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Oral History Interview with Donna Cuthbert

Voices of Crown Heights oral histories, 2016.027.1.23

Interview conducted by Svetlana Kitto at the narrator's home on August 25, 2017 in
Crown Heights, Brooklyn

KITTO: Today is August 25th, 2017. I am Svetlana Kitto from the Brooklyn Historical Society. And I am here with Donna Cuthbert at her apartment on St. Marks and Brooklyn Avenue. This interview is our first for the Voices of Crown Heights oral history project. And we're going to begin. So, Donna, if you could just introduce yourself and say where and when you were born--

CUTHBERT: Oh. My name is Donna Cuthbert. And I was born in Crown Heights.

KITTO: When?

CUTHBERT: Oh, 1956.

KITTO: And your birthday?

CUTHBERT: September 5th.

KITTO: Right.

CUTHBERT: I'll be 61.

KITTO: Nice. And, can you just tell me a little bit about your early life, any early memories?

CUTHBERT: Oh, like what? Like -- I was bused out of the neighborhood to go to school. I went to school across Eastern Parkway, which is, I think, now Lefferts Gardens. I went to middle school across Eastern Parkway. And then I went to high school in Flatbush. Typical life -- I was an only child, grew up in a house with my grandparents, my uncle, my cousins, my parents. It was a large, 15-room house on Dean Street.

KITTO: Any memories of that house?

CUTHBERT: Oh, it was a beautiful house. Actually, there's a garden there now. It was 1097 Dean Street. It was a 15-room house, mansion-style. Might have been one house -- because the other house next door to us, they were connected. So, I'm thinking that it might have been one house at one time. It was a nice, large back yard, driveway.

KITTO: Yeah. And did you have siblings?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: Oh, right.

CUTHBERT: No. I was my mother's only child. My father had a son. And later on in life he had a daughter, very late, while he was with my mom.

KITTO: I see. And, did you play around the neighborhood?

CUTHBERT: Well, OK. Growing up, we wasn't allowed to play with the children on Pacific Street. That was the street right behind us. My grandparents were Barbadian, very stush.

KITTO: Stush?

CUTHBERT: Very upper echelon -- you know, "Oh no, we can't have that. We can't do that. Sit and, you know, cover your legs." And, you know, "You can't play with the children with the little runny noses. And you can't--" That was my grandparents. They owned two houses on the block, on Dean Street. So, that will kind of give you an understanding. Pacific Street was tenement buildings, a lot of alcoholism there, people who were on the system. I mean, in between there were working people, but people who were in the system. A lot of heroin use around that corner, so we weren't allowed to -- the children on the block could come -- on Dean Street could come down the block and play with us. But we couldn't go down the block and play with them.

KITTO: Because they were scared for your safety?

CUTHBERT: Perhaps. Probably. You know, now that you're older and you try to figure things out, because everyone loved them. So, they weren't -- it's not that they were nasty to the people in the neighborhood or they weren't giving to the people in the neighborhood. So, perhaps it was for my safety. I don't know. I remember my uncle saying, "Don't let Mr. So-and-so touch you. Don't let him hug you. Don't --" You know, I remember little things like that. My father was a bartender in the area. That's another thing. So, people -- people were very, very kind to us. Later in life when my grandmother became senile, I used to take her for walks around the corner. And, things were changing then, but still the heroin use. And, every time I'd get her around

that corner, she would break away from me. And that was senility then. She was senile. And, who would bring her home would be the junkies on the corner because she wouldn't let me touch her. Whatever the brain was telling her, she would say I'm not Donna. That's not Donna. Donna's a little thing. And they would say, "Come on, Miss Williams." And she used to like to. She would go and walk with the men. But she would not come home with me. I did that twice. I would not take her for a walk around that corner anymore.

KITTO: Wow, that's a great story.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. It was nice times.

KITTO: Can you -- so -- so, you're Barbadian, you said.

CUTHBERT: Barbadian descent, born in Brooklyn.

KITTO: And your -- but your parents were born where?

CUTHBERT: Born here.

KITTO: Born here? OK. So, it's your grandparents who were born in Barbados?

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: OK. And what were the other demographics in the neighborhood at the time, like the other ethnic groups?

CUTHBERT: There were a couple of Caucasian families on the block. But they didn't stay long after, say, '62, '63. You know, I remember -- it must have been around then. I'm using those years, but it must have been around then. I mean, as I got older, I didn't see many Caucasian families. Nostrand Avenue had Caucasian families across Eastern Parkway. But, I would say they were probably mostly all gone by '68. And -- yeah, I'm saying '68, because that's when I think I started going back and forth by myself to school and stuff. So, yeah, they were mostly gone. Shop owners were Caucasians.

KITTO: Jewish, largely?

CUTHBERT: Probably.

KITTO: Yeah?

CUTHBERT: I -- I can't say now.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: I can't say now, but probably, yeah. The fish market was Italian. The hosiery store was Jewish. This is what I'm saying off the top of my head.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah, just how you remember it.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. The drugstore, I think he was Italian. The meat market, he was Italian, because he used to give credit. And, another funny story -- I must have been in junior high school, becoming aware of things -- my color, who I was. And, I -- they used to have a little wooden statue with the middle finger up. And, I had this middle statue. And across the top I had "Whitey." And I left it in the meat market in a bag and forgot. And, Mr. Tony called my mother -- he used to give my mother credit -- and told her that your daughter left this in my store. But you want to know what's funny about that?

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: I went to Mr. Tony, and I apologized. I used to play with his children. Not play with them -- actually, he used to let them go to the movies with me, even after that. There was a movie theatre on Bedford Avenue called Savoy. And he would let me walk up -- he would let them walk up with me to go to the movies. So, he never -- I don't think Mr. Tony ever took that to heart, you know?

KITTO: Yeah. What was the significance of the statue?

CUTHBERT: It was "fuck you, Whitey."

KITTO: Yeah. But what was it? Like, what was the sta-- what was it of, exactly?

CUTHBERT: It was a -- it was a wooden statue with this.

KITTO: Oh, it was just that?

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: Oh, I see. OK.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, with the hand, with the fist with middle finger up, with a few Black Panther papers I had there.

KITTO: Were you in -- were you politically involved?

CUTHBERT: Later on. You know, that was the beginning of it. I used to go to what they used to call PE meetings in the Erasmus Hall basement, and yeah.

KITTO: To Panther meetings?

CUTHBERT: No. They were political ed. We weren't really Panthers. We weren't, really.

But it was political education, you know? They would tell us some stuff, and we'd be,

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."

KITTO: I guess you don't care about whatever you were learning anymore then. Or what were you learning?

CUTHBERT: Probably nothing. It was just something to do. At that time, probably nothing because I'd know just who -- I knew just who I was, you know? I didn't have any problem with my color or who I was. I never did.

KITTO: How were your parents about that stuff? Like, how was race talked about or not talked about?

CUTHBERT: My father was Martin Luther King, and my mother was Malcolm X.

KITTO: Can you give me some examples of that, like an example of what you're talking about?

CUTHBERT: My father -- my father worked for a Jew, Mr. Nussbaum. My father adored him. And I think he adored my father. But he was still who he was. So, my father--

KITTO: This is at the bar?

CUTHBERT: Yes.

KITTO: OK.

CUTHBERT: On Dean Street there used to be a car dealership on the corner of Bergen. Up the block there was warehouses and factories. And at lunchtime, everybody would come to Unity. And they would go in the kitchen and say, "Hey, Eddie," which was my father. So, my father didn't see the wrong that some were doing. My mother, on the other hand, worked Brooklyn Hospital. And when she would go -- she was a nurse. When she had a couple of patients who would look at her and say, "I don't want no Black bitch taking care of me," you see. So, that -- so, you get the demographics of the neighborhood.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: You have these factories where all these White men in suits and -- come. And

then you have my mother who used to go downtown to go to work on the TB floor, that's-- she worked the TB floor. And you'd have these people who said, "I don't want you touching me," you know? So, my mother didn't like them. And my father --

KITTO: OK. Well, so tell me a little bit about your -- the bar that your dad worked at and stuff. So, it was owned by this Jewish guy?

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: And who was he? And it was called Unity, you said, right?

CUTHBERT: It was called Unity Bar and Grill, mm-hmm. So, on one side--

KITTO: Why was it called that?

CUTHBERT: --on one side it was a restaurant. I don't know why he called it Unity. On one side it was a restaurant. On the other side it was a bar. 5:00, the restaurant would close up. And then you had the bar. And that's when all the neighborhood women would go in. That's where my father met my daughter's mother. And, it's just what it was. They would play numbers there. Typical bar; tell their stories, run from their wives, hide from their children.

KITTO: So men, mainly?

CUTHBERT: Mainly. Later on in years you'd see a lot of women.

KITTO: Do you remember any of the people who used to go?

CUTHBERT: Sure, I do. Yeah, I remember some of them.

KITTO: Can you tell me about one of them that comes to mind?

CUTHBERT: A woman named Doris; she used to go with a man there named Arthur. I could never understand the relationship between her and Arthur. Later on I found out Arthur had a wife, of course. But, she used to live right next to us on Dean Street. And she used to make these wonderful cakes. But she was so different than Arthur because she would go to church all the time. And, she'd wear these big hat-- elaborate hats. And, you know, she -- she -- she always had on these clothes. But they always looked thrown together. They never looked like -- she was -- she wasn't fabulous. Arthur, on the other hand, drove a truck. And, very street-smart. And, you'd see him pass her house and go to her. And then you'd see a couple of hours he'd pass back and he'd

leave. Or you'd see her running down to the corner. She wouldn't go in the bar. But she would peek at the door, and he would come out. And that was so -- she was a nice lady, used to make me cakes all the time. She ended up going crazed, losing her mind. I saw her in -- and it was over Arthur. I remember a couple of times her there crying to my mother. I couldn't -- I didn't -- I don't know what they were saying. But, I would hear his name mentioned. And she ended up losing her mind. And after my mother died she found me, and she used to come here. But when she came, she would want to spend the night. I let her stay one night. After that, then she started talking about snakes coming out of her head and stuff. And, next time she wanted to spend the night my husband ended up giving her some money and tell her to go to a hotel. And she never came back. But she had borrowed some money. She sent the money back. That's what it was. The money for the hotel he gave her, she ended up sending. Maybe three years ago I got a letter from her with this check. And it was the money that he had given her for the hotel. Previous to that I saw her in Penn Station, and I didn't speak to her. I felt a little bad about that because she was always a nice woman. But, I knew that her sanity wasn't there. And I just couldn't deal with it.

KITTO: Did you hang out in the bar as a kid, like, when your dad was working?

CUTHBERT: When it closed at -- well, sometimes he would open up the other side and let me and my -- my cousins in. I'd come over there, and he would make us some sandwiches. And we'd sit there, you know? But no, I didn't hang out in the bar.

KITTO: But you remember who was there?

CUTHBERT: I worked. I worked the restaurant at one point.

KITTO: Oh, you did?

CUTHBERT: Maybe I started working there about 12. In the summer, they would let me do the cash.

KITTO: So, what happened to the bar?

CUTHBERT: Teddy ended up leaving New York, selling it to a Panamanian. My father ended up staying there for a little while. But, it was never the same. Then, the factories left. There was no need for that there anymore.

KITTO: What factories specifically are you talking about?

CUTHBERT: I can't remember the name of them.

KITTO: Yeah. Or do you remember what kind of factories they were?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: But they would have shut down, like, right around when you were born, right?

CUTHBERT: Some sort of machinery. Some sort of machinery. I don't know what it was.

No, they shut down maybe '67, '68, '69. They were there for a long time.

KITTO: Oh, OK.

CUTHBERT: The building, I think, on Bergen Street side is still there. And they just did the inside. Dean Street they tore everything down. I can't remember.

KITTO: Yeah. So, let's see. Can you tell me a little bit about, like, one of the schools that you went to? Like, you mentioned you went to an alternative school. My dad also went to an alternative school--

CUTHBERT: Oh, he did?

KITTO: --in England. And it was like, it had to be shut down by the government because it got so crazy.

CUTHBERT: We were -- they were terrible.

KITTO: Yeah. It was Wingate Prep?

CUTHBERT: It was Wingate Prep.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: You were allowed to call teachers by their first names. We were reading books like *Helter Skelter*. They would take us on trips all the time. That's how we ended up getting our credits.

KITTO: What kind of trips? Where did you go?

CUTHBERT: We went to our -- actually, we had a photography teacher whose name was John Barracuda. John Barracuda used to take us to museums, walk us around the city. We were, we were supposed to be doing photography. Take us to photo shows and all kinds of things, took us to his house one time. And as I sat there in his house-- I believe it was his aunt, and-- I looked at this woman. She was Barbadian. And I said to

her-- I always liked adults; I always thought I was grown, always talking to old people-- And I said to her, "My grandparents are from Barbados." And she said, "Really?" And I said, "Yeah." I said -- I told her her name. And she said, "Really?" And she said, "What's your mother's name?" And I said, "Louise." And she said, "I'm your Aunt Enrauld's sister -- godmother." And I said, "Really?" And so-and-so -- there was another woman there. She said, "That's your cousin." And the cousin was -- the photography teacher ended up being my cousin. But it was so -- and at the time, my mom and her siblings were estranged because Grandma was senile. The house was falling apart. Couldn't keep it warm.

KITTO: This is Dean Street?

CUTHBERT: Dean Street.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Money just wasn't going far enough. Couldn't pay the taxes. And she decided to get up and leave. And she ended up getting an apartment on the corner over the bar. There was a big building on the corner, 1112. And we ended up moving into an apartment there. And she was angry with her siblings, and her siblings were angry with her. They weren't willing to help. And she just couldn't do any more. And she took her mother with her. And my uncle-- who didn't like to work, for whatever reason-- ended up staying in the house. Then, the house burned, had a fire. And some woman picked him up. And, I mean, I could tell you stories. And, he ended up leaving. Later in years they got it together, but yeah. How did we get there?

KITTO: This is good. This is good. Can you -- do you want to just keep talking and tell me a little more about that? Just, this is great. It's getting you into the past. It's really rich. Just, let's go with it.

CUTHBERT: Oh, God. So, he ended -- my uncle ended up leaving. And so, why did we -- why were we going there? Why did I go there?

KITTO: Because you were talking about how at the alternative school--

CUTHBERT: Oh, how I went to the alternative school and ended up meeting family in Harlem?

KITTO: In Harlem, yeah.

CUTHBERT: OK, yeah.

KITTO: That you had been estranged from because of your mom.

CUTHBERT: Well, the thing is: When I went home and told her, she said to me-- my mother was the youngest-- she says, "Your uncle and your aunt." She says, "I know the name, but your uncle and aunt would know more because they mixed with them." She said -- my mother was a change-of-life baby. So, then my uncle and my aunt were much older than her. So, she says, "You know, by then Mama wasn't traveling like that." That's what she called her mother. Mama wasn't trav-- so she didn't know. She knew the names, but she -- I couldn't even tell you the names right now. I don't remember them. But she said, "You would have to talk to them about it." Now, her sister left home at 16. I never figured that one out, why she left home. We ended up -- you know, she's been -- she used to come holidays, birthdays. But, why she left home so early, I don't know. So, that's it. Oh, so the alternative school. So, the alternative school, we did everything but what we were supposed to do. We played cards.

KITTO: How old were you when you were there?

CUTHBERT: Oh, gosh -- 14, I was there 14, 15. And then they ended up closing it. Some people were able to get out. They wrote them out. They wrote their credits in and were able to graduate. They didn't have no credits, but they wrote them in so they could graduate because they were getting ready to close down the school. But I was too far behind for them to write mine in. I ended up taking my equivalency years later.

KITTO: Yeah. Was that the last school you went to before you were--?

CUTHBERT: Well, pub-- junior, I mean, high school type? Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm, yeah. It was fun there. We had fun there. We did all kinds of things there. We played strip poker. We had parties.

KITTO: Did you live there?

CUTHBERT: Just about. No, we didn't live there. But schools are just -- seemed like it didn't close until 7:00, 8:00. We'd just stay there, you know? It was -- it was a good

place. It did a lot of good. It kept a lot of us off the street, you know, a lot of us off the street. It was good.

KITTO: Do you talk to anyone?

CUTHBERT: Actually, my -- my buddy, I have two buddies. Reggie, he went there. He ended up graduating. And Viola, I think, ended up having to come out and do her equivalency. Viola and I have been friends forever. I was going to beat her up at Erasmus.

KITTO: You met her at Erasmus?

CUTHBERT: I met her at Erasmus. And I had a friend. And she was talking to my friend's boyfriend. And, I asked her who did she think she was?

KITTO: Did she tell you?

CUTHBERT: She said, "What business is it of yours?"

KITTO: That was kind of a fair question.

CUTHBERT: I'm talking 14, 13, 14. What did I care? What was I -- why was I going and taking up for her? Her and I became very, very close friends. That's my buddy. That's my ride-or-die, yeah. Mm-hmm, all those years later we became very, very, very good friends. We're very good friends.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Uh-huh, we talk every day, two, three times a day.

KITTO: Oh, amazing.

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: Is she still here?

CUTHBERT: Yeah, she lives here in New York, mm-hmm.

KITTO: But not in Crown Heights?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: No?

CUTHBERT: Mm-mm. But she grew up in Crown Heights.

KITTO: Oh, she did, yeah?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. Yeah, she lived on Nostrand and St. Johns, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah. So, when did you start to hear about the Starlite?

CUTHBERT: Oh, gosh. I was a little girl when I knew the Starlite. We'd go -- there was a -- right across from the Starlite used to be a frankfurter stand; sold frankfurters, Icees. And that was a treat, to come down. Perhaps your mother would cross -- would cross. My mother would cross me at Bedford Avenue, Rogers Avenue, and then let me go down the street. And then when I'd come back, I'd walk to the corner of Dean. She'd see me and cross me back over because that was a treat to go down there and get an Icee. And we couldn't eat it in the street. While my grandfather was alive, you couldn't eat your food in the street. See, how we eat potato chips and--

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: So, I would come home.

KITTO: Why? Because it was, like, rude? It was uncouth?

CUTHBERT: Oh, ladies -- right, ladies didn't do that. So, I would come back up the block with my Icee, covered that with a piece of wax paper so I could sit down and I could eat it on the stoop. But I could -- so passing the Starlite you would see all these interesting people in the daytime. And they were dykes. And, I was petrified because I couldn't understand it. I couldn't -- and I mean younger. I don't think I was 12. And I would see them, and I would say, "Is that a man? Is that a woman? Why?" And they were number writers. It was two, particularly. I can't think of her name. But they wrote numbers, illegal numbers. You see how lotto -- oh, you have a lot of research to do, my friend. You see how lotto has the numbers? Well, in the Black community, that's how people survived was numbers. They put 10 cent, 15 cent, and they say, "Put 10 cent on 253 for me," you know? Maybe you get \$30. I can't remember what the exchange is, but so that's what they did. These two particular women, who were very, very rough, who I was petrified of, I would see them. And I would be -- I'd see them all around the neighborhood. But I really remember seeing them walking in the Starlite.

KITTO: What did they look like?

CUTHBERT: Men, but they were women.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Really weird, you know? And they walked like men, and-- really, really weird to me. But, my mom had a friend who was male and gay. So, that wasn't -- being male and acting like a woman wasn't weird to me. But being a woman and acting like a man was very weird to me. And they looked very rough. And I was very afraid of them. Now, they never bothered me. They never looked at me. They didn't even know I existed. But I would see them and go into a panic, you know?

KITTO: How did you know they were number writers?

CUTHBERT: Well, my father played numbers.

KITTO: Oh, OK.

CUTHBERT: And, I think he played a few numbers with them. And as you get older you realize what it is they're doing. And they would have these slips in their hand that were like -- like this. They were thin, you know? And, they'd have the numbers, you know? And they remembered -- and number writers remembered just who played what, you know? So there was no names. There was just the numbers. And they knew who played -- who played what and who was going to win, who won and stuff like that. It connects with the horses. I don't have the whole number thing because I was never interested. But my dad was -- my dad was a gambler. He loved the numbers, yes.

KITTO: Yeah?

CUTHBERT: Oh, yes.

KITTO: Did he make a lot of money doing that?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: No?

CUTHBERT: Of course not.

KITTO: But some people did? It's just some give and take. It's like you make it, you lose it.

CUTHBERT: You're just -- yeah, it's the same amount of money you're putting in, you know what I mean? So, you're really not making anything. It's a game of chance just like lotto. It's a game of chance.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: So, I started going to the Starlite maybe at -- my mom started letting me go

out early, about 13, because I used to love to dance. And, you would hear the music coming out of the back of the Starlite. And I would sneak in and dance and leave.

KITTO: By yourself?

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm. Later on I had a friend named Jerry. We used to sneak in. Jerry was gay. And we used to sneak in. And then after that I wasn't interested in dancing anymore. I was interested in boys, men. So, I didn't sneak in for years. When Butchy took it, when Butchy started DJing there, I would go more often and dance and see the guys dance. And then when Butchy took it over, I would go much more often and sit at the bar; not dance as much, you know, meet up with Viola, have a cocktail, you know, sit there, talk to Butchy, a few other guys we might have known that were there. And that was that.

KITTO: So, when you were young -- so -- so, you were, like, 13, early teens?

CUTHBERT: Starting to hear the music.

KITTO: Starting to hear the music? What was the music at that time?

CUTHBERT: Oh, gosh.

KITTO: What was the dancing like?

CUTHBERT: Oh, I don't know. What were they calling it then?

KITTO: Was it, like, I don't know, like boogie or something? I don't know. It was, like, pre-disco, right?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. So, I guess it was still kind of--

KITTO: It was house, maybe, like early, early -- no?

CUTHBERT: No. Butchy wasn't playing house that early. He wasn't playing house that early. It was different. The music was different. But I don't remember it being house, no. I would say it was Motown-ish.

KITTO: How was it different from other places you would dance at? Because that -- you would go to other places, too, because you liked to dance?

CUTHBERT: Oh. Well, first of all, it was men dancing with men.

KITTO: Right.

CUTHBERT: Or women dancing with women. Not many.

KITTO: Oh.

CUTHBERT: Not many, just a couple that -- it really wasn't a female bar. It was mainly a guy bar.

KITTO: But you did see women there?

CUTHBERT: Yeah, yeah. And all through the years you'd see -- you'd have a few. Some of them were what we called "fag hags," like me. They called me a fag hag.

KITTO: Yeah, my mom, too.

CUTHBERT: Really? And, you know, some were just from the neighborhood, someplace safe to go and sit and drink and not be bothered. You know, your friends were there. So, yeah, but I don't remember it being house. You know, I'm trying to go back to what was the music like.

KITTO: Well, what were -- do you remember -- do you have any memories of, like, people dancing and what they were dancing like or what they looked like?

CUTHBERT: Very sensuous, very, very --

KITTO: Yeah, men dancing together?

CUTHBERT: Very "Dirty Dancing" type of thing, you know, that kind of way, yeah.

KITTO: What did you think about that?

CUTHBERT: I didn't think anything of it. I'm telling you, women puzzled me more than men.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: I don't know why. I don't -- I don't know why. There was never anything said in the house. My mother -- my parents never acted any kind of way. I -- I -- I don't know why. Maybe because at that time, to me, they were so -- they looked so rough. I -- I don't know what it is, you know, because I'm sure there were some who were very, very feminine. My mother had a friend who was very feminine who I talk to to this day.

KITTO: --Who was gay.

CUTHBERT: She was bisexual.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: And, I was never afraid of her. It was the roughness in the women that I was

afraid of.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: I still don't know why that bothered me so. It doesn't bother me now.

KITTO: But it doesn't bother you now, yeah.

CUTHBERT: No, mm-mm. I have a daughter who's very, very -- adopted child. And I said, "Why don't you put on some lipstick or something?" She's very rough, you know? I said, "Put on some heels, some pumps." But no, it doesn't bother me anymore.

KITTO: Yeah. So, you would go to the bar, and you would dance. And you would see men dancing with one another.

CUTHBERT: I had friends who were gay.

KITTO: Oh, you did? At that age, at 13?

CUTHBERT: 13, 14, I had a friend who was gay and used to dress up.

KITTO: As a woman?

CUTHBERT: And his mother would let him.

KITTO: Oh, wow.

CUTHBERT: Kevin Fields.

KITTO: Tell me about Kevin a little bit.

CUTHBERT: Kevin was very sweet. Kevin went to Erasmus. Kevin dressed up very early, wore women's things, very feminine.

KITTO: Would he walk on the street like that?

CUTHBERT: Yes.

KITTO: No one cared?

CUTHBERT: Nobody bothered him, maybe because he was a little big and stout. But Kevin was beautiful. That's another thing. Kevin was beautiful. Her face was to die for. Her makeup was -- she ended up -- sorry. Sorry, that was the dryer.

KITTO: Sorry. I have the headphones on, so.

CUTHBERT: Kevin ended up dying -- diabetes, not the virus like everybody thought. He was a diabetic. He had juvenile diabetes and just went.

KITTO: How old was he when he died?

CUTHBERT: About 22.

KITTO: Oh my gosh. So, you would go with him to the Starlite or not?

CUTHBERT: With him and my friend Jerry. And then that stopped. Then there's no -- you know, there was no need to go. It was the fun of being able to sneak in through that back door.

KITTO: Yeah, how did you do that?

CUTHBERT: See, because we'd never go through the front door. Starlite--

KITTO: Because you're too young?

CUTHBERT: Starlite had two doors. Somebody would open up that back door to come outside, and we would slip in.

KITTO: They would know you were slipping in?

CUTHBERT: Probably. The owners probably knew. But we weren't causing no trouble.

KITTO: And so, the owner, the original owner was alive at that time?

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: Right, Mackie?

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: Did you know him?

CUTHBERT: I don't know Mackie.

KITTO: No?

CUTHBERT: They say I do. I just don't--

KITTO: Who's "they?"

CUTHBERT: People say I know people all the time.

KITTO: Because you've been here a while?

CUTHBERT: They -- yeah, because I've been here forever, you know? And I say, "I don't know who Mackie is." I'm so sorry that -- gosh. I threw away these pictures. I didn't even think. There was a gentleman who used to live downstairs. His name was -- is this OK? I keep stepping on it, on purpose.

KITTO: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's perfect.

CUTHBERT: Mr. Branch used to live downstairs. Mr. Branch would have been the perfect

person to interview because Mr. Branch just lived a double life. I ended up taking care of Mr. Branch. The man hadn't spoken to me for years. The most he would do is say, "How do you do?" Not say "Hello" anymore. If he had -- was a little tipsy he would say, "Tell them boys I'm coming up there for them." And I'd say, "Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Branch." He'd say, "I'm just joking." So, one day there was an odor coming up in that room. I smelled, and I said, "That odor, I don't know about that odor." So I put on my clothes. I went downstairs. I knocked the door, and nobody answered. I put on my clothes and I went to the bar because Mr. Branch used to go to the bar.

KITTO: To Starlite?

CUTHBERT: Yes. I didn't know that. I didn't know that Mr. Branch was going to the bar, OK, until I started working there. So, I asked Al, "Albert? Anybody seen Branch?" And he said, "No, Branch, no." I said, "I'm getting an odor from downstairs. No one's ope-- answering the door." He said, "I'm going to check it out for you." So, a few hours later Al calls me and says, "Branch is away, Donna. He's OK. You know, his mother's up in Harlem. He's up in Harlem." And I said, "OK." [Interview interrupted.] You know I don't know how to work the phone, right?

KITTO: Well, you just turned it on silent, so that's good.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, I did. They told me that Branch is up in Harlem. So, I said, "OK." When he comes home he says to me, "Heard you was looking for me." And I said, "Oh yeah, Mr. Branch." Now, this was just a man that said, "How do you do?" He'd see me in the bar, he'd wave or something, but no long conversation. And I said, "Yeah." He said, "OK. Check on me every couple of days. Just take my number. Call me. I'm getting older, you know?" So I said, "OK, Mr. Branch. No problem." And I started doing that. It went from calling him to buying his groceries to cooking to taking him to the doctor to becoming his healthcare proxy to burying him or cremating him. He had no family. Branch had dozens of pictures. What I'm getting at is: Branch had dozens of pictures of the Starlite. And, you know what? I threw them away. Branch died last year, July. I must have thrown everything away the second week of July of this year.

KITTO: That's OK.

CUTHBERT: But he had the pic-- he had pictures of Albert, pictures of himself, pictures of them dancing. Now, Mr. Branch was -- one of the largest churches in Brooklyn was Concord at one time. Mr. Branch played the organ for Concord, OK? And the other church -- that was a Baptist church. The other church he played for was an Episcopalian church, which I grew up in -- St. George's. He played the organ for them, too. Nobody had a clue of Mr. Branch's lifestyle. Only reason I knew Mr. Branch's lifestyle -- he never said that that's what he was -- was because he'd be in that bar. And I would see certain people come and knock his door.

KITTO: So, he had boyfriends?

CUTHBERT: He had a boy toy.

KITTO: A boy toy?

CUTHBERT: He had no steady. He never had the conversation with me. But, I think he must have had one significant lover that must have died. Just going through the paperwork and stuff, yes. But he used to go on Tuesday nights when Albert was there. Albert will verify if it was Tuesday or Wednesday night. But that's when he would go. He would be in there Saturday just before the dancing started. And then he would leave.

KITTO: Why?

CUTHBERT: I guess, older; the crowd was a little younger. Plus, he had to get up for church on Sunday to go play that organ, you know?

KITTO: What was his job?

CUTHBERT: He was a musician. He was a musician. He had graduated from Juilliard, had his doctorate. People didn't know that. I only found that out going through the paperwork and stuff.

KITTO: He was like a freela-- like traveling musician or --

CUTHBERT: He didn't travel. He just played for -- he played the organs for the churches.

KITTO: Oh, and that was his job?

CUTHBERT: And that was his job. And, he was the first Black carrillonneur, the church bells. He was the youngest and the first Black to learn how to play them.

KITTO: Oh wow.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, he was a very interesting character, Mr. Branch, very. But he was a queen as he got older. Whoa, baby.

KITTO: Explain.

CUTHBERT: Oh, he was just -- it's what he wanted and nothing -- things I had never seen with him before because he was always such a gentleman when he walked in and had on his suit. You never saw the queen side of him. But as he got older and was in the nursing home and I would go, he would throw his shoulders around and swing his hand. And I used to say, such a sad life that you had to live half of your life one way, and the other half; you could only live that way sometimes and not all the time. You know, because he was a nice man, you know?

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: But, you could see it was a sad existence.

KITTO: So, was Albert his friend?

CUTHBERT: Yes, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah?

CUTHBERT: Yeah, maybe just in the bar, just the bartender. But, you know--

KITTO: Still, yeah.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. Mr. Branch is interesting.

KITTO: Are there other people like that?

CUTHBERT: There was one named -- oh gosh, why does his name leave me? He used to live here in the building, too.

KITTO: It's OK. You don't have to remember it right now.

CUTHBERT: Stanley.

KITTO: Stanley?

CUTHBERT: Oh, Stanley would wear long hair and men's suits, you know, which today it wouldn't -- nobody would look twice, you know what I mean? But back then -- and long fingernails.

KITTO: When are we talking now? What era?

CUTHBERT: Oh, gosh.

KITTO: Like, are we talking about the '70s at this point?

CUTHBERT: I wish -- no.

KITTO: Earlier?

CUTHBERT: Later.

KITTO: Oh, later?

CUTHBERT: Yes. I would say the '90s. I can't -- Butchy was still alive, because we went to Sammy's funeral together. I would say '90s. He was a manager for a while.

KITTO: OK.

CUTHBERT: But, Stanley was just so flamboyant but so weird; men's shoes, men's suits, long hair and nails and maybe a little eye shadow with a goatee. Really, really -- you know, you say, "Uh-oh, here comes Stanley," you know? Really weird, nicest person you would want to meet, though. Willie, too; Willie is the nicest person you want to meet. I'm so sorry that you can't interview him. But he won't let you. Nicest person; Willie could tell you the stories of the Starlite.

KITTO: Well, you're doing it now, and it's great. So [inaudible]--

CUTHBERT: Stanley would get up on the bar and do a little jig and -- yeah, Stanley. Stanley passed. Yeah, he was a good manager.

KITTO: Yeah. When did he--?

CUTHBERT: I don't know. I'd say, maybe 2008. And that's-- not 2008. It couldn't be 2008 because Butchy was still walking around.

KITTO: So, tell me about--

CUTHBERT: Sometime in 2000.

KITTO: --tell me about Butchy then.

CUTHBERT: There's Butchy on the wall. You see the person in the red shirt?

KITTO: Mm-hmm.

CUTHBERT: That's Butchy. Butchy loved music. Butchy--

KITTO: How did you meet Butchy?

CUTHBERT: You know, I think I met Butchy through Vi. I -- I can't -- it must have been

through Vi because me and Butchy and Vi used to ride out to the Riis beach on our bikes and smoke our little marijuana and -- you know? So, it must have been through Vi. You know that circle? There was a circle we had. You know, not many of them are - only a couple are left. But there -- it was a circle. And Butchy was in the circle. Butchy worked for UPS. Butchy worked for, I think -- well, what is it? Stanley Morgan? He pl-- he worked for Wall Street. He -- and then he got sick. He always played the music for the bar. He was a DJ, played music around the country.

KITTO: DJed?

CUTHBERT: Around the country, around the world; he was a DJ. Ended up putting his money into the bar, and that's what he did until he died.

KITTO: And what year did he die?

CUTHBERT: You want me to -- girl, I'm 61.

KITTO: Or just around.

CUTHBERT: I'm wondering. Let's see.

KITTO: Oh, what's in those?

CUTHBERT: I don't know if it's in here or not. It might be in my other book.

KITTO: He died, he died in, like, the early 2000s, right? I think it was, like, 2004 maybe?

CUTHBERT: Mm-mm.

KITTO: No?

CUTHBERT: No. Let me see. Malachi is 34. Butchy died, and my son got diagnosed with cancer, like, two weeks after. And my husband had made his first trip to Trinidad in over 30 years. Malachi was 23. Butchy couldn't have been at 11 years. It couldn't be 11 years already.

KITTO: Yeah, that sounds right.

CUTHBERT: It is, huh? You know, I found his obituary the other day. And it was -- I thought I stuck it in this book to get a page. Yeah, OK. So, he must have -- did I leave all the things in another book?

KITTO: Yeah, that's better.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. So, yeah, he put -- and the reason I started working at the Starlite is: He

wasn't making any money on a particular night. And he couldn't understand what was going on.

KITTO: On one particular night?

CUTHBERT: One partic-- well, there was some problems in between the other nights. But, it wasn't Albert's night. He didn't have any problems with Albert. He didn't have any problems with a friend of ours named Neil.

KITTO: Neil Crawford?

CUTHBERT: Neil -- Somebody told you Crawford?

KITTO: You told -- I thought you told me.

CUTHBERT: Oh, OK.

KITTO: Or maybe somebody else told me. Now I'm confused.

CUTHBERT: Greir. Neil Greir, Neil Crawford -- same person.

KITTO: OK.

CUTHBERT: And, he asked for my husband. He called and asked did he think my husband would want to do some work in the bar because -- here's another story. The West Indians had -- West Indians had taken over Nostrand Avenue. So, he was figuring -- he was known. Plus, they were robbing a lot of places. So, he just figured your husbands and uncles, they -- he hung out. My husband hung out on the Avenue. He figured he was known. It'd be good for business. He would get some of that clientele, too.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Well, my husband didn't want to do it. So he said, "Well, what about you? Do you think you want to do it?" He said, "Because I'm watching this person, and I never get any money this night." And I said, "OK, I'll do it for a few times." I didn't plan on staying, like -- I said, "I'll do it. OK. We'll see what happens." And that's how I got in the bar. He was watching this one particular bartender. And of course, I worked two nights, two weeks. And, the guy was stealing his money. He was ripping him off royally. He says, "You made all this money." And then he asked somebody else who was sitting in the bar. He said, "Were a lot of people in the bar last night, da-da-da-da?" And the person said, "No." It's a guy who just used to sit in the bar; Eddie. Eddie really

didn't have a job there. But Eddie was the runner. We ran out of soda, run across the street. "Oh, you're hungry? Eddie go get something to eat. Eddie -- oh, somebody can't get here at 9:00. Open up. Pull up the gates for me." But Eddie wasn't really on payroll. Eddie was just there. And he asked Eddie, "So, how was it in here last night, da-da-da-da?" And Eddie said, "Oh, same old crowd, nothing exciting." And that's why the boy got fired, because he said, "This has happened for two weeks; that she's bringing in money and you're not bringing in no money."

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: And that's how I got there. I couldn't believe the whole thing. I had become a barmaid. I said my -- I used to laugh. I said, "My mother must be turning over in her grave."

KITTO: I was going to say, had you ever tended bar before?

CUTHBERT: No. Well, yes. I had tried it. My father's -- my brother's mother owned a bar. And she needed someone. And, she -- I wasn't working. I mean, I must have just turned 21. And she says, "You think you want to do it, Donna?" And, you know, I was "Donna will try anything." I was Mikey, OK? I'll try anything once. And, my mother was furious. I never knew how furious she was until after she -- I stopped doing it.

KITTO: Was she religious, your mother?

CUTHBERT: No, not like that. But, ladies don't tend bars. You've got to be a lady. And ladies don't do that. [laughter] And my husband was furious, too.

KITTO: Oh, really?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. I don't think we were married then. But I was -- yeah, because people have this outlook on what barmaids are, at least back then. Not so much now, but back then, you know, you was a floozy. You was a hussy. You was a whore. It wasn't none of that. I was just looking to make some money.

KITTO: When you started working at the Starlite, were you teaching at that time?

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: So you were doing both?

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm, yeah. And the teachers used to come and sit with me just because I

ended up working Sundays. So, they used to all pile up there in there on Sundays. I used to make little hors d'oeuvres. I was having fun. [laughter]

KITTO: Sounds fun.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, it was -- it was fun. You know, the Starlite was a nice place. I ended up having -- "Oh, it's so-and-so's birthday? Let's have a party. It's got to be on Sunday, though." We'd have a party. "Oh, you need a ba-- Cousin Mary's having a baby shower? We'll do it at the Starlite." And I was -- you know, I was making money. I said, "Just tell them you're doing a cash bar. You don't need to buy no liquor. Just buy the food, and we'll do a cash bar." It was making money for the Starlite, and everybody -- you didn't have to pay for a place. We used to decorate. It was wonderful. The Starlite was a good place. And then it started changing.

KITTO: Before it started changing, can you tell me, like, a little bit--? So when you started working there, who were the people, other people, who worked there?

CUTHBERT: Lisette.

KITTO: Oh, I talked to her on the phone.

CUTHBERT: Really?

KITTO: Yeah, I did. She lives --

CUTHBERT: In Georgia.

KITTO: -- in Georgia, yeah. Yeah, I talked to her on the phone because she -- I got her number. She was -- from Tim, I think. And I called her, and she -- yeah, she was, like, very mad, very upset about many things, most of which I didn't understand because I don't know the whole story, but about the film, about not being, you know--

CUTHBERT: Well, she thinks that -- first of all, Butchy and I were very close. People don't realize how close Butchy and I were. About a week and a half before Butchy fell -- Butchy fell. Did you hear what happened? He fell. Butchy had a virus. But, he fell one day going out; wasn't feeling well, was weak. Actually, I had been at his house the day before.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Didn't -- he didn't want to bother anybody. He was trying to get to the grocery

store. Although, he had Lisette who called him, who -- he didn't like Lisette anymore. He was angry with Lisette. But that's another story. I had called. There was a lady downstairs who I hooked him up with, who used to go and do a little cleaning for him. So, it's not that he didn't have anybody to call and say, "I need this." But he wanted to do it on his own. He left the house, tried to get to the grocery store. He was weak. He fell and broke his hip. Went to the hospital, tried to repair the hip. They should have never tried to repair it because he was too weak. And he became allergic to the anesthesia. And he never -- so, it wasn't actually any virus affiliated thing. He was allergic to the anesthesia.

KITTO: Yeah, that happens a lot.

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: It happened to my grandmother.

CUTHBERT: Really?

KITTO: Yeah. Like, she wasn't even really -- I don't know. She wasn't that sick. But then she went to the hospital, and then she got really sick. And then she died.

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: So, that's what happened with Butchy. Lisette -- at that point in Butchy's life and Lisette's life, he didn't -- Lisette had been working for Butchy. Lisette was also touching the money. I don't know. We shouldn't say that.

KITTO: I don't think it was what -- really hearable, what you just said.

CUTHBERT: OK. And then, he banned her from the bar.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Or they had the argument, told her, "Don't come back--" Da-da-da-da. When he passed, she thought no -- well, nobody did know. I knew. A few other people knew that him and her were estranged. She pops up with his sister and Dennis. And she says, "Use her name." And it's publicized, the bar. And one thing led to the other. She lent them a couple of dollars. And one thing just led to the other, and she didn't get paid. And then they didn't have a license. The bar lost their license. And she was trying to

help. She helped them with the money to get the license. And they didn't do what they were supposed to do. And then she jumped up and she left and went to Georgia.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: But then, she didn't do things with a clean heart either. Now, Butchy was talking about putting the bar in his name -- the name of the bar in my name and another friend of his, named Sheila, because he said his sibling and her husband wouldn't know what to do with the bar.

KITTO: With a bar?

CUTHBERT: With a bar.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: And that was about two weeks -- a week and a half before he passed. He said -- so, we were talking about it. And I said, "I don't have no problem with that." And then he asked, "What about getting your medical insurance, this insurance, that insurance?" It was going as far as me leaving my job to run the bar. And then that happened, and I just -- I'm not going to say anything. Sheila never said anything. We just -- who are you arguing with? So, we both went our own ways, you know? But, they tried the best they could.

KITTO: Do you know anything about, like, what happened in the transition into Butchy owning the bar? So, how did he -- how did he--?

CUTHBERT: He got it from Lorraine, didn't he?

KITTO: I don't know.

CUTHBERT: I think he got it from Lorraine. I think he paid some back bills for Lorraine, and he ended up with the bar. That's how I think that s--

KITTO: He started DJing there.

CUTHBERT: He was DJing there for a few years before he got the bar.

KITTO: Did you go to the bar then?

CUTHBERT: When he was DJing?

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, not that often, but I -- maybe once a month I would pop in to see him,

wouldn't stay that long, you know?

KITTO: And then he took it on?

CUTHBERT: He took it on. He took it on. But I don't know what happened with him.

Lorraine owed all these bills. So, I don't--

KITTO: And Lorraine had gotten it from Mackie.

CUTHBERT: Mackie, I think, yeah.

KITTO: And who was she to Mackie?

CUTHBERT: I don't know.

KITTO: Just a friend?

CUTHBERT: I don't know.

KITTO: Do you know anything about Mackie? Like, do you know any stories about him?

CUTHBERT: Dot.

KITTO: OK.

CUTHBERT: You would have to talk to Dot about Uncle -- because she calls him Uncle

Mackie. I don't remember Mackie.

KITTO: Yeah. So, Butchy -- so your real memory of it starts --

CUTHBERT: Is Butchy.

KITTO: -- with Butchy being there.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't know much. And a lot of things went on with Butchy being there.

KITTO: Yeah. Well, you tell me, just, everything.

CUTHBERT: It got closed. It got closed.

KITTO: Not to overwhelm you or anything.

CUTHBERT: It got closed down one time.

KITTO: Oh, really? What happened?

CUTHBERT: There was no license, no liquor license. They got closed down for them writing numbers in the daytime in the bar.

KITTO: Yeah, what was the police's relationship with the bar?

CUTHBERT: Well, when I -- by the time I got there, it was good. The precinct was -- the

precinct liked the bar. There was never really any incident there. The numbers; everybody got closed down for numbers from time to time, you know? But there was some other underhanded things going on in there. But, like every place else, you have those, you know? But, I don't think it affected the bar or its business.

KITTO: Oh, it's your phone.

CUTHBERT: Oh, you can hear it?

KITTO: Yeah. It's OK. It'll end, right?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. Everybody's calling me. I wonder what's going on.

KITTO: Well, you're usually so available, right?

CUTHBERT: I'm always -- I always pick up that-- I always pick up that phone. My husband--

KITTO: Yeah, you just answer your phone. No one answers the phone when I call, so you always are just like, "Hello?" And you always know my voice, too, already.

CUTHBERT: --says, "That phone, that phone's going to cause your death," yeah. My husband's phone be ringing. He just -- he'll just look at it. He'll be over there. And he'll look at it and say, "Oh," --

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: -- and go on about his business. It drives me crazy. Yeah, but anyway.

KITTO: So it got shut down for numbers.

CUTHBERT: It got shut down for numbers.

KITTO: The police had a pretty good relationship with it.

CUTHBERT: For the most part because they wasn't coming there to start no fights.

KITTO: Yeah, there were no fights.

CUTHBERT: No real drug dealing's going on in there. You know, there was never, there was never any problem at the Starlite.

KITTO: Just good, clean fun?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. The guys, you know, they can leave there after a party. And you never heard anybody getting mugged, harassed. And there was some very, very feminine guys leaving there, you know, and walking to the train station. I be looking at them and saying, "Oh, Lord, I hope they get down the block all right," you know? But, never

any incident. The cops would come by, and they'd slow down. Once in a while, they say, "All right, everybody all right?" And that's it.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: It was a good, clean bar. But--

KITTO: So, what else were you saying about Butchy owning the bar? It got shut down for not having a liquor license. It got shut down.

CUTHBERT: Oh, no. He got -- then he got the license. And, you know, somebody went to jail for something behind the bar. I can't remember. I think Gaylord ended up going to jail for something -- oh, operating without the liquor license. But, all that got cleaned up. 'Cause there was no real problem going on in there, you know. A couple of fines because the lemons were out, but no real problem in the Starlite. But then the Starlite started to change, after Butchy passed.

KITTO: Before Butchy passed, just-- [laughter]

CUTHBERT: I don't know what you want me to say.

KITTO: Let me tell you.

CUTHBERT: OK, go on.

KITTO: So, you were saying, so the people would be Lisette--

CUTHBERT: Lisette.

KITTO: Who else? I just want to understand--

CUTHBERT: Lisette, Neil, Albert. Then you had Jamie. We forgot about Jamie. Jamie was also a manager and a DJ. Jamie was Butchy's nephew. He took over after Butchy died. But they didn't want him to DJ because they said he couldn't play the music right. [laughter] And he wanted to DJ so bad. He played fine for me, but they said no.

KITTO: They had high standards?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. They said no. So, they ended up hiring a bunch of DJs. And Jamie ran the bar. I forgot that. Yeah, Jamie ran the bar for about a year, year and a half.

KITTO: Like, after Butchy died?

CUTHBERT: After Butchy died.

KITTO: So, when no one owned it, kind of?

CUTHBERT: Well, his sister came and took it over. It was just about paying the rent. You see, it's not that Butchy owned -- Butchy owned --

KITTO: The lease?

CUTHBERT: The lease, yeah. But he didn't own the building. He didn't own the room, you know? He paid rent to Mr. Brown who owned the funeral parlor next door, OK? That's who he paid rent to. The rent was pretty reasonable. Sometimes they were short, but it was pretty reasonable for the most part. And then Mr. Brown's son wanted to up the rent to all these crazy prices. So, but Jamie ran the bar. Jamie tried to renovate it and paint it. And he put in a new bar. And he was trying to make it better than it was. When you was in the Starlite, the floor would shake in the back. They used to have to go down there and reinforce the -- what did they call them? Those poles that are in the middle of the floor, I can't -- for lack of a better name, those things -- I can't think of the names. But they used to have to go--

KITTO: Like, the poles, yeah.

CUTHBERT: They used to have to go and reinforce them. Gaylord and Marcus is who used to go down there and reinforce the floor because I used to say, "They're going to fall through the floor any minute now." And they would go down and do what they had to do. So, the place was a mess.

KITTO: Yeah. What else was a mess about it? So, the floors? Was the plumbing--?

CUTHBERT: The bathrooms -- yeah, the plumbing was bad. The place needed to be renovated all through. Jamie tried to renovate it. But it was just a façade, just the face he was trying to do. Things needed to be done, and that wasn't happening. Mr. Brown and his son didn't want to do the work. So, it worked. But it continued on. They'd go down there in the cellar, and they'd prop up those floors. And they tried to clean the bathrooms and -- but, it needed work. But, that was the Starlite. If it had gotten any better, it wouldn't have been -- excuse me. It wouldn't have been the Starlite. So, Jamie tried that for a while, and it worked for a while. Then we used to put up a lot of decor-- a lot of decorations and stuff. Willie was the master decorator. And Neil would decorate for Christmas, Neil Greer/Crawford. Yeah, he would do Christmas because

he does the windows for Bergdorf's. So, but all the--

KITTO: He would be great to interview.

CUTHBERT: Huh?

KITTO: He would be great to interview.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, he would. I'm going to ask him if he's interested.

KITTO: Anyway, so -- so, what would, like, a regu-- before the change, before Butchy died, what would, like, a regular night be like there for you, working there? What would--?

CUTHBERT: I would be at the door.

KITTO: Oh, you'd be at the door? OK.

CUTHBERT: I used to do Sundays. And then after a while I stopped that, because who was doing the door got sick or something. And I ended up doing the door. So, I would collect the money at the door. Oh, that's-- that would be my Friday nights and Saturday nights. I stopped doing-- tending bar on Sunday.

KITTO: Because they charged to come in?

CUTHBERT: Yeah, \$5, \$10, depending on the night, depending on who the DJ was, you know? It was no more than \$10.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: You know, sometimes it was nothing at all. "Mama Donna, I got no money." I was like, "Go ahead and shut up. You'd better buy a drink." So--

KITTO: Yeah. What were some of the--?

CUTHBERT: Neil worked the bar Friday nights. Sorry.

KITTO: That's OK.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, Neil worked Friday nights.

KITTO: And who were the people that were coming into the bar on those -- on the nights that you worked? Was it locals? Was it--?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: No? No?

CUTHBERT: It was the children.

KITTO: Oh, OK.

CUTHBERT: The children would come in.

KITTO: So, young -- young--

CUTHBERT: Well--

KITTO: Is that what you mean, like young gay people?

CUTHBERT: No. They weren't that young.

KITTO: No?

CUTHBERT: Well, yes. I guess they were younger than me. I would say between 25 and 55.

You had a few people in there who were much older than that who would come regularly and dance all night, you know?

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: So yeah, I would say between 25 and 55.

KITTO: So, it was like -- it was this gay bar. It was a gay Black bar. So, it would just attract people from all --

CUTHBERT: Yeah. Yeah, people --

KITTO: -- parts of the--?

CUTHBERT: -- came in from Jersey, from Washington, just to come to the Starlite, you know?

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: And the music, the DJs.

KITTO: Yeah. Well, who were the DJs that stood out at that time or the music?

CUTHBERT: Carlos Sanchez, Cameron [Da DJ].

KITTO: Oh.

CUTHBERT: We used to get different DJs. We started commissioning different DJs every weekend, you know? So, it would be Cameron this week, and it would rotate. Cameron, Sanchez, Donna -- what's Donna's last name?

KITTO: That's OK.

CUTHBERT: You know, James Smith. There was a few DJs. Frankie Paradise, you know, those sorts of DJs.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: Did you dance?

CUTHBERT: Oh, they would put something on, and I would jump up and do a little jig.

And, you know, I was watching the door, so, you know, not any-- not like it used to be, you know?

KITTO: Yeah. So, tell me about, yeah, like what happened after Butchy died.

CUTHBERT: OK. After Butchy died, Jamie took over. He renovated the place. He tried to bring it up. And then he got sick. And he ended up leaving. Well, he got sick. He had pancreatic cancer. So then, Gaylord was the manager. Dennis and Linda were running it. And they were actually leaving it for us to run because they really didn't have a clue. They really didn't understand it, you know? Everything they did they were doing by hearsay, all of us really, because we didn't -- we really didn't know what to do. Who was -- I had learned over time, you know, what Gaylord knew from sitting there because Gaylord was just a regular who'd just come in and sit. He's one of the people who would be there during the day. So, it was from what he learned, from what he knew, to what I knew, you know? And--

KITTO: What did you know? Like, what do you mean specifically?

CUTHBERT: What liquors to buy, wh--

KITTO: Oh, OK.

CUTHBERT: Because we were not using a distributor. We didn't have that kind -- Starlite didn't have that kind of money to use a distributor.

KITTO: I see. OK, that's important.

CUTHBERT: So, we were actually going --

KITTO: To the stores --

CUTHBERT: -- to the liquor store.

KITTO: -- and just buying a bunch of bottles, yeah.

CUTHBERT: Right, you know? They were actually buying a half a gallon of Bacardi and then putting it in a quart bottle because you couldn't put the half gallons on the bar. It was -- we were doing a lot of stuff that we weren't supposed to be doing, which really

wasn't that bad. But, you know, that's not what you're supposed to do. Sometimes we'd forego pay because we didn't make pay and rent was due.

KITTO: But you would work on tips, or no?

CUTHBERT: No, they paid us.

KITTO: Oh, they paid you?

CUTHBERT: There was a payroll.

KITTO: Oh, good.

CUTHBERT: Uh-huh, there was a payroll. And you got your tips. You know, by then I wasn't working the bar anymore.

KITTO: Oh, OK. You were just working the door?

CUTHBERT: I think I stopped working the bar as soon as Butchy died. I would do it in between sometimes if somebody wasn't there, but no. No. And then, after Gaylord, Tim came. I'm trying to think how Tim got there. I can't remember how Tim got there. But, things changed when Tim got there. Tim used to work at--

KITTO: This is Tim LaViticus?

CUTHBERT: Right. Tim used to work somewhere in -- One Potato Two Potato? One Potato Two Potato was-- OK, I don't know which word I'm using-- a trans bar. Is that the word?

KITTO: Sure, yeah, trans, yeah.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. And he...

KITTO: Where was that?

CUTHBERT: In the Village.

KITTO: OK.

CUTHBERT: I think it was on Christopher.

KITTO: Like a tr-- like a bar where people -- where drag queens performed or something?

CUTHBERT: Yes. Some of them were transitioning, and some were just dressing up. And that's where Tim had worked. And One Potato Two Potato closed down. And he came to Starlite. Can't remember how he got there, who knew him, or what. But he came to the Starlite. And, he became the manager. And he started having these drags shows, which was very unlike the Starlite.

KITTO: Oh, really?

CUTHBERT: We didn't do that. You had -- all the time I was in Starlite, there was one drag that came in there. Her name was Champagne. And we used to call her Butchy's wife. We said, "Butchy's wife is here," because at Butchy's funeral, we're sitting in the pews. And we see this woman come in with this big, fabulous black straw hat, beautiful dress. And we're sitting there. Between our tears we said, "Who the hell is that?" And we didn't know. And we're all going, "Who is that with that hat on?" Such drama, you know? And when we got outside we reali-- and then she walked behind the casket. Now, him and Champagne were not lovers. They never were. They were friends, but they weren't lovers. And she walked behind the casket like she was the wife. So, we ended up calling Champagne Butchy's wife. All right. But she was the only one that--

KITTO: Did she come in a lot? Like, she did performances? Is that--?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: Oh. You said "came in." Oh, OK.

CUTHBERT: That's the only one that used to come. But when Tim came, it changed; a lot of trannies. They started having these shows on Friday nights. And the guys who came there didn't like those things. The crowd started to change. A lot more of Tim's crowd starting coming. Tim used to have a house, House of La'Viticus. So, all his children started coming. And, he wasn't a bad guy. Tim wasn't a bad -- I didn't have a problem with Tim. It's just that he changed the aesthetic of the bar, you see? And that's what Kate showcased in the movie.

KITTO: I see, yeah.

CUTHBERT: You see? And that wasn't the bar.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: At least not originally. But that--

KITTO: Or not even when Butchy was there.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. And -- and, while Jamie was alive, you know what else they did? They did strip shows, male strip shows. [laughter] And I used to say, "What are they doing? This is not" -- the bar was strictly a place to come and dance. And they changed it. So,

that was that. It wasn't bad. We still had our dance night Saturday. But Friday night was all these shows.

KITTO: Drag shows?

CUTHBERT: Oh, yeah, Jasmine and this one and that one.

KITTO: Oh, Jasmine?

CUTHBERT: Oh, yes.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah, Lady Jasmine.

CUTHBERT: Lady Jasmine, yeah, you know? And there's another one who's very pretty.

Did they give you Jasmine's phone number?

KITTO: No.

CUTHBERT: Oh. How do you know Jasmine?

KITTO: Just from research, yeah.

CUTHBERT: Oh, OK. Yeah, so she started doing shows every weekend, which was very unlike the bar. We didn't do -- Butchy didn't do that at the bar.

KITTO: What do you think -- like, when you say that, what do you think -- what is it that people don't like about it? Is it just -- is it -- like, when you say, "We didn't do that. That's not what the bar was about," like, what else are you saying, you know what I mean?

CUTHBERT: No, I don't think I'm saying anything else. The bar was strictly a dance place. It wasn't a performance bar.

KITTO: I see. OK.

CUTHBERT: Not that we didn't like Jasmine. Jasmine, she was a pain in the behind. But Jasmine was good. And there was another one that used to come. They used to alternate. It used to be Jasmine and this other woman. I can't think of her name now. Karen -- her name is Karen Diaz; beautiful. [inaudible] Beautiful, I didn't know until they told me. When I first saw her, she was sitting at the bar. And then when they said, "Well, she's going to be performing," and I said, "Performing what?"

KITTO: And what was it?

CUTHBERT: Oh, they would just, you know --

KITTO: Lip sync?

CUTHBERT: -- lip sync to the music. But, she was gorgeous. And she was good. She was very, very good. Actually, I think she was better than Jasmine, you know? So, it was just -- it wasn't that I had anything against them or I think people had anything against them.

KITTO: Well, oh yeah. I guess I'm more asking, like, are you saying that; because of that, people who used to come stopped coming or something?

CUTHBERT: Well, they wouldn't come on Friday nights.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: They would come on Saturday nights, you know, and be annoyed if you were stopping the show for, you know, Jasmine. So, it ended up that we wouldn't have -- I think we ended up talking and saying, you know, that you've got to give these guys the night just to dance. They don't want to see Jasmine. Give Jasmine Friday nights, and leave them to dance on Saturday nights. So, who wanted to see Jasmine, they got it. And so, it worked out.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: It worked out. It's not -- you know, the bar didn't close because of that, didn't get better because of it.

KITTO: Didn't get worse?

CUTHBERT: It's just -- yeah, it didn't get worse. It's just that it was the time, you know? Those people, they want -- they wanted outrageous rent. He wanted to sell the building, you know? The people wanted-- what is it, not cost of living? What's the other word?

KITTO: Like a per diem?

CUTHBERT: I'm old.

KITTO: What are you talking about? Who wanted?

CUTHBERT: The rents; market value rents.

KITTO: Oh, market value rents.

CUTHBERT: They wanted market value rents. The bar wasn't making that kind of money.

The bar was just making payroll on Saturday night, you know what I mean, just making payroll. It wasn't much, you know?

KITTO: So, was it -- so, like, leading up to the eviction -- because it was an eviction, right?

CUTHBERT: Well, it was an eviction because he wanted to sell the building.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah. So, leading up to that, Tim was the manager. You were still--

CUTHBERT: It was Tim.

KITTO: You were still--

CUTHBERT: I was assistant manager, or they would call me -- whatever my title was, they would call me for everything every five minutes.

KITTO: Because you knew everything about it?

CUTHBERT: I would have to leave work sometime and run down and open up the bar or something, which wasn't a problem. I worked in the neighborhood, so it wasn't a problem.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah. And then, when did the -- when did it start to get threatened? Or, like, was there--?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. It had been being threatened the whole time. But, when--

KITTO: What do you mean the whole time? Like, as long as you--

CUTHBERT: The whole time I was there -- for years. He was always going to sell it, this, that.

KITTO: This -- is this Mr. Brown?

CUTHBERT: Mr. Brown. But then his -- something happened to Mr. Brown. I don't know if Mr. Brown started getting senile or he couldn't move around anymore. But his son took over. And he really pushed for it -- greedy, not thinking, ignorant young man. And he wanted market value. And no matter how they tried to say, "You can't ask for market value rent. We don't make money like that," you know? So, he wanted to sell it. Tried to find another place; the rents were too high. Just -- because they had the liquor license. They had just spent all that money on the liquor license. So, that was that. And that was the end of the Starlite.

KITTO: How did you feel about it closing?

CUTHBERT: Oh, I was devastated, because it was a -- Starlite had been there all my -- I guess, all my life it had been there on that corner. It belonged there, you know? It was supposed to be there. It was a neighborhood staple for people. You know how many people would run in there because they thought they were being followed or mugged or, you know, or something was happening, and they would run into the Starlite, you know? So, it just wasn't making the money, though. If it could have lasted, it would make the money now. If it could have just held, if he would have let them stay there a few more years--

KITTO: Yeah, 100%, I agree.

CUTHBERT: Anything on that corner doesn't stay. Nothing -- since the Starlite's been gone, nothing lasts on that corner.

KITTO: No. The first thing was, like, a MetroPCS, right? Because I went to the -- I only went to the Starlite once. And I went, like, in the weeks leading up to it closing. There was a fundraiser or something. And a friend of mine performed. And I went. And it was just this small, little place.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, yeah.

KITTO: With all that history, it's interesting, this tiny little space. And then, there's this huge fight. And then, what's in its place, a MetroPCS? Just like, who needs that? I mean, it's just so sad.

CUTHBERT: It didn't stay. Then it was one grocery store; it didn't stay. Then it was another grocery store; it's closed down. But if you let Mama Dot tell you, she says she put a spell on the corner.

KITTO: I mean, I feel like that -- yeah.

CUTHBERT: Mama Dot said, "I put a spell on that corner, and nothing going to last there."

KITTO: So, what was the -- was there -- there was, like -- what were the -- what was the content of the struggle to keep it open? Like, how -- what -- was there a fight around that? There was, like, little protests and things?

CUTHBERT: Oh. Well, I think Kate had a lot to do with that, and Debbie. They were having protests. They were writing letters, getting petitions. But--

KITTO: They just didn't have the money?

CUTHBERT: It was a money thing. It was a money thing. If you had the money to buy that corner, you could have had it, but no. And Mr. Brown's son is just greedy, just greedy, that's all, and not business-minded, you know?

KITTO: So, because they had the funeral home?

CUTHBERT: Yeah. I don't know what's happening with all that.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: I don't think it was sold. I don't -- I don't know.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: What's that?

KITTO: So, the major challenges were just the finances?

CUTHBERT: Finances, yes, yeah. Dennis and Linda were talking about trying to get a loan and do some things. But, it didn't matter, not unless they were going to buy it. And they really couldn't -- I don't think they could afford to buy it. I don't think so.

KITTO: Did you like working there?

CUTHBERT: Actually, I did.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: The characters, you know? I knew everybody's business. All those guys that came through the door, they had a story for me. And I'm a frustrated social worker. [laughter] I was always going to figure it out for them, you know? What was interesting; to see the men who came in to tell me that they had wives. That was so -- I mean, I was fascinated with that. And I was going, "What are you doing here?" I said, "You'd better not get in trouble. Where does your wife think you're at?" You know, those were the facets. You look at these men and say, "Gosh, you know, so many undercover men."

KITTO: A lot?

CUTHBERT: A lot, a lot. If you see the Hasids come in--

KITTO: Oh my God, please tell me about that.

CUTHBERT: We put them out when--

KITTO: Why do they always go to the gay bars? They're so funny.

CUTHBERT: --whenever they'd come we'd put them out, tell them, "Get out!" We were terrible.

KITTO: Why?

CUTHBERT: "Get out of here. There's nothing here for you. Get out of here!" They would come in and say, "Oh, we just want to use the bathroom." "No, you have to buy a drink. No, you can't come in." Yeah, the Hasids.

KITTO: Yep, I've seen them out.

CUTHBERT: All in the neighborhood, trying to pick up young women, young men, yeah.

KITTO: That's so interesting.

CUTHBERT: Somebody should document that.

KITTO: I know. Well, it's hard to document since they won't tell anyone anything.

CUTHBERT: No, you've just got to catch them; see them driving up and down St. Marks Avenue. Well, now it won't look funny because they own half of everything around. But, say, a few years ago?

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Fascinating; yelling out to the young women on the block or young girls on the block.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: Well, are there any other, like, memories that you want to share of the Starlite that come to mind?

CUTHBERT: No. I'm not that exciting, no.

KITTO: Well, you -- that was a great interview, actually. You told me a lot of stuff.

CUTHBERT: Oh. I'm happy I did. But, no, I don't have -- you know, there was -- I don't know. The devastation of -- the devastation of losing Butchy and trying to go on with it -- and sometimes you just didn't want to go on. You say, "Give it up," you know? But, it was a good part of my life. It was a good part. It was fun. The sadness of, you know, seeing somebody every -- every weekend, and all of a sudden they're gone, and you

hear of their demise and, you know, those things bother you.

KITTO: Did that happen a lot?

CUTHBERT: Sure.

KITTO: I mean, was it, like, the virus a lot of the time?

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah. I wondered also, like, what it was like in the 80s/early 90s around HIV/AIDS and--

CUTHBERT: I don't know. Butchy had the virus. Stanley had the virus. Willie had the virus. Willie used to live in this building with his lover.

KITTO: Oh yeah. Tell me about Willie a little bit.

CUTHBERT: Willie dances. He can dance his behind off, loved to decorate, could clean anything. I need to bring him here so he could clean. Very pleasant man, very sweet man, lived in this building for years with his lover. What's fascinating, brought my husband home one day. My husband came home from work, wasn't feeling good, fell out on the corner. Willie and his lover brought him home to me like this. Ended up he had the flu, but just sweet, sweet, sweet man. Willie -- how Willie has survived so long I do not know. Willie's lover died early. He was one of the early ones. And we all said, "Oh, Lord, Willie." Before I started working the bar, and I said, "Oh, Lord." Willie keeps pushing on. Willie's 70-something years old -- wonderful man.

KITTO: And what was he to the bar, just so we know?

CUTHBERT: Everything.

KITTO: Yeah?

CUTHBERT: He was everything. He was a bartender at one time.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: He was the cleaner. He was the go-get-changer. He was buy soda. He was the decorator. He was everything. He was everything.

KITTO: He was there for a long time.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, very long time.

KITTO: Was he there right up until the end, too?

CUTHBERT: Yes, he was, yep, yep. And the first thing out of everybody's mouth was, "What's Willie going to do?" Everybody worried about Willie because that was Willie's life. Well, we thought it was his life, you know?

KITTO: Because he was sick?

CUTHBERT: No, because Willie was always there.

KITTO: Oh. Oh, you mean, like; what is--?

CUTHBERT: What is he going to do now?

KITTO: Oh, OK, yeah. What did he do?

CUTHBERT: His little \$60 a week -- what did he do? He's -- you know, he keeps in touch. Willie calls me. And I'm so bad with phone calls. But Willie calls me at least once a month. "Hey baby, how are you?" Yeah, he's a good one.

KITTO: So, it's the people?

CUTHBERT: It's the people who make the Starlite, definitely.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: And we had another one named Eddie. Oh, Eddie was something, too. Eddie had a wife around the corner. But we know that Eddie used to dip and dab with women, men, anything he could get, yeah. Eddie used to sit with me when I first started working my Sundays. That's who used to sit in the bar, just sit in the bar. But he was not on payroll. If they had a couple of dollars extra we'd -- they'd throw Eddie a couple. But, Eddie used to sit in the bar.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Yeah, we assumed he was doing some underhanded things. But yeah, he was always there. He did -- when I opened up, he was there until I closed down.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: Yeah.

KITTO: And any -- were there any lesbians?

CUTHBERT: There was a few.

KITTO: That you -- were sort of regulars that you knew?

CUTHBERT: There was a few, yeah, but not that many.

KITTO: Or that you keep in touch with or anything like that?

CUTHBERT: No.

KITTO: No, nothing like that?

CUTHBERT: I only keep in touch with the guys. Lisette and I, we were all part of the same circle. But, Lisette became too bold and too accusatory, I guess. Is that a word? You know, that I -- you know, she thinks the Starlite survived because of her, as long as it did. It didn't. People knew the Starlite was there, you know? It wasn't because of you, Lisette, you know?

KITTO: Yeah. Do you think that people wanting to make a film about it, like, affected -- like, made people more sort of hungry for saying, "Oh, it's me, it's me, it's me?"

CUTHBERT: Probably, because they weren't in it. They wanted to be in it, you know? Yeah. Yeah, Jasmine shouldn't have been in it. It-- I mean, to me the film was all about Jasmine. It didn't seem like it was really about the Starlite, you know? You didn't film the daytime people. You didn't see how it transitioned into the night. Yeah.

KITTO: Also, can you just say a little bit more about -- because you've sort of mentioned that in passing. But you're saying that during the day it would be--

CUTHBERT: Basically a straight crowd, the neighborhood people. People--

KITTO: Just the people, yeah.

CUTHBERT: People would come and sit, eat their lunch, wait for the numbers to come out, wait for their kids to come out of school.

KITTO: Yeah, and then--

CUTHBERT: It was just something to do, OK.

KITTO: Yeah, and then it would become, like, a gay bar.

CUTHBERT: Well, it was basically straight during the week, too. When Albert was there on Tuesdays, I think -- I think Albert was there either Monday and Tuesdays or Tuesdays and Wednesdays-- you had the older men who came; the older gay men, the older closeted men who came and sat because Albert was bartending. Albert's a marvelous bartender. But Albert couldn't work the weekends, couldn't deal with the crowd on the weekends.

KITTO: Why?

CUTHBERT: He just couldn't. It wasn't his thing. He'd get nervous. He couldn't -- he liked his Tuesdays and Wed-- Mondays and Tuesdays, Tuesdays, whatever those nights were. That's what he liked.

KITTO: His crowd?

CUTHBERT: Yes.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: They'd play jazz.

KITTO: I see. OK.

CUTHBERT: You know, they'd have little hors d'oeuvres.

KITTO: It's like sophisticated?

CUTHBERT: Yes. Albert goes to the opera and to the ballet and to those places, OK? So, you know what he brings in, you know? Yeah, that's Albert.

KITTO: And so, what was the gay crowd like on the weekends?

CUTHBERT: Oh, those wild young people.

KITTO: Just young people?

CUTHBERT: Young people who want to dance, who were flirting. Sometimes couples came, and sometimes they argued while they were there because one was looking at another one too hard or, you know?

KITTO: Yeah, just more out?

CUTHBERT: It was just a regular dance party with people; some couples, somebody maybe looking for somebody, maybe somebody not, some people who just came to dance. You know, because you had a few who just strictly-- Used to be one guy; he'd ride up on his bike like clockwork. He'd lock up the bike, "Hey, Ma," pay his money, hit the dance floor. He didn't drink. He didn't eat. He didn't do anything. He hit the dance floor. He'd dance for five hours. And on his way he'd say, "OK, Ma, I'm going." And that's it. He's not dancing with anybody. He's not rubbing on nobody. He's not doing anything. He just wanted to come and dance.

KITTO: What did he look like?

CUTHBERT: Dark-skinned, bald-headed, nice-looking, muscular. It was probably part of his cardio. [laughter] You know, that's all he did.

KITTO: That's amazing.

CUTHBERT: Yeah. Then you had one who was trying to work on the weaker set. We had one that -- we had a bartender who was in love with this guy. And this guy used to just take such advantage of him, you know? He might walk in with somebody else and then come over to the bar and whisper at him. And you know he's in love with you, you know? Why are you paying those games? Until I put him out one night.

KITTO: You did?

CUTHBERT: Yeah, told him, "Don't come back here with that nonsense. You're messing with my bartender." Yeah. You had some who came every weekend and never had any money. And you know they didn't have any money. And then you had some who was quite flamboyant, tall and thin and very feminine and wear the little shaker skirts so when they dance it could -- you know, they were a bunch of characters, you know? And you loved them all. You loved them all. You know, I don't know if -- like I said, growing up my mom had a gay friend. I don't know if it made me accept my son some. It didn't -- it never bothered me. From the time the kid was little I used to say to Viola, "Got a little happy kid here, my little strange child. He different." And she used to say, "Don't say that." She used to get all upset. And I'd say, "I'm telling you, I know that kid is different. He ain't like the rest of them." I don't know. When he said to me at 18 -- he's talking on the phone. And I turned around, and I said to him, "Who are you talking to?" And he said, "My friend." And I said, "Is that your boyfriend?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, thank God you finally said something." And, I went and told my husband. He said -- him, my husband and my son, the oldest son, said, "Thank God. Now we can stop tiptoeing around here," you know? So, what I'm saying is, I don't know if growing up and my mother having -- that it made it so easy for me -- Hilton.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: I don't know if it made it easy for my husband, because he loves Hilton. He loved Hilton. He adores Hilton, you know? So, I don't know if that made the transition

for us of knowing -- I don't know if it was just in us and it was OK, you know? I don't know if it was the bar that did it or loving Butchy so much, what. I wonder. To people calling me up and saying, "How do you deal with having a gay son?" I say, "What do you mean how do I deal with it? I deal with it the same way I deal with the rest of my kids." Are you an only child?

KITTO: Mm-mm.

CUTHBERT: Oh, OK.

KITTO: Sister.

CUTHBERT: OK.

KITTO: Yeah.

CUTHBERT: And how are you and her, good?

KITTO: We're OK, yeah. She was gay for a while. But now she isn't. Whatever. Anyway, that's a beautiful place to stop. Thank you so much, Donna.

CUTHBERT: We're funny. We are fun.