Another life lesson.

I was lucky enough to have lessons. [*Technical issues 0:53:30 - 0:57:51*].

Whitney Strub: We're just waiting for somebody to knock on the door and then you've gotta go, basically? Is that it?

Bernard McAllister: No, no, no, I got some time. They're not here, so I got time.

Whitney Strub: Okay, 'cause I wanted to ask quick about Carnell. He's such a vivid figure in your life and—

Bernard McAllister: Yes. Yes. Carnell—if there was a book—if there was a novel, which hopefully there will be, Carnell would play a major, major role, especially in my early years and my early gay years. Carnell was a very—because he was very well known.

Whitney Strub: What was his full name?

Bernard McAllister: Carnell Williams. Pretty much as a little kid, I would always hear people snickering about him, but he didn't give a fuck. (*Laughs*) he didn't care. I was always like—I would watch him, our styles were completely different. I told you he had a Jerhi curl and he looked like Sylvester, the singer. But, he was still, in my eyes, he was like—I can't picture me bein' who I am today, especially in the gay world, without Carnell bein' a part of it.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. I wondered, do you have photos or even old home movies, videos? Just thinking of ways to—I'm thinking as historian here.

Bernard McAllister: I can get his sister and mom to send me some pictures of Carnell. It had even gotten to the point where one time, I had this boyfriend named Ronal and we broke up. Such a bitch. My mother be like, "Why he always stay the night over here?" "Oh, that's my best friend." Cousin Carnell works at Murphy's and they had a disco night. I don't know why my mother and my aunt actually went to Murphy's, but I made sure not to go that night because I was still underage.

My mother calls me, "When I get home, I have to have a conversation with you. I thought Ronal was just your friend, he's tellin' me he was your lover." Ronal was such a bitch. I was like, "Oh, god, here we go." Again, her not wantin'—didn't have no follow through, she never asked me again about it. At that moment she was upset, she came home, she never mentioned it again. Well, she did, she was like, "Huh, I can't trust you." Well, okay.

Plus, I also learnt the lesson, too, you never shit where you live. That lesson taught me that my mother didn't need to know about my dating life, my gay life. My mother came to a ball, right? Corey Booker was the mayor then. Corey Booker was there, a senator was there, three or four counsel people, and I was in drag on stage and they were screamin' for me. My mother was like this—she would never say it, but I know my mother. She was like, "What the hell?" They're all screamin' for Bernie?"

I think that's when she got it—I think she patted herself on the back, "I did all right with this one." I remember my mother because when she came one time, she didn't need anymore [1:01:34], she was good with it. My Aunt Ethel would love to drink and hang out, she used to come and we did the Golden Child Eddie Murphy movie theme. If you remember the Golden Child, there was the lady that was half snake behind the thing, so the whole thing was Asian themed. I got these Asian girls from Rutgers to serve food, I went and bought all

this Chinese food, like pounds and pounds of shit, and we served dinners and everything. Everything was Asian-themed.

My niece, who is thirty right now—oh, my god. She was the little girl for me, she was my golden child. We had a runway and everybody came out Asian-themed, and I was behind the thing, and they had somehow made it seem like I was movin', and I had a snake body, and everythin'. It was fabulous. I know, I shouldn't say that, but it was fantastic. It was really cool.

My Aunt Ethel stood up and gave me a standing ovation. Everybody had done sat down already and Ethel was like, "Ah," (claps) and anythin' my Aunt Ethel liked, my mother accepted because she was the most—she was more like the matriarch of the family. That was so funny for me like, "Man, I was worried about all this shit for nothin'." That's 'cause I hear people say they like to be in the closet, but I think some people are addicted to bein' in the closet, that's almost like a turn-on for them. It gets them goin'. Everybody know you're gay, but you pretend to be super straight. You'd be like, "Well, girl, ain't that a lot of work?" They'd be like, "No, I'm enjoyin' myself." They like it 'cause everybody has their own thing.

Carnell—what else about Carnell? Oh, god. There's so many funny stories about Carnell. One time this guy broke into our house and he climbed through the window, and woke my mother up. When the guy came through my room and when I jumped up—because I usually slept with the cover over me and I came up like I was some type of Michael Jackson Thriller thing. He screamed and I kicked him out the window. My mother calls the cops, Carnell comes downstairs in a bathrobe [01:03:53], a bat, and a bonnet.

He come in, "What happened? What happened?" He had the robe like this, "What happened? What happened?" He forgot he left the back door open. When he looked and saw the back door open, he screamed, "He's back," and we all ran out the house. Me, Carnell, and the dog, and we left my mother sittin' there. My mother comes out, she says, "Well, thanks for the protection, guys." She said, "Even the goddamned dog left." It was just the funniest thing and he had this big 'ol bonnet on his head, you know the bonnets that girls wear? He had the robe [01:04:35] like this, it was hilarious.

We laughed about that for about ten years, oh, it was the funniest thing. He was talkin' all that shit sayin', "Well, you know what? Good thing he wasn't here when I got here. You know what I woulda did. I woulda did this and I woulda did that." [extraneous dialogue [01:05:00] It was so funny and he said because if he was here and he

saw that back door open, and he screamed, I screamed, the dog just ran out—it was hilarious.

Carnell, when I think of good times, Carnell was—especially my younger years, Carnell was very influential in me bein' the person I am. He told me—I didn't even know this, that if you're at a bar because he was a bartender, if you turned your back to the bar old school, that means you're buyin' everybody a round of drinks. I didn't know that and I wasn't buyin' nobody a round of drinks, I had no money. I was sixteen, seventeen. He would be like, "Well, you shouldn't do that."

Certain men would come by and he said, "I hope you're not goin' home with him." I said, "Well, I don't know, he seems nice." He said, "Hm-mm. Don't go home with him." He would never explain why, so I just didn't. He was the leader of his generation, everybody listened to Carnell because he—Murphy's was the only real gay club and he was very, very well known. So he was very influential in the gay community.

One time, he was Ms. Pride for New York City. He was very influential for me in the sense of his—he didn't have any fears. He really wasn't, like, scared of bein' him. You know, it was addiction that kinda messed him up, but he eventually—well, he died from—he was supposed to get his—he had sugar, and they were gonna amputate a toe, and he died on the table. I think—and it wasn't sad, it's sad that he died and I would love to be able to sit here and laugh with him right now, but I knew his ego would not have allowed him to wanna live that way.

When he passed, I became even more close with his momma, Aunt Ethel. She's like my mother. I got two mothers, they're sisters, best friends, and they're both my moms. The people that influence me most were my grandfather, my Aunt Ethel because she believed in family, and takin' care of everybody. My grandfather believed in takin' care of your own, that's why I took my sister's children, and protecting. Ethel believed in standin' up for people.

If my dad and my mom had a fight, Ethel would come with all the girls, all their lady friends, their cousins and them, big Black, women [01:07:44] big butts come out there. "Now, who did what? I know he ain't put his hands on your mother." The next—because this was really the '70's and the '80's so they was really in that mode then and it wasn't no stereotypin', that was who they was. I learnt about family and what it's supposed to mean, and some days I feel like I'm an alien

on another planet because no one else in my family feels the way I do except for my Aunt Ethel. My grandfather's passed.

I'm big on family. I'm big on—and family doesn't have to mean blood. I'm big on my circle of family. I've had friends' mothers who—Darcel 1:08:31 works at MJCRI, her mother had cancer, they was doin' some operation on her. Darcel was still usin', I hadn't seen Darcel in maybe five years. I was out somewhere and I saw Darcel walk by, I said, "Oh, hey, Darcel." "Oh," we hugged and everythin' because she was one of my best friends, "Ah." She said, "It's so funny that I'm seein' you." She said, "My mother was in surgery two weeks ago and when she came down, she asked for you." I said, "What?" She said, "She come out the medicine and she said, 'How's Bernie? Anybody talk to Bernie?'"

They started goin' off on their mom, "We the ones here with you and you askin' about Bernie?" What made you bring up Bernie? She said, "I don't know, he just came across my mind." That's how the type of person I was because I was a real, real—Brendan, you wouldn't believe it, I was such a shy child. I was so shy, so timid. Because I was really a momma's boy and a grand-momma's boy, I was intimidated by my grandfather 'cause he was so masculine and I like masculine men—attracted to, so—and my father was masculine.

I was enthralled by women. Like Charlie's Angels—I know it's going to sound crazy. Women—Mary Tyler Moore, anything with women in it as the lead really did it for me. It really did it for me. I remember watchin' All My Children—I was cuttin' school at the time because she thought I was in school, I wasn't—and watchin' Erica Kane and them, and bein' like, "Them some bad bitches. I wanna be a bad bitch." I think I was successful in bein' a bad bitch. I remember that, I wanted to be a bad bitch. I remember when I first came out, I said, "I wanna be well-known, I want my name to be known from coast to coast. I want everybody to know me."

Worst wish [01:10:40] I ever made, but all of it came true through Ballroom. People who walk Ballroom [1:10:49] now, they may be in their 20's and they still come up to me and be like, "Oh, my god, you are Bernie. Oh, my god." It happens and it's not like an ego thing because it's not like I'm makin' any goddamned money off them sayin' 'Oh, you're Bernie,' but they really would tell me how they would watch Ballroom tapes—this is before social media—and they would be like, "Oh, my god."

One time me and my son, Kwan 1:11:16, we were in the Village and it was—I don't know why we were in the Village, it was nice out. I

guess we were going to meet some other Jourdans and these two Southern gay queens, right? I'm gonna do it just like he said. He said, "Oh, my god. Oh, my god. You're Bernie Jourdan. You're Bernie Jourdan." I'm like, "Who? Do I know you, sis? You're a little close. Woo, woo, woo, woo, woo." She was like, "Oh, my god. I got your tapes. Oh, lord." She said, "I would ask for an autograph, but I don't wanna be some—I don't wanna be naughty."

I said, "Oh, okay." She kept talkin' and I'm like, "Girl, all right." I'm embarrassed by it and Kwan is falling out because he knows how uncomfortable I am with it. For years he'd be like, "Bernie? Are you Bernie Jourdan?" Because she had this southern—it was so funny. It'd probably been better if you were there, but it was really fucked up. It was really hilarious.

I learned how to humble myself and it's so funny how the world works because you never know when you're bein' influenced. You never know who's making an impact. You never know who would I, if I was five years old, would I ever think that Iman, the model, would make an impact on my life or Naomi Campbell, or my grandfather who I was complete opposite of. I'm him right now, I'm just a gay version of him today. You never know where your influence is gonna come from.

I believe—I'm tryin' to make sure I word it correctly because I wanted to be as honest as possible. People come into your life people say for a reason or a season, I believe that, but no one ever tells you how much people are goin' to influence who you are. You know what I'm sayin'? It could be good or bad, but I was lucky enough, blessed enough to have strong women around me. The men that were around me, they weren't slouch men, they weren't men that were abusing women, they were strong black men. Even with my father bein' in jail most of my life, he was still a strong man.

I melded the two, the female version of the strong woman takin' care of your family, feedin' them, goin' to the store, make sure everything is done. The male part protectin', fuckin' somebody up if they fuck with mine. It just melded. Add that with my Aunt Ethel, my mother, Carnell, and other women—mostly women—in my life, I was molded into this person that was sensitive to other people's situations.

I wasn't the girl that would sit in the corner and kiki 1:14:36 at somebody, and if I did kiki, it was just for that moment, don't take it home with you because I forgot about what—if they was readin' somebody, I would ki, but I wouldn't be that type of person to say, "Ooh, look at her." I didn't care. I didn't care enough about you 'cause

I was so consumed with me and makin' sure that people knew that I wasn't really a scared person on the inside, so I had to put on this persona. The persona I started to wear was my Aunt Ethel's and my grandfather's until I came into my own. Even to this day, my straight aunts say, "Out of everybody, you act more like your grandfather than his own sons."

You won't believe this, I'm not more masculine, but I'm tougher than all the men in my family. They call me. That's a blessing. That shows that it wasn't wasted on me. I have a niece, Soniya 1:15:45, my youngest girl, she's twenty-three, my sister's daughter, and I raised her from two to about thirteen or fourteen—maybe fifteen. Even when she went to live with my sister, then eventually went to North Carolina and graduated North Carolina with my mom, I seemed to have had the most—well, not even say the most influence, but all of them act like me in different ways.

Her brother, much like my sister's older son, he has addiction problems, he's schizophrenic, he's an asshole, so you just feel bad—if somebody have mental health issues, right? You'd be like, "Aww," but they were an asshole before the mental health, you say, "Hm. He's still a dick." She takes care of his children, much like I did my sister. My mom wants for nothing, just like I did from my grandmas. She's so much like me in that department.

Now the other young lady, Greer 1:16:53, she's like me in the sense that she remembers all of the life lessons I taught her. Like, "Don't be a slut because if you do one thing with one boy, boys have the tendency to tell everybody what you did." She said, "How do you know that?" I said, "Well, they wouldn't say what they did with me because they would be ashamed, but I've been around enough straight boys and straight girls to know that's what boys do." When she lost her virginity, my sister called me screamin', "Oh, I can't believe it, she's a slut." I said, "First of all, she's not a slut, she lost her virginity. What the fuck? Is she supposed to keep it in her pocket forever? I mean, come on. Also, too, don't call her [01:17:35] that. Nobody called you a slut."

My sister, well, she wasn't really slutty, my sister was just gettin' stoned. My nieces turned out to be great women, my niece is a great parent, she's gay this week because it changes with her, but she's been with this girl for about a year and a half now. She raises her daughter the same way I raised her. Her daughter can't say 'What' to her, she has to say 'Yes', and when you're asked a question, you're supposed to answer it, and you're supposed to look people in the eye.

All the things I did with Greer and Soniya, Greer does with her children. Greer helpin' her brother raise his children, she's the same way. The same way they used to come to me, "Uncle Bernie, Uncle Bernie," now they go to Soniya, "Auntie Nana, Auntie Nana," and I'll be laughin' and I'd say, "Soniya, you're me." She'd be like, "I know, I don't wanna be you." I said, "But you're me, unfortunately." That's pretty much—any other questions?

Whitney Strub: You've been really generous with the project and I hate to ask to ask you to do more, but I'd wonder if you'd be up for one more session maybe next month or over the summer. The one thing we didn't talk about and I don't wanna cram it in the end here because I feel it deserves more attention. Is your experience of the AIDS epidemic and what it looked like in Newark, and people—

Bernard McAllister: Oh. Oh.

Whitney Strub: You know what I mean? I don't wanna throw that in—

Bernard McAllister: Oh, that's a whole 90-minute subject.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. No, exactly. Exactly. Is that somethin' that you—

Bernard McAllister: Oh. Oh, AIDS came through Newark—oh, oh, oh. When the epidemic was at its worst—we can wait 'til the next one, but I'm gonna say this now. When the epidemic was at its worst, it was two funerals a day for years. It went through Newark. Oh, it was terrible. It was terrible. Terrible, but we'll talk about that next time. We can talk next week, if you'd like. Well, not next week because I think I'm out of town, I don't know.

Whitney Strub: Well, whatever works for you, I'm pretty flexible.

Bernard McAllister: Well, you know what? Next week would be—what would be the date for next Thursday?

Whitney Strub: I don't even know, the 29th?

Bernard McAllister: Okay, then that's fine. Anything that's still in April is fine.

Whitney Strub: Okay. Well, how about—I mean, actually, next week is the last real week of classes at Rutgers and so it's a crunch week here, but after that thing's loosened up. Maybe sometime in May, would that be all right with you?

Bernard McAllister: It has to be early May.

Whitney Strub: Oh, okay. Okay. Nice, nice. Yeah, okay. We can just go back and forth on—

Bernard McAllister: You know what else I would love to talk about next episode, I would love to talk about aging. That's something nobody talks about. With gay people, you never hear older people sittin' down with gay people sayin', "Well, this is gonna happen, and this may happen," or, "You're gonna run into this, you're gonna be forty and you may not have any children. You gotta make sure you have a strong circle around you to get that energy of love." You know what I'm sayin'? They don't tell—they told me none of this. None of this. All I thought was just look fabulous, I'd be twenty—I thought I would never be over thirty-five even if I was seventy, but life is not that way.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. No, I agree, it's a really—

Bernard McAllister: I think that's one of the things, I love the Queer Project when we have Pucci and Craig, or Blunt 1:21:23, and them speak because I will always tell Pucci, "Talk about how you got where you're at and how things change. That's why we don't wanna call it spans, we call it episodes in life, this is one episode and everything. I think that's somethin' that we don't talk about and aging being gay in Newark is a very—it comes with a lot of depression, it comes with a lot of suicide, it comes with a lot of puttin' yourself in danger 'cause you want company at any risk. That's somethin' we should discuss. I would love to discuss that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. No, I agree completely, depending on how much patience and endurance you have. That could be two standalone sessions.

Bernard McAllister: I told you, I hate doin' this, but when I'm in the midst of it, it doesn't seem that bad.

Whitney Strub: No, well, you're great at it. Yeah, one way or another, let's maybe aim for early May then, if that's all right. Well, what's your—

Bernard McAllister: That's fine.

Whitney Strub: What's your cutoff? When are you goin'—

Bernard McAllister: I'm leavin' on the 11th and I'll be back on 16th, 17th.

Whitney Strub: Okay, yeah. No, we should be able to find somethin' before then. Yeah, Brendan, obviously, you're invited, too, and if you wanna participate, that'd be great.

Bernard McAllister: Brendan is so cool, yes, I enjoyed Brendan.

Brendan Fox: Thank you.

Whitney Strub: No, that's awesome. Yeah, I know, yeah, but we can table it and come back to that, though. Yeah. No, any closing words here? I can stop recording, I'm worried about my Wi-Fi dropping out again, so I'm eager to hit the stop button. Any closing words for this session from either of you?

Bernard McAllister: It was really good for me. It's like once I get talkin', it's like therapy. I'm like the gay Iyanla Vanzant, honey. I can fix your life, everybody's life, and just startin' to learn how to fix my own.

Whitney Strub: No, I think that's a good note to end on. Let me hit stop. Okay.

[End of Audio]