

## Queer Newark Oral History Project

**Interviewee:** Janyce Jackson

**Interviewer:** Kristyn Scorsone

**Date:**

**Location:** Zoom

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Thank you for taking the time.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No problem. No problem. I looked at your questions again. I was like, "Oh, my God. Am I gonna remember?" I started. I'm glad I asked again, and I started makin' some little notes, and I guess stuff will come back to me as we talk.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, that's okay. Do you mind that I'm recording? Is that okay?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* It's okay. It's okay.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* If it's all right, if you feel comfortable later, I'll ask you later 'cause you don't have to decide now, but I'd love to include it on the website, this conversation, but that's up to you, and you can let me know later how comfortable you are.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Will the website have a photo or just the voice?

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, it could just be the voice. Yeah, it doesn't have to be video. Yeah, I don't think our website even has the capacity for video.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Oh, okay. No. Yeah, no problem, but remind me of the full—I think this part is part of your thesis, but what is the whole theme about, the topic about?

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, so I'm kind of building out on—so, I did my master's in history at Rutgers Newark, too, and I transferred in as a BA student, too. I'm from Kearny, like the town across the river, and I grew up in the '80s and '90s queer. I didn't know anything with my history, with queer history or trans history, and so when I got to Rutgers and I found out all of this stuff that's happening, like L.I.T. and Unity, and Pride, and the AIDS activism in the bars and the clubs, I was just like, oh my gosh. I always wanted to know all of this as a young person but didn't. There was just, I guess, Roseanne's kiss on TV and Ellen.

I kind of thought everything happened in New York City or on television, so it's kind of just been my mission to record

as much of this history as possible, and so my dissertation is about Newark's LGBTQ history, but specifically the leadership of black, queer women and trans women in Newark because I just see so much has been spearheaded by black women that are queer, and so I'm trying to write about that from the '70s forward, and part of that is looking at Liberation In Truth, and yourself, Jacquelyn Holland so one of the chapters is on Liberation In Truth, and Unity Church, and the activism around Sakia Gunn, and just the church seems to me—and obviously I've never been there, so correct me if I'm wrong, but it just seems like very much a space where people from all over kinda came together 'cause I talked to Jae Quinlan.

I've talked to Burley Tuggle. I've talked to different folks that have said that it kind of drew them to Newark, too, that they were from the city, and because they heard about Unity and that it was such a welcoming space, and then they also kinda knew some stuff about Newark. They came and got really involved in the church, and even people like Anita Dickens that owns Off the Hanger, I think June Dowell-Burton, too, felt like some of the early activism was spurred by going to the church and getting connected to other organizations like Newark Pride, and the Newark Pride Alliance, and the Newark LGBTQ Community Center, of course. So, I talked to, also, Denise Hines, which was so interesting. She's such a cool person.

Yeah, so I'm at the start of writing this chapter, and I wanna know more. I know you talked a lot about it in your oral histories, too, but I know because the oral histories also focused on the breadth of your life, you couldn't get into too much of the nitty-gritty of it, so I'm just more interested to hear more of your perspective on what L.I.T. was—just what was it like? Before we got on this call, I had found a couple VHS tapes in the Queer Newark office that I think James Credle donated, and one of them that I started watching was a sermon at Liberation In Truth, and it's November 19, 1995, when Bishop Carl Bean was there.

So, that was really neat, and it was interesting to watch because there was the choir is singing, and it's all women, which was really cool to see, and then one woman started talking, and I'm sort of curious. Maybe you don't remember who she is, but she wore all buttons. I think she wore all political buttons, and she was talking about being the

national LGBTQ liaison for the National Action Network, Reverend Al Sharpton's.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, I know who that is.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Do you know?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Reverend Kennedy. What's her first name? Magora.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Magora.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* We called her—it'll come back, but I definitely know who she is. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. If you could ever—if you still talk to her, I'd love to talk to her.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Oh, yeah. I could reach out to her. Let me write that down. Mother Kennedy is what we called her.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, she said she was called the shepherd mother. She was so inspiring because she was talking about—she was saying she was doing this liaison work, and somebody in the group was like—what did they say to her? We know that shepherd mother is gay and all, and that's okay, but why does she have to wear those buttons? They were so mad, and she was like, "I'm sorry, but I'm gonna wear the buttons. I was at Stonewall. I'm doing this work. I'm proud of this work. I'm proud of who I am, so you need to basically stuff it." She said it in better terms, of course, but I just thought that was really cool, and the fact that she had been at Stonewall, too. She said, "Over time, the gay movement got whiter, and whiter, and whiter, but at Stonewall, it was people like us. It was people that looked like us. We were the ones there and doing this," so I thought that was really interesting to hear.

But anyway, was that kind of—she gave that sort of talk, and then they did more singing. They did the announcements, and Jacquelyn Holland spoke, of course, too, and did a lot of affirmations of people's identity, and welcoming them, and being like, "You are loved by God no matter what, how you identify," and that kinda thing. Was that kind of typical the way the sermons went, the atmosphere of the church?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes. So, before we move further, I wanted to give you some important information. The AKA of Liberation In Truth Unity Fellowship Church is L-I-T, so if you say L-I-T, people know who you're talkin' about, and I think I heard you say LIT, right? Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay, yeah. So, it's L-I-T, okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, we're more familiar with L.I.T. and we're a community of comin' up with our own names. So, that's who we are.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Sorry.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. No, that's why we're here, right? *[Laughter]* Yeah, so that is a typical order of service, especially in the beginning. Some of the churches have moved away from it, but in the regular order or service, affirmations were included, and during that affirmation time, it was to affirm who we are, that God loves us just the way that we are, and it spoke to not only being LGBTQ, but being a black person, a person of color, our features, our size, all of that. Yes, that was a—on the in-service every Sunday.

It was part of it, and I would also say that many of the sermons were also around us being who we are and knowing that God loved us just the way that we are, and so in various ways, it was about trying to get rid of the old tapes, the old messages, the ways that we had been treated before by our families, by the schools, by society as a whole, that even though that happened, now is the time for us to understand that that is not who we are. That is not who God is and to let that go. I would think that that's like the overarching message, especially in the beginning when Unity Fellowship Church Movement came to the East Coast.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Right, so it started in 1995, L.I.T.?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes, April of 1995.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. That's kind of—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* *[Crosstalk 00:12:27]*.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* I'm sorry. Go ahead. You were gonna say, our first.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Our first service was the last Sunday in April of 1995, and I can remember that because I came back from my mother's funeral and caught the last half of service. Even though I had been involved in the plannin' and building up to that service, I would have to go away for my mother's funeral, but I came back on that Sunday, so that was the first L.I.T. service, yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. How did you organize it to get a space and get everybody together?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* So, we came from—and this is important. I've been thinkin' about this a lot, our legacy and where we came from, and where we are now. How'd that happen 'cause it seems like some of our history has been dropped as we move forward, so Unity Fellowship Church Movement was founded by Carl Bean in Los Angeles. In 1992, Zachary Jones came to New York City, and he started the first East Coast Unity Fellowship Church in New York City, May of 1992, and that was amazing. We had service at the LGBT Center on 13th Street in Manhattan. That was the space, and I think by month two, the lines to get into church every Sunday, we were all the way upstairs, and the line came from downstairs all the way out to the sidewalk. It just shows you the need of a church that affirmed LGBT people, right?

So, that was 1992, and Jacquelyn Holland and myself, and many of the other people that are still involved were there in New York, and we lived in New York. She lived in Manhattan. I lived in Brooklyn, and she, Holland, became the assistant pastor of that New York Church, and I was a trustee, and she and I became—we worked together, and we were also in Hunter College as adult students, she and I, and so our friendship and our relationship grew from those three places, and so in 19—I don't really know when, maybe. I would imagine it's somewhere around 1994, which is only two years, but at the time, it seemed like a long time.

She began to think about starting a church in Newark. It was like her. She could tell it better than I, 'cause I don't remember where that all came from, but she wanted to go to Newark. I knew nothin' about Newark. I don't know how much she knew about Newark, but she must've heard some need or calling because, in Unity Fellowship Church, one

of the one things that was very prevalent was the HIV and AIDS, the number of people that showed up that were infected with HIV and AIDS, the number of young peoples, particularly young, gay men, and so I think that may have had some connection to why she wanted to go to Newark, as well, because that was—when we say we're a social justice ministry, HIV and AIDS was the first issue that we worked with, and it came from Carl Bean.

I think that was his first issue, as well, because when he started the church in the '80s, it was the time when funeral homes were not acceptin' the bodies of people that died from AIDS and so forth. Zac brought that ministry, but he had no choice really, because that's who showed up in church, were young people with HIV and AIDS, so that was our work. Stop me at any time, because I can find myself going on and on and on and on.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Oh, no. This is so interesting.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Where was I? Oh yeah, so in 19—so, I had left church, actually for a minute while she was planning to go to Newark, and my personal background and what I do was really not so much church-oriented. I didn't really grow up in church that way, but organizing, and working as a treasurer, and those kinda things. When she decided to go to Newark, she asked me to come and help her get it started.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

You were working at the police department at that time? Is that what you were doing?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yes. I started working in the police department in 1973.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Wow.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah, as a civilian, and so yes, I was still at the police department, still livin' in Brooklyn, and was part of the group of people that helped to organize Liberation In Truth Unity Fellowship Church. So, we met at Barnes and Noble in the city, wherever else we could have a free space to gather and organize, and we did that for a while, and she came to Newark when we were ready and started looking for spaces and places. We didn't have money, so it had to be a place that would be welcoming and that weren't gonna charge a lot of money. I know she went to a few places, and

she ended up at Trinity in St. Phillips, and met the dean at the time, the most wonderful—he is Dean Sabune, S-A-B-U-N-E. I love him, love him, love him. He was very welcoming, and was yes, absolutely. You can come. This is the ministry that—you're a part of our ministry, of our work, so he invited us in to have service at Trinity in St. Phillips.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did she find other churches were not welcoming, or was it more just once she got to him, it was like he was so welcoming that it was the obvious choice?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I think she did go to other places before she got there, and I don't think everyone was welcoming, but she would be able to speak to that more than myself. Yeah. That's how we started out. They have their own service, and so our service would have to start, I think it was 3:00 in the afternoon, 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Do you remember the first time you came to Newark, what that was like? Had you been to Newark before, I guess?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No. *[Laughter]* No, I had not, and I don't remember the first time, but what I remember in the beginning was that it was closed. Things were not open. There were not places to eat before or after church. It was quiet. People weren't really on the street except for the people without homes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Right. Actually, I wanna ask you something about that because that reminds me. In your oral history, you mentioned this, and I was curious because I think you said something changed where there was more foot traffic, and then there was more organizations that came around near L.I.T. and near the Social Justice Center. Do you think it—was that when the performing arts center was built? Is that what changed things, do you think?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Maybe, because when we got there, it was in the process of being built, and it wasn't moving very fast. So, you know when they started buildin' and they have the foundation, the—what do you call those things? Not even the walls, but the things that stick up.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay. Yeah, I don't know what they're called. Yeah.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* You know when you wanna drill a hole, and you have to find the thing? That thing, those things.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay. Okay. I don't know. *[Laughter]*

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Don't put that on the *[laughter 00:22:38]*.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Like scaffolding? I don't know. No, I guess it can't be, right, because—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. No, it's really like the back—it's like the foundation of the building, so not just the floor, but the things that will hold the walls together.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay, like the load-bearing things. *[Laughter]*

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, those kinda things. So, it was like that. It's like a skeleton.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, the bones of the house, I guess. Yeah.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Right. It was like that for a while.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay, weird. That must've been weird.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, it was like that for a while, so we would—I would come to church, do church, and then get in my car and come back to the city to find somethin' to eat. Part of it was I didn't know where to go. I'm sure there were restaurants and places further in Brooklyn, but in that particular area there on a Sunday, things were not as open.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Right. Yeah, that makes sense. So, what made you—was it just mostly your friendship with Reverend Holland that made you wanna get involved, 'cause you said you weren't very religious growing up?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* So, the way I got involved with church in the beginning, in the New York church—actually, I got involved in my head in L.A. because I was just comin' out, if you will. I had just fallen in love with this woman and was totally not knowing what to do or where to go. *[Laughter]* We went to a leadership conference in Los Angeles, and I was introduced to Unity Fellowship Church there. They have it—I think they still do it sometimes. They have the conference all week, and then on Sunday they have a service, and they did



that in Los Angeles, and we were very curious about that, and we went to the location and kinda watched the people go in to see if they were like us, more so if they were like my partner at the time because she definitely identified herself as butch, and she presented that way, and so we wanted to make sure that this was a place that both of us would feel comfortable in. Yeah, and it was amazing to see the people go in. That was our first introduction to Unity Fellowship Church in Los Angeles. I think that was 19—maybe '89 or '90.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

So, there was a good mix, like a lot of women as well as gay men?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Was that similar in New York, the New York City one, too?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yes. There was a good, good mix of—yeah. Absolutely. Now, when we moved to Newark, it was 98, maybe 99 percent women.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Wow.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

In the early days, in the very beginning, all the leadership, they were all women, and then we—I don't remember the year, and I don't know if you know Reverend Don, Donald Ransom.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

I feel like I've heard the name.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah, he passed recently. He was the first male deacon, I'm pretty sure. Then Aaron Frazier, who's still around, he was also a deacon, but everybody, all the other leaders were women. So, from time to time, other men came, but for the most part, the congregation, they would not tease. Tease is not the right word because they didn't mean it in a positive way, but we were the church of women. We were a women's church. Even some gay men didn't wanna come because it was led by women.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

So, when you were—when that was being teased, was that just the community in general? Straight people would say that?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No. It was the queer community, too. Listen, we have it in our community as well, the it, right? *[Laughter]* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Uh-huh, for sure. So, when I was watching the video, it was like, yeah. You were in the church, and then there's Bean was sitting on one chair, Holland is sitting on the other, and then they had two people behind them that had a black—both of them were wearing black robes with a purple sash. Were they just maybe—I don't know. I grew up Catholic, so that's my frame of reference. Are they like altar people?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, they were probably deacons.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Which is the first level. They were probably deacons.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Is pastor a next level up?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No, so there's deacons. Then, there's minister. Next is reverend, and a reverend can become a pastor. So, the deacon, minister, reverend are like—let's see. What's the word I'm looking for? They're titles, and then pastor is a job within the title.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* 'Cause I've heard—so, you're both a reverend and a pastor, right?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay, 'cause I always was confused as to whether you were a reverend or pastor 'cause I didn't understand that. Okay. That makes sense now.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, so as a reverend, I was consecrated pastor when she left, so I'm still a reverend as a pastor.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* What's the duties of pastor?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* So, the pastor is actually in charge and works with the congregation, is the congregational leader, and spiritual

leader, and teacher, and the pastor is—you could relate it, compare it to—the pastor is the CEO of the church.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Okay. Then, I saw the people in the choir, right. Then, the pianist, do you remember who that was? It was a guy, I believe. They made announcements. One of the announcements was like, it was coming up. It was World AIDS Day, and it was gonna be at Paul Robeson, and he was like, "You can talk to me or James Credle for information." I don't know if he was involved with Project Fire or that kinda—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

I'd have to see it. I don't remember.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

I can take a picture. I'll take a picture with my phone or something and send it to you.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah. I don't remember who.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

It's tough, too, 'cause his face isn't really shown very well. Maybe I have another video I haven't watched that. Maybe he'll appear clearer in that one.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah, 'cause it may have been someone that was there for the special occasion. If I see it, I can tell you who it is, and that person—yeah, it sounds like it was someone local.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Needs pic. I'm just writing myself a note so I remember. Was the congregation—I couldn't see in the video. Was it big to start off with, or did it take time to get bigger?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

It started off big. It was full. Yeah, do you know the church? Do you have a sense of the feel? No.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

[Crosstalk 00:32:05] no, not so much.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

No, there were maybe five empty—from the back, one, two, three, four, five, and that might be a lot. It was full. Yeah. It was full the first service. It was full for a very long time.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

It went from 1995 to—what year did it end?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

So, I'm glad to hear you say that. I'm gonna write that down because I'm havin' my own issue with the history, with our history, right? So, it did not end. It evolved, and that's not

what we have said, so for you to say end, that's what you know, right? New Brunswick, Unity Fellowship Church New Brunswick and Liberation In Truth, merged in 2012. We did not merge our names. We picked another name, which—so, that was 2012.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

That's when it becomes Unity Fellowship NewArk?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yes, December. There's a 10-year anniversary comin' up.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Oh, congrats. So, was it a lot of butch-identified women, too, in the beginning, or in the congregation, too, and in the leadership?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

In the leadership. Yes, in the congregation. In the leadership of Liberation In Truth, yes. I would say yes. I don't know if they'd say yes, though. *[Laughter]* I'm tryin' to think if I could put names, too. I can come up with two names. I don't know how Jae [Quinlan] identified at the time, but I'm gonna put her in it, too. There were at least three.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Jae meaning Jacquelyn?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

No, Jae Quinlan.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Oh. Jae's cool. Yeah, I like Jae. What kind of—oh, yeah. I guess, I don't know if it's easy to say or not, but—or maybe it's better to ask, what kind of activism, if any, was L.I.T. involved in?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

That's a good question, and so, mainly, the most obvious maybe, yeah, was our work around HIV and AIDS. So, we were definitely involved in the AIDS walks, in the World AIDS Day. We got to know Gary Paul [Wright] and worked with him in ways that we could, and that is how—so Reverend Don [Ransom] was there at the time, at the church at the time that we were approached by the state to do HIV prevention with women because we were the women church.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Yeah, and I think if I'm not wrong, black and brown women were experiencing, or getting infected with HIV at alarming rates, right?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes. I don't remember what year that was, probably '96 or '97, maybe '97. What else did we do? Oh, we would feed the people without homes. One of the ministries would go to Penn Station with food, so we did a lot of feeding and collecting clothes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did you find that many of the unhoused were part of the LGBTQ community?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No. No, and it became more apparent when we opened the Liberation In Truth—no, Loving in Truth open-door drop-in center. We ended up serving mostly men, and these men did not identify as queer.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. Loving in Truth, the drop-in center, is a separate space from the social justice center, right? That became the—eventually became the Newark LGBTQ Community Center?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Right, so it was a progression, so it was—first, it was Lovin' and Truth, which was specifically around black and brown women, HIV prevention. That was the first thing that we did, and from there, it grew into the drop-in center, open-door drop-in center, which was a place that provided showers, HIV and AIDS prevention education, and condoms, and snacks, and showers. That was the drop-in center. That was the place that actually ended up—we ended up serving more men who did not identify, and then from the drop-in center, that evolved into the social justice center, Liberation In Truth Social Justice Center. From there, we went to Newark LGBTQ Community Center.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* So, all three spaces are the same space, or were they different buildings?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* The physical space, yes, all the same. All the same, so 11 Halsey is the first space we had for the HIV and AIDS prevention for women. The drop-in center moved to New Street. The sign is still there. I was there this year. I'm like, he could've just let us stay there, but we moved—

*Kristyn Scorsone:* I took a bunch of pictures.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. We couldn't afford the rent anymore, and then so when it—so, that was the drop-in center, and then the social justice center—did we make it the Social Justice Center

before we moved? I don't remember. I don't remember, but it ended up back at Halsey.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay, so you were at 11 Halsey. Then you moved to New Street for the drop-in center, and then back to 11 Halsey. Is that right?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes. When that Halsey Street building shut down, it was the Newark LGBTQ Community Center that went to the library.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Right. That [block] was bought by a developer, right?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I have no idea. There were so many rumors, and when I was there in May, the building looks worse than it did. Its like nothin' is happening, but now there's no one in it.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Right, yeah. Do you remember what rents used to be? Just curious. If not, that's okay. It's more just curiosity.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Wow. I shouldn't forget it, but I do. How much was it on New Street? I wanna say somethin' like \$2,500.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Wow, that's a lot.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I don't remember. It was a funded program. I wanna say \$2,500.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. It was state fund—is it still state-funded?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* It was. The drop-in center was state funded. The HIV and AIDS for Women Prevention was funded. The Social Justice Center was not funded.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* How did you keep it going?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* A wing and a prayer. *[Laughter]* Fundraisers, because once we lost the HIV and AIDS funding, we would be—yeah, it was rough. It was fundraising. It was fundraising. Now, the rent at Halsey Street was not as much as it was on New Street, but the landlord on Halsey Street was also not present.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Right.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* So, we didn't pay a whole lot. We were not gonna pay a whole lot because we weren't—yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. My last situation, the apartment I lived in in Kearny, the landlord was not there, and the rent was cheap, but it was like good luck getting anything fixed. That's not gonna happen.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* That's the way it was.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Somebody told me that the artist Jerry Gant was above you guys, too.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Jerry used to live upstairs, and the other artist, the photographer. I can't remember his name. I don't know if he lived upstairs, but he did work upstairs. What is his name? I can't remember his name, but he's a famous Newark photographer.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, probably my friend—I think my friend, Colleen [Gutwein O'Neal] would probably know.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. He has work at the museum, the Smithsonian. He has a Newark thing there. His name may come back to me.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. Things like that always come back to me in the middle of the night.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. Did a lot of people in the congregation help out at the drop-in center and the Social Justice Center?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes, lots of them. Well, our volunteers mainly came from the church. We have volunteers. We did have some funding, so there were people that actually were paid at the drop-in center, and we were—one of the things we wanted to do was be on the streets at night to support the workers, so now I'm hesitating because I'm down here in North Carolina. I'm like, "Okay. What's the proper way to refer to my siblings out there doin' that kinda work now?" *[Laughter]* One of the things that we—our goal was to be open as late as we could so that they could have a place to

come in, get some condoms, maybe a snack, take a shower if they needed, and the overall goal was to encourage them to be safe while they were out there.

- Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, okay. So, you mean folks that were engaged in sex work?
- Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.
- Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay.
- Janyce Jackson Jones:* Mostly our trans siblings were out there. Newark turned into a different world at night.
- Kristyn Scorsone:* Right. Was it still referred to as the stroll at that time? I've heard that.
- Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.
- Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. Also, I've heard that the stroll was sort of like the trans women were usually working in one area, and cis women were working in another. Is that true, or were they working together in the same area?
- Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, I don't know.
- Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, I was just curious.
- Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, I don't know. I don't really remember seeing cis women, and maybe because that wasn't my focus. I didn't pay attention.
- Kristyn Scorsone:* Right. That makes sense. Let's see. What else do I wanna ask you? Oh, Denise Hinds mentioned something about a butch women's group at L.I.T. Do you remember that?
- Janyce Jackson Jones:* Now, when you said that, you really had me thinkin'. I'm like, what group was that, but I think I know what she's talkin' about. So, the Unity Fellowship Movement has churches in various cities in the state. There are two times a year that we have a conference where all of them come together. I don't know what she's doin' to Buster, but they're down there making noise. *[Laughter]* They would come together, and so their national meetings. Remember I mentioned to you that I was on my way to a national convocation meeting when you first reached out to me?



*Kristyn Scorsone:* Uh, yeah.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* At those meetings is where the national groups come together to meet, to fellowship, that kinda thing. One of the groups was the masculine-identified lesbian group, so it was not a Liberation In Truth Group. Though, the founders of the group came out of Liberation In Truth.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, interesting.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* So, it was a group for masculine-identified lesbians, but everybody—you could go to church in Maryland and be a part of the group.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, it's so cool. You said that the folks from L.I.T. made up the group. Sorry, say that again. I just wanna make sure I understand.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* The masculine-identified leaders at L.I.T. were instrumental in founding that group, like Reverend Alicia, Reverend Shonda. I think Jae, too. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. I'll ask them.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Each church would have their own meetings and get together just like the ushers, the choir. There were groups within the church, and then when they got together, when we got together nationally, those groups would also have a national meeting.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* That's so cool. Was it like socializing, or was it focused on certain things?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I'm laughing because they would not let me in. *[Laughter]* I did wanna go in, but I didn't—it was a whole thing. They really got upset with me because I wanted to come in. People like me were not allowed to be in, but I do know that it was like support. It was like a support group. It was about sharing of information. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* That's cool. Do you identify as fem?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes. *[Laughter]* Ergo.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did they have any fem groups?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Not that I remember. Not that I remember.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* For masculine of center folks, too, did that count towards—was it only butch women, or was trans men invited, as well, or did they have their own thing, or just sort of maybe weren't as big of a population to be there?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Now, I'm not really sure, but I don't think trans men were invited, but I could—I'm not the person to really be able to answer. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. I could ask Jae or Alicia. That's so cool. I love that. Yeah, Liberation In Truth was—so, from—oh, my God. See. Now I'm blanking on her name. The woman who formed the Newark Pride Alliance—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* [*Crosstalk 00:52:31*].

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Say that again.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Laquetta.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Laquetta [Nelson], yes, Laquetta. Laquetta mentioned that L.I.T. was one of the organizations that was a part of it, so it was kind of like an umbrella. NPA [Newark Pride Alliance] was an umbrella, it seemed like, to bring some organizations together.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes. I think that was their goal.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Were you a part of it, too?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I was a part of it as being a part of Liberation In Truth. I wasn't part of the—I think Laquetta, James [Credle]—I forget the other man's name—were the ones that really organized it and then invited folks in to be a part of it. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. Let's see. I'm trying to think if there's anything else. I know there's other things. Oh, okay. The person in the video, they also said that the person that did the events, they said there was a women's support group, a men's support group, and then the choir group. Do you remember any of those?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Uh-huh. There were so many groups that would meet. They were talkin' about meetings?

*Kristyn Scorsonone:* Yeah. There were like, each of these groups meets every week or every other week at 6:00 at the Newark Community Health Center.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Oh, yeah. That's the place. Yeah, that's where Reverend Don—he was the deacon at the time. That's where he worked.

*Kristyn Scorsonone:* Oh, okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* We open in the evening for meetings. Yeah, it was called Newark Health something.

*Kristyn Scorsonone:* Okay. Cool. I wasn't sure if I could hear him correctly 'cause like I said, the audio's—'cause it's a VHS. It's old, so I was like, is that health center? Okay, all right. That's interesting.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, probably the Newark Health Center, and so he was able to get space for us to meet, and so, yes, there were women's support groups, women's group, men's group. There was a women's day every—so, I don't know if the Catholic churches do that, but a generalization of black churches. There's women's day. There's men's day. There's usher day, children day. We kinda followed that model, and so one of the things that the group would do would be to plan those days or to plan—we actually—now that I'm remembering, the women, we had an annual retreat. We would go up to Stony Point.

*Kristyn Scorsonone:* What's Stony Point?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Stony Point, it's in New York. It's the Stony Point Center. I think it's still around, but it's a interfaith community, sort of like a conference space, that targeted or that was open to religious organizations, and any faith could have an event there. So, our retreats, there was on these acres of land, and so there were—not bungalows. I don't even know what a bungalow is, but that's the word that's coming. *[Laughter]* That's what's comin' in my head now, but there were like cottages with rooms on the space, and space to meet, and then we'd all have lunch together. I miss those. Those were

nice. Those were nice, so yeah. Well, it wasn't just for—it was for women, so no matter how you identify within that.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Cool. Oh, also, I don't wanna assume, but when you said it was like 98, 99 percent women, was there any trans women, too, or just cisgender?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

There were trans women in the beginning. I remember one specifically who helped me really understand what bein' a trans woman was all about because we had to—when we planned the retreat, for example, we had to invite her. She identified as a woman, so for many of us, that was a new kind of thinking, even as queer people, so yes. There was trans women. Not that many, but some, yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

What kind of conversations were happening in L.I.T., like in the congregation? What would people talk about maybe before or after the service? Were people talking about hanging out to have fun, or were people ever planning actions, or were they—I don't know—fired up about something, or experiences they were having in the world?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Hm. I don't know 'cause you remember, the congregation is one group, but within the congregation, people, like a family, for example, may come in the church and be in the congregation, but when church is over, that family leaves together and go on with their lives. There's a lot of that, and then there are people that maybe knew each other before they came to church, and they hung out, and then there were single women. It was all a mixture of everything, and if there was something—

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

*[Crosstalk 00:59:15].*

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Hm?

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Kids, too?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yes. Yeah, kids, too. Some of our kids, you should see our kids. They're all grown. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Oh, my God. I heard a college—I overheard a college student saying, "I was born in 2001."

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Exactly. Yes, there were kids, and the kids that came in the beginning, some of them now they have kids. There was

that, and so we had bowling. We would go bowling sometimes as a—that would be one of the events that would be announced, and so everybody that wanted to come could go. We would—I don't know—do things in the park. We would have an annual park event, and if there was something specific to plan around—so, eventually, one of the national meetings that I told you about was held in Newark. I think we had it there for three years. It was called Midyear, and so there was planning around that. So, that would be some of—and remember, we had church at 3:00, also. Well, for me. Now, it gets dark at 4:00. I just wanna go—even then, this is not—I think I have SAD, like seasonal. It's like, I wanna just go home.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yes. It's pajama jam time.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* One more question about the drop-in center, and then I just wanna ask you a few questions about Unity, like the switch when it became Unity in 2012. What did the drop-in center on New Street look like inside?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* So, we had it renovated, too, because we had to have two showers, a sitting area, and a private office space. So, we started—so, he had two spaces together, and we started out with one space, so you'd walk in, right? There's the check-in desk, and then you'd go. There were two offices. It was like a narrow hall where you'd walk down with two offices to the left, and then you'd get in the back and there was a seating area, and behind that—not behind, but once you go through that were showers. Oh, and another office was there, as well.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You did laundry for folks, too, right, I think?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes. Where was the—yeah, I missed that part. Ooh. *[Laughter]* It was back there, so I'm tryin' to remember if it was—it was after the showers. Yeah, it was, but there were two offices back there, too. Wow. It was all there. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. They have that grating in front, but I tried to peer in, but I couldn't see.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. I may have—

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* I just wondered.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. I didn't get to—I know I have news clippings, and pictures, and stuff. I didn't get to look, but I will. I'll look and see if I have something to show you. Then, eventually, we rented—so, we started out renting that one side, and then we got the other side, and the wall was broken through so that the two can come together, and that side became mostly administrative, so there were more offices there, so there was more room on the other side for the people to come in and hang out and stuff like that. But yeah, sitting area where they serve snacks, washer and a dryer, one washer, one dryer, two showers, and office space.

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* Neat. That's really neat. Then, when the two churches merge and it becomes Unity in 2012, was it—how was it different from L.I.T., or how was it the same?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* What do you mean different?

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* Was it the same congregation, the same leadership, or did it change?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Oh, okay. Let's back up a little bit.

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* Okay, sure.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* In 2005, Elder Holland, who was the pastor, retired as pastor, and that's when I became pastor in 2005. A couple of years—so, that was 2005. I think maybe 2000—so, Sakia died in 2003. Maybe it was before 2003. I don't remember the year, but people from Liberation In Truth left and formed Unity Fellowship New Brunswick. The year is escaping me now, the how it's all coming together. So, when I became pastor, there's Liberation In Truth and New Brunswick in New Jersey, so also—'cause I'm listening to your language, and when you're in something, you say things and it's just automatic, and you think people know.

In the beginning, when other churches were becomin' a part of Unity Fellowship Church Movement, they could name themselves and add Unity Fellowship to the end. So, we were Liberation In Truth Unity Fellowship Church, or there was the Sacred Soul Unity Fellowship Church. That was in the beginning, and then at some point, the leadership said,

any of the churches that come in have to come in as Unity Fellowship Church and the city that you're in.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Churches like Liberation In Truth and those others are grandfathered in, and can keep that name, but anybody else has to come in as Unity Fellowship Church New Brunswick, for example. So, we're all the same. We all came from the same parent. We're all part of the same movement, right? Now, this is 10 years later. There are other affirming churches. There's more access. People are more comfortable in being who they are. People are saying gay and God, which they never said before.

The congregations, both Liberation In Truth and New Brunswick, began to get smaller, right? Small is fine if you're doin' what you're doin', and we did what we did. So, Liberation In Truth, we moved from the Sanctuary of Trinity in St. Phillips to the—what did they call it? It's on Rector Street. I forget what they call it. I forgot. I forgot what Trinity called it, but it was an open space that still belonged to Trinity that they allowed us to have service in, so it was like a big auditorium. I think it belongs to NJPAC now. It's that building with the writing on the wall on Rector Street.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

I'm not sure.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah, so it's down Rector. Anyway, we were having service there, and things changed. The leadership at Trinity in St. Phillips changed. It didn't feel as welcoming as it did before. Things like we'd be told maybe the day before that we couldn't have service because they were having something else, or we had to be out at a time that we weren't accustomed to bein' out. They were coming in, and setting up, and doin' what they were doin' while we were still having service. So, things changed. *[Laughter]* It was clear we had worn out our welcome, and they were asking for more money. They were asking for more at a time that we had less.

During the time when I was pastor, and I don't remember what year we did it. we still had Halsey Street, so we started having service at Halsey Street, and New Brunswick had moved from a couple of locations, as well. Sometime

in 2011—so we were two different churches, but we're still family, so we still came together. People from New Brunswick and L.I.T., they went to different churches, but they were close, and Kevin [Taylor] and I, Kevin was the pastor of New Brunswick. We would get together, and we started to think about the future of our churches, and our impact, and our work in New Jersey, and what would be better for all of us, what would be better for the work that we did, what would be better for the churches, and after a long, many conversations, and tears, and all kind of—we decided to merge in 2012. So, it was just two churches that became one, and because we were both pastors, we were copastors of Unity Fellowship Church Newark.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Okay. Did Holland train you to be a pastor?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Pretty much. Yeah, so I was a reverend, and I'm always uncomfortable saying this, but she talks about it, and I think I always say this before I say it. It's like I need permission to say. You know the old thing, you don't tell family business, right? But, she got sick. *[Laughter]* I was part of the leadership, the next level of—I was the reverend. So, I was *[unintelligible 01:12:45]*. Others were reverends, as well, but there was conversations, and we met with the bishop, and made a decision on who would be the next pastor while she left that position. I learned from—yeah, I learned from her. I learned from doin' it. I also went to Newark School of Theology with Dr. Bendall, and I have other mentors. Who was he? Zachary Jones at the time, so yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

That's cool. In 2003 then, Sakia Gunn is killed, murdered, and I know you worked for such a long time to get the Newark LGBTQ Community Center to be established, but the city wasn't listening. So, you gave the space that you had, right, at 11 Halsey?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

So, I didn't give the space. So, it's clear that I believe in collaborations, working together, merging. We're all doin' the same thing. Let's come together and do it. So, what happened was, so in 2003, Sakia was murdered. It really ticked us all off, the whole community, to start workin' harder, have more conversations with the city. We needed space. The community is here. We never really got anything from the city, and so, by this time, I think



Laquetta had moved out of Newark. She was gone, and we were working with Rutgers Newark were part of it.

We kept talkin' about—this was 2013, 10 years, right? It's like we're talkin' about it for 10 years. Ten years we're talkin' about we need a center. What the hell? That's basically, I was like, "What are we doing here?" We don't have the funds to have this dream center, but we're talkin' about what we need, and who we need to serve, and what we can do, and so, we're called Liberation In Truth Social Justice Center. This is what we're doin'. I'm workin' with all of you, workin' with Gary Paul, Darnell [Moore], Rutgers. We're all working together. Why don't we come—NJCRI, Brian. It's like, okay. So, we got Halsey Street. It's here. The name doesn't matter. Why don't we figure out? Why don't we come together and make this our center? Let's make this the beginning, and then see what comes out of it. You got me excited. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

I don't blame you.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

So, I was heard. They heard me, and when I say they, I mean the leadership in Newark at the time, and they were leaders in their own right and own organization. Newark, Rutgers Newark, we met there, actually, and so, a number of—we all got together. The L.I.T. Social Justice Center agreed that we would basically change our name, change our structure to become the Newark LGBT Community Center with the help of the leaders in the community. So, that's how it started. That's how it started. Gary Paul was a part of it. Brian was a part of it. James Credle, you name them, we were all at the table together. So, that's how it became, and we did the march from city hall, and cut the ribbon. [mayor] Ras Baraka 01:17:47 was there. *[Unintelligible 01:17:50]. [Laughter]* I'll stop there.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Did you say you marched from city hall to the ribbon cutting at 11?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah, I think it was city hall. We came up—I think we started out at city hall.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

That's so neat.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

I think we started out at city—yeah. You know that picture that my wife took?

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Is that with the flag, the rainbow flag, people—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, that's what that's from?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, that's so cool. I assumed that was a Newark Pride march.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No. I don't think it was. No, it wasn't because if it had been a Newark Pride march, Gary Paul would've been with AAOGC. Yeah, no. We were all together behind that—what were we—yeah. Yeah, it was that day.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Wow. That is so cool. That's such a cool picture.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. I think it was that day. Now, wait.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Oh, you're probably right. I literally just in my brain assumed. I didn't have any reason to assume that.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* But, you know what? What just came to me was what I was wearing when we cut the ribbon versus what I was wearing when we were marching. So now, I don't know. *[Laughter]* Maybe I changed. I'm that kinda girl. I'm not ashamed. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You had a costume change.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Maybe I changed for the occasion. I'm pretty sure that's what that was, where that's from. It definitely was not a Pride thing 'cause in Pride we were all in our individual—you know how you line up.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. Your wife took that picture?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Wow, that's so cool. Is she a photographer, or she just happened to take it?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* She is a photographer. She does not own that sometimes, but she is. She really is. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. That's a beautiful picture.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* [*Crosstalk 01:20:21*] She's not doing anything now, but yeah. She took that.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Wow, that's awesome. So, did everyone that was at the old spaces and stuff, when it was known as L.I.T., even though it's the same place—now it's Unity and you're merging with Pastor Kevin, is it still kind of the same feel?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* That's a good question. [*Laughter*]

*Kristyn Scorsone:* 'Cause you said it was like 98, 99 percent women. Did that change, or was it still predominantly women?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Oh, okay.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, I guess that kinda thing.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Gotcha. That changed.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Sorry, one second. I'm just gonna let my cat out. He desperately wants to leave 'cause he's hungry. Sorry. I just know he'll start screaming.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* What's that phrase about—what's that saying that speaks to the group and the leader? I don't know. I can't think of it, so let me just say this. It did change, so now we are a male and a female leadership, so more men came and stayed, because we had men to come, but they didn't stay often. So, there are more men, and while I was still there, right—so, there's two things. So, I left six years ago. I can't believe it's been six years. So, when I was still there and it was the two of us, there was a—it was a lot goin' on. A lot of it was emotional of us coming together 'cause there were some people that were excited and some people who were not excited, so there were some people that actually left, but the overall mission and goal is the same. We are just two different types of leaders. We're two different types of preachers, but it's still mostly women. I think that's in most churches.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, I guess so. Yeah.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* It's mostly women, but there's definitely more men coming. They're still feeding people. Reverend Jerri Lee is—so, she's not the copastor. She's the assistant pastor, but she does a lot of work around health and wellness, and feeding people, and clothing them, so that is still going on.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You said Jerri Lee, Reverend Jerri Lee is assistant pastor. Is that right?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Where he and I had the—we were on the same plane in the hierarchy thing, he's the senior pastor, and she's the assistant.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. Also, it seemed like—do you think the church unity, maybe 2012 on, do you think if—'cause it seems like so many queer people, especially women in Newark are entrepreneurs and are very—even whether they own their own business or start their own nonprofit, or just are very get up and go types people, do you think that's fostered within Unity, or do you think those types of people are attracted to Unity?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Hm.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* 'Cause even Pastor Kevin, isn't he sort of an entrepreneur? Doesn't he write books and—I'm not sure what else. I'm not too, too familiar with him, but he seems like he's an entrepreneur to me.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah, he is. He is. That's interesting. I saw that question, and I thought, hm, because you're right. I can name a few of them who have or have had their own business, but I don't know.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. I feel like it was Anita Dickens who said to me, at Unity she was encouraged, I think, to get involved with Newark Pride. Is that part of the church, too, to be like, "There's these community organizations. You all should go out and help where you can," or do people express interest in that and then they are like, "Okay. Well, you might really like go and helping Newark Pride," or, "You might really

like going and helping at the Center," that kinda thing, like a facilitator, I guess?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Well—

*Kristyn Scorson:* Unofficially, you know.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Yeah. So, I can say to be a part of the leadership of Liberation In Truth, one of the things you had to do was to volunteer at an organization. That was part of your training or your—because that's what we wanted—that's who we were. That's what we wanted to do. We wanted to be involved in community and also to give back. That was a part of what we did. I also think, like when you're encouraging people to be all of who they think they are inside, which is a constant message, there's somethin' that we say or hear all the time that nothing can stop us from the love of God. No matter what our parents said, no matter what the Pope said, we have something within us that we can give to the world. That's a constant message, so I would not be surprised if that language didn't help people to look inside and see what else they could do.

We're also very supportive of each other. If somebody is doing something, there's an opening or something, we're gonna announce it, and as many of us that can go, will go. If you're makin' and selling jewelry, we're gonna buy it. That's just the community of who we are, but you're right. We've had musicians, and artists, and jewelry makers, and all kinda people. Of course, I didn't tap into mine until I got here, but yeah. I think it's the constant message and the opportunity to really move beyond the fear of not being good enough, which we have been told. We've been told that as queer people. We've been told that as women. We've been told that as black, and so to be in a space where you're hearing that none of that is holding you back, none of that stops you from bein' who you—it could be.

*Kristyn Scorson:* That's interesting. What are you doing now that's entrepreneurial?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I'm an artist. I'm painting. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorson:* Oh, that's right. I've seen some of your work. Yes. I've seen it on Instagram. It's really neat.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Two years ago, during COVID when I was in, I learned how to do paint pouring, and I started doin' it. I love it. I love it. Out here learning Instagram and Facebook.

*[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

I like Instagram. It's like the least stressful social media app, in my opinion. That's really cool. There was something else I wanted to ask you. Two other kind of little-ish things, I guess, or side questions, I guess—wait three. Three, sorry. One, do you think, too—'cause I've read, also, that just on the same vein as entrepreneurship, since—there was this article. I think it was in *Forbes*, right, and they were saying since 1997, black women have been the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs, but even looking back, in Newark, too, if you look—there was this guy.

He was a historian, Robert Curvin. He notes some black women that owned businesses in Newark in the early 1900s, and then there was this other librarian, George Robb, I think his name is, that has uncovered this, too, in Newark, and knowing—I can't speak as—I'm not a black person. I'm white, but as a queer person, I know all my life I've made less money. As a woman, all my life, I've made less money, not taken seriously, that kind of thing. That's part of why I'm in grad school 'cause I wanna do something for myself and understand the world better, and have a better grasp and understanding of society, right, and make a place for myself. For me, Rutgers is that sanctuary space because I can be myself. I can be nonbinary. I can be queer, and nobody's gonna take me less seriously, at least at Rutgers Newark. So, maybe that's a part of it, too, is you have too many shut doors in the corporate world or wage work, that I can see that being part of it, too.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

It could be.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Trying to make your own way, but yeah. Anyway, maybe that was just more of me thinking out loud than a question, but sorry.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

It's okay.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

In your opinion, too, do you—'cause I hear this a lot, but I don't know if it's true compared to—to me, the white church is very homophobic. I heard that messaging

growing up in Catholic churches, right? Then I hear people saying, "Oh, the black church is very homophobic. It's the most homophobic," and I think, "Can it really?" I don't know, 'cause I think the white church is pretty—so-to-speak. What do you think?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

I think they're all homophobic. I don't know where this—I don't know where that conclusion came from that the black church is so homophobic, and maybe it's because those preachers, or more of those preachers have said it out loud, have actually said it. It's been recorded. I think maybe in the white churches, it's more of how they treat you, how they move, what they don't do, and what they do. My opinion is not really based on a lot of information because I don't—

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Oh, right. Yeah, 'cause you didn't—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

I don't go to those churches. Growing up, I did go to church, but I don't remember hearing any anti-gay messages from the pulpit. I was 35, 36. I think that my hesitation to goin' into these places had more to do with what I thought was gonna happen, what I would hear. Not that people didn't hear it [homophobic sermons], 'cause people [preachers] have actually said it, and people were sittin', but I don't have that experience. So, I don't know. I don't know where that came from. I don't think that's fact [that predominantly Black churches are more homophobic than predominantly white churches]. I think they're all in the same boat. *[Laughter]*

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Yeah. That's my sense, too. Oh, and one other thing that occurred to me. You said you were working for the police as a civilian in '73 or something, right? Did you hear anything about Stonewall through the police? Did people ever talk about it?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

So, I got the job in 1973. I was a young woman that had a young baby. I had a husband, ex-husband. Nope. I didn't hear nothin' about Stonewall. *[Laughter]* The police headquarters, I don't know if you know the city, is right downtown where city hall is. That's where I worked. It's not far from Stonewall. I didn't hear anti-gay conversations. Huh-uh.

*Kristyn Scorsone:*

Yeah, that's cool. I was just curious.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* More anti-black, and it wasn't even—so, my class was a group of—we were mostly black, young black women that went into—we answered the phones at 911, and we replaced the cops that should've been on the street that were answerin' those phones. That's the negativity that I got from them as a woman, as a black woman, and it's because we were puttin' 'em back on the street. That's another story.

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* Then lastly, what do you think of the revitalization in Newark and the way the city's changed?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* I haven't been there a lot. I was there a few months ago, and of course, I went to Halsey Street, and I looked around, and I think it's good what they're doing, but how far does that reach to the people that can't afford those, but that Halsey Street building is worse than it was. It's still empty. I think the building across the street from it on the side is empty, and these were places that not just our organization, other organizations were tryin' to get in, and we couldn't get anywhere. When Jerry Gant was upstairs, it was a dump. Yeah, so I don't think it's going far enough. The people who don't have homes, they're still there, but what's happening with there? Where's the revitalization around that? Where's the affordable housing? Take that buildin' and make it—yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* Yeah. It's a shame that it just has sat there. Yeah, so much else could be done with it. Well, thank you so much for talking to me. Is there anything else that I didn't ask you that I should've, or that you wanted to say that I didn't think to ask?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* No. I think I can't think of anything now. If I do, I will email you, and as you're writing it, if it doesn't connect, or you hear somethin' else that doesn't—don't hesitate to call me. Reach out.

*Kristyn Scorsonne:* Thank you. Oh, I guess if I may ask you one thing, too. Thinking about it, too, with the city not paying attention and stuff like that, but sometimes paying—or I guess paying lip service, maybe, do you think it helped that you all were part of the church to be visible to city officials in some ways—

*Janyce Jackson Jones:* Oh, absolutely.



*Kristyn Scorsona:*

- in terms of being respectable, so to speak?

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Absolutely. I think that us coming into Newark, we were not the first queer people, gay people in Newark, but we were the most visible, I believe, and we were saying gay and God in the same sentence, and we showed up at city hall to try to get something. We were already working with young people, but the murder of Sakia was like a catalyst to make us really get out there and show up.

I think that was very good for Newark. I think it were good for other young people that saw us and felt safe being around us and being able to come out and to be who they were. So, yeah. I'm glad we came in. I think we were good for Newark. Even the trans people, and they were mostly sex workers at the time. That's when you saw them, but now you see them during the day. *[Laughter]* Yeah, I think that Liberation In Truth Unity Fellowship Church, Reverend Holland, and all the people that came to church during all those years had a big influence on what Newark is today.

Other churches, other gay-affirming churches came in. Other churches that—not many, but some were open and—the church that we were having church in changed. We introduced them to what it was like. They didn't even know, but we introduced them. We helped them to find out we were just like them, except I have a wife. You have a husband, but we're the same. So, yeah. I think we made a big impact, and I hope that Unity Fellowship Church Newark continues to do that. The flip side of it, or the—there's so much politics in Newark, as well.

*Kristyn Scorsona:*

Yeah. Thank you.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

*[Crosstalk 01:42:40]*. You're welcome.

*Kristyn Scorsona:*

Thank you. I really appreciate it, and I appreciate—like I said, I'm from Kearny, but as the young person in me that grew up thanks you for doing all this stuff your whole life, and being so visible, and fighting for people like Sakia Gunn and for other young people. I just appreciate it, and I'm glad to have talked to you.

*Janyce Jackson Jones:*

Yeah, I'm glad to talk to you, too. Thank you.

*[End of Audio]*