Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Jacquelyn Holland
Interviewer: Esperanza Santos
Date: November 25, 2019
Location: Telephone

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Esperanza Santos: Today's date is November 25, 2019. My name is Esperanza Santos and I'm interviewing Jacquelyn Holland over the phone while I am in Rutgers, Newark for the Queer Newark Oral History Project, and she is in North Carolina in Charlottesville.

Jacquelyn Holland: Charlotte.

Esperanza Santos: Charlotte, okay. Thank you again for taking time to share your story for this project.

Jacquelyn Holland: You're welcome.

Esperanza Santos: Let's get started just from the beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Jacquelyn Holland: I was born in Hickory, North Carolina, December 7, 1957.

Esperanza Santos: Does that make you a Capricorn?

Jacquelyn Holland: Sagittarius *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: Sagittarius, okay *[laughter]*. I think Jesus was a Capricorn. Can you tell me who raised you?

Jacquelyn Holland: I was raised by my parents, my mother and my father.

Esperanza Santos: Did you grow up in one place or one household, or did you all move from place to place?

Jacquelyn Holland: I grew up with both of my parents, but we moved a lot. We had a growing family, so it was seven of us. We didn't have much money, so we moved to a lotta different places. I finally landed in New York City. I moved from the south when I was five.

Esperanza Santos: In the role of seven, where do you land?

Jacquelyn Holland: Number two.

Esperanza Santos: Number two, oh, that's a lotta responsibility.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: Can you tell me more about who made up the household about when you were in New York City?

Jacquelyn Holland: I think we moved to New York City when I was in the—it's really when I remember my childhood, I think that I'm older when we moved to New York City because we moved to so many different places, lived for a short time in different apartments in Brooklyn. We moved to New York City when I think I was in the third grade, so I was probably eight, eight or nine.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. What made your family move up to the north?

Jacquelyn Holland: My grandmother lived here. She lived in Brooklyn, so we moved closer to her. We stayed with her for a little bit and then we moved to Manhattan where my mother got a job with the Housing Authority, I think.

Esperanza Santos: Oh. Do you remember either what part of Brooklyn or what part of Manhattan you all were at?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. I grew up in lower Manhattan by Chinatown, right by Chinatown.

Esperanza Santos: How did this stay the same or change as you became a teenager?

Jacquelyn Holland: How did—

Esperanza Santos: I'm sorry, your household.

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, I was one of the oldest, so my sister, my oldest sister who's only two years older than I am, she moved when she got married. She got married and she moved. My brother, he—we had five girls and one boy for a very long time. Then when he turned 19, he committed suicide, so then it was just—or right before he died, a couple years before he died, my mother had another boy, so he really never knew him. The household shifted a lot. By then I think I had moved out and gotten married. It started to change as we got older. Different ones got married and moved out.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. How did your brother's suicide impact you?

Jacquelyn Holland: It impacted me emotionally very deeply. I was one of the older ones and he was—I was very close to him, so he was like my son. He was like my son. We went everywhere together. Out of all my sisters, he talked to me the most. When he died, actually we thought he just didn't wake up and it was 10 years later when I found out he committed suicide. My mother initially didn't tell us.

She told us that he just didn't wake up. She didn't tell us when he died. He was 19, so I had to be 20—he was nine years younger than I was. It was my little brother who was like my son, so that was a really hard blow when he died.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, 'cause it's not just your sibling, it's someone that you raised and took care of and had to be responsible for as one of the older siblings.

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly, yeah.

Esperanza Santos: It's different having a relationship with a sibling two years older versus nine years older because at that point, you're like the third parent to this child.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right.

Esperanza Santos: If you don't wanna get into it, that's okay, but what happened 10 years later that made your parents wanna tell you more details?

Jacquelyn Holland: My sister, the oldest sister worked for a lawyer. Somehow, she was able to find the other records of the autopsy and saw the cause of death, so my mother admitted it after she was confronted, but she never really—she didn't tell us initially.

Esperanza Santos: Not that there has to be a reason to die by suicide, but do you know what was his motivation?

Jacquelyn Holland: He was depressed. His favorite aunt died a few years before. He was really close to her. He was very close to her. He spent a lotta time in her house, and she got really sick. After she died, he was never able to really come back to himself. He was just so depressed.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Is mental health a challenge in your family?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes. I also deal with depression as well and a number of people in my family that are undiagnosed. They don't deal with it, but they also deal with mental illness. *[08:10]*.

Esperanza Santos: I know. That's welcome to my family *[laughter]*.

Jacquelyn Holland: I just happened to go and get help and all of that stuff.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. You just happened to break through that stigma barrier, that stigma or access barrier that prevents a lotta people from getting there.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah, exactly.

Esperanza Santos: We talked about moving to New York City when you were about seven, eight, being in Manhattan, the change of your brother. Did you live in Manhattan when you were also in your adolescence?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes. I lived in Manhattan 'til I got married at 20. Then I got married and moved to Jersey City. After a while, after about four or five years, I moved back to Manhattan before I got separated from my husband. I'm raising my children on the lower eastside in Manhattan.

Esperanza Santos: What were your neighborhoods like growing up in Manhattan?

Jacquelyn Holland: It was actually multicultural. We were very close to Chinatown, so there were a lot of people that were Chinese, specifically Chinese. There were people who were from all over. We grew up in the projects, so it was low income housing, people from many races. I grew up being very comfortable with difference. My mother always taught us that we should be kind to people, that we weren't better than anybody else. Growing up, I had two aunts that were disabled.

One was in a wheelchair most of my life, and the other one was mentally disabled. She literally probably had the mentality of a child, five-year-old, even though she was an adult when I was young. I was desensitized to seeing people with a wheelchair, people who were blind, people who were mentally or academically slower than other people. I always had an affinity for people who were treated differently.

I always felt that was unfair, so I always tried to befriend people who were not necessarily in the popular crew even though I always had lots of friends. I was not bullied, necessarily, when I was younger. I always was able to be around a lotta people.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It sounds like you were able to get along for others, but you always held this value of keeping an eye and taking care of those who maybe didn't always belong.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. Exactly.

Esperanza Santos: In your adolescence, do you remember either—do you remember what high school you went to as a teenager?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. I went to Mabel Dean Bacon Vocational [12:06] Vocational High School. It was actually an all-girls school, nursing high school.

Esperanza Santos: Oh. Did you become a nurse? No?

Jacquelyn Holland: I didn't become a nurse because when I got into college, I realized that I really was not good at science. I couldn't grasp it, so I went more into the social sciences.

Esperanza Santos: Beautiful. Welcome *[laughter]*. As a teenager going to this high school or even in middle school, were there adults who shaped your adolescence, besides the people who raised you?

Jacquelyn Holland: Oh yeah. I grew up in church. We had to go to church all the time, so I had a godmother who was from church. A number of the people from church had a lot to do with my growing up. We were very Pentecostal, orthodox kind of church thing, so we had strict rules. We only hung around the people who were from the church pretty much. While I was a teenager, you were supposed to. I mean I hung out with other people, but we had, certainly, adults that influenced us.

They were all from the church, and my aunts were very involved in my life growing up. My father would always take us to see his sisters, so I grew up with cousins, aunts and uncles that had a lot to do with our raising.

Esperanza Santos: How do you think having these adults in the church and these aunts and uncles affected you?

Jacquelyn Holland: Some of the values that I learned, I learned from them. Some of them, I—the assistant pastor and his wife were very kind people. They were very close to my mother, so I learned how to love people unconditionally. I saw examples of positive relationships, positive examples of relationships outside of my home from the church 'cause my mother and father, their relationship was strained.

They argued all the time, which was confusing to me in terms of if that's how you love people, that didn't make sense to me, but I was able to see other examples of people who were loving, people who treated their wives really, really well, treated their children very well. That had an impact on me and shaping my world view.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It sounds like even though people talked about love one way and your parents acted another way, you still saw other examples in other people.

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. That was helpful.

Esperanza Santos: Just knowing this how one person can show love, but there's other things that I can do.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. What would you say are some of the challenges you faced in your childhood? When I say childhood, I mean under 18 years of age.

Jacquelyn Holland: Poverty, we really didn't have money. Abuse, it was a lot of fighting, a lot of abuse in the household.

Esperanza Santos: Who to who?

Jacquelyn Holland: My mother and father for a lot, so that was difficult, but they stayed together. They never separated. Never separated.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like it was just a dynamic in the household.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. You just got used to it, so church initially became that safe place to be even though I didn't agree with a lotta the stuff that they said. I stayed with it anyway.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It sounds like you were able to take the good parts and leave the parts you didn't agree with or put them somewhere else.

Jacquelyn Holland: I did, but I think it was like a schizophrenic way of being.

Esperanza Santos: Whoa, tell me more about that.

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, innately, I felt this pull to justice, equality and a loving God, a God that was fair, but in church, I learned about this punishing God, this God that didn't like certain things about certain people. Something about that just innately, I pushed up against. At the same time, it was all that I knew so I felt like I was supposed to embrace it. I did things on one side and tried to adhere to other things.

Growing up, as a teenager, we were taught in the church that it was wrong to be attracted to people, so we were taught that that was lust. In my mind, I felt that it was a natural thing. It's a natural human feeling to be attracted to someone. They encouraged us to get married very young, so a lot of the teenage women got married at 16 and 17, which I thought was ridiculous, but—

Esperanza Santos: You're like, "You're still a child. What are you doing *[laughter]*?"

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. It didn't make sense to me, but the pastor would even tell people that there were certain ways to have sex. I would have meetings with the women about sex, and I would tell them if it's with your husband, there's nothing wrong with that, so I was considered rebellious according to the pastor, and I didn't wanna have six children. He felt like you should have as many children as your husband wants. I was like, "I'm not having all those kids."

Esperanza Santos: You're like, "Listen here, until he has those babies, he does not get an option in this *[laughter]*."

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. I adhere to things on one hand, and I rebel on the other side. I felt called to ministry at a young age. I felt a real connection with God, and it was a very—it just felt like a schizophrenic way of being. This makes sense, but that doesn't make sense, or how

can that be okay if this is not okay? It was just crazy. Women could be evangelists, but they couldn't be pastors. My mother was a feminist in her own way because she also pushed for women to have rights even though she also fell into a wife is supposed to be a certain way.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. She was pushing the envelope in her way, but maybe not all the ways?

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. Exactly, so I felt that most of my life growing up. It's like double Dutch, in and out.

Esperanza Santos: Oh man. I don't know if people have played double Dutch before, but that's a lotta work to jump in and out of double Dutch.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah, it is. Growing up, I used to love double Dutch. I actually enjoyed that.

Esperanza Santos: I know we talked about, in your childhood, there was domestic violence, poverty and I would say almost hyper control by the church. How did you manage these challenges?

Jacquelyn Holland: I think what got me through was developing a real relationship with God that helped—it actually comforted me. I used to be really afraid of things. I was afraid of the dark, but my sisters would make fun of me. I was afraid of getting hit. I didn't like the violence, so I used to pray a lot. I used to pray, when I fell asleep, that I would wake up in the morning. That helped me have a foundation to believe in something that was outside of myself that could help me.

I think it helped me get through and having friends. My sisters and I, even though there were five of us, we all had different friends. We didn't necessarily—when we were young, my mother made us go with my older sister, which she hated, but as we got older, we went our separate ways and we had our own friends as teenagers. I think that also helped me survive and, I think, set the foundation for, as an adult, having the courage to do my own thing. I also read. I loved to read, so that also helped me survive. I would escape into books.

Esperanza Santos: What was it about reading and praying and having friends that helped you get through it?

Jacquelyn Holland: It would take me to a different world. I can go somewhere in a book. I can be with my friends and have fun, and a lot of my friends, growing up, they also lived in the projects. Some of them, most of them really didn't have money as well, so we would commiserate together. We would do things like have picnics. We'd go to Coney Island, pool our little money that we had and do things like that. As I got away from my friends in the projects and hung out more with the ones in the church as I got a little older, we would bowl. We would go to movies. My house was the place where a lot of my friends would come from church. We'd have meals together. It was like we created a reality within a reality.

Esperanza Santos: Yes.

Jacquelyn Holland: It was amazing that we always had lots of food for everybody even though we didn't have that much money. Everybody ate. Nobody else really brought anything. I didn't even—I learned about potlucks when I got older. I didn't even know that term until I think I got to college. What was that? We just had what we had, and everybody got something.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. No one leaves hungry and you do what you can when you can.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right.

Esperanza Santos: I know that we talked about the role religion played in your life. It sounds like it was a similar escape and it helped you build a stronger relationship with God and with different models of adults having loving relationships. Is there a role religion played in your life that we haven't talked about yet?

Jacquelyn Holland: When I got older, I was able to be introduced to a different theology, and that theology helped shape my identity.

Esperanza Santos: I'm not too familiar with all of Christian's theology. Was there a specific theology or a specific teaching that opened your eyes?

Jacquelyn Holland: When I was introduced to Unity Fellowship Church movement, the belief in God was based on this idea of the love ethic. It's the idea that God's love is for everyone. In the Pentecostal church, growing up, the contrast to that was in the Pentecostal church, I was taught

that God did not accept people who were gay. If you were gay, same sex gender loving, you were going to hell, period. You're an abomination.

That's against God. Once I was introduced to Unity, Unity's theology says that God accepts you just the way that you are, so our motto was God is love and love is for everyone. When I started to church, the motto was God loves you just the way that you are, and we would have an affirmation. That helped shape my identity around—I knew that I was a lesbian before I was introduced to Unity, but I did not know it was okay with God until I got to Unity. That helped me develop this whole belief and that God accepts me. I am love, and I should inspire other people to love themselves.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, check that out.

Jacquelyn Holland: It was a huge revelation.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like where your faith and your attraction can exist in one place.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. That really helped everything come together in my life. When I was young and I was called to ministry, I became an adult and I came out as a lesbian, and decided I was not gonna be in ministry because I wasn't gonna lie. I wasn't gonna hide, and all the people I knew were hiding. It was Unity that helped me come out, spiritually come out as a person who would say, "Okay God, now I'm willing to be clergy because I know that it's okay with You." I became a reverend, then an elder and now I'm a bishop, which is one of the top leaders in the denomination.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. That's a big deal, isn't it?

Jacquelyn Holland: It is. I was the first woman bishop that was ordained in the denomination 10 years ago.

Esperanza Santos: Congratulations. That's such a big deal. Congratulations.

Jacquelyn Holland: Thank you. Yeah, so that's what I do now.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. We can take this interview one of two directions now. We can go more in the direction of talking about your LGBTQ identity 'cause I feel like that's where the direction is flowing, or we can

talk about Newark and your relationship to Newark. How would you like to go forward?

Jacquelyn Holland: Oh, it's up to you. It doesn't matter.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. I feel like it makes sense to talk about the LGBTQ identity next.

Jacquelyn Holland: Okay.

Esperanza Santos: How would you describe your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Jacquelyn Holland: I did apply as a lesbian of masculine center. Back in my day, I would say butch. They don't say butch that much anymore.

[Laughter]

Jacquelyn Holland: That's how I identify.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. You're with the times if you're saying masculine-of-center.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes. That's a term I learned. I was so proud of myself. I was okay.

Esperanza Santos: Hey, get it. Okay, Jacquelyn.

Jacquelyn Holland: OG! [30:12] *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: Okay Jacquelyn, come through. How did you first become aware of this aspect of yourself?

Jacquelyn Holland: I knew that I liked women, but I felt it was wrong. I pushed it, pushed it back. Then I was going to the Baptist church when I was about 26. I had two sons—'cause I wanted to make sure that they stayed in church, took them to Sunday School. This student reverend came to the church. She was probably 28, and she was an out lesbian.

Esperanza Santos: Uh-oh.

Jacquelyn Holland: She was the first person that I had ever met that was a clergy person and was out. I said to her, "How can you do that? How can you be okay with being gay and being a reverend?" We became

really close friends and we had this argument one day where she said, "When you can deal with your own latent homosexuality, then talk to me." Of course, I was insulted and at what she was talking about. I was like, "What are you trying to say?"

Esperanza Santos: Like, "Excuse me *[laughter]*."

Jacquelyn Holland: We had become like best friends. We were actually soulmates. I felt like we were soulmates. We answered each other's—finished each other's sentences. It was the strangest thing. I had never met anybody like her before. I knew that once I had put my husband out, I just had a lotta sex with a lotta men. Sex wasn't a big deal to me. It felt very natural, like, "Oh, that's fine." I had said to myself I know I like her, but if I can be attracted to her sexually, there might be something to this lesbian thing, right.

I seduced her one day. Short of a long story, I seduced her one day, and it was revelatory. It was like, "Oh, this is what I was missing. This is so different." There was an emotional connection, a physical connection. I was like, "Okay. Yeah. This is really who I am."

Esperanza Santos: It's not just an obligation. You're like, "Wow, I haven't experienced this kind of attraction, physical, emotional, sensual, all the above." You're like, "This is what it's supposed to be?"

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. That's when I actually came out. That was my experience.

Esperanza Santos: What was the first age when you shoved it down to the point where you came out? What were the ages for that?

Jacquelyn Holland: I was probably—if I came out when I was 26, maybe 22. No, it had to be older than that because I got married when I was 20. I was married for seven years, so I was 27 when I put him out. I came out at 28. I was 28. Yeah, it was a year later, a year or two later.

Esperanza Santos: Wow, that must have been pretty bold.

Jacquelyn Holland: I was so old actually.

Esperanza Santos: No, I said bold.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah, I guess. It was difficult. The hardest thing was the church piece. I still felt hurt in my head that it was wrong. That was the hardest, dealing with the stuff that was in my head.

Esperanza Santos: How did you deal with the stuff that was in your head?

Jacquelyn Holland: I think the church made a difference, getting a new theology just really focusing on that and studying and staying around people who were saying the same thing. I was able to raise my children in Unity, so that's where I kept hearing that God is love and love is for everyone. They were around other children that had two moms, two dads, so it just gave me an environment to raise them in that was accepting.

When they were really little, they used to ask me what does it mean to be gay? I would explain to them it's about people loving someone of the same gender. There's nothing wrong with that. It's who you are. I never had people around my children that were hateful, that were homophobic. They saw that even my heterosexual friends were gay.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, that's so cool.

Jacquelyn Holland: They thought everybody was gay.

Esperanza Santos: That was their normal.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah, it was. It was like, "Okay." Their aunts and uncles, that's just who they are.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It sounds like before the—I think you called her the young gay pastor. Did you know about the existence of LGBTQ people before her?

Jacquelyn Holland: Not really. There was nobody really in my—I had met this guy who I thought was gay. He never talked about it. He never talked about it. My ex-husband's sister, she was gay. My baby sister was also gay. I had met a few people, but I didn't really have a community until I came to the church. That's what really introduced me to the community and then I expanded and started meeting people—hanging out in The Village and stuff like that.

Esperanza Santos: How did you hear about The Village and how did you find—what did you learn and discover, figure out?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, just from talking to people. The church itself was located at the community center when they started, the Lesbian and Gay Community Center, so from there, I was able to find out more about where the community hung out, places that were gay friendly. It was much more dangerous to be just anywhere with your girlfriend, with your boyfriend. You had to be more careful around where you frequented and was just out at that time.

Of course, New York City, The Village was the spot. That's where a lot of the establishments were. That's where the clubs were. That's where the parade wound up. I used to march in the parade every year. I went to rallies to—the church, a lotta people in the church were activists, so I found out a lot from them.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like they gave you not just the affirmation and the spiritual connection to God, but the connection to justice and social issues too.

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. We are a movement that is a social justice movement, so we were very involved in some of the issues that affected our community. It was in college I—I went back to college after—once I got married, I had gone to college straight from high school, and then I stopped when I got married. I went back to college after separating from my ex-husband. In college, I met a—I majored in women's studies as well. I had a double major, English and women's studies.

Esperanza Santos: How beautiful is that? What year was this?

Jacquelyn Holland: I finished college in—I don't remember what year it was, maybe '92, '93.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Jacquelyn Holland: I must have graduated—it took me forever. I had two children, but—

Esperanza Santos: Hey, but you know what? You did it.

Jacquelyn Holland: I was blessed to be introduced to a returning women's club. We developed this family. It was women who came back to school after being out for years and we did a lotta trips together. I was able to travel. The head of the women's studies department was one of the out lesbians on campus as well, so she made sure that she added things. We had a course that was taught by Jewelle Gomez [41:00], which is a black lesbian writer. It was lesbian writers, black lesbian writers.

She would add these different courses and through the club, we would go to women's conferences, women's retreats. Everything was paid for through this particular club. I was able to be introduced to all these things that helped enhance my experience around who I was. I learned more. I was able to be around some people who liked me. My mentor was a black lesbian as well, and she came back to school when she was older. It was through college, I was able to also gain a lot, help shape my identity.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It seems like it's not just you and the world you experience, but you getting able to be exposed to—it's like the next level from being to a multicultural neighborhood to belonging to a really welcoming, inclusive and a space that really advocates for you in college.

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. Yeah.

Esperanza Santos: What college was this at again?

Jacquelyn Holland: I went to Hunter College.

Esperanza Santos: Hunter College. Awesome. Was that the same college that you dropped out of and then went back to?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes. I dropped out and went back and in the 2000s, I went to graduate school. While I was a pastor, I went to Drew University, so I also met some great people there who supported the ministry. I was able to bring certain students in to get some experience around working with our community from graduate school, from the theology school that I went to, met some great couple of people who were out. Then there were people who were just very supportive, who were heterosexual, who mentored me and helped me get through graduate school, which was very difficult *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: I mean it's not easy.

Jacquelyn Holland: It wasn't easy. Being a pastor and I had some really traumatic things that happened while I was at graduate school that the professors were still so very supportive, very supportive. One of my members had a heart attack. She had a heart attack and died, and I had to go with—she was an adult. I think she was in her 40s. She might have been in her 40s, and all her family knew was she used to be on drugs and when she found the church, she turned her whole life around.

That's all she talked about was the church. She became a deacon in the church, so when she died, her family was clear that what she would've wanted was for the church to do her funeral. I had to go pick out a casket, had to do the eulogy. I remember having to come to school for a test, and I had just been to the funeral home. I looked at the paper and I said, "I just don't know. I just don't know anything on the paper." My professor talked to me afterwards and said, "The work that you do is so difficult and so important, and I completely understand."

She actually passed me. She had me answer some question, I don't know what it was, but I didn't have to do that entire test. I just mentally didn't have the capacity for it because there was just so much going on. Her death was already traumatizing because it was unexpected. She just had a heart attack and just died. She wasn't sick, and then having to do everything and having to comfort everybody else, it was very heavy. My niece was killed at 31 by her husband a few years later.

That was when I was in graduate school as well. They were very understanding around going through that and trying to do your work at the same time. I graduated. I actually graduated in 2012.

Esperanza Santos: Congratulations.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. It was a long journey *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: Hey, but you know what? The only way out is through and it sounds like you got through.

Jacquelyn Holland: Mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: There was a moment when you were, I think you said 27, 28, when you came out. When you came out, is that how people became aware of your lesbian identity or had people been suspecting or maybe it was just through the grapevine?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. No. They didn't suspect at all. I think because I had children, people just did not put it together, and I was very private. I was with women that were very fem identified, fem looking, and I wasn't necessarily—I was out in my community, and my family knew, but we didn't really talk about it.

Esperanza Santos: Wait, your family—

Jacquelyn Holland: *[47:40]* They had no idea in advance.

Esperanza Santos: Your family knew, but you didn't talk about it?

Jacquelyn Holland: Hm-mm. We didn't talk about it 'cause my mother totally disapproved. My mother disapproved and my sister, who was gay, was very quiet about being gay. She wasn't necessarily in the closet. We all knew. She used to tell me that I was just too out. I was an activist. I was involved in things and she just was like—I just made too much noise for her. They knew I was. They knew where I stood, but they just accepted me and didn't support really anything that I was doing.

They did come to my retirement. When I retired as pastor, my family did—my mother even came. That was huge. My mother even showed up. When I was consecrated a bishop, they actually all showed up. My entire family showed up for—even my nieces and nephews, but for the most part, it was like, "That's just how she is *[laughter]*."

Esperanza Santos: That's her thing *[laughter]*.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. My sister, my oldest sister was extremely supportive. She was the one who I could talk to. She was proud. She just believed that everybody should be accepted by God. She's still really supportive, my older sister, the one who's not gay.

Esperanza Santos: She wasn't gay or trans, but she still really had your back and supported you.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. She would even come to the church sometimes.

Esperanza Santos: Earlier, you said that it was special that your mom and family came when you were consecrated as a bishop and when went to your retirement party. Did your family or mom not go to other events that you had or other important church events for you?

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. No, they didn't come.

Esperanza Santos: Did they say why? They were just like, "Oh, she's a lesbian. We don't support her like that."

Jacquelyn Holland: That's what I believe. My mother just didn't agree. She loved me, but she didn't agree with the fact that I was gay. She thought I was going to go to hell, so she wasn't supporting that.

Esperanza Santos: Outside of church events, did you all still talk or did she just cut you off?

Jacquelyn Holland: Oh yeah, no. I went to a lot of the family reunions. I visited a lot. I was pretty close. I actually took care of my nieces and nephews. They were with me all the time. I took them to church. Even when I became a lesbian and started going to Unity, my nieces and nephews used to go to church with me as well, so they were fine with that. We were a close family. They just didn't show up. They let the kids come.

Esperanza Santos: But they didn't show up?

Jacquelyn Holland: No, they didn't show.

Esperanza Santos: We talked a little bit about how your religious identity affected your LGBTQ identity in terms of getting to know a new theology, and being exposed to a new community, and having an out younger pastor be pretty direct, is there any way or how do you think your racial identity also affected your LGBTQ identity?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, I'm very connected to being African American and my history and who I am. I saw the difference between the LGBTQ people of color community and the white community. Though, in college, of course, I spent a lotta times with white lesbians. There was this—I could see the difference in the community and our issues were different. A lot of stuff that we dealt with had to do

with survival and being accepted. We can go into places and we would be carded [00:52:35] and the white people would not. I saw the disparity between the two communities. We didn't go through the same things.

Esperanza Santos: What would you say they went through that was different from what you went through? I knew you mentioned being carded and struggling to survive. Is there anything that calls out to you? What would they say their struggles were?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, I would say that, first of all, in America, there was white privilege, right, so people would be able to—they wouldn't get the same prejudice. They wouldn't be treated the same way. Even in restaurants, white people were treated differently, served differently in certain places, looked at differently. They would not be followed in the store as some of us were, wasn't under the same kind of suspicions as people of color.

Esperanza Santos: They weren't suspect the way that black people were.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. You can actually see it and feel the difference, just—yeah.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Absolutely.

Jacquelyn Holland: I know there was this controversy around a lot of black women, black lesbians had sons, and there was this thing about having these women's festivals and retreats, that they didn't want male children to attend, which we thought was very weird, like, "They're our kids," but women wanted these—white women wanted these all women spaces. Sometimes it just didn't even make sense because we had children. We had male children.

Esperanza Santos: When was this?

Jacquelyn Holland: I remember that, years ago, conversations around that. In the 90s, early on.

Esperanza Santos: Do you remember what festival or circles this was in?

Jacquelyn Holland: It was those music festival circles. Back then, they had a lot of those lesbian music festivals. We actually did one for people of color one year.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah, which was very different.

Esperanza Santos: When you said, "I have black sons. I'm gonna bring them anyways. What are you gonna do about it?" Not that you said that, I'm just imagining. If I had sons and I wanted them to bring—and I wanted to bring them to the festival, I'd be pretty furious that I couldn't.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. No. I wouldn't wanna take my children anywhere that they weren't welcome 'cause they're kids, so they're gonna feel it differently from me. Me, I could ignore you, but you don't want children to feel like—they won't get it, like, "What's wrong with me?" [00:56:09]

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It's like, "No baby, nothing's wrong with you. It's these people."

Jacquelyn Holland: Right.

Esperanza Santos: How has being a lesbian made your life different from the way it would be if you did not have this identity?

Jacquelyn Holland: We always carry this feeling of oddness, like there's something—because I grew up in the church, there's always that feeling in the back of your mind that was like there was something wrong with you, so you always had to deal with reminding yourself that there's nothing wrong with you. You're different. You're odd. You're not the way that society feels like you should be showing up that way. Being a masculine center, so I wear men's clothes. I remember, in my late 20s, I finally got the courage to start wearing men's clothes.

I'd always liked men's clothes, but I wouldn't wear them because I felt like that was wrong, so being able to wear men's clothes, even—I've been wearing men's clothes for so many years and buying men's clothes for so many years, but even today, sometimes I still feel that angst around when I go into the store, am I gonna be treated differently because I'm trying on men's suit? We had this fashion show, this butch fashion show, where we had all masculine identified models about two years ago.

We went to K&G [clothing store 58:13] and there was this black man there, this older black man, who was so sweet and so supportive. He treated us like he didn't even care that we were women. I sent people to him, like, "Go talk to Mr. James." He measured me. He explained to me the kind of suit that I should wear. It was just an experience that I don't normally get when I go in a men's store. I haven't experienced a lot of rudeness, but I have experienced people ignoring me *[laughter]*. You can tell they're uncomfortable, like, "Okay."

Esperanza Santos: Right. What are you doing *[laughter]*?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. This is not for her husband or her brother. This is for her. She's actually trying this stuff on 'cause at first, when you ask for something, they don't know who it's for, but then when you start trying stuff on, then you have to take the stuff in the women's—always take it to the women's dressing room. I don't go into the men's dressing room. I just wear men's clothes, but I don't think people necessarily think I look like a man. It's different. I always carry that difference, that feeling of I'm different.

Esperanza Santos: As a lesbian, it feels different, but at the same time, it's what feels like you. It's what feels authentic.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. Absolutely. I'm only attracted to women. I mean I know it's who I am.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Earlier, we were talking about how before you identified as butch and now you identify more as masculine-of-center, what changed between what you called yourself before than what you're calling yourself now?

Jacquelyn Holland: Just new language basically. I mean I learned new language. I don't think I've changed. I think just the language has changed because butch seems so archaic. People look at you like, "Oh yeah, you're old."

Esperanza Santos: Oh no *[laughter]*.

Jacquelyn Holland: You're an old lady. You don't look old, but you are old. If you're saying butch, yeah, that's a giveaway. Yeah, in the south, a lot of the time they say stud, which I don't like. I don't like stud.

Esperanza Santos: What about the word stud is not something you like?

Jacquelyn Holland: Stud, in my mind, and I'm a words person, so stud, in my mind, conjures up this image of this dude that just takes advantage of women. It's all about sex, and a dude that uses women for sex physically. You're a stud. That's your identity. It's like the bull that's used to breed *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Jacquelyn Holland: Lord, no, that's not who I am. That's harsh.

Esperanza Santos: How did you first learn about the word butch and the word masculine-of-center?

Jacquelyn Holland: When I came out, I used to read a lot, and that's how I learned the different terms; butch, fem and what it meant 'cause I needed to figure out where I'd landed, so most of the things I'd learned was from reading. Masculine-of-center, I learned from a friend of mine who is definitely masculine identified. She's a professor. A lotta times, when she's in public, people will call her sir. I was talking to her about my talent in the south of people saying that—so the House of Bishops, there are two men and me now.

They said that there was no women in the House of Bishops. I was insulted by that because I'm masculine identified; they're trying to say I'm not a woman. She talked about being masculine-of-center instead of masculine identified, that it may be a better way of explaining to people. They still don't get it, but it helped me in my brain. I'd like the term better. I got it from her.

Esperanza Santos: Who is this friend again?

Jacquelyn Holland: A good friend of mine. She's an elder and a pastor in our denomination.

Esperanza Santos: Would you like to say her name or if not, that's okay too.

Jacquelyn Holland: Her name is Dorothy, Dorothy Parish-Harris [01:03:53].

Esperanza Santos: Dorothy Parish-Harris. When you were younger and looking over at the books about different identities and labels and names, was there a book that stands out to you as being pretty informative?

Jacquelyn Holland: Probably Audre Lorde's, I've read a lotta Audrey Lorde's stuff. *Zami,* I think it is: *A New Spelling of My Name,* is one of the books that I read that was really helpful.

Esperanza Santos: What drew you to—I mean Audre Lorde is like—she's so special. What was it about Audre Lorde that you learned so much or that drew you to her?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, my mentor was friends with Audre Lorde, so I met Audre Lorde at Hunter College. I was able to hear her work from her, and her life inspired me as being an out, black lesbian. I know some of her works, some of the publishers wouldn't print, so just her struggles and her dealing with cancer, really her courage inspired me.

Esperanza Santos: Wow, that's pretty special. What do you like best about being LGBTQ?

Jacquelyn Holland: I love women, and I like the fact that I can live authentically and be different. I wouldn't say it's easy 'cause I don't think it is. I think that as much as we have rights now, it's more common and accepted, there's still a huge part of society that pushes against who we are. As we rise up, the orthodox left continues to rise up as well. You feel that. You feel it. You see it.

Even though I'm in an open and affirming denomination and there are more open and affirming churches that are opening, there's still so many religious people that are spewing hate. People are still getting killed, so you live with that. You live with that concern. Even for your life, you have to be I'm not in the closet, I'm still out. I'm conscious of being who I am and living my life. I enjoy the fact that I'm able to be who I am, as well as I still have concerns about it.

Esperanza Santos: Absolutely. You talked a little bit about this, but what do you find most challenging about being a masculine-of-center lesbian?

Jacquelyn Holland: The thing that I find most challenging is that people in the south do not get that you're actually a woman. If you say that you're trans, a trans brother, they can get that, but they don't quite understand how you feel like you're still a woman and you love being a woman, but you're masculine-of-center. That's very challenging.

It's very challenging because growing up, I did have that issue. I didn't have that issue in the north. I have it here in the south. I find that their women—I have a friend, for example, who wears men's clothes, but does not identify as butch.

She just wears men's clothes. She gets her toes painted. She sometimes wears women's blouses. She just likes—I'm not sure why she wears men's clothes, but she definitely says she does not identify as butch at all. It confuses people because she likes feminine women *[laughter]*, so they definitely don't get it.

Esperanza Santos: *[Laughter]* It's like she's almost too odd and too queer to really fit.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. They don't get it, but she's fine. She's in her 60s, and she feels like she's been this way most of her life. She sits in the south because there are a number of people who are here, who are like her. *[laughter]* I don't get where they land actually, and they're not able to articulate that they identify one way or the other, and they're not fluid [01:09:48], which I also get where you're fluid, you can go from one spectrum to the other. If you're not fluid, they just like men's clothes.

Esperanza Santos: As you express yourself and come out and discover what's authentic and what's not, where have you found the most community or support from people?

Jacquelyn Holland: In my denomination, that's where I found the most support, Unity Fellowship Church Movement.

Esperanza Santos: What was different about this from other churches or other spaces that you belong to?

Jacquelyn Holland: One of the differences is I feel that our theology resonates with me. A number of the spaces that I've been in, that are open and affirming, they say that it's fine to be gay, that God accepts you as gay, but they still preach the theology of hell and damnation and sin. They're saying the same stuff that the churches they come from say, except it's okay to be gay, so it doesn't feel as welcoming because again, I feel like the odd one out. We are considered—my denomination is considered radical even in the affirming churches.

Esperanza Santos: What's different or radical about your church?

Jacquelyn Holland: The belief that God is a God of love, that God is not a punishing God. One of the things the other churches believe that God does things to harm you in order to teach you a lesson. That goes against what we believe. It's one of the basic traditional images of God. God is a punishing God. God is a sadistic God. Though God loves you, you have to be a certain way in order for God to accept you, and God will do things to you to teach you a lesson. We don't believe that. We believe that things happen, that you can learn a lesson, but everything is not God doing it to teach you a lesson.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. It's not about the brimstone. It's about the love.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. That's a major difference. It's a major difference.

Esperanza Santos: For us just switching our gears, is it cool if we talk about you in Newark?

Jacquelyn Holland: Uh-huh.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. What is your earliest memory of Newark?

Jacquelyn Holland: My earliest memory of Newark—do you mean the year, or do you mean what happened?

Esperanza Santos: Normally, the way I pitch it is the first time you arrived at Newark or that you remember arriving at Newark, something that stood out to you. It doesn't have to be momentous. It can just be something like, "Oh, the trees are nice," or, "The architecture reminds me of this."

Jacquelyn Holland: Oh okay. One of the things that really stands out for me—when I came from the New York church, right, I was the assistant pastor, and my task was to start a church somewhere. I decided Newark, which wouldn't be that far from New York, so I wouldn't have to uproot my children right away. The thing that stood out for me when I looked into where we could worship, the organization that I connected with said that the cathedral, Trinity & St. Philip's, which has always had a black rector, African American or African rector, they said that the cathedral would not rent to us.

The moment I went into the cathedral, I knew that's where we were supposed to be. What stood out for me was I met the rector or

the pastor, and he immediately connected with me. I was very excited. It was like he was a brother that I knew years ago. We had this innate connection. He talked about how excited he would be to have us worship with them. That's one of my earliest memories of coming to Newark. When Newark came to me—when the pastor of the New York church asked me where I wanted to start a ministry, I had no idea.

I went home, and I woke up and Newark dropped in my brain. I hadn't even been to Newark before in my life. It was just something that came to me. I felt like that's where I was supposed to be.

Esperanza Santos: There was this intuition and almost a connection to God of kind of like, "This is where you go next."

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. That's how it felt.

Esperanza Santos: Do you recall the first time you met that rector? Do you remember what year that was?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. It was in '95.

Esperanza Santos: Since that moment in '95, roughly 25 years ago, for you, how has Newark changed since then?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, downtown Newark has changed greatly. I mean they have built up the place. It looks different. I've been there a few times over the years, and it looks different, and it seems like the environment is different. I don't know. It's just more modern. It feels like a lot of the focus that used to be on HIV and AIDS has shifted a lot for sure. Some of the agencies that were around then don't exist anymore. A few of them continue to exist, but it feels like there's a lotta gentrification going on.

Esperanza Santos: What organizations existed then that may or may not exist now? Then I'll ask you about gentrification in a second.

Jacquelyn Holland: I can't remember. We started this information—it was a Newark coalition, a coalition of different organizations. I can't remember the name of it, but a couple of those don't exist anymore. Sorry, I can't remember *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: No, it's okay. It's okay. For some people, they would say, "Oh, Newark, it's just getting better," but there's something unique and impactful that the word gentrification carries with it. What about what's changing in Newark made you label it as gentrification?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, so one of the things—they have Whole Foods [01:18:52], I believe, that's downtown Newark, for example, right. Whole Foods is great in the sense of a lot of the stuff is fresh, but it's also expensive. Some of the places that exist there is prohibited for some of the people in the community, so they're building up Newark and bringing in people that have more money. It pushes out a lot of the people that don't, which is what happens a lotta times with gentrification. It shifts the face of the community, so Newark looks more—I think it's more expensive to live than it used to be.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Earlier, something you said was the HIV focus shifted, and that's something that I haven't heard of before or it's something that I don't think most people are aware of. When you say the focus of HIV has shifted, can you tell me more about what that means to you?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, I think that in the 90s, in the late 90s, early 2000s, there was a lot of conversation about HIV and AIDS, getting tested, the importance of. There was information about people being infected, the rate of the epidemic, what was going on, the communities that were really affected, even in the media, right, there were a lot of prompts and pictures or public displays around reminding people about getting tested and what was going on and even people living with the virus and people who had passed from complications of AIDS.

You saw it more. You heard more. Agencies were getting money and really, that was their focus. Now it seems to have shifted that you don't hear as much about it. You don't see as much about it. There's not as many conversations around the actual disease.

Esperanza Santos: It's like it's yesterday's news or something.

Jacquelyn Holland: I think so. I think it feels like the idea is wanting people to think that the disease has been eradicated. I'm not sure why, but there's just not as much focus and people have been living longer.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, like it's not—having HIV today wasn't the death sentence it was in '95.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. Exactly.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. When you began your ministry around '95, did you live in the city?

Jacquelyn Holland: I did. I lived in New York. I moved to New Jersey a few years after I stopped [01:22:57] the ministry.

Esperanza Santos: Where in Newark did you live?

Jacquelyn Holland: I actually lived—when I first moved to New Jersey, I actually moved to Hillside. It's right next to Newark. I lived there, and then I moved to Newark—I lived on New Street, which was near Broad Street.

Esperanza Santos: In the downtown area?

Jacquelyn Holland: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Esperanza Santos: What, if anything, do you find appealing about Newark or what was special about Newark that called you here?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, the thing that called me there was it wasn't too far. It was easy to get to from New York. I mean I could take the PATH train and be in Newark. That was one of the things that drew me there. It was very easy to get to. Everything was accessible. I didn't really drive. I don't drive, so living in Newark, I was able to get everywhere by the Light Rail, the PATH train. Buses were easy. Even though it wasn't urban like New York City, Newark felt like it was part southern and part northern.

The mentality of the people—it just felt more country *[laughter]* than New York City, but was still very, very urban. Things are easily accessible. That's what I liked about it. It was easy to get places. I spent a lotta time visiting people in the 90s in the hospital. I was there when people made transition as a pastor. Yeah. It was easy to get everywhere.

Esperanza Santos: Is it okay if we touch a little bit more about your connection to people and to being in the hospitals?

Jacquelyn Holland: Mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: Why were you visiting people in the hospitals?

Jacquelyn Holland: I had members, I don't know, that were infected, and a couple of them had got very sick and eventually died from complication of the AIDS. I used to visit people when they got sick. Sometimes, people were afraid back then to be around people who were infected and particularly when they got really sick because they still were believing them myths of how the disease is contracted, so they would feel like if they around somebody, they can catch it.

They can be infected *[laughter]*. I knew that that wasn't true, so I would spend time going to see people who were particularly sick. I had a couple people who were dealing with cancer, who got very sick from that as well and eventually died.

Esperanza Santos: How did you learn about these individuals? Were they people who came to the church and became part of the fellowship, or did the hospital contact you? How did you connect to the community?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. They were people who were members of the church.

Esperanza Santos: How would you describe the kind of person that was attracted to your particular theology?

Jacquelyn Holland: They were mostly gay, mostly gay, mostly women who went to the church. Actually, we were known as the women's church. Even though we did not exclude men, women were drawn to the ministry.

Esperanza Santos: I'm attributing that, in part, to your leadership and your ability to speak to that experience.

Jacquelyn Holland: I think so. I think that was part of it, yeah. Even though in the black church, a lotta times it's predominantly women anyway *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, that's true *[laughter]*. For how long were you a pastor at this church?

Jacquelyn Holland: Ten years.

Esperanza Santos: Ten years, so from ’95 until 2005?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: How would you say the church evolved or progressed in those 10 years?

Jacquelyn Holland: It evolved in ways—we developed a community-based organization. We had a really big choir. It grew and then it got smaller towards the end, so we had to leave from the cathedral to have service in our office because the church got smaller.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. What did it mean to you to be able to start this church?

Jacquelyn Holland: I thought that it was—I was very excited about it. I felt like being the pastor was the thing that I was supposed to do in life, and I was really committed to creating a safe space for people who were same sex gender loving [01:29:52], letting people know that God loved them just the way that they are. Even at the time, it was different for some people that I was a woman. They had more of a pause [01:30:07] around that in Newark than they did around me being a lesbian.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, interesting.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. I thought that was interesting.

Esperanza Santos: Do you have an idea as to why that is?

Jacquelyn Holland: Because traditionally, the feeling was men were supposed to be in leadership, not women, in the church. The church is very patriarchal.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Some churches are very that way. I know that to some people, the picture of AIDS is a gay man dying in the hospital, but it sounds like, based on your constituents, your base being lesbian women and you going to hospital for cancer and AIDS related infections, not infections, but diagnoses, were there a lot of women in your church diagnosed with HIV also?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes. There were a few. There were a few, and we also had men as well, but one of my deacons actually died from complication of

AIDS. Yeah. Early on, as a pastor, I went through sitting with her around how she wanted her funeral to be, what she wanted to wear, the service and all of that. We had one, two—it was about three or four of them actually, that were women, that I can remember.

Esperanza Santos: That were deacons or that were a part of the church?

Jacquelyn Holland: That were part of the church. Two of them were deacons.

Esperanza Santos: I'm not too familiar with how it was like in Newark in '95 or in New York City in '95. How was it like to live through this where you're seeing some people drop off almost like flies?

Jacquelyn Holland: It was rough. I hated funerals. I was at so many funerals and my brother actually died—I think he died in '95 as well, so it was reliving his funeral all over again every time. It was hard. It was really hard. It never got easier. We just did it. Sometimes we would have three funerals in the week. It was a lot.

Esperanza Santos: That sounds exhausting.

Jacquelyn Holland: It really was. We were burying people every week. We were the church that was willing to do it, so one of the big stories, while I was still pastor, was Sakia Gunn, who was the young lesbian that was killed by this man who made advances to her. She was out with a few of her friends and she was masculine identified. This guy approached her, her and her friends, and she said that she wasn't interested in him, that that was her girlfriend.

Then he stabbed her. I remember we had meetings where we supported the young women that were her friends, the people that were with her. We had rallies. It was a lot and one of the churches would not allow the funeral to be held at their church because she was a lesbian. That was one of the big things that happened, Sakia Gunn, that we dealt with when I was in Newark.

Esperanza Santos: Wow. Just to offer her family and her body a place to rest and to be honored—I mean it's not hard to believe. It's just, from my perspective, you can't honor a 15-year-old girl because she's a lesbian in your church. I would have been so—that sounds very frustrating and very—I would have been very angry.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. It was ridiculous. It was ridiculous.

Esperanza Santos: How did the family respond when you said, "Yes, you can have her funeral at my church"?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. They were excited. It was at a big funeral home. It was so many people it wasn't even—the church would not have accommodated her. Yeah.

Esperanza Santos: Just to move back, you said you were a part of a coalition around HIV and AIDS activism. Do you know how that coalition was formed or what some of its goals were?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. We pulled together organizations that were doing HIV prevention and care. We just contacted the organizations. We had grants that the state had given us to do drop-in centers where people could come in and take a shower and can be tested. That's how we pulled together because we were doing similar work. We would meet frequently. We had health fairs and different events that we did together. Did that for a few years. It was only organizations in Newark. I can't remember the name of it, but it was the Newark something.

Esperanza Santos: Sorry, I can't help you there. By founding this church and being connected to the organizations, what, if anything, did you find appealing about Newark?

Jacquelyn Holland: At the time, it felt it was a city of mostly people of color *[laughter]*, so it was very cultural. I felt centered from a cultural perspective.

Esperanza Santos: You're not jumping into a white town. You're jumping into a town full of people of color.

Jacquelyn Holland: Right. Exactly, so that felt comforting.

Esperanza Santos: Are there things about living in Newark that you found difficult or frustrating?

Jacquelyn Holland: Just the sexism, that was frustrating. I would go somewhere, to an event, a meeting, and I was a reverend, and sometimes they would call me sister and call all the men reverend. That would wear me out. It was like, "Really, it's ridiculous."

Esperanza Santos: Wait. They wouldn't call you reverend even though you were a reverend?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. I've had those moments where I had to correct people. Just the sexism—they expected men to be the leaders in the church, not women, so I was in a lotta those environments. I don't know what they call it now. It's capacity building, but it was specifically around consciousness raising. There's another name for it where we would talk about being accepting and tolerant, the difference—diversity training, yeah. They used to do that. We'll go in these spaces and talk about accepting people who were gay, people who were HIV positive and the problems around not treating people with respect.

Esperanza Santos: Who did these diversity trainings?

Jacquelyn Holland: I did it. I think I was given a grant by the state to do it. The health department, I believe it was, that they had given us money and I would go in and actually do these trainings.

Esperanza Santos: Was it mostly for audiences of faith in churches, or was it anywhere in the community?

Jacquelyn Holland: I think it was mostly churches that had gotten money to create these community-based organizations.

Esperanza Santos: How did people respond to your training?

Jacquelyn Holland: They seemed to respond where they were grateful for the information. They were enlightened. They seemed to walk away enlightened. At first, they were often defensive, but we would break down that whole religious thing that it wasn't really about religion. It was about treating people with respect, so find a common ground. [01:42:02]

Esperanza Santos: Like the principal was respect and from there, you all could get into the information.

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. Yeah. That broke down the barriers. They seemed to be receptive.

Esperanza Santos: How do you think this changed the people who received these trainings?

Jacquelyn Holland: Well, the hope is that they were able to see people differently, not see them as other, but see them as human beings just as they were. [That was] the goal. *[01:42:42]*. Some people, when I came in, sometimes I would do an ice breaker around assumptions, stereotypes, who am I? People wouldn't know that I was a lesbian, that I was a mother. Once they found out I was lesbian, that I had children, I was a reverend, talking about, first of all, some of the assumptions that we make when we see people and then the stereotypes and prejudice that goes alone with the assumptions that we made. That, I always found, was eye opening to people. They were always surprised, and they were enlightened from there.

Esperanza Santos: That was a good starting point to just be like, "Hey, what are you assuming and what's caught up in those assumptions?"

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. It really helped get through the rest of the session.

Esperanza Santos: Just switching gears a little bit, what's your perspective on Newark's connection or relationship to other nearby cities or suburbs or places?

Jacquelyn Holland: My perception has always been that Newark stands out, that Newark is different from the connecting places. Newark is the city. Newark is the hub that people come to where it's supposed to be more tolerant. It's supposed to be more open because it is a city and it's so colorful in terms of the type of people that are there, more accepting, doing more things around, people are more out than some of the surrounding cities, suburbs rather.

Esperanza Santos: Wait, would you say that there was more out LGBT people in Newark than in neighboring suburbs?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: Why do you—

Jacquelyn Holland: That's what I would say. I would say that people felt safer to be out in Newark because it's a city, so there's the thing that people feel like in a more urban area. There are more people who are like you. There are more odd things that happen. You can dress any way. You can be whoever you are, rather than the smaller suburbs where people tend to be more closeted. They could lose their jobs

from being out. That could happen in Newark, probably not as much because I still had people in church that were closeted back then—

Esperanza Santos: Probably still now.

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah, still now where people feel like if I'm out, it may affect my home life. I mean we had a lot of young people that were put out once their parents found out that they were gay. When going to Newark, there was a feeling that there would be more people who are like you, so it feels safer.

Esperanza Santos: When you say the youth were put out, would you say that they were homeless?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. Some of them actually became homeless.

Esperanza Santos: How did you either learn about these young people or did these young people learn about you?

Jacquelyn Holland: They would go to the specific organizations that a lotta times would give them food and sometimes clothes. We had a place where they could shower, so they were told about us through some of the other organizations. We shared services. We shared the service we had, and we told them about the services they had. That's how they would find out, and the school, we had a relationship with Rutgers, and they would also let them know that we existed.

Esperanza Santos: It sounds like you were accessible either because partners recommended you or because you were out in the community?

Jacquelyn Holland: Right, both.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. When these youth were put out and you all gave them a place to shower, do you know where they went or what happened to them?

Jacquelyn Holland: Sometimes they had friends that they could live with. Other times, they wound up being on the streets, which was very sad. We didn't have a place for them to go.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Was there a place where they would go to sleep or hang out or find other LGBT people?

Jacquelyn Holland: I think there was probably an organization that they were able to connect with where they had other young people. I'm pretty sure there was at least one back then.

Esperanza Santos: In line with the same question, are there other places in Newark that you associate with LGBTQ people?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yeah. Office of African Concerns, Office of AO, Gary Paul Wright.

Esperanza Santos: Yes. I think it's the African American Office of Gay Concerns, (AAOGC), I want to say it is?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes, AAOGC. I always think of him *[01:49:11]* when I think of that. I remember a dean, James Credle [01:49:19] was very out and very connected in the community at the time. He was from Rutgers. In Newark, we actually—the church was into mental and helping to open the first LGBT center in Newark, so that's there. Those are a few of the places that I can actually remember.

Esperanza Santos: As we were talking about LGBT people, something I noticed through our interview was we talked about trans people as we related to how people in the south can understand south, but maybe not a masculine-of center person. Do you know where did trans people go if they were in Newark?

Jacquelyn Holland: I know there was another organization besides Gary Paul's because I know a lot of the trans sisters, particularly, would go to his organization. I can't remember the name of it. I don't know.

Esperanza Santos: No, that's okay. Was there any trans people as part of your fellowship?

Jacquelyn Holland: Yes, definitely.

Esperanza Santos: I'm transgender and I think, for me, it's been a little bit harder to find a church that I belong to. Do you know what was it about your church that the trans sisters or trans brothers felt they could belong to at your church?

Jacquelyn Holland: I was just accepting. I really pushed that we have to accept all of us. We are all God's children. You don't get to decide who belongs and who doesn't belong. All people are accepted. I welcomed my trans sisters to dress in ways that were comfortable for them. A lotta churches would bristle around wearing dresses. I thought that was ridiculous. This is who you are. Come as you are. That's what we talked about. Come as you are. Don't feel like you have to change or be a certain way or dress a certain way to come to church.

Come the way that's comfortable for you. I would talk to anybody who treated anyone differently or in a negative way because of how they looked because people come to church and some people still come with those same oppressive ideas and ways of thinking. We always had to counteract that. We can't accept that in this space. That's not okay.

Esperanza Santos: Like, "In this space, right here, right now, that's not something that we tolerate."

Jacquelyn Holland: Exactly. You just have to keep reiterating that.

Esperanza Santos: I've asked you all the questions I have as part of my interview. Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we haven't been able to get to?

Jacquelyn Holland: I can't think of anything right now *[laughter]*.

Esperanza Santos: No, that's cool. Yeah. I think it's, for a lot of people, faith is something that gives them solace, but finding a church where that faith is protected and safe isn't always guaranteed, so I just wanna say during your time here in Newark, thank you for providing that for so many people, especially as it relates to a place to honor someone with their funeral.

Jacquelyn Holland: You're welcome. I do have a question. The oral project is something that gets archived. What happens with it?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. I'm gonna turn off the record button, and then we can talk more about where the interviews go, if that's okay?

Jacquelyn Holland: Okay, great.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Okay, so I'm gonna close up now and say today's date is November 25. My name is Esperanza Santos. I'm interviewing Jacquelyn Holland at Rutgers University while she is Charleston, North Carolina?

Jacquelyn Holland: Charlotte, North Carolina.

Esperanza Santos: Charlotte, North Carolina for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. Thank you so much again.

[End of Audio]