Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Tamara Fleming
Interviewed by: Kristyn Scorsone
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Location: Rutgers-Newark

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay. Today is January 26, 2017. My name is Kristyn Scorsone, and I'm interviewing Tamara Fleming at Rutgers Newark for the Queer Newark oral history project. This is the second of two interviews. The first one was done by Monica Liuting. Thank you for doing this with me.

Tamara Fleming: No problem.

Kristyn Scorsone: First question. I know that in your interview with Monica, you had said that you started working in corporate America first. Right?

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: Then you moved into FEMWORKS? Is that right?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Yeah. For the most part, yeah. I started working in the corporate America field. One was working for a toy manufacturing company. Soon after, there was an opening at this PR Newswire, which is basically, I would say, the news industry. We would distribute news and content so that journalists could pick it up and write articles and publish it in from the *New York Times* to *The Record* to whatever.

Then, soon after—I would say not necessarily so fast after, but about six or seven years later, the company started to notice that there was an area that they needed to make adjustments to, which is in their location. They found that Cleveland, Ohio, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, afforded them a better opportunity to, I guess, save on their overhead, and so we were moved from New York office and Jersey City offices and were pretty much—as they

started to do a downsize, select employees were given the option of either making a choice to go on to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Cleveland, Ohio, or to take the severance package.
At that point in time, I had already started running my business, FEMWORKS, at that time, while I was working there. It's a funny story behind that, too. When they gave us the options, I took the third option, which was a severance package and used that to catapult me to this world of entrepreneurialism.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was it difficult to do both at the same time?

Tamara Fleming: It was interesting to do both at the same time because I didn't necessarily— as far as code of ethics, not running a business inside of a business. *[Chuckles]* That was something that I was essentially doing. I was using my equipment in inappropriate ways and basically using the computer to write invoices to my other clients and—

[Laughter]

It's so funny. Okay. One day, when they were doing a transfer—I was workin' in the New York office and Tech Support had to break down all of the computers to migrate it over to Jersey City. I didn't even think that this was something that I should—that's how clueless I was about the whole process of code of ethics and misuse of company equipment, and so I kept all of this stuff on there. Yeah. All of my invoices, the copy, the language for creating the messaging for my company—all of that stuff was on there. I think what really stood out was the invoicing part. When I got my

computer set up at PR Newswire in the new location in Jersey City, not so long after, I got called into Human Resources, and they had a very long, detailed conversation with me about the misuse of their company equipment.

I was pretty much put on probation. They said, "Okay. We found several things on there, from pictures of your clients and you doing this, your setting up a business entity and invoicing them and all of this stuff." Basically, said that they would have to put me on probation, which I think they did it for maybe 30 days or somethin'. I was just thankful that they didn't fire me for that because they could have done that. It was a lot of information on there. I guess according to them, it's like, "Is she even working while she's here, or is she working for her other company?" Yeah, that was a little funny story behind that. I was just glad I was not fired for that.

[Laughter]

Kristyn Scorsone: Around what years was this?

Tamara Fleming: This was around—gosh. Wow. This would have to be around 2000. Anywhere between 1999 or 2000 to 2003 or '04. Maybe 2003 or '04. One of those. **[00:05:00]**

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. It was not too far after 9/11, and I think that happened in 2000. I was still based in New York. Hadn't quite made the leap to leave the company because I didn't do that until May of 2007. It was around that time.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: What made you decide to start FEMWORKS?

Tamara Fleming: That whole thing of being an entrepreneur. The actual action of it. I guess if you—it's—it's a, to me, a verb that means that you have to do something. You have to move. You're doing something. You're—call it grind, cuz it's a hustle. It's a grind. I necessarily didn't think of it that way. I thought, "Oh, I have a passion. I have a interest in photography, so I'll just take pictures, and I'll have extra money in addition to what I'm doin' here."
I think at one point I hadn't necessarily thought about really saying, "Let me create and form a business entity, name it, brand it, get it registered." All that kind of stuff wasn't on my agenda necessarily because I was still trying to figure out how to climb the ladder of my company. There was job openings that I was applying for. I never really saw entrepreneurs in my—in my family. I saw it on a way that was maybe a unofficial way of being an entrepreneur, like my grandmother, my grandfather, but I don't think they ever established a formalized S corp, C corp, or LLC, or anything like that.

Kristyn Scorsone: Right.

Tamara Fleming: In conversations with my friend, Kimberlee Williams we had just been chitchattin', and I think I started to talk to her about being really super interested in photography and design and graphics and things like that. She had gone through an entrepreneurial program to learn about web design. One day at a bar, it was me, her, and a good friend of ours, George Maro [Spelling: 00:07:29]. We were all talkin' about it one day just at the bar—just up the street up

here. It was a quick conversation. I saw her make the entrepreneurial attempt once before, and it closed soon after, but she had her learning lesson then.

With me, I think just a conversation of what we see as not seeing enough content that's distributed that talked about people of color, women, gay women, gay black women, women in urban communities, blackness—all of that. Just not really seeing enough of our own representation. It became a conversation a lot more often where it was a little bit more than a bar, or we're havin' drinks and like, "Yeah. You never see—PR Newswire just doesn't really have that outlet to push out news about people that look like us." I was—

Kristyn Scorsone: What's PR Newswire?

Tamara Fleming: PR Newswire is a news wire distribution service. It's one of the leading ones in the United States that like a public relations agency would use as their vehicle to widely distribute news to all of the media outlets, whether it's local, national, regional, so that if you're a journalist and you have an interest in a particular topic, like banking and finance, and you're looking for content to write about, you can see in your newsfeed that there's just been a press release that's announced that—I don't know—Bank of America has just acquired some other company or there's been a ribbon cutting of another organization.

It's where all of the news comes from. It gives the journalists the power or at least the assets to write further. It gives you a—"Here's a press release. You got a picture, a link to download the picture, contact information." If any of them see somethin' that they want to—especially in their particular target or demographic—they want to follow up on it, they have all of the content to take it to next

level, give that person a call, say, "Hey, I heard you just started your own business" or "Your company has just been acquired by IBM. Could you give us more information?" Then that creates a whole 'nother **[00:10:00]** opportunity of more stories that are put out about that.

I worked in the department that's called—gosh, I don't know why I'm drawing a blank. I worked in the photo desk department. I started out as a photo editor, and that was just someone that received an image from a public relations agency. There's an image and there's a press release that went to the copy desk. I got the image part. Someone else got the copy. The editors are reading the press releases, making sure that it's grammatically correct, punctuations, all of that stuff. They're doin' some fact checkin' as well, too.

Then our department would get the photos, and we'd do some color corrections, making sure that it was all set up to be well received when the end-user gets it. Well received means that it is the right DPI. It is not pixilated. It's captioned well. If it's referencin' from left to right, find people with their names. Say, for instance, if there's a name that's not listed and you have four names but it doesn't say "Not shown" or somethin'. You're pullin' up all of those red flags about it and makin' a call back to say, "Hey, I noticed you have five people listed in the caption, but there's only four people in the photo." Then that person's like, "Oh, wow. I forgot to put that person's name in there."

We'd do the fact check, and we'd do the color correction and making sure that it's—I think it was 300 DPI with 9 inches on a longest side. That means that we would make sure that that picture was good enough quality so that when we send it out with the press release and someone downs the press release and the photo, that

it's in the right resolution and they can scale it up to be a full-size print or they can make somethin' small from it.
I was in the photo desk, and my friend was in the copy desk. She was an editor. With those conversations of what we don't see enough as a representation of who we are, we started to talk about what it would like to have our own company. In our own company, if companies need to—when companies—because companies should be working towards really trying to reach our demographic of people, they would come to us to do that because we were the ones that knew of how to reach people that look like us, like women, African American women, the LGBT community, and urban communities. We were those people, and we were going to be that solution for how companies reach out to us and how they reach out to more people that look like us.

Kristyn Scorsone: Mm-hmm.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where are you from?

Tamara Fleming: I'm originally from North Carolina. A little town called Jacksonville, North Carolina. I got here when I was probably—maybe 19-1/2, 20 years old.

Kristyn Scorsone: You moved to Newark?

Tamara Fleming: I moved to Irvington, New Jersey, and then found my way in Newark. I did a number of different temp jobs. I started to look into a college, and I was also looking at some real estate, but the reason why I came here is because I had gotten married, and my

husband was from New Jersey. I came here, but that marriage didn't last no more than maybe a year.
Within that time, I had already started to temp different places. I was lookin' at schools, but it was a lot of little things that were happening in my relationship with him that—I think for a 20-year-old, I had a lot to deal with. It wasn't so easy to jump back in school. It wasn't so easy to do a lot of things because it was a very aggressive relationship where it was like, "You gotta get out of this." It was a bit a struggle on that end, and that pushed some stuff aside for me. It was more like, "Yeah, I would rather be alive, so let me leave."

[Laughter]

Kristyn Scorsone: Right.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Does FEMWORKS serve just Newark or different areas in New Jersey?

Tamara Fleming: The original idea of FEMWORKS was to be starting out in a local community, and we picked Newark locally. At first it started out in Kim's home in Montclair and in my home in Roselle. That's where my photography studio was. We would meet. It was three of us, Jackie [Spelling: 00:14:59], Kim, and myself. **[00:15:00]** It was three of us. Jackie was the graphics person, I was the photographer and visual person, and then Kimberlee was media and marketing/communications person.
We had these—like, "We're gonna go in, and this is what we're gonna do." We started to—just like with any business, you assign who's gonna do this and creatin' task list of "You do this. I do that.

You do this." That was to get all of our entities in alignment with each other, the formation of the company, thinkin' about the branding. We had countless hours of meetings and going through all of those things that you think about when you're starting a business, about "What is the brand gonna look like? What is it—" It was initially created under FirstEye MediaWorks, and we felt that "Okay. FirstEye MediaWorks is going to be a little bit of a hard thing to remember, or it could even be mocked because people are used to sayin' the third eye and everything." I think maybe Kim said, "What about if the acronym—" It could've been Kim or Jackie—if we made it short, like Fem Works. At first it was Fem and then Works separate, and then it became Femworks together.

Our first logo was a eye that was closed with the eyebrow with the word "fem" in there and "works." It was so ultra-feminine, and it was purple eyeshadow and nothing that you should ever see in a corporate world—*[chuckles]*—but that, to us, was like, "Yes! This is it, girl. We got it together." That's when it was like, "Oh, wow! This looks nice."

I think, eventually, it just made sense to not be so literal with the fem cuz we would get people—"So what is this? Like an employment agency? FEMWORKS. What do y'all do there?" or "Do you only hire women?" or so many different things that were comin' out. I think, personally, people just weren't used to seeing women entrepreneurs like that, and they definitely weren't used to seeing two gay women entrepreneurs and two gay black women entrepreneurs and two gay black women entrepreneurs in an urban—very urban community. All of those things that were like, "Gosh, you guys are just breakin' the norm, knockin' down these walls of what they thought normal was."

I switched from three to two because before we really moved to Newark, Jackie—I think I could tell that there was just not enough—I wouldn't even say commitment. It was just a point where I know that she had a lot on her plate. It was like, "Look. This is a lot for me." I think her mother was sick at the time. She had to make a decision to back out. That was pretty early on. It wasn't like we got several years into it before that happened. She really just had to step up and say, "I'm gonna have to bail out of this one, ladies." That's what she did, and then by the time we got to Newark, it was just the two of us. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: When you got to Newark, was it brick and mortar or did you—

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. I would say for the most part, yeah. We were at a home office, and then there was a company called Tritonic that had just moved into 421 Halsey Street in Newark. Kimberlee knew one of the three business owners there. They had just moved in from Central Avenue here into Halsey Street. I remember when she was talkin' to me. I think we were with our good friend, Hasan Love, who's a clothing designer. We talked to him. I think we were with him, and she said, "It's time for us to move out. We gotta just take a leap of faith and get into a business, go into a open door, close door, open sign, closed, and just have a place where we can operate so that we can spread our wings and really make this thing happen." I think at that time she could've said, "Let's move to Timbuktu," and I would've been like, "Okay, Kim. We'll do it." I didn't push back. I'm like, "You know what? She's got the vision. This is great. This is awesome." I was hesitant because I'm more of a reserved person to be more concerned about "What if?" What if we lose every person that we would've had as a client **[00:20:00]** or have as a client because we were boldly stating somethin' that

we were here to be seen and we weren't trying to be covered up in shame of not wanting to be our true full selves, which meant that we had to boldly say, "We're women, we're black, and we're gay." At that time, we did have faith-based companies working as our clients, and I felt like if we say this, then we're gonna lose them as a client. I was concerned on that end, but, eventually, that fear subsided, and it was more so like, "If they leave, then they're not for us anyway." I've never really hidden anything, so I'd rather have lost them as a client than to lose myself as a person that's trying to cover up this thing because I was too afraid and too ashamed of it. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: It would state it on your website or when you would speak—

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm. A list of services. There was a terminology that was even used, intimate insight, which confirmed that intimate insight meant that we had this firsthand knowledge of it. It wasn't like we weren't the people that we're talkin' about. It's not like we're not women, it's not like we're not black, and it's not like we're not gay. Those intimate insights. It's like, "Yeah. We know who we're talking to because we are these people." When you're listin' out the services and who we wanted to do business for, it did still include the LGBT community. That was a bold statement there.
At that time, I didn't know of any company locally that put it on their site like that. Like, "Yeah. We work with companies that want to reach this multicultural community in a way that is authentic and is very true to how you should be talkin' to us." I was big on the image part. Like, "Yeah, because companies will still undermine the fact that African Americans—they're buying the Nike shoes and all of these brand names in a big way and spending

all this money, but so much of the advertisin' is something that looks completely the opposite of what they look like."
It's like getting frustrated of "Gosh, you guys always—we're buying this, but we're not seen in any of the marketing and advertising." It was that idea that helped me really, back then, understand that producing stock images was somethin' that I wanted to—a focus that I wanted to incorporate my passions in, is making sure that there was enough images so that people could no longer say they didn't have the right image to support that message or that campaign or somethin' like that. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you ever have clients ask you to market in such a way that perpetuates stereotypes?

Tamara Fleming: I would say if you don't have someone that is—it's really easy to stereotype. It's really easy to stereotype when you don't know. What our agency was really about was making sure that people knew that this is what's not cool. The stereotypes. Even with stock, it's like you would get just the most interesting kind of photos of a representation of an African American, but it's not done in an authentic way, or say, for instance—I would even say for casting, if you're doing a commercial, you could tell that the person that's casted the commercial was—there was not an African American person on set to style them, to clothe them, to do their hair, to do their makeup. Either the makeup was two, three shades lighter than what it should be—

Kristyn Scorsone: Right.

Tamara Fleming: - or the hair was done and it's like, "I know she does not normally wear her hair like that." It's like if you don't have someone to really

say that "This is not right," "This is stereotyped," or "This is not—" We can see that you're trying, but you're not trying in an authentic way because if you were to do it authentically, you would really look to the source **[00:25:00]** of "Who can really do this? Who can make sure that we're keepin' integrity?" Where we're not developing or creating these kind of stereotypes that's gonna lead to very interesting conversations, or where they may want to reach us the right way. They're pulling the whole concept and idea apart.

Advertising. You can hit or miss it, and then a lot of times, if you don't do it the right way by being purposefully focused on wanting to create the right type of message and engagement, you can totally get it done completely the wrong way. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: What are some—would you call it campaigns or—

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: - that you're especially proud of?

Tamara Fleming: I wish there was—there was one that we did. I said a lot of what I was gonna say was about our focus on women. There was one that a client of ours—we had developed a relationship with them for some time. They had gotten some funding to do a campaign to get testing done for the LGBT community—actually, the B and the G and the T part of the community. Right?

This was to get this demographic tested for HIV and AIDS. It had a prevention and a treatment component to it, but at first you had to get people in to get them just tested to see that they're healthy or just to give them that information if they didn't know. We worked on this campaign from the beginning to the end in creating the

messaging, doing the images for the campaign. I did the scouting of the—casting, scouting locations. Developin' the logos, a website, the copy, the strategy.

All of this was all to kind of, if you're familiar with—there was one campaign that—gosh, I forgot the name of it, but it was something similar—it was somethin' in the lines of getting tested for HIV and AIDS, but this one was called Status Is Everything.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay.

Tamara Fleming: Status Is Everything really did focus on knowing your status is everything because if you don't know your status, then you could risk the chance of getting someone else infected or you could either get yourself in a lot more of a health-complicated situation than you ever thought because you're not doing any treatment. If you don't know, then you are actually doing yourself a disservice. There was almost like a ownership or being proud in knowing what your HIV status was because at that point it was such a heavy saturation of new HIV cases all over and especially in our community.

For an agency to think locally and to choose us was really amazing because that gave us really our true first opportunity to saturate the entire community with the most amazing images. We decided to keep it authentic and instead of usin' stock photos to create organic custom stock images and using people that were the real people in our communities, almost looking for people that would endorse this campaign on a ground level, which would elevate the chances of—or increase the chances of people actually takin' it seriously and going in to get tested.

If you had your local mayor—you have your Cory Booker as the mayor—he saying one thing is one thing, but when you have

someone that's the mayor on the street that is really like your father of the house and he says, "Child, you need to go get tested," you're better go get tested.

Kristyn Scorsone: You mean the house as in ballroom house?

Tamara Fleming: Yes. Yeah. We had Bernie McAllister *[house mother]*. He was one of our main mayors of the movement, and he was in the project. He endorsed the campaign. Like, "Yes. Absolutely." He has definitely had his share of family members that passed away from HIV and AIDS, so it was a no-brainer. We had a transgender, and that was also makin' a statement as well, too, because nowhere in Newark were you **[00:30:00]** driving around seeing a transgender person on a poster or on a billboard. It wasn't in those like side alley streets or anything. It was downtown Newark. It was right on Washington Street. It was bold, in your face.

That campaign was only supposed to really—it had life that was breathin' into it for that campaign. We did a bus wrap. It was on the side of the bus, it was on the back of the bus, and it was on the bus wrap. It was so funny because years later, we'd be driving and you would still see the campaign on the back of the bus or somethin' like that. It just would not die. It just refused to. It had the longest life of a campaign ever.

That was pretty cool of a project to be involved with because it allowed me for once to really flex my wings of really producing something from the beginning to the end. I was managing the creative process, takin' the photos, being there to scout the people and the models, bein' there on location while we were doin' the videos and interviewing. Just so much involvement that it was just—it was a lot of work, but it gave me life. I loved bein' a part of it. I loved getting a chance to really know the people in the

community a lot better. That's what was the most exciting for me, I would say.

Kristyn Scorsone: Can you say which client that was?

Tamara Fleming: Yes. The client is AAOGC, African American Office of Gay Concerns. Yeah, that was a really impactful campaign, very successful. It was awarded, it had international recognition with this particular campaign because we set it up really lovely with regards to the visuals of it, just to intrigue people and really getting' them to see. We had these great postcards. They were photos that I took, and they were branded. If you—if someone is having to choose a digital postcard, there was options on the website to choose a postcard and actually type in a message and then send it to someone. That's even like, "Hey. Did you get tested yet?" or like somethin' that, one, once you see this really love card and then you see the message—it was pretty cool to get that in your inbox where you get someone that's, first of all, the person on the postcard is someone that you know, and then this message is almost like a gentle reminder as like, "I love you. I want you to go get tested" type of thing.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. Not so clinical.

Tamara Fleming: Right. Right. Not so clinical. It was the furthest thing from clinical that I have seen because we had guys like they were stuck together in a hugging position. I used my apartment at the time to set up in this bedroom series and these two guys kissin', but it was nothing like, "Oh, yeah. We're just walkin' down the street, and we want you to get tested." No. We pulled them in with very compelling images of "This is how it is. This is about love. This is about sex.

This is about you being healthy. You can continue to do those things, but we just want you to know what your status is." Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Around what year was this?

Tamara Fleming: Gosh. Um.

Kristyn Scorsone: It's okay if you don't remember exact or anything.

Tamara Fleming: It was maybe 2009 or '10 maybe, I think.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah.

Tamara Fleming: I really don't know. I can't remember. Hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you always wanna be an entrepreneur?

Tamara Fleming: I probably wanted to be an entrepreneur but didn't know the word for it. Yeah. I could say that I would want to have always have been in a position to do what I want to do—right?—but I didn't know that meant entrepreneur. I knew that I loved photography, but I didn't know that I would be able to run my own business if I started my own business.

I definitely credit Kimberlee for those soft nudges of saying, "This is what it looks like to be an entrepreneur. You go out there not knowing, and you keep fighting until you make a way out of what can be absolutely no way." I'm talkin' about starting something from nothing. Like, "Okay. We're in a home. You're at home, and I got my studio down here." **[00:35:00]** It's starting from there to actually having a business. There's overhead. There's assistants. There's interns. There is paperwork and filing and legal obligations

and insurances and all of that other stuff. Accounts payable, accounts receivable. All those things. I didn't think about those things— *[laughter]*—but the word "entrepreneur" sounded sexy. You know?

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

Tamara Fleming: Accounts payable didn't sound so sexy.

It was just the freedom. To me, it meant also that it would give me an opportunity for no one to write my chapter or write my story for me where it was hard to get a place in the business world cuz I just didn't have the skill set for, one, even just like with just in the boardroom settings and stuff. I was not at that table in the boardroom. Although I had been working in a manager capacity, I wasn't titled as a manager, but that was one thing I was applying for, trying to get that position for.

I did go from photo desk, just a regular editor, to a supervisor. I knew that I knew more than my manager did, and I knew that the people that I was supervising respected me more than they respected the manager. I was buildin' up this entrepreneurial muscle. I can also admit that I have not mastered that muscle as much as I should have over the years, which has been a big growth opportunity to learn what not to do next time and in the future.

At least I'm thankful that I took the leap anyway because I wasn't in the boardrooms and the business community, but as an entrepreneur, I was. I was at these tables, but at the same time I brought my fear with me because I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to say it. I thought that there was—actually, I spent a lot of times being very clueless about business. What a company wants and what we have to give, and then how magically

it seems that everybody around the table understood the conversation, and I'm still catchin' up.

It's almost as if there was another language that was being spoken that I didn't know about what it was. Right? That used to keep me up at night just because I felt incompetent. Like, "I don't know what the heck. They said a lotta stuff, and—whoa!" Then I realized that a lotta stuff, when you wanna do it as an entrepreneur, you're promising on things that you may have never ever done before. Your goal is to convince that company, that person, that you can do it and they can trust you.

I started to realize that it's really all about whether someone feels that they can trust you to get the job done. Because if they hire you, they don't wanna hear, "Oh, I'm sorry. I completely overslept, and I forgot about the project. Darn it, I had the event on the next day, and I forgot—" They don't wanna hear any of that. It's a very low opportunity to make a risk and high opportunity to risk something because at any given time anything could happen.

It took me a long time to realize that my silence in these meetings was very loud and clear and that silence came off as inexperience. It probably came off as not being confident or not very knowledgeable of a certain topic or somethin'. I think it was a mix of havin' a personality of maybe a quiet-natured person but one that doesn't want to also say the wrong thing, to not be looked at as ignorant or somethin', and then a whole bunch of other things, a whole bunch of other conversations I was probably havin' in my mind while the meeting was happening. I can't say it's somethin' that—goin' back to is it somethin' I've always wanted to do. Not necessarily, but so very glad that I did. **[00:40:00]**

Kristyn Scorsone: Mm-hmm.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. I feel you. I know you said that no one in your family was an entrepreneur—right?—but your mother was a beautician?

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm. My mother—let me see. She was—she's not a beautician cuz she didn't—you have to, every year, I think it is, get a new license. That long expired. She changed her careers. The only entrepreneur that I can reference is my grandmother. She would sell—like you see the food trucks. She would sell foods on a food truck in a blueberry farm. She had a truck. I'm sure they invested money. Her and my grandfather invested money to buy a truck.

It was the kind of truck where it had the glass—almost like a ice cream truck or somethin'. It comes up. You stand up and you order anything from chips, soda, pickles, to a fried chicken sandwich or a sausage sandwich or snow cones or somethin' like that. She would stock her moving store or store on wheels, and she would go out to the blueberry farm and sell this product, which was in high demand. You're talkin' about North Carolina in this heat that was unbearable. People, for additional money, would go and pick blueberries all day and get them weighed. Then they'd get compensated. It was a beautiful thing to see and hear her truck come up the road because you knew, one, "I can take a break. I can get somethin' to eat. I can get somethin' to drink."

From my perspective, my grandmother, being that person that had the store that was like my savior and everyone else's savior, was beautiful. I didn't have to wait in line. Walk right up in there. Pull off what I wanted from the truck. That was just so amazing. It was just beautiful. She was an entrepreneur.

I saw her from the beginning of going home to cook all of these things. We had a carport. Underneath the carport, there was a big vat with grease. The chicken is bein' dumped in there and fried. She'd be in the kitchen and she'd be makin' the sandwiches, and me and my uncle would be wrappin' those up. There was a full production goin' on. Wrap everything up, stock everything up, and then drive down the street to sell it.

That was my first entrepreneurial reference, was seeing her, to see her do it. I don't know how much money she made, but I know she probably did pretty good with it because it was such a demand. It wasn't like there was any competition. Just her and maybe one other person, but she dominated that particular area.

My grandfather was—they called him a one-man band. He was in the navy. Once he got out of the navy, he had drums and a harmonica and four other instruments that were somehow melded together so that anytime he wanted to beat the drums, he'd be on the harmonica. He would come over here and play the trumpet. He would travel all along the East Coast and go to mostly the beaches and stuff, especially during summer. Imagine instead of goin' down to Florida for spring break, all the kids would be on the East Coast in North Carolina all the way up here and be performin' in these clubs and stuff.

I knew that that's what he did as a entrepreneur as well. That's what he'd do. I'd see him maybe twice a year, but when he came to stay, he stayed, I would say, maybe a month. That was the longest, craziest, worst month of my life because he would just take over everything. When I'd have my little teenage self of a—"This is the kitchen. It's my responsibility. I'm cleanin'," he would come in. The whole table would be taken over with everything he set up. He was also a packrat, too, but he was pretty cool because I guess he

was my first oral historian or document orally conversations he'd have with B.B. King—

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Tamara Fleming: - and Dizzy Gillespie. Just different references of everyone that he's done business with or he's been in a band with. What he would do is—I think he'd always want to be a DJ because he would play music. He'd have a recorder. He'd play music, and then he'd have a recorder to record what he's saying. While the music is playing, he would talk over the music and say, "Yeah, I remember back in the day, I used to play music with this person," **[00:45:00]** or he'd sit me down like, "Let me talk to you." Just like in a chair that you were in. I'm on the other side, probably did not wanna be there, kickin' my feet like, "Okay. Whatever," but he would make me listen to what it is that he'd have to say, and he would be recording those.

When he passed away—I have a huge bundle of cassette tapes of all of his conversations. I don't think I'm in them, but other people that he's interviewed and talked to, music, and everything from—yeah, it was just amazing.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's so cool.

Tamara Fleming: You don't really know how cool it is until you got access to it. Like, "Oh, my god. This is freakin' amazing." Just to think that somewhere out there in the world, there's a tape out there that he was talkin' to me, and who knows what I would've said. He could've talked to me about being an entrepreneur, but he really wanted me to be a registered nurse.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, yeah?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Why?

Tamara Fleming: I don't know. Cuz he felt that that was the best, most concrete way to be independent or not dependent on someone as a woman. Thinkin' about it in his mind, too. As a woman, the best thing you could probably ever do is just be a nurse. That's probably about as far as you can ever go—*[laughter]*—as a woman.

[Laughter]

Tamara Fleming: That was his way of thinking. "At least she could probably just be a nurse." You know?

Kristyn Scorsone: Right.

Tamara Fleming: "She'll never, ever, ever be a president or even be able to run." Who knows? He probably even thought that—like "I'm surprised that you guys can even vote now." Just coming back from where he's born and raised, that was his best vision for me. To never get pregnant without getting my trade. It wasn't even a focus on education. It was a trade. "Just get a job. Get something, but if you do go into focusin' on education, be a nurse. You have more freedom. You'll probably make a little bit more and—" Yeah. That was his vision.

Kristyn Scorsone: How did you get turned on to photography?

Tamara Fleming: That's a good question. I can't quite remember how, but I do remember when I was younger—I have a cousin. That's Selena [Spelling: 00:47:20]. She's about five years older than me. I always tell people this story, that she was five years older than me, and she had a boyfriend that was in Germany. He would call. They didn't have a phone. They lived right upstairs from me. They didn't have a phone. My cousin didn't have a phone, but when her boyfriend calls from Germany—"Okay. Who is this? Okay. Go up there and get your cousin, girl." I'd run upstairs and go get my cousin.
Then she comes back down. They have this weird—you had to talk, and it was like, "Over," cuz then the operator would switch 'em back over. Then when he's finished talkin', he'd say, "Over," and it comes back so she can hear it. It's kinda weird.
She would write him a lot, and she'd want to send him pictures. She would ask me to take her pictures. I think she has a sister that was a year younger than me. Perhaps she probably got Charmaine [Spelling: 00:48:19] to take a picture, but when it came back, maybe it didn't come out right or whatever. When she got me to take it, I knew how to frame it right, and her head wasn't cut off or somethin'. Maybe that's why she kept havin' me take the photos. That was one of the reasons why—or one of the things that I remember most about takin' pictures when I was younger, but then I remember that when I was younger, I was in an incident where—

Kristyn Scorsone: Was it your teenage years?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Takin' pictures of her was teenage, so this could've been 15—no, it was probably younger than that. It could've been anywhere from 12 or somethin'. Anywhere from 11 to 15, I would say, but before then, when I was younger, probably 2 or 3, I had an accident. There was a piece of metal or somethin' that ricocheted

into my eye. Then it scarred my eye really bad. I remember going to the eye doctor. This was really, really young for me. I grew up and knew that I didn't have all of the vision in my eye, but I think it wasn't until I was in my teenage years that I realized that I could not see out of that eye.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Tamara Fleming: With both eyes open, you can't tell a difference, but with one eye closed, I could tell. Like, "Wait a minute. I can't see anything." It was like my peripheral vision. **[00:50:00]** I can see on the side, but I couldn't see anything directly. It probably came to light once I was doin' the eye check where it's like, "What do you see?" I'm like, "I see the E, A, B, H." Then "Cover the other eye. What do you see?" I'm like, "I can see this stuff in the room, but I can't see the—I can't see the chart at all." It was almost like there is a cloud that removes anything that I'm lookin' at.

I used to grow up thinking—I was growing up thinking that I would be blind eventually one day because the tear is in this eye, but the loss of vision is in this eye. It's a weird thing, like "You've got the scar in this eye, but you can't see in this eye," so in my mind I'm like, "What if this scar changes something and now I can't see in both eyes?" I remember going on runs or walks or something and just wanting to spend extra time looking at somethin' because I'm like, "I don't know if I'm ever gonna see this again."

I'm sure with exaggerated teenage mind, I probably was really trippin' a lot. Like, "Yeah. She's just buggin'. That's not gonna happen," but in my mind I'm like, "I might be blind one day" or "Oh, my god. By the time I'm 20, I might be blind." That's a lot that I was dealin' with then.

It's not like I had joined the school newspaper or found images interesting, especially because regarding images and photos in particular; I never liked any photos of me. During class pictures and stuff like that, I would take the picture cuz it was like you had to do it, but then when it was time for the yearbook pictures to come back around, I would look for my picture, and I always had a black marker. I had a black marker so I could scribble my face out of all of my friends' books.

Kristyn Scorsone: Aw.

Tamara Fleming: That was because I hated what it looked—I hated what I looked like, and especially, too, because then I was sportin' this thing called a Jheri curl. This was where your hair is—it's almost like a perm to make your hair curly, but then you have to put on what they call a activator to make it wavy and wet. *[Laughter]* That was the trend back then in the '80s. I had a perm to make it— African Americans have to perm our hair to make it straight. Right? I permed my hair to make it straight, but then I think it started to break off a little.

Then when Jheri curls became popular, maybe I wanted one and my mother did my hair, but she realized she had to cut a lot of the perm out. When I had to have my hair done into this Jheri curl, it had to be really short. That's another reason why it was just like I didn't like the picture. I didn't like what I looked like. My hair was short. It was just my thing. My pictures are always either—they could probably tell you. I either ripped my pictures up or I would black 'em out so no one would see them. That's probably why I don't have a lot of pictures of what I looked like when I was a teenager.

Kristyn Scorsone: Hmm.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you feel like, then, being a photographer gives you a little bit of control?

Tamara Fleming: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely, it does. It's so funny because the person that had that much internal conflict with what they look like, from not liking my lips, my eyes, my ears, my hands, my fingernails, my feet, my toes. My legs were too big. My thumbs were too big. I was just a walking ball of insecurity. I didn't like the way my eyebrows grew. I spent countless, millions and millions and millions and trillions of seconds lookin' in the mirror, exploring me, explorin' it from this side, from that side.
It's interesting that photography allowed me to help other people cuz in photography; it's me celebrating another person. I do a lot of coaching with someone else to talk to them about their own insecurities. What I love about corporate and business photography is that I get a chance to see the insecurities in the largest, **[00:55:00]** most well respected CEO. All of the ego and all of the accomplishment—they become 15 years old again when they're in front of the camera. It's my job to build 'em back up. It's my job to tell them, "No, you look great. Oh, this looks really great on you. No, that color looks—I like this one better. No, just—"
That's why at the beginning of my sessions; I try to get a feel for what the tone of—what their vibration is. They can come in like, "Oh, yeah. I'm ready to do my shoot," but then it's like turn in front of the camera. Like, "Oh, my god. Oh!"

At that point, my support mechanism, my coachin', my counseling, and all of that kind of stuff—"I'm gonna build you back up so that you know that we're just havin' fun. I've got my lighting. I have spent countless hours working on how to light, how to make people look good and feel good, the angles and everything. I'm gonna make sure you look good. You don't have to worry about anything. Guess what? I'm gonna tether this so that everything I shoot is going right into this laptop so you can take a look at it. If that's something that you don't want or you don't see that you like, you have all the time in the world to just make an adjustment." That's what I really love about photography is that it's almost like me reversing my issue, my karma, to be supporting of that other person that's in front of the camera. In this world now, you have to take pictures. Just like you have to have a website, you have to have photos because that's what people connect with—

Kristyn Scorsone: Right.

Tamara Fleming: - but then there's so many people that hold onto photos that they took ten years ago, and it's like, "You don't look like that no more." *[Laughter]* They don't wanna do it again because that was traumatic ten years ago. "I don't wanna have to do this again. I just wanna go on to where people see me as being the most important person in a room." It's something that I realize all of us hold because if you're in a group picture, when that person shows you the picture, then the first person you wanna look at is you. Like, "What do I look like?" You're not lookin' at everybody else. You wanna know what you look like.

I think what I give to them in that process is my little 15-year-old self, wanting to go back to that. Like, "No, you're so beautiful" or "Maybe next time when you take your school pictures, do this

instead" or "Try to sit up better or somethin'," or "Just use an affirmation to build your confidence and maybe that will be captured in the camera" or something.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. I have to say your photos are remarkable. They're so beautiful.

Tamara Fleming: Thank you.

Kristyn Scorsone: You definitely capture each person's beauty.

Tamara Fleming: Thank you. I try. It's a lot of fun. It's a very competitive field because everybody is a photographer now. That's a cool thing in a way, too, because what I realized is that people shoot to get past their shit. You shoot to get past your shit in a lot of ways. You're an artist to get past your stuff or to get over whatever it is. Like art interpretation. Is this person feeling this way or is this person trying to move past their own internal limitations or self-doubt or whatever? Photography does that, too.

In business, you may not see that a much, but definitely that person that took the photo may not be a ham and they just wanna be photographed. You get few—there's a good five percent of the world that really loves to be photographed, and they're always camera-ready, but it took time for them to really accept that, cuz guess what? I know that when they were younger, somebody told them that they weren't beautiful or they looked ugly or this and that. They have to shut that down in order to be now confident in front of the camera.

That's what helped me start a program I call Expoz(HER), personal development through photography. That's where I work with girls in particular to talk to them about "You may be feeling this right

now and judgmental or whatever, but guess what? It will get better. Your eyes will catch up, and your ears will start to balance out. You don't have to think about you bein' in this situation forever. It will get better, so let's talk about where you are now, and then let's talk about what you see as a representation. I'm sure if you're anything like me, you may not see a person that looks like you on the cover of this magazine, but—" Because you see more white, blond hair, blue eyes, and that's what our girls are looking at as a comparison **[01:00:00]** to what beauty is, and that's what the standard is.

Even though we may buy the most lipsticks or beauty products, you still won't see a lot of the products that has our faces on them unless it's targeting us specifically to sell that skin tone. I have worked with countless makeup artists that have that same complaint, that they don't make shades that's realistic to people of color. It's like the entrepreneur in all of us has to realize that we have the power to, might make shades that complement brown skin better cuz that's what we need.

I think art in general, which I see photography and everything else—it gives me constantly that opportunity to push past cuz I always still get somethin' that comes up for me that's about not knowin' if I'm gettin' it right. I'm still nervous at every single shoot, but I know that I have to silence that nervousness because I have to build someone else up. I'll tell myself to chill out and to become a magnetizer towards creating the most awesome vibe so that we can have a great time. "You can worry about overhead or runnin' a business and all that kind of stuff later, CEO, because right now you're gonna have fun."

Kristyn Scorsone: Mm-hmm.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was that part of your insecurities growing up, was not seeing yourself reflected?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Definitely, I could say that. I didn't see it, or when I did see someone that I could resonate with because they were African American or brown, they were probably extra beautiful, and that made it even worse. It was like, "Darn it!" At one point I was a little bit of a bully. If it was a girl that had naturally beautiful long hair and we were in a group walking, I would tug at her hair or somethin' like that. It was all in bein' a little jealous.

No, I didn't see that representation so freely back then. It wasn't like there was a big push towards having even Barbie dolls that were brown like me or darker skin tones. My dolls were white with blond hair. You grow up lookin' at a doll that's 12 shades lighter than you, playin' with hair texture that's nothin' like yours. All of that kind of stuff. Yeah. You're like "Wow. Okay. Beautiful is probably a size 2. Beautiful is blue eyes. Beautiful is much thinner lips," and everything else.

You have to really have a family or a network of people that are aware of all of those things that we internalize. You can't even assume that even if you grew up around a family that was supportive of sayin', "You're beautiful no matter what" and "You look great" or whatever—you can live in a household where all you see is just black beauty or whatever, but it only takes that one friend, that one frenemy or whatever that says something to you, and that sticks to you like—it sticks to you forever.

Kristyn Scorsone: Mm-hmm.

Tamara Fleming: Even though you go back home and they tell you all day and all night, "You're beautiful. You're a princess. You're a queen. You're a king" or whatever, when that girl went there, and she has this air about her and seems like she might be smart, and she says somethin' about me, that's what sticks out. I don't think that it's—cuz I've read stuff—people always talk about black. "That's because they're insecure." They don't have love at home." No, that's not the case.

You can have so much love at home, but like I said, it's the person that don't have the love at home that is telling your child that she is stupid or ugly or whatever, and then that's what resonates. Cuz you know you got your mom tellin' you you're beautiful, but if your peers tell you one thing, you're gonna remember that. It's gonna stick to you just like it's a actual limb on your body. You have to actually cut it off so that you won't that keep your mind in that kind of way of "Oh, maybe she's right" or somethin' like that. Then the next thing you know, a boy can say it or a girl or whatever, and if they say somethin' out of the way to you, that's another thing. It's stickin' on you. Like, "Oh, my god!" It takes a lot of time to try to get that stuff reworked **[01:05:00]** so that it doesn't influence you anymore.

Kristyn Scorsone: With Expoz(HER), is that what you were talking about in the first interview where you're helping young girls take their own photos—

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: - and empowering them through learning about photography?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: That was really beautiful.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. It seems like I am the type of person—I'm a slow movin' entrepreneur. *[Laughter]* It takes me, in my process, a long time to bring somethin' to light because it's almost like I do a focus group or a feasibility study with my friends and people I talk to. I'd been talkin' about this for a long time. "This is what I wanna do."

I probably spend too much time in my head thinkin' about it because I'm also thinkin' about it being so perfect when everybody finds out about it that it's been this time and it's unnecessary because even—I remember going to have a meeting with a guy, Richard Bryant [Spelling: 01:06:06]. I think he was workin' for Hands and Arms [Name: 01:06:10]. We had breakfast one early morning. I told him—I told him about the program. I was like, "Yeah, I still got some stuff to work out." He says, "So what? Just do it." I'm like, "Yeah, but I don't know what I'm doing in this particular area." "Do it."

He gives me the keys to this buildin' that I had full access to, and he tells me to call this other person, tell him what it is that I wanna do. Then the program director called me up and said, "I have ten girls that are in my program. I would love to have them come and be a part of your program."

That wasn't the first time it had ever been done, but it was really the first time in the U.S. it had been done, cuz when I went to Africa in 2006, I brought these little mirrors with me. The thing was, "I wanna bring all the mirrors to these little girls so they can see how beautiful they were." That was the inception. That was the idea of what I wanted to create, this movement of beauty acceptance and loving yourself even if—whatever.

See a couple of little girls. I was not there that day to give out the gifts I'd had, but they were just so beautiful. I reached in the trunk

of the car that we were travelin' in, and then I got out three mirrors. I said, "Don't tell anybody. Shhh. Don't say anything." I turned my back and I'm talkin' to some friends that we went with, and before I knew it, I turned around and it was like the whole entire village was runnin' towards me, like, "Ahhh!" Those little girls went back like it was a press release, and they distributed a press release all throughout the village and let everybody know that I had gifts to distribute. It was so funny because I had even more an opportunity to spread the joy of self-love and beauty and blah blah blah.

Then in Haiti—I remember in January, I was talking to a friend of mine that I knew had—she would travel to different countries, and she would set up camp and do a basketball camp or sports camp or something. She would get some of her friends to go on this service mission all over, from Belize to—I don't know—different places, different parts of the world.

One day, in my mind I was like, "I wanna be a runner. I wanna run." One day we were in the park, Central Avenue. I forgot the name of the park. We were stretching. She was like, "Yeah, I'm gonna probably do somethin' again." I'm like, "You know what I always wanted to do? I always wanted to go to another country and work with girls and do this workshop where I'm talkin' to them about photography and blah blah blah." Then a few months later, they had that horrible earthquake. Then she let me know and other people know that they were all gonna go and stay there for ten days and work with a hundred girls.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Tamara Fleming: I was able to raise some money to get people to help. It was almost like—even before GoFundMe was really big. I got my friends to donate money to help me get the airline ticket to go to Haiti for ten

days. We slept outside. We had a hundred girls. It was a huge communication barrier. I had no idea how to speak Creole. I just couldn't, but there were interpreters there, and some of the girls knew how to speak English so they would translate.

My goal was to—there was someone there to help them with beauty, so they were polishin' their fingernails. Then some of 'em were teachin' 'em soccer, basketball. My track was teachin' them photography. It wasn't like I was thinking, "Oh, now they're all gonna be the next Annie **[01:10:00]** Leibovitz or somethin' or Gordon Parks or somethin'," but it was really talking to them about that internal conflict and that internal conversation that we have. I'm like, "If I can talk to them—cuz I know they may have a [Inaudible: 01:10:16] situation."

I started with layin' the groundwork of the reason why I became a photographer or that I love photography is because it allows me to create beauty and it allows me to focus on beauty and look for beauty when there may not be such an obvious place of beauty. Such in case, Haiti.

Most of the things that you guys see in the news—"What I see in the news about you guys is that the media shows me that it's awful. It's famine. It's disease. It's rubble. It's all of these negative things, but you guys have shown me something completely different," because they have such a spirit and an energy to them that they could water all day and still be happy that they have water and just very, very excited about the little simple things.

I said, "I used to really be hard on myself about what I look like. I'm coming here to this country, and your country looks way better than my country. Right? Cuz I have a mountain behind me. We just went to the beach the other day, and the water is clear, see-through. The water in New Jersey is like mud."

I was lettin' 'em know, "Wow. You guys have a lot of beauty here. If you do ever see interest in becomin' a photographer or to get a chance to take pictures, perhaps you can take photos that can change the perception of your country, and then sell the postcards. Talk to your tourism board to talk about redefining what Haiti looks like so that people can come here and see for themselves just how beautiful you guys are."

Then in the conversation, I did start with just acceptin' what I look like just sometimes you gotta get through that stuff. Right? I'm starting to tear up. The interpreter is interpreting what I'm saying, and she's starting to tear up. It was almost as—it was right at the moments of when I started to cry and she interpreted that and they heard it, they started to cry. We were all crying. *[Laughter]*

Then I gave 'em the cameras and I let them shoot. It was power poses. It was accepting and looking—it was just basic stuff, like, "If you're out in the sun, look for some shade because you don't wanna have someone that's completely out in the sun." Basic stuff, but it was more so the message that I was delivering. It was about finding a way out of no way, looking for beauty when there may not seem to be a place of beauty, and to be internally having a better conversation with yourself about what you look like cuz you will grow up lookin' like a beautiful person, but the best part of that beauty has to come from the inside.

That was a program I started then or I did then. Now I work with—I do work in Montclair. I do work in Newark with charter schools in different places that want to have their girls learn photography. With exposure, it's more so like, "Okay. How do I teach them photography?" My idea was about using the wording and terminology of photography to talk about—one I use is depth of field. Shallow depth of field is when your foreground is very sharp but everything in the back is kind of blurred out, and it's intentional

cuz your aperture is at 1.2 or 2.2. In life, you wanna have a shallow depth of field when it comes to hearing the words of your peers that may not be reflective of what you wanna build for yourself, so keep that shallow. Keep those conversations shallow. Keep those conversations shallow.

If ever there's some light—if there's a shadow—and those shadows are thoughts, it's words, it's ideas, it's not uplifting—add some light to it. How do you get rid of a shadow? You add light. It's all like the use of terminology of photography, but usin' it in a way that's empowering, and they get it. "Oh, shallow depth of field. Oh, I see what you did with that picture."

Now they know to look in a picture. If it's blurred but in the back, "Oh, that's a shallow depth of field. Yeah." Then change it up. It's like, "Yeah, I'm gonna keep you—your depth of field is too sharp right now. You need to turn that down." Just mocking or they spice it up a little bit. Like, **[01:15:00]** "Yeah. You're gonna slow down your shutter a little bit because—I'm gonna have to blur you out." *[Laughter]* Everything is just like, "Yeah, your aperture is way too—" It's so funny. They take it, and they soak it in. They understand how to use it and your rules of thirds and how to frame and compose. All of that is stuff that we go over, and it's really awesome.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's so cool. I like that it's both empowering and then they're learning to document their truth, I guess you would say.

Tamara Fleming: Right. Yeah. Cuz a lot of that is definitely about—Newark isn't always created in the media as a positive and wonderful, dynamic place as well, too, but there's a lot of places in Newark that is beautiful. If you just look up or look out, then you see more beauty, and it gives you that chance to look for stuff that—like I

said, it's not always so visible and apparent, but you have to look for that kind of stuff all the time and just be thankful cuz it could be a lot worse. Yeah. I think it's really cool.

Kristyn Scorsone: You took photos for *New Millennium Butch [cross talk 01:16:10]*?

Tamara Fleming: No. You know what? I took some pictures for the—I guess it would be for one part of the creation of that project. My wife, Elaine, was one of the models for *New Millennium Butch*, so I did—one, two, three—maybe four people that was included for the—there was a coffee-table book for *New Millennium Butch*, and I did some of the pictures there. That was in 2007. That was actually the first I'd ever saw her when she came to my—

Kristyn Scorsone: Saw Elaine?

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm. She came to my studio on Halsey Street. I think it was four people, and out of the four people, I asked her—I said, "Can you stay for a little while longer? I just wanna—" There was no attachment. There was nothing. I just felt like out of everybody, she was the one that I felt had a very chiseled face, and she had a very easygoin' personality. That was for that particular project. There was some other stuff with regards to *New Millennium Butch*. I would say my manager or Kimberlee would be—in order to release the rights of the photos, she negotiated a number that wasn't on the same page as what the founder, Peggie Miller, wanted to spend, so that particular portion of the—like sending high-resolution to get approval to publish a book for—that part didn't happen.

There was still some images used, but they were low resolution, so I don't feel like I got the best visually compelling images because

they were low resolution, but that was just a part of business. Just like, "No, in order to take it to scale to produce in a book, you need to have the rights, and it needs to be—this is how much it will cost," but then if someone doesn't wanna hear it, they're gonna do their own thing. Yeah. It was still a awesome project to be a part of.

One of the other projects I did with Queer Newark was the documentation of what I call the leaders of the Newark LGBT community. I think maybe 20 people so far. Just getting people photographed and talkin' about what their contribution to the gay community in Newark has been. That's been a really awesome ongoing project.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, yeah? Still going?

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's really cool.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: How did you get involved with the New Jersey LGBT Chamber?

Tamara Fleming: Let me see. *[Mumbles]* It was five of us small business owners. Goin' back past that. When FEMWORKS was lookin' at how to maximize our certifications or what could you do with a certification to stand out, there was promoting of that women-owned business or minority-women small business and LGBT. Those are the certifications we could qualify for. Right?

That qualification meant that you could be in a opportunity to get government and corporate contracts, like through a procurement process where these particular companies would hire certain vendors based on their services. If there's something that they needed and this is a service that you provided, they could possibly hire you for that. Say, for instance, you do graphic design, and Johnson & Johnson is lookin' **[01:20:00]** for a new graphic design team. They can look for—here's all of our women-owned businesses, our minority-owned businesses. Then, since they're also acknowledgin' the certification of a LGBT-owned business, we were also a LGBT certified business.

Kristyn Scorsone: You mean you're listed on the website then?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. They have this back-end portal.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, okay.

Tamara Fleming: Whenever they're looking for a certain service fulfillment, they're looking for all of the people that do it, and if they want to set aside—like, "You know what? I wanna diversify who gets these contracts, and I wanna see what kind of gay-owned businesses are out there," we would come up in that filter of gay-owned businesses that are LGBT-certified. We were already working with the Chamber of Commerce on a national level. I had been photographing—it started out where we were trying to get our name out there as an organization. We were one of the few and first African American-owned companies that were certified for the gay certification. What we did a lot of in the beginning was almost a trade, like "I'll photograph your large gala or business

awards reception event if I can get a full page ad in your journal," or something like that. It was that until it became almost a need –

Kristyn Scorsone: That was for the National?

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Every year they would have this event at the New York Stock Exchange where they would ring the closing bell and on the trading floor they would have this really elaborately wonderful event that was a reception. They would go into a larger hall to have the dinner. I photographed that for maybe four or five years.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Tamara Fleming: It was just amazing, and it was one of the cool things that one of the employees just was like, "You know? This one time when we hired you to do this event—" We were in this very secure, secret—only the top of the top people come in here. I had 50 people I had to photograph in a group, so it was a little challengin' to get eye-level. Someone says, "Stand on a table."

I took off my shoes and I stood on a table—of this table where major transactions went down through the whole world. This black gay woman is standin' on the table, pushin' all these white people around, tellin' 'em, "No. You get your butt over here. You get your butt—" Not like that, but "Move over here. Come up here. I can't see you. Move over." I was directin' them on a table.

She was like, "That was one of the most profound instances that I love about working with you and working with you in this capacity because it said so much. Not only did you have—the terminology, 'We want a equal seat at the table as a gay-owned business.' You were on top of the table. You weren't sittin' at the table. You were

on top of it." Yeah. Then we did just several years of buildin' a relationship and—

Kristyn Scorsone: Wait. Did anybody take your picture?

Tamara Fleming: Oh, no, no. No. Nobody. I wish. That was one of those things. Nobody took my picture. That's what she was sayin'. She was like, "I wish I had pulled out my phone and I took that picture cuz it was profound." I always got a kick out of it anyway cuz even when I was shooting, I always felt—it was always out of hundreds of people attending, it was maybe always probably about five people that were black in the room.

That was very interesting to me, too, because I guess growin' up, I had a—I can't say an issue. I guess white people had a issue with me cuz I'd been called nigger twice. This was down South, so it was like that's—whatever. It's common or whatever, so it was to be expected but not really because I'm like, "No." I can see it back in the '50s and '40s, but not no 1990 and '80. That's not—you know. I did—not that I have an issue, but you know how you build up a wall cuz you don't wanna get hurt again? I never wanted to get too close to white people because I'm feelin' like, "Ah. I just don't want that word to ever come out or just to judge me or look at me funny or look at me weird." There was really another thing of "I'm shooting past my—no one knows I'm carrying this baggage of 'Oh, my god,' or no one knows that I'm thinking that you may not even want me to take your picture because you think I might be the **[01:25:00]** photo assistant and not the main photographer," and so many other things if me taking photos of this almost entirely white room of people that I feel is lookin' at me as if "How did you get this job? Who hired you?"

That was a very interesting thing cuz every year it happened, it'd be the same way, and I could feel where people would—it's a difference, of people being too overly accommodating. Like, "Oh, no, no. Are you okay? Are you alright?" Too much of that or trying to be like "Oh, girl. You gotta a camera? You go, girl." Being too much of like, "I want her to know that I'm cool. I'm down with the black people."

I've seen it all. My hair was a lot longer, and "Oh, let me touch your hair" and kinda pull it or something. Not pull it to yank it but touch it. Like, "Okay. You don't have to touch my hair." Then even a question I've gotten from the chamber. Not the chamber but just people that would come. Like, "How do you wash it?" Retarded questions. *[Laughter]*

Kristyn Scorsone: Mm-hmm.

Tamara Fleming: I've heard it all. I've gotten it all. I've gotten funny looks at me. I've gotten—it's just—yeah, yeah. Anyway, to answer that question. They did give me an opportunity to shoot, and then the tables started to turn where it was like, "You know what? We don't wanna do this whole barter thing anymore cuz we respect your work. How much does it cost for you to cover this event?" It started to change. The relationship started to change a lot. Anyways, there's tons of affiliates that are statewide, and Kimberlee mentioned it a while ago. Like, "Oh, we should start a New Jersey affiliate." She talked to a couple of other people, and we were all like, "Okay. That's cool." We each divided up the tasks of what we have to do to become an affiliate chamber cuz we had tried several different things of—we would go to them about "How do you diversify what your chamber looks like? There's a lotta white people in this chamber. There's a lotta black businesses that

are gay. How do you recruit them, and how are you talkin' to them? We're tired of just bein' the only ones."

It was one of those things where we started it to provide this opportunity to be another pioneer in this particular industry and to get other people to see that it could be somethin' that's a benefit as a small business owner, as a gay-owned business. Started that. That was probably over five years ago. I went in from being the person in charge of sponsorship to now I wear many hats because all of the original founding board members are no longer on the board, and so it's just me.

I'm in the president role. My current challenge is still—even with all of us, the originators, it never grew to where I want it to grow and where I know that there's potential in it growing, so I wear the hat of social media, marketing, sponsorship, community partnership—just so many different things. I guess my energy—I'm wanting to do this because I just want this to be beneficial for other people.

I want to, once I'm off the board, be able to come to a fabulously well-put-together event from this chamber and then still feel like I can get there to really network and make some business contacts and really grow the organization and also to know it's—I don't wanna just be at a mixer. I want it to be to a point where I can learn how to grow my business, whether it's through "How do I learn to take advantage of the next marketing focus, the next move in technology?"

I wanna be able to go to my local chamber and get those particular services to me because, one, I'm a cofounder of it, and we've been under National for a long, long, long, long time. Right not, it's about growing it so that we can get corporations to really see value in partnering with our community.

It's not even a black—black is not even there. It's not even about black. It's about gay-owned **[01:30:00]** businesses, but then we also work with allies as well, too, cuz if you have a business and you are straight and you wanna do business with a gay person because that person can help take your business to the next level, then let's do it cuz money is green. It's not a color that as—"Oh, you're black. That money's black" or whatever. No, it's green. I got kids that go—pay for college, and I got a house and a mortgage just like everybody else. I want the same things.

I want it to be where they see value in doing business with our community because there are statistics and numbers out there that show that we are brand-loyal people. We love when a company says, "Hey, I endorse and I support the LGBT community." I want people to know that. Just like in the Civil Rights Movement. "If you don't treat a certain person right because of the color of their skin, there can be a protest. There can be a shut-down of your whole entire business infrastructure because you're not talking to us the right way and you are purposefully trying to take us out of the equation."

I want the same thing for the LGBT business community where—"Don't treat us funny cuz we come in holdin' hands together comin' to a restaurant, because I will shut this place down. Do you know the chamber is in New Jersey, and it's local, and we are supporters, and if any of us get mistreated, we will no longer patronize your establishment. How detrimental is that gonna be to your accounts payable and receivable?" I want them to know that there's a impact for choosing not to want to partner with us or want to welcome us with open doors when we're spending green money.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. It's like you're getting political clout almost in a way through economic power.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. The national focus is a lot on policies and making sure that, with regards to maximizin' those certifications as a gay-owned business, that there's opportunities for us. They do a lot of that, a lot of advocacy in that area. Our affiliate chamber in New Jersey—it's like we're just a limb of national. We have the main people at national making sure that they're talkin' to the people in government and they're talkin' to people in Congress or just the whole political breakdown from city council all the way to the highest government position that you could have, on our behalf.

What we have to do on a local level is make sure that that same conversation is repeated so that—if you see something and you hear something over and over again, it's a lot harder to ignore, but if it's just comin' from a national focus—that's why it's just like with some corporations we've gotten—it's like, "We're already a part of the National, so we don't necessarily need to be a member or support you on a local level," but like, "Yeah, you do."

It makes sense. If you're a company and you have a service and you don't want to represent on a local level to let—locally let these communities know—that National money is going for them to continue on with the fight they have to fight, but on a local level there's still a fight because that National money is not gonna trickle down. It's not like we're getting money from National to fund events locally.

We have to go local to get local companies to help and partner with us so that we can have events to educate and power and grow economically our communities on a local level because national—what money they get is not coming to us. We have to fundraise. We have to advocate our own selves to make sure that it's dispersed in a way that we can use it to grow our small businesses.

A gay-owned business that opens a flower shop wants to be around someone that feels—it could be anything. It could be just wanting to be a sounding board. Like, "I just wanna be around a group of people that get it. They understand me. They may have the same or similar challenges." Much like if you would talk to black people and they wanna be around other African Americans to talk about where they felt a situation's negative impact on a interview was. "I just didn't feel good. It just didn't—"

People know when somethin' don't feel right, but you wanna sometimes meet with that person to talk about it. That person is not there to say, "Yeah, you're right. That's awful. Screw them," or whatever. It depends on how it's framed. It's like, "You know what? We should do somethin' about it."

With the LGBT community, it should be in that same fashion of "You're a business, **[01:35:00]** and you're a gay-owned business, and you're a bar. They find out that you are a gay-owned business, that some people could say, 'I don't wanna come back in there anymore,' but if it's enough of us that are supporting you, then guess what? We're gonna come there all the time because your dollar is important. Your business is important. More than likely, you have kids, too, and you want them to be educated well, so we have to support your establishment."

It's a lot more to it than just supporting us on Pride. Pride is a one-day or one-month, but I'm more so wanting to see a Pride 365. Like every single day, there is Pride.

Kristyn Scorsone: Are any of the businesses in Newark certified with you guys?

Tamara Fleming: Certification comes if your business is at least 51 percent gay owned and operated. You go and you just—this is the most tedious process of havin' all this paperwork where you—"Let me see your

paperwork. Let me see that you were formatted." They come out and inspect to—you gotta get references of people to say that you are gay. *[Chuckles]* It's like, "How do I prove that I'm gay. I mean, really."

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

Tamara Fleming: There's checking to make sure that the stuff that you're sending is accurate and correct. Yeah, there are gay-owned businesses in Newark. I don't know how many of them are actually certified. I think that even with the certification process, that has to be revised in a little bit because it's all about perception, too, because you can get where you hear about certification. Like, "Oh, this is it. This is people gettin' certified," but it takes so much sometimes, as a small businessperson, to get all this paperwork together, to now send it off and then wait for it to be reviewed. They come back and do an interview, and they do an inspection of your premises to make sure it's runnin' up to par.

At the same time, maybe there's a simpler way to get this stuff done, to encourage people. Maybe they see this by seeing more case studies of people that have successfully won business contracts through certification. It's not so much "This is a business that is making over $5 million a year." In order to increase those numbers of certification, you need to get a regular old person. "I make $200,000 a year in my business. I got a certification, and I got a contract. It was a small one, but it was a good one. I am a testament to it working and it being at least an additional way in which you can earn money or band together with other gay-owned businesses to compete for a contract opportunity or somethin' like that."

I would say that the certification process has to—in order for them to grow in that number of how many people are certified, they have to also change the way in which certification is either simplified or more attainable or more memorable because it's not so much like a well-established, 15-year-running company got a certification and got a contract. Yeah, that's kind of expected, but what about the underdogs. You know?

Kristyn Scorsone: Right.

Tamara Fleming: What about the people who—"I have a company, and I have aspirations. Just like you want me to be certified and pay this money for certification, I want you to show me ways in which I can really get a contract or set me up for opportunities like that." Doing more of that kind of work to, I guess, yeah, lower the bar so that people can see that there's more opportunities.
Then the bar raises the more these companies are getting more opportunities to compete for these projects as well, too. I think it's a lot of that that needs to change, but it makes sense to have. It is a good—it's almost like a card of a validation of your—if people that want to support gay-owned businesses and they're like, "Okay, I wanna go to a gay-owned business cuz that's where I choose to diversify my span, is by this way or that way."

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you see a trend—I was looking at the FEMWORKS website, I think it was, and Kimberlee Williams did the TED talk.

Tamara Fleming: Mm-hmm.

Kristyn Scorsone: She was saying that African American women entrepreneurs—it's grown exponentially, the amount of businesses that are being owned.

Tamara Fleming: Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you see that same—a similar trend **[01:40:00]** with lesbians and/or women-of-color lesbians?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah, yeah. Because in that same number of women, African American women started to dominate the area of entrepreneurship because of many ways and many reasons. A lot of them could still be ladled with the issues of racism or sexism and everything else where you feel like, "I'm just not gonna—I'm not gonna be able to break this glass ceiling at this company. Too many times, I've been training the people to work over me. I'm more qualified than them, and yet I'm training them. It's impossible for me—I think this company I'm workin' for will never see me for a powerful person or main contributor, a innovator. They're always gonna see just a black woman."

They have to create their own avenues of being a CEO because it ain't gonna happen in the corporate area. Right? The same thing with—if you say that African American—I don't know the statistics specifically—women are dominating the entrepreneurship arena, then there's a lot of African American women that are lesbian as well, too. Whether they feel good about sharin' that information—they may feel that it may be a negative impact as well because just like I thought—FEMWORKS was 50/50 when we first started. I was one to not necessarily wanted to boldly put it out there, but Kim was like, "No, we gotta be bold about it."

If you are in a position where you've already gotten off on a skinny branch by quitting your job, you're already out on a skinny branch because you started your own company, and your mama and your cousins and your aunts and all them sayin' you're crazy cuz you got food and bills to pay and everything else, and then on top of that you wanna tell 'em you're gay? I'm sure that there's a big chunk of people that are gay black-owned businesses in that number.
I think that just in general for gay-owned businesses, whatever your ethnicity, your races, I think that it's even gonna grow even more because I read studies and statistics that you can be white and a woman and a gay woman, and you will still not be afforded the opportunities to grow and advance as a gay white man. She will have no choice as a white gay woman but to start her own business so that she can be at level of empowering or empowerment for her company, for her community, for her family, and feel like, "At least now I have a equal seat at the table because I made the table. I bought the table. It's my table. If you don't like it, you don't have to be here."
Just like with my wife, Elaine. She dresses male—if you wanna put gender on there, it's like, "Okay." It's like her—she's not gonna wear a dress, first of all. She's not wearing heels. When I met her, she had suits on every day. *[Chuckles]* Going to the store. "Why you got a suit on? You're going to the store."

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

Tamara Fleming: The way she dresses would be very intimidating for a corporate entity, to have some woman that's dressed as a male, quote/unquote, and workin' at this company. She had to create her own business because of that, but even in the entrepreneurial world, you still gotta do business with straight people or whatever,

and they will still judge you. It's still not as easy. I think I may have it, if I could say, easier because I can pass, quote/unquote, for being just two things instead of three things. I can pass as bein' a woman and a black person. No, excuse me—yeah, I can pass as bein' those two, but I don't have to say that I'm gay.

That's why we can look at being—there's like a family. I think if you take out race, then you take out—when you bring in sexuality and gender expression or whatever, there's such a family that exists in the LGBT community because we either wink or nod or smile or shake your hands. When you see someone else doin' it and you're like, "Yeah. That's not cool," because you don't know. That person may just be—even if they're white or Spanish, they may be in a position where they feel like, "All the time **[01:45:00]** I have to be not this person because of the way I dress" or whatever.

I think it just forces you—it should force us all, especially now, to come together to be more inclusive, genuinely inclusive. Yeah. Cuz that's what makes up what America is—this hodgepodge of people and complexities and different personalities, shapes, and thoughts, and everything else—but at the core of it, it's about "I want to live as long as I want to live and be happy and healthy, and I want that for all of everybody that I know. I wanna go to my white friend's house and eat caviar, and I want them to come over to my house and eat the collard greens and—" You know?

[Chuckles]

Yeah, let's experience that kind of thing and let all that other stuff go cuz it would be a crazy world if we just all were the same. It would be very—it'd be super boring if we were just the same. What could you ever learn from just being with someone that's exactly like you?

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you worry at all with the new political climate, with our new president?

Tamara Fleming: Yeah. I do. I try not to focus on what is happening, but it's almost—it's where right now I think you have to jump all in to know what's goin' on because anything can change. With the way these bills are being signed and stuff now, and if you're just like, "I'm not gonna—he's not my president. I'm gonna turn off the TV," the whole world could change. It could be somethin' that he said and he approved. You wouldn't even know because you just don't wanna hear anything about it.

I think this is a time right now; it's about a magnifying glass. You really gotta see cuz the removal of the Affordable Care Act or whatever—health care, HIV treatment—you can't say anymore that "That's them. That's impactin' them and not me." That's your neighbor. That's your kid's potential classmate. Little things.

He is a businessperson, and I like that about him. He's such a businessperson. He's done really well in his area, so I'm like, "Maybe I can learn somethin' from him on that particular end," but I think he needs to do the same thing and open up his mind to really learn about culture and people and learn from a very genuine—cuz no one is a point where they're above learning. If you open yourself up to—if that's even possible. I just don't know. It's like a dream or a fantasy, but I think that we all have to be concerned because it's affecting black, white, someone that's of color, Latina. It's affecting transgender, homeless, people with jobs, people without health care, people with healthcare. Everybody is at risk right now—everybody, and especially your neighbors and in your community. Something that happens two houses down is like a—how long before it impacts my own household? What happens in your household and with your kids

may end up impactin' my kids, and guns or—just anything. Yeah, you just really have to be a lot—we have to be a lot more aggressively concerned about what's happening and what's coming down the pipeline. Yeah.

I think even with my business, Tamara Fleming Photography, I can say that I'm goin' back a little bit to a concern or a question on whether or not someone would feel okay with me takin' their picture because of me being openly gay. When I was in business and we're FEMWORKS, and it was two, and it's okay. That's fine. We've already created this brand. Now in my particular arena, I'm still like, "Huh. I wonder if it's somethin' that—have I lost a client or will I lose a client if I say this, if I'm all the way out?"

Those decisions, those questions, they do come up. What the president is doing or will do is a concern to me as a small businessperson, as a woman, **[01:50:00]** as a gay woman, and everything else. I just think it's just time to be as much into politics or what needs to change or being more vocal about that as possible.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you have any sort of a motto or a mantra or a favorite quote that lifts you up when you're stressed or worried?

Tamara Fleming: Hmm. Oh, wow. None that I can—oh, yeah. There is one that I really love because it centers me and it reminds me that I'm human. I work every day with—every day of being more in, I guess, my goal of being fearless, but that sometimes is still—it still comes up to me. This particular quote was by Audre Lorde. She talks about being fearless a little bit, like living in your—hold on. How does it go? It's when I dare to be powerful—when I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.

That's a really grounding, centering quote for me because my vision for my business, what I have started in the past and what I will start in the future and what I have now, for my wife's business, for my wife's mission of providing a safe space for homeless LGBT youth, and for my business— I might as well say it's a business. It's a volunteer business of running the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. All of those are visions that are all unmistakably gay—*[laughter]*—cuz it's run by a gay woman's thoughts and ideas and vision is of a gay black woman that's been told one thing by a white person but told another thing by her own self and has internalized her own battle inside and has been afraid to sit around a boardroom with people that don't look like her or not being welcomed by a company that will never let her break the glass ceiling.

All of those things where the vision still is—yeah, that freedom comes in entrepreneurship. That freedom comes in being able to redirect my own focus, and I believe that my vision is definitely empowering to other people because, even I feel like no one notices me—*[chuckles]*—I get a lot of people that do come up on the side, like, "You know what? I really love your work. You do a really good job."

All of those kind of—when I first started and we first moved to Newark, when I felt like I wanted to push the gay thing underneath the rug, I'm glad I didn't because now it's influencin' other people, other entrepreneurs, and other photographers and other female photographers in this male-dominated industry. It's a lot. If I can pat my own self on the back, it's like, "Yeah. Okay, girl. You may not have gotten this, this, or that"—cuz my mom even says, "You're just too hard on yourself"—that I am makin' a little bit of headway. I'm happy about that.

That quote is definitely—it reminds me of—if she can say it as a quote, that means that she was afraid, too, or she was pretty badass, so I should really keep that in mind and know that that's what's gonna keep pushing me. My goal is to keep buildin' myself up and learning as much as I can in personal development, professional development, to really help propel myself to the next stage, whatever that's gonna look like—that I can live by this quote.
The other one is an African proverb that I really love. It's—it's "When you pray, move your feet." Some people would pray for things. They could meditate. "Oh, I pray. I've got my vision board, and I'm prayin' and I'm meditatin'. I'm chanting and all of this stuff," but then they just sit there and just wait for all this stuff to happen. **[01:55:00]** It ain't gonna happen unless you move your feet. It's like you can pray for it, chant, meditate, all that other stuff, but you gotta move your feet and do it and then know that whether you're afraid or not, you can still make it happen. I just combine those two quotes. *[Laughter]*

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, I love that. I also wanted to ask what do you think about the revitalization happening in Newark?

Tamara Fleming: I think it's a good thing. Revitalization is always good. Transformation is always a really good thing. I think it's now even more important than ever for people to see—as much as it's changing, I can see where people can be afraid of that change because that change has historically, in other places, not always included them.
There's been so many countless hours of people pavin' the street and knockin' down doors, trying to make change happen through numerous council people, mayors, and city hall meetin's and everything else. It never felt probably that it was getting anywhere.

"That little buildin' that was just vacant forever—I've always had a vision to do somethin' in there, and now these developers come up and they just took everything, and now ain't nobody in there to look like us in there."

I can see how in a lot of ways, it would create a great divide of people that felt—for years I've been passionate about this one thing. I may have not been intellectual enough to bring all of the cards to the table to make it happen, but that has been what kept me up at night. I could see someone feeling a very serious struggle with the success of the revitalization now because revitalization didn't come until money came to the table, but money wasn't coming from people that look like us.

It came from other people that—if you look at examples and these case studies within Brooklyn and Harlem and other places, it moves you out of the conversation when you've been in the mix for a long time, praying for that street, praying for that building, prayin' for that manifestation of something that would come out that's positive cuz you organically always knew that Newark is all that a bag of chips, but now I can't even afford to live there, be there, whatever.

I think it's one of those things where you'll have people that are happy about it, and you'll have people that feel like they might as well just throw in the towel because only now there is a light. They've been keepin' the light on without electricity because the light has been that passion in their heart for a long time.

I'm good with it. I think I can say that, yeah, it'll be important now than ever for me to tell my story because I was one of these people that came in when Newark was a street where I was concerned about going to my car, or my business partner's car got stolen a bunch of times in the city of Newark. Buildin' got broken into, and little things where you're like, "We've been in it when it wasn't

cool and when it was weird—not weird—scared, scary. We've seen these things and stuff."

I think the revitalization is great. It just has to be—like with anything, you have to be very, very, very purposeful in making sure that it stays true to its organic roots. It's built on a city of immigrants and people that migrated here to seek better fortune, and I think we need to keep that as a main ingredient because without that, you just lose—the lackluster just dwindles, and it becomes just a money-makin' machine that has no heart.

I think the city just needs to keep the heart as the focus as much as it has been years of—it never had a heart. "Newark is awful. It's terrible. The only thing you see is negative, bad things." There were so many—always so many beautiful things happening, but you have to look for that beauty. I think people have to still make sure that it's looked for.

That's why I think communications agencies that are telling these stories still have to make sure that they keep the story alive with all of the good stuff that's happening and not just all of the new people that came here to start a new business, but the old people, like the ones that still got the storefronts that you know need some help, or their basement and their transactions and their receipts and everything are still kind of antiquated, **[02:00:00]** but that's what they've got now. They don't have the same money and stability as everything else of these new buildin's.

You have to mix your stories. Your stories have to be very diverse. It can't just be all of the new, opening, trendy restaurants. It has to be people that's been here for a long time and even the ones that had to close their doors. Call them back up, do a feature story on them, and have them talk about why they saw beauty in Newark. That would even bring more people excited about comin' to

Newark because of a story that is more authentic than this new person that came in because now it's "in." It's trendy to be here.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you feel successful?

Tamara Fleming: I do. I struggle with that feeling and I'm—you know what? Never mind. I do. I feel really successful. I feel really successful for having made a decision, whether it was made for me or not. I say "made for me or not" because in my company I probably would've been trying to knock on those doors, do whatever, but it was closing down to a point when I had to make a decision. I'm like, "I'm not going to either of those places." I took a chance on bein' an entrepreneur.

I learned a lot. I have a Ph.D. in entrepreneurism. It gave me that opportunity to flex my wings, to be a little bit more out there. I think coupled with prayer, my camera, and support from my friends and family, that I'm not the person that I was before. That's what's really where I feel that the success comes from because I was a walking basket of insecurities that started from the teenage years to here. It was always trying to figure out what my place is, what my purpose is, what my goal is.

I think just even talkin' about this—"You talk like you got some sense, woman." I do believe that my impact is beneficial to—it will be beneficial to other people, and I look for that platform where I could talk about that more to help other people, mentor other people that are considering entrepreneurship and also really battling with that internal struggle of whether they're worthy of those things, as well, too, that you can get with entrepreneurship. That's just in that freedom and that is in carvin' and makin' your own way. It's all of the struggles. I went from a company where I had a manual that could tell me what happens if this happens—the

computer—"Okay, I'm gonna call Tech Support, and let me look through this book to figure out how you do that"—to a company where it's like, "Tech support. Oh, shoot, that's my number."

[Laughter]

I gotta call my own self to fix it.

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Laughter]*

Tamara Fleming: It's very different. It's—it's a invisible pathway that you have to—it's almost steppin' out on faith where you have to know that there's one foot in front of the other. One of my biggest things that I learned is that even though you may have a fear about sounding right, doing things right, you still have to do it and to still try to network and be in as many people's faces as possible because that's when you build up your self-esteem and your ability to network more.

I think people gravitate towards you more when they see you movin' in that fashion, where half of the time when you do a networking events, there's not that many entrepreneurs in the room. They have a mission because they've got stuff to do. They got bills to pay. It's not easy to do. You gotta talk yourself into motivating yourself to silence your negative critic all the time and sell yourself, constantly selling yourself and your services so that people can be okay with hiring you.

That's where I feel like my success has come in. From the shy, introverted person that couldn't make eye contact with people and was always in the back of the room because I never wanted to stand out, and now **[02:05:00]** if I'm shooting an event or if I'm out networking, I want to be seen. I have to be seen if I'm covering an event. That's for sure. I can't be a shy photographer. Now to a point where I'm like, "Hmm. Yes. Okay. Here's a room. You do your

self-talk." I think it's even to this day like, "Okay." It's kind of nerve-racking—uh!—but you just go in and do it. You shake it off, shake it off, and just like, "Okay," and just do my thing. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you have downtime?

Tamara Fleming: I think my downtime—it's funny. I—I do, but it doesn't come often. We both work very hard, and we used to go from a place where the bed is covered with iPhones and iPads and a tablet. Everything that you could think of, the whole bed is covered with. You wake up with it. You go to sleep with it. It can be a bit much. Then I think the downtime is harder, too, on a relationship, especially when you got both of 'em working because it always seems like you never see each other.

I just responded to *GO Magazine*, like captivating couples, and one of the questions is like, "What do you guys do to keep your love alive?" I'm like, "We try to shut down the computers and the phones and all the other stuff," but bottom line is that the downtime, I guess, would be I might be a little harder on myself because I feel that I feel guilty when I'm on Facebook.

I try to do maybe—I think if I—I started to time myself. I may spend 15 minutes, and sometimes I can spend up to 30 minutes on Facebook or some other social media platform, and I feel super guilty by it by not completing certain tasks that I have, but I stop being too hard cuz I'm like, "Shit, I'm just relaxin' for a little bit. You just gotta take it down."

Then downtime, too, is reading. It doesn't sound fun at all, but you gotta read. Most of my stuff is in learning about what's going on in the world or trying to stay abreast onto what's newly developing. Technology is moving so fast. Especially as an entrepreneur, you have to throw yourself into learning and to read and see what's

going on because if you're not in a large corporation where you've got a spray of age diversity, race and ethnicity diversity, and education diversity, then you don't have people just meetin' at lunch and you be like, "Oh, yeah. Where'd you learn—oh, yeah, we talked about this, and then we were doin' this."

You don't get—you're not getting the same amount of access to new stuff, new trends, new development, as you would when you're working for a company. As an entrepreneur, I don't have my staff or whatever. I have consultants, and they do jobs and they leave. They do what they gotta do and gimme what I gotta have, and then they're gone. It's not like a company where you can talk about what's trending, what's new, and it's something that you're staying abreast on.

You have to be your own researcher, and so downtime looks like reading, research, and—yeah, either audio books, something. Then downtime when I really wanna break it down could be we go fishing and just trying to relax. I like outdoors and nature, so I do a lot of "Oh, let's just go—" My whole thing is really doing—I wanna go to the mountains and just picnic or cook out or somethin' like that. I like to do more stuff like that.

I feel like I'm more into driving now. At any point in time during the summer, "Let's go for a drive." We go all the way up 280 and end up in Pennsylvania. That's why I love it cuz it's like the hills are just freakin' amazing, or Bear Mountain, or upstate New Paltz, New York, and little places like that cuz it's like, "This is nice." The drivin' part ain't so cool, but I still like it. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years?

Tamara Fleming: That's the same thing *GO Magazine* asked.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah?

Tamara Fleming: It asked about where do I see my relationships. I see myself with the newly created ways of havin' residual income so that I have money comin' in from different places. **[02:10:00]** It could be from real estate. I could be from affiliate marketing. It could be from consulting. I can see just having a better grasp of different types of income and still having photography as a main source, but maybe not the shooter but the recruiter, the overseer, a distributor of that, manager overseeing the ease and flow of something and the process of it but not necessarily doin' it as much unless it's a special project.

I see myself definitely doin' a lot more international travel, working with more women and girls in different countries. Yeah. A lot more of that, and being super super happy and traveling more with my wife who's been very patient. I'm gonna get it tonight for real.

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Chuckles]* Do you feel like I covered everything? Is there anything you wish I had asked? Did I miss anything?

Tamara Fleming: Hmm. No. I think this is—you got a lot of great questions. I would say to ask my own question—answer my own question—if I had it to do all over again, would I do it?—I would say yeah. I would definitely do it. I would do it a little bit differently where I would take who I am now and bring it back to who I was and say, "It'll be okay" and "You don't have to be so afraid," and "You don't have to let somebody just be in control more because it would be better if all of y'all were in control, and you can collaborate," and it wouldn't be so much of a concern about not making the right decision.

I would just say, "Make the wrong decision because all of the decisions you let someone else make isn't always the right ones. Make it and be more vocal." I would just talk to my 15-year-old self a little bit more to tell her that she needs to stay back there with the 15-year-old and stop coming into my meetings—

[Laughter]

Tamara Fleming: - and stop making herself very present in my meetings, and have myself now be more present—yeah—or stop second-guessing the stuff and just do it. That's what I would say, that I would still do it, but just do it in a different way, more from a wiser point of view. Maybe if I had my grandmother around, I could've asked her. She could've been that person that—tell me what some of her struggles as an entrepreneur was. That could've give me that power to do that.

I think, yeah, I would still just—and then I would say I would just, as I am now, not to be too hard and to really be more confident in knowing what I want, cuz I think one of my other big things as a person has always been in my communication, thinking that I have to sound a certain way in order to be heard or respected. I would let go of some of that stuff cuz I'm like, "If Donald Trump can be the president, and his biggest word is 'very, very' and 'many, many'—

Kristyn Scorsone: *[Chuckles]* Mm-hmm.

Tamara Fleming: - then I could definitely—*[laughter]*—

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah.

Tamara Fleming: - be okay." Yeah. I would let go of a lot of that internal chatter.

Kristyn Scorsone: I guess I have one final question, and that is what is your favorite kind of day look like?

Tamara Fleming: Hmm. My favorite kind of day is to wake up, pray, chant, tap, cuz I'm into everything now—it's so funny—

[Laughter]

Tamara Fleming: - and exercise. All of my equipment is already packed up because I'm goin' on a super awesome shoot, and I have my team. They received their call sheets. They know exactly where we're gonna do—where we're going, what time to be there. We've scouted out our location. We're gonna have a wonderful shoot, shooting some amazing people in the business community, whether it's telling a story of what their story is, or whether it's **[02:15:00]** a CEO and getting some very professional but then also some lifestyle photos in there.

We're shooting. I got my boom box with me so I can change the music up at any time. I have a little selection of really nice, healthy foods to eat and nibble on in the middle of the breaks. I'm lookin' at my laptop because I've tethered, and I'm lookin' at the images, and I'm, like, "Oh, my god. This is so amazing!"

The sun is shining or it's overcast—it doesn't matter—but everybody is just havin' a really great time. The team is in their zone, their creative zone. The person that we're shooting and working for is really excited and feelin' it and tweetin' and taking behind-the-scenes footage and loadin' it onto social media. We got live Facebook, and everyone's seein' what we're doing. It's creating this momentum around what's being created and havin' fun about it.

Then I'm also takin' time to be grateful and be thankful for every single click, every single thing I see, my client, the car that I'm drivin' in. I check my phone, and every time it dings, it's someone that's makin' a deposit or payin' a bill, and it's comin' into my bank account. I go home to a beautiful home, to a beautiful wife. The food is cooked.

[Laughter]

Tamara Fleming: The music is on. Incense is burning. I have a beautiful backyard that is the perfect escape and get away. We retire to the backyard for the evening, and there's a big super projector with a awesome movie playing. A couple of friends stop by. Yeah. That's what it looks like. *[Laughter]*

Kristyn Scorsone: That sounds great.

[Laughter]

Kristyn Scorsone: Thank you so much.

Tamara Fleming: Thank you.

Kristyn Scorsone: Thank you.

Tamara Fleming: Thank you so much.

[End of Audio 02:17:17]