NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SYLVER

Interviewer: Elliott Maya

Date of Interview: July 28, 2017

Location of Interview: Sylver's job

Interview Recording URL:
http://oralhistory.nppl.org/interviews/sylver-7d4y8

Transcript URL:

Transcribed by Colette Arrand (professional)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #043

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Elliot Maya: Hello, my name is Elliott Maya, and I will be having a conversation with Sylver for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experience of trans-identifying people. It is July 28, 2017 and this is being recorded at Sylver’s job. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Sylver: Hi, I’m Sylver. I’m 24, [Laughter]. I’m gender non-conforming. Um, I’m genderqueer, kind of like a gender outlaw as well, [inaudible]. My pronouns are she, he, they, them. I currently live in Brooklyn. I’m a Brooklynite. So yeah.

Maya: Are you a native of Brooklyn?

Sylver: No, I was born in the Bronx, uh, but I’ve live in all five boroughs.

Maya: Amazing.

Sylver: So I think my least favorite would be Staten Island, but I think that’s everybody’s least favorite. And then Queens is my least favorite as well. I can’t stand Queens. I mean, I like Queens for the food, but like, I hate it for like the location. It’s like so ridiculous to get out there, and like, you have to take busses and like, a camel, and like a Zipcar, like, just a bunch of things, it’s ridiculous. Too much for me.

Maya: So you said you grew up in Bronx?

Sylver: In the Bronx—well—

Maya: What part of the Bronx?

Sylver: Uh, University and uh Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Maya: What was that like? [Laughter].

Sylver: [Sighs], I loved I a lot. It was a, well, I mean, the location is very, very beautiful, the community to an extent was very, very beautiful. I was like home. I mean, it technically is home, but yeah, I don’t know.

Maya: Cool. Uh, what was it like growing up there, and what was your childhood home like?

Sylver: I didn’t have like the beautifulest like uh childhood. My dad left when I was two. So it was my mom and like, four other husbands. And those, in the course of those years, and it was—there was some good times and like bad times, like I remember like the Sesame Street place, like trip, the house parties to an extent, but then I also like remember like the night terrors and like, you know, the nights when we don’t really get to eat, or the abuse, you know, sometimes it gets crazy. But it was a childhood none the less, I lived with my grandmother for a good
amount of years, and she lived on Soundview, that's the south Bronx, uh, and it was really cute, uh, living with her was like amazing. Um, my friend recently had a birthday, and they asked me what was my favorite birthday, and I remember it like it was the back of my—like yesterday and shit. It was amazing. Sorry, do you mind if I curse?

Maya: Oh, go ahead. [Laughter].

Sylver: Okay, [Laughter]. But it was my 10th birthday. And my grandmother made me oatmeal for breakfast. And it was like a big thing of oatmeal with like fresh fruit, and she served it to me in bed. And it was magical. And I had to open my gifts, and I had like five gifts. My grandmother like, she was a big thrift shopper, so she found like a good amount of like, most of the X-Men. Most of the X-Men. There was one guy that wasn't part of the X-Men, but that's cool, whatever. And then she got me a dog that peed on itself. So you got to walk it, and it like peed itself. It's magical. But yeah. She died when I was, uh, 11, and uh, after that it got a little dark, so. That was my stupid childhood. Uh, and then I kind of like jumped from like adult—like a child to an adult afterwards, so, from like 11 to like now where I was kind of on my own, just a little bit. Um. But yeah.

Maya: You said—you mentioned you mentioned that you liked portions or aspects of your community. What did you like about your community and what did you not like about your community?

Sylver: Then?

Maya: Yeah.

Sylver: Okay. Um, I was a bit different. Like, I think since a baby, whatever. And I prided myself with it. Um, I dressed weird, like uh [noise], is there a ghost in here?

Maya: [Laughter].

Sylver: Okay. I have four sisters, four older sisters who um uh [inaudible]—I got a lot of their like, hand-me-downs. So they had like a lot of uh, jumpsuits and like tights and like those are the things that I wore. Uh, and we lived right next door to a Christian church. This was like a Methodist, I believe. I think they were Methodists, whatever. It was a little pushy, because like all you did was hear like, you know, they held all their windows open so all you could hear was like the Word, which sometimes is beautiful but then there are times when you just like, heard a lot of like, really like, you know, fucked up shit. And then like people kind of reference you to it. So like, their—it wasn't like I wasn't able to like be myself, but I was kind of like excused because they were like, you know, it's a kid. You know, it's whatever. But my—I definitely—I didn't feel super, like, home. Like, it was home because I didn't know, but like, reflecting after I think I want to say it was the age of awakening was when I was uh, 15. So once I like, awoke, I realized a bunch of that stuff, that—and how it like, held me back, a lot. So that's why I say like it's not like a great—it's home, but it's not like home. It's not family, you know? But yeah.
Maya: Did your family attend that church?

Sylver: No, no. Jesus, no. My mom was a Catholic. And it’s not—she was a real snot. A real snot. She wasn’t super religious, but she was religious enough to throw stones in her glass houses. So yeah.

Maya: Um, when you say you dressed weird, how, what do you mean? How did you dress?

Sylver: Like I enjoyed wearing like jumpers—

Maya: Yeah.

Sylver:—that had like little Mickey Mouse on it. I used to draw like little designs of like, kind of like uh, kind of like a henna tattooish type of thing on the jeans, and I would be that child in the back of the classroom, just diddle-daddling on my pants, uh, all awkward. I would wear like my mom’s like, the nudest shade of lipstick. I swear, I created nude lipstick before everybody else. Okay, I just went light on it. There was only one person who ever caught me doing that, and they were looking at my milk carton, and it was a little embarrassing, but I was like, my mom gave me chapstick, it’s totally fine. But she didn’t. Uh, but then my brother went back and told my mom, and that was kind of bad. Got a little bit in like trouble, not full out trouble, but I got in trouble. Um, when she caught me in the bathroom and I was wearing it. But that was an experience. Just don’t do it at home. [Laughter].

Maya: What was your family’s dynamic like?

Sylver: There was a lot of saving. I found myself doing a lot of saving for my family. Um, my mom had a really like, horrible relationship with her mom. So she kind of was the woman to put like, a lot of her like, resentment onto like, her kids, you know? And I was really close with my grandmother. So a lot of the resentment that she held against my grandmother kind of went towards me, and she would do some things that were very[sighs], like very, very horrible. Like, she would make some really bad decisions. And uh four of my older brothers and sisters weren’t in the picture. They were about 10 years apart from us. There was like an ACS case that happened on that, so they were—

Maya: ACS?

Sylver: Um, Child, like, Services. So they were out of the picture for about 10 years, they kind of like grew up, you know, outside of the house. So it was mostly me, my younger brother, and my older sister. But we still had all of the—like, we had this nice little condo in the Bronx, and it had six closets, like, six closets, this is before—it was magical. Six closets, we had four rooms and a kitchen and a living room that fit like a good 300 people. Like, it was really spacious. Really, really spacious. And this is back in the Bronx though, so you’ve got to go like all the way up though. Um, I don’t know if they still have the houses though, I feel like they do. [knocking at door]
**Sylver**: Yeah?
*Unknown Speaker*: [inaudible]

**Sylver**: Um, can we do like 11:00?
*Unknown Speaker*: Oh no, you can do it.

**Sylver**: Yeah, yeah, so just literally an hour.
*Unknown Speaker*: An hour? [Spanish].

**Sylver**: Yeah. So you mind switching rooms?

**Maya**: Oh we can switch rooms.

**Sylver**: Yeah, okay. [Audio cuts out, resumes]. Sorry, so where was I?

**Maya**: Talking about the house in the Bronx.

**Sylver**: Oh yeah, so we had like a big house, but my sister wasn’t the smartest one in the bunch. I mean, granted there is like a little bit of mental illness in my family, but I felt like I was the one who kind of escaped it to an extent. I think later on in life, yeah, I realized there was a lot more like mental disability, but in a different form. So I kind of like can relate to an extent, but I kind of felt like the savior of the family, because I constantly had to like, attend to everybody else. Um, especially after my grandmother died. Um, my mom went through like a really bad state. And she like took it out on a lot of us. Especially me, and it was really, like, it was really tiring, but yeah.

**Maya**: You said at 15, that was like an awakening period.

**Sylver**: Mmhmm.

**Maya**: Was there a specific moment in which you felt like you were coming to understanding like yourself and the world around you?

**Sylver**: Yeah, so it was a time that I was kicked out of my mom’s house. This was when we were living in Brooklyn, and I think I was doing a good job, you know? Like, I was in school, like, I was focused. I, like, worked like I was doing my shit. And I was being myself. Uh, and I like toured people around the block, like I used to like, excel in shit. And uh, me and my sister got into an argument, and she called me a faggot, and then threw a chair—not a chair, uh, a shoe at my head. And then my mom came home later on and my sister told her and my mom like kicked down—not kicked down, but like kicked the door open, and told me to get out, and that I had until the end of the weekend to get out. So. I think that night I like cried the most, and then I don't know, that next day it was like, I don't know, I was a whole new person, you know? I painted like this really beautiful piece, and it was like half-face lion, and then the other lion was like, little excerpts from my journal, and I like, smoked a pack of cigarettes, and I listened to uh,
a lot of Stevie, like, really loudly, uh, and I packed my stuff and I left with one bag and my knapsack, and that was it.

Maya: Where did you go?

Sylver: Um, I was living in Staten Island for about four months, and I hated it. It was ridiculous to get from there to like the city, and I worked and I went to school. So like, to go into Brooklyn from Staten Island, where I was at, was like an hour commute, so it's ridiculous. And I lived out there, and then I moved to what was it, the Bronx? Was it the Bronx? No. Harlem. I lived at 155th. And I lived in a youth shelter there, that was magical. Um, my stuff got stolen, uh, my fourth night being there, and I completely broke down. Like, broke down. I remember the lady who was working there, her name was Belinda, and I loved her name, that's one—it's Belinda, like that's such a Bewitching name, but she like, completely like saved me. Like, she got me clothes and like, she told me everything is going to be okay, you know? And then literally like two days after that I got into a transitional living program, and they worked with kids um 18 to 24, which was fan-fucking-tastic, they're not—they weren't like the organizations that you have now that put a timeframe on a person, you know? Conforming to like the way of like man, you know, like how normal people would deal with like, life changing situations like this, you know? They remember that these like, folks are like—were deep in like, there was a bunch of like, hard shit that they were dealing with. They weren't just, you know, uh, like random individuals, you know? Normal, they weren't normal. None of us were normal, you know? They actually took care of us, which was very beautiful. You know, they gave us enough time to like, grow into like a person that you know, a nurtured child would turn into, you know? Rather than just a fuck-up, you know? I'm not saying that people who are going through them now are doing that, but they have to adapt in a while different way, you know? I guess. It's weird, and I ramble, weirdly, but uh, yeah. I lived there, uh, for about three years, and then I lived on my own for awhile. Um, for a good while. Then I got really, really lonely. And I went to like a pretty deep depression, and it was towards like Thanksgiving, this was after graduation and all that jazz. Um, I had like a really bad like moment in life, and I tried to like, end it all, and I like quit my job, everything. Um. And nothing happened, you know? So I was just like, I woke up the next day and then was just like why, why am I like, here? Why am I doing this, like, why am I here you know? It didn't make any sense to me, and I don't know what really like brought me out of that part, I don't know, I think it was more like identifying with myself, because there was different stages of that awakening moment, you know, like that you have the denial phase of like no, you know, like it can't be like that, and you try to save the situation, you know? And then like there's a doubting phase where you'll just like, constantly like thinking it's your fault, and then like it drives you down. And then you realize that it's not your fault, you know? It sounds like a lot easier said, but like, when you live it it's like a little weird, you know? Not a little weird, it's hella weird, it's crazy. But it's a beautiful, like, transition, you know? But when I fully awoke, uh, I started doing a little more uh activism uh and it was the first time I met, uh, some folks at Sylvia Rivera, uh—not Sylvia Rivera Project, Sylvia's Place. And I found out about Sylvia Rivera and I like, [inaudible], and it was very, very beautiful, you know? And I think that's when I was just like, okay, you know what, it may not be the end, you know? Uh, like a push forward, you know? Because like, living like on my own and not having anybody there kind of, it got really dark and really, really scary, because like everyone can say that you can live on your own and you know
do all that and it's going to be beautiful and it's very [sighs] scary uh. Not saying I wouldn't do that now, because I think I can do that now, but I like my roommates too much, so it's whatever. But yeah, once I was living on my own, I uh, left that place um and I uh mostly because I spent a lot of money and I did all these stupid things, and I went into Sylvia's Place, and uh, I lived there for uh, a month and a half. Two months. Was it two months? Or three? I believe it was probably three. I don't know. And then at that time I think I was 21ish? Ish. I think. 21ish, I think. So, and I had like—I kind of developed a really bad uh dependence on alcohol, and that was pretty bad. I would like drink at least like two or three pints a day. And I didn't realize how bad that was an issue for me um until I want to say the second month? I got really—like I started getting really depressed, and when I didn't have it I like cried, and it was pretty bad. And I didn't want to go to school, didn't go to work, it was pretty bad. But, I met some really fantastic-ass people who uh, kind of shifted me off of that path. And also I kind of got sick, so they were just like no, you need to stop that or you're going to die, so, I cut that out. And uh I met some really great, inspirational people. Um, I'm part of a WRRQ Collective, um—

Maya: What's the collective?

Sylver: It's called WRRQ.

Maya: Okay.

Sylver: It's an artist's collective.

Maya: Oh, okay.

Sylver: And uh, we've been around for a couple of years now, a couple good amount of years, we do a bunch of awesome ass shit around activism, uh, we create like banners for organizations. We, host uh events for fundraising so that we can like, do a summer camp for like, LGBT youth, you know? Um, well, homeless youth, sorry. Um, like we're having one in August called, well, it's I think our sixth year. Our sixth year. And it's called Arts in the Woods. Uh, Arts in the Woods, [Laughter]. And sorry. We have about 15 to 20 youth from like Boston, New York City, Connecticut, um and uh they all come together and they create art. So there's different paths, there's there's like painting the fine arts path, we have a music path, we have uh dance, like tracks, sorry, they're called tracks. All of them are called tracks, and then uh, this year we're starting a new one, uh, we used to do it at um [inaudible] and that was like the shitty spot. So now we're doing it um in New Jersey. Uh, I forgot the name of the place, but it's very, very, very pretty. From pictures. I haven't visited it yet. We're going to, I think, next week or this week, I'm not 100% sure, but we have about 15 to 20 youth, and it's going to be fan-fucking-tastic. They create like a bunch of awesome like art. Like last year they made a song and video—well actually different forms of videos. So like there was like four different videos to the same song, which is fantastic. Ish, right? There was like four different videos? It was like magic, there was like a bunch of—just awesome. But yeah, after working with them, kind of brought me into like a new light and like kind of more of accepting myself. And then also like finding out about the people who came before me, like the Marsha P. Johnsons and the Sylvia Riveras and—
Maya: How did you find out about them?

Sylver: Uh, through Sylvia's Place, and uh kind of just being on the street as well. Um, I want to say I kind of went through a little bit of like all communities to an extent, you know? Like I've visited the ballroom scene, I visited the uh drag—well I am part of the drag scene. A little bit, not really. I feel like it's more, I like to perform, but I don't want to do it. I want to do it for money, but then I don't want to do it for money. I would love to just do it, you know? Just be on stage and like, voice out my own song or like, do like a really beautiful skit, you know? But yeah, I've done a little bit of everything. Uh, but I think now is kind of where I'm like, building myself. You know? I'm like, I'm on my own planet, you know? I'm not on anyone else's planet. It's a little combination of like all, like right here, you know? So it's beautiful to an extent. Um, yeah.

Maya: When did you first get into ball? The ballroom scene?

Sylver: [Makes popping noises].

Maya: [Laughter].

Sylver: I want to say 2009? 2008. Yeah, it was '08 or '09, and I used to go to Door, and ah!

Maya: What's the Door?

Sylver: What? You don't know the door?

Maya: No, tell me.

Sylver: It's on Broom Street, not too far from here, and back in the day they used to have a lot of like, LGBT like programs before all the cuts and all the takeovers. Now they're kind of straight, like, ish. Like, they have like a good LGBT program, but the way it was before to the way it is now, it's different, you know? But it was a beautiful place, we used to like, try to do a little duckwalk, even though I didn't learn how to duckwalk until like, three years later. It's horrible, [Laughter], but hands are my thing. I loved hands. But yeah, and then uh, when I started working with kids, uh, I got to like watch um House of Mulan um vogue a little bit and they were so cute. They were really good, really, really good. But after that I just like diddle daddled sometimes, played around kikiing with folks, but nothing serious no, like, competing or anything. I wouldn't do that. like, I'm not ready for that, [Laughter].

Maya: What other spaces that you visited or like performed in or like to go to and be part of different scenes in the city?

Sylver: I was part of The Web for a little bit.

Maya: The Web?
Sylver: Ugh!

Maya: What's The Web?

Sylver: The Web, okay, this is just really shady um bar-slash-club, and it was in, was it the west side or the east side? I think it was on the east side, on 40-something Street or 50-something, one of those areas. I don't remember because I was like, 18, I know, 18. They're closed down, they're not open anymore. Um, I don't think they're open anymore, and if they are they shouldn't.

Maya: [Laughter].

Sylver: No, actually, I ain't going to down their game, they can do what they want. But uh, The Web was very cute, it was the first time I really got in drag, and I did my first competition there. It was really cute, I fell down the stairs, to Rihanna's “Where Have You Been” and it was really cute, really, really cute. And uh, that was the first time I met uh like a famous drag queens. No name mentioned, but she a bitch.

Maya: [Laughter].

Sylver: But then I realized how much I wanted to do drag, and how beautiful it is, just the art of it. But drag is like, ever changing, you know? It can change you, it can change your life, it can change your room, it can change your everywhere. Like, it's a magical, oh, it's a magical thing how like, just a person's drag in general like, how you evolve as a person is fucking fantastic, especially like of our like you know, community, it's like you're constantly being dipped in different types of chrome, okay? But yeah, uh, that was the first time I really wanted to do drag more, and then I went onto my second pageant, which was for this like community health center—not community health center, that was this one here, but that's another one. But for this community like uh center uh in the Bronx and I won fist place for that one, and I was beautiful because I wore this really gorgeous like, orangeish like dress, and I kind of looked like Belle, [inaudible]. It's gorgeous. And then I went—and I came here before and I won a competition here, but it wasn't really like a competition because there was only two people and like, the crowd was like, of four, [Laughter], but it was cute. I got my [inaudible], so.

Maya: Let me pause it.

Sylver: Okay, I don't know why I [Laughter]—

Maya: No, I wanted to ask you, yeah what was it like coming into contact with the drag community?

Sylver: It was very catty. Very, very catty. They were very nasty bitches. Like, when I was when I first got off like, uh, first—ugh! Once I got through the first round at the competition at The Web, one of the drag queens who was like hosting was like, some girls should not be doing drag. Drag is not for everyone. And that drove me to like, strive even harder, like, just to fight
this bitch, because I wanted to knock her in the neck. Um, like how dare you, like, tell someone something isn't for them. Like who the fuck do you think you are? Like, you're ridiculous. And then I went on, and I went to top two, the other bitch won, but still, I got top two bitch, like what? Like, uh, no, fuck her. But but yeah, after that, I did meet some really great like girls around like the time. But I know just a lot of like shady bitches. Just a lot of shady bitches. But um there are some good girls who are about family, you know? Like like the Brooklyn scene girls sometimes are very friendly, depending on where you're looking at. The Manhattan queens, you leave them alone, most of the time, unless they're the downtown Manhattan queens, then you know, you adapt with them, you love with them. The uptown girls [inaudible] there's some of them that are like really, really promising and very beautiful, but then there are some of them who are just, why are you doing drag? Like, you know, you're supposed to be like, the community friend, like, [Laughter], but you're a nasty little bitch. But it's totally fine. A lot of people don't look at it um in the way that I see it, because I see the family ish, you know, we are kind of like you know, the clowns of the group, you know, but we tell it how it is and we explore, we bend, we like, take the form of like art and create it to something different, you know? Like come up with a seven minute number that's filled with Erykah Badu, Angela Bassett, and Carol Burnett. Like, shit like that just to make something so that everyone can enjoy, you know? It's art. It's beauty. But it's also about family as well, and community. It's about bonding, you know? But a lot of bitches don't see that. They want competition, they want to be queen, which you can definitely be queen but you don't need other people [inaudible] the queen, [Laughter]. But yeah.

Maya: have you been able to find that sense of family in the drag community?

Sylver: No, I find family in the trans, like, family. Um, my brothers and sisters and those in-between are I don't know—they're my blood, you know? They pump, you know. When needed, you know, they're there for me. The same thing for me and them, you know? Like, I don't know how to explain it, [Laughter]. It's, I don't know. It's when you know, you know? You know. It's just there, you know? You feel it. It's beauty. It's very, very beautiful especially when you're seeing like your brothers and sisters strive and do their shit, and God damn it, ah, ah, it's just like it's beautiful. Because back in the day we weren't even considered a person, like, we were considered diseases and something was wrong with us and there's a demon inside of you and like, all this shit, you know? And we're strong and we're beautiful and we're like, creative as fuck. Oh! Oh, yeah. Sorry, but that's my family.

Maya: How did you find that family?

Sylver: At my worst. It's those people who stood there. They were there. And those are the people that are going to see you at your best, you know? They deal with you when you don't want to be dealt with, you know, and when you do, you know? But it's beautiful. It's beautiful. But I think it was, yeah, it was towards my like drinking time, I was really, really down, and I met a couple of great folks. Some of them I won't remember their name, but they all touched me in a way, you know? Like I did an inter-generational theater group with Sage, and I love them. I love them down, the people I love even more, the organization, uh, they're cute. But it was the people that were there. Um, like Barbara. I love my Barbara, oh my God. She was so
fantastic. Oh, she showed so much love for me, ah, it was amazing. Um, Barbara and Pat. Pat was her partner, and ah, I love them both. And I met some really, really great fucking people, who have like—who were there before me. And they strived on, you know? Like, this is at the time when like, they had to be like very, very like—they hid, you know? They rode that trolley the first time, okay? They were on that bus, striving down the street, down Christopher Street, and they were like, you know? And yeah, I don’t know. It’s just fucking fantastic, just beautiful. I love old people.

**Maya:** [Laughter].

**Sylver:** But not all of them. Some of them are nasty, because they have like a lot of still pent-up like aggression against the community, and then you have those folks who are like the ageists, and then you have the sexist gays, like, ugh, and then the transphobic gays. Like, especially in our generation now, like, I feel like yes, everyone is slowly but surely becoming queer, but like feminine folks are like off the limits. Like, no one wants a femme person, you know? Or a person who falls on the femme side. Which is fucking ridiculous. There’s a lot of like, uh, a lot of like stigma, and it’s a lot of borders in people like getting to know other people. And you don’t need to like have like a you know like a wall you know? Just to get to know someone, like, you don’t even have to like know them in a like, a, like, intimate way, you know? It’s just opening yourself up to like, finding out what these people are about, you know? Like, their walk of life is different from your walk of life, just, like, learn, you know? A little bit. Yeah. [Laughter].

**Maya:** Are there any trans elders you look up to?

**Sylver:** I think those two in particular, like Marsha and Sylvia, and there’s Gale, I met Gale. I love her. Vicki, oh my God I love her. I love her. Go see her. If you ever go to, Free Speech, you’ll meet her. She’s like the elder up there. And like ugh, I don’t know, like, right now, I’d say my elders are like, for me are the girls who are like, in their 40s because other than like Vicki, there’s not many that are like left, you know? Or at least that I know of. I mean, I’ve met some folks in like Texas and like, places down there um where they’re like considered two spirited, or they go by two spirited, and like they’re fucking fantastic as well. But yeah, I think my elders right now are the girls who are pushing forward for me, like Ms. Cecilia Gentili, she used to work here. She was my mother. I love this bitch. Ah, I remember the first time like me and her ever met, and I think what was I doing—we were having a sex workshop here, a safe sex workshop. And she came in with this girl Sydney, and uh, I was like hi, you know, I’m Sylver, nice to meet you, blah, blah, blah. And she was like, I’m Cecilia, and then like we were like talking and she was like, are you going to transition? And I was like, ahh, I don’t know. At that time I didn’t know, like I was coming out a little bit more and I was, I think, 19? And then we met a little like briefly around a little bit, and then I met her one time, uh, in passing, like walking down Christopher Street. And this is I think after an event and she had on these really beautiful heels, and she was like wearing [inaudible] and it was just like oh my gosh, hey you, and she was like, you look gorgeous, don’t let them bring you down. And I looked jacked up, she was totally fucking lying to me. But she gave me so much, like, so much strength. I knew I looked jacked up, okay? I had garage door eyebrows, okay, my hair was not symmetrical, it looked
horrible, my bodysuit was not cute. Mm-mmm, nope, nope, the outlines of my lips looked like I was in a road accident, like, oh hell no. But then four years back, about four years, was it four years back, or three years back? I think it was like three years back, because I was doing outreach. Well, shortly after I started doing outreach, there was a little competition here, and um I thought—I felt gorgeous. Like the contour was everything, the highlight was everything, the face was everything. She was beat with every single fucking bat in the room. Like it was, pshew. Well, not with a bat, you know what I mean? But I looked like everything, and she was in the crowd—no she wasn’t—she was a judge. She was a judge. And I was walking out and I did a Barbara number. Was it a Barbara number? I think I did a Barbara number. And then she was like baby, you look gorgeous, gorgeous, you look so good now. And I was like thank you, I'm doing a lot better, and I had this little bun on my head, it was like gorgeous. And then uh, it was me and another girl, and neither of us won, but we both got prizes. And uh, Cecilia came up to me and pulled me to the side and she gave me her pearl necklace and her bracelet, and it was so sweet. I like cried shortly after. I was like oh mama, thank you. Because like, she made herself like, she is a fucking force. Do you know Cecilia Gentili?

Maya: Mm-mmm.

Sylver: Ahh!

Maya: Tell me more!

Sylver: Ah, she's an activist, she's a mother, she's a sister, she's fucking everything. She, ugh! So, she moved here 17 years ago from Argentina, and she's gone through some really hard like times. She went to jail. Like everyone else where, we have our like ups and downs and types of shit, and we dabble in stuff, you know? But she was able to like, push herself forward, you know, and like now she's uh, one of the like head people at GMHC, and she's fantastic, okay? She used to be, uh, the coordinator for our program here, and she helped so many girls. So, many, girls. Uh, she's such an inspiration for so many people. I don't know, I feel like there's nothing—I can't say anything wrong with her except her accent is strong as shit. That's it. [Laughter]. And that's not even bad because you love her accent. Like, it's, oh, I love her, I love her down. But yeah, where was I? I feel like I just went off on a tangent with her.

Maya: You were telling me about um just trans elders.

Sylver: Oh yeah, right. So yeah, there isn't a lot, but the ones that I do have, they played a big force in my life, so I [inaudible] with them, even though sometimes I'm like what? Excuse me? Did you just say that to me? Other times I'm just like yes, I won't say anything.

Maya: Where did you meet them?

Sylver: In trying times, sometimes. And that's the best ones, when you meet someone in trying times. Sometimes you meet them in places like this, through organizations, you know? Um, you get to connect with other people, you know? Um, yeah. Those things, places like that.
**Maya:** Yeah, how—does drag interact with the way you understand your gender at all? And I guess part two of that question is have you experienced issues in um drag spaces or I'll say LGB spaces as well due to being non-conforming?

**Sylver:** Yeah. Yeah. Um, we get some shit from um some of the girls who don't understand. Because there are some girls who believe that if you're not taking hormones, you're not trans. If you're not taking T, you're not trans. And it's fucking ridiculous. Okay, standards. Like where the fuck do you see there being a book, like, what? Okay. So, [Laughter], I do find problems with that sometimes, and then I see problems, well not really in the lesbian community. Not at all in the lesbian community. They love me. I think, yeah, they love me. The gays, I don't really talk to gays, they're like, I don't know, closeted a little bit. Probably a little harsh against me, but I think I'm ever changing you know so like it's fine. You know? So yeah.

**Maya:** Thank you.

**Sylver:** Mmhm.

**Maya:** When was the first time ever you came into contact with a more accepting community or a trans community?

**Sylver:** When I started working here a little bit more, because we got to meet on like a different level, and we bonded, uh, and I made some really grat family members coming through this job. Like, I know it's not like a—it's not like oh, you come in here and I'm like oh, I don't know who you are, give me your number and we'll connect, blah, blah, blah. No, these are like people that I see on the regular, you know? And they come here and they want to get help. And like, when they see me on the beach or when they see me on like, the street, if they see me at a party, oh hey girl, how are you doing, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Oh I need this, blah, blah, blah, talk later, like, if I'm on like—it's family, you know? So like it's bond. But yeah. It's good to like network and get together with people because like, there aren't many places that provide great services you know, especially for our community. It's fucking ridiculous. Fucking ridiculous. If I didn't work here, I'd fucking be coming here, [Laughter], only because my doctor is a douche. Yeah, no, I was so over it today. I literally waited like a good hour just to get tested. And like, four people came before me—not before me, four people came after me and went before me. And I got so mad. I was like, aren't I on time?

**Maya:** Oh, yeah.

**Sylver:** It's ridiculous. But yeah. Family is important though. Especially my family. I love them. Oh, I love them. Like granted a lot of us aren't like talking as much but like, we still hold each other. You know, time doesn't stop, you know? One hour right? Right? God, right? Yeah. [Sneeze].

**Maya:** Bless you.
Sylver: Oy. Thank you, hoo! [Sniffle]. Okay, time doesn't like stop, you know? It continues on like sometimes you don’t see each other for like a month or two, but then when we do it's just like oh hey bitch, you know? Like one of my friends, John, this little tramp, we met when I was 20, 19? 19, 20. And at first I was like this bitch, I'm going to end up like, knocking the fuck out of. Like, just knocking her out because of the way that like, she used to stare at me. And I'm like, fight me then bitch, like just get, you know, nasty glares type of thing. But he’s just a Virgo, okay, born on the 31st. And yeah, we've been friends ever since. Like, there are times when we don’t talk for like a good four or five months, and then when we do talk it's like oh, hey, you know? But yeah, I don’t know. It's beautiful.

Maya: Tell me a time when you supported someone in the community.

Sylver: In what way?

Maya: In any way. It could be financially, emotionally, sort of—

Sylver: Shit, there's so many of them to like, explain which one. Like, I don’t know if I have like the greatest one. Um, [makes hissing noises], I don't know. Shit. I’m trying to think of one that doesn’t breech, confidentiality.

Maya: That’s not to say names—

Sylver: No, no, definitely. Definitely. But still. Oh, shit. I don’t know. I don’t know. It's coming up blank to me. A time that I helped someone in my community. I mean, like my friends. Like I’m always an open ear, like an open ear for like my friends um and my family, so I think that would be a way of helping to an extent. Uh, financially I'm like dirt broke, like poor, um like, give me some change poor, okay? Um, like check the [inaudible] kind of thing. But I had some friends who like, who like reached like bottom points, you know? And like, they need someone to like sit there and like talk to them and just like listen to it, you know? And I’m definitely down through that, you know? And I intend to like, make lists or like, let's do about this, let's do about that, you know? Like, especially when they’re like, think about you know the end, and it’s just like, that's not where you need to be going. We need to change that path, change that mindset. Let's listen to some music, let's you know, do something that motivates you, you know? Only because like, that for me is what I needed. You know? So like, if I find someone that needs that shit, best believe we are pumping out the jams, okay? Especially for music. For me that was like the greatest way of like getting through a lot of shit. A lot of shit. Um, like my heart cannot wait for Kesha's new album to come out, because you know for a fact that she went through a little bit of what we were going through, you know? To an extent, you know. But knowing an artist to like come out with something that's just pouring out of their heart, you know? Um, music is very important. And when—I'm not saying that that's the only thing I do to help my folks in my community, but depression I tend to like, tackle that within my family. Like, I don't allow you to like, walk away from me sad. Like, we're going to smile. We're going to like, I want to you know see something come off your face, you know? So yeah. Also I'm a Virgo so, I'm not saying that it has to be blamed on all the astrological like charts, but it's beautiful. Oh shit, uh—
Maya: What time do you need to be done?

Sylver: Like—

Maya: Now?

Sylver: Yeah, because uh, it’s 3:00. Is there like [crosstalk].

Maya: Okay is there anything you would like to—is there any information you would like people to know about you, or one piece of wisdom you’d like to pass down?

Sylver: Yeah, I don’t want to be all cliché and be like, the end is not near, it’s only the beginning. No, that’s not true. Shit's going to happen, okay? But in the words of Marsha P. Johnson, “Pay it no mind, honey.” And strive, and just know that the only person that you need to acknowledge your existence is you, [Laughter], okay? That may sound like harsh, and may be hard to like accept because you feel like you’re supposed to have family. You do have family, but you’ve got to have yourself, too. And those people do make up like, a lot of you. But you need to be held, yourself, and those folks that you come across, just know that they are going to stay and they’re going to go, but—I’m rambling on with that one, sorry. Um. That’s like the really longest last statement ever, and this is still going on, ha ha.

Maya: [Laughter].

Sylver: Um, [Laughter], but uh, yeah, just be open. Just be open. It’s totally fine. Just say yes. There we go, just, like Michelle—what’s her name? Michelle from—Williams. Uh, now I forgot the song. See, I forgot her last name and now I forgot her song. Sorry. Um, just say yes. Oh that’s what—just say yes, that was Michelle Williams. That stupid-ass song. I’m kidding, it's not stupid, it's beautiful. But yeah, just say yes, because you never know what the fuck your next path may be, especially if you’re coming from the bottom. Just say yes, and then try it out. As long as you're happy, safe, and you know, being productive, that's all that matters.

Maya: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Sylver: Yeah, no problem.

Maya: Amazing.