



WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies, other reproductions, and reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

- Brooklyn Historical Society is not responsible for either determining the copyright status of the material or for securing copyright permission.
- Possession of a reproduction does not constitute permission to use it.
- Permission to use copies other than for private study, scholarship, or research requires the permission of both Brooklyn Historical Society and the copyright holder. For assistance, contact Brooklyn Historical Society at library@brooklynhistory.org.
- Read more about the Brooklyn Historical Society's Reproduction Rights Policy online: http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn_Historical_Society_Reproduction.

GUIDELINES FOR USE

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.

2. Every oral history relies on the memories, views and opinions of the narrator. Because of the personal nature of oral history, listeners may find some viewpoints or language of the recorded participants to be objectionable. In keeping with its mission of preservation and unfettered access whenever possible, BHS presents these views as recorded.
3. This transcript is a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. As such, it may contain the natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, and repetitions that are common in conversation. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
4. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
5. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
 - La'Viticus, Timothy, Oral history interview conducted by Andrew Viñales, July 13, 2017, Voices of Crown Heights oral histories, 2016.027.1.18; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Oral History Interview with Timothy La'Viticus

Voices of Crown Heights oral histories, 2016.027.1.18

Interview conducted by Andrew Viñales at the narrator's home on July 13, 2017 on
Grand Concourse, the Bronx

VIÑALES: Hello. Today is Thursday, July 13th, 2017, and I am Andrew Viñales from the Brooklyn Historical Society. I am with Timothy La'Viticus, and we are at his home in the Grand Concourse near the Bronx-Lebanon Hospital. This oral history interview is for the Brooklyn Historical Society's Voices of Crown Heights Project. Now, Timothy, if you would please introduce yourself, giving your full name, birth date, and where you were born.

LA'VITICUS: My birth date, you say? [laughter] I'm Timothy Boyd, aka Timothy La'Viticus, born in Virginia, and what else was there?

VIÑALES: Where you were born, birth date, and can you tell me just a little bit about your early life?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I was born in Virginia, raised in New York, basically in Harlem, and then I moved to the Bronx. And I've been in the Bronx in the same apartment for about 40 years or more.

VIÑALES: Wow.

LA'VITICUS: And I live here with my two Yorkshire Terriers.

VIÑALES: What are their names?

LA'VITICUS: Shy and -- I'm sorry. Sky and Chloe.

VIÑALES: Sky and Chloe. They're beautiful dogs. [laughter] Well, thank you for letting me be in your home to do this interview. This interview primarily is about your experience with Starlite and what you know -- the club or bar in Crown Heights. But before we get into that, I'd like to know a little bit more about your upbringing. Can you tell me a little bit about your early life and --

LA'VITICUS: OK, you ask me what you want to know, and then I'll answer it.

VIÑALES: Sure.

LA'VITICUS: OK. [laughter]

VIÑALES: So tell me -- tell me about your family, growing up in Virginia, and then moving to New York.

LA'VITICUS: Growing up in Virginia, that's kind of far back to remember. It was just a country. I was raised in the country, in the boondocks -- well, I call it the boondocks. It's the woods. And I lived there with my parents and was raised with my aunts and uncles who -- we now call my cousins, sisters, and brothers, so we look at them -- just so you know, I'm not good at this.

VIÑALES: [laughter] That's OK. You're doing fine.

LA'VITICUS: I moved to New York. We moved to -- again, we moved to Harlem where I lived with my mother and my sisters, and from there we moved to Delaware, which was Wilmington, and then I moved back to New York.

VIÑALES: So it was a lot of back-and-forth?

LA'VITICUS: Yeah. Well, I never lived in Virginia. Well, from a child I lived there, and then I moved from there to New York. So after I moved from Virginia, I never moved back there. It was just to New York, Delaware, and then back to New York again.

VIÑALES: OK. [laughter] Well, can you tell me when you finally moved to the Bronx and kind of stayed here? You said you were living in this apartment --

LA'VITICUS: OK. I lived -- I have been living in this apartment for 40 years, but before I lived here I lived on College Avenue, which is walking distance from here. And I lived there with my daughter, my biological daughter. And I raised her here in this apartment.

VIÑALES: Wow, you're very lucky to --

LA'VITICUS: Yes, just her and myself.

VIÑALES: -- to have an apartment for 40 years these days. [laughter]

LA'VITICUS: Yeah.

VIÑALES: So, just so I -- I just want to get a better picture or idea of who you are as a person before we get into Starlite. Can I ask you a little bit more about the things that you

liked to do growing up and--?

LA'VITICUS: I'm not too good about talking about myself. Growing up, what did I do? I didn't do much of anything growing up. I was a homebody. I'm still a homebody. What did I do? I worked in a fish store, a pet shop. We distributed -- I forget what you call it when you distribute fish from different -- wholesalers. I worked with this lady and husband team who owned a fish warehouse where they delivered pets, tropical fish, to different stores, and I did that for a while, and that was in Delaware. And what else did I do? I had a lot of pets growing up. I loved animals. I still love animals, there just not in my place. [laughter]

VIÑALES: Minus your two dogs.

LA'VITICUS: Yes, minus my two -- and when they're gone, there will be no more. I had snakes here --

VIÑALES: Wow.

LA'VITICUS: -- an iguana here, which I shared with my ex-mate. What else? I don't know what else. [laughter]

VIÑALES: OK. Let's just get into it then. I know we're -- we're here to talk about Starlite, and Starlite has been around for a minute. And what I know about Starlite is things that I've researched, people saying that it opened more or less in the 19-- early 1960s, but I don't know about you and your involvement with it. So can you tell me how you started up with Starlite?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I used to work in a bar in the Village, Greenwich Village -- 81, I think it was 81 Christopher Street -- called Two Potatoes, which became -- later on became Chances Are. And the manager of Starlite at the time would come by. He'd frequent our bar as well, [unintelligible]. His name was Bob Mack. He used to try and -- he would ask me to come, you know, work for him at the Starlite as well, but I was running Two Potatoes at the time, and I was dedicated to them, so I stayed. Once Chances Are, which was formerly known as Two Potatoes, closed down, eventually I did go to work for Bob Mack and became manager there within time.

VIÑALES: Wow.

LA'VITICUS: But before I man-- was managing the bar, there was -- his name -- his biological name is Gaylord, in case -- don't anybody think I'm being -- [laughter] OK. And before Gaylor--, Gaylord, they -- oh, God, I can't remember the manager's name before him, who was also related to the owner of the bar, after her brother passed away - - which was Butch. He was the owner of the bar as well. He had a lot of wonderful workers there with him at the time before me, which was Lisette. She helped run the bar. Somebody we called Mama Dot; she ran the bar, she worked there. And we had the mayor of New York, who frequented the bar, which was Mildred; a pain in people's behind, but she was a lovely woman. And then quite a few people. We had a lot of -- during the daytime, we had a lot of older people there, and it, as time went on, you'd see it become younger and older. It was a very mixed crowd in this bar, Black, White. Everybody was welcome, and they had a beautiful time there.

VIÑALES: Great. Can you tell me, just to be a little bit more specific around what time period, what year was it that you started working there?

LA'VITICUS: OK, now you want my brain to work, huh? I think it was -- no, it wasn't -- it was around about 2000. No, it couldn't have been 2000, about 2006 maybe, I think, around there. I'll have to double-check that, but I think it was 2006.

VIÑALES: And you were saying -- at this time, you were already working at a place in the Village.

LA'VITICUS: Right.

VIÑALES: Can you tell me how you got involved in working the clubs and the bars?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I used to frequent Two Potatoes a lot. I used to go there quite often, and at this time -- at this particular time, it was run by someone named Conrad -- I hope I'm pronouncing his name right -- Wickolin, and he was the manager there. And we used to call him "Queen Bitch" because he was just that, you know, and he became -- I have never had a gay mother before, but he was -- became my gay mother of the bar. He was also White, in case people are wondering. But he was a beautiful person, and he hired me as his assistant at the time when he was there at the bar.

VIÑALES: Great.

LA'VITICUS: So that's how I got into the bar business, and we did showcases there and all that.

VIÑALES: What were the showcases like?

LA'VITICUS: Showcases are wonderful. We had quite a few hosts. I think the -- probably the iconic hosts of Two Potatoes, aka -- well, also known as Chances Are, was Princess Brittany. You know, she's one of the -- from what I can think of, remember, right now, she's one of the oldest performers they had there. Then, there came a group called "The Divas," which was -- consisted of Lorraine, Victoria Lace, and I can't remember the primary person who started that particular group. He -- he passed. He was from the Island. He passed on, and then someone else took his place who -- I can't remember their name either, but I'll get back to you on that. [laughs]

VIÑALES: That's fine. [laughter] Well, we're just getting started, getting your -- your brain thinking. And so, around this time in 2006, you were working in Two Pota-- was it called Two Potatoes yet or--?

LA'VITICUS: No, it was called -- it was Two Potatoes then. It became Chances Are --

VIÑALES: Two Potatoes then. Right.

LA'VITICUS: -- later on down the line.

VIÑALES: So you -- so you were working in Two Potatoes, and then Bob saw you.

LA'VITICUS: Right.

VIÑALES: And then -- so what did he say to you to go-- to convince you to work?

LA'VITICUS: Well, no, he -- well, he would always come in and say, "Whenever you need another job, you know, come work for me." Well, you know, "Would you like to work for me, you know, do part-time?" And I would always say no, because managing a -- Two Potatoes, a bar, takes a lot of your time. You never know if you're going to be in there from one minute to the next, and sometimes I was there during the day. I spent a lot of nights there, so most of my ti-- it was like I lived there, so I was always there, so you couldn't run two bars at the same time. I'm sure you could have, but I chose not to, you know, so -- well, not run his bar, work at his bar, correction. And eventually, when this bar closed down, I went to work for him.

VIÑALES: When did that bar close down?

LA'VITICUS: You know, I don't remember that either. [laughter]

VIÑALES: Was it shortly after, maybe a couple years later?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I -- I think I went to work for Bob in two-thousand-- again, these dates may not be right -- around about 2006, and that's -- a little before that is when Two Potatoes cl-- Chances Are closed down.

VIÑALES: Right.

LA'VITICUS: I still call it Two Potatoes though.

VIÑALES: Right. I'm asking you these questions because, in my experience and in my research, I know that gay bars tend to come and go, sad story.

LA'VITICUS: Yeah. Yeah.

VIÑALES: And I think it's really important that we understand, kind of, that dynamic. So from around 2006, somehow, Two Potatoes closes, turns into something else. You leave, and you go into Star-- to Starlite, and you were there until when?

LA'VITICUS: Until they closed.

VIÑALES: Until they closed. And when did they close?

LA'VITICUS: And don't ask me that date either.

VIÑALES: OK. [laughter]

LA'VITICUS: I think it was 2010.

VIÑALES: Yes. And according to my research, it was 2010, so you're better than you think.

LA'VITICUS: OK, good. I think my birth-- my last birthday party there was 2009, so that's why I'm thinking it was 2010. OK.

VIÑALES: Right. So in that time, from two-th-- around 2006 to 2010, what were some of the things that you would do managing Starlite, working -- working it?

LA'VITICUS: Whatever entails running a bar, I guess, ordering different types of liquor, different types of beer. We had a variety of beer, which a lot of other bars didn't have, because we had a variety of people who drank a lot of things, and we had the seasonal - I think it's the seasonal beers with -- you know, that change with the seasons, we had that. So -- especially around karaoke, because that's when they like to drink the most.

We had dancing. The front area was a bar, a nice, little, cozy bar. Oh, sorry.

VIÑALES: That's all right.

LA'VITICUS: A nice, little, cozy bar area, and then you go up these little two steps, and it's a little dancing area on the weekends. And otherwise, it was used as a little lounge area. People sat around talking and drinking their drinks in the little, cozy, dim lights back there. You could see each other, but the music was nice and soft, you know. So I guess the daily ordering of things and making sure things went right and the staffing was on point. But we did everything as a team there. So, in order for it to wor-- for me, in order for it to work, it had to work as a team, and everybody had input, basically, in what we did. I mean, I had the last say-so -- other than the owners, of course -- but we usually did everything as a team, and it worked better that way because everybody stayed happy. You know, we had less attitudes and less people trying to be big shots, and, you know, to me, in my opinion, yeah.

VIÑALES: Speaking of teams, can you tell me some of the people who were part of that team when you were there?

LA'VITICUS: We kept my pain-in-the-ass friend David. [laughter] David -- I hope I'm saying his name right -- Popo? Papao? Which is -- I was going to hit up before you got here. He's the sound and light tech. He made sure the lighting for the dance floor was on point, the DJ's booth was on point and sound, probably. He would give me hell about the DJs that we hired and want to, wanted to hire. He had a lot of input in that area, and I, you know, admired him a lot for that because he kept me on my toes, and I kept him on his, I guess. So that was David. Then, we had our bartenders. I hope I don't leave anybody out. There was Michael, again, Mama Dot, Lisette, who was also -- helped the running of the day-to-day business of the bar before I came along and after. Who else? I can't think. Karen Covergirl, who's transgender, Montana. There's quite a few people. I know I'm missing somebody, and, of course, there's Donna, who helped run the bar as well. And who else is there? I'm missing quite a few people. I just can't think of them right now, but there's quite a few people that helped with the day-to-day running of the bar and worked there.

VIÑALES: And so can you -- so I'm getting a sense of -- there was a team of people there, and it is an LGBT, gay bar, but I would like to know maybe more of the demographics of the people that were there.

LA'VITICUS: We didn't call it was a gay bar. We just said it was an open-to-everybody bar. I never liked to put that -- a name on it, because when people come along, they'll say, "What kind of bar is this?" We would say, "It's an everybody's bar," because that's what we -- it was known as to us. We had all walks of life in there, and everybody was welcome, so I never said it was a gay bar. I just said it was an everybody's bar, and what was the other question?

VIÑALES: Well, I was going to ask you, so -- but I think that's more important, calling it an "everybody's bar," and --

LA'VITICUS: And it was also known as a safe zone, a safe haven, or whatever they used to call it; safe zone, safe haven. But we had a sign that said "Safe Haven," so if you had a problem outside and you needed some help, you would come in, and we did our best to either get the authorities and to help you or let you stay there until somebody came that would help you do whatever you needed to get done.

VIÑALES: And do you think that was important?

LA'VITICUS: Yes, we did. It helped that people knew we cared, because we did, and they were all in the neighborhood, and it helped us communicate better with the neighborhood. And they walked by, and we'd speak like -- you know, everybody was neighbors and stuff. It worked out. It worked out for me. I'm sure it worked out for everybody else as well.

VIÑALES: Great. So you're talking about the neighborhood, and can you tell me about, one, where Starlite was situated but also about the community itself?

LA'VITICUS: Say that again.

VIÑALES: Can you tell me where Starlite was and ab-- can you describe the community?

LA'VITICUS: You mean, oh, the location of it. It was on Bergen and Nostrand. It sat next to a funeral parlor who also owned the building we were in until they sold it. And as far as -- and about the community, the community -- it was a nice community. They -- we

never had any problems with the community, and they never had any with us. As a matter of fact, the community got along with the bar, and the bar got along with the community, and everything went smooth. I don't know what to say. [laughter]

VIÑALES: You're doing fine. [laughter] So can you tell me what being a safe zone really means and a safe space for the community, and were there any instances where people would come to seek that safety?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I think some people would use it as an excuse, probably, to come into the bathroom. "Oh, someone is chasing me. Can I go to your bathroom?" You know, so we got that a lot, but I don't think we really had -- that I can remember -- had any real problems. Oh, yes, we did. We had one lady who got lost. I think she had Alzheimer's or something. We don't know, but she would -- a couple -- a few times, she found her way to the bar, and then we would call 911, and they would come and pick her up and try and escort her home. But other than that, I don't think we ever had anything really -- any real problems come through there that we had to help somebody with. But if it did occur, they were -- we were there to help.

VIÑALES: Well, that's great --

LA'VITICUS: That I can remember, anyway.

VIÑALES: Well, that's great that that was a thing that people can go to if they needed it. And I think, if we could slow down just a little bit, I'd like to know -- you know, you -- again, you said it was an everybody's bar, but I would like to know who were the actual people that frequented it.

LA'VITICUS: Well, everyone, actually, everyone. We had all walks of life there throughout the day, the weekends, or whatever, because everybody was welcome. Now, on the weekends, Saturday mostly, there was-- more or less-- the gay community in there for dancing, but still we had others in there as well, enjoying themselves among, you know, all of us. But on Saturday, basically, there was a majority of gay people there. On karaoke, there was a mixture of everybody there. All walks of life came for karaoke. It became a very good spot for karaoke for most people in the neighborhood, and people came from other places as well to join, to sing karaoke with us. Yeah, so that's what I

can think of right now. [laughter]

VIÑALES: So you -- I know, currently, you do a lot of events and perform-- help run performances and things like that. Were you doing things like that at Starlite?

LA'VITICUS: Yes. Yes.

VIÑALES: Can you tell me about some of those?

LA'VITICUS: Let me see. We had quite a few shows there, quite -- birthday parties as well as anniversary parties, different events there for different people. I think at one time or twice we may have shut the bar area down, and I think they had something there for little kids, as well. Which, you can't do that as long as the liquor is out, so you have to cover it and shut that area down. So we had a back door that the kids would use if they had to come in to go to the bathroom sometimes, you know, in an emergency or they want to give a little bit of a party or something. I think we did that twice. Other than that, most of our shows were female impersonators; Karen Covergirl, Lady Jasmine, Luscious. Who else? There's quite a few people, male and female performers. We even had a poet for a while come there. He did a poetry night there. It went well for a while, but he preferred -- I think he went to go to -- either to Manhattan -- that's the area he wanted to be in. But we had a variety of different things there, yeah. So if you want to give you a party there, I think you could have come, too. [laughter]

VIÑALES: So were you -- so you're talking when -- you're talking about different types of performances, different types of activity including drag performances.

LA'VITICUS: Drag performances, yeah.

VIÑALES: And was that a common thing in Crown Heights?

LA'VITICUS: Well, at our -- yeah, it is a common thing in a lot of places, though, nowadays. Well, before now, too, but, yes, it was common, especially for us, because we did -- a lot of our customers enjoyed the drag shows, and they would call just to see who was performing and if there was a drag show that night. We didn't give a lot of drag shows because it was, basically, a dance bar. We basically had drag shows there if there was a special event, like a birthday party or something there, then we did it there. Other than that, it wasn't like an everyday thing, you know, just special events.

VIÑALES: OK. And while these things were going on, what were you doing?

LA'VITICUS: Who, me?

VIÑALES: Yeah.

LA'VITICUS: Running around, making sure everybody was having a nice time, being a host. I had to make sure everybody was having a nice time, so I would go around --

VIÑALES: That's good.

LA'VITICUS: -- to, you know, different -- various people, saying, "Are you having a nice time? Do you need any help? Is there --?" You know, just asking questions to make sure everybody was good and their drinks were on point, because, you know, I wanted to make sure everybody was well. There's no way they'd come back again, so --

VIÑALES: That's nice.

LA'VITICUS: -- yeah, I did a lot of that.

VIÑALES: Yeah. Well, I'm going to bring something up. You were quoted in *The New York Times*. [laughter]

LA'VITICUS: Which I probably -- I don't remember, but go ahead.

VIÑALES: This is in 2010, just when it was about to close, and you said here, "If someone had too much to drink, we'll make sure someone follows him home to make sure he gets there safely whether he likes it or not," while you were currently the manager. Can you tell me what being the manager at Starlite really meant for you in terms of keeping the people who were there feeling safe and like [inaudible]?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I looked at everybody who came there as though they were family, and I treated them as they were family, and so did the people who worked there. That's what -- that's what -- we liked everybody to feel like family there. So if someone was intoxicated, we tried to get them a cab. A lot of the -- of the people who came there lived in the neighborhood, so we would get people to walk them back home and make sure they got in their apartments. They weren't -- they didn't go inside. They would just make sure they got to the door and the door was locked, unless it was somebody that we knew well and they invited them in. Then, they would go in, but mostly it was just to make sure people got home safely and were in good health. Yeah, so that -- I

guess --

VIÑALES: Community, right?

LA'VITICUS: Yeah, just making sure everybody got there. A lot of them were in walking distance, so they walked, or they got into a cab or whatever. But even if they got into a cab some of our people still went with them, depending on the situation that they were in or how they felt, just to make sure they got in. Yeah.

VIÑALES: That's great. I really get a sense of family and community and --

LA'VITICUS: Yeah.

VIÑALES: -- making sure that everyone is OK, but that brings me to thinking about its closing. So can you tell me the events leading up to that being closed?

LA'VITICUS: The bar was sold. When the bar was sold, that's when we started having the problems, because the -- it was so -- the funeral parlor owned it, the building, and he sold the buildings. I guess he sold sections of the building off, as well, and when he sold this, our building, the people who bought the building no longer wanted the bar there anymore. I'm not sure if it was because it was a gay bar or they considered it to be a gay bar or because it sold liquor. It was many excuses. But, anyway, they had no -- they did not want us to renew the lease. They would prefer to rent the lease out to other people, which they did once they got us out of there. But we tried to stay, but it didn't -- reason with them, and it didn't work, so we had to go. And we weren't able to find anything else, so it's been gone-- we did give a reunion. I think we gave a reunion party once, and as it ended, there was a discussion a couple of months ago about doing it -- giving another one, but we haven't gotten back into the discussion about it again yet. But, hopefully, we will be doing another reunion soon.

VIÑALES: Can you tell me about how you were feeling and how everybody else was feeling once you realized that the closing was a possibility?

LA'VITICUS: Wow. It was like losing part of your family, because everybody there was so close, and, you know, it was a really hurtful moment when we realized that we really had to go. And a lot of other people felt the same way, as well. The night, the final night, there were just so many people there, showing their support. There was not even

enough room to get them all in, so; as people went out, people were coming in, right up until closing. Even when we closed there were still people trying to get in to have a drink, their last drink there before the doors closed, so it was a very sad day -- night, or morning I should say, because it was morning when it-- when we closed it, yeah.

VIÑALES: So one of the things that, I guess, keeps Starlite and its lore kind of popular is that there was some sort of documentary about it. Do you remember anything about this, this happening?

LA'VITICUS: The documentary?

VIÑALES: Yeah.

LA'VITICUS: Well, I remember being there. [laughter] I don't get too involved in a lot of talking, so I don't remember very much about it, and I didn't see the documentary myself. But a lot of people who have seen it said it was great, to see it. And when it came out, I was out of town, and I just never got around to seeing it. I'm not sure if I want to yet, you know, but eventually I will. But so -- but I got -- a lot of people who have seen it told me that they enjoyed it and it was nice. And if you -- they had a few talk -- panels on it. I guess that's what it's called, panels on it, that -- I wasn't able to get there either, because I was out of town again, too. It seems like every time something happens I'm someplace else. [laughter] But it turned out to be pretty well from what I understand.

VIÑALES: Great. So you mentioned that there were some reunions. There was one reunion at least. Can you tell me how that wound up happening?

LA'VITICUS: The owners, Linda and Dennis, and myself decided -- came up with the idea. There probably were other people involved in it, too. It was quite a few of us. We would have meetings about doing it and eventually found a place that's no longer there. I can't remember the name of it, but the place that we found, they used to do a lot of Roaring '20s parties there and a Roaring '20s setup. It was nice, so we gave it -- there was a beautiful turnout. A lot of people came, so it was beautiful.

VIÑALES: Were there a lot of themes that you did --

LA'VITICUS: No, we didn't do it -- for this particular party?

VIÑALES: No, for -- for all the parties that-- in Starlite.

LA'VITICUS: No, it was only a theme if it was a special event. If someone gave a birthday party and they wanted a theme, then there would be a theme for that. Or if it was a special show and someone wanted it to be a theme, there would be a theme for that. But other than that, if it wasn't a special event, there was no theme, because we were just, basically, dancing on the weekends. And then, most people who came there, came there to dance. They wanted to hear house, and a lot of them didn't care for shows, and if they did they wanted it to be done and over with soon so they can get back to dancing and put their baby powder all over the floor and dance in it and stuff like that, but yeah.

VIÑALES: So this was a dance spot.

LA'VITICUS: A dance spot, yes, basically, dancing. They liked the shows, but they didn't want them there for long periods of time, so it was basically just dancing.

VIÑALES: So was it -- what kind of music were people dancing to?

LA'VITICUS: House.

VIÑALES: House music?

LA'VITICUS: House, yeah. Who was it that DJs there? Here we go again with my memory. Wow, this is horrible. I can't think of anybody's name. Do you have anything written down there with their names on them? [laughter] That's -- oh, did I mess up?

VIÑALES: That's OK. No, you're fine.

LA'VITICUS: That's horrible when you can't remember people's names when you're -- when you're put on the spot. Wow. I'd have to look their names up.

VIÑALES: That's OK. Don't worry about it.

LA'VITICUS: But there's quite a few people that played there on a regular basis that--

VIÑALES: Don't worry about it. It's fine. [laughter] So I'd like to know -- so on the weekends, you said, it was the parties and, you said, the dancing, and sometimes there were performances. But what about the day-to-day, regular --

LA'VITICUS: Throughout the week?

VIÑALES: -- throughout the week?

LA'VITICUS: Throughout the week, we just had people come in, order drinks. A lot of the old-timers throughout the week, they came in just to have a few cocktails and whatever and probably go outside and play their numbers outside and come back in and wait for the numbers to come out and complain that the numbers didn't come in, I mean, that they didn't hit and buy a couple more drinks because they were -- didn't hit, and, you know, tell some people off because -- they accused them because they didn't hit, because they jinxed them or something. But throughout the week, there was just a lot of people just coming in and drinking and having a nice time and holding conversations and walking out. After work, people would come there and have a couple of drinks before going home. And then, you have the little night people-- that come in during the night-- that came in to get a drink right before they went to bed. I can't think of anything else right now.

VIÑALES: So can you tell me if there was any involvement with the community outside of, just, the actual space?

LA'VITICUS: Yes. Yes. I mean, a lot of the people that came to the bar actually hung out together outside of the bar. They gave cookouts. People would come to their cookouts, or they would come to the bar and invite people from the bar and say they can come out. We had one person, Mildred -- we called her the mayor of -- the mayor of Nostrand. That was Mildred, so she did the macaroni and cheese. Everybody loved her macaroni and cheese. It was always late getting there; but, you know, if you told her to be there at 1:00 with the macaroni and cheese, she'd come there at 3:00. You know, so they communicated outside of the bar a lot. Yeah.

VIÑALES: So one of the things that I'm interested in is, kind of, what other people had to say, who weren't at the bar or who didn't go to the Starlite -- was there any type of pushback from the community? Might be--?

LA'VITICUS: Negative-wise or --

VIÑALES: -- it could -- yeah, if there was any negative --

LA'VITICUS: I don't remember anything negative. We had a lot of people in the neighborhood say, oh, they're going to come. I can't think of anything negative

offhand, but I know when we would walk out and let people know that we were in the bar, some people didn't -- in the neighborhood-- didn't know that it was a bar or just didn't pay attention, but they would say they would come. And we got a lot of -- we never got any bad feedback from the bar, because we were a very good -- the bar was good. The people in it were good. There was never a whole lot of arguing outside of the bar, so it never brought any bad attention, any bad attention to the bar, so-- Now, somebody else may have known things that are bad, but, you know, not me, because they've been there longer. Yeah.

VIÑALES: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, you got in towards the tail end, but can you tell me what you know about the history of this place?

LA'VITICUS: If I'm not mistaken, I think the bar -- before Butch took it over, or maybe even before him -- I'm not sure -- it was an Irish bar, from what I understand. And then, I think -- I think it was Butch, but I'm not exactly sure. Then, they started calling it a gay bar, but then we would all say, "It's not a gay bar, because everybody comes here." You know, so I know he took it over. His name was Butch. Butch passed on. When Butch passed on, his sister and her husband took it over. Her nephew -- I think it is, whose name I cannot remember right now-- ran it, the bar, for her, and then he passed. I may have this a little wrong. I think it was Butch first. No, not Butch, I'm sorry -- Bob, did Bob bring the bar with him? I think he ran the bar along with -- with Bob, and then he passed. And then, Gaylord became manager. And then, after Gaylord became manager, and he stepped down or whatever happened with that -- I don't remember -- I became manager. I was -- I was basically everybody's assistants as far as Gaylord's and Bob -- and Bob's, and then I became manager after Gaylord. And they all ran the bar well. They were good people, you know, and they lived in Brooklyn. Well, no, that's not true. I think Bob lived in Queens. But Gaylord lived in Brooklyn, not far from the bar. Yeah, and so did Lisette, lived in Brooklyn -- she lives in Georgia now. But she has a lot to say, so, still, even though she's in Atlanta. She still has a lot of feed-- what do you call it, feedback or whatever? You know, a lot of input in the bar, still, to this day. When the people -- people want to say something about Starlite, they call her a lot and

let her know what's going on, or she'll call them if something is happening, and we'll call her and say, "We're going to do this," and she gives her feedback. And it -- you know, so we try to keep her in the loop whenever it's something that's pertaining to the bar, as well. You probably didn't ask anything about that, did you?

VIÑALES: That's fine.

LA'VITICUS: OK. [laughter]

VIÑALES: Give me -- I want to hear everything. I want to hear it all.

LA'VITICUS: Sorry. OK.

VIÑALES: You're doing fine. Don't worry about it. If you could tell me a little bit more about the dynamics of the people who worked there, what kind of people were working there, and how did you work together to keep the place successful--

LA'VITICUS: Going?

VIÑALES: --ly going?

LA'VITICUS: I don't know. I just think it -- we just worked together as a t-- you know, as long as we worked together as a team, I think that's what made it work. You know, everybody knew what they had to do, and we did -- even though they had their own-- Like, the bartenders knew they were bartenders, but if they were needed in other places they would go to help out, even if they come out to hang out. If there was something that needed to be helped with, they helped. It was like, you know, everybody lent a helping hand. Sometimes our customers, our old-timers, I should say, even had a lot to say, you know, on the day-to-day, because they had -- they had a lot to say. Trust me, they had a lot to say. Tell you how you shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that. And sometimes it made sense, and we listened to them, too, because they were there everybody, you know, so that even helped us make things run better. So I think just the fact of, again, as a team, that's what made everything work, you know. I don't know what else to say about that other than just: It was a team. That's what made it work. Yeah, I think I told you I'm not good at this. [laughter]

VIÑALES: You're doing -- again, you're doing just fine. Don't worry about it. [laughter] But I -- so let's get back to a little bit more about you. What did you wind up doing after

Starlite closed?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I do a lot of homecare as well, freelance homecare. I used to work at Bronx-Lebanon across the street, 17th floor AIDS unit. I also worked in New York Hospital as a nur-- orderly, and I worked in quite a few different places. But now I do most of my freelancing in homes. I took care of quite a -- most of my patients are females. I don't know why, but they are, and a lot of them are from the bar, as a matter of fact. They would call and say, "Hey, I need some help," and I go and help them out and take care of them, so now I do a lot of homecare. [unintelligible] or they come to me, or I'll go them, and that's it. That's what I'm doing. Either that, or I'm sitting at home, watching the boob tube, or it's watching me. I do -- I mean, I put together shows for -- I do a show once a month, except for July and August, that I put together with a lot of newcomers and old-comers. Well, I shouldn't say old-comers, but it's at St. John's Lutheran Church in the Village, 81 Christopher Street. I gave you that address twice, didn't I?

VIÑALES: That's fine. [laughter]

LA'VITICUS: That's not Two Potatoes's address. That's the church's address, 81 Christopher Street -- not the bar, I should say. We give shows there once a month, and we bring in people who have never per-- never performed before, but they want to perform. They can come do a poetry or a dance or sing or do drag or whatever, and we have a lot of the old-school girls that are there that work with them; give them pointers on their makeup and stuff like that. So we do that once a month there. And that turns out very well, so that's what I do with that. That's the only show I'm working on right now, is that one. Well, that's not true. There's -- Lady Jasmine has a show at a place called Wild Café. I assist her occasionally with a show that she has coming up, for Two Potatoes reunion, that we usually give at the church. We're giving it at her place this year, so I'll be helping her with that. But other than that, I don't do much of anything. That's it. [laughter]

VIÑALES: Well, I think you're still doing plenty, a lot of work for -- for the young performers trying to make it. [laughter] And can you --

LA'VITICUS: Yeah.

VIÑALES: -- can you tell me how--? I know you said that -- although it was primarily a dance club, can you tell me how people reached out to Starlite while you were the manager to -- to get the special events going? I'm interested in knowing how -- how that worked.

LA'VITICUS: I mean, most of the people that came there to give the special events were just, basically, parties or something that somebody would come in and say, "Can I give a party here?" They would come. They would talk to me, or they would talk to the bartender or somebody, and they would come to me or Donna, and then we would get together with them and see what they wanted to do and work with them on making it -- making it happen. So it's a lot of -- most of our events that we gave there are people who knew of the bar. Very few were people who did not frequent the bar, but they were allowed to -- they -- we accepted them as well. Don't think that we didn't, but yeah.
[laughter]

VIÑALES: Were there any fees? Were there --

LA'VITICUS: No, no, never any fees. If -- I mean, they were purchasing liquor from the bar, so why charge them to give the party there? You know, I enjoyed doing it, and I think the staff there enjoyed doing it because they had just as much fun as I did. Most of our bartenders loved making new drinks. So, if you were someone they knew and they could make a drink for you and you loved it, that was your drink for the night, because they loved making new drinks. We had -- the head bartender, which I will call him, is Albert. He's the older -- I think he's probably the oldest bartender there, or is Willie the oldest bartender there? I'm not exactly sure which one of them was the oldest. Willie was an all-around man. He did everything at the bar. You named it, he did it. Albert was the head bartender, if I'm not mistaken. Well, he was to me, and he made all kinds of drinks. You name a drink; he could make the drink. Then, we had Michael, who was very good. He was also very heavily into the church, if I'm not mistaken, but he would come to the bar. He, you know, talked to people who had problems, and if he could help, he would help. We all liked to help people there, so, yeah. Did I answer that

question right? I don't --

VIÑALES: Yes, you did.

LA'VITICUS: -- oh, OK. [laughter]

VIÑALES: You were talking about just the people in -- at Starlite loving to help each other, and I wanted to know was there any type of help that the people who went to the -- to Starlite to help it kind of stay in line.

LA'VITICUS: Well, there was a lot of people who came to try and help us stay alive, and they even came to do their little-- What do you call that thing when you stand out in front of the bar, in front of places that are getting ready to go down, to try to keep them-- a march or whatever it was-- to try and keep it open? We had a nice crowd there. I mean, a lot of people came to give their opinion on keeping it open. They wrote letters. I think there's a picture of me somewhere holding up a bunch of letters, behind the bar, that a lot of people wrote; to keep the bar open and of their experiences there at the bar. I'm sure someone still has them. But, yeah, they did a lot. They did a lot to help us. It didn't work. But, hey, I'm thankful. We're thankful for the help that they did give while they were there. Yeah.

VIÑALES: Have you been back to the location?

LA'VITICUS: It's now a store. It was -- I think it was T-Mobile first, after we left, and then from T-Mobile it's now a bodega. And the bodega has been there for a little while, now, I think. Yes, it's right around the corner. You can't miss it. [laughter] And every time you walk by it, you go, "Oh, that used to be Starlite. Oh, that used to be Starlite." Yeah, but, I mean, they have quite a few bars now opening up on Nostrand. If you walk down Nostrand, you'll see quite a few bars are opening up now. So, that bar would have fit right back in there again if it can go back. Yeah, it would be a great bar to put back there again if it could go back. It was -- yeah, it was -- I loved that place.

VIÑALES: Yeah, that place is something special. You were kind of talking about kind of the changes in the community. Can you tell me what-- that little corner, that little section-- looked like while you were working there? You said that right next door was a --

LA'VITICUS: The funeral home was next -- was, actually attached to the building, was a

funeral home. Across the street was a tax place. It starts with an H. What's that tax place with an H?

VIÑALES: H&R --

LA'VITICUS: No, not that one. HW, or was it a "W"? I don't know. But, anyway, there was a tax place over there, and-- A flower shop was across the street, across Nostrand from there-- which is now, I think, a bagel store or something-- and the flower shop has moved around, around the corner. And then, of course, you have the -- Chris, the Jamaican restaurant, which moved on the adjacent corner from there, which has been there. Well, it was around the corner first, now it's adjacent. But she's been around for years. So it's changing a lot. I haven't been in the last two months, so I don't know, or was it a month? But it -- every time I go there, something is changing. But when I go there now, I go to a bar down the block called -- which is another old-time bar called Q's on Nostrand and St. John's. It's called Q's. That's been there for years, too. If you walk inside, you can -- it's, like, really old, the old look, but it's nice and cozy inside, and I have friends that work there, friends and family that work there, as well, so yeah.

VIÑALES: Great. I want to learn, from you, what you think about these changes in the community. I know you didn't live there, but you did work there for some time.

LA'VITICUS: Well, I, I -- I never thought about what I think about the changes in the community. I mean, I don't think they -- I don't agree with some of the prices that are going up there because I feel that it -- to me, I feel like some of these prices are running the poorer people out so the richer ones can get in. Instead of helping maintain what you have there and helping the people out, that are there, be able to afford and stay where they are, you're just running them someplace else. That's my opinion. I don't know why that came up. Why did that come up?

VIÑALES: I was just asking you what you think of all the changes.

LA'VITICUS: Oh, see, my mind is going and coming now. This is why I don't do these things. I can't think straight. [laughter]

VIÑALES: You're doing just fine.

LA'VITICUS: Yeah.

VIÑALES: Do you think, maybe, that's one of the reasons why--? Well, we can only speculate, but maybe that is -- do you think that's part of the reason why Starlite had to --

LA'VITICUS: Starlite?

VIÑALES: -- eventually just go?

LA'VITICUS: You know, it's a possibility. But I strongly -- I think it-- Well, maybe that's what they had in mind when the people took it over, was to make it something different and more -- so they can make more money. I don't know, but I think just because of the bar selling liquor and possibly the lifestyles that were in the bar could have been against the religion of the new owners of the bar. They were -- what were they again? Not Muslim. What's the other ones again, with the turbans?

VIÑALES: Sikh?

LA'VITICUS: No. The ones that kneel and pray at noon. What religion kneels and prays at noon at the mosque?

VIÑALES: I mean, well, different -- the Muslims.

LA'VITICUS: That's Muslims? Oh, OK. Yeah.

VIÑALES: Yeah. It's the Islamic faith.

LA'VITICUS: OK. Right. Right. Right. OK, because they bought the bar -- they bought the building, so it could have been against their religion, which most likely it was according to one of the people. But he would never say that on the record, though. But, yeah, talking to him, it was -- first, it was the liquor, and then it was the lifestyle of the people that hung out there. But, he would say that to us verbally or to me verbally, but he would never say it in front of anyone else, so that's probably the reason.

VIÑALES: Did you ever speak to this person in pers-- like, face-to-face?

LA'VITICUS: Yeah, he said that to me. Those are the things he said to me. I mean, he just had no int-- I don't think he had no intentions on the bar staying there, because he was gung-ho about it being closed, you know. No matter what we said or tried or tried to work out, it was just simply a no, you know, just a no-go. And then, after a while-- from what I understand-- the people who bought it sold it to somebody else, so they don't

even own it anymore, allegedly. So -- and I guess the store is going good there, because it's still there, and the funeral parlor is -- must be doing good. Oh, yeah, I think it burned -- caught fire. I think the funeral parlor caught fire, but they said it might be renovating or something. I don't know, but they're still attached to the building as well, so--

VIÑALES: In your conversations with this owner, who may not own it anymore -- I can do some research to find that out -- were you speaking to the own-- the new owners to try to salvage Starlite? Or, what was that like?

LA'VITICUS: No, trying to, you know, work something out so we can stay. So the -- it could stay Starlite, but no matter what-- We even went to mediators. We had lawyers and-- trying to work things out where we can stay there-- and it just didn't work; just, nothing we did worked. They just didn't want it there and turned it into T-Mobile, and that didn't last long either. [laughter] So -- and then, after that, I heard they don't own it anymore.

VIÑALES: Wow.

LA'VITICUS: Yeah. It would be nice if it would go back. That was a beautiful spot. I miss it. Yeah.

VIÑALES: Do you think that could happen?

LA'VITICUS: No, no, no. No, no, no. Yeah, I think for that to happen -- no, no, I don't think so. [laughter] I mean, anything is possible. I just don't see it. I don't see a spot in Brooklyn where-- But then again, I don't go to Brooklyn to see anything anyway, but maybe another reunion I can see happening, but not right now. I just don't see another Starlite being put someplace there, no, unless you see something I don't see.

VIÑALES: [laughter] Well, I think -- you were telling -- you were talking about this long process of -- with mediators and lawyers, which sounds kind of dramatic. [laughter] How long -- can you tell me how long this process took and who were the people really involved with trying to at least get your voices heard?

LA'VITICUS: Well, you know, I -- I can't remember most of the people. I know it was a lot. There was a lot of people involved. I just don't remember who they are. Now, Donna

might remember those names of those people, or Linda, who was the owner. They would probably be better at remembering who the people are. I just can't remember those names.

VIÑALES: OK. Well, can you tell -- well, were there any type of meetings and things like that that you were involved with or Donna and them were involved with?

LA'VITICUS: I -- were there meetings? I mean, we had meetings. We had meetings with -- again, with the mediators, basically. I can't recall meeting with anyone else right now, but I'm sure we did, because we had a couple of meetings in the back. I just don't remember who they were with, at the moment. Some of them were with people who just wanted to come and lend a hand or wanted to know what they can do to help the bar, so we did have meetings with people. I just don't remember when and where, but I'm sure they will remember more of that, because I'm -- I'm the absent-minded professor. [laughter]

VIÑALES: And you said there were mediators?

LA'VITICUS: Yeah, we had-- We went because of the lawyers. We had to see mediators to try and talk; to try and see if they could help solve the problems of, of us staying there. But no matter what we did, it didn't work. Yeah, so it just came up to be a big, fat "No, gotta go." So we left, and that was it.

VIÑALES: So Starlite as a place, although it's no longer there, you did say that you had a reunion, and there's this documentary on it. What do you think is the quote-unquote "legacy" of this place?

LA'VITICUS: Say that again.

VIÑALES: What do you think is the legacy of Starlite? What do you think -- if you could tell people a little bit about Starlite, what would you have them know?

LA'VITICUS: Next time, you will give me these questions before you get here. [laughter]

VIÑALES: I [inaudible].

LA'VITICUS: I think they would like to -- I guess it was a fun place and a very loving place, and everybody there was like family, and we treated everybody like family, and everybody got along. And it was just a place to be. Yeah, I -- I can't think of anything

else. [laughter]

VIÑALES: That's beautiful, though, a place to be, a place to be with family and folks.

LA'VITICUS: Yeah. And, I mean, everybody got along, so I think that was a place of peace.

Yeah, I do.

VIÑALES: Can you tell me how this -- the reunion that you had, how that started, how that came to be, when it happened?

LA'VITICUS: Well, I don't remember when it happened, but I know it wasn't far from the Starlite. It was -- how did it -- how did it come about? We just got together, and we just started looking for places to give it. A place; we needed a nice-size place because we kind of figured there would be a large turnout, and we came across this place. I don't remember the name of the place. I -- I think -- was it on Bergen? I know it was on a way where a bus moved. I just can't remember which way the bus was going, but I think it was, like, on Bergen, somewhere on Bergen. A nice place -- a nice-sized place, and I don't remember who was all-- Well, Lisette; I think Lisette was involved with it. Most of the staff was involved in it, because whatever we did, we had a meeting before we did anything. So everybody would have their input on it. I think our last meeting was at the location, and everybody came there to give their input on what they thought of the location and stuff, so I think it was -- that was a team effort, as well. Most of the stuff we did, we did as a team and let everybody know what was happening. Yeah, so--

VIÑALES: And all the people that you still stay in contact with?

LA'VITICUS: All of them, actually, from time to time. I mean, not every often, but every once in a while we'll hit each other up, and we'll say, "Hey," online, which I'm hardly ever on, so it'll take me forever to get a message. But we still keep in cont-- Mama Dot and I, Mama Dot calls all the time. You should meet her. She yells a lot. Yeah, most of the people I hit up a lot, even the karaoke -- Bill, who is related to them, I speak to him a lot, and we were talking about trying to get everybody together to do another reunion. We just haven't figured out when yet or where. So we're going to start working on that; probably looking for a place when I come back from Texas from seeing my sister, hopefully.

VIÑALES: Hopefully it happens. [laughter]

LA'VITICUS: Yeah, something to do, something nice. Hopefully we get everybody back there again. They'll come and say, "Hey, we're here. We're still around," you know, and get all the old DJs who I cannot seem to remember. That's horrible when you can't remember your DJ's name. That really is bad, but yeah.

VIÑALES: Well, it was a long -- it was a while ago that it closed, so I -- I forgive you. I'm sure they'll forgive you. [laughter]

LA'VITICUS: Yeah.

VIÑALES: Do you know what some of these people are doing now, Bill and --

LA'VITICUS: Well, Bill is still doing karaoke in various places, and the DJs are all still playing in various places as well. I'm not too sure what Donna is doing right now, no. I know Montana's still bartending. I'm not too sure what the rest of them are doing, and if I did I don't remember.

VIÑALES: Are they working still in Brooklyn or--?

LA'VITICUS: Probably in Brooklyn, probably in Brooklyn. (This is my son coming in from the rehab.)

VIÑALES: OK. [laughter] Let me -- let me stop this tape. Yeah.

LA'VITICUS: You can pause this.

[Interview interrupted.]

VIÑALES: All right. So we're back. We had to stop for a minute. [laughter] So I want to ask you again if you could talk to the legacy of Starlite as a place for everybody, where everybody is welcome.

LA'VITICUS: What's the -- what's the question again?

VIÑALES: If you could tell me about the legacy -- yeah, tell me. Tell me.

LA'VITICUS: Oh, tell you. Oh, what the -- well, I just want the people to know that -- I would like for them to know that it was a beautiful place for everyone to come to, and it was just -- I don't know. It was just a fun place to be, you know, and everybody was welcome, and everyone there was-- it was beautiful. It was like family. Coming there was just like being family. Everybody who walked in was family. We tried to make

them feel like family when they came, so, yeah, I just think that was -- I don't know what else to say. [laughter]

VIÑALES: Well, I think we -- we painted a really great picture of Starlite, and I hope that I'll be able to interview more people. Are there any other people you think I should interview or other people who you think would be great people to reach out to?

LA'VITICUS: Well, Lisette would be one. I'll send you her number, because I'm not if she's on Facebook or not. Lisette Lanier, if I'm saying her name right. I'll inbox you her information. And then, there's Bill, Donna, and then there's Will, Willie, who's probably the oldest person from the bar. He may have been there the longest as well. That's Willie, Willie Roe. He's also somewhere on the internet hanging up a disco ball. I think everybody from the bar would probably be interested, or I'll send you all of their contact information. So you can hit them up and see what they want to say, if they want to talk or not. But-- and then, there's a few people that are just people who used to hang out at the bar that might be interested in speaking, too. 'Cause, they all have something to say. They all -- a lot of them do, so yeah.

VIÑALES: Great. Well, I'm looking forward to it. Thank you for allowing me to be in your home --

LA'VITICUS: You're more than welcome.

VIÑALES: -- to talk about Starlite and a little bit about your life, and I'm looking forward to learning more.

LA'VITICUS: All right. Great. And I want to hear this before y'all use it.

VIÑALES: Yes.

LA'VITICUS: OK.

VIÑALES: You get to hear it, and then we'll send it out. Thank you so much.

LA'VITICUS: Because of all my mistakes I have in there, I might have to correct a lot of things.

VIÑALES: [laughter] You're fine. Thank you so much.

LA'VITICUS: OK, thank you.