

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Phoenix Sherling

Interviewer: Marissa Myers

Date: June 8, 2026

Location: Home of Phoenix Sherling, Newark, NJ

Marissa Myers: Okay. Today is Monday, June 8th. My name is Marissa Myers, and I am going to be interviewing Phoenix Sherling for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. Thank you for doing this with me. Phoenix, before we start, let's go over pronouns, and we're doing this interview at Phoenix's apartment.

Phoenix Sherling: I'm Phoenix. My pronouns are they/them, he/him and **vae**/vaem, **V-A-E***/V-A-E-M and vaer, V-A-E-R. Those are in that order of preference. The last ones are just for fun and me time. I don't usually ask people to use those, but they're there as an option.

Marissa Myers: Okay, so we're gonna start out super easy. What, where and when were you born?

Phoenix Sherling: I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April of 2002, April 16th, and then I lived in Raleigh until I was about 11 months old and then moved to Indianapolis with my parents.

Marissa Myers: Okay, so you lived in Indianapolis after you were an infant. Is that where you were raised, and how were you raised? Parents? Grandparents? Legal guardian?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah, I grew up in Indianapolis on the northeast side with my parents and two younger sisters who are two and four years younger than me. My parents, my mom works a full time statistician job. My dad was mostly stay at home when I was a kid, so we were with my dad a lot. We didn't live near any of our extended family, 'cause my parents are from New York, but we visited our grandparents a lot and they came to visit us a lot. Yeah. It was just my parents, my sisters, me, no pets, no extended family in the area.

Marissa Myers: When you lived there, did you move around a lot? Or did you stay in one place for a long time? Were you at the same school district?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah, so I was in Lawrence Township the whole time that I was in Indiana. I changed elementary schools between second and third grade because they did some redistricting. I moved schools with maybe five other kids from my class and then we all got put in the

same class at the new school. But we lived in the same house from when I was a baby— or, you know, like 1, until I was 12, and then in between sixth and seventh grade, we moved to the house that my parents still live in now. I stayed at the same school for the rest of elementary school and then went to the middle school that also my sisters went to, and then went to Lawrence North for high school. Then my parents are still there. My dad works at the high school. Yeah, they haven't moved since I was 12, so 12 years ago.

Marissa Myers: Describe your childhood a little bit. Do you remember it being happy? Were you super involved in things? Were you more of a loner?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah. I was a big nerd, very—I read a lot. I was also in a lot of sports, not awesome at any of them, but I played a lot of them just as something to do. I did flag football. I did T-ball. I did basketball. I did soccer. I did basically every sport. I did volleyball the longest, and that was the one I liked the most and also liked cross country running. Yeah. My parents were always really involved. They are high school sweethearts who I to this day have never heard fight. They didn't really raise their voices at us or each other. There was not a—I would say overall very supportive and happy childhood.

I was Catholic growing up, and I know that was hard for my sister, but for whatever reason only my youngest sister. Myself and my middle sister did not really leave Catholicism with any major trauma the way that she did. We went to a pretty progressive church. Our parents were always Democrats. Yeah, very supportive, very active family life. I had a strong group of three or four really close friends from when I was eight or nine, and then I was casual friends with most of the other girls in my class, but I had that little group of my best friends from when I was eight until graduating high school.

Marissa Myers: I was actually about to ask about religion, so you grew up Catholic and you said that you don't really have much trauma or much impact from that, but did that affect you a lot when you were younger?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah, I would say there was definitely a time where I was worried. When I was starting to realize that I might be gay, I was a little worried about how to square that with being religious, but I was never—I knew other people who were non-Catholic Christians who were a lot more worried about what their church would say about them being gay. I always felt at the very least the kind of

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Catholics that my parents were, weren't going to hate me for being gay. I always felt that the kind of Catholicism that I was being taught was a very forgiving kind, and so I had moments where I struggled with feeling I didn't know how to handle things or I didn't know how to go forward as a religious adult, but for the most part as a teenager I didn't really feel I was scared that something bad was going to happen in that way. I always felt a very supportive religious presence, and I'm not Catholic anymore, but I don't have as much of a negative relationship with it as I know a lot of other ex-Catholics [*chuckles*] do.

Marissa Myers: Okay, so let's go back. Was there a turning point in your childhood or is there a part of your childhood that really sticks out to you?

Phoenix Sherling: I definitely remember having crushes as a kid where I felt I had crushes on boys and that felt very what was supposed to happen. Then when I was about 13, I spent about—I would say the biggest day, single day was I went on a school trip to King's Island and hung out with a girl from my school for that day that I realized I had a huge crush on and went, "Oh, man, this is nothing like what having a crush on a boy felt like. I am a lesbian" and had a very sudden realization. Then that was the moment of, "And I'm— now I'm gay and I'm gonna stand my ground about it and be myself."

Then I was a lesbian for a long time and not really anymore. Gender got involved in that. It didn't fit quite right anymore, but that was a big moment for me as becoming a teenager and going, "Hold on. I have these feelings for this girl that I've never felt for any man, and that's something different, and I need to explore that." That led me into progressive spaces and to making other gay friends and all of that good stuff.

Marissa Myers: Okay. I'm gonna ask more questions about that later, but let's go ahead—you went to high school in Indiana, so talk a bit about undergrad and college. Where did you go for that?

Phoenix Sherling: I went to Indiana University, Bloomington, for undergrad, which is in southern Indiana. I was a history major. I graduated high school in 2020, so started college in fall of 2020 and then graduated in spring of 2024. It was peak COVID at the start of when I was in college, which complicated things, but I did live on campus. I had a roommate freshman year. I lived in apartments and houses. I was in Bloomington for four-plus years and then took a gap year after undergrad, before starting grad school where I stayed in Indiana but left Bloomington.

I did actually a double major at IU, history and classical civilizations and originally was going for a minor in Latin but dropped that halfway through because it required seven semesters of Latin. After four, I said that's way too many, oh my god, so much Latin, I can't do it anymore [*chuckles*], so I gave up on that one, but I did learn some Latin. Overall I liked IU. I met a lot of my currently really good friends there, but I didn't always agree with their politics, and I'm I would say glad to not be there anymore.

Marissa Myers: Okay, so sorry that I'm pulling you in a lot of directions, but let's go back. You said at 13 is when you had this realization that you liked girls and you were a part of the LGBTQ community. Were you encountering a lot of people of—queer people or gay people in your childhood where you could make sense of these feelings? Or was this something that you really had to come to within yourself?

Phoenix Sherling: There were some I had seen, the occasional gay person on TV, things like that, but I also knew a few people at school that were gay. I had a friend who was out as a lesbian at the time. She later went back into the closet and was straight for a while but now is a lesbian again and has a girlfriend, and I'm happy for her. At the time, she was out as a lesbian, and so I did know her. Then as I was processing those—I did also know some people that were bisexual. There was in middle school was when I think I started to actually meet people in real life who were openly queer in some way.

I definitely knew a couple of gay boys, a couple of bisexuals, maybe one lesbian, and then I went basically to my best friend and was like, "I think I'm a lesbian," and she thought about it for about five minutes and said, "I'm happy for you. That's great. I think I'm bisexual." [*Laughter*] Just was like, "I'd never really thought about it before, but then you brought it—you brought that to the table and I thought about it, and I went, hmm, I think I also like girls."

[*Laughter*]

Phoenix Sherling: Then she was just like, "Yeah, I think we do." Then it was I had people around me who were also openly not straight and people my age. Then I was also the—we had a GSA in high school. I was with the Human Equality Alliance, was what it was called at my school, but I was in it once I was in high school. I was the president when I was a senior. There were people around once I was—I would say I probably didn't actively know any gay people until I was in middle school, but once I was at that point, then I

started to actually have people around me who were queer and open about it and encouraging me to do that, too.

Marissa Myers: Were you out openly as a lesbian in middle school? Or was that something more that you—came about in high school?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah. I would say at the very end of middle school, towards the end of eighth grade was when I said, "You know what? I think lesbian, we're gonna tell people." I was pretty open about it at school. I wasn't necessarily well-known enough that it was big news for everyone at the school, but I do think people knew. Then I was, yeah, once—the end of eighth grade, I was pretty open about that and then got to high school and it was pretty not a huge deal at the high school. For the most part. There was the occasional person or incident, but for the most part people didn't really care.

We were in northeast Indianapolis in an urban/suburban high school, which is code for mostly Black students, so it was a—it wasn't the same vibe as a lot of rural Indiana areas. Yeah. Once I was a sophomore in high school, that was when I had my first girlfriend, and that was when I felt I should tell my parents.

[Laughter]

Marissa Myers: Yeah. Yeah. That does it *[chuckles]*. Let's go into college. You had this identity in high school. You had these experiences in high school, and you said that some of your identity formation changed when you went to college because of this issue of gender coming up. Do you want to explain a little bit about how college opened your worldview *[chuckles]* or whatever?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah, so I went to—like I said, I went to college peak COVID, so right before starting college I'd had a lot of time alone in my house just with myself, and I wasn't really having any conscious questioning my gender thoughts at that point, but I was experimenting a lot with makeup and looking more masculine and cosplay and then I got to college. I'm living on campus. I'm making friends that I'm experimenting with drag makeup with. I also was working at the dining hall, and I remember a day where we had a uniform at the dining hall that was the most ridiculous, ugly, big, boxy, black, buttoned-down shirt, and a black, flat-brimmed hat and then aprons.

I remember wearing that big, oversized shirt and having an apron tied in at the waist, and it made such a very boxy and masculine but also snatched waist, kind of androgynous figure, that I was

like, "Hold on, what's this? I like this." Then I thought about it. I called my best friend. I talked to her. I was like, "I don't know. I'm feeling maybe being a girl's not quite right. I don't know." We talked about—I had communed with the people around me that I was like, "I don't know how I'm feeling about this. I don't quite feel this is right anymore, but I'm nervous about whatever."

I thought about it and I eventually—I started with using she/they pronouns, and that was when I was 18. Then eventually I believe I switched it to she/they/he, where I was like, "Oh, you can use any. It doesn't matter." Then I think I changed the order to now it's they/he/she of she's last. I would rather that would not be used. Then eventually I got to a point where I was just like, "Okay, I'm really uncomfortable anytime anyone uses she/her pronouns for me. I think I should probably just get rid of them completely as an option and not tell people that they can use them."

Then I just had cut it down to they/he. I had also somewhere in this process I started going by Phoenix. I started out by testing it with friends online. I started going by Phoenix online with some friends on Discord, and then really liked it so I started introducing it to friends at school and my best friend from high school. Then started going by that more consistently and eventually I wanna say my sophomore year of college, January, started testosterone for the first time. Then it got to a point where I was still identifying as a lesbian because I was still like, "Well, I'm not a man and I'm still attracted to women, and I just am not really fussed about the labeling of it all," but then I started to, as I started to transition more and feel a bit more comfortable with myself not being perceived as a woman in a relationship, I started to have moments of being attracted to men, and going, "Oh, what's going on?"

I realized that I wasn't comfortable being a woman in a relationship with a man, but if I was also masculine in some way, then maybe men were not off the table. Then I was like, "Okay, well, then lesbian really doesn't feel right anymore. If I'm not exclusively attracted to women and I'm not a woman, that just doesn't really feel like the right label at this point." Then I just said, "I don't really care to specify. I am just queer." My gender is queer, my sexuality is queer, so basically I just say I'm genderqueer, queer in general.

I've also realized over the years that I am—this isn't a label that I necessarily am gung-ho about, but I am nebulously demi-romantic I think, of—I am in a relationship, I have a partner who I love very much, but I have never in my life experienced real romantic

feelings for someone that were not brought on by them first making that an option [*chuckles*] of I—someone can say like, "Oh, I'm interested," and then I'll go, "Oh, interesting. Maybe I am, too." Then I'll think about it and then that can become a thing. I don't necessarily independently experience romantic attraction out of nothing. That was also confusing for figuring out how my sexual attraction and potential romantic attraction related to my gender and who would I actually be willing to be in a relationship with?

Would I actually be wanting to put in the effort to find a relationship with anyone? I got very lucky and am now in a relationship where it just worked out that way. I didn't really have to seek anything out in particular. That was definitely a learning curve for me, figuring out how to understand and navigate and express romantic attraction, especially as I was masculinizing and figuring out that I might be more open to men than I thought I was when I was a woman. It all just shifted around how I felt comfortable being perceived in the relationship.

Marissa Myers: Mm-hmm.

Phoenix Sherling: If that makes sense.

Marissa Myers: Yeah. I think that that makes a lot of sense, but so that did sound like a process.

Phoenix Sherling: [*Laughter*]

Marissa Myers: How would you describe your family and friends' reactions to this process that brought you here when I guess identity is ever changing?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah. It was interesting. I was really grateful to have a lot of friends at the time that I was figuring out my gender who were very willing to listen to what I was asking them for and adapt to what I was comfortable with as we went. It happened to be a space where one of my closest friends at the time was a transman who was maybe a year further on testosterone than me and was happy to be very accommodating with me figuring out my gender. I also met my current—my now partner in that process, and they were also figuring out their gender at the same time.

My roommate, when I was a sophomore in college, was also figuring out her gender. I was really fortunate to be surrounded by a lot of people who were also exploring gender and exploring presentation and were very, very willing to help make me feel

comfortable and adapt to whatever I was asking them for. My family, my parents I think were scared a little bit by the concept of me starting testosterone, but they came around, and they've been supportive. They were confused about pronouns at first but did their best to listen as my pronouns were changing and are now pretty good at getting them right.

My extended family, I waited to tell them really anything until I had it fully figured out, because my extended family I mostly see once or twice a year, and this was all a journey that happened in the course of maybe six months. I waited to tell my grandparents and aunts and uncles and everyone until I had a solid grasp on what I thought was going on. Then I said, "Okay, here's the deal. This is my new name. These are my pronouns." Whatever. Everyone has been pretty good about getting my name. They try with pronouns. They're not always great about it, but I can tell they're trying.

Overall, I've been very fortunate to be surrounded by people who are willing to at the very least try, even if they're not getting it 100 percent of the time. That's made it very easy for me to feel comfortable exploring the way that I express my gender and my sexuality and my presentation in general. I've been given a lot of room to play in that space without being too judged *[laughter]* by the people around me, which is very fortunate.

Marissa Myers: Yeah. It's very, very interesting. I think I'm gonna get a little bit into the Newark questions then. It sounds like you graduated in your undergrad in 2024, and you said that you took a gap year after that. What brought you to Newark?

Phoenix Sherling: I basically knew that I wanted to go to grad school on the East Coast. I wanted to be in—my parents are from Upstate New York, and I wanted to—most of my family is over here, and I just have such a love for the area and always wanted to come back here. I knew that it would be really exciting to be able to be close to some of my family, close to New York City, able to access all of these things that are so close together on the East Coast as opposed to the Midwest everything is a million hours apart for no reason.

When I was looking into schools on the East Coast, Rutgers was one that stood out as having something really special for queer community and queer academics. That was something that I was really looking for as someone whose academic specialty is essentially queer history and as someone who had a—the people around me socially at IU were fantastic with my transition. I was

not always met with such grace and kindness from the administration and professors and whatnot. I had a professor or two that were transphobic whatever and weren't really stopped by the administration, so I was looking for a place that I felt both I could do my research and be supported with an existing body of academic work and somewhere where I would feel comfortable as a queer academic and feel supported in that way.

Maybe it's something to do with the fact that I'm also a music scholar and a hardly reformed emo kid who grew up on so many bands that came out of the New Jersey music scene, but I've always been drawn to Jersey in a weird—there's something special about it. All of those things just felt right, to have, "Oh, it's so close to New York, it's so close to my family. It's got this amazing program that does important work in queer academia. It's in New Jersey. It's close to where all of these bands that I love came from. It's got an incredible music scene. That means I'm gonna have such a strong basis for my music-based research."

There were all of these things that made it feel right. Then we moved here. I went to the history department on campus, and it was just every office door had a pride flag or a we support Rutgers unions or we stand with Palestine. All of these things that I was like, "Oh, thank god." I never felt this in IU spaces. The administration at IU was very hostile and *[coughing]*. Sorry. Excuse me. It was just a very immediately different environment that I got to Rutgers Newark and went, "Oh, thank god. I'm in the right place." Like, "This is where I need to be, to be doing the kind of research I want to be doing."

Marissa Myers:

When did you end up moving to Newark?

Phoenix Sherling:

We moved actually almost exact—a year ago two days ago of we moved into this apartment *[coughing]*—god, sorry. I've got something caught in my throat. We moved into this apartment June 6th last year, and *[coughing]* it was a whole ordeal. My parents drove a U-Haul from Indiana *[coughing]*. My partner and I drove in their car with our cat and then their mom drove another car full of stuff. My partner and I moved in first and then our roommate, who is a good friend from undergrad, moved in two weeks later. Then we had the summer where we were all just living together.

Didn't really know anyone yet. I was getting ready to start school *[coughing]*, and we just—yeah, had that first summer before I started school where we were just unpacking, getting settled, trying to make it so that everything was ready to where I could just start

school and not have to worry about anything around the house. Now it's insane, but we've, yeah, been here for a full year and are coming up on renewing our lease until I finish my master's next summer *[coughing]*.

Marissa Myers: Okay, so very new to the city. How have you gone about building a community within the city, either through fellow students or just general people? What kind of activities have you done, and stuff like that?

Phoenix Sherling: Definitely I've been making friends, meeting people through my classes. When I'm taking gender studies classes, it's a pretty sure bet there's going to be other queer people in those classes that I might have things in common with, so I've made friends that way. I have also been going when I can to QXTs, the golf club, because there's not really any explicitly queer nightlife in Newark or really any nightlife at all. Q's does have queer events pretty regularly and also a lot of people who go there are queer.

They have a lot of drag events. They have karaoke every week. They have all of these things where it is a not overtly but pretty commonly queer space. I go there when I can. My roommate goes more often than I do, and so she's also made friends at the club that she's then introduced to my partner and I. She's also poly[amorous] so we've made friends with people that she's dated casually and there have been multiple people in and out. There's a lot of—that's the thing at Q's in general is that everyone is sort of poly and nebulously—they might all kiss a little.

Having a roommate who is poly and on and off single and going into that space when I'm in a more closed dynamic is helpful for then making friends that I might not have met otherwise. We've also made a lot of friends through going to gay bars in New York City. We have some friends that live in the city but a lot of the people that I've met being in Newark have been through school or through going to events at QXTs. *[Blows Nose]*. Sorry.

Marissa Myers: No, it's okay. It sounds like you had a pretty big community in Indiana when you went to school there, so how have you—how would you measure a difference between building a queer community in Indiana and building one in Newark or building one in Bloomington specifically?

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah. I think the thing that was interesting about Bloomington is that there was a queer student union at IU, and that was they

organized a lot of events. There was a queer prom that was pretty regular.

[Extraneous Conversation 43:22]

[End of Phoenix Sherling Pt 1]

[Start of Phoenix Sherling Pt 2]

Marissa Myers: Okay, let's just start from the last question which was you built a pretty big community, queer community, with your friends and stuff in Bloomington. I was just wondering how you've seen a difference in the community here versus in Indiana.

Phoenix Sherling: Yeah. The thing about Bloomington was that there was the queer student union at the school, and so they organized a lot of events. There was stuff like that. There was also a gay bar. Well, queer bar called The Back Door. It's actually on the lesbian bar list of the last 30 lesbian bars in the US. It was owned by a middle-aged dyke named Smooth, who was awesome. We loved The Back Door. That was a really—they had every Wednesdays there would be open stage drag nights where anyone could do drag and just perform and make tips and just try it out basically of they would have drag shows with more, quote/unquote, professional performers on the weekends.

During the week, anybody could just try. Then if you did a Wednesday drag enough times, you might get on the lineup for a weekend show, because now you've done it and now you are kind of a professional. It was this very cool community, but it was also very, very White. Lawrence Township where I grew up was my school was majority Black and then Hispanic and then White after that. That is not typical for Indiana, but it was the norm for the area that I lived in. Then I got a culture shock moving to Bloomington and being completely surrounded basically just by White people.

Because it was southern Indiana and also an instate school where a lot of the people from the Whiter parts of the state were going. The community that was there had a lot of really awesome things about it and had a lot of spaces that made it easy to plan events and do things and meet people. It was not a diverse space in any real sort of way. Coming to Newark, it was a twofold culture shock of I was very surprised by the lack of community space and there's no gay bar, there's no—there's not much in terms of bars anyway, but there's not a dedicated gay bar. There's not a gay space for people to go specifically.

I was also relieved to see how diverse the community is here and how truly intersectional it is in a way that the community in Bloomington just was not. Yeah. I would say that's the major difference in my mind is there's less support for formal community organizing, and there is less third space options than we had in Bloomington, but IU is also a bigger school and the community here is a lot more diverse and a lot more of what I'm used to from growing up. I'm glad to get back to that.

Marissa Myers: There's definitely a lot of preconceptions that people have about Newark. What were your expectations while moving here, and were those expectations fulfilled? Are you surprised by anything?

Phoenix Sherling: I would say I've—obviously I had heard the like, "Oh, Newark is so dangerous" kind of rhetoric. I also, as a My Chemical Romance fan, I know that they are—all of the members are from Newark and Belleville and have talked about how dangerous the areas that they grew up in were and how impoverished of areas they grew up in. I knew some of those ideas of, oh, it's dangerous, it's this, it's that, I didn't necessarily feel worried. People also say a lot of stuff about Lawrence Township in Indiana. We have sort of a reputation as being poor and dangerous and this and that, and so I wasn't necessarily buying into all of the like, "It's so dangerous." I had definitely heard that.

Moving here, it definitely—I definitely felt the like, "Yeah, no, I don't know why people are so worried about it's so dangerous." Yeah, there are parts of Newark that are less awesome than other parts, but that's true of every place. I've never had an experience in Newark that has made me go, "Oh, my god, so dangerous." That definitely—moving here has put any idea of that to rest in my mind of Newark is not any different than any other city in terms of there are parts that can be sketchy, and it has a lot of really amazing stuff that I wouldn't have known or thought about. I didn't expect my apartment to be two blocks from a massive park, but it is. I didn't expect the area that I lived in to feel so residential and to not feel like I live in a city center, and you definitely, when you go to more downtown Newark, you can see the damage that gentrification has done and the empty buildings, the damage. All of that.

It feels almost familiar in a way that is like, "Oh, I can see how much history and character this city has, and it's made me really feel people, shockingly if you can believe it, don't understand the reality of what it's like and make a lot of assumptions based on the fact that Newark is a city with a high population of people of color.

Which is something else I wasn't expecting was for there to be such a strong Hispanic population in Newark. That was something that was so exciting for me. I don't speak great Spanish, but both of my sisters are fluent and have been since they were kids.

That was something that was very jarring to me to not experience in undergrad, and so moving to Newark, that wasn't something that I expected to be so exciting to be around again. I live in an area that's very heavily populated by Puerto Rican people, and it's something that I didn't expect and didn't expect it to be so welcoming and comforting coming in. It's just been a really cool thing to get to see the ways that Newark has met my expectations in some ways but in other ways it's completely surprised me.

Marissa Myers:

Okay. Another question. What kind of support or updates or changes do you think need to be made to make this city more accepting or more open to having a vibrant queer community?

Phoenix Sherling:

I think really the big thing is just the access, I think, of I've not really encountered much in the way of explicit anti-queer sentiment at any point in Newark. It doesn't feel the queer community is really being held back here by—at least not currently. Obviously, there have been a lot of really horrible instances of homophobia in Newark in the past and fairly recently, but the way that I've experienced it in the last year and the way that it seems people around me have experienced it in the last couple of years, it doesn't feel the community is necessarily being held back by overt homophobia so much as it's being held back by a lack of support from the local government and financial stability and access of if there were a more permanent place for queer people to gather, I think that would make a huge difference.

I know that there are queer-owned stores. There's the LGBTQ community center, but the hours on that are limited, and I know they've had issues maintaining a space in the past few years. The thing that feels like it would make the biggest difference to me in this moment is not even a we need a gay bar or a queer bar, as much as that would be amazing. It just feels like it would be such a benefit to have a space that is stable and functional for the Newark queer community. I know that's something that people are trying to do, and I hope that can get off the ground. Because I think that would be an immense benefit to the community here to have something like that.

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Marissa Myers: This question ties into the last one, but what do you hope to see in let's say the next 5, 10 years? What kind of changes or things do you hope to see in the city?

Phoenix Sherling: I would say I would love to see—frankly, there is a lot of things I would love to see that would require a lot of generosity from the economy that I think might not be particularly feasible. It would be really amazing for rent prices to start coming down so some of the empty buildings downtown could be storefronts or restaurants or—if there could be businesses in those empty buildings that are just taking up space right now. If more nightlife could come back to Newark.

There used to be so many bars and specifically queer bars, and now if you want to go out and socialize with people in that kind of context, you almost have to go to Jersey City. It would be amazing to have that kind of social space, with or without alcohol, come back to Newark. I've talked to Kris Scorsone about, I know they have been talking about wanting to build a Queer Newark museum and create a space that functions both as a community space and an archival documentary space. I think something like that would be so, so, so amazing to have for the queer community here, to have that sort of multifunctional space that also holds the history that we're working so hard on recording. I think that would be something really amazing.

Marissa Myers: Okay, and last question is honestly just did you have anything you wanted to talk about? Was there anything I should have asked? Anything you'd like to add?

Phoenix Sherling: I don't know if I can think of anything. I think just my ultimate thought is Newark is a really special place for queer history. It's been really amazing to get to learn about that in the year that I've been here so far. I am hopeful to keep getting involved and contributing and hopefully help keep moving the community in the direction we're trying to go in terms of stability and organizing, which I think are the most important things for us right now.

Marissa Myers: Yeah. Thank you so much for doing this with me, Phoenix. I really appreciate it, and yeah, so checkin' out.

[End of Audio]

*Note from Phoenix for clarity: I misspoke here on the spelling of vae, so the transcript doesn't match the audio on the highlighted words, but the way it is currently transcribed is the corrected spelling.