

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

Kristyn Scorsone: All right. Today is January 9th, 2025. My name is Kristyn Scorsone, and I'm interviewing paulA neves [aka Paula Neves] or is that how you say your name?

paulA neves: Yeah, that's one way you can say it *[laughter]*

Kristyn Scorsone: How would you say it?

paulA neves: I mean, the Portuguese Way is [pronounced] "Nevsh". The standardized American way is "Neh-vez," which is fine too... anything works.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay. Paula Neves over Zoom for the Newark Oral History Project. So, thank you so much again for doing this. So, the starting question, easy, easy, when and where were you born?

paulA neves: I was born in Newark in 1968. So yeah, at this point I've been around a while. I forget my age, but yeah, and I was born at St. James Hospital, which no longer exists.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where was St. James?

paulA neves: It was right in the Ironbound on, I believe on Lafayette Street. Not far from our Lady of Fatima Church, which is where I went, you know, my parents went to worship there, well, my mom mostly. My dad wasn't really that religious but it was not far from there. Now, it's like, I think a medical you know, office building or medical center or something, parking lots, but yeah, it officially doesn't really exist anymore, like a lot of hospitals.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, a lot of hospitals have closed or been bought up. So did you, you mentioned your mom and your dad. Did they both raise you? Did you grow up in the same household as both of them? Did you have any siblings?

paulA neves: I did. Well I have a younger brother. He is three years younger, lives up in the Catskills. And my dad was very typical immigrant dad of his generation. He worked a lot. A lot of his identity came through work. He had a working-class job. He was a longshoreman. I write about this stuff in my poetry, so he was, he would be physically present often, but not really emotionally present. So pretty much my mom raised us, and she was also

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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Location: Zoom

herself an immigrant and you know working. And yeah, we were of that generation that pretty much raised ourselves, so yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah so, you mentioned that both of your parents are immigrants. Where did they immigrate from?

paulA neves: They immigrated from Portugal in the sixties. My dad I believe it was like very, in the very early sixties, or maybe even the late fifties, I forget, if it was like the late fifties, it was probably '59. It might have been '60. I don't know. My mom came about seven years later. They got married over there. And also, both sets of grandparents immigrated here for a time and all of my family is from the central region of Portugal, close to the coast.

Interviewer: What made them come to Newark?

paulA neves: Well, at the time, they were living under a dictatorship. Not that they were very political, but both sides of the family came from you know, fairly poor, rural, backgrounds. And so like a lot of immigrants, they came for work to make money, and there really wasn't much of a future where they were. So yeah, they both, my dad, I think had a better sense of that because he was older. He was eight years older than my mom. My mom was 18 when she immigrated. So I would imagine a real culture shock for her going from that rural background to come to you know, a very urban area like Newark was even then, you know, and she came in '67, so '67, '68, there was a lot of civil rights issues. Although, I don't know to what extent that affected the Ironbound, but you know, it's, you're still very close to other neighborhoods where things like that were happening. Unfortunately, both of them are—

Kristyn Scorsone: I'm sorry, did you say the rebellion?

paulA neves: Did what?

Kristyn Scorsone: Was she here for the rebellion, for the '67 uprising?

paulA neves: What month was that in?

Kristyn Scorsone: That was summertime June or July 1967.

paulA neves: No, she came right after that in November. So she just missed that. But you know, I'm sure there was still a lot of tension in you know,

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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Location: Zoom

subsequent months. A lot of immigrants, they were kind of cloistered within their community, you know, with other folks that came over but I would imagine that there was still some tension that they encountered, especially, my mom didn't get a car until I think the mid-70's, like maybe sometime between 74 and 76. So she was riding the bus. She was using public transit, she was walking often dragging my brother and I along with her *[laughter]*

We'd go shopping on Broad Street. She'd take us from our neighborhood in the Ironbound, and we'd go walking to Broad Street to go shopping. So even though we were mixed in with other Portuguese immigrants and families, we did actually, you know, mix in with other populations in Newark and went to other areas of Newark. That was really interesting and kind of ironic that now I teach not far from there. And so that area as you know has undergone a tremendous amount of change. But yeah, there's something about Newark that's still interesting and you can't, even if you move away, you can't quite get the Newark out of you, as I've discovered.

Kristyn Scorsone: I feel that way about growing up in Kearny, which is somewhat similar.

paulA neves: Yeah. Well, what's interesting is then I also, we moved to Kearny when I was nine, so I kind of have experience of growing up both in Newark and Kearny, but still visiting Newark a lot, because my grandparents still lived there on, my mom's parents. They left when they retired back to Portugal in like '87 but between like '77 and '87 I still was going to Newark a lot so yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: You mentioned, your dad was a longshoreman. Was that in Newark?

paulA neves: Yeah, it was at the Port Elizabeth/Port Newark.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was that like for him? Do you know?

paulA neves: I mean, like I said, I think he derived a lot of his identity from work. He just wasn't around a lot. He was just, you know, understanding some of his background from his childhood, it was like pretty, pretty harsh. I get it now. In some ways it was that stereotypical male attribute of not really communicating a lot, not knowing how to communicate. And I think a lot of that starts in

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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Location: Zoom

childhood where you know, you don't have other male role models that encourage you to communicate or set a good example. And I think that it was, I'm not passing judgment here, it was hard for his parents too. So no, he worked an awful lot. In fact, he died at work. It was a work accident, rather suddenly, when I was about, when I was in my early thirties. It was like, unfortunate because we had just begun my brother and I having a relationship with him again so yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: I'm sorry. How about your mother? Your mother worked as well?

paulA neves: She also did a working-class job. She worked in a factory her whole career. The factory made light bulbs, and she, was with that employer, like I said, over 30 years. So she went from it, she saw it transforming from a fairly good size company until by the end there was like maybe a dozen people. It was you know [at the end], it was owned by an engineer and his wife from China, and my mom, she also died because, I believe of work-related exposure to chemicals and stuff 'cause again, this is not anything I don't, I write about this in my work, so. She developed cancer, blood cancer, and yeah, that was difficult to deal with. Also, being a scrappy immigrant, she got her cosmetologist's license when I was a kid. And so she did that on the side too. She worked at it for a time in a salon in a Harrison but then she would also, that became a lot of work. In later years, she would just have clients come to our house or she'd go to their house, you know, that kind of thing, you know, yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: My dad's a barber, so I get it. Was the factory in Kearny?

paulA neves: No, the factory was in Newark on Chestnut Street. In fact, they tried to put a development, it was called Hanovia, Hanovia Colight and they tore the factory down. They moved to different locations. They were in Union for a while, and then their last location was in Fairfield but it used to be on Chestnut Street. And I believe they tried to put a development of houses there, and then there was some kind of, contamination or something. I believe that single house that they put up is still there, or maybe they've torn it. I don't know but the last time I was in that area, I noticed that they put up one house and they never completed it so yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: I think I'm curious because I feel I've heard my grandmother may have worked in the same factory, or one similar to that.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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paulA neves: It was on Chestnut right before McCarter Highway.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay.

paulA neves: You know, like a block or two from McCarter Highway. I forget the address, but that's probably easily found out from like archives and stuff.

Kristyn Scorsone: I'll have to ask my father too. He remembers this stuff really good. Do you recall any events or transitions in your very early life or turning points or sort of things that stick out to you as important memories?

paulA neves: In terms of being gay or just in general?

Kristyn Scorsone: In general, or being gay. Like how do you identify, first off?

paulA neves: I think it's important for me to identify. I know that we live in a time where there's a lot more discussion about the fluidity of gender and I think that's great. But I think also that's always existed. I was just hearing a really great interview with Tilda Swinton, who's always been like someone I admire. And she grew up talking about, she has brothers and I believe that she was the only you know, girl and her hand-me-downs were all from her brothers, so, and she still dresses both in men's and women's clothes, and she talks about it being a form of boundarylessness. Right so I kinda like that idea.

For myself personally, sometimes I identify as lesbian because I think that word is very politically important. I know a lot of younger folks identify as sapphic. To me, I think it's the same thing, you know what I mean *[laughter]*. Sapphics came from Lesbos, lesbian, there you go right? Sometimes I identify as queer. Sometimes you know— gender is a really interesting concept for me. I don't necessarily believe in identifying myself with a particular gender, because, I like that Tilda Swinton idea of boundarylessness you know and just, I have friends who call me Paul. I have friends who call me Paula. I don't have an issue with that. I know, for me personally, that works.

So sometimes I identify as queer. I mean it just depends you know. but I definitely had a sense of feeling different from the norm

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

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Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

'cause you know, I think a lot of other queer people have a sense of, even as children, young children, of what the norm is and how they are different from that. And I remember having a sense of that like really far back. My parents took me to Portugal when I was about two years, seven months, I think it was the first time. They took me back, firstborn kid. I have still vivid memories of being in my mom's parents' house, meeting their cat, you know the chickens. I realized then that I loved animals, but I also remember them taking me to one of these festivals that these villages often had. Whenever I watch The Godfather, I always crack up because that marriage scene, right, there's that big festival, and I think a lot of countries like Italy and Portugal and Spain, these rural areas, they have these very similar festivals. So I have a pretty strong sense of being at this festival. And I must have been cranky or something or maybe tired, I don't know, but I have a clear sense of this woman that was at this party, right, kind of fussing over me and she gave me a plastic swan. She just handed it to me. And I remember realizing, I love this woman. It was just such a very strong sense of like wow!

Kristyn Scorsone: How old were you?

paulA neves: I was like, two years, seven months. I was pretty young. And then you know, going forward into early childhood, I remember having crushes on every single one of my female, grammar school, elementary school teachers, every single one of them. My, I think it was my kindergarten teacher, she must have sent this out to all the kids, Christmas cards right. But when I got mine, I'm like, "she loves me. She just sent it to me."

I remember my mom putting it on the, we had this fake mantle, fireplace mantle. My mom put it there. I just remember looking at it like, "Oh my God, that's like for me!"

Definitely had a sense of that from very, very young.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you ever go ahead out loud and, or no?

paulA neves: No, I had a sense that like, okay keep this quiet.

I remember the girl who lived upstairs, her family was from the Azores. And you know, just like with other cultures, and even here in the United States, there's regional differences. My parents were

from mainland Portugal, and that was fine right, but if you were from the Azores, the islands, they were kinda looked down as hicks. But anyway, that family lived upstairs, and their daughter [Irene], I had such a massive crush on her. She was a year older than me and so we hung out a lot.

And you know, in the summers, when my parents would be at work, this was back in the day, you didn't like go to daycare or whatever. We had a babysitter for a while, but then it was like, my mom couldn't afford to pay for both my brother and me. So my, you know, I think at some point, my brother, I would watch him. But I think that was later on, just before that summer, just before we moved. So he must have been maybe six, and I was maybe nine. But prior to that, he would be at the babysitter in the summers, and I'd be at home, and Irene and I would hang out with her cousin. Her cousin lived across the way. And we would just, we'd tent camp, make tents out of blankets, and camp, you know, like the kids stuff. But I had a real strong sense of being very attracted to her. And again, like, I didn't talk about it. I just like, okay, this is my thing. I'm just gonna, you know, keep it to myself.

Later after we moved to Kearny, and I was in high school I became very close with someone who I'm still very close with. She's like my sister, we became best friends in high school, and we're still in touch. Our lives have taken very different turns, right, but I clearly remember in high school, we were 14, and it was a gym/health class. And I remember, and I had no idea about this at the time, but her brother who's about six years older than we are, had recently come out and gone through like a lot of trouble with that, with his parents and et cetera. This was like the early eighties, and I have a clear memory of talking to my best friend and she was saying something about how she had just seen the movie *Personal Best*?

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh!

paulA neves: Yea right, I mean, actually to this day I still have not seen that movie, but she was talking about, I don't know why I haven't seen it, but she was talking about having seen the movie and you know, that there was an attraction between these two women in it. I think at that age, I was kinda testing the waters, and I didn't know where she was going with this. I'm like, "oh, that sounds so gross".

And she stopped me in my tracks, and she's like, "what's gross about it?"

I was like, "Oh, yeah, you're right. It's not a big deal."

You know, boom, but that just speaks to how much of an influence just our peers have on us and our peers' experiences with siblings, with others, and how important it is to kinda come out. Then from that point on, it was just like, "Oh, I think I'm gay. Oh, this explains all the stuff I've been feeling my whole life. I get it now. I'm attracted to women."

I never personally had a personal crisis with it, this is great. I'm like, different. This is so cool. It's a different perspective. Never had an issue with that personally, but I realized that, you know, especially at that time in the eighties, and that was the AIDS crisis was really coming to the fore. I knew enough to just like, okay, you're gonna have to keep this a little bit quiet until you go to college. Just for like—I've always been very practical. I'm like, it's not like that I was embarrassed by it or ashamed about it. It's just like, I had other issues to deal with, with like my parents. My parents' marriage was not great. They were you know getting a divorce. Like there were other things going. My father was an alcoholic. It was like, things were pretty rocky in other ways. I was beginning to deal with adolescent depression that none of that had anything to do with being gay. It was just other aspects of my life were taking over right. I'm like, okay, I'm gonna set this aside. I don't have any burning desire to date people or explore my sexuality right now but I'm aware of it.

And so, I had this magnet to, I would turn on BAI radio and they'd have a gay special or something about lesbians. I'm like, I don't know how I was just able to like find this stuff, or I'd turn on the TV and there would be something about bisexuality. Because that's how the media shows started breaking into depicting gay, queer characters was by you know, the bisexual thing, first. I would listen to Dr. Ruth Westheimer because she often had a lot of gay people calling. This was like in the eighties. This with the same best friend and I—

Kristyn Scorsone: Was your best friend gay too, or no?

paulA neves: No, she's very straight, but she's like always been, again, because partly because of her brother being gay, and also just because she's always been very, she's more politically, way more politically conservative than I am, but she's always been very socially liberal. That was never an issue for her.

But I mean, I remember even as freshman in high school, we went to a Catholic high school, and the religion teacher, we both had a sense that the religion teacher was probably gay. He was young. You know, I mean to 14-year olds as someone who's like 23 is like old, but looking back, he was pretty young. He just, he read as gay to both of us, and we had a sense that he would be very receptive to you know, talking to, because it was at that point where even in Catholic schools, it was like, the subjects we were talking about were like more diverse. It was like a more liberal attitude. And so we just got the sense that we could approach him, and we thought it was important right, so we went up to him and we're like, "we noticed that you've been talking about these important issues, that you've talked a little bit about AIDS in class, and I think it's really important for our generation to learn about this. It's gonna impact us a lot. Could you do a class on the AIDS situation? Could you do a class on—"

It was like an early class on transgender people too, but at the time we called it cross-dressing, right. There was like other names we had for it, but it was just like, okay, I think we had a punk attitude, like we need to talk about this stuff. I don't know what, to be honest, I don't know what possessed us to like go up. I guess because we felt safe. Neither one of us was like popular and we didn't seek out being popular, but we both had this sense that these things are important to talk about, so he talked about homosexuality; we asked him to, and he did. He talked about AIDS, he talked about you know, cross-dressers. So—

Kristyn Scorsone: —[*Crosstalk*] Was this topic neutral or pro or anti?

paulA neves: It was definitely not anti, it was more informational and neutral. And of course, there were other kids who like, you're 14, you're kinda immature. They would snicker, but it's not like, [no] overt condemnation. It was just dumb adolescent snickering about some of this stuff you know. But, I count that as one of my prouder moments of being an adolescent, like we got a teacher to talk to us and to other students about these important issues right.

So yeah, I think I've never considered myself an activist in that sense. I don't have that activist personality where I would need to be out front and I need to be leading things or organizing it. I don't have that kinda bandwidth. I try to be more of an activist in a quiet way, like more like an individual situation. So I think that was really cool. I loved that school. It was Saint Cecilia's here in Kearny, Saint Cecilia's High School.

Kristyn Scorsone: I was gonna ask if it was Queen of Peace, or, okay. Saint Cecilia's cool.

paulA neves: We were sent to Queen of Peace the following year for sophomore year because, but I'm like, wow. I really loved Saints. Although, I definitely got a better education at Queen of Peace, but there was something really, like I said, punk rock about Saints that I really loved. It was such a diverse population, too. We had people from Newark. We had black kids, we had Indian kids, Asian kids.

We had Hispanic kids. We had Portuguese kids, Italians, Polish. It was just so many different kinds, like in the eighties, early eighties, remember, so way more of a diversity of kids than I experienced in my public grammar schools. So, and then when we went to Queen of Peace, not so much, it was mostly white middle-class kids. So we didn't really, my best friend and I, didn't really fit in ever into that school. But again, got a good education there but definitely kept the, still kept the being gay quiet, but I was reading, I was going to Kearny Library and taking out books, reading Rita Mae Brown and reading the book called *The Beauty Queen* and *The Front Runner* [Patricia Nell Warren], all those books that were coming out in the seventies and eighties. Even sometimes when we'd go to the Ben Franklin, they used to have the paperback racks. Every once in a while, I would like, I always had an eye for like, okay, that book is gonna have queer material in it, you know, maybe positive—

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you ever go to Daniel's Den?

paulA neves: Go where?

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you ever go to Daniel's Den?

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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paulA neves: Oh my God, I loved Daniel's Den! Yea, love Daniel's Den. I got my, I bought my first poetry anthology there and Daniel was a friend of Mr. Maisano who was our civics/social studies teacher at Queen of Peace and he was really cool. I mean, he showed us the Zapruder film about Vietnam, I don't know how many times *[laughter]* it's because of him that I know the stuff about Vietnam, and I have like a real affinity for that era for some reason. That was his generation right so, he really drilled us a lot on Vietnam-era stuff. And so he would hang out at Daniel's Den a lot because he knew the owner. Yeah, I mean, I love that it was such a small, sweet—you're younger than I am, so do you remember like when it closed? I was outta here by then.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, I don't remember. I honestly don't remember the year, but I feel like I graduated Kearny High in 1998.

paulA neves: Mmm-hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: And I honestly can't remember if it was still open at that point, or if it had already closed. I went there sometimes, but I never had like money to spend. I didn't go there that often but everybody loved it. I remember the little bookmarks with the little lion on them.

paulA neves: Yes, I think I still have a couple somewhere yeah, from those books that I bought there. I think that it was a really good example of like a queer space that wasn't necessarily like a gay space. It was just a little bit offbeat, a little bit like, you know, not mainstream. So I always sought out places like that. Even in when we were at Queen of Peace, sometimes I would cut class and I would just you know, hop the Harrison Path to go into the World Trade Center. This was before obviously 9/11 and I'd never get out into the city. I would just like hit the bookstores in the World Trade Center because now, this is New York, and they're gonna have like weirder books or more intense books than I'm gonna find at the Kearny Library. And sure enough, you know, I found a lot of books there that had queer material in it. I just you know, and also, that was kind of coinciding with me realizing that I wanna be a poet. I wanna be a writer. And so I was, you know, two things were like, it was actually three things were coming together like this, I'm gay, I'm a very strong Portuguese identity, or very much influenced by my Portuguese background, even though I'm Portuguese -American, so that's like a blend, and I wanna be a writer or artist of some kind. So all of that stuff was coming

together at that point. Those are pretty much been the themes of my work since.

So it's always this interesting fusion of when I started publishing work in my early twenties, I would you know, sometimes publish these essays or these poems on these Portuguese-American outlets right. But there was something always a little queer about my writing about being Portuguese. And when I would write, I was publishing stories and essays and stuff in queer anthologies, you know like lesbian anthologies or you know.

I don't know if you remember Alyson Publications, they used to do these series of yeah, you should check out Alyson Publications. They were kind of in their heyday in the nineties. They would often put out these anthologies. So every time there was a call for an anthology, lesbian erotic stories, lesbian love stories, or just essays, or even I recently reworked a story I published in, this was by a different press, this was New Victoria Publishers, feminist press. I'm not sure if they're still around, but they put out an or they were doing an anthology called *All the Ways Home Parenting in the Gay and Lesbian Community*. I remember I was in my twenties. I wasn't a parent, but I just wrote a story about you know, these Portuguese queer women raising a kid that got published in that anthology. I you know, was writing stuff that, Tee Corinne, she put together an anthology, and I had the privilege of actually speaking to her on the phone you know. She put a story I wrote that she accepted for that anthology that was called *The Body of Love*. I was so honored.

Kristyn Scorsone: Who's Tee Corinne?

paulA neves: Tee Corinne, was a photographer, a Bay Area photographer. If you look up her work, she did something called *The Cunt Coloring Book*. She took photographs of like disabled lesbians. I mean, she did some pretty radical stuff in the seventies right. And the Lesbian Herstory Archives, I believe it's either the Herstory Archives in New York or there might be a separate center dedicated to her in San Francisco. In any case, you know, when I talked to her on the phone, I also ended up interviewing her 'cause I was working in the early nineties for *The Network for the 10 percent Plus*, which was an LGBT magazine, was more LGB at that point than LGBT. But I mean, these two women put it out of their house and they were partners at the time, out of their house in Edison, New Jersey. You

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

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know, for a while, it had quite a nice publication, I still have issues. And I ended up having a gig as their assistant editor. So I would do, I would do editing on it, and I would also write the feature stories and stuff and other stories. And one of the stories, I did an interview with Rita Mae Brown. I did—

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow!

paulA neves: Yeah, it was a fax interview, but I don't care if it's a fax interview, it's like I still got an interview with her. I have copies of that in my garage of the, you know, I saved all those magazines.

Kristyn Scorsone: Can you explain what a fax interview is, 'cause I know folks won't maybe know?

paulA neves: Well, you know, when fax machines came out, you know, just like they would transmit electronically through this machine, you'd get this like printout. So it was done through phone wires, and so you'd send a piece of paper, but it's like, it was almost like a printer. You'd type in a phone number and it would come out on the other to the sender.

Kristyn Scorsone: Kind of like slow emailing.

paulA neves: Yeah, it was sorta like slow emailing, but we didn't find that it was super slow. It was pretty radical for us at the time. But I had the nerve to track down her agent. I don't know how the hell I got this woman's like information. I'm like, I tracked her down, it was either the agent or her own address, and I just like contacted her. I think I might've just sent her a letter, an old, snail mail letter, 'cause that was like early nineties. It was not, it was even before email. She responded, she's like, yeah, I'll do the interview, but I'll do it through fax, right. So I'm like, good, that works for me. I just wrote up a bunch of questions, faxed her the questions, and she responded via the fax with the answers. And then we just used some stock photographs that, this was back in the days where you had to actually buy stock photographs. You couldn't get them online but yeah, there was that.

And then, Tee Corinne, I interviewed her for this other publication. It was an anthology that Philip Sherman put out. I mean, this was called *Uncommon Heroes*. It was a book that he, this guy was pretty well connected to a lot of famous gay people like in the

eighties and nineties. I don't even remember—I think he must have contacted me through *The Network*, the magazine, so maybe we featured something else by him. Actually, I contacted him and I'm like, "hey, are you still looking for profiles?"

This anthology included profiles of very famous gay and lesbian people of the era. I'm like, "are you still looking for profiles because I've just recently been in touch with Tee Corinne. I've done this interview with Rita Mae Brown, and James Dale."

Do you remember James Dale, the Boy Scout? He was in New Brunswick. He brought a lawsuit against the Boy Scouts 'cause they fired him for being gay. So I interviewed him too. I interviewed him for *The Network*, the magazine. He was on our cover. And I also did a profile with of him for *Uncommon Heroes*.

So I mean there's like a, like this project that you're doing is super important. It kinda, it radiates out from Newark because everything is so interconnected. There's a lot of queer history that people should really be aware of. I mean that was pretty like groundbreaking that James Dale took on the Boy Scouts.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah.

paulA neves: And it went to the Supreme Court right. I believe that the Supreme Court did not rule in his favor, did not reinstate him. I could be wrong about that, but I get the sense that it wasn't a good outcome for him, but like wow, what courage for him to have done that, right?

And so yeah, in *Uncommon Heroes*, I have three profiles in there. One of James Dale, one of Tee Corinne, and one of Rita Mae Brown, and the Tee Corinne interview I actually recorded on cassette. So I have an actual cassette, right. And at some point, I am going to turn that over and just my interview notes to the Herstory archives and probably also the Tee Corinne archive in San Francisco, if it still exists. So that's on my to-do list.

But I mean, that was a really great time in my life. I had just graduated Rutgers-New Brunswick. I went to Livingston College. I was accepted also at Douglass, but in a very rare bout of internalized homophobia, I'm like, "Oh, I can't go to Douglass

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

College. It's a women's college. Everybody will know I'm gay." I don't know why the hell I thought that.

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

paulA neves: Because I ended up spending all my time on Douglass right, and actually Douglass is where the Portuguese and Spanish department was based, and I ended up being an English and Portuguese double major. So I was on Douglass all the time, not just for social life, but also academics.

But yeah, right after I graduated that I got this gig working for *The Network* magazine. I wrote a series of vignettes about, just fictional vignettes about being, I was trying to do the written version of like an Alison Bechdel cartoon. I was trying to tell these little serialized stories about being young and queer in the nineties and looking back on it now, they weren't well written, you know, 'cause I was like, you know, honing my craft or just beginning my craft at that point. But *The Network* accepted these little serialized installments. Then I was like, "hey, you know, do you need an editor? You know, I'd be willing to like—"

And they hired me right. So I got to do really great stuff there, like interviewing all these interesting people, but also doing cover stories on subjects that were only really beginning to be addressed, like I did a cover story on the BDSM community in the area, right.

Kristyn Scorsone: That area, meaning New Jersey?

paulA neves: I got contacts from a lot of people in New Jersey. A lot of the interviews I ended up doing were in the New Brunswick area. But yeah, I mean, it was such a great time because it's like, wow, all these subjects are so interesting. I'm just going in there with like an open mind and I'm learning about this stuff and you know these people are sharing stuff with me and sometimes you know, using their real names or their pictures, you know, that was pretty out there for like the nineties, the early nineties.

Yeah. I'm trying to get back in touch with that excitement I felt back then because you know, life happens. Life happens, things happen, and sometimes you get a little bit cynical, a little bit hardened, but I'm at a point right now where I'm like, oh my God, I wanna get excited about this stuff again. You know, how do I do

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that now? We're in a different time, but in some ways not really you know. So, yeah. I don't even remember what your original question was, but I kinda went off on a tangent.

Kristyn Scorsone: Interesting. Like *The Network*, what years, roughly, was it active?

paulA neves: I would say it was active, I don't remember if they were active in the late eighties, but definitely early to mid-nineties they were active. I mean I still have, I definitely remember writing, working with them in '92, '93, '94, for sure.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was *The Network* archived anywhere?

paulA neves: I don't think, I think that would've been before digital archiving, but I kept hard copies.

Kristyn Scorsone: Nice.

paulA neves: Be happy to share that with you. I think it's super important. I don't even know if the women who ran it are still around. You know, you might have to track them down to get permission if you're going to digitize it or anything but they didn't end up staying together. They broke up, but, and I think at least one of them moved to Florida. I don't even know if they're both still alive 'cause they were older than I was. But you know, they would be in their sixties, seventies now, possibly. Yeah I mean it's— What's that?

Kristyn Scorsone: You know the *Lavender Menace*?

paulA neves: Yes, yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: This not the same women though, right?

paulA neves: No, no. No but all these publications were kind of like aware of each other. I was aware of the *Lavender Menace* because when I was at Rutgers, I would haunt the library, just looking at magazines like that so I was aware of the *Lavender Menace*. I was aware of *Sinister Wisdom*, all those things, yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: *Sinister Wisdom*, is that New Jersey?

paulA neves: No, I don't believe it was New Jersey. It was just a feminist. I think *Sinister Wisdom* might've been the first one to publish Alison

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Bechdel's cartoons. It's either *Sinister Wisdom* or one of those. But like no, I encountered all this stuff through actual hard copies in the stacks, like, oh, this is so cool you know.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you know, *Lavender Menace* was put out by Pat Freeman, I think was her name, and she graduated from Kearny High.

paulA neves: Interesting. Okay.

Kristyn Scorsone: So I'm like trying to track, and she might have moved to Florida. I have friends in the archives at Newark Public Library, and one of them thinks she might have tracked her down to Florida. That's why I was like, wait a second. Is this the same one?!

paulA neves: I mean, if you're ever gonna do a project with tracking down this stuff, I'd love to participate in something like that 'cause I think that's so important. We don't want our queer history to be lost, you know.

Kristyn Scorsone: Like you said, prior to the internet, this is how we found each other and disseminated information and like, and I just think about now with the crackdown on you know, sharing our history and such, it may become a thing that we have to do again in, maybe in a digital way, but like you know, yeah.

Anyway, with the *Lavender Menace*, being that you were at Rutgers-New Brunswick, did you ever hear of Amazon Autumn?

paulA neves: What was that? I don't think so.

Kristyn Scorsone: It was like a big lesbian conference that I think maybe you were there after, though 'cause you said you were at Rutgers-New Brunswick in the nineties?

paulA neves: Yeah, I graduated in '91, so it might've been after, I was still plugged in a little bit to the scene. I remember going to women's dances in East Brunswick. I was involved at the Rutgers Lesbian Gay Alliance while I was a student. I was aware of like GAAMC, Gay Activist Alliance of Morris County. There were all these different things, what was the other thing that was—there were Ladies for the Eighties. They kept the name Ladies for the Eighties into the nineties, and then they finally changed it. That's all disbanded too.

I think once the digital era really dawned and people started finding each other online, those kinds of places disappeared along with the—I remember going to a bar, a lesbian bar, called Todd's in New Brunswick. It was like on this weird little island in the middle of a residential area. And I spent like, so much of my undergraduate time at Todd's you know, and then also at the Den. The Den, which closed a couple of years ago, I believe.

I mean so, the digital era really killed that. And I kinda miss that because there was so much that you would get out of just communing with other queer people in person. I don't know where we're headed with that. I mean I think the digital era has connected people in other ways, but I'm hoping that there will be, especially with you know, political climate that we're in, I'm hoping that there's gonna be some resurgence of in-person activities and you know, things like that 'cause there was something really special about that.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. I'm sorry, I have to ask you too, 'cause you're tapped into the newsletters and magazines, but like did you ever hear of *New Jersey's Gay Black Woman* newsletter? That was in the '95, '96 '97, I think.

paulA neves: No, I kinda lost touch with that because I left *The Network*. The thing about being, I always joke and I always tell people, you know how you have like Mom and Pop businesses, this was like a Mom and Mom business because these two women ran it. And the sister of one of the women was there also, the staff was all women pretty much. Even though we had writers'/contributors who were men as well, but I, they, you know, because they were a Mom and Mom, small operation, they couldn't always pay their bills. Towards the end, I wasn't able to you know, get paid for working there. So as sad as it was to leave, I ended up getting a full-time job in finance of all things, which wasn't a good fit for me, [laughter] for three years and that didn't last long.

Then I got into Education, and then I got my Master's in English, and then my MFA in Poetry. I eventually ended up at Rutgers teaching English Comp. I have to say, I don't know why I didn't just persist with the small press or working in media like that. I guess because I wasn't making any money and I just, I needed to make money, and so—

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you happen to remember how much they were able to pay you?

paulA neves: I think it was like, at the time, maybe \$300 a week, maybe two to \$300 a week. At some point, I needed a roommate 'cause they ran the business out of their basement in Edison. And at one point, I actually moved in with them, so I was renting a room from them. So it was the best commute I ever had. It was 30 seconds from my bedroom down to the office. It was awesome. But even with that setup, they weren't really making enough money. This thing, I think eventually got into other countries. I think they got into Japan. I mean it was never a huge circulation, but you know, for the scope that it had, it was pretty impressive. They needed more staff to really manage it and help it grow. And then they broke up and so you know how that goes. It fell apart, but it was a really golden time of my life.

Kristyn Scorsone: They made money through ads or subscriptions?

paulA neves: They did, a lot of it was through ads. And this was back in the old days where you had to send the hard copy ads to paste up and stuff. There was nothing really digital about it. So people did buy ads. We ended up getting ads from, you know, at our high point we got ads, I believe from, God, what was the name of that vodka company? That was like, Absolute right? Yeah.

So yeah, we were covering all that stuff. We were covering, I remember writing a little piece about there was some anti-gay law being passed in Colorado, and you know, it's like history repeats itself, we're like kinda facing this stuff again. But I'd be happy to share that stuff with you. I saved a lot of the copies.

Kristyn Scorsone: I'm sorry. Did you see any ads for queer businesses in there?

paulA neves: Yes, it was queer businesses, like a lot of therapists *[laughter]*, accountants, professional people, definitely. I would say queer and gay friendly businesses would advertise in there. But you know, it was a way for, true to its name, it was a way for people in the community to network. Hey, I'm a lawyer! You know, this was way before even civil unions. Do you like have estate issues? You wanna do your will? I'm a lawyer. I'm gay or I work with gay clients, or I'm an accountant. You know, it was like a real forum

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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for gay people to find each other. There was like a calendar of events. Here's these dances, here's these gatherings, here's these Al-Anon or AA meetings, you know, it was that kind of stuff, yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, that's so interesting. I can share with you the *New Jersey's Gay Black Woman*, because I have that saved and it sounds pretty similar, although on a much, much, much, much smaller scale.

paulA neves: If that came out in the mid-nineties, not only then was I like working full-time, but also, I was in a relationship, I was like living with my partner at the time. Not long after that, I bought my first house with the partner, so I was kinda like married for all intents, you know, so I kinda dropped out of a lot of that stuff. But yeah, I'd be interested in seeing that for sure.

Kristyn Scorsone: Cool. What was, you said—sorry, just to go back to something really small for a second, but you mentioned BIA radio, what was that?

paulA neves: BAI?

Kristyn Scorsone: BAI, oh.

paulA neves: WBAI radio. It still exists. It's a public radio station based in New York City and they would always have these weird little shows like kinda offbeat, I think more like liberal, liberally slanted or more like you know, non-mainstream. And they would often feature a lot of gay content. I definitely remember this show that came on in the evenings, I forget what day, but it was hosted by a lesbian, you know, and she would play music and she would talk about being a gay woman in the eighties.

That was like, I listened to that before I listened to like NPR you know. It was just more, more like independent kinda radio. But I mean, WBAI definitely still exists, so you'd probably be able to find some information. I don't remember the name of the show, but you might be able to Google it and find out what their programming was like in the eighties. But yeah, that was kind of a, that kinda kept me plugged in.

Oh, the other thing I was thinking about yesterday is often during that time, before I went to college, when I was in high school, I

was looking at the *Village Voice*, right. The actual hard copy *Village Voice*. I was looking at the personals. I reached out to some people in the personals, just to have contact with. We were writing letters. I was writing letters with this woman named Jess, J-E-S-S, for a while. And she would send me little cartoons, and I would write, that was going on. This was all before like social media and stuff. I would sometimes, if I was having a particularly hard time, because you know, later in high school when I was about 16, 17, 18, it got kinda tough because you know well, everybody else is dating, when am I gonna have a social life? And the only social life I had, the only dates I had was with a guy who also turned out to be gay 'cause you know, we find each other [laughter].

We hung out together and we went to the movies. I remember his name was Richie. I remember going to see, this was at the Lincoln, remember the Lincoln Theater right. Yeah. We went to see *Thief of Hearts* with Steven Bauer and Melanie, I think Melanie Griffith and Steven Bauer is in it. I'm like, and I was not interested in him as a date at all, but he's like, I clearly remember there's a scene in that movie. I believe it's that movie where Steven Bauer has his shirt off, or he is in the bathtub and Richie was like, "Oh, my!" [laughter] I'm like, this guy's gay too! [laughter] Oh my God, so funny.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you talk to him about it afterwards, or no?

paulA neves: No. Although, at our high school reunion, god what was, I think it was at our 20th-year high school reunion, he was there and he was so clearly gay at that point. He came up to me and I brought a girlfriend that I had at the time, you know, and he's like, yeah, "our lives turned out to follow very similar trajectories!" [laughter]

Kristyn Scorsone: Amazing. Let's see, so many things. So then, how did other people in your life become aware of your sexuality, like your family or your close friends?

paulA neves: Well, I mean, my family, especially my mom, I think always had a sense 'cause I think parents know, even if, you know, they're not like comfortable with it. Although I have to say my family experience was never, some people have it way worse, it was never like abusive or like you know, I wasn't like shunned. But, I think that's why I also write so much about being both queer and also Portuguese-American because it was both things you know,

because I was testing out my wings being an American kid, and that always didn't jive with being Portuguese, right. So being American, I felt more personal freedom to be, or explore myself in just, in all different kinds of ways. And that always didn't like, again, my dad was kinda checked out, but my mom was our main parent, so that always didn't line up with what her ideals about what being a proper woman was, you know. And so I was never someone into wearing dresses or being very feminine or, I was always you know, a tomboy. I was the only girl on my block, always playing all sports, you know, tackle football, I mean, roller hockey you know, in driveways, baseball. Not so much soccer, but even though I loved soccer, but the guys who lived in this area were into other sports. Just I remember like just being very athletic, very physically active, and not being like girly and my mom really reacting to that.

And so as I got older, I never told her, and it's funny 'cause I have I had this ongoing conversation. I think it it's the Portuguese part of it really flavors this because I have this ongoing conversation with a good friend of mine who lives in the Bay Area. He's bisexual and he's my age right and he's like, he's not quite been able to come out to his mom, even though there's always innuendos. She's always making comments. He is always making comments back, you know. He doesn't necessarily hide who he is, but he hasn't had that conversation with her. I'm like, yeah, I remember going through that process with my mom too.

It was like, it was always the closet with an open door where my family was concerned. But it was never overtly stated but you know, when the partner that I had in the 90's, into the early 2000's we owned a house in Plainfield. Well, we lived together first in an apartment in one of those old converted Victorians. And then we bought a house in Plainfield, and my partner at the time loved to give these big holiday parties to invite family and friends. And so a lot of our friends in our social circles were other gay couples right, men, women, you know, and we never asked them to like tone down their behavior....And then we invited our families. My mom and my stepfather, 'cause my mom was divorced at that point for a long time. You know so there would like be people kissing and dancing, having a good time. Never you know, I never like, never said you can't be yourself. Never tried to deny that. Never denied what my relationship with my—I mean, I was bringing people, girlfriends, and other queer women that I was hanging out with to

my mom's house, even in the late eighties, when I was still in college.

At that point, didn't say "this is my girlfriend" or whatever, "these are my friends", but we'd sleep together in my room. It was not overt, but I didn't hide it either. You know, it's hard to explain. But eventually, I had to really work. I really do think it's a cultural ethnic thing. I really had to, in my forties, early forties really had to work up the like, "Okay, I'm gay! If you wanna know, I've always been gay. I'm always gonna be gay. I'm not girly the way you expect."

And I remember it came out because I was going to Paris with my gay male--it was a book club, but it was all gay guys and me. I called it my gay boy book club, and we decided for this one Christmas you know, week, let's go to Paris and like just rent an Airbnb and it works for me. I've never been away from my family for Christmas, let's go. I remember my mom getting way more pissed off about the fact that I was not spending the holiday with the family, that I was, you know, "you care more about your friends and your family."

I'm of course thinking there's different kinds of family. There's your biological family and your chosen family you know. She was way more pissed off about, that's the occasion where I came out to her 'cause we were working up into an argument. I'm like, and "by the way, I'm gay and they're gay and we're going to Paris!"

Kristyn Scorsone: We are gonna have a gay old time!

paulA neves: We're gonna have a gay old time! When I talk to my Portuguese friend out in the Bay Area, he gets that, he gets that you know. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, for sure. What do you— Have you experienced any issues regarding, working in finance or working in, well, obviously not *The Network*, but working in other spaces as a queer person

paulA neves: Where I've been discriminated against or? Yeah. I worked in finance for like three years, that was, and I got into it. I worked for Bloomberg in the Skillman area in the mid to late nineties. And I started out as a financial proofreader. So the people that had that job was a [*coughing*] it was a part-time job. It started as a part-time

job in the evening. And the people that gravitated to that work were already kinda like oddball or fringe, or not like mainstream folks. And then the company I guess was using that as a way to like recruit full-time employees. And so I was one of the people that was recruited. I never had an issue, in fact, I met a really good friend who was also gay, who worked at the desk across from me. He was also, his family were also immigrants from El Salvador. He had a very much different experience than I did. He himself was born in El Salvador, and he was there during the Civil War. So he saw sorts of atrocities and he had nightmares about it, but he was also gay. So he and I became buddies. Never had a real negative experience. I just like realized that this is not the field for me. I wanna be working with something more meaningful, like with words, you know. Ended up in education.

And then so education, I worked at Middlesex County College after that for several years. Never really had an issue there but then that was the period of time where I was in that long-term relationship, living in Plainfield. So I mean, you know. I kept my private life, private 'cause I didn't feel the need to, unless there's a need for me to, and when there was a need or when it came up, I would say something. In the job at Middlesex, one of my co-workers was also another gay woman, so and we had a very similar, we were the same age, had similar upbringing, similar interests. In every job I've had I've always found other queer people or allies you know. And then, eventually ended up at grad school at Rutgers, and then teaching and poetry school is full of queer people or poets, it's just poets, artists. It's like, no, I haven't really had work-wise an issue with that.

Just like in terms of everyday experiences, out on the street. Yeah, sure. I have a clear memory of being in Scotch Plains, at that point in my life, I had my hair very short like yours. Very similar cut, in fact. And I have a feeling—I have a memory, a vivid memory of walking down the street in Scotch Plains, and this carload of teenage boys rolled down their window and were like yelling, “queer, queer!” you know, it was more stuff like that. Then it wouldn't happen all the time, but periodically. But no, I've been fortunate that in terms of work or other situations, no, I have not really had negative experiences. But then, I think for people who can't pass, there have been periods in my life where I can pass for straight or not, not necessarily identifiable, you know. It's a

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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different experience than people who can't pass. I'm totally aware of that.

Kristyn Scorsone: What about with growing up Catholic? Did you get any negative messages from the church? Did they not really talk about—I know you had that great teacher, but?

paulA neves: Yeah, with the church, I always had the sense of, take what you need from it and let the rest go you know. Because I had that sense way back from attending catechism classes for my first communion. I mean, that was when I was living in Newark, 'cause first communion's around when you're eight years old, and again, I can't remember if this was actually what happened, but I have the sense of my mom putting me on the bus to go down to our Lady of Fatima to attend classes 'cause they were like in the afternoon after school, and I got there late.

Again, I might've taken the bus, or maybe she, I don't remember my mom having a car at that point, but for whatever reason, I got there late. I remember the priest just like smacking me on the back of the head like I'm an 8-year-old kid, smacking me on the back of the head and saying, “get in line”.

I'm like, and it's like, wow, this is not cool. The stuff about the church had more to do with just cruelty, general cruelty, not necessarily because of people being gay or whatever, having other beliefs. I just always had the sense, take what you need from it and let the rest go.

Kristyn Scorsone: Isn't that called sometimes cafeteria Catholic?

paulA neves: Yeah, yeah. I appreciate some of the rituals of Catholicism, but again, they're all stolen from the Pagans. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: I was raised Catholic too, so I totally feel you. And then, just two other questions before I wanna ask you about New Brunswick a little bit more, but you mentioned also the AIDS epidemic, like, being that you were so, you were a little bit older, did that scare you at all? Like I know, I was younger than you, but it terrified me as a kid.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

paulA neves: I wasn't scared, I was concerned 'cause I remember at the Rutgers Lesbian Gay Alliance, that's how I came out officially at Rutgers. You know, I hopped the bus from Livingston one day, and I'm like, I'm gonna go to the Rutgers Gay and Lesbian Alliance meeting. And I was very nervous. I remember when it got to the college at campus center, right, I stayed on the bus and went around one more loop before I came back to the stop, and then I'm like, okay, I'm gonna get out and go.

And I went into the meeting and I'm like, oh, wow, there's all these other gay people here. That's so cool. Ended up dating a couple of people there, *[laughter]* because that was part of our social outlet. I met a lot of cool people, went to a lot of parties, but also, they had a hotline where, you know, people could call. In particular, I think it was an AIDS hotline that people would call in for information about AIDS. I never actually got to work the hotline myself because my, we were always paired up and the guy who I was paired up with, he basically liked to hog the line and he stayed on it the whole time. But I would be there physically present. So there was that, we'd have events or we'd have speakers or we'd find out about events at other places. I remember attending gay Pride marches in the city and just being in the orbit of a lot of discussion going, I have clear memories of Act Up and all those groups.

I was not ever personally terrified for myself. Also, because I was working at a magazine in the early nineties so there was a lot being written about that and a lot of information being disseminated. So I was kind of up to date on what was happening. I'm like, okay, it seems for gay women, that's the population that has the least, is the least at risk right? But I do remember there being discussions about people using dental dams and all that stuff. But it was definitely always more of a concern for the men and for women who had, or IV drug users or women who had partners that had been exposed.

I didn't personally know anyone. I don't know how I was not a, I did not personally know anybody who was sick, you know which was like kind of— but at that point, a lot of people in my orbits were practicing safe sex it seemed like, and were just very attuned to what was going on there. There was later on more of an issue with when the whole meth, was more with the drugs, people dying because of like crystal and all that stuff. Not really because of AIDS, yeah.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

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Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

Kristyn Scorsone: Then the other question, follow up question, when you were younger in Kearny, did you notice like if people talked about Newark, what the perception was?

paulA neves: Well, Kearny at the time, you know, as you probably can relate to as well, was seen as the country compared to Newark you know. Remember, Tree City USA, remember those signs? Unfortunately, one of the things about Kearny now is that there's a lot of trees being cut down and I don't feel enough of them are being replaced, so that's like a real bummer. But I mean if you moved out to Kearny, it's like in a way you had made it, or you were making it and you were getting out of the Newark area. But I retained the fondness from Newark for a long, long time after that.

I think my lack of—my change in attitude towards this area has more to do with, its so many people and so many people on top of each other. And it's just like, that's some often hard to deal with, the traffic and it's just a lot of people. The perception was its Kearny was a "better area", you know, it was a suburb. We still did so much in Newark. My mom still worked in Newark. We still had family in Newark, shopped in Newark still. I mean, there was always contact with Newark. Even when I went away to New Brunswick for college, I would come and visit her often, like every week or every other week, even when I lived in Plainfield or you know wherever. Then, I got into grad school at Rutgers Newark, so I was always in the area or in contact with the area a lot.

Kristyn Scorsone: Awesome. And then, going back to New Brunswick, you said you used to hang out at Tods and The Den, and Tods was a lesbian bar?

paulA neves: It was, and I've tried to get information about it. I can't find any information anywhere. There's nothing that I can find online. I don't know if there's any archives at the libraries there, but I clearly remember hanging out at Tods.

Kristyn Scorsone: T-O-D-S.

paulA neves: T-O-D-S, yeah. I can't remember the name of the street, but it was a weird little island. I think it was off of Livingston Ave. There was a weird little island. It was like in a residential area. I have this sense of that. I don't think I ever saw it in the daytime 'cause I would always go at night, obviously you know. Yeah and I have a

Queer Newark Oral History Project

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Location: Zoom

clear sense of dancing to a lot of eighties music there, like Rick Astley and just a lot of eighties pop and just having just a great time. A lot of my college friends went there, other people from the area went there, and it was like, even to me it seemed like remarkable. Like wow, this is a women's bar in New Brunswick right. We'd go hang out at the Den too but the fact that it was a women's bar, it was like pretty amazing.

Kristyn Scorsone: How big was it?

paulA neves: It was not huge. I remember there was at least two levels because we'd go downstairs to the food part and there was the dance level. It was not big, I would say, I don't know, like 1,200 square feet. It wasn't a huge thing. I wish I had taken note of the street that it was on because I'd love to go back to that area and see what's there now and just, but again, I've tried to search online for information. I can't find any information, but I know that it existed. I've danced there.

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]* That would be a wild fever dream to have.

paulA neves: I know.

Kristyn Scorsone: They serve food there too, so it was a restaurant?

paulA neves: Yeah, like you know, like french fries and mozzarella sticks, that kind of stuff.

Kristyn Scorsone: The Den was more gay, and lesbian, or?

paulA neves: Yeah, it was mixed. And that was on Hamilton Street and Somerset. That was there a long time. That was a fun place. Too much bigger. I think it closed just after COVID, like permanently. It was there for a really long time. Really long time. It was like an institution and that you can definitely find information about online.

Kristyn Scorsone: And then you also hung out at what was the place that you told me about that had the music shows?

paulA neves: Oh, the Melody.

Kristyn Scorsone: Melody. No, there was another one though.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

paulA neves: George Street Playhouse?

Kristyn Scorsone: The Court Tavern.

paulA neves: Oh, it was not the Melody, it was the Court Tavern. Was Patti Smith there, or no, she was at the, oh my God. No, I saw Patti Smith.

Kristyn Scorsone: The theater?

paulA neves: It was at the theater.

Kristyn Scorsone: State Theater.

paulA neves: It was at the State theater. Yeah, there was a fundraiser for the Court Tavern and wait, hold, pause a second. I'll see if I can find the t-shirt.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, I'll pause it.

paulA neves: Yeah, Court Tavern. There you go.

Kristyn Scorsone: My God. Mint condition too.

paulA neves: It is 'cause I keep all my stuff in mint condition and there's that.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wait, can I take a picture with my phone?

paulA neves: Of course. There's the front.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay, got it.

paulA neves: There's the and, I got this at the Patti Smith concert for the Court Tavern.

Kristyn Scorsone: Amazing. That must have been so cool [*crosstalk*]

paulA neves: —Oh my God, it's so cool. I just visited with last month with friends who live in Highland Park, who I went to that concert with, and they were like, “Oh yeah, that was so much fun. That concert.” Yeah, it's, it's a bummer that the Court Tavern closed too, so many of these landmarks in New Brunswick are just like gone.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

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Kristyn Scorsone: That was 2010, that concert?

paulA neves: Yeah, I believe so. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: You had mentioned other, was there other spaces that you went to that maybe weren't queer per se, but you found other queer community there?

paulA neves: Tumulty's. Tumulty's was a pub, I believe it was on George Street. It was like a college pub. Other queer communities, yeah, they would have these, I think it was the Unitarian Church would sponsor these dances in East Brunswick, these women's dances. A lot of this stuff was like word of mouth or things that the Rutgers Gay and Lesbian Alliance would put out information about, or when I worked at *The Network*, people would send their calendar listings in and we just would like go to these things.

It was so funny, at one of these women's dances I think it was like in '94, I ended up hanging out with this one woman. We just hung out all night and it like, oh, she's really cool, really funny. And then 14 years later, I believe, yeah, 14 years later, we ended up going to the same karate dojo in Highland Park, and I'm like, I know you, I know you, too. I'm like, yeah, we were at that women's dance like in '94. We never dated each other right? She's was married and had kids by that point, and she and her wife still live in Highland Park. Those are the friends I just had got together with that we went to the Patti Smith concert with. But yeah, we reconnected back in 2008 and, and I'm like, we never dated, did we? No, no *[laughter]*.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you ever see any other cool bands that you in New Brunswick, local shows?

paulA neves: Well, not in New Brunswick, but what was that? The Starlight Lounge, the Indigo Girls. I saw The Indigo Girls there. Who else? Oh man, it's hard for me to remember because it's like really weird. I didn't grow up with a lot of music in my household, so music didn't come to me until much later. Even now, like I just recently went to a Bikini Kill concert for the first time in my life in Brooklyn. I'm like, why were these people not on my radar in the nineties?

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

It's just the way it was. It's like, I just have a lot of joy in discovering a lot of this stuff now. I did get to see some people when I was like younger, but yeah, Indigo Girls, was like, that was a good one. Who was that other band? I don't know. I do a lot of concerts now at City Winery, you know, all those folks that are playing these residencies there. I just didn't see, I also didn't have the money to go to concerts, when I was you know, younger.

Kristyn Scorsone: I loved Bikini Kill back in the day, but I didn't see them until maybe like five or 10 years ago, probably. Oh, sorry, go ahead.

paulA neves: No, it's like, my girlfriend is always like, oh yeah, I saw them. I saw them in the eighties. I saw them in the nineties. I'm like—

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, so lucky. You started publishing, you said poetry and, was it stories as well, or just poetry?

paulA neves: I think the very first thing I got published was a poem in a Portuguese-American publication out of Coral Gables, Florida, you know, I was working, the summer after I graduated college, I was working at the Rutgers Speech and Hearing Clinic on the Douglass campus. There was not a lot to do on that job. I was bored outta my mind, but there was a computer, and you know, often spent my time on the computer writing poetry.

I clearly remember working on this poem and sending it to the, it was called The Portuguese American Journal. There's a different Portuguese American Journal now that's an online publication, but this one was a print one that was out of Florida. And I remember sending my poem off to them, and the poem was definitely about growing up as a Portuguese-American kid in Newark, in fact, and you know, visiting my grandmother and all the traditions that she brought over from Portugal and that got published, and I was like, over the moon, like wow, this was 1992. I'm like, wow, I'm gonna have a future as a poet.

And that was really cool because the poem was about my mom's mom who had just died the year before rather suddenly. She was only in her mid-sixties, so she hadn't really gotten to enjoy her retirement that long. And it was really tough for my mom to go back to Portugal and take care of my grandfather, get him set up, you know, pack up all her mom's stuff, and disperse them. She only had three weeks to do this, so she had to take emergency

leave from work. Later, I found out that she had to borrow money from some friends to pay for the trip. All this stuff that you know, I didn't learn till many years later. My mom was always very quiet about this experience. It must've been an incredibly painful experience for her. But then I got that poem published the following year, and I came home and I'm like, "Look, mom, look what I got."

My mom was always very, she always had a project. She could never sit still. She would work at the factory. She'd come home, she'd have some house project, she'd be painting or doing construction in the house or something. I remember she was doing that. She was working, she was painting or something. I'm like, "Mom, look, look at this. Look, what I got published," and I'll never forget. She read the poem and she cried. It's like, I get emotional thinking about it now. It just blew the top of my head off. Like I didn't say anything to her. She didn't say anything to me, and that was like, wow, this is why I do what I do 'cause those of us that do some kind of art, right, or some kind of education, that's what we do it for. It's that connection.

So that was the first thing I got published. Then the things that got published after that were these essays or stories and they were always semi-autobiographical, it was always like, and those came out in more anthologies, the ones that I was talking about before, from Alyson Publications or from New Victoria Publishers. And they were always about being a queer, young Portuguese-American person trying to navigate both identities, you know. And you know, some of those books are still in print. In fact, it's really funny, one of the books that, and this one I got in later, it was 2000, late nineties or 2000. It was a book called *Early Embraces*. I think there was a series of them *Early Embraces* one, two, maybe three, I don't know. But the first one, *Early Embraces*, it was about lesbian love stories, or lesbian erotica. My stories were never really erotic, they were just you know, kinda coming-of-age stories. And I'd submitted a story to this anthology *Early Embraces*, and it got accepted, and then my current girlfriend, when I started dating her, I was at her apartment. I'm looking at her bookshelf and there's the book, *Early Embraces*, and I'm like, "I'm in that book."

She's like, "I bought that book in Provincetown."

I'm like, "Did you like all the stories?"

She's like, "Yeah, I really liked all the stories."

I'm like, "Then you read my story and you must have liked it too."
But it's like, that is so wild. It's just cool coincidences like that.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's really cool. It's really sweet. You wrote something called *capricornucopia* too.

paulA neves: That's...that was my poetry chapbook. So you know, a chapbook is just 20 to 50 poems. It's not a full-length collection. And that came out in 2018. I've been working on those poems for like decades in some cases. You know, they'd been published here and there. I've never been someone who's been widely published or big publications. I've always gotten more success at doing readings, in-person events, but I'm like, okay, I had put together this collection, and I gave it a title and I sent it off to Finishing Line Press, which is a press that publishes a lot of first-time poets, and they accepted it. And so that came out in 2018. And quite a number of those same poems in that collection then, are included in a full-length collection I've got coming out this year called *Passaic*, right.

And *Passaic* is—the poems in *capricornucopia* were really about my mom and my grandmother, and their enormous influence on me. Also, a lot of those poems were about growing up in Newark, that whole experience and being an immigrant's kid, working-class background, et cetera. The poems in *Passaic*, use the Passaic River more as an extended metaphor. While there are a lot of the same poems from *capricornucopia*, there's also newer poems. Some of them are set in Newark or the Newark area, or the areas around the Passaic River. Some of them are set in completely different places in/across the country, or even in Portugal but they all use this idea of river as a metaphor to talk about like, being split between different identities.

Also, the poems that are more explicitly about the Passaic River, they sort of comment on the toxicity of it. It's a superfund site, you know, it's taken decades to try and get it cleaned up. There's some development happening along it now, but it's like if the Passaic River, this area of the Passaic River had been cleaner like it is in Passaic County for instance, there's sections of it that are way cleaner than here where all the industrial pollutants are. If this area of the Passaic had been in a different county where it was a lot

cleaner, I think you would've seen way more development of the area at this point. And so the whole question, or one of the questions that collection thinks about is if there's so many areas that are becoming unaffordable, not just in New Jersey, but around the country, you know like, what are we doing to our natural resources that we destroy them and then we rehabilitate them to develop them to you know, make them inaccessible to people.

Like my parents, I don't know that my parents would be able to, with the jobs they had, be able to afford to live in this area now. I'm surprised that I'm able, like, where am I gonna go? That's true for so many of us who are educators or artists or whatever. So it's using the Passaic River as a metaphor to comment on certain attitudes about being American, but it's like putting it within the context of like immigrant working-class experiences and also, queer experiences. It's kind of a bunch of different things.

Kristyn Scorsone: How do you feel growing up working class, and immigrant has impacted you or shaped you?

paulA neves: I mean, I can't get away from it. Even my work as an adjunct instructor, I feel my mom did manual piece work in the factory, and I feel like I do intellectual piece work as an adjunct. And I think colleges, universities have gone that route, like so many other industries because you know, it's a money thing. So adjuncts are not given benefits. I still don't get health insurance through Rutgers. The union, it's a really strong union, and we've gotten a lot of concessions, and our per-course pay is higher than at a lot of places. I'm thankful for that, but we don't get benefits, you know.

But then, there's that part of me that's very stubbornly working-class...I'm doing this because it has, I realized my mom had the opportunity, not many, but she did have opportunities in her career to get other jobs. They would've still been in a manufacturing context, but there would've been higher pay, it would've involved her moving. In fact, it's really interesting. I went on an interview with her that she had in Maryland. She was being interviewed for a higher manufacturing position in Maryland. She would've made more money, and she didn't take it because she wanted to spend more time with her grandkids.

And then also later I realized it's because she had a real community and she had developed a real leadership position at her job and

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

those are the non-monetary benefits of work. I think it's like a real working-class attitude. There's a real fellowship in working-class jobs that you don't really have or haven't really observed in other environments. And I would consider the adjunct work I do as a working-class type job, yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: I really appreciate that. What is it like for you to teach in Newark now, having grown up here, and also, being working-class and do you ever have, what is it called? Imposter syndrome?

paulA neves: I don't have imposter syndrome in terms of that. I have more underachiever syndrome, like lack of confidence. Like by all metrics, I should have been able to do something, you know, more "important" but I also think that's the pressure of American culture, that if you do something like teach or teach English composition or history or one of the humanities, that you somehow are a failure because back even when I was at Middlesex County College, I was at a National Science Foundation center. It was to develop an engineering technology curriculum, but I was the publications coordinator for that. So I was kind of coordinating all the different subject matter people, and I recognized at that point that to really communicate this effectively, it needs to be a communications course, right? We don't do so well at emphasizing the value of communications and of the humanities. I think that's just gotten worse, especially now in light of AI and, chat bots and all that. There's an emphasis on "go into STEM, go into STEM," but there's not a real value on human experience.

I love teaching at Rutgers because I love the diversity of students. I love that there's so many international students and there's so many students from immigrant backgrounds and working-class backgrounds. It's a little bit challenging though to teach what I teach now because of, the lack of value placed on certain aspects of education. That's been long term.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. How do you feel now being an educator in Newark, and having grown up here for a time and grown up in Kearny so nearby, and you've been involved in a lot of Newark projects, you were talking about before, the Krueger-Scott Oral History project, the Glass Books project, and obviously, as a poet and you've won, I feel you've won of a lot of awards, right, and done some stuff.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

paulA neves: I've won some awards. I'm starting to like get—I'm a slow burn. I think that's actually a very typical Gen X trait like late bloomers. I'm finally getting, but then again, I've never been someone who's like, actively sought it out. In some ways, the social media era is foreign to me because I'm not used to like just promoting myself just for the sake of promoting myself, which is difficult because I have a book coming out. It's coming out from a small press and we have to do a lot of the legwork ourselves. We have to promote it. I have to send emails to people, I have to post on social media: pre-order a copy of my book. It helps it publish, blah, blah, blah. All this stuff is not natural to me but I have started to get some attention just because I know that my trajectory has always been the long game, not like instant gratification. So, I'm sorry, but what you were gonna ask a question. I just jumped in.

Kristyn Scorsone: No, no, no, that's fine. No, I was just curious, the way you see Newark and how you understand the city, or if that's changed through doing, being involved in these projects, and being an educator here.

paulA neves: How do I see Newark? Like Newark is, because it's developing a lot, and I get perspectives from my students that are really interesting. I had one student last semester who is from Newark, and he's like, "I can't wait to get out of Newark."

Because he sees that it's gentrifying and it's a good thing, but it's come too late. He was saying that he wants to go somewhere else, live out of state after he graduates, or even out of the country. I think that there's a certain dynamism about Newark that's always existed, but I have always been concerned that this like development that's happening, even though Newark does seem to be one of the cities that has a better, I think it's like, they have that mandate that 30 percent of the housing has to be affordable, and I think in some ways they've actually done a way better job than other places of following through on that. I'm just like, this affordability issue is a big concern for me.

People are now paying, in some cases, half of their income in rent, sometimes more you know, in this area. This area is just getting, it's getting harder to survive financially you know. So either you have to find a place way out in the boonies and deal with the commute or—and even places like that are getting a lot of people.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

I think it's an American thing that we're not doing a good job of keeping the human element, the quality-of-life element, in this idea of progress and development. I think that the Newark mayor city, the administration has you know, made some efforts to address that. The forces of that are so overwhelming that I just don't see—I think the money is going to come out on top, unfortunately, who knows?

Kristyn Scorsone: It's so hard because even I think it's nearly half of the housing market in Newark is owned now by private corporations.

paulA neves: Yeah. It's a big issue across the country, and there's not really, I think there was legislation—

Kristyn Scorsone: You can't do that much about it.

paulA neves: No, you can't do much. There was legislation, I think, in Congress being or considered about banning that, and that went nowhere, right. After the housing crisis and when private equity really got into it, I think that's one of the contributing factors. I mean it's like a confluence of all these things. The millennials are a huge population. The private equity getting into this, there's other things happening now, but the private equity thing is a huge one, and I just don't see it changing.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah.

paulA neves And I think that's another reason why I wrote this thing about Passaic, this idea of a river, it's a natural resource. I've been thinking a lot now about AI and data, and things like how we were talking about when I worked for *The Network* magazine and how we would go to actual meetings, you know, those things were tangible. You actually owned stuff. You held it in your hand. Everything now is, or a lot of now is intangible. It's database. It's a subscription model. Like you have to subscribe to everything. You can't even get entertainment without subscribing, having a monthly subscription to something and like you actually don't ever own that. Even when you buy a movie digitally, you don't own it. They only keep it on their servers for a certain amount of time. So this is about this, I think it's part of hyper-capitalism. It's just this rapacious consuming of resources, even if the resource is just data. I don't know what we can do about it. I don't know if old-style activism is up to this.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, it's hard. The AI thing too is such an environmental impact as well.

paulA neves: It's such a huge environmental impact and that and crypto, and they don't care. It's gonna just steamroll ahead. I think maybe one way that we can respond to that is to, like projects like this, like let's go back and rediscover our history. Let's actually touch things. I make my students look at things and touch things. I bring in samples of, this is what a telephone looked like, you know, these things are important. You could like touch these things. You could experience these things. I think I'm trying to be optimistic and just think that there is some way that there will be a resurgence of community-based something in the future, you know.

Kristyn Scorsone: The Passaic too, the Passaic River. Growing up in Kearny, and I don't know if you felt this way, but it never felt like a natural body of water to me. It almost looked to me, like concrete, like a road you couldn't go on. Even though there was the crew and I was very involved in the crew team, but it still seemed just—we should have this really amazing natural body of water that we could look at and be like, oh, that's so pretty. It's like just blank. It's just nothing, you know.

paulA neves: That part of it is pretty much dead. Right now, they're rehabilitating certain parts of the riverfront. They just put in a bicycle path, you know where the vet, the Arlington vet?

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, I worked there.

paulA neves: It's not far from where they crew right. Oh, you did work there? Okay, cool! That's my cat's vet. They put in a bike path and they're doing walking paths and bike paths. I'm like, yeah, but it's still a walking or bike path along this like, this river.

This goes back to this thing about development, buildings and construction and buying people's houses and you know, that's become now a model for, not only private equity, but new immigrants is like they're in on the construction thing. Like buying these older people out of their houses for half of what they're worth, and then flipping them, because it's a way to make money, but there's that, there's all that development and progress and whatever you wanna call it, and bike paths are being put in. But

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

there's like, just take, next time you're in the area, just take a walk around here. There is so much garbage everywhere. There's plastic garbage. It's just along the river, along the streets on, like, I don't get it.

The new Kearny mayor has been talking about beautifying certain areas and like, you know, they've been fixing up West Hudson Park, fixing up, just putting in more courts but I'm like, but no one is doing anything about the garbage. There's so much garbage everywhere. As you know, living where you do, it makes a difference psychologically to look out and see things like clean and beautiful right? And you can have that in an urban environment too, to not see garbage is—

Kristyn Scorsone: It's such a baseline.

paulA neves: It's a baseline, right? So why is nobody talking about that?

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, that's a great point.

paulA neves: I try to get my students aware of that. Like I said earlier, I'm not an activist in the sense of being out on the front lines and organizing stuff, but I talk to my students about this. So we do a unit on plastic/trash pollution. So I make them go out and record all the trash you see even on campus. Did you do anything about it? Did you see anybody else doing anything about it? Not in terms of judging, but in terms of just observing.

Kristyn Scorsone: Right. And you know, like I believe like activism comes in many forms and not all of us can be out and on the bullhorn and it's not useful if all of us just crowd the bullhorn.

paulA neves: Right.

Kristyn Scorsone: I have a mentor at Rutgers Newark that she always calls it, there's like doing politics with a capital P where you're canvassing and voting and all of these things. Then there's politics with a lowercase p where you are, being like teaching your students about this stuff. Making sure to educate others, through your writing, through your poetry.

paulA neves: Right.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

Kristyn Scorsone: You know, so like doing politics through even the way a person dresses or performance art or I think you've created some or been involved in film production too?

paulA neves: Yeah, I, a colleague at the writing program and I, we've been working on documentaries since about 2018. He was working on this before I came on board. So in 2018, he had already started a project where he was profiling a queer, black female hip-hop artist from Newark, and also an Ecuadorian immigrant from the Elizabeth area. And they were both in their thirties at the time, so they weren't like kids, and they had been building their careers and they were adults and they had day jobs. She was a diesel mechanic, still is. She's moved to Atlanta with her wife. And I think she's got a mobile mechanic business there, but she's still pursuing her music on the side. He, her name is Serenity, and his name is Freddy. And Freddy is very active in the local arts scene, like in the Newark, Elizabeth, and throughout Northern NJ and he does, he's gone and has done festivals in other parts of the state and elsewhere. He's very active. I believe he's performed at the Williams Art Center fairly recently 'cause Boris, that's my film partner, and I, so we profiled Freddy and Serenity in this documentary called *The Remedy* because they both talk about how music is the remedy.

So that's available, I believe it's still streaming on Tubi TV online for free, so you can catch that. So we did—that won like Best Music Documentary at the New York Hip Hop Film Festival. It screened at a bunch of other film festivals here and like in other countries. That was really cool. Now, we're working on another one on polyamory.

So yeah, there's that. I've always tried to keep my hand in different art forms. It can make it crazy at times 'cause oh my God, I gotta promote my book. I'm like, I gotta work on the documentary. I gotta do this but you know, it's really satisfying. I'm fortunate that I'm still able to teach and I'm able to pay my bills from teaching and yeah.

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: paulA neves

Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone

Date: January 9th, 2025

Location: Zoom

Kristyn Scorsone: That's really cool. Would you wanna read one of your favorite poems from the *Passaic* or from one of your other *capricornucopia*? Are you a Capricorn?

paulA neves: No, I'm not. I'm a Taurus, but my grandmother was a Capricorn. She was actually a cusp, she was a Capricorn-Sagittarius cusp but there's something about Capricorns that I've always really admired. They're the GOAT's, they're very sturdy and work-oriented, and they're like Tauruses because they're stubborn in a way that they will accomplish what they set out to do so, and because a lot of the poems are about my grandmother and just my mom in a weird way, because my mom came to the US in November, so that's right around Thanksgiving. So like the whole idea of the cornucopia, the harvest, the bounty of America. That was at play there too. Also, that was also a play on one of my favorite dishes growing up that my grandmother, my mom made it too, but my grandmother really perfected. It was like this goat stew that you stew in wine in the oven. It's a Portuguese dish, very traditional Portuguese dish called Chanfana, and its mutton or goat and it's so good. You stew it in red wine and you stew it in the oven until the meat falls off the bones. Now, I mostly am vegetarian, so I don't eat it really, but I had a really vivid experience, vivid memories of eating that as a kid is, oh my God, it was so good. So yeah, it's all wrapped up that title in a bunch of different things. I'm trying to think of a poem that I could read.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. And if you don't want to, that's okay. I just thought it would be cool, but I don't mean to put pressure on you or anything.

paulA neves: Is it possible that we might be able to do a follow-up for when I actually have the book *Passaic* in my hands so that I could maybe read from the book 'cause—

Kristyn Scorsone: You could even send me a voice note reading it.

paulA neves: Oh, yeah. I could do that. I could do that too. Yeah, for sure. I could even record myself. Yeah, cool.

Kristyn Scorsone: Why paulA with the Capital A?

paulA neves: Well, that's got a story behind it. Because, you know, like kids from a lot of Latin, Latin European, or Latin American

backgrounds, a lot of kids from those backgrounds have three names. They have like the first, the middle, and a last name. And my brother has three names. He's got three, his first, his middle, and his last name, and I never had one. I'm like, I would always ask my mom, "Why didn't you ever give me a middle name? I don't get it. All these other kids, you know, all these Portuguese kids have middle names. How come?"

"Ah, I don't know. I was busy. I just couldn't think of anything."

So I remember, I think this ties into the whole issue of identity, like if I was gonna have a middle name, what would my middle name be? And I racked my brains like, no, that doesn't sound right. Maybe it could be a name that begins with an E, then my initials could be PEN. No, that's corny.

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

paulA neves: I always liked the name Inez just as a name. What if I gave myself the name Inez? No, my initials would be PIN. No, I don't like that, everything—

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

paulA neves: —everything I came up with, it was like, no, there's just not one that fits. So then I'm like, I thought it was really funny. In fact, my friend Millicent Borges Accardi, who's also a Portuguese-American poet. She's Portuguese-American, but also Irish-American. She writes for the *Portuguese American Journal* online. She did an interview with me a few years ago, and she titled, and like I realized at one point, I know I'm paulA with a capital A. What?! It just threw people off, and she wrote this piece called "PaulA with a Capital A" 'cause I realized if you capitalize the A, it is putting a placeholder, a middle initial there, but also is playing with gender too because some people read it as Paul, some people read it as Paula. Some people aren't sure how to pronounce it. And I like to have people thinking about that right? So Millicent herself, she calls me Paul. There's a couple of people at work that call me Paul.

This whole thing with gender, with gendering and pronouns. Even when we declare pronouns to people, it doesn't always like sink in even for people who are allies, right? So, and I did that as an

experiment for myself. I'm like, I told a lot of people, you know, I sometimes I prefer to be called Paul. Sometimes it has to do with gender, sometimes not. Sometimes I just like the name Paul better than the name Paula. And it's been really interesting for me to note how many, who have been the people that have listened to that. There's not many of 'em. There's like one colleague at work will call me Paul, she remembered. Millicent will call me Paul, she remembered. Even like very close friends to me, you know, they know that paulA with A capital A is my art name. They won't when they email me or text me, they won't like capitalize the A, right. And it's just like, I don't hold that against them. It's like, I'm not not friends with them anymore. I'm like, hmm, yeah, this is a really interesting experiment to do with people, right?

So yeah, it's like an ongoing experiment. At some point, I might do something with it, turn it into some video piece, because apart from the documentary stuff, I also sometimes do these little video essays or video poems. I just had one at the Montclair Art Museum and that one was a little video essay called *Regina*. And I started getting into like playing around with video and we're talking very low-tech video. We're not talking about anything like that you couldn't do with a phone or just a basic camcorder. It's not anything high-tech because to me it's more about like the story you're telling than the bells and whistles.

So this little video essay, it's like a one-minute video essay called *Regina*, and it's based—back in 2017, Rutgers Newark through Express Newark, was offering these free video classes, community video classes. And I just took that class over and over again. I took it with a colleague of mine, Adrienne Wheeler, who's like, she's pretty big in Newark Arts, she's pretty big in the Newark art community. So we took this class over and over again, and that gave me the confidence to like, okay, I can express myself in a different way. And one of the assignments that we had for one of the classes was to do an audio documentary with—do an interview and an audio documentary of someone. So I interviewed a woman named Regina Perkins, who was a custodian at Rutgers Newark. She was just about to retire.

Kristyn Scorsone: Cool.

paulA neves: So I did an audio interview with her. I did a lot of, you know, took a lot of just sounds like ambient sounds of the other, of her

colleagues talking in the hallways of her sweeping with her broom, of them opening and closing doors, you know, the locks, and stuff. So I had the audio for that for several years and then in working on *The Remedy*, the hip hop documentary, we, Boris and I, went to Newark and we took some B-roll of some of those streets. Like right off of, you know, right in the Market Street between like Market and Broad and like University, you know that, remember where Skippers used to be? Just before the courthouse and Essex County, that area. There's a lot of side streets there, like Academy Street.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah.

paulA neves: A lot of side streets there that a lot of those buildings are being bought and they're gonna be either torn down or whatever reno'd. But a couple of years ago, we went and just like, we took some footage of these streets, the way they looked then, and just some of the old, the old parking lot for the, what was that? Bamberger's, was it the Bamberger's? That's now a Rutgers parking lot. Yeah, that's a really interesting parking lot. So it took a lot of that and I was looking at the B-roll, I guess, last year. And I'm like, "I'm gonna pair up this B-roll, these outtakes with the audio of the interview with Regina."

I know I had some video footage of Route 280, around Exit 15, right by the Broad Street station. I just paired it up and it worked and so it got into the New Jersey Arts Annual last year, and it was at the Montclair Art Museum until just a few days ago. Was there from September until January, early January. And I've had some success with that as well. I previously had one of these little video essays at the Newark Museum, and that one was called *Lathe Operator*, L-A-T-H-E. And my mom, when she worked at the factory, she operated a lathe. She made, she took raw glass tubes and she made them into light bulbs and stuff. She became like a real artisan kind of job. And so I did this little video essay called *Lathe Operator*, and that was just still photos of her at work, and it's like a poem. There's actually a poem that's over that one. *Regina* is not a poem, it's just Regina talking about her experience in Newark and her wanting to retire.

Oh, that's the thing I forgot to mention about *Regina*, the commentary that I, what struck me about Regina's interview? She's like, "Yeah, I've been working here for many years."

I didn't identify specifically that she worked at Rutgers. I cut that part out, but I just kept the part she says, "I've been a custodian in Newark for like 27 years. I really love my job. I love my colleagues. I see a lot of changes happening in Newark. I just hope that they have places for the homeless people to go to. And I see them sometimes and I will give them a dollar, 'cause it just hurts my heart."

And I'm like, it strikes me again and again, how people who are not like wealthy people have in some ways, a stronger sense of their community and the needs of their community and give back to their community in tangible ways and like real heart ways that you know, the movers and shakers do not. So that's what that was about.

Then, the one about my mom, the *Lathe Operator* was just about the poem that appears over the stills in that there's no sound in that except the sound of an old-fashioned movie projector, because that kind of mimics the sound, like industrial sounds that you'd hear in factories. And it's just this poem that's just talking about how this lathe operator and she made light bulbs and that whole thing was a comment on this disappearing history of working-class jobs and manufacturing in this area. So, and that was at the Newark Museum. I really enjoy these little video pieces, I mean, who knows what it's gonna lead to, because it's not really a tangible thing. It's not like a painting or you know, an installation that physically exists. It's like a video right, so but—

Kristyn Scorsone: You could probably also donate the video file to the Newark Public Library Community Archives.

paulA neves: Yeah, that's a good idea. I hadn't thought about that. Yeah, for sure. I have to investigate some of that stuff myself.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where do I watch these? Can I watch them?

paulA neves: I can send you links, you know, unlisted links to them. I'm trying to be careful about not having stuff publicly available, because again, the whole thing with like AI, one of the big issues with it for me is, you know, like myself and other artists, I know we've been working decades on our art and we don't get compensated for it.

We don't get credit for it. I'm just, it's like that's a really important issue for me.

Even when I teach at Rutgers and I use the work of colleagues like a book of short stories by a colleague, it really bothers me. And I tell my students when you upload, take pictures, and upload these PDFs to AI so that you can get AI to tell you what this story's about, you are exposing this to like a training model that's now using his work without compensating him or giving him credit. And I know for a fact that he has worked, he worked for years on perfecting these stories. I have him come to class you know.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's such a good point.

paulA neves: This is like how we have to make things tangible to people. There's nothing wrong with using these technologies in ethical ways. I mean, I just used it recently to have it put out a film budget for me. But I didn't say what the name of the film was. I didn't give any particular details. I just said what is, this is the amount of money that we have to work with. Give me a line item for like industry standards that, you know, because of the thing we were applying to something that needed that. And it was just easier to do that. But my fear is that we're not teaching our, or the culture is not really focusing a lot on the ethics of it. So there's gonna be a lot of personal information that's gonna get out. There's gonna be a lot of creative work that's gonna be training these models. It's not going to be compensating or crediting the originators you know, and just that is the part of it that really sticks in my craw.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, that's such a good point. I'm definitely gonna say this to my students. Yeah, because that and there's a lot of labor issues with it, I think, too.

paulA neves: There's a colleague of mine who teaches for another university, and she's been getting pressure and she teaches also composition. She's been getting a lot of pressure from her higher-ups, to incorporate the chatbots into her writing exercises with her students. But her, she's got a very hardline stance on it. She's like, "These things were trained on stolen labor. I cannot do this ethically."

Kristyn Scorsone: Right. It's so true. And I think that people, there was a podcast episode I listened to about it, this woman, she works in tech and

has studied AI. I think she's an academic too, and was just talking about how little they train laborers, like say in Africa, I believe it was, where they have like a person sitting in a room just reading lines, and they get paid very little and it's very mind-numbing work. You're no comradery with anybody like you said, where like working-class jobs back in the day where you have this like, you called it, I think a fellowship maybe.

paulA neves: It's a fellowship. It's like you develop a real community. I mean, I'd be fortunate enough to go to my mom's factory periodically. Sometimes I would go in the summers, especially when I wasn't teaching or not in school or whatever, I'd go to have lunch with her. She was really admired at work and she didn't have a college education, but she developed a real leadership role among her colleagues and she was valued, you know, and she contributed and they were part of a team.

I realized later that's why she fought so tenaciously to hang onto that job and didn't go elsewhere because that really nourished her. And that part about working is so important as this AI is being developed and to increase productivity, you're increasing productivity but at what cost? Because work isn't just about making money, it's also about your sense of purpose, your sense of identity, your sense of community, you know, and that's not being studied enough.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah and I think it sounds like your mom almost had a chosen family there and you know, from what I understand too, thinking about even warehouse Amazon jobs, where perhaps back in the day that could have been a fellowship kind of job where you have a community there. Now, you're more and more siloed to your station, and you're not able to talk to people around you because there's machines pulling stuff, and you have to stay in your place 'cause you know, deviating from that spot if you're wearing a watch that's tracking you, or you know, you only have so many minutes to go to the bathroom and you gotta make it back. There's no time to stop and chit-chat with anybody. This person, I don't know if it was the same podcast episode or a different one, but they said, they went to the Amazon warehouse as the shift was ending, and in the parking lot, normally back in the day, people are getting into their cars and maybe they're gonna go to a pub together.

paulA neves: Right, right, right.

Kristyn Scorsone: Now, everybody's peeling out to get the heck out of there. You know what I mean. There was no comradery there, no sort of fellowship.

paulA neves: I think a part of the reason why Trump was re-elected too was, it was a real working-class response to that. I think the working-class has been abandoned basically by both parties. But I think Trump tapped into something and even though he's never been working-class, I think they perceive him as being more plain-spoken and not putting on airs. And that really tapped into something in the working-class community, and it's like, I think there's a lot to unpack there for any political science people. They have a lot of, but I think that the Democratic Party has drifted away from this sense of working-class people and you know, they're not stupid, the work they do has meaning. And work is, it's not just about making money and progress at all costs. It's about identity. It's about purpose. It's about value. You're gonna see, I fear as more of these things become, more of these jobs become automated, you're gonna see a lot more violence and stuff. It's gonna be similar to what happened with COVID when people didn't have an outlet. So like if they're projecting maybe 20, 30, 40 years from now, AI is gonna really be automating a lot, it's not just gonna be middle-class jobs, I mean working-class jobs, it's gonna be white collar jobs too. What are people gonna do with this lack of purpose, you know?

Kristyn Scorsone: I guess just a final question, but is there anything I didn't ask you about that you wish I had asked you? Or anything that you didn't get to touch upon or talk about that you would've liked to?

paulA neves: No, I can't think of anything right now but probably at some point if we do a follow-up about New Brunswick, I'd get into more of the fun stuff being young and queer in New Brunswick in the late eighties, early nineties. That was a fun period.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah, that would be really cool. Yeah, awesome. Well, I guess, thank you so much. I'm gonna stop the record button. I'm gonna press the record button to stop the recording.

[End of Audio]
