

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Darryl Rochester

Interviewed by: Timothy Stewart-Winter and Esperanza Santos

Date: September 19, 2019

Location: Residence of Darryl Rochester, Maplewood, NJ

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wonderful. Esperanza, this is a new graduate student working on the project and you're welcome to jump in any time. This is September 19, 2019. We are interviewing Darryl Rochester for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. My name is Timothy Stewart-Winter.

Esperanza Santos: I'm Esperanza Santos.

Darryl Rochester: I'm Darryl Rochester.

Tim Stewart-Winter: We are so delighted to be with you.

Darryl Rochester: I'm delighted.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Maybe you could begin by telling us when and where you were born.

Darryl Rochester: Okay. I was born 1953 in Newark, at Beth Israel Hospital in Newark. My father was from Maryland. My mother was from Georgia. They raised six wonderful children. I was the youngest. My mother passed when I was eight and it was very devastating 'cause I was there when she passed and I saw her die. She had a massive heart attack, went into cardiac arrest. She had asthma. Later on, my father remarried and we became the *Brady Bunch*. My stepmother had two girls and so then it became the *Brady Bunch* and then it's eight kids. I was still youngest. Luckily, my father married my mother's—which was actually my mother's best friend, one of her best friends.

My father was a very dashing young man. He was very, very—he was a very handsome and robust John Wayne-type macho man and he was a good provider, so one of my mother's friends was gonna come after him anyway. My Aunt Letty [00:02:50], she ended up with him. The reason why I'm getting into that is because it wasn't like the typical stepmother; it was someone who raised me as well. She changed my diapers, so she was always in my life.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You already knew her [*crosstalk*].

Darryl Rochester: I already knew her, yes, and her kids were my first cousins and my mother was her daughter's godmother. We just became a blended family. I can recall as early as four, five, liking boys, attracted to

same sex. *[Brief exchange redacted at DR's request.]* I just remember being gay. Well, at those times, we were fags. I was a little sissy and I have these brothers who, strangely enough, they didn't taunt me, except my oldest—my brother that's three years older than me. He was my playmate. We used to take baths together. He was the closest in age. Like *Leave It to Beaver*, he was Wally. He was like Wally. I did everything that he would do and he would get upset with me because I couldn't play basketball or I couldn't do little things like that. He would taunt me, little things like that, but really hard-core taunting, I never received that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: He was how much older?

Darryl Rochester: He was three years older than me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I'm sorry. Tell me his name again.

Darryl Rochester: His name is Gregory.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Gregory.

Darryl Rochester: Yes. Gregory was just an average son, an average brother. One of my oldest brothers, it came to a time when—I used to babysit my nieces and nephews and this therapist at school decided that I should not babysit anymore because that was a sign of femininity. That really crushed me because I looked forward to babysitting. I love tuna fish and the only thing my sister would do was have the cupboard full of tuna fish and I could smoke my cigarettes. I was at that age when I was sneaking smoking cigarettes.

Esperanza Santos: How old were you?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, I was like 13 now. I was babysitting and smoking cigarettes out the window. That was my free time. That was my liberation and I was crushed because I no longer—and then I had a responsibility, so that gave me a sense of wealth. I didn't have to babysit anymore.

Tim Stewart-Winter: 'Cause the therapist told your family that you shouldn't be doing this?

Darryl Rochester: I shouldn't babysit because it was a sign of femininity.

Tim Stewart-Winter: They said okay.

Darryl Rochester: They went through this whole thing of me agreein' to go through therapy, so I went to therapy. This was a big meeting my family had. They had this meeting at my stepmother's house and decided that I should go to therapy. My brother cried and he sat me down and talked about being homosexual and he decided that—to tell me his spiel on homosexuality, that he had played around once or if the boys will like you and stuff like that, things that I already knew because I was really—not out, at all, but I was in denial. I knew that I liked dresses and dressing up and fantasy and arts and crafts and things like that, but I was not officially in my mind gay, or at that time, “gay” wasn't the word we used—a homosexual or a fag.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This meeting was when you were 13?

Darryl Rochester: This was when I was like 13.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your brother was there and your whole family was there?

Darryl Rochester: My brother, my sister that lives here. She kinda raised me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: She was very instrumental in covering me when my brother Gregory—the three year older than me—and I would have a fight. She gave me keys to her house and she would always just protect me. She was my protector. She was a teacher.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How much older was she?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, gosh. She's about six years older than me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sorry to keep interrupting. Just one more question: Where are we? Where's the house, your stepmother's house?

Darryl Rochester: This house is on Johnson Avenue in Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Johnson—?

Darryl Rochester: Johnson and Watson Avenue. The house is gone now because the highway took it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: It was a very lovely area. We went there and they had this little family council. Getting back to the psychiatrist, I went to the therapist and then from there on, I was seeing a therapist in

grammar school. Even in high school, I would go to the therapist. Moving right along, I—when I said I was in denial, I never would admit that I was gay because—and I’d never had sex. I had just that romp with the guy when I was very young and I would have play sex, which was just kissing, kissing and getting aroused. That’s as far as I would go because I was—in my head, I was saving myself, I guess. I don’t know. All my other friends, they were promiscuous and they’re no longer here.

Esperanza Santos: The people in your age?

Darryl Rochester: The people my age, they were very promiscuous and they were having sex, the real deal. I wasn’t and the guys used to call me “the queen.”

Esperanza Santos: Why?

Darryl Rochester: The queen because I was untouched, so I was special. That made my friends furious at me ‘cause they really hated me because I was, I guess, a virgin. I went through high school a virgin and then later on in high school, I met my best friend, Jamie McDonald, who’s a reputable designer. I’ll tell his story later.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, hey.

Darryl Rochester: He was amazing. The guy could sketch and he could sew and he was just amazing. He went to Arts High and then he transferred to Weequahic High School, which I went to. I was a leader in my group. When I look back on it, I—

Tim Stewart-Winter: In high school?

Darryl Rochester: In high school, I was kind of the leader.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You went to Weequahic for all of high school?

Darryl Rochester: All of high school.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You started there when, or finished?

Darryl Rochester: I finished in 1971.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You were there four years?

Darryl Rochester: Four years, right. I became very popular and I was always a popular kid, even in grammar school. I used to fight a lot. I used to

fight the—”You look like you’re putting your lips to say ‘fuh’, the sound ‘fuh.’ You could be sayin’ ‘funny,’ but I would take it as saying ‘fag’,” and I just would come at you. I used to sit home and write—I was very good at hiking people, reading; as we call it, reading, so I would read you—

Esperanza Santos: Hiking people?

Darryl Rochester: Hiking at people, like reading them, telling them off.

Esperanza Santos: I know reading, but I don’t know hiking.

Darryl Rochester: Hiking. That’s a straight term. We always said “hiking.”

Tim Stewart-Winter: You said that’s a straight term?

Darryl Rochester: A straight term. Before I was introduced to the library, I would say “hike” ‘cause that’s what we were taught. I used to sit home and write out speeches of what I would say to someone if they approach me wrong. I would write stuff down so I would be prepared. It was a crazy thing, but I used to do this.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: I later on became very good friends with Jamie McDonald and this guy named Tommy Garrett and this young lady named Erica Harrison, Jamie’s brother Clinton McDonald, his best friend Ricky Moore and there was a young lady named Cybil Moore. We became a clique and we would do everything together. We would have séances in the park. This is in our senior year and we would have séances and we were called the symbolize 00:14:49. The whole entire school would come down to the park, anybody that was cool. We were hippies. We would trans into hippies. I was introduced to Jimi Hendrix and Elton John and that was the music of that time.

I became this hippie and we would have séances and we would have what we called—oh, I forget what we called it—but we would have these periods where we would talk to one another as if we were the opposite character. We would tell them off.

Sensitivity, sensitivity sessions. That’s what we called it. I would say with Tim, “I don’t really think that you’re fabulous because you’re this, that, and the other,” and the head would be goin’ and the fingers would be suavin’. We would just rip each other off, but that then empowered us because it made us stronger as a clique because we knew each other’s weaknesses and we were really a

clique.

When I say that, to this day, we are still best friends, the ones who are still alive. Later on in life, the characters became stronger and stronger. I introduced them to a young man who I'd met. Prior to becoming a senior, I met Albert Murphy. Albert Murphy was all of that. He was just everything. I can't even put it into words. He was like "I wanna be like him" type of a guy. He was much older than I.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How did you meet him?

Darryl Rochester: I met Al Murphy from his roommate, which was Ronald Matthews, who later on became a drag queen. Ronald Matthews and I were friends in high school. I met Ronald Matthews in I'd say the 11th grade. Ronald Matthews was a runaway child. He ran away from home and he lived with Al Murphy and he was a hairdresser by trade.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Ronald was?

Darryl Rochester: Ronald was. He went to Weequahic High School for a few months and then he just dropped out, but we remained friends and I came up to his apartment one day. They were having a fashion show. This led into the fashion aspect of my life.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where was the apartment that you came over to?

Darryl Rochester: This was on Lyons Avenue and Elizabeth Avenue, across the street from Weequahic Park.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay, great.

Darryl Rochester: It was in the Weequahic section and we all lived in the Weequahic section. That was the tush-tush area to live in. The Weequahic section was—basically, it was a predominantly Jewish section.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Still in that time.

Darryl Rochester: At that time, yes. During the riots it started weeding out and Blacks start moving in. We moved up there when my father remarried and we became the third Black family on my street, which was Keer Avenue, which is still a beautiful tree-lined street.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When was your father's remarriage, just to—or how old were you?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, I was 13.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It would've been just before the riots.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. It was just before the riots, actually, just before the riots. I'm going into that because we all lived in the Weequahic section, so we had a certain *aviance*. It was a certain lifestyle. We didn't think we were better, but people thought you were better or you thought that you went—if you went to Weequahic High School—'cause Weequahic was number one academic at that time—you were like bougie.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Bougie.

Darryl Rochester: Which we were. We didn't know about being a bougie or anything like that. We were just this is where your parents told you you had to go; this is where we went, but it was a wonderful experience. Getting back to Ronald Matthews, I met Ronald Matthews. He took me to his apartment and I met Albert Murphy, which was the godfather of it all. He just changed everyone's lives. Albert Murphy was a charismatic—just beautiful. He looked like Johnny Mathis. His hair was permed and he wore it back in waves and it was—everything was just so, just so.

You couldn't read a thing on him. His skin was beautiful. He was a beautiful looking man. He worked at this place called Carlston's in Elizabeth. It was a mod shop for—the look was mod back then, so the English look. The long maxi coats and the boots and hotpants and all that stuff was just coming out. You know what hotpants are? They're Daisy Dukes.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, okay.

Darryl Rochester: They're really short hotpants.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Like short shorts.

Darryl Rochester: Short shorts, yeah. Really short shorts. Men would wear hotpants—the gay kids would wear the hotpants and midriff tops, so you had the hotpants and the little midriff tops—

Esperanza Santos: That sounds very YMCA.

Darryl Rochester: - and you wear a maxi coat to the floor with boots. This is mid winter and you would wear this and you were fabulous.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Would you wear this to school?

Darryl Rochester: I wore hotpants to school my senior year.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow, okay.

Darryl Rochester: We were going to graduate. I wore hotpants because I was out of there anyway. Jamie, my best friend, who was a designer, made me an outfit for one of Albert Murphy's fashion shows and it was—I wish I had the picture. I wish I could put my hands on it. Anyway, it was a midriff top and it had a snap-on top that would laid over long, so it was like a skirt and underneath the skirt was hotpants. You could see it from the front, but not from the back. In the back it looked like I had on a skirt with a top. You snap that off and it was hotpants and a midriff top. I wore that to school and the principal called me into the office and asked me what was I doing and I said, "I'm wearing hotpants. This is the fashion and I'm a model, so, there."

He says something to me and I reply, "We have no dress code here at this school," which we didn't, so that was in my defense. I wore hotpants the next day and the next day. I was almost a troublemaker, but I had this clique, the clique of us. Later on in life, I met—getting back to meeting Al Murphy and them—I introduced Al Murphy to my clique. I brought them over. Al Murphy had moved from the apartment which I had met him in.

He moved cross the street from this high school and so it was very convenient to leave high school and go over Al Murphy's house and hang around, smoke pot. That's what we did in those days: drink wine and smoke pot. That was the big thing in the '70s. Al Murphy introduced me to his fashion show. He would have a Mother's Day annual fashion show. At that time, I was studying dance because only thing I wanted to do was be on stage my whole life. I wanted to be on stage and I studied dance. My sister bought my first dance shoes because my father didn't understand why I wanted to do ballet.

Esperanza Santos: The one who was six years older and protected you?

Darryl Rochester: Yes. The one I lived with. She bought my first—my dance shoes and my aunt, who's 105, took me downtown to Newark to Halsey Street and we purchased my dance shoes. I was studying dance and then I got a scholarship studying dance at Thompson's Dance Studio in Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sorry. That was also while you were a teenager?

Darryl Rochester: Yes, mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: When you graduated high school or while you were in high school?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, I studied dance at 13.

Esperanza Santos: Thirteen.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Thompson's Dance Studio, where was that?

Darryl Rochester: That was on Bergen Street in Newark and Bergen and Lyons Avenue, right in the proximity of where I lived.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool.

Darryl Rochester: I would walk there and there was not many men who danced, so they gave me a scholarship. Anyway, I went to dance classes. Getting back to meeting Albert, that changed my life because Albert gave me a venue now. He gave me a platform to display my talent through his fashion shows. Ronald Matthews—going back to Ronald Matthews, who was Albert's roommate—he had a dance company, dance group called the Ronald Matthews Dancers in that time, so I became a Ronald Matthews dancer.

I outshined some of the dancers because I had training. I had training and they were just good dancers. They could really dance and move and gyrate their bodies, but I would take it to another level. I would take it into a ballet, something like that when we had—when we did—we would dance, come out as a group to dance and then we would have—

Tim Stewart-Winter: In the fashion show.

Darryl Rochester: In the fashion shows. We would have a segment when the Ronald Matthews Dancers would come out. We would come out in our costumes with glitter and all kinds of stuff and fringes. We would all make our costumes. They were all precision. They were really, really good and everyone was very talented. They were sissies. Later on, Ronald Matthews decided to go into drag. I'm sorry. I left one major part out of my life. In the fifth grade, I met this young man, which I will not say his real name because he's transgender and I really always respect that.

This person is now called Tracey Norman. I don't know if you've heard of Tracey Norman, but she's from the House of Africa. She's my best friend. To this day, we are all best friends. She was part of our clique, also. She went to another school.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Another high school?

Darryl Rochester: Another high school. She went to a mechanical high school. I forget what it's—North Tech. I think she went to North Tech. She could change a tire and rev up a engine in heels. She was amazing. Tracey and Ronald Matthews and my good friend Gregory Howard—which Gregory Howard was responsible, I must say, for introduc' me to Ronald Matthews. It stood between Gregory and I for this venture that I'm about to get into. They all wanted to go to this drag ball one night. Tracey had never been. Tracey was an incredible looking young man, beautiful, stomp down gorgeous. I mean [*whooshing sound*].

I also studied makeup and I would play around at the fashion shows and I was the makeup artist in the fashion shows along with being a dancer, so I wore many hats. I put makeup on Tracey and she knew then, she says to this day that that was her turning point when she knew what she had to do. She wore makeup and she put a bandanna on her head and that was it and that's all she wrote. She was gorgeous. Tracey was a dancer, also, and then Ronald Matthews was a dancer. They just continued to drag. Albert wasn't havin' that. He was not being affiliated with a drag queen in his show. One of the shows, Ronald Matthews went out on the runway because he was a part of the show, but no one knew what he had up his sleeves.

What he did was he came behind stage because we were all friends. At this time they had different designers that had their models. Every designer had a group of models that were in the show and they collaborated with this group, with this mod—the designer named Al Grundy and Darryl Grundy, who later on became very famous. They collaborated with them and when the curtains opened up, out comes Ronald Matthews in drag and Albert Murphy was furious. He disassociated with him, with Ronald Matthews after that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Why was he furious?

Darryl Rochester: Albert had high standards and he was not—it was not heard of, drag queens on a runway and he discredited Albert's show.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: He disgraced Albert. He wasn't a Tracey Norman. Tracey was gorgeous. Ronald was just a guy in drag with tits. He had started takin' hormones then. He deceived Albert and he did not know. It was not set up. This was done all behind Albert's back and Albert did not know that the designers had Ronald Matthews to come out. This was supposed to arouse the crowd, like wow, which I guess it did at that time because it was a first. He came out and he displayed the garment very well. He executed it very well, but it was still discredited.

Albert was furious, so he disassociated with Ronald Matthews and then he gave me the group, the dancers, so now it was the Darryl Rochester Dancers. I took it a step further. There was maybe five dancers of Ronald Matthews. I had 20 dancers. I had 10 dancers that were very good dancers, street dancers, really club dancers and the other 10 were ballet and jazz students from—at the time, at that time I had left Thompson's Dance Studio and I was a student, a full-time student, at Alvin Ailey.

Esperanza Santos: Alvin Ailey?

Darryl Rochester: Yes, Alvin Ailey American Dance Academy.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Very famous dance school in New York City.

Darryl Rochester: Very famous dance school in New York City, yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You were a full-time student at Alvin Ailey—

Darryl Rochester: Alvin Ailey.

Tim Stewart-Winter: - and doing the Darryl Rochester Dancers in Newark.

Darryl Rochester: Yes, in Newark.

Esperanza Santos: There was a team of 20.

Darryl Rochester: It was a team of 20. What I would do is when I choreographed things, I would choreograph something like—say, for instance, there was a scene of—there was a dance called “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,” and it was like [*sings rhythmically*] and it was a guy that was throwin' up a coin and catchin' it; throwin' up a coin and catchin' it. It was very dated and it's '30s, so they had really tight shirts, Mafia-type bad guy pants with black slacks.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Like 1930s?

Darryl Rochester: 1930s. It was under a street lamp. I made a streetlamp out of a coat hanger and then I had this piece that was a lamp and I just nailed it together and it was like a streetlamp. He was throwin' up a coin and the other guys were shinin' shoes. It was that type of rhythmic type of thing. Then I would have—the leading girl was my girlfriend Brenda Braxton, who was a ballet dancer who is now—she's on Broadway. She's been in *Smokey Joe's Café* and everything. She's done everything on Broadway. She would be my lead dancer because I was a lead dancer. After all, it was my dance company.

She would come out very—in a jeté and come around and I would—a long scarf, flowing scarf and we would have fans blowing. I would take it to another level. I took it into theater, as opposed to just coming out, gyratin' your bodies and throwin' somethin' like a little dance. I took it into a theme.

Esperanza Santos: To elevate the drama.

Darryl Rochester: To elevate the drama. My dancers had drama. The other 10 dancers were behind the scene. They were hailing a cab or something like that and the dancers that were dancers did the harder parts. They did the spins and leaps and stuff like that. Follow me. There was a dance that we did which was a—the opening of the Darryl Rochester Dancers was my premiere, the Darryl Rochester Dancers.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When was that?

Darryl Rochester: The date I can't remember.

Tim Stewart-Winter: '70s?

Darryl Rochester: This was in the '80s now. No, no, no, no. Late '70s, about '75. I opened the show with a theme of the '20s, the '30s, the '40s, the '50s, the '60s, and the '70s, so what I had was I had my main dancers, the ones who were studying dance, they came out one by one in couples, simulating the era. The '20s came out; the girl came out with—like a flapper. She had finger waves. She had a long, flowing dress and she came out and they did the varsity, like a little ragtime thing.

Esperanza Santos: Like vaudeville.

Darryl Rochester: Vaudeville, thank you. Then the '30s came out and they did a ballroom dance.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is that this?

Darryl Rochester: This is it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is the premiere.

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: What? Wait, so this is a paper that shows the actual event of the dance?

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is "Al Murphy's Fall and Winter Fashion Review."

Darryl Rochester: Fashion show, mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is from *Blue*.

Darryl Rochester: This was in '73.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In '73. November, '73.

Darryl Rochester: I said '75. Was '73.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was '73.

Darryl Rochester: This was the introduction of the Darryl Rochester Dancers.

Tim Stewart-Winter: At the Robert Treat Hotel.

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. You were a student in Alvin Ailey at this time, while you're putting together this Darryl Rochester Dancers. The premiere is in Albert Murphy's show at the Robert Treat.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where are you living?

Darryl Rochester: I'm living with my parents still.

Tim Stewart-Winter: With your parents in Weequahic.

Darryl Rochester: At Weequahic.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How would you get to New York?

Darryl Rochester: I would catch the 107 bus to New York. I think the car fare was \$1.75 back then.

Tim Stewart-Winter: To go to and from—

Darryl Rochester: New York.

Tim Stewart-Winter: - dance—to Alvin Ailey.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How would you get around in Newark?

Darryl Rochester: Buses.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Buses. Just curious.

Darryl Rochester: By this time—

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: - let me go back a little bit. My friend Tommy Garrett, he was an inspiring—he was a tennis player. He could play tennis. His family were big on tennis and Tommy—

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: - was a tennis player. He had a scholarship to Howard University on tennis.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Did he go to high school with you?

Darryl Rochester: He went to high school. He was one of my clique. Tommy became a part of Albert Murphy's fashion show and he was a—he started modeling. We didn't know where that was gonna take him, but it led into him leaving to become this—one of the first black models in the fashion industry. He blew up. He left school and he just started—he got into Eileen Ford's agency, Ford's agency and then he was with Elite.

Esperanza Santos: Elite Model Management?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. He just became big. Erica was the house mother, which was—she was just—she ran everything.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In your clique?

Darryl Rochester: In my clique and in the fashion show.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Albert Murphy's fashion show.

Darryl Rochester: Albert Murphy's fashion show. I left out that I introduced all of my clique to Albert Murphy and he changed our lives by adopting us as his kids. He had a breakdown one night. He just started crying and said, "I think I gave birth to all of you." He was like the house, the house mother, if you wanna say.

Tim Stewart-Winter: He was, not Erica.

Darryl Rochester: No. Albert Murphy was like the house mother. He gave me keys to his house because he trusted me and I became his best friend. When I had problems at home, I could just walk up the hill to his house. That was a big thing back then, when someone gives you keys. To this day, if someone gives you keys to their house, that's trusting you. Erica was the house mother. When I say "house mother," Erica was a very lovely young lady who I befriended in high school. I brought her to my little clique and said, "Do you wanna be in our clique?" She said, "I don't care. Not really," 'cause she was from Harlem. She was tough.

Esperanza Santos: She had that edge.

Darryl Rochester: She had that edge and I saw that in her and I just caressed that and I just took that. She didn't think she was pretty and I thought that she was lovely and pretty. To this day, she says, "Darryl's the first person that told me that I was pretty." She had just lost her mother. Her father married her mother's best friend. We had very similar stories. But, her mother was mean. Her stepmother was mean to her. We took Erica in. Erica became the house mother. She became the manager of the fashion shows. She would run the back.

Esperanza Santos: She would delegate.

Darryl Rochester: She would like say, "You can't come in the back. You can come in the back." She would run the whole thing. When Albert Murphy had a discotheque, she ran the front door.

Esperanza Santos: Discotheque, like dance?

Darryl Rochester: He had a club. This is just the beginning. He became very large. Erica became the mother. The other guys were just part of the clique. Tommy was this great model. Everyone else married. Clinton married one of the models. Until this day, they're married and have lovely kids.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Clinton was a guy and married a female model.

Darryl Rochester: He was a guy. He was Jamie's brother, big brother. Jamie was the designer. Jamie later on became a big designer in New York. He had his showrooms on Seventh Avenue and his partners gave him a—his showroom was on 57th Street, across the street from Bloomingdale's. He made it big.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, that was on the east side, then, huh?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. His first show was at Studio 54 and it was big.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: The others just did their thing, but I just wanted to just go into that just to not leave out what happened to these people. I did this show with the eras, with the '20s, the '30s and '40s. The '50s was real cool. Was a guy named Jimmy Ishman, who's a very good friend of mine to this day. He's still living. Jimmy did this dance. He had a leather jacket on and he had—Jimmy looked like he was Spanish. He had wavy hair and he took out a comb and did this. It was really cool. He was really slick, on like *Happy Days*, '60s or '50s. He did that and picked the girl up and then they did the—I can't remember. When you stick your hand in and out like that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is in this show.

Darryl Rochester: This is in this show. Then, when it came to the '60s, the '50s, the '60s, the '60s—after the '60s, then I had my other 10 dancers, who were just good dancers. They were dressed up in glitter and—because they represented the '70s, so that the curtain just—each group, they would leave the stage and then the next group would come out and they would leave the stage. The '40s would come out and they had some—the '50s, Jimmy did this thing. When he left, the '60s came out and then all of a sudden the curtain opened up and these dancers just busted out and this disco music. They had glow paint on them and everything like that.

By that time, when they were doing that, we were—speaking of we—the first group with the eras, we were back in the back putting on gold and silver makeup because we were gonna represent the ‘80s. I hope you can picture this. Then the curtains closed up again while the dancers were in the front dancing and we assembled in the back with balloons on our heads and these little white skullcaps and silver paint and white leotards. Looked very spacey because we thought that we would be like the ‘80s back then, the future.

Esperanza Santos: The future.

Darryl Rochester: I don’t know what we thought the ‘80s would be like, which it wasn’t. Nothing like that. It was nothing like it, but we thought we were really very futuristic.

Esperanza Santos: You were imagining.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. This was in my head. We came out and the music was very spacey [*humming*]. Very spacey and we just did this isometric type of movements. It was really great and that led to us going to the Bahamas to do this show.

Esperanza Santos: Wait. In the show you’re in the Bahamas or you took the show to the Bahamas?

Darryl Rochester: No. We took the show to the Bahamas. That was my first hire for having a dance company.

Esperanza Santos: What?

Darryl Rochester: Someone that was in the audience saw the show and wanted Jamie to do a show, which is a whole ‘nother story. Woof. That was crazy experience. They hired me to do my dancers in the Bahamas. That was my first time flying out with my dancers.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: That was a good tribute.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where did your dancers—where did you practice?

Darryl Rochester: We practiced in my basement. My father had a big house. I always come from a big house. It’s funny. My father had a big house on Keer Avenue ‘cause they were one-family homes back then. We had a large basement—it was larger than this—and we would practice in my basement.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your father was okay with that?

Darryl Rochester: He was okay because at this time, I was out. I was out then. The way I came out to my father was really weird because I was going to clubs after high school and Tracey was the designated driver. She would always drive us. She wasn't really completely out then, as far as dragging. I'm sorry for goin' back and forth, but I'm sure you'll edit this different. What happens is Tracey was the designated driver. She would drive us to New York to these clubs. I was still living at my father's house and the gay life was just you go out late and you come home early and that's all in my head, was you go out like at 12:00 and you come in at like 7:00 in the morning.

My father was in the kitchen listening to his gospel music one day and I came in the house 'cause I had practiced crawling up the steps without squeakin' the steps, but I was busted this time because my father's already up and having his toast. I said, "Oh, Lord. How am I gonna gettin' this past him?" Because you have to pass the kitchen to get to the staircase. I stood in the living room with my hands like this and I said, "Oh, my gosh." I just rushed in the kitchen; I opened the refrigerator door and said, "I'm gay. This is what we do. We go out late; we come in early," and that was my introduction to my father.

Esperanza Santos: Then he said?

Darryl Rochester: He just looked at me.

Esperanza Santos: How, like what?

Darryl Rochester: He just looked at me and shook his head.

Esperanza Santos: Disappointment or sadness?

Darryl Rochester: Disappointment, sadness, all of that; all in one, but also a kind of relief because I'm his child. A parent knows their child. From the early stages when I said I was going through therapy, my father knew I was different.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was the purpose of the therapy to make you straight?

Darryl Rochester: Straight, yes.

Esperanza Santos: Conversion therapy.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. Isn't it all?

Tim Stewart-Winter: The therapy was at school?

Darryl Rochester: Yes, it was at school.

Tim Stewart-Winter: At Weequahic.

Darryl Rochester: At Weequahic.

Esperanza Santos: At school, by school or did someone else come to school?

Darryl Rochester: No. This in school. They had a therapist. It was regular and what happened was because I was very popular, like I said earlier, I changed that therapy appointment into a gala affair. I had all my friends take that period and go to the same session that I went to, so we would all be in there together. It was four guys who were gay in high school, who our friends were. We were friends and we would come in there and just sit. It would get us out of gym.

Tim Stewart-Winter: They were in your clique, too?

Darryl Rochester: No.

Tim Stewart-Winter: No?

Darryl Rochester: No. They weren't in my clique.

Esperanza Santos: What were they?

Darryl Rochester: They were just friends, high school friends. Just high school friends I knew, but I had other friends outside of my clique.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I'm tryin' to get a picture of your high school. The neighborhood is still Jewish, significantly.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What's your grade or your class in terms of—is it mostly Black?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, by that time, no. By that time it was predominantly Black because after the riots, it was predominantly Black. My class was the first class to have an African-American council.

Esperanza Santos: Wait.

Darryl Rochester: In '69, I'd say, in '69 was the first Afro-American history group and they had Afro-American history in the curriculum. We were the first class to introduce—we wore dashikis and we were Black.

Esperanza Santos: You were proud Black, not just Black. You were proud Black.

Darryl Rochester: We were proud Black.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Were all of your friends Black in high school?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This group of four gay classmates also went to the counselor and that's where—

Darryl Rochester: None of my clique went to the counselor. Jamie didn't go.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: No. Jamie didn't go. The other foolish ones, the foolish queens—

Esperanza Santos: The foolish queens.

Darryl Rochester: - who all became drag queens. Let me make that clear. One thing I was very proud of for me: it was very proud and very important that I did not become a drag queen.

Esperanza Santos: Because?

Darryl Rochester: Regardless of what my father, what I were dealing with, my most important thing was I'm not going to become what they stereotypically expect you to be. I was going to wear my pants. I wore hotpants, but that was my fashion move.

Esperanza Santos: Then you wore short shorts.

Darryl Rochester: I wore the hotpants, though.

Esperanza Santos: But that wasn't drag.

Darryl Rochester: That wasn't drag.

Esperanza Santos: That was just, "I wanna serve a look."

Darryl Rochester: I was servin' looks. That was fashion 'cause I always knew I was tied into fashion some sort of way. My mother was a very fashionable woman. She was a very fashionable woman. A lot of these pieces down here were my mother's, like these lamps and stuff back there, those lamps and that bed.

Esperanza Santos: I was gonna say...

Darryl Rochester: The bedroom set was my mother's. My mother was very fashionable and she was amazing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It's beautiful.

Darryl Rochester: I come from that type of family.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What did your parents do for a living?

Darryl Rochester: My father was a truck driver for Bayonne Steel and my mother was a house worker and she just stayed home and bought furniture. My father would come home, *said*, "Mabel, where did this come from?" She said, "I ordered it." She just spent his money.

Esperanza Santos: When you say "mom," is that the one before you were eight or after you were eight?

Darryl Rochester: Before I was, yeah. My real mom. I inherited a lot of her ways.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your stepmother, she also didn't—

Darryl Rochester: She didn't work at first. My father took care of her and then she later on got a job. She was an independent woman.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I'm just curious. Your father's job was—when you said he was a truck driver, was that not long-haul trucking?

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, so was he gone—?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, no. Just for the day. He would go long trips to distribute tile or concrete or whatever, like that. Some days he would take us on his trips, my brother and I.

Tim Stewart-Winter: But he wouldn't be—

Darryl Rochester: Gone for a week or gone for—

Tim Stewart-Winter: - going to California or something.

Darryl Rochester: California, no.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay, cool. He liked gospel music?

Darryl Rochester: He loved gospel music, yes. I just stuck my head in the door and I says, "I'm gay and this is what happened." Then I went upstairs to the third floor, which was empty at that time. My brother had a room on the third floor, the one who's three years older than me, but he was in the service now.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That was Gregory.

Darryl Rochester: Gregory, yes. Very good. Gregory. He was in the Air Force then, so his room was vacant and I ran up to his room—I don't know; for some kind of reason. I don't know why I went up to his room and didn't go to my bedroom, but I went upstairs and my stepmother came upstairs and she comforted me. Now this is an interesting thing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your stepmom?

Darryl Rochester: My stepmom. Because later on she became Jehovah Witness and it was all hell broke loose in the house because Jehovah Witnesses really do not care for gay people and they don't—they ostracize. They just [*sounds of disgust*]. She became Jehovah Witness and then things just changed in my house.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Can I ask, were you raised going to church?

Darryl Rochester: I was raised in church.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What kind of church?

Darryl Rochester: Baptist Church. I'm Baptist. I was baptized Baptist and I'm Baptist.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You're Baptist now?

Darryl Rochester: No. I go to a Baptist Church on Chancellor Avenue called Good Neighbor.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where did you go to church as a child?

Darryl Rochester: I went to church as a child at this—which is still standing in Newark—it’s Metropolitan Baptist Church, which is on Springfield Avenue. The original church is on one side and the new church is on the other. They’ve gone through tryin’ to make it a museum or something like that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your mother and father and siblings all went to church with you.

Darryl Rochester: We went to church. My father didn’t go to church much.

Esperanza Santos: But he loved gospel music.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah, he loved gospel music.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You said this. He was from Maryland.

Darryl Rochester: He was from Maryland.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your mother was from Georgia.

Darryl Rochester: From Georgia, mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your stepmother?

Darryl Rochester: She was from Alabama.

Tim Stewart-Winter: They were all raised Baptist, as far as you know?

Darryl Rochester: Yes, mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your stepmother changed, became Jehovah’s Witness.

Darryl Rochester: She became Jehovah’s Witness.

Esperanza Santos: Why?

Darryl Rochester: Well, she studied it. She would dib and dab in Jehovah Witness and then she just finally started studying and it just changed everything. Our Christmases changed.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How old were you?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, I was about 20, 19 or 20.

Esperanza Santos: You probably what, came out when you were like 17 and then 20 [crosstalk].

Darryl Rochester: I came out when I was 18.

Esperanza Santos: When you were 18. That was the day that you came home from the club early.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. I still wasn't having penetrating sex, though.

Esperanza Santos: So, you weren't having penetrative sex and it was two years later that your stepmom became Jehovah's Witness.

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That changed.

Darryl Rochester: That just changed everything. She didn't wanna have a Christmas tree, stuff like that. She was like, "Why do you have boys up in your room?" I've always had company because now, at this point of my life, I'm on the third floor where my brother lived 'cause he got married to this lovely Italian girl. I come from a biracial family.

Esperanza Santos: Wait.

Darryl Rochester: My brothers married outside of our race.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Both of your parents were Black—

Darryl Rochester: Were Black. Excuse me, yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: - or all three of your parents, I guess.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. My brother left. I was on the third floor at this time and so I used to have company because I had the third floor decorated, really laid out. It was laid out. I used to like to entertain. That was my space. That was my space and a little hanky-panky would go on upstairs, of course, but I still wasn't having real sex. To give you an example of how my stepmother thought, she says to me one time, "You shouldn't have company upstairs. I know what you're doin' up those steps," and I says, "Well, Rosalyn—" which was her daughter—"I walked in on Rosalyn having sex in the den one night," and she replied to me, "Well, that's what girls do in their families' houses."

"It's okay for your daughter to have sex, but you're tellin' me that I can't have sex up in my bedroom." It was a twisted thing and

then it was a thing of her showing possessions of hers and what was not hers. Hers was her children and we were not her real children. Her ways started changing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That was new.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow. That must've been really difficult.

Darryl Rochester: It was difficult because I was a young, gay man who was very love with her 'cause she was my aunt from childhood and then later on became my mother. I always was up under her because I needed that motherly touch and now she tells me I can't sit on her bed and watch the soaps with her, but Rosalyn can sit on your bed. "That's my child," she would say, so she's changed and that really hurt me. But, we remained good. Later on, as we grew older, my father died.

Esperanza Santos: How old were you?

Darryl Rochester: I was—

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: - almost in my 30s. I had left home, moved in with Al Murphy and Al Murphy did me wrong. I would give him my rent money. He took the rent money and paid for a guy's car that he liked. He bought a guy a car and left us with no rent and we were evicted, so I didn't speak to Albert for years. I was devastated. I had to move back home. Go ahead.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I have so many questions.

Darryl Rochester: Go ahead.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When you moved in with Albert, that was where? Keep asking you where. That was in Weequahic?

Darryl Rochester: It was in Weequahic district.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The same place.

Darryl Rochester: Same area.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Same place. You move out of your parents' house. You move in with Albert.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. We had a lovely house. Albert was such a wonderful decorator.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is when? This is around the time you were doing the show?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, no. Way after the show.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is after Le Joc.

Darryl Rochester: No. This is prior to Le Joc.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, prior to Le Joc.

Darryl Rochester: Albert has stopped doing his fashion shows for a while and he opened this club called Le Joc's, which was the first club, gay club in Newark on Halsey Street. We all had something to do with it. I painted a wall and my wall was very good. I made it brick. That was the concession stand. Erica ran the concession stand. She was the mother. She cut up the fruit and displayed all that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay, so wait. Wait. I wanna come right back to that. You get evicted and then move back in with your family. What was I gonna ask? Oh, where does Albert move?

Darryl Rochester: Well, Albert was much older than I, all remember. Albert moved to another apartment.

Esperanza Santos: When you say "much older," let's say you were 20; how old was he?

Darryl Rochester: I would say he was about 28.

Esperanza Santos: He was an adult.

Darryl Rochester: He was an adult.

Esperanza Santos: How old were you when you first met him?

Darryl Rochester: About 14.

Esperanza Santos: For you, 14 and 22. Twenty-two is much older than a 14-year-old.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where was he from?

Darryl Rochester: I don't know.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You don't know. I guess we're in the period between Darryl Rochester's Dancers starts up and Le Joc is not—is a couple years later.

Darryl Rochester: Le Joc?

Tim Stewart-Winter: I think we have—my colleague, Whit—'74 to '76. Established in June of '74. Closes sometime in '76. Does that sound about right?

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I would be remiss if I didn't ask: Is there any possibility that you have any photos of Le Joc?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, no.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Had to ask.

Darryl Rochester: I don't have any photos of Le Joc and I don't know if I could get you any.

Esperanza Santos: Why?

Darryl Rochester: I don't know. We didn't take pictures. There weren't any little cameras then.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, you didn't have iPhones back then.

Darryl Rochester: The iPhone, we didn't have iPhones.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Photos of clubs are very hard to come by.

Darryl Rochester: No one walked around with a camera, hardly, to a club.

Esperanza Santos: If I was at a club, I'm more interested in finding someone cute to dance with, not taking a photo.

Darryl Rochester: You could find pictures of that era.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. We can come back to that.

Darryl Rochester: Unfortunately, I'm still unpacking, so I have no clue. I just got out of that apartment. I didn't label a box. I just packed stuff, so everything is in the back. I have no clue. I'm sure Erica has some pictures of when we were young and stuff like that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Erica's still around.

Darryl Rochester: Erica's still around. Erica's still around. Tommy Garrett's still around, the model. Jamie's deceased. His brother's still around. Ricky is still around. Cybil Moore is still around. She's become really holy than thou in the church. That's her thing now: she's really a holy roller.

Esperanza Santos: Holy roller?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. She'll hold a cross to your face and make you confess.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In the Baptist?

Darryl Rochester: In the Baptist Church, yeah.

Esperanza Santos: You'll repent.

Darryl Rochester: She did everything.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Who's Ricky?

Darryl Rochester: Ricky was one of our best friends. He was just fine.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I feel like I derailed things. We're talkin' about Al Murphy. You had this fight, but then you—

Darryl Rochester: Then later on, one of the dancers who was very important to me at the time was Shelton Hayes. He's in *Blue*. Shelton knew Albert Murphy, but I pulled Shelton into the clique because he was one of the dancers, so now he's family. He and Albert established a good relationship and he becomes a part of Le Joc. He works at Le Joc's and Shelton was my best—one of my besties. Loved Shelton. He's no longer with us, you know. Shelton became one of Albert's right-hand man.

He later on became so instrumental and talented—his talent was just amazing. He was a decorator and he had that under his belt. He would decorate the club and stuff like that and then later on, he opened his own business, a furniture shop on Halsey Street. Shelton then later on became the manager of Zanzibar, which

Albert managed also. After Le Joc's, Albert managed Chanique's 01:10:21, several clubs and then he went back and he reopened Zanzibar—I mean he reopened Le Joc's, but that didn't work.

Esperanza Santos: Why?

Darryl Rochester: I don't know. Times had changed.

Esperanza Santos: Did people not go to the club?

Darryl Rochester: People didn't go out. It's a strange thing when you have something in Newark or it's just like with Blacks. Blacks don't patronize other Black stores, for some reason.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Chanique's? I don't think I've heard of Chanique's.

Darryl Rochester: Chanique's was another one.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was a club?

Darryl Rochester: Was a club on Halsey Street.

Tim Stewart-Winter: A gay club?

Darryl Rochester: It was a predominantly gay club, but it was a mixed club. The only really gay club was Le Joc's. That was known because it was gay and if you were cool and smooth and you were sharp, or whatever like that, you got in, but it was open for the gay group, community. The other clubs were—that Albert Murphy had something to do with—was basically a balanced club, but because of Albert Murphy, the gays flocked and straights always hung with the gay kids back then. I don't know to say they still do now, but mostly all the gay clubs—like The Garage. The Garage was another big club.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In New York?

Darryl Rochester: In New York. The Garage had to the point that they had to open up two nights. They had one for the straight crowd and one for the gay crowd. The straight people, who was really, really down with the gay kids—'cause the gay kids had the best parties—they had co-memberships. You had to have a gay person sponsor you. You could get a core membership. It was a little more, but you could go both nights.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow. Chanique's was after Le Joc.

Darryl Rochester: Chanique's was a small little club.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Like S H A—

Darryl Rochester: I don't know the correct spelling of it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Chanique's, like Chanique apostrophe S.

Darryl Rochester: Yes, Chanique's.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Chanique's. Tell us about Le Joc. We're very interested.

Darryl Rochester: Le Joc opens up and it was fabulous. It was this old warehouse. This great illustrator named Maning, Jamie was instrumental in having Jamie and Tommy Garrett—because they were big in the fashion industry—they were instrumental. The wonderful thing about our whole clique was everyone had some substance into something in the clique. They were involved in the arts and they had some sort of pull, so that was a good thing. Jamie and Tommy had pull in the fashion industry and they got us Maning. He befriended us.

He was a big illustrator and he made a sketch on the wall of Le Joc's which was very big, this large-size portrait of Sherry Gordon. Now this was Sherry Gordon. This is Sherry Gordon.

Tim Stewart-Winter: On the left?

Darryl Rochester: On the left.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The person on the left, in the lower left—I'm just gonna just grab it so that we can find it again. It's the November 11, '73 poster.

Darryl Rochester: That's Sherry Gordon. Maning painted Sherry.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Maning painted Sherry on the wall of Le Joc.

Darryl Rochester: On the wall. Sherry was introduced to the industry behind Tommy Garrett. She was walking down the street. We all worked at this shoe store in Newark called—I'll get back to it. We all worked at this shoe store in Newark. Al Murphy was the manager. He always looked after us and gave us jobs.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was that on Halsey?

Darryl Rochester: This was on Market Street. No, this was on Broad Street.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Broad Street.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, my gosh. I can't remember. It slips my mind right now.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Can you describe it?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, it was sharp. It was funky. It was where everyone went to get their shoes during the '70s, the high heels for men, the cha-cha shoes, everything. It was like it. Arrowsmith's.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Arrowsmith's?

Darryl Rochester: Arrowsmith Shoes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Al is the manager.

Darryl Rochester: Al was the manager, so he gave us all jobs there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Selling shoes?

Darryl Rochester: Selling shoes, stocking shoes, whatever. I was doin' the cash register. I had a part-time job there because my other part of the day, I was in dance. He gave me an opportunity to have a job and I had a dance—went to Alvin Ailey. I left Broad Street and went to Alvin Ailey.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow, and you're goin' out.

Darryl Rochester: And I'm goin' out to the clubs, yes. We were working at Alvin Ailey—I mean we were working at—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Arrowsmith.

Darryl Rochester: - Arrowsmith and walking down a street was this girl. She was just walking down the street and Tommy ran out of the store and says, "My gosh." She was Sherry Gordon. She was gorgeous. She was just raw, but Tommy had an eye for fashion and he knew what he was looking at. He introduced her to Antonio Lopez, who was the biggest illustrator in New York. Maning was his rival.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Antonio's rival?

Darryl Rochester: Yes. Antonio discovered Pat Cleveland, Billy—the stars back then. Sherry Gordon later on became a model through Tommy. When Antonio met her, he sketched her and put her in *Women's Wear*

Daily. She was on the front cover of *Women's Wear Daily*. He says, "This is some of the most beautiful women you'll see in New York City," or something like that. I forget how the caption went.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sherry Gordon was from Newark?

Darryl Rochester: She was from Newark, in the projects somewhere, just raw.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was she in your clique?

Darryl Rochester: No. Later on she became in our clique because she's family now.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay, cool.

Darryl Rochester: She's part of Albert Murphy's stars, the fashion. We're still doing the fashion shows.

Tim Stewart-Winter: During Le Joc?

Darryl Rochester: Durin' Le Joc, durin' Arrowsmith shoes, we were still doing the fashion shows.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool.

Darryl Rochester: Then there was Marsha Vaughan who was—that's Marsha Vaughan next to Sherry and she was Jamie's star. Jamie was the designer who—Studio 54, this, that, and the other. Marsha Vaughan, she did the Ivory soap commercial and that blew her up, with her little girl.

Tim Stewart-Winter: She was from Newark?

Darryl Rochester: She was from Roselle and she still lives in Roselle.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

[Pause]

Tim Stewart-Winter: Tell us about Le Joc.

Darryl Rochester: Okay, back to Le Joc's.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Or whatever you want. Whatever you think's important.

Darryl Rochester: When you walk in, they have this life-size statuette of Sherry Gordon. It was beautiful and then you walked in—

Tim Stewart-Winter: You mean painting.

Darryl Rochester: Painting on this wall. Then you walked and it had a staircase that went up and it was live white doves.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Painted on the wall.

Darryl Rochester: No, just real doves.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What?

Darryl Rochester: In cages, yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, maybe I have heard that.

Darryl Rochester: The white doves were just—this was spectacular back then and then you went to the disco booth and it was just chairs and lounge. It was nothin' to see Pat Cleveland lounged out on one of the chairs.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The whole place was upstairs.

Darryl Rochester: No. It was two floors. It was like a loft.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right. Street level and one level up.

Darryl Rochester: Yes, mm-hmm.

[Pause]

Tim Stewart-Winter: What are people doing or when would you get there?

Darryl Rochester: We would get there around 12:00. That's when it was really startin', 12, 1:00 or 2:00.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Or 2:00 and you were there all night.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. Drinking. Smoking pot, taking drugs, taking LSD.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Drinking liquor, wine, beer.

Darryl Rochester: It was not so much drinking because it was punch and it wasn't a lot of drinking, unless you had got drunk before you got there, but you took your tabs of acid and your Snoopy or whatever you took or your pills. Back then, my choice of drugs was Quaaludes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I knew you were gonna say Quaaludes.

Darryl Rochester: Yes. I was a big Quaalude person. Me and Jamie, we were Quaaludes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was there a cover charge?

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How much?

Darryl Rochester: Well, I don't know 'cause I didn't pay. I never paid to get into the clubs, fortunately, except Studio 54.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I love that. Except Studio 54.

Darryl Rochester: 'Cause I didn't have any real connections with Studio 54. The whole thing with Studio 54 was to get in.

Tim Stewart-Winter: To get in and everybody paid the cover.

Darryl Rochester: That was the whole thing, to get in.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it, got it.

Darryl Rochester: If you could get in, that was it and I have a wonderful story about that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What else about Le Joc? Also, I'm also curious about Murphy's. You're going to Murphy's.

Darryl Rochester: This happened at Murphy's.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You're pointing to a scar.

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Gary vaguely mentioned something about this.

Darryl Rochester: I was at Murphy's and one night, my best friend—who later on became one of my best friends—my sister always says I always say this was my best friend, that was my best friend. She says, "You can't have everybody as your best friend," but I've had some best friends in my life. My friend Douglas and I, Douglas Hobbs and I, we were out one night because we had nothing to do. We

had little money on us. [*Extraneous conversation*]. What we did was we went to this—down to Murphy’s and we had nothing but just bus fare. I had gold chains on because at this time, I was traveling.

I had been to Bahamas and I had went to St. Thomas and I had started accumulating gold and that was the big thing. Gold was precious. I was always told not to wear so much gold because they were snatching gold off of you, snatching chains. That was a big thing, then, snatching gold off of people and stuff. That’s what happened to me with this scar. I was at Murphy’s and we decided to leave and Douglas and I was—all of a sudden we was assaulted by four guys. It was four guys. There were two guys on each of us and they just split us apart and we were fighting.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is this outside Murphy’s, on the street?

Darryl Rochester: Outside of Murphy’s, on the street.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How old were you when this happened?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, gosh. Around 30.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is the ‘80s, ‘83 or something.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. We’re fighting for our lives. I was hit on the head with a gun and I just remembered someone snatching my gold chains and then they punched me on my leg, which I thought was a punch, but it was an actual stab.

Esperanza Santos: That’s what, a six inch scar along your right calf—not your calf, thigh?

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. Yeah. This is where it went in and they operated on me and that’s why I have these scars. Well, this scar because I just had knee surgery on both knees.

Esperanza Santos: That’s why you have that vertical—that 10 inch vertical scar.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm, because through dance and all that stuff, through the years, my legs—I’m of age where my legs have given, so I had knee surgery, but this leg here was really the worst one because of this wound here.

Tim Stewart-Winter: ‘Cause of the stabbing.

Darryl Rochester: The stabbing. Later on, I became arthritic. It's arthritis.

Esperanza Santos: In that knee?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That must have been awful as a dancer.

Darryl Rochester: It stopped my dance career. That was it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, my God.

Darryl Rochester: That stopped my dance career. That was one of the worst times in my life and I remember laying in a hospital saying, "I'll never dance again. I'll never walk, I'll never show another model how to walk down the runway," because I was very good at teaching models how to walk the walk, which I miraculously can say I'm very proud I can still do now. I'm not a dancer anymore, but I can still teach a tight walk. It changed my life and it was very teary and very, very sad, but I was very persevering. I said, "Something. I have to do something to stay in the industry." That was my whole focus: stay in the business. Stay in the industry.

Tim Stewart-Winter: The industry of dance or of fashion.

Darryl Rochester: Of dance, theater.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Theater.

Darryl Rochester: What happens was due to Albert's fashion shows and through the years we met different models and stuff and I was fortunate enough to work with Beverly Johnson, who was the first black model on the cover of *Vogue*.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: This was the time when she was the first black model on the cover of *Vogue*. It was a fashion show coming up and I was healing from this leg wound and I didn't know what to do, what direction to go. I still could do makeup 'cause I always could paint a face, but I couldn't explain to you what I was doing. I just could paint. I would paint palm trees on their face; I would just—on their eyes, little—I just was very interested—intricate detail on the face, but I couldn't explain makeup or why I was doing this, the contour. I didn't know about contour or any of the stuff like that.

Later on, I met Beverly Johnson and I asked her at one of the shows, I says, “Beverly, what can I do to be like your makeup artist?” She says, “Well, I’ll introduce you to him.” She introduced me to James Farabee, who was the greatest thing in my life.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Farabee?

Darryl Rochester: James Farabee. Beverly was his muse and he and Beverly were partners. She was the silent partner. They sent me to beauty school, where I learned to study the art of makeup, hair, and so forth and so on.

Esperanza Santos: Hence your studio.

Darryl Rochester: Yes. That changed my life in the direction of now, instead of being out there in public, I was behind the scenes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I see.

Darryl Rochester: I had to adjust to being out on stage as opposed to being in the back, doing makeup or the technical work. I develop the technical skills now and they promised me a job after I got out of beauty school, which I called them up. My brother said, “You’d better call that woman, Beverly Johnson,” and he made me call her right from his house. I said, “Do you remember me?”

Esperanza Santos: Gregory?

Darryl Rochester: Not Gregory. My brother Robert. Robert is like when E.F. Hutton speaks, everyone listens. He’s not the oldest. Two of the oldest have passed, but he’s the next—no, my sister’s oldest, and then it’s him, but he thinks he’s the oldest.

Esperanza Santos: He really owns his power.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, he’s very powerful. He’s very powerful. He made me call Beverly. I called Beverly. Beverly returned the call from James to James Farabee. James Farabee contacted me and told me to come to his studio at New York on 57th and 7th. I met up with James Farabee. He gave me a job there. I was workin’ for \$50 a week.

Esperanza Santos: Was that a competitive wage then?

Darryl Rochester: That was shit. That was shit, but I was working for James Farabee. He was gettin’ over. I was his assistant. I was doin’ all the dirty work: the perms and washing the hair and stuff like that, but I

learned. He was like a peacock. He had little Shih Tzus that ran around the studio. He was just that way. He was like fragrance in motion.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: Later on, I introduced Shelton to him and him and Shelton hooked up. They were seeing each other, so Shelton became very much like James Farabee as far as the way he spoke and his sittin' and everything. It was like watching James Farabee redo himself through Shelton. I had to throw that in. James Farabee was the best thing in the fashion industry or the beauty industry that ever happened to me: the theater, music, all that. This is in my head. Opera. You got nothing but opera in his studio and I'm still the same way.

Even though I've worked other places and there's reggae and whatever like that, but now I have my own space, I prefer to hear opera. I probably would have Shih Tzus in here somewhere, but dogs are not prohibited here because of allergies. He was fabulous. He created his own fragrance, which was called "America," which I wish I had the documents to America.

I wish I had the formula. Oh, it was fabulous. Oh, I mean extremely fabulous smell. He would have me—we would do things like he would need to me—he would tell me to meet him, "Dress very nice. Very nice, Darryl. Be very nice and I want you to meet me in front of the place," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, "and we're going to Long Island to do this newscast," or radio or whatever like this. "We're going to talk about America." We talked about America—

Esperanza Santos: The fragrance or America?

Darryl Rochester: - the fragrance. As he talked, as he's being interviewed, I would walk around spraying the place with America and that was what I did. I would fill the auditorium with this lovely scent. He could sell anything. He was amazing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sounds like a character.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, he was such a character. He wore big fabric clothes and—

Esperanza Santos: He was like billowy.

Darryl Rochester: Just fabulous and he would come to the clubs with a big peacock fan. He was just very, very, very frou-frou.

Esperanza Santos: Very like clack the fan and just go.

Darryl Rochester: Very fou fou. That side of me is not—I don't have that on James Farabee. I'm not fou fou. This is as frou-frou-ish as I am. I'm not that very—that feminine.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: He was very just too much.

Tim Stewart-Winter: He got you into the beauty industry.

Darryl Rochester: He got me into the beauty industry. What happens is he was also an aesthetician and I asked him, I says, "James, where did you go to school for—?" I went to Woolford Academy, which was very big at the time for hair.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Where is that?

Darryl Rochester: It was downtown Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Downtown Newark?

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. On Raymond Boulevard.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You went to Woolford Academy?

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is after your injury?

Darryl Rochester: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is in the '80s.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. I went to Woolford Academy.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Are you still living in Weequahic?

Darryl Rochester: I was living with my parents.

Esperanza Santos: 'Cause you were with Albert, but then you had a tiff and you had to be out.

Darryl Rochester: Yes. Very good. I was with my parents because I remember that very clearly because I had a scholarship to go to Woolford Academy, which was the Sigma, the SAG something or whatever Bob or something that I got, which they paid you to go to school.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool.

Darryl Rochester: ‘Cause this was a grant. This was back when the grants was a very big thing. I got this school grant and they paid me \$110 every two weeks to go to school. They would come and check and see if I was attending. I would attend and I would take the hundred dollars and put it in the bank, a Howard Savings Bank, and I would take the \$10 and spend it on my car fare. What I did is towards the end of my tenure at Woolford, I was workin’ for James Farabee and I would work—I would come in part time. I would come in around 5:00 and work a couple of hours at Farabee’s with the \$50 a week. I would work there and my coworkers, my colleagues at the school, they would cover for me.

Towards the end of the day, I would leave out a little early and catch the train ‘cause the train was right up the street. Penn Station was right up the street from Raymond Boulevard, right where I was going and I would catch the Path over to the city, up to 57th St. and go in and see Beverly sometimes. She was a silent partner, so I worked for Beverly Johnson and James Farabee. That was the only thing that kept me going as far as the \$50 a week because what the hell? Everyone couldn’t say that they worked for Beverly Johnson. That was my reward and it looked good on a resume.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: I had a little savvy goin’ on. There was a reason for my madness. I did that and from there, I went to—when I graduated out of Woolford’s, I wanted to go to school for skin care because makeup was my whole thing. I didn’t give a damn about hair. I couldn’t stand hair, but I knew that you had to go through the motions of hair to—I wanted to have a degree in everything.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You wanted to have the skills.

Darryl Rochester: The skills, the background. Mind you, I was a dancer at heart, to this day I’m still a dancer in my head, but I chose hair. I went through hair and in hair school, you did manicures, you did it all: skin care, but I wanted to take skin care to another level. I went to school at Christine Valmy. I asked James one day, I said, “James,

where did you go to school?" He said, "I went to Christine Valmy. Oh, but there's another school in Jersey called Marie Polay 01:37:23." I said, "No. I wanna go where you went."

That's where I went. The hundred dollars that I would deposit paid for my tuition for Christine Valmy, so I had a plan all the time because the grant wasn't going to cover New York. I paid for my tuition cash and I went to Christine Valmy.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You're going to both schools at once.

Darryl Rochester: No. Graduated from Woolford's and then I went to Christine Valmy—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: - which happened to be right on the corner of James Farabee's salon. I would go to Christine Valmy and leave there and go to work.

Esperanza Santos: You were a busy bee.

Darryl Rochester: I was a busy bee.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Totally.

Darryl Rochester: Totally, yeah.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: That's about it as far as my career. Then makeup just became my thing. I got my first job at Soul Sisters, downtown Newark, which was a big—this was a big—Bamberger's. There was a department store named Bamberger's, which was affiliated with Macy's back then. They had two sections. There was a black section and a white section. One was called Valmy—not Valmy, Chantray's 01:38:55 and the other one was Soul Sisters and I worked for Soul Sisters.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is inside the Bamberger's?

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow, interesting. You worked for Soul Sisters. You're in your 30s?

Darryl Rochester: I'm in my 30s. I'm good in my 30s now.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool. Then what happened? [*Crosstalk*]

Darryl Rochester: Then what happened after that, I left there—

Tim Stewart-Winter: You lived in Newark your whole life?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah, my whole life.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Cool.

Darryl Rochester: Then I left there and I got my own apartment. Back at the same apartment that Al Murphy and I had, there was a opening. The same apartment was open. It was a grab ‘cause it was fabulous.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That you were evicted from.

Darryl Rochester: That we were evicted from. It was fabulous. I got that apartment back and Douglas, who was stabbed—who was in the stabbing with me—he became my roommate. It was beautiful. It was a two-bedroom and a living room, kitchen, and there was a back terrace. It was just fabulous and we had marvelous parties back there. Then we outgrew each other. Douglas became—he was more New York inclined. He wanted to leave and he wanted to do New York, so we had a little spat and he moved to New York. I stayed there, kept that apartment. Then finally I’m being robbed and people were robbing me, so I moved back to my father’s house again.

Esperanza Santos: Wait. Robbing you. What do you mean?

Darryl Rochester: I came home once—they were robbing us.

Esperanza Santos: People’d come to your house and take stuff?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah.

[*Pause*]

Tim Stewart-Winter: The neighborhood has changed? There’s more crime?

Darryl Rochester: The neighborhood had changed, but it was just still—

[*Pause*]

Darryl Rochester: I just invited the wrong people up to my house. They saw what I had.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, got it.

Darryl Rochester: The neighborhood guys, they knew what we had. You know. I always had a lovely apartment: state of the art music and stuff like that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it. Then you moved back to your father's house.

Darryl Rochester: Moved back to my father's house and then my father passed when he was in his 80s and my stepmother did the wrong—she didn't do the right thing. She did not divide the property up correctly. She took the most portion. In New Jersey, it's 50-50, whether there's a will or not. If you're married, the property goes to—one half goes to the wife and the other half goes to the husband. She took 75 percent and left my brother Gregory and I with 25 or whatever. Her kids benefited by my father's—fruits of his labor and that was a bitter time. We split for a little while. We did a hiatus. I went to my side of the family; they went to their side of the family.

Esperanza Santos: 'Cause when you were 20, that's when she became a devout Jehovah's Witness and then when you were what, mid-30s, this happened and then that probably broke it up even more.

Darryl Rochester: It just a broke it up, but now we're back together. Our families are mended. She passed, but I was there when she took her last breath. Que sera, sera. Only one that's bitter is my brother Robert. He's still bitter. He does not speak to them. He's the matria(rch) male of my family. That's the way he feels. Ask me any question.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I have a question. You said that Douglas was New York inclined and you were not.

Darryl Rochester: I love my family and I'm a very family orientated person. Understand one thing: I never had problems with my family. Remember that from the very beginning of this?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah.

Darryl Rochester: I never had problems with my family. My family accepted. They loved Erica; they loved Tommy. They loved my friends. My father would tell me, "You have the best friends," and they would come in and sometimes when I wasn't even home Erica or Tom, they would come—I would come in the door and they'd be sittin' talk with my father.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This was as soon as you told him you were gay?

Darryl Rochester: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: He was accepting.

Darryl Rochester: He was accepting. In his heart, it still rubbed him wrong, but I was his son and he loved me and he would buy me anything. He bought my first refrigerator when I got the apartment, finally, from Al. That's Albert. I needed the refrigerator. He bought my refrigerator. You know what I mean? He would do for his children and that's just the way my—like my family brought me back here. That's what it is. Like my sister today says, "You have your own entrance. I don't care what you do downstairs." It's just like any straight family. They're gonna have their own personal feeling.

I don't care what you say. They may love you and they can say—just like I'm saying my family is wonderful, but deep down inside if they had their way, they would want you to be straight, bottom line. I will argue that to my grave for anyone. I don't care how lovely your family is. If they are a straight nature, they would want you to be straight nature because that's the only way they go, they move. They move that way. They may be open-minded, which is a wonderful thing and I'm very fortunate to have an open-minded family, but if they had their way, they would want you to be straight. It's just a protective mechanism with them and I understand that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You wanted to stay in Newark 'cause you wanted to stay close to your family.

Darryl Rochester: With my family. I love people that have moved on and moved to other places and stuff like that, but I'm a family—this is me. I'm family orientated. I wanna be close to my family and I have a large family. When I say "family," I have a huge family. I have 20 some odd nieces and I have nieces, grand nieces and great-great nieces and I just have an ongoing family and we're still like this.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I have a couple questions about Newark, but do you wanna jump in?

Esperanza Santos: No. I'm tryin' to be an observer.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sure. You don't have to be. Murphy's bar. Before you go to the—before you were injured, did you frequent Murphy's?

Darryl Rochester: I would frequent Murphy's. Not often, but it was the only watering hole in Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah. The only gay bar.

Darryl Rochester: The only gay bar. Then there was another one that opened up called SRO, Standing Room Only.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, yes.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, you know about sass 01:47:00?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah. We don't know much. I think we found a flyer.

[Pause]

Tim Stewart-Winter: It was on Halsey.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. It was on Halsey Street.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Tell me about SRO. It's a gay bar, too.

Darryl Rochester: It's a gay bar. It was owned by this couple, who were a lovely couple.

Esperanza Santos: Gay, straight, trans? Which one?

Darryl Rochester: They were gay. One was very masculine and the other one was masculine, but just a little effeminate; just a tad flavor. They were a lovely couple.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Nelson and Scott?

Darryl Rochester: Nelson and Scott. Very good.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Were they Black?

Darryl Rochester: Black.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Black gay couple.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. Nelson and Scott. I had forgotten their names.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That's about all we know.

Darryl Rochester: I was working at Soul Sisters then and the routine was we'd go, leave Soul Sisters, walk right down to the bar, which was in the next block and do we'd go through Nelson's and Scott's and we'd hang out there for a while. It was just beginning, their opening. It was just small little bar, SRO, Standing Room Only. Perfect name. We would go there and it was a little shift, the people that were comin' there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It was a little what?

Darryl Rochester: A little shift. A little group of people that would come in, regulars, to patronize them, to show them support.

Esperanza Santos: Support.

Darryl Rochester: 'Cause they were brand-new at this. I remember they only had certain vermouth. I liked martinis and they wouldn't have—they would only have sweet vermouth and they would have to run out to the store. This is how new they were.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: It was open for a few minutes and then it just closed because people was—Murphy's was stronger.

Esperanza Santos: Couldn't they support both?

Darryl Rochester: That's what I was going to say. The routine was you go to SRO and you end up down Murphy's, so Murphy's prevailed anyway.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It's the center of gravity. When did you first go to Murphy's, in high school?

Darryl Rochester: No. I was a good kid. I didn't go to the clubs then.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In your 20s.

Darryl Rochester: In my 20s.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What was it like in Murphy's?

Darryl Rochester: Murphy's was a dark, seedy stomping ground.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like fun.

Darryl Rochester: It was fun. it was seedy. Then they had a disco. They had a disco and you would go in and you would dance. They would serve food durin' lunch hour, so City Hall, a lot of people from City Hall would patronize Murphy's also and straight people. It was straight by day and gay by night.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Interesting. They had dry vermouth.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, they had dry vermouth, yes. They made the best drinks. Murphy's would knock you out. Two drinks, you were knocked out. That's why people went 'cause the drinks were so potent.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was it cruisy?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, very cruisy and very seedy. It was trashy.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I see.

Darryl Rochester: It was like you wanted to get hooked up, you wanted to get laid that night, you went to Murphy's.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Were there lesbians at Murphy's?

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah?

Darryl Rochester: Lesbians.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Trans folks?

Darryl Rochester: No. Not too many transgender.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Gay and lesbian.

Darryl Rochester: Gay and lesbian. Mostly gay at first and then the lesbians start comin' in towards the end.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Towards the end.

Darryl Rochester: Then there was another club down on Ferry Street that the lesbians ruled, First Choice.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I don't know if we've heard of First Choice.

Darryl Rochester: I think it was First Choice. It was down on Ferry Street.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, we do have it, in the '80s. Cool.

Darryl Rochester: Now, lesbians really rocked that. It was more lesbians than gays and that kinda was cute. I met this guy there once. I met this crazy Spanish guy there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What about Zanzibar?

Darryl Rochester: Zanzibar was a mixture of gay and straight, total mixture. Again, Al Murphy ran it and he ran the shit out of it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What does that mean?

Darryl Rochester: It was like for the anniversary, the anniversary was elaborate. Now he's working with money.

Esperanza Santos: He has a production.

Darryl Rochester: He's working with the Bergers, who own—they now own the Robert Treat Hotel. They also owned the Lincoln Motel, which was next to Zanzibar, which was theirs, too.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it.

Darryl Rochester: He's working with money now. Before, he had backers and stuff like that, but now he's working with money. Zanzibar was an African name from Zanzibar, Africa. He had a opening which he had live animals in cages.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I've heard that.

Esperanza Santos: Like cheetahs or what?

Darryl Rochester: He had cheetahs. He had tigers.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I heard about that.

Darryl Rochester: It was fabulous and it was a back pool, and they were in the back pool and people were swimming.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really?

Darryl Rochester: It was fabulous. Then it had another anniversary, which was to die for. They had this place done up like a jungle. When I say a jungle, I mean vines and a big leaf. Oh, it was fabulous.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like fun.

Darryl Rochester: It was fun, fabulous. That was one of the best and I have been to some clubs in my life: the Red Parrot. I've been to them all, but this was laid out.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds better than Studio 54 or something.

Darryl Rochester: Nothing was better than Studio 54, only because of the celebrities at Studio 54. I have this great story I'm going to tell you about that.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sure.

Darryl Rochester: They had this done up. It was fabulous. Then Shelton took over the decorating. I don't know what made Shelton do this, but when you walked in the door, there was glitter piled up like this.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Like a foot high.

Darryl Rochester: A foot high of glitter.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Whoa.

Darryl Rochester: All through the club, upstairs and downstairs, so people was walking through glitter and at the end of the night, everyone was sparkling.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: I hate glitter. Glitter from dance and stuff. I know glitter stays with you forever.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Forever.

Darryl Rochester: Forever. My roommate—I had the apartment—he had to come home with me in glitter and I was in the cab and the cabs—the only thing I can say is downtown Newark had glitter all up Broad Street for two days. For two days, glitter, glitter. Everyone was laying and rolling in it and just crazy. Could you imagine sweat and glitter?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Ew, yes. I can imagine.

Darryl Rochester: I don't know if it was fabulous 'cause I don't like glitter, but it was spectacular. It was something to talk about.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like it was a moment.

Darryl Rochester: It was a moment. It was a moment. That's very good. Thank you. She bailed me out. It was a moment. But, my funny story about Studio 54 was they always—at one time, we went to Studio 54 and we would normally go with Jamie or Tommy Garrett, the people who had connections in the fashion industry. This one night, this model named Candy—she was this little skinny Spanish girl—she and I wanted to go to Studio 54 and we're like, "Well, how are we gonna get in? We don't have our connections." Steve Rabbell 01:57:15 at the door, he was very strict.

People would be in lines wrapped around the whole street tryin' to get into Studio 54 and you could not get into Studio 54. One thing I always learned and I observed about disco clubs was you never approach anything—a party to this day—you never approach something with fear. You never approach something like, "I wonder if I'm gonna get in," cringing and clutching your pearls. "I wonder if I'm gonna get in," 'cause it shows and it shows that you're not a part of something. You have to walk your walk and stand your stance and that always worked with me in life.

I went to Studio 54. We dressed up. We said, "Okay. We're gonna go to the thrift shops," 'cause we had a little money again. We were always poor. We had a little money, so we went and we got—I ended up with a zoot suit. I had a zoot suit and I had this long chain that went around like that and I painted my face in a '20s look, real dark eyes, smudged eyes, like a black-and-white movie. I looked black smudged eyes, blocked face, was really painted, really, and the black lips and she had finger waves and I painted her face and she was really done.

We took the 107 bus to 42nd St. We walked on 42nd St. to 54th St.—no. We walked on 53rd St. and we hailed a cab on 53rd St. and said, "We're gonna give you five dollars. Just turn the corner real abruptly and start hitting your—step on your brakes right in front of the place." He did that. He went [*screeching brakes sound*]. We got out, "Steve, darling, how are you?" [*Kissing sounds*]. He never had a chance. They must be in here. That's how we got in. We fell on the floor and started screaming. We said, "We made it."

Esperanza Santos: You made your own celebrity.

Darryl Rochester: We made our entrance, yeah.

Esperanza Santos: You made your status.

Tim Stewart-Winter: That's an amazing story. I love that.

Darryl Rochester: It was like, "Oh, good evening." [*Kissing sounds*] Kisses and lovely and accolades. "How are you, darling? Don't you remember us?"

Esperanza Santos: You're, "Excuse me. I belong here."

Darryl Rochester: "I belong here." Oh, my gosh and next thing you know, the gate opened up and we walked inside.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Amazing.

Darryl Rochester: We fell on the floor. We ran in and fell on the floor and started screaming. We made it through. I remembered that from once, one fashion show was my sister-in-law. One of my sister-in-laws was on a poster somethin' like this. She was white, Robert's wife. Robert's wife was from—she was French and Portugal or something like that and she just had this look. She was taller than Tim. She was tall and she was just—about his—just lanky and she was a perfect size for a model. She was a perfect size model and she just had this chiseled features and stuff. She looked like she was from Europe and I used to cut her—her hair was bleached blonde and I used to do it. She wore it in a Dutch boy with the bangs.

Esperanza Santos: Ooh, and the severe bangs.

Darryl Rochester: It's a severe bang. She would wear that and they said that Albert Murphy's show was changing. He needed more diversion. He needed white models in his show and so I said, "Well, I have a sister-in-law. I don't know if she can walk or whatever like that." She really couldn't walk.

Esperanza Santos: I was just imagining she probably looks good, but she walks like a duck.

Darryl Rochester: She's just everything. Everything, but she would walk like this. She didn't have the coordination to know that you walk—

Esperanza Santos: You step, you swing.

Darryl Rochester: You step left, right, right, left. She didn't know what to do with her arms, so I said, "That's it. That's your look. That's your walk," so that's what she did.

Esperanza Santos: Hey, it worked.

Darryl Rochester: She walked like that and it worked because she had everything to go with it.

Esperanza Santos: You'd take a snapshot and it's glamorous.

Darryl Rochester: Yes, so Jamie's show, over at Studio 54, she was a headline model.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: *Women's Wear Daily* said, "One of the Birds of Paradise." That was a capture.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Your sister-in-law.

Darryl Rochester: My sister-in-law. I would always do her hair and makeup, but this one particular time I said, "I want someone else to do you. I wanna see what someone else would do with you." I had already had her hair braided because her hair was fine, but I wanted it braided to volume. This guy did her hair and he teased it up and it was just—just messy. It was fabulous. It was like oh, he turned her out. She looked like a bird. This guy John—I forget his name—he was a big, big illustrator also. He put her as "Bird of Paradise."

Tim Stewart-Winter: What happened to Al Murphy?

Darryl Rochester: Al Murphy, which along with a lot of my other friends, contracted AIDS. He said to me one night, he said, "I want you to get your shit together."

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: He said he wanted me to get my shit together [*crying*] because he had such dreams of me. I could do so many different things. I wore a lot of hats, as I said.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: He was telling me that—he had a poster of Grace Jones that I always wanted. It was signed and everything, so he told me he would give me his poster and he just started getting sick. Then I

didn't know. I didn't put it together, why he was sayin' get my shit together. I hadn't put it together. This is the first time I've ever gotten emotional talking about Albert.

Esperanza Santos: You really love him.

Darryl Rochester: Yeah. That was it. That was his internal thing. He got sick and he passed on. The greatest tribute that I could give him was to do *Blue*. When Gary and I hooked up, that was just amazing. That was a fluke. I don't know if it tells you how we met. He was walking down the street and he ran into my cousin. They were walking from the Penn—from the station here in town and they started talking. He said something about Darryl Rochester and my cousin's name was Kevin Rochester or he said it's Kevin Rochester and he—they put it together and it happens that Gary lives seven houses from me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darryl Rochester: He came over. He called me up. My cousin gave him my number. He called me up and told me what he was gonna do and I just threw myself on the floor and started talking. Then I took them over to meet Albert's mother. She gave us pictures. That was a hard thing to do because she was very—Albert's mother was his best friend and she had him at very young, so they were almost like the same age.

Esperanza Santos: He probably had to assume a lot of responsibility.

Darryl Rochester: It's all in the book, I think, some of it. She was very close minded about a lot of things when it came to Albert because that was her baby and so she was very, very taken about Albert's death, so she had disassociated with us, with a lot of people, all his friends and stuff. She opened the door to me and I had talked to her at the door and told her that this young man wanted to do a book on Albert and if it would be okay if he came in. She opened the door. I said, "My gosh." I clutched my pearls. I was amazed. Then we started getting into the session and she started bringing out pictures that I had never seen of Albert when he was young. That was it.

The earliest days that I can remember of AIDS was my friend who I loved very dearly, Marvin Davis, who was also one of Albert's models. He was Jamie's partner in the business, the fashion business. He contracted AIDS and it was unbelievable to see. He was workin' for Dionne Warwick at the time as her wardrobe and she sent him home. When he came to my house, I understood why.

He had these big black lesions on his face. This was before they knew anything about this disease. Next thing you know, he's in a hospital and you had to go put a gown on and gloves and surgic[al] mask. It was just horrific 'cause they didn't know. They didn't have the treatments that they have today. I have a picture of Marvin and this, what I'm talking about, how he looked. I'm tryin' to find my phone. Oh, excuse me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sure.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: This was amazing to see and then the next thing you know, everybody started getting AIDS. You turn around, one week, this one is gone; the next week, this one was gone. They were going. I was very fortunate. I had brothers that I grew up with that I always watched them and they always had condoms in their drawers: condoms, condoms, condoms. Robert was the biggest sex fiend and he would have condoms in his drawers and I contribute that to my life because I always used condoms whenever I had sex. This is Marvin in his heyday.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow. He was in Al Murphy's fashion show.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm. I'll show you a picture of him with AIDS.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, what a cutie pie. Look at his polka dots and red pants.

Darryl Rochester: We were born on the same day but different years. He was older than I, but I used to tell people we were twins.

Esperanza Santos: I can see it. Gold chain, nice mustache.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Did he go to high school with you?

Darryl Rochester: No. Albert, he was older than I.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, I mean Marvin.

Darryl Rochester: No. Marvin was older than me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Marvin was older than you, okay.

Darryl Rochester: This is him in Europe with a leopard. Ironically, the leopard looks like him. The leopard, see in his face. Do you see the black nose?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, my gosh. The brown suit.

Esperanza Santos: A brown suit? I haven't seen a brown suit in a minute.

Darryl Rochester: Mm-hmm, but do you see his face? Can you see his face?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, I see.

Darryl Rochester: The lesions. That was just the beginning. Oh, his face was covered with those. It was devastating.

Esperanza Santos: It looks like contour from far away, but these are lesions.

Darryl Rochester: It was devastating. These were lesions. You don't see lesions anymore on AIDS.

Esperanza Santos: Not with today's medicine.

Tim Stewart-Winter: No. Wow.

Esperanza Santos: What year or how old were you the first time that you knew a friend passed away of AIDS?

Darryl Rochester: I can't remember. I just can say is when it happened, it happened and it was swift. It was like a thief in the night. It just robbed so many lives. It robbed so many lives. When the population really took heed to AIDS was when Rock Hudson. That's when the world opened up their eyes because one of their own, great movie star, had contracted this horrid disease. It was devastating, because he was a heartthrob.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What about Magic Johnson?

Darryl Rochester: Magic Johnson?

Tim Stewart-Winter: That was later, obviously.

Darryl Rochester: That was later on. The horrific horror of it was all digested then.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Got it, right. Rock Hudson was in '85, I think.

Esperanza Santos: How are you feelin' right now?

Darryl Rochester: I'm okay. That was just a little moment. It was a moment. I accepted an award for Albert not too long ago. It was an Icon award for Zanzibar, as a matter of fact. I got one also.

Esperanza Santos: Hey.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Congrats.

Darryl Rochester: For dance. It's in there. I got one for dance. I gave his to Erica.

Esperanza Santos: The model?

Darryl Rochester: The house mother.

Esperanza Santos: The house mother.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What do you wanna know?

Esperanza Santos: What do I wanna know?

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah.

[Pause]

Tim Stewart-Winter: Well, while you think about that, I have one question that's been—I've been wanting to ask. You were raised Baptist. You are Baptist. How does your gay identity and your religious identity mesh?

Darryl Rochester: I separate.

Tim Stewart-Winter: You separate it.

Darryl Rochester: I'm a gay man and this is my stance and this is who I stand by, far more than my religion. I am also religious. I have a relationship with God and he's my Savior and I know that I'm his child. I know that this is not a fluke. I know this is not man-made. I know this is old as Caligula.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: Take me as I am or don't take me at all. I go to church. I haven't been in a while because some churches—okay, to answer your question, I guess is to say that gayness doesn't have any space in churches, except for a gay denominating church, or a diverse church. In the Baptist Church, it's one of the hardest things, even though I don't know why because every ministry of music, the ministers of music, the ones who play the organs and direct the choirs are all gay. They've been that way since I can remember, but it is what it is. I walk my walk. I wear what I wear. I had one

minister say—I used to wear my hair very punk, punk. Really crazy.

He was preachin' one day and he says, "I wanna wear my hair like Brother Rochester." It was funny. Then the same minister started talking about demonic spirits one Sunday and he went into, "You know what I'm talkin' about. You know those people. They design your clothes and they put you in," da-da-da, and I said, "He's talking about homo—he's talkin' about my people," and I walked right out of church, went up the street, copped some drugs. This was all anger. Went to New York. There was a gay parade. It was one Sunday, one Gay Pride's. I had no intentions of goin' to Gay Pride. I went to church.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was this the Metropolitan church?

Darryl Rochester: This was Good Neighbor, where I go now.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Oh, okay.

Darryl Rochester: That minister's dead.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: They just do sermons, talk off their heads sometimes because he was one of the ones who would get—he was fashion down from his socks to his tie, so all those gay people that stitched a stitch for his little look.

[Pause]

Tim Stewart-Winter: Do you remember people dying from AIDS being turned away by their families?

Darryl Rochester: Of course. By their friends, even.

Tim Stewart-Winter: By their friends.

Darryl Rochester: It was frightening. I could almost understand.

[Pause]

Darryl Rochester: It was frightening.

Esperanza Santos: It's like people don't know what causes it. People don't know what's happening.

Darryl Rochester: Let me tell you a story. When it hit me, I was getting dressed and I wear—and I still do, I love—it’s a piece of garment that I have. It’s a cape. It’s a cloak, actually. I love things that flow and long scarves and stuff like that in the winter. That’s my favorite time.

Esperanza Santos: To billow.

Darryl Rochester: I love it. It inspires me. It just tells me what I need to do. I wore this cloak and it’s sharp. It’s just like you can go out—you can wear this cloak and underneath have on a bathin’ suit or something, but you’d look like you’re dressed. With the right hat, you look like you’re dressed.

Esperanza Santos: It’s over.

Darryl Rochester: It’s over. Thank you. It’s over. I got on the bus and I sat down and this woman looked at me and she looked again and she looked again and she got up and moved her seat. That’s when the devastation hit me. People were frightened of people who were gay. She was frightened and it was clear why. It was of AIDS. My family, again, I’m very fortunate. I have had three lovers who were HIV. I’m very fortunate, again, like I said.

I always used condoms. That was my sex. That was my protector. My friends used to laugh at me and say, “Why would you use condoms all the time?” That one, who’s a deceased friend, says to me, “You know what? That’s why you’re alive now.” He’s deceased. I don’t know if it’s just that, if it’s by the grace of God it was just not my time or it’s not my time now. Now I take the PrEP.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, beautiful.

Darryl Rochester: I take the PrEP. I also go every three months to be checked.

Esperanza Santos: Beautiful.

Darryl Rochester: I’m very fortunate. I have done the same people, I’m sure, but I’ve escaped it and I’m healthy.

[Pause]

Tim Stewart-Winter: Do you have things that you wanna ask?

Esperanza Santos: What’s next for Darryl?

Darryl Rochester: Oh, that's an interesting story. I think something great's gonna happen for me since I've moved here because this has given me an opportunity to do my own thing. I'm home again.

Tim Stewart-Winter: "Here" meaning in your—in Maplewood.

Darryl Rochester: I'm meaning that I'm in this house.

Tim Stewart-Winter: In this house.

Esperanza Santos: With family.

Darryl Rochester: With family.

Tim Stewart-Winter: With your sister.

Darryl Rochester: I'm home again and I don't have to worry about the bureaucracy of a landlord's bullshit or going up on my rent. I have a certain amount of money I pay my sister. I'm here to help her; she's here to help me. She's my best friend. If someone's gonna say some shit about me, let it be my family because I know what their interest is. Like they say, I can say this about you, but that one can't. My family can say—they can discipline me. At my ripe old age, she can discipline me, but no one else can. I'm in a better place. This is my last destiny, as far as moving around [*unintelligible*], moving again, 'cause it's such a bitch moving.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Moving is the worst.

Darryl Rochester: It's the worst.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I moved in April.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, it's the worst. If I could show you the shit that I have back behind those curtains, oh, my gosh. I don't even know where my remote to my TV is, so I have to get up manually and turn it on, turn it off. I'll get to it eventually, but that's like I don't even know where my remote is.

Esperanza Santos: Well, it still looks good.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It looks beautiful.

Darryl Rochester: Thank you.

Esperanza Santos: I know we were—I come from the generation where I—I’m 28.

Darryl Rochester: Okay. You’re a baby.

Esperanza Santos: For us, AIDS happened back then and it didn’t really happen now and I don’t think my generation really understands the kind of trauma it is to just see your friends fall and your family turn away if you had it. What hope did you have at the end of that? You were someone who made it and not everyone made it.

Darryl Rochester: It still can haunt you, but it is so—when I say devastating [*crying*] ... and it’s funny, because I haven’t had these feelings surface in so long. I’m usually much better at dealing with it, but I don’t know. There’s something about the two of you. It’s like you’re bringing this out of me and it’s like wow.

[*Pause*]

Darryl Rochester: It’s rough because we have a generation that are gone, beautiful people, lifetime. It’s hard for me now to even go out. I’m still a popular person and I know I’m well-liked and I’m very blessed [*unintelligible*] that, but my babies, my family, they’re gone. So, to answer to your question is to rebuild or carry on a legacy and the truth that I am, who I am.

[*Pause*]

Esperanza Santos: Thank you.

Darryl Rochester: Thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Thank you. Thank you so much. Anything else?

Esperanza Santos: No.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is there anything you want to say or you wanna—that you feel like we haven’t touched on? I’m sure later, we’ll think of things.

Darryl Rochester: Oh, there’s so much. There’s so much. I could do this again. It’s so much—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Awesome.

Darryl Rochester: - because I’m a book of knowledge, of stuff.

Tim Stewart-Winter: I know. We would love to do this again.

Darryl Rochester: I'll be willing.

Tim Stewart-Winter: We'll take you up on that.

Darryl Rochester: Okay. I'll have cocktails next time.

Esperanza Santos: Hey, I'll drink some coffee, but Darryl, thank you so much. This is such a pleasure. Thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: It's delightful.

Darryl Rochester: Thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really, really. It's an honor.

Darryl Rochester: Thank you. It's an honor to do this.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Thanks so much.

[End of Audio]