Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Michael Bronski
Interviewer: Timothy Stewart-Winter
Date: May 2, 2018
Location: Newark, NJ

Interviewer: Okay. I am here with Michael Bronski in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is May 2, 2018. Do you want to say something?

Interviewee: Hi.

Interviewer: Great. As you know, this interview is for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. I guess could you start by telling us when you—what your first experience of Newark was and how old you were at the time?

Interviewee: Sure. I grew up in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, which is a suburb, which is probably a 25-minute bus ride from Newark, just between—it's on Route 22 before you get to Plainfield. As a teenager, I and some friends might go into Newark occasionally to see a movie. There were five very large, functioning movie theaters that had first-run films that were not always in the suburbs. When down there, we would actually go to some of the stores too, but I didn't know Newark very well at all.

Interviewer: Which stores?

Interviewee: Bamberger's. I want to say Hahne's. I'm not sure if that's correct.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Hahne's, Bamberger's. Gimbles maybe. They were all the same—they were all off Halsey Street behind the *[unintelligible 01:36]* theater.

Interviewer: This is in the—this is when?

Interviewee: '64.

Interviewer: '64?

Interviewee: '65, '64, yeah. Then, I ended up—I went to Catholic High School in Scotch Plains, actually. It was the diocesanal high school for the whole area. From then, I went to college at Rutgers Newark. That was '67, and I was there every day, well, during the school year for four years. For part of that time, because at Rutgers they had no dorms, it was essentially a commuter school, which I think it is now, too.

Interviewer: There are dorms now, though. *[Crosstalk 02:26]*

Interviewee: Oh, there are? We didn't have any back then.

Interviewer: All right. You lived at home with your parents?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. I lived at home with my parents. After the first year, I got a really cheap apartment with a friend that I stayed at four nights a week, and I went home on weekends because I had a job in the public library in my hometown.

Interviewer: On the weekends?

Interviewee: On the weekends, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. The apartment, this apartment was in Newark?

Interviewee: It was right in Newark. It was right—I can check and tell you the street. It was one of those streets that runs parallel to Broad Street but before you get to the campus. Maybe University?

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean, I'm not sure where the campus—

Interviewee: The campus is—

Interviewer: This is the current campus?

Interviewee: It is, yes. Yes, yes, yes. They had just built it two years before, the big concrete campus.

Interviewer: Right. It could be up University from campus.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: University *[crosstalk 03:24]*.

Interviewee: I mean, it ran parallel to Broad.

Interviewer: Cool.

Interviewee: You'd walk down one of the perpendicular streets, yeah. That lasted for about two years, and then we gave it up.

Interviewer: Then, you were back with your folks?

Interviewee: Then, I was back with my folks, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I guess one reason we gave it up is that Jeffrey, the man I lived with, graduated.

Interviewer: From college?

Interviewee: From college, and I had—it was nice to have it, it was nice not to come home every night. It was really a complete—it was like really one room with a shared kitchen and shared bathroom with two other single rooms on the same floor. It was a nice feeling I had the illusion of more freedom and some more freedom, but I was fine giving it up, I think, after two years.

Interviewer: Tell me about Rutgers Newark and your decision to go there.

Interviewee: The decision was very easy. I had been rejected from every other college, which included Rutgers New Brunswick. No, that's not true. I was actually accepted at St. Peter's in Jersey City. I was turned down by Seton Hall. I was accepted at St. Peter's, but that came late. I had already accepted Rutgers. I guess maybe I was on the wait list. Also, my family had really not very much money at all, so Rutgers was the obvious choice. I also paid for it myself because I believe—we could check on this, but I believe it was like $150 a semester *[Laughter]*, obviously for in-state students, right?

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: I don't know what it is now, but I'm sure it's not $150 a semester.

Interviewer: No.

Interviewee: I was making money at this public library and doing some other stuff so I actually had some money and my parents gave me some money as well. Making a choice to go there was made for me, essentially.

Interviewer: Right. You definitely were going to college?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. I was a semi-first-generation student. My mother took some courses when she first married my father at St. John's. My father went to St. John's for a little bit and then quit when they began having children, and then spent about nine years going to night school at Seton Hall, on the Newark campus of Seton Hall. Seton Hall had class in some buildings in Newark, yeah.

Interviewer: Got it.

[Crosstalk 06:32]

Interviewee: Well, they also had the big campus, but I think Seton Hall is only the big campus now.

Interviewer: Seton Hall's law school is in Newark—

Interviewee: All right.

Interviewer: - but it's only the law school.

Interviewee: It's only the law school, yeah. They used to have night classes there. Obviously, it was easier for people to commute from New York than to South Orange or East Orange, wherever it is.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Although my father did graduate college, it was an arduous—he probably spent 15 years in various places, 8 years going several times a week.

Interviewer: You were raised Catholic?

Interviewee: I was raised Catholic, yes. Catholic grammar school and high school.

Interviewer: Siblings?

Interviewee: I have three siblings. My brother Steven is 18 months younger than me. My sister Suzanne is six years younger, and I think, approximately. My brother Jeffrey, who's also gay, is seven years younger. When I went to college, Jeffrey was probably 10 or 11, right?

Interviewer: It's the fall of '67—

Interviewee: Yes, the fall of '67.

Interviewer: - when you're on campus?

Interviewee: Yes, which was right after the riots that summer.

Interviewer: Do you remember the riots?

Interviewee: I remember reading about it. I was not there, but I remember reading about them in the *Newark Star-Ledger* or the *Newark Evening News*. Both were functional then. We got both at home.

Interviewer: Yeah. Good papers.

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. They were good. Better than the *Plainfield Courier*, the other paper we got. In retrospect, so there was a riot in Plainfield that same summer.

Interviewer: Right. Interesting. Okay.

Interviewee: Right, so a little bit later than Newark riots. It's interesting to talk to students about this, right, because they say, oh, my God, all these cities—actually, by that point, they had happened since '63 every summer so it, actually, felt totally normalized in some way. I don't remember having any anxiety about going to school.

Interviewer: You were not freaked out about it at all?

Interviewee: No, not at all. Not at all. This occurred to me, the name of the bus, the 45 bus that went along South Avenue that goes—went right through Cranford, Garwood, Hillside, into Newark, *[unintelligible 09:14]* I'm not sure of the other name, Frelinghuysen Avenue?

Interviewer: Freling—

Interviewee: Freling, something like that, right, yeah. Then, it went down the back streets and went right to the center of Newark. I have no memory of any anxiety nor do I have any memory of my parents being worried about it. I mean, the riots were over, order was restored.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right.

Interviewee: The North End was attacking black people.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Tony *[unintelligible 09:55]*.

Interviewer: You remember him?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. When I got there, it was—I mean, I think the Catholic school, I didn't—everybody was always shocked by my performance because, although I had incredibly high scores

on testing, I was essentially sort of a C student, maybe C+. I mean, in my class of 100, I was literally dead center. I was like 48.

Interviewer: Your high school class?

Interviewee: My high school class, right. It was exciting to go to college, and I had, in retrospect, and also working here *[unintelligible 10:42]* I had—I mean, what they call study habits were almost nil. I had a very expansive mind, I read all the time, I read huge amounts, but I mean, I really—

Interviewer: Very expansive mind?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think so. Well, expansive interests, yeah. There are books, I actually had spent—I actually had a book review column in the town newspaper in high school.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: Yeah, because I'd—

Interviewer: The *Plainfield Courier*?

Interviewee: No. The *Scotch Plains Times*. Yes. Because I worked in the public library, and they asked if myself and this other young person, whose name was Donald Kitzel wanted to write—if the library had anybody to write a book review column. The head librarian asked us if we wanted to, so we did. We alternated weeks.

Interviewer: Cool.

Interviewee: College was exciting because there were all these courses I couldn't wait to take. I enrolled in English classes over the—I mean, I really was completely ill-prepared to take these classes for the most—to take any classes in college, I think. I mean, intellectually, I could deal with it, of course. I actually was probably better read and had a more inquiring mind than many, many other students in the college in my classes, but—and I had a facility for writing, but I really had no discipline, and I mean, I couldn't—I still can't proofread.

I couldn't proofread a paper myself easily because I just couldn't focus on it. I mean, I said that to somebody once, and they said did I have learning disabilities, and I don't think so at all. I mean, I think I was just sloppy and lazy *[Laughter]* and not trained.

I mean, also, you have to realize that in '67, right, everybody in my high school was expected to go to college. My parents expected me to go to college. College was not like it is today. I mean, it wasn't like—my best friend from high school went to Harvard, and we didn't really know what Harvard was. I mean, we knew that it was Harvard, that it had a name, but it was like, the notion of ranking schools—the main thing in my high school was that you went to a Catholic college. You went to a Catholic college, right? They made no distinctions between St. Peter's Jesuit, Georgetown Jesuit, Holy Cross, Holy Cross Brothers, or Marist College—we talk about Marist Brothers, right? I'm sure Marist is a fine college, but nobody said Fordham is probably better.

In retrospect, I probably wrote really interesting papers that were completely garbled and not very good and got C's on them.

Interviewer: Interesting. Where were you in terms of your coming out in gay identity in the time that you were in Newark?

Interviewee: Yeah. I couldn't wait to—I mean, I knew I was gay. I couldn't wait to be out of the house to have sex. Surprisingly, the person that I ended up rooming with, he and I had sex the day we got the apartment.

Interviewer: In Newark?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Wow! This is the fall of '68 or—

Interviewee: Well, it's probably—

Interviewer: - sometime in '68?

Interviewee: - yeah, probably later on in—yeah, yeah, yeah, '67. No, no, probably spring of '67, I mean '68.

Interviewer: You had sex with him the day that you moved in?

Interviewee: Yes. Well, we had a place. *[Laughter]*

Interviewer: You knew him before or no?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah, we did. We were in classes together.

Interviewer: Okay. You hadn't hooked up before then?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Tell me more.

Interviewee: He, actually, was out already. He had had much more experience than I did. He was a little bit odd. I hesitated, I didn't—not really a happy person. He was depressed most of the time, a lot of the time, I think. We were never boyfriends at all. We occasionally had sex, depending on if—I'm not sure what it depended on because when—we were having sex even when he had a boyfriend at one point. It was, what's the phrase I want, circumstantial. It was situational, right.

Interviewer: Was this your first time, first person you had sex with?

Interviewee: Yes, it was. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: You had not been interested in women?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Got it.

Interviewee: I never had a—well, no, I was never interested in women. There was somebody in high school, we used to go to movies together sometimes, and we went to a few plays—a woman—plays in New York, but I don't think either of us thought of it as even approximating a date. In college, I actually did have a girlfriend.

Interviewer: Before or after this apartment?

Interviewee: During. We actually never had sex, much to her chagrin.

Interviewer: Okay. Got it.

Interviewee: She wanted to, I didn't. I kept avoiding it. We spent lots of time together and did lots of things. We were always in New York at the museums together and doing other things. She was an art major.

Interviewer: She also went to Rutgers?

Interviewee: She went to Rutgers, yes, yes. She came from Jersey City. We were friends for three years. In our senior year, she slept with someone and got pregnant and decided to keep the baby. They did not—they ended up living together, she and the—but not getting married. We were all part of a group of friends.

If we are thinking about—so a lot of my social life there revolved around politics, and I joined—as a freshman, I joined Students for a Democratic Society and went to lots of meetings, which were sort of, in retrospect, really, really interesting cuz I was quite—I wasn't very vocal, and SDS, as I'm sure in many cases, was sort of overshadowed by the more talkative, aggressively political people.

Interviewer: This is SDS campus chapter?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: At Rutgers Newark?

Interviewee: You got it. Yeah. I'm not sure that we were ever officially affiliated with national SDS, but like with the Gay Liberation Front, right, I mean, they popped up all over the country without any affiliation, right?

Interviewer: Right. Do you remember, was it new, had it been around?

Interviewee: It had been around for a few, for maybe two years. I don't think it was—well, SDS was not around. It only began in '64, right?

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It couldn't have been around for more than three years, and I suspect two.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. What else were you involved in? You said politics. Were there other—

Interviewee: Basically, politics. There were antiwar rallies in downtown Newark. I would go to them. The law school always had—the law school, the building was brand new, newish I mean. It was there when I got there, but it was a new building, right? It was very progressive. They always had speakers. I would always go to them.

Most of my friends centered around SDS politics or sort of hippie-type counterculture events, right? Within a year, I made close friends, two of which I'm still in touch with all the time. My life really centered on—at school, it centered on not doing schoolwork, political involvement to some degree, and going into—I used to go, the best thing about Newark, Rutgers Newark was that it was 25 minutes out of New York.

I spent a lot of time in New York City with friends, seeing theater, seeing movies, hanging out, going out at night to coffee houses in the Village.

Interestingly, my gay life, I was—through my friend who went to Harvard, I actually met somebody who went to Harvard, and he and I had this on-and-off affair for a while. I would come up to visit here, and there was somebody else that I had an on-and-off affair with up here.

I met very few people in Newark that I actually had sexual connections to. I was, I wouldn't say—no one I knew went out to gay bars. We went into the city all the time, and we could see that the city was very gay, and we liked that, walking down Christopher Street, but we didn't go to bars. We didn't go to—until we began going to Gay Liberation Front meetings in '69, right? For those two years, Newark was not a sexual place for me.

Interviewer: Got it. Right. You weren't out on campus, as it were?

Interviewee: I was in many ways. I mean, we were—there were a group of us who certainly identified as being gay, although—

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Interviewee: People knew that we were gay. I think we would talk about it.

Interviewer: You would say it?

Interviewee: We would say it, yeah. Yeah. I don't think, like the woman I was good friends with and I guess dating, although I think we had different notions of what dating meant, didn't really know it, even though we were in the same group, right? It was really kind of a glass closet for people who wanted to see it. Everybody in the drama department knew it, and I wasn't in the drama department, but I had friends there.

Interviewer: Interesting. Everybody in the drama department at Rutgers Newark?

Interviewee: Yeah, knew that I was part of this group of men who were probably gay.

Interviewer: Were the other men also students—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: - also in the drama department?

Interviewee: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: All of them?

Interviewee: All of them, right. Right. That's not unusual.

Interviewer: No. When you say everyone in the drama department, does that mean your teachers?

Interviewee: They suspected, I'm sure, because there were a group of men who were out in the drama department, and I was friends with them, so only by association.

Interviewer: You aren't counting yourself in that group?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay. You were adjacent?

Interviewee: I was adjacent. I was more of the sort of political—I mean, the drama department actually functioned quite separately. It actually was in a whole different part of—it was four blocks away in some old warehouses closer to the river. I'd have to look at a map to figure out where it was. We could look at some old catalogs and find the address.

Interviewer: Yeah, sure.

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Sure. Sure.

Interviewee: Because the English department was on one of those little side college—one of those little side streets that were like if you're looking at the main, the big buildings, right, go about four blocks to your right if you're on Broad Street looking towards the main campus. There were a series of departments that were in old apartment buildings.

Interviewer: Got it. Your major was?

Interviewee: English.

Interviewer: English, not theater?

Interviewee: Yes. Not theater, no.

Interviewer: Tell me more about your life in Newark. You're going to New York. You're going to New York for theater—

Interviewee: Theater and movies.

Interviewer: - and movies?

Interviewee: Socializing.

Interviewer: Coffee houses?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: With people—

Interviewee: With people. With people I was friends with, with—we had a fairly large group of—a friendship circle of people who were, we hung out with.

Interviewer: You were also going back to your parents' house on the weekends?

Interviewee: On the weekends. My senior year, right, every weekend—I mean, every—I didn't have the apartment so it was—I was back and forth all the time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Taking the bus?

Interviewee: Yes. Then, but I have to say that my life in Newark felt sort of peripheral. I mean, I went to classes when I did. It was a place to congregate. I used to go to the Newark library sometimes, but I never cruised. I know there were some gay bars. I never thought of going to them. They were sort of scary sounding. The bars in New York were scary sounding. There was some bathroom sex going on on campus. I never participated in that. If anything, I sort of avoided those bathrooms.

Interviewer: You were aware of them?

Interviewee: I was very aware of them. Yes, yes. People told me.

Interviewer: Where were they just out of—

Interviewee: Mostly the basement of Conklin. There's a building called Conklin, right?

Interviewer: Yeah, that's where my office is.

Interviewee: Yes, in the basement, I believe. Not in the student center. There was a bathroom that was reputed to be cruisy in the library in the basement.

Interviewer: Fairly typical kind of college campus places?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I'm sure, in retrospect, I'm sure there were plenty of places around Newark with bathrooms in the department stores, bathrooms in the library, but—maybe even in The Little Theater.

Interviewer: Oh, right. Right.

Interviewee: There was a theater called The Little Theater that showed porno.

Interviewer: Right. Whit Strub has written about it.

Interviewee: Who has?

Interviewer: My colleague, Whit Strub—

Interviewee: Oh, he has? Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: - has written about The Little Theater for Vice, the website Vice. It's still there.

Interviewee: Oh, right. It's still there?

Interviewer: It's still open. Probably not very much longer.

Interviewee: One thing I didn't do a lot in Newark was—on my own often was that you could really go to matinees. Newark had five movie theaters.

Interviewer: Yeah. You went to the movies a lot in Newark?

[Crosstalk 00:28:05]

Interviewer: Probably want to talk to you about that.

Interviewee: It was like 75 cents for a matinee, right, or 50 cents. I'm sure those were very cruisy as well. I either didn't notice or, if I knew in the back of my mind, I didn't go to the bathroom there. I mean, I didn't—I mean, not that I didn't want to have sex, but I was not—I

was not in a place in my life where I was looking for it at those places.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Newark was, in many ways, the conduit from my house in Scotch Plains to New York, yeah.

Interviewer: Where you sometimes had class?

Interviewee: Yeah, where I sometimes had class, yeah. Yeah. I mean, I'm not sure that I was that unusual a student. I think a lot of people, many people—I had a part-time job that was actually about ten hours a week. Other people, friends of mine, had two jobs, or they would take a semester off. It was not a campusy-type campus. Everybody lived on their own or at home. Newark was not, nobody really felt safe in Newark at night.

Interviewer: Nobody?

Interviewee: Nobody that I knew. Yeah.

Interviewer: Nobody that you knew?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Interesting. Even on the nights that you stayed there, you would—

Interviewee: Well, I could walk to Broad Street and catch the bus, right, but like one thing—everybody knew this, that you walked in the street to get, to go to Broad Street, not on sidewalks.

Interviewer: Not on the sidewalk?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about on the campus itself? I mean, was that *[crosstalk 30:08]*?

Interviewee: The campus was, felt very safe the first two years, and then they changed some policies that allowed people—I mean, it sounds terrible—a lot of neighborhood people would come into the student center who were African American, and the amount of thefts, even some assaults, went up. That was a combination of many things, I think, probably tensions in Newark, probably shifting student body populations, maybe lack of security.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: I think right there because—

Interviewer: You remember a marked shift?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. Yes. Also, we were right on the edge of the Central Ward.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: The Central Ward was, essentially, seriously devastated during the riots. Yeah. There were a lot of tensions, but also a lot of the people who—I mean, I do, I do remember a lot of overt racism from many students, white students, who were from Ironbound or from North Ward or from Bloomfield or the Oranges.

Interviewer: When you say racism, does that—overt racism with reference to Newark?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. Yes. I can't wait to get out of here. My mother wants me to be on the 4:00 bus before it gets dark. Certainly, racist language.

Interviewer: The student body is almost all white, right?

Interviewee: Yes. For the first two years, then it shifts. I believe they had an open admissions policy at some point or that it was called open admissions.

Interviewer: The admissions policy changed.

Interviewee: Changed, right. There were many more students of color.

Interviewer: There was an effort to recruit students of color.

Interviewee: Yes. Yes. Yeah, open admissions, I think that's the phrase people used or the school used, right? I mean, I'm not sure how—

Interviewer: It could be. I'm not—

Interviewee: Yeah, I'm not sure how it was implemented or what it meant to be out.

Interviewer: There was a notion of opening up the school?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: It did become more diverse—

Interviewee: It did, yes.

Interviewer: - in the second two years?

Interviewee: In the second two years, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. You also said that in '69 you start going to gay political meetings or GLF?

Interviewee: Right. Right. Stonewall is, obviously, June of '69. Beginning later on that month or July, I guess, my friends and I would actually go to Gay Liberation Front meetings.

Interviewer: In New York?

Interviewee: In New York, yes.

Interviewer: Very quickly?

Interviewee: Very quickly.

Interviewer: You had never been to a gay meeting before that, right?

Interviewee: No, and thinking about it, right, nobody really had—

Interviewer: There weren't very many?

Interviewee: There weren't many, right. I had a passing knowledge of Mattachine from the West Coast, even though there was one in New York and one in Washington, now I know. My political background was more leftist, right, so it was more civil rights marches and high school SDS.

All of our women friends were, became feminists in '68, '68 so that—but there were no really gay meetings to go to that would have been anything close to what I would consider my orbit. Even in retrospect, right, we know that Mattachine in New York was essentially sort of—even before Stonewall was already riveted in half with more progressives versus the more conservatives.

Interviewer: You go to these meetings with friends from Newark?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you sketch the arc of your next two years of college?

Interviewee: Sure. That was the summer of '69, right, so I had two more years, a year and a half, I guess. I didn't, I would go infrequently. I would always sit in the back of the room. It was, again, like SDS meetings, a little bit intimidating. I mean, interestingly, I read—I know some of the people. Like Jim Fouratt was there, right, or Martha Shelley or Karla Jay, right, all of whom were scary if you were quiet in the back of the room. It was a sort of New York political scene that I wasn't quite used to. It being an anarchist group, right, there was not a lot of order sometimes.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was beyond SDS?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, the SDS chapter, we were all very nice, and we had good discussions and we were polite, and people—you didn't have to raise your hand, but everybody would let somebody talk.

The end of my junior year I met a friend of a friend, and we became boyfriends. He had just moved back from England, where he had gone to college and was enrolled at—was teaching in Bloomfield, I think. Later would go to New Brunswick to get his master's and then Columbia to get his PhD. He actually came from Newark. He actually grew up in Newark in Weequahic, a Jewish family. He was the youngest child. In retrospect, his parents may have been Holocaust survivors. I'm not sure. Nobody ever talked about it. They both had very heavy accents. I mean, I don't believe they were born in America.

Interviewer: Yeah. He became your boyfriend in 1970?

Interviewee: '70, I think, yes, probably, yes.

Interviewer: When you say "your boyfriend," what does that mean?

Interviewee: We would see each other as much as possible. We'd talk on the phone every day. He had an apartment so I was—if I wasn't—I would stay there two nights a week maybe. He sometimes came out to my parents' house for dinner on a weekend.

Interviewer: His apartment was in Newark?

Interviewee: His apartment was in East Orange.

Interviewer: Was in East Orange?

Interviewee: Just by the Newark line.

Interviewer: Okay. He was teaching in Bloomfield?

Interviewee: In Bloomfield, I believe, yes.

Interviewer: Got it.

Interviewee: Yes. Yes. Yes. That was my first relationship, my first real committed sort of relationship. That lasted until, for like two and a half years.

Interviewer: Okay. Got it.

Interviewee: We both read. We were both literary. We both went to—I mean, we were very much suited to one another in ways that only 19- to 20-year-olds can be suited for one another. *[Laughter]*. During that time, I also had lots of friends at school, and I was going to political meetings, which he was never really part of. I mean, he was teaching and had not much interest in it, in the political scene, right? He wasn't particularly closeted, but he—the notion to be in politics was not exactly of much interest to him.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to a Gay Liberation meeting in Newark?

Interviewee: Well, after we began going to the ones in New York, right, some of us started having meetings on campus in September or October of '69.

Interviewer: That early?

Interviewee: Yeah, right after Stonewall. Right.

Interviewer: Where were they? Do you remember?

Interviewee: I don't remember. I mean, they were very small.

Interviewer: In a classroom?

Interviewee: In a classroom somewhere, yeah. Yeah. I mean, my memories of the campus is like Conklin, Boyden, library, and student center. There may be more buildings now.

Interviewer: Yeah. Smith Hall was not there?

Interviewee: Yeah. It could have been.

Interviewer: Hill Hall?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: I'm not totally sure.

Interviewee: We sort of had discussions. It was semi-underground, but we were sort of—we wanted to do something, and I don't think we had any notion of what that something might be. I mean, it would look something like an SDS meeting or it would look something like—but we were also going into the city too so that was—and what could we have really done on campus at that point, right?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I mean, I couldn't think of any demands we would have ever made that would make sense in that historical context.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I think for some people it was a way to meet people as sort of a support group thing.

Interviewer: What else?

Interviewee: I mean, certainly, I was with my boyfriend most of then—after a while there, so I mean, I really never, except for the man I moved into the apartment with, I never had sex with anybody that was on campus except one night at a party I had sex with an ex-Marine that was in the drama school, the drama—not school, the drama department.

Really, when I think about it, right, that my—even though I had really close friendships at school and I really was—I was quite—I wrote a paper about homosexual themes in Tennessee Williams' plays, right, in 1967, '68, I guess, for a drama class. I mean, I had no trouble articulating—I mean, interestingly, I was looking at—they used to be—I haven't read *[unintelligible 42:24]* nor printed out reviews I wrote in high school and college for the town paper in my book review column. In 1970, I reviewed *The Lord Won't Mind* for the suburban paper. I mean, I clearly had no trouble—

Interviewer: How funny.

Interviewee: I mean, clearly, I was coming out without saying it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: In retrospect, in my mind, I have very few associations with queerness in Newark. I mean, even though I had gay friends and we were friends with women who knew we were gay and we talked about gay and lesbian or gay and feminist politics and things, and I was dating somebody—or I guess I'd say—dating sounds odd—I was boyfriends with somebody who had an apartment in East Orange, and he knew—I had met through a good woman friend at school.

My gay life doesn't seem to really emotionally have been centered on Newark much at all. I mean, I had much more sex visiting my friends in Cambridge then, at Harvard, which was interesting because Harvard was far more repressed and closeted than Rutgers Newark was at that point.

Interviewer: How do you explain your, nonetheless, having more sex in Cambridge, I guess?

Interviewee: It's a good question. Well, everybody here had rooms *[Laughter]* you could have sex in.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: When you say in Cambridge, you really—

Interviewee: The scene at Harvard.

Interviewer: On campus?

Interviewee: On campus. Yes, yes, yes. Yes.

Interviewer: Sure. The students all live in dorms, yeah.

Interviewee: Yes. Right. Right. Also, I think that the—I don't want to make a complicated correlation, right, but there was something—Harvard at that point was—I mean, like everybody I knew here who was gay was completely terrified of being found out. I had no trouble writing a paper for my sophomore class about homosexual themes in Tennessee Williams' plays, where I said everybody knows that Tennessee Williams is a homosexual. Here's how this works out.

I was far more out in Newark than here, than in Cambridge. I was in Cambridge maybe once a month visiting friends, my main friend whom I was not having an affair with. We were just very close friends. I think part of it was simply that it was sort of a flight from Newark, and it was a—even though I was mostly sort of out in Newark, it was a place where people were more receptive to having sex up here because it was easier, the rooms, and I don't want to say it was like sex tourism *[Laughter]*, right, but it wasn't home. It wasn't where I was all the time.

Interviewer: Right. You were on vacation or something?

Interviewee: I was, and I really did see coming up here as a relief from being at home with my parents or being in Newark, right.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I mean, Cambridge really seemed—they were great book—not that New York doesn't have—I mean, Cambridge had the Brattle Theater, it had—we had bookstores. It had beautiful scenery, all of which I could have gotten in New York. I mean, it wasn't like I didn't know every art theater in New York City and went to Central Park, right? Cambridge sort of epitomized something a little bit different. Not epitomized, it was emblematic of something different.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Cool. Then, you leave Newark?

Interviewee: I leave Newark, right. I also had some—one thing that just occurred to me that when I was a senior, right, some of us petitioned Dorothy Dinnerstein, who was in the psychology department, to do a—

Interviewer: Psychology department? Okay.

Interviewee: Hmm?

Interviewer: She was in the psychology department? I think of her as literary.

Interviewee: No. It was either—no, no, no. I mean, she is—she was the writing—but, no, she was in psychology. We petitioned her to actually hold a seminar for credit on homosexuality.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That happened?

Interviewee: Yes. It was Dorothy, and it was another teacher from sociology named Suzanne Schad-Somers. They jointly ran it.

Interviewer: The subject was homosexuality?

Interviewee: Yes, sort of psychologically—I mean, we're talking in our world of gay queer theory and everything else now, we're talking like reading Hendrik Ruitenbeek *[Laughter]* and reading—one thing we had to read was *Voyage to Lesbos*. I forget who wrote it.

Interviewer: Valerie Taylor?

Interviewee: No. No, no, no.

Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: Would that it were.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: No. It's a book by a male psychoanalyst about a woman who was *[crosstalk 48:53]*. I mean, it's actually interesting, but it's completely neo-Freudian. I believe you may have read *Giovanni's Room*? I mean, there was actually very little to read, actually.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. Right. Right. This was your senior year?

Interviewee: This must have been just after Stonewall, right, but it was before those deluge of gay books came out, right? There was no—like the Dennis Altman book.

Interviewer: Why did you do this?

Interviewee: The seminar?

Interviewer: Yeah. Why did you want to do it? Why did you approach them?

Interviewee: I knew both of them from classes. Other people in the group were actually—had many classes with them, sort of—they were—I think we wanted, for many people in the group, we wanted to actually have some formal way to talk about stuff. I mean, it really was—part of it was instigated by the fact that there was something called feminist studies that was beginning to happen or women's studies. We thought that this would—I don't think we thought of it

as a safe place to do it or anything. I think we thought of it as an interesting topic that was extremely personal to many of us to discuss intellectually.

Interviewer: Right. How many of us, I mean ballpark, would you take a guess?

Interviewee: Seven, eight. Seven, eight. How interesting.

Interviewer: Very interesting. Do you remember where it met?

Interviewee: We met at the—my memory of the classes were that they were—we went to the teacher's—the professor's apartments. I remember we went to Susanna's apartment way over in Alphabet City.

Interviewer: You went into New York to go to class?

Interviewee: Well, just for this. We met occasionally, right.

Interviewer: I see. It was for credit?

Interviewee: My memory that it was for credit. Yes, yes, yes. Like seminars, right, it doesn't have to meet every week.

Interviewer: Got it.

Interviewee: I mean, we probably took it each as an independent study.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Right.

Interviewee: Collectively, right?

Interviewer: Susanna and Dorothy Dinnerstein—

Interviewee: Yeah. Dorothy lived in Leonia.

Interviewer: Neither of them was gay?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: They were sympathetic?

Interviewee: Yes. Yes. Both interested, right, Susanna being a sociologist and Dorothy being a psychologist or a psychology person, both very interested in politics.

Interviewer: Cool. That's great.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's so interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah. Then, I graduated in the fall—spring of '71, right, and then got accepted to the MFA program in playwriting at Brandeis and then moved up here.

Interviewer: Got it.

Interviewee: Was still boyfriends, lovers with the man from East Orange.

Interviewer: Oh, from East Orange?

Interviewee: Yeah, for another year or so, I think.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Then, we had the first terrible breakup everybody has.

Interviewer: Yes. Got it. What have we not touched on that you think is worth—

Interviewee: I don't know. I'm thinking about, I feel like four years at Rutgers Newark is sort of—not a black hole, but that—I mean, I have no emotional attachment *[Laughter]* of queerness or gayness, even though I was *[unintelligible 53:26]* friends, I had a roommate and we had sex. There was nothing really *[unintelligible 53:40]* Newark centered, right, that actually really resonates.

I mean, I'm sure there are other people who grew up in Newark or who were there later or who had deeper roots there, but I guess that's the word, right? I really don't feel I had really roots there, even though I spent time there, even though I had—it was very formative in many ways.

I mean, my sort of roots in gay politics feels more like they're in New York or when I moved to Boston, which was a much more manageable city for me than New York was in terms of politics. People were not screaming at each other all the time.

Interviewer: You could get more involved?

Interviewee: I could get more involved. Also, right, it wasn't—I mean, it was very community oriented. It wasn't a big city, right? There are a couple of bars that everybody went to. We had meetings of Gay Liberation. Everybody knew each other.

Interviewer: It's a smaller place?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was a smaller—I mean, it was really a small town compared to New York.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They were also, to a large degree, far fewer—not fewer, but far smaller egos.

Interviewer: Spoken like a Boston partisan.

Interviewee: Partisan? No, no, no. To be fair, right, I mean, New York is a thriving metropolis and a lot—so many people have wrote books and did other things, but the political scene in New York didn't have a consistency that the political scene other places did.

Interviewer: Sure. People are coming and going all the time.

Interviewee: People coming and going, think too big in the media industry.

Interviewer: More people, right?

Interviewee: I mean, Boston had gay publications that lasted a long time. New York had come out for six months that it had—

Interviewer: That's very interesting.

Interviewee: - gays week.

Interviewer: Chicago too had—I mean, *[unintelligible 55:55]* for years and years.

Interviewee: Right. Years and years. San Francisco had B.A.R. [Bay Area Reporter] for 50 years now? I mean, a long time.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: What's the word I want? The lower energy, the softer energy of Boston, Cambridge, particularly because I was in Cambridge, was far more conducive to what I needed. In fact, worked on many, many, many projects, right.

Interviewer: Any other reflections?

Interviewee: I don't think so. I think—I mean, I think I came into Newark sort of retiring and wanting to do political work and through those meetings and meeting other people, it formed me in a way that made me flourish up here when I got here. I don't want to dismiss it, by any means. It does not feel like it was deeply formative to me. As I said before, the roots are not there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Cool. Well, thank you so very much for taking the time.

Interviewee: Sure. Sure. Was this enough?

Interviewer: Yes. Unless there's something—

Interviewee: No, no, no. I really—

Interviewer: This was fantastic. Thank you so much.

Interviewee: I also sort of avoided names too because I didn't know how much do people—I mean, I could have said names of my friends and stuff, but I didn't.

Interviewer: That's totally up to you, but I think it's fine to—

[Crosstalk 00:57:55]

Interviewee: I mean, it would have been things like Charlene and I went to the movies. It would have been meaningless.

Interviewer: Yeah.

[end]