

Oral History Interview: Magora Kennedy

Interviewee: Magora Kennedy

Interviewer: Mark Bowman

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Mark B: This is Mark Bowman with the LGBTQ Religious Archives Network. It's March 8, 2023. I am sitting here in the Bronx, New York, with Reverend Crone Goddess Magora Kennedy to do an oral history interview. Thank you so much for doing this interview. And I'll just ask you, to start, I know you were raised in Saratoga Springs, New York. Tell us about your family and your early years.

Magora K: Well, thank you so much for having me, and I hope that this, as it goes into the archives, it will be down the way and be able to help a lot of gay, especially gay religious people. I was born in Albany, New York September 22, 1938 and raised up in Saratoga Springs, New York. So my personal joke is Saratoga has a lot of history. Saratoga was the first place to have horse racing in the United States and also it was the turning point of the Revolution. The British surrendered at Saratoga in 1776 or '79, so I said so that's the historical, and also history, they have me.

Mark B: The highlights of your childhood. What are just a few of the key memories from your childhood?

Magora K: Right, so my childhood was, being born in '38 and in 1948—I was ten years old by that time—but I knew that I was different. How I knew that I

was different, it was like I would hang out with the boys at school, you know, but I was always very mindful of what was going on with the girls. One incident that happened in school was there were Jewish families that kind of had moved into Saratoga, and there were a couple Jewish kids that were in the school that I was in at that time. And this happened in the third grade. The kids were making fun of the girl. She had pigtails, you know. And of course back in the old—I don't know if you remember—but they had, the desks were desks, but they had the inkwells in them. Well, this is the kind of school we had, and that was also, the desk had inkwells.

And one of the boys went and took this girl's pigtail and put it in the inkwell, and they were making fun. And so I went up to the boy and I said I'll see you after school. Said that was not nice to do. Now, the teacher takes me to the principal's office. And I guess now that I look back on it, I guess that was like my first, I would say, encounter with racism, but I didn't realize it at the time, because I went to the boy for what he did and then I told the teacher what he did. And the girl, of course the ink was, you know, getting on her clothes and whatnot, and the teacher says, well, you're disrupting the class. Took me to the principal's office.

The principal called my grandmother. And of course like on my side of the family, my family, my mother's Native American and Black and my father is Caribbean. So my grandmother came to the school and went to the principal's office. And the principal said that I was disrupting the class. And my grandma said wait a minute, I'm talking to my

granddaughter. And of course she looked at me, and of course my grandmother had one of these really heavy stares, and she was like, “Magora, what happened?” You know, looking up at her, you know. And I told her exactly what happened, step by step. My grandmother looked at the principal and the teacher and said, “And you brought her to the office? Did you bring the boys that put the girl’s pigtail in the inkwell?” And the principal said well, no. And my grandma said, well, let me tell you, that’s my granddaughter, and I’m her grandmother, and I’m here—you bring those boys that did that and the girl and then we’ll talk. And they looked at her like...you know.

And see, now I know they were...white people in those days were not used to Black people speaking back to them. And of course my grandmother, you know, she was, like I said, Native American, and by this time her hair was gray. She always wore these pigtails.

So long story short, they brought the kids in. And of course the boy said he didn’t do it, you know, and the girl—and of course like he said he didn’t do it, but he hadn’t washed the ink off his fingers where he dipped her pigtail in the inkwell. Well, long story short was I realized over the years that was my first encounter with racism, but I didn’t realize. And my grandmother nipped it in the bud. She said do not call me to the school, and next time I come I will bring my lawyer. And that’s all she said, and that was the end of that.

But then over the years, now being in Saratoga and being raised up the way that we were—I mean, everybody got along okay, but there were these subtle things that you didn't realize. And I didn't realize how bad racism was until I left Saratoga.

Mark B: Were you like the only people of color in your network in school, or there were a few others?

Magora K: I was...there were three of us at the time that this incident happened, and so the other two were boys, and they ran and left me, you know. And I was like...yeah, I was kind of upset with them, and I said well—because we played baseball. And I said I'm going to get them at the baseball field. But anyway.

And then over the years, you know, it was like my mother would say things like when you leave town do not tell them about Saratoga or where you were raised because—I didn't realize what she was talking about until the Cosby show came on television, and I didn't realize that a lot of Black people did not realize that Black people lived like from the Cosby show. And that was strange to me. But then I remembered what she said and I would just go places and observe. And then I began to realize wow, this is really something in this country, you know.

Mark B: So your grandmother was an influence in your life.

Magora K: Yes.

Mark B: She was very involved in church, right?

Magora K: Mm-hmm. She was involved in church, but she was also involved in now what they would call civil...you know...well, civil rights, to a certain extent.

Mark B: What do you recall about your grandmother?

Magora K: I recall that she was a very strong Black woman and she had vision. She could see things into the future. And I remember like one night we were at—it was after dinner, and we were sitting on the back porch. We had a back porch in our house in Saratoga. And she was sitting in her rocking chair and she was rocking. My mother and I, you know, we were... She said, “Oh, there’s going to be a Black president.” Well, now you can imagine in the ‘50s or, you know, the early ‘50s and whatnot, Mama and I looking at each other, you know. And by this time Mama kind of pulled me closer to her. You know, my grandma’s just rocking. She said, “Oh, hmm, man is going to the moon.” And we said oh, my god—*[laughs]*—we better keep her close, you know, because...yeah.

And imagine that over the years to see the different things that she saw come to pass. So down to my years, the same thing has happened. I’ve seen things in the future and talked about them. I talk on some things, and some things I just kind of kept to myself.

Mark B: I know you’ve said in other interviews about when you are 14 and you have this run-in with your mom. But before that, anything else about your

childhood that stands out? Or we can move on to that interaction with your mom.

Magora K: That was some of the incidents that happened in Saratoga. The thing was, like I said, I was always with the boys. You know, we went and we played baseball and whatnot, and I started—

Mark B: You did sports.

Magora K: —growing, and my mother would say well, you're not going to be able to play baseball with the boys anymore. I'm like, what? Why not? That's because I was beginning to develop. And so I didn't understand, but she explained it to me. She said this is the difference between girls and boys. And see, they explained everything to me, whereas other kids' parents didn't. So my mother and my grandmother would say what we're telling you and what we're teaching you, you keep it to yourself because other people are not going to understand. And I did that.

You know, it was like, I remember like one of my best friends, and her name was Geraldine. She came, "Guess what? The stork is coming to our house." And I'm like, what? You know. I didn't even know what she was talking about. You know, but I let her, you know, my mother always said listen, listen, and if you don't understand, come home and we'll talk about it. So she's talking about the stork and I'm like, okay. "So I hope I get a little baby brother." And I was about to say, but the—then I remembered what she said, you don't tell people what they're not ready for. So I said,

“Oh, that’s nice, are you hoping to get a baby brother or baby sister?”

“Yeah, the stork is going to bring them.”

I went home and I told my mother and my grandmother, and she said they do not understand. As I got older it was amazing to me how much American people did not know about their bodies and how they functioned and, you know, the different things. So I said okay. So the next day she comes running to the house, “There were two!” I said, “Two what?” She said they had two babies. And I think one was a boy and one was a girl. I said, “Oh, twins.” She didn’t even know that word. I was, I mean, these are the things, these are the kind of things that I kind of like remember. And as I left home I began to realize, you know, some things you just, you know, you just observe and...yeah.

The incident that happened in Saratoga when I was 14 was that, again, the story was getting around town, because Saratoga was a place that was, in the summertime it was really a summer resort. People came from all over to go to the racetrack. There was history in Saratoga. People would come to the museum. There was Canfield Casino. They just went around and they would come for the water. But then after the racing season, then Saratoga went back to being the little small town that it was.

And so the stories now were getting around about me and the girls. And my mother, of course my mother, she was mortified. I sang in the choir in the church, and her whole plan for my life, she wanted me to become another Marian Anderson, because I had a very, very deep voice. And of

course when I sang in the choir I sang with the boys. You know, like they sang tenor and I could sing bass and so, you know. So Mama just had these whole things all she was going to lay out. Now the stories are getting around town. And so she said, well—and every time I look at this I think about that—my mother said, “Well, we have a cure for what’s happening with you.” And I said, “Cure? Mama, there’s nothing wrong with me.”

My mother was the type that was oh, come to me with anything. I would tell her all my stories and the things that I had done and she never changed the expression of her face. But then when it started getting around like the neighborhood and whatnot, then by this time she’s like...she says, “Well, we’re going to cure this.” And I said, “Cure what? Mama, there’s nothing wrong with me.” She said, “I’m getting you a husband.” I said, “What?” She said, “Oh yes,” she said, “don’t worry about it, everything will be okay, and we’ll stop the rumors.” So I’m like mm-mm, this ain’t happening, you know.

And so I went to a couple friends of mine, and two of them were girls and two of them were boys, and they were saying the same thing’s happening to my—but they were older than me. Now meanwhile, in the group that I was in, I was the youngest one in the group and they were older than me, and they said our families are talking about the same thing. And a girl said, “Look, why don’t you come with me? We’ll join the convent.” I said, “But I’m not Catholic, I’m Baptist.” She said, “Well, I don’t know what you’re going to do, but I’m not getting married.” And so they went to the

convent. A couple of the guys, one guy went into the priesthood and the other one said, "You know what, I'm going to join the army." I said, "Can I join the army?" He said yeah.

So we got these certificates, because in those days when you went to the recruiting center all they required, they didn't require a birth certificate, thank God. You could have a baptismal certificate or anything, a certificate from the church they would accept. So I raised mine up to...and I took the test for the Air Force and passed it. And of course in those days they shipped you right away, you know, and I was like oh boy, I'm free now. I was in the Air Force exactly 14 days.

Mark B: You went to Texas, correct?

Magora K: Yes, Waco, Texas, the Air Force. And it was like two weeks exactly almost to the day they called me into the CO's office. And I'm like mortified because I'd been out with a girl the night before and I thought to myself, oh God, they found out, I'm going to be dishonorably discharged. All these thoughts were running through my head.

We get there, there's my mother in her furs and a private detective. And they were like smiling and kind of applauding me for wanting to serve my country. They gave a certificate, which I saw once. They gave it to my mother. I never saw it again. I don't know if it ever got archived. I don't know anything. All I know is that we were on the plane back to Albany airport and she said you will get married in June. So I said to myself, mmm.

But meanwhile my grandmother on my father's side lived in New York, and when I came down—I would come down and visit her. And like a lot of times people would come to Saratoga because we took in Fresh Air kids, you know, that would come from New York up to Saratoga, Schenectady, Albany. All around those places they'd have what they called the Fresh Air Fund, and the kids would come up. And I would go down to New York and be with my grandmother and my grandfather, you know, because they were from the Caribbean and I liked for them to tell me the stories of what happened in the Caribbean.

So I'm going down the street not too far from where they lived and there was this little storefront church. Well, first of all, being from Saratoga, I'd never seen a storefront church. The next thing was all this music was coming out, and I'm like darn, it sounds good. I go in there. They had saxophone, drums, you know, guitar, organ and man, they were having a good time. And I was like wow, this is nice.

So I went back and I told my grandmother, and she said well, if you want to go down there, you can go down there. And of course in those days, it wasn't far from the house, and I went down. Well, I went early this night because in the Pentecostal churches they have something for you to do seven nights a week, you know. I guess that's to keep you, you know..and all.

Mark B: *[Laughs.]*

Magora K: So when I went in the church there was the elders, what they called elders. The elders are like, I guess in a Protestant church would be deacons and deaconess, but they were the elders. And so the elder mother, she was saying, well, he's not married, and we don't know, you know, he's kind of young. Now young, the man was 35, but to them he was young, but he wasn't married. So I thought to myself oops, there's my way out, I think. Because I had met the pastor, and he was nice and was friendly, whatnot. So I went back into his office. I said listen, they're getting ready to put you out of here. You're going to lose this church if you're not married, I said, and guess what? My family wants me to get married. I did not tell him how old I was. And I said my family wants me to get married, too, so can we strike a deal? He said oh yeah, I don't want to lose my church. And he built up the church and all this kind of thing. Long story short, called my mother on the phone. Mama, I'm ready to get married. She said oh well, the guy—I said no-no-no, I've met a minister. When she heard the word minister, oh, she was thrilled, you know. And I said and I'm ready to get married, I'm in love. *[Laughs.]*

So sure enough, June 7, 1953 we had this big wedding in Saratoga and I got married. But the whole thing was I had not figured out that being married meant you had to be with your husband. I'm like uh-oh, how do I get out of this? *[Laughs.]* But the thing was I knew enough to, like, as they said, fake it till you make it. And so then afterwards I said to him we're not doing this too much, are we? And he says well, you're my wife,

whenever I want. And I'm saying to myself oh no, this is not going to work.

So the long story short of that was we got into a fight. And when I refused him he decided that he was going to, you know, unfortunately, we didn't have domestic violence in those days, but that's what it was. But see, I was from Saratoga, and I had been raised up kind of like in the country, and I say the water in Saratoga. So then like he came at me to stab me, and the thing is, if you can see this mark here, because I threw that hand up to keep him from hitting my face. And so we fought. And I knocked him down and ran out of the house. And when I ran out of the house—he was a super in an apartment building in Sunnyside, Long Island. That's where we were. And so he had the super's apartment. I ran out of there into the laundromat. And I ran into the laundromat. He had followed me, and of course the commotion and whatnot, the people there, they were not having it. They called the police.

And there was this older—I'll never forget—this older sergeant, and he kind of looked at me. He said how old are you? And the way he said it, you know. I said I'm 14. He said, what? [*Laughs.*] He said where are you from? And I told him Saratoga and whatnot. Honey, they got my mother on the phone, and my mother came and got me. We went back to Saratoga, we got a lawyer, and though the marriage was consummated, it was annulled, which kept her from going to Saratoga County Jail, long story short. So that was that part. Okay.

So now as I get older, you know, I'm more...I kind of felt like—I had a lot of anger, plain and simple. I had a lot of anger. I felt like my mother had betrayed me, you know, and things that was going on. And so I got involved in the civil rights movement. I was up in Boston at the time. And the women's movement. I worked with Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug. I worked on Shirley Chisholm's campaign for president upstate, you know, I drove her around in Albany, Schenectady and whatnot. After that we ran into—I can't remember her name—but what they call the community, the juice lady that said that, you know, gay people were—

Mark B: Anita Bryant.

Magora K: Yes, Lord. So we had protests, you know, like against her, and those were some of the things. It was all right. And then because of my voice, and I was up in Boston, and I was at the radio station, they liked the content, and so they sent me to school up there to become a DJ, because I had that, you know. And what was happening was they had people, because it was WLIB Boston, and they had this comedian doing the Sunday gospel show. Well, he was a raw comedian, you know, and they said we're going to replace you, you know, telling him that they were going to put me on. And he said he was so glad. And so we met, you know, and he said I am so glad. He said I do it because people want to hear gospel songs and like that on Sunday, but you've got the perfect voice for that.

And I was all right with that. I was going to school. I had to go to school three times a week and then I was at the radio station the rest of the time.

And then it came over that they had assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King, and I was at my desk, and I just threw the papers up in the air, you know. And the station manager came and I said, “They killed him! They killed Dr. King! I’m out of here!” And he said, “Wait a minute, we have a contract, you have to...” I said you...well, back in them days I said you can take this contract and, you know, I said but no, this is it. They have assassinated a man of peace, I’m out of here.

I met Stokely Carmichael. He told me about the Black Panther Party they had formed in California. I said did they have one back here on the East Coast. He said well, we’re working on it. And so me and my son, we joined the Black Panther Party. So I say I’m an original Black Panther. So that was one part. And then after that, over the years—

Mark B: And that was happening in Boston, right?

Magora K: This was in Boston. I was at the radio station. And so prior to that I had been on the civil rights drive where we went South to help people to register to vote. And like you had to go through a training, because they said in the South, you know, it is what it is. And it was amazing. First of all, I’d never been south.

Mark B: It’s not Saratoga Springs. [*Laughs.*]

Magora K: People would call my mother and say Magora’s going south. Aren’t you worried about her? And my mother was saying oh my god, no, they better be worried about her. Long story short, what happened was one of the

things I learned, we had to travel at night out of Boston because we had these northern plates. And there were routes that they had laid out for us to go, and people's houses for us to stay.

My first learning experience was I had never seen an outhouse. And so when I got there I was like I've got to go to the bathroom. She said oh, okay, she says, here, go in the room. She hands me this thing, what they called like, I think they called it the slop jar. And I said what is this for? She looked at me like don't you know? I said I want to go to the bathroom. She said you can go tomorrow. You know, all that was so confusing. And finally there was a girl that had been, you know, she had been north and she said come here, let me explain something to you. She said the bathroom is outside. I said outside where? She said out in the back. You know, it's why it's called outhouse. And I said okay. And then I remembered what my mother said: observe, listen and learn. Okay.

So the next morning, sure enough, I went and I saw this thing. [*Laughs.*] You have no idea. I'm like what in heaven's name? The woman explained to me you can't go to the outhouse at night because that's when the snakes come out.

Mark B: [*Laughs.*]

Magora K: Where am I, you know? And so anyway. So then after that she says now, when we go in town remember that the white people, they're not going to be very nice. Under no circumstances say where you come from. You're just visiting. Said okay. Sure enough, we go into town. Mark, I'm telling

you it was like stepping back into history. I'm watching the people. Black people get off the sidewalks so the white people could walk by. There were two fountains, like one for colored and one for white. I'm looking at this and I'm telling myself, you know, I think I'm going to call somebody. I don't think I want to stay here because this...ay-yai-yai. If any of these white people put their hands on me it's going to be a war, I'm thinking to myself, right? Okay. So but then I said okay, remember what you're here for, you're here to help the people here.

We get into the area where the people had to come in to register to vote. They had this big jar sitting on the table, and they're supposed to guess how many jelly beans in the jar. I'm like... I feel my anger rising, and then, the next thing I learned, nobody makes a plain X the same. That's how they knew who different people were, by the X's. And I was saying this is unreal, you know. But at that time I never thought about writing anything down. There was a lot of things that I just remember and committed to memory.

So you had to be off the streets of the town by sundown. You couldn't be out there after dark. So the lady came in to get me. She was pregnant. And she said it's time to go. And I'm looking like the car... So okay, okay. And I would always hear remember where you are, remember where you are, you know, and like you said, this ain't Saratoga.

Mark B: Do you recall, were you in Alabama, Mississippi? Do you remember where it was?

Magora K: I think I do. It's along like Alabama, maybe Florida, something like that.

Mark B: Alabama or Florida, okay.

Magora K: You know, because like over the years, you know, it's just like—*khkhkh*.

Mark B: Yeah. It's okay.

Magora K: So on the way back she knew a shortcut, and we took this shortcut. And here come the sheriff in his car—and turn the mike off for a minute. Can you turn that off for a minute?

00:24:57 [End Part 1.]

[Part 2.]

Mark B: So you spent some time doing some entertainment...went to resorts and in Canada.

Magora K: Yes. What had happened was, because I was still underage, I went to the Apollo Theater for the amateur hour, and my mother had to be with me. And at the amateur hour I won second place to somebody that had been winning, and so I had to come back the next week. And the next week when I came back Peg Leg Bates was in the audience, and when I sang, he said that he wanted me for the nightclub in the Catskills, Peg Leg Bates' Country Club. That was my first paid gig, okay? And I was very excited about that. After—

Mark B: You sang? You mostly sang? Do you dance? What was your...?

Magora K: I sang.

Mark B: You sang.

Magora K: And so then Mama said—they said come back the next week, and Mama said do the same song, she said, because if you do a different song it might, you know. So I don't even know what song. Well, what it was, I did it, come second again. And that night Peg Leg Bates was in the... And my first paid gig was Peg Leg Bates's Country Club.

Now after that, as I started to really embrace show business, again racism rears its ugly head. First of all, you had to be 18 in order to join, I think it was SAG, if I'm not mistaken—it was either SAG or AFTRA—in order to work in the nightclubs and things in New York. And most of the time my mother, she didn't mind, you know, she had to be with me because I wasn't of age. But the jobs were so few and far between.

When I went up to Boston, again, I was still like kind of involved in the women's movement, and so the guy was up there and he said, with a voice like that, he said, you're going to be stuck on the radio station. We laughed. I don't remember even how I met him, but he said, man, he said, you could work in Canada, because they love—well, at that time—they love Negro entertainers up there. And I said fine with me, you know. It's like I was getting paid and whatnot.

And so yeah, I was a standup comic, and I was a singer, and I was an MC. Most of the clubs I worked in, especially in Montreal, had to have an interpreter. And he said now when you're doing your monologue do it slowly because she's got to interpret what you're saying to the audience.

So then I did, and they would fall over laughing, you know, and I was like, wow. And it was, to me that was joy, because after all the things that I had seen and heard up until that time it was good to be able to make people laugh. So when I found out I could do that I said okay, fine, we got this.

And I used to work six months out of the year in Canada. Whereas here in the United States I would be lucky, they would send you on what they called the Chitlin Circuit that was going South, and I said to myself, hm-mm, I'm not ever going back South again because if I go back South they'll probably put me in jail or hang me or something so, you know, we ain't doing that. So I did, yes, I worked as a comic.

Mark B: And there's a story about there was a blackout and there was an aura around you. Tell that story.

Magora K: So what had happened was, it was the first blackout on the East Coast, and everything was blacked out from Florida to Canada. And I believe, yeah, I recognized it that night. Everything was blacked out, and I'm in the dressing room, and I remember distinctly hearing my name called, but it was a very soft voice. And the voice said, "You are my child. You are to represent my people." And I'm like, okay. You know, wasn't nobody in the room but me, and I'm like...okay.

And I remember my grandmother always used to say pray over everything, don't worry about nothing. And so I'm praying. And as it happened, the lights were coming back and they said okay, you could go

onstage. Everybody in the audience said there was a light around me. This is what they said. And I felt that was my calling.

So then I came back to Saratoga and I was telling my mother about this. My mother says well, you know, they don't exactly accept women ministers. So I go to the church and I talk to the pastor, and he said...and so he was like, well, God didn't call no woman. And he stopped in mid voice, and I'm looking at him, what happened? He said oh my god, he said, come Sunday and preach. This will be your trial sermon, and I'll set it. So I did. *[Laughs.]* And I remember that it was someplace in Matthew about where the women went to tell that Jesus was no longer in the sepulcher, and that was my sermon. And that went over.

So then they contacted the New York Baptist Association in order for me to become ordained. They wanted to ordain me as an evangelist. And my mother said no. And my pastor at that time said no, she's not an evangelist, she is a minister. So that went back and forth, back and forth. And I remember that I got ordained by Reverend Elizabeth Gray from Abyssinian Baptist Church. So that was like a big deal, okay?

So then after that, that was when, you know, things began to turn around, and I got thoroughly, thoroughly involved in the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and then left for Shirley Chisholm, working in her campaign.

My friends that were in the closet, I would take them up to Provincetown in the summertime. We're on the road, I'm driving up, and I hear about

this disturbance, as the commentator said on the radio. And of course in those days they had no, you know, they didn't care. They'd call you faggot, bull dyke, some faggots and bull dykes are raising hell, and he was laughing, in Greenwich Village. And I said that sounds like something I need to be involved in. So the nearest town, I think, before P-Town, I took them there. I gave the cab driver the money that they had given me. I said you all are on your own, I'm going back to New York.

And I got back to New York the night—the uprising started on Friday and went through until Monday. And I got back there Saturday, I'm thinking it was early, like Saturday morning. It was Sylvia Rivera and me, Storme DeLarverie and one more—oh, Marsha P. Johnson. I never met her, but I heard the story what had happened.

And what had happened was it was Friday, and they were having the wake for Judy Garland. Everybody was dressed up in their finery and whatnot at the Stonewall Inn and was going uptown to view Judy Garland. When they got uptown they said that the lines were stretched like around the corner just to be able to view her. You know, people had come from all over the world to see Judy Garland.

Long story short, it started thundering, lightning, raining, and everybody finally got messed up and they went back to the Stonewall Inn to lament about what had happened. When they got there the police was pulling one of their last famous raids. And so there was this football player. He'd come down to New York every weekend dressed up in drag and hang out

in the Village and then go back to Los Angeles that Monday. And what had happened, when he got there, got in, the cops had walkie-talkies. They didn't have all the sophisticated equipment like they have today. And he got in.

And the cops used to carry a sign about the size of that picture there on the wall that said this is a raided premises. So when he got in and then I don't remember whether they said he had...he didn't fight with the cops, but after he seen what was happening, and I guess because, you know, he, knowing who he was, he turned around and got out of Stonewall. And Marsha P. Johnson was right behind him. She took the sign.

And they got out into the streets and the word went around the Village, and everybody emptied the bars and poured into the streets and had...it was this confrontation with the police. So it was Sylvia Rivera and me, a cop chasing me. And of course in those days, me being a new minister, I always wore my collar and my black suit and whatnot. And this Catholic cop, when he was chasing us up Christopher Street, Sylvia would be like, "Come on, honey, let's run in here." So we went. And the name of the street was Gay Street. We ran into Gay Street, but it was a cul-de-sac. And so we turned around. She said, "Uh-oh, we gonna die tonight." I said, "I don't know about you, but we ain't dying tonight, not tonight."

And so this cop, he looked at me and he thought—his words—he said, "Oh, there's a faggot imitating a priest." And he went for his gun. Well, at that time the trash cans weren't, you know, the tops weren't chained

down, and when he was coming toward me to reach for his gun I grabbed these two trash can tops, clanged him upside the head, and me and Sylvia were ready. Said, “Oh, come on, honey, we got to get out of here.” And we ran. And that was like, you know, our involvement. I mean, we were out in the streets until that Monday. And we didn’t know in those days that that was the beginning of the gay rights movement. [*Laughs.*] All we know, we were fighting the police and, you know, not having any more raids.

00:09:38 [*End Part 2.*]

[*Part 3.*]

Mark B: Okay, so after Stonewall you’re living in New York and you’re getting active, and tell us about after that.

Magora K: After Stonewall I wasn’t...I wasn’t really living in New York. It’s almost like I came down to New York on weekends. And I was trying to remember. At that time I believe I was still in Boston, okay, and I would come down to New York. They had started...they had gotten a firehouse, and the firehouse was started by the people that were—

Mark B: It was the Gay Activist Alliance, wasn’t it?

Magora K: The Gay Activist Alliance, exactly. They’re the ones that got the firehouse on weekends. And I guess like between the firehouse and Stonewall, you know, people would just kind of like hang out. But then after the uprising in ’69 people started really getting into legalizing, accepting who they

were, coming out. Some places people would come out on their jobs and immediately get fired. Other people would come out on their jobs and... And what I learned over the years, like the biggest fights we had were the people that were so far in the closet you'd have to shine a light to find them, they were the ones that were really against us because they didn't want us breaking up their little playhouses, you know.

Mark B: Exactly.

Magora K: Let me see...

Mark B: The New Haven experience, does that come in now or is that later? You talked about working for Fair Haven in New Haven.

Magora K: Yeah, Fair Haven Parents Ministry. That was put on by Professor Robert Jones of Yale, Yale New Haven College. And he was also involved with the seminary.

Mark B: And how were you involved with that? What were you doing with that?

Magora K: It was because I was working at Fair Haven Parents Ministry. I was one of the ministers there. I did counseling and I had access to Yale Divinity School, and that's when I learned a lot and I committed a lot to memory because actually you could come, sit in the classes and whatnot, but you really wasn't supposed to take anything. And at that time I didn't know that much about doing notebooks and stuff, but I committed a lot of stuff that I thought was very important to memory.

And I remember that a lot of times Professor Jones would say to me, he said, you're enthusiastic, and I know you are, but you cannot give people what they're not ready for. And I learned that. You know, and he said and unfortunately, our people—and of course one thing I would like to say at this point—I know this is kind of diverging from what we're talking about—but the thing is that the 1619 Project came out, I was told, came out of something somebody had heard that I was talking about, our ancestors coming from Africa here. And whoever that sister was, she decided to research it and find out that the first Africans were brought on this side of the continent in 1619. So I'm like, wow, thank you, I helped.

[Laughs.]

Mark B: Yeah, helped with that. Certainly.

Magora K: Yeah. So let's see. After—

Mark B: You said you were getting involved in maybe the women's movement around that time.

Magora K: Yes, yes, around that time also.

Mark B: This is the early '70s.

Magora K: Yeah. And I would come into New York. We'd be at Flo Kennedy's place, and there would be Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug, Flo Kennedy and me. We went on demonstrations. We demonstrated at Harvard, at Cambridge. We went out and did a demonstration there. A young lady was...she had been raped on, I forget the name of that area. But anyway,

we all went out demonstrated about that. And the result of it, they put a whole lighted thing around that. They used to canoe. You know, they had the canoe...what do you call it, the canoe races on...

Mark B: On the lagoon? Is this in Boston?

Magora K: This is in Boston, and it was an area. I can't think of the name.

Mark B: That's okay.

Magora K: Oh.

Mark B: The Fens? No.

Magora K: No, Fenway Park, that was the ball field. No. You know what's going to happen, it'll probably come to me afterwards. I'll call you and say Mark, I remember, the name of it was whatever. I think it was the Commons, Boston Commons. Boston Commons, yes. That was around the Harvard area. And so it was Flo Kennedy, Bella Abzug, the three of us, we took over this building and we held the building for the whole weekend until they started doing something to make it more safe, you know, for the women that were at Harvard, like that. That was a highlight.

Mark B: So then were you out then?

Magora K: Oh, yeah.

Mark B: There were issues in the women's movement around whether lesbians were involved and how much.

Magora K: Yes, yes.

Mark B: How did that play out for you?

Magora K: Thanks to Anita Bryant and oh, there was another woman that just said that we were pariahs. [*Laughs.*] Lesbian women were pariahs. But yeah. And during that time, yeah, we... They started a boycott on orange juice, and then when the growers started losing money, you know. See, people don't realize, a lot of things don't get into the media, how deep that went, you know, when she came out against the gay people. And, you know, these people just stopped buying orange juice. In fact, it was told to me—I don't know this is a fact—but it's like out of that Tropicana came, Tropicana orange juice and different orange juices and whatnot. I mean, that's what was told to me. I do not have that as fact, okay?

Mark B: You had some involvement with MCC and the Unity Fellowship through the '70s and going to the '80s.

Magora K: Yes. What had happened was we were still in New Haven again and there was a group at Yale, a gay group at Yale called the GALO [??] Society. Professor Jones told me about it. I said, well I want to go to that, you know. But these were young gay guys, you know. And I told them the story of Stonewall, and they said oh, well, we're a religious group, we want to be involved with Metropolitan Community Church. I said write about it, you know. And at that time I had talked with Troy Perry on the phone. I think I'd met him in person. I kind of remember that. I think yeah. I think something happened here in New York and he was here and I got a chance to meet him.

Then, after that, when the guys from the GALO [??]Society wrote wanting to be part of Metropolitan Community Churches, the churches were just starting to spread out. I wrote Troy a letter, I called him, and I said, you know, I see that there's going to be a Metropolitan Community Church in New York and I said I see that a lot of guys are getting ordained, I said, but I'm already a minister and I want to be part of, you know. Well, I didn't hear from him, so then I decided, told my kids, you know what, we're going on a journey.

We hitchhiked from New Haven to California, to Los Angeles, California for the Metropolitan Community Church convention. And that's a matter of record. Troy was like, what? I told you, yeah, me and my sons, we're here. You know, we want to talk about becoming part of Metropolitan Community Church and the ordination of women. So over the years, you know, we went back and forth. He was the one that ordained Bishop Carl Bean. Carl Bean had been here in New York and he had won... what is it they get for the Broadway plays?

Mark B: Yeah, he had won some awards for singing.

Magora K: Yes. He wrote the song "I Was Born This Way" and the other one, "I'm Coming Out," and he received royalties for that. What happened with him, he was a backup singer for Shirley Caesar. Shirley Caesar, she found out he was gay and kicked him out of the backup singers. He went out to California and when he got out there, there was so much with the AIDS Project, he got first involved with the AIDS Project. He got ordained by

Reverend Troy D. Perry and then started Unity Fellowship Churches.

Yeah. I was involved with Metropolitan Community Church with

Reverend Pat Baumgardner, and then, after that—

Mark B: Did you know Renee McCoy and the Harlem congregation?

Magora K: Oh, baby, let me tell you.

Mark B: Okay.

Magora K: Renee McCoy and I, we went like this, you know. I mean, she literally... You know, I guess whether she heard rumors about me or whatever, but she had this kind of like dislike for me. And I'm like, "Renee, what is the problem?" "I don't like the way you treat your children." I said, "You have any children?" I said, "You don't know anything about my life. We can sit down and talk about it, you know." But we were like, I guess you'd call it, friendly enemies.

Mark B: We kind of skipped over the whole involvement with the APA and the activist working with the American—

Magora K: Okay, what had happened was—

Mark B: How did you get involved in that?

Magora K: Well, like I said, after I met Barbara Gittings, you know, on the David Susskind show, and she was telling me what they were fighting against—and it's in the documentary. That picture I gave you, see this here? And I know you'll have to blow it up, but that's me right there.

Mark B: Okay.

Magora K: Confronting David Susskind, and that part is of—because if you can kind of see, he’s kind of looking at me, and then when I kind of screamed at him, that’s when he dropped the papers. He dropped all his papers and everything.

Mark B: This is the documentary “We Cured.”

Magora K: Yeah, uh-huh. And so—[laughs]—so I told her, I said, well honey, you keep on fighting on the inside, we’re gonna keep on fighting on the outside. And we laughed about it. But it did, it took seven years and we won. Yeah. So...

Mark B: How did you see your role? How did you see yourself involved in that?

Magora K: I didn’t really see myself, you know. I mean, I knew that I was fighting for gay people, period. In fact, like when we was talking about it at the community center I said heck, you know, this is the fight, you know, for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, two spirit. And the next thing I know that’s LGBT. I said well, yeah, you know. But I kind of remember that we were talking about LGBT, and they dropped the two spirit, which were natives, or Native American, and add the T at the end for the transgenders, who were really not welcome.

And I used to say to myself how in the hell are we going to win anything if we keep fighting in, kept this infighting going? And I was, you know, I was really angry about that. You know, I said here they are, because straight people try to kill us, and you all are fighting among yourselves

within the organizations that was being formed. So that was kind of like... Yeah, I kind of saw myself as like spearheading, I guess for lack of a better word. Because, you know, like real people wake up. Now let's not become enemies of each other because we've got too many enemies on the outside that wants to see us actually dead.

And then I was referring, by that time I was referring to J. Edgar Hoover for what he was saying about the Black Panther Party, bring in Panthers dead or alive. One of the reasons like you see the walk-in clinics now is because Fred Hampton, in the Pennsylvania chapter of the Black Panther Party, set up a model of walk-in clinics for the community, you know, for the neighborhood, because, you know, Black people in those days wasn't getting proper care from the medical center. So he set up this model and all of the leaders of the Black Panther Party in different chapters came to Philadelphia to see this working model of a walk-in clinic. And I think two weeks after that is when they blew up the place.

So it's like wow, all the good things the Black Panther Party did will never be told unless we tell it. The free breakfast program, the free clothing program, the fact that I was in the New Haven chapter of the Black Panther Party when Yale New Haven Hospital opened their doors. Because a lot of people that was in the Black Panther Party in Boston, New Haven, Hartford, they were like nurses and doctors. And so Yale didn't have any problem opening the research and development departments to them because they were certified. And that is when they

found out about the sickle cell. That was at Yale New Haven Hospital. That was through the Black Panther Party. Before that they had been treating Black people for pernicious anemia, and they did not know about sickle cell. So that was one part. And then, let me see. Oh gosh, what else?

Mark B: Well, I was thinking your, you talk about your theology is starting to change, and that now you—

Magora K: Oh, yeah.

Mark B: And you're starting to think beyond Christianity, so tell a little bit about that journey and how that started.

Magora K: Okay. The journey started when they...the Adam and Eve theory. And of course like if you have access to places like the Yale Divinity library, there's so many books on how that religion itself and life itself started on the continent of Africa. They tried to make Africa look like it was a little, small country when Africa is a continent with 56 countries in it. So then I'm like hm, let me go further on this. Like I said, I committed a lot of things to memory.

There was a temple in Nigeria where they had statues, which is why the Catholic church has the statues. And they had the different, you know, the different deities along, and [the devil] 00:14:36 in Nigeria still stands today. It's in [Savo] 00:14:40. And from that, they took that model.

And then after that, over the years, the Catholic church developed, and then finally the Protestant church, which was protesting against the

Catholic church, came out and dropped, you know, Mary as the mother, made it the Holy Ghost. You know, I mean, those are just little, you know, segments, things that I studied and remembered. Those are the things that I kind of committed to memory. So then, after that, when Martin Luther went against the Pope and came out with the whole Protestant thing, England embraced Martin Luther and the whole concept of...oh, what do they call it? The Church of England had a name, and I can't remember the name now, but they had this big, you know, like what I'd say a big name. And they would go places with these armies and trying to convert people to Christianity. Minus the Catholic church. Now they were protesting against the Catholic church, too.

And I believe—I don't have any proof of this—but I believe this is why the war in Ireland between Ireland and England went on so long because their belief system was, you know, we ain't giving this up for what you got. That's my words, you know. We're gonna keep what we got, you keep what you got, you know, like that. So I believe that happened.

And I think one of the most... One of the things, I used to go to SAGE. At that time there was SAGE in Manhattan, and I used to go down there practically every day. And some of the things that we learned about was that gay is legal in the country of Ireland. And a lot of gay people have gone over to Ireland to live. And the feedback has been they were treated better over there than they were here in the United States. Said wow. So that's kind of like on my bucket list. I'd like to go to Ireland.

Mark B: Ireland, okay. Good. You started exploring goddess worship and other kinds of—

Magora K: Yes, uh-huh.

Mark B: Talk about how you first encountered that and how did you get involved—

Magora K: Well, I had a business partner named Cecile Jackson. She was like my mentor when it come to learning about business, how to conduct business, how to have a business of your own. And I kept talking about the goddess, you know, that I had seen and read about at this, you know, when I was at theological seminary in New Haven. And so she said you're going to tell me that the goddess is Black? I said well, yeah, you know, because artists up until that time, people talk about goddess worship and all they'd ever seen were white women. So there were like, a goddess like Oshun, Nefertiti, even Cleopatra, they made her white, too. You know, I mean, it was just that whole thing, you know, and I'm like...

So then she had been going to different seminars and she met this woman, who is now my pastor, who ordained me, and she called herself goddess, Reverend Goddess Charmaine. So when she came back from that, she said you know one thing? She said I found somebody else talks as crazy as you do. But, I mean, she didn't mean it like, you know, but she thought it was comical that I would always be talking about god/goddess or goddess/god. And yet and still throughout you've never seen any pictures of any Black goddesses, right? So sure enough that Sunday I went to her service. She used to have it in Manhattan—

Mark B: Reverend Charmaine is in New York?

Magora K: At that time.

Mark B: At that time she was in New York.

Magora K: She was in New York and she would come every Sunday to this place. I forget the name of the place, but it was here in Manhattan. And I went there that first Sunday and I've been there ever since. And I shared with her the things, the knowledge and stuff that I had gained from being in the movement and whatnot. And so then in 2011 it was like okay, it's time, you know. And I spoke to her and she said, you know, I had a feeling. And so sure enough, I got initiated in 2011. I received my crone in 2012.

Mark B: Today.

Magora K: My anniversary.

Mark B: Is it appropriate to talk a little about what that initiation was like and the crone? Or was that experience—

Magora K: Well, the experience was that you were coming from whence you came. And because, like, the goddess and the earth realm and the whole thing, like I remember from childhood it was always Mother Earth, Father God, you know, Mother Earth, Father God—Mother Earth, Father Sky. In some of the tribes they say Mother Earth, Father Sky. And so that was my mother goddess, you know, mother god, father god experience. And it was African women's society that Reverend Goddess had been trained in, and

she had been initiated, and she had come through Yoruba, which is an African religion, which I had kind of come through Yoruba.

And when the babalawos, or what you would call a high priest, came from Africa, somehow or another they had heard about and they wanted to meet me. And when they did they said she does not have to be initiated because she's been here seven times. I mean, they read things... And they were doing these readings, because they do the readings with shells, the cowrie shells, and different things that they would say would come back to memory. You know, and all of a sudden oh yeah, I kind of remember that.

And I can remember, too, as a child I would see these different images and whatnot, and I knew it was our ancestors and things like that. But back in them days, you know, you talk about something like that, they were ready to put you in Utica before you could... Which is what my mother threatened me with if I didn't get married, you know, Utica Upstate was like Bellevue down here in those days. So the whole thing was I stood my ground, you know. And like I said on the back of the book, it was like a salmon swimming upstream. You know, I had a focus, I knew who I was, and I was not going to let anybody turn me around from that. And then I began to find others who felt the same way.

Mark B: You've started doing some teaching now, so tell us about what you're doing in terms of teaching and advocating.

Magora K: Well, I had been doing—

Mark B: You're leading a group?

Magora K: No, I have Revelations Now. African Goddess Temple, which is RevelationsNow.org on Facebook. And we just do what I call Sunday Words, because we're nondenominational. Everybody is welcome, you know, to the website, and between my assistant pastor, she became a chaplain, Chaplain Jane Whitehead and myself, this is what we do. I do the first Sunday, she does the second Sunday. If there are five Sundays in a month we do it together. But just giving out, you know, different things for people to think about, you know, and hoping that people get the understanding that parents don't need to feel like it was their fault that their kids were gay. Most gay people that have not been traumatized—and I put that word traumatized—know from the time that they're little who they are. It's parents that try to orient them away from who they really are.

Mark B: So a few minutes. I don't know if there are any, kind of want to wrap up with reflecting any threads. Part of what made you outstanding is that you never...you always refused to be in the closet. You always were going to be—

Magora K: The reason for that was—

Mark B: How did that come about?

Magora K: That came about because at that time, Upstate New York, when it comes tax time, you could work for the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. The partner that I had at that time, she would—we'd only get

paid every two weeks. And she was always threatening to go to my supervisor and tell them, you know, that I was a lesbian if I didn't give her some money, which I did. The final breaking point of that, they called me on the job and said my son had been rushed to the hospital. He had asthma. That was my oldest, my firstborn. And it was either get to the hospital or, you know, pay her. And I told her, I said, you're not getting another dime out of me. So she went to grab for my pocketbook, and I smacked her and knocked her down to the ground, stepped over, got my car and drove to the hospital.

So then that Monday, when I came to work, I said, you know, I don't care if I lose this job, I'm not going to live like this. I went to my supervisor. Because now in those days, you know, everybody had a code. And I noticed like on Thursdays, like some of the women would either have, you know, everybody had to dress in suits and whatnot. And women would either have like a little flower, you know, on their lapels, and the guys was like, they had these, I guess, lapel things. I didn't know what that was.

So I went to my supervisor and said look, I have to tell you something. And I said at this point if you fire me I really—and of course in them days I wasn't, you know, I didn't become a minister, and I said and I don't give a damn if you fire me, but I'm not living like this. And I told him the story. He said, oh really? So then he pulled up his pants leg and I looked and I saw these socks. So he said this is how we identify who we are. I

said oh. He said so next Thursday just make sure when you wear your suit you put your little white handkerchief in there.

Mark B: [Laughs.]

Magora K: I said hey, you know. And he said she's on state property. Don't say a word. When she comes, she's on state property, we'll have her arrested. And they did. She went to Albany County Jail, okay? Thursdays, what we'd do, everybody would, what we call, we'd get in cars and we'd go down to Newburgh, New York. There was a bar in Newburgh that was a gay bar called Yesterday's Inn. They didn't even have a bar in Albany yet, you know, a gay bar in Albany yet. But this was called Yesterday's Inn. Because everybody would come there on Thursday. And we'd usually stay, we got off at 5:00. At that time there was no New York State throughway, so it took us about an hour to get down to Newburgh, we'd stay there till about 8:00 and come back so we could be to work on Friday morning. And so that, you know.

And in that time the men and women, we were all together, you know, sticking together. It wasn't till I came down into New York that I found all the separation, you know, the guys over here, the gals over there, Black folks over here, white folks... I'm like what the...? You know, and I said boy, somehow this has got to change. And then Stonewall came.

Mark B: Yes, started it.

Magora K: That's kind of like encapsulation, you know, it's...

Mark B: Yeah.

Magora K: Yeah.

Mark B: Yeah, good. Looking back on your life, any other reflections, observations, blessings, things that you're thankful for in terms of—

Magora K: The song says, [*singing*] “When I look back over my life I have so much to be thankful for. I can truly say, truly say, I have a testimony.”

00:25:36 [*End Part 3.*]

[*End of recordings.*]