

Suzan Cooke Interview

by
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in association with the
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Introduction

Suzy Cooke was born in upstate New York in 1947. She had been discovered cross-dressing by her parents during early adolescence and felt that the abuse they heaped on her until she left home deeply affected her self-image and her subsequent life path. She was active in the anti-war and student movements by 1967, and had spent some time in New York City's gay street scene, on the fringes of Andy Warhol's crowd. About this same time she had begun trying to contact Dr. Harry Benjamin, after reading his book, The Transsexual Phenomenon, and learning that sex-reassignment had become available in the United States. She moved to the San Francisco Bay Area later in 1967--first to the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood and then to Berkeley--where she participated in the youth counterculture, radical politics, early gay liberation, and feminism. She began transitioning male-to-female in January, 1969. Cooke became one of the staff members of the transsexual center in the Tenderloin in 1971. She wrote a successful grant application to the Erickson Educational Foundation for the center's operational expenses after federal "war on poverty" money dried up during the Nixon administration. Cooke had genital surgery with Dr. Donald Laub at Stanford in 1972. In 1973, Cooke was a principal figure in the drug sting that SFPD orchestrated to shut down the transsexual center and scuttle director Elliot Blackstone's career with the police department. Cooke moved to Los Angeles in 1974.

SS: So Let's just go ahead and start, and try to get a chronological overview.

SC: OK, first--I'm Suzan Cooke, and I'm aware that I'm being taped.

SS: Great. We'll do the signed release when we're done. So--you told me that you were born in upstate New York, a Navy brat--

SC: No, the Navy brat part is a fiction, just something I tell customers, I don't generally give out where I'm from. But upstate New York, born in 1947, one of the post-war baby boomers. Lived in Ticonderoga. Absent father pretty much until I was ten, then he and my mother got back together. Made my brother, much to my dismay, because I was enjoying being a blessed only child. I started—I always had the feeling—but I started cross-dressing when I was ten, never had the occasion before. Got caught when I was about twelve, and as a result I suffered a lot of oppression about it from my parents. Now, I didn't think I was that obvious, but I was pretty much considered gay from about the time I was fourteen, and as a result I got a lot of queer bashing.

SS: You said you suffered a lot of oppression from your parents—what did they do? Tell you it was wrong, punish you?

SC: They pretty much abused me over the cross-dressing. Forced to play football, forced me to take part in all these activities that were aimed at making a man out of me—some of which I actually enjoyed, but most of which I didn't. I was constantly getting searched and observed and denied privacy. When I was about—let's see, in 1962—I discovered in the tabloids sort of a biography of April Ashley that ran over four or five issues in the National Inquirer. And I clipped stories about Bambi and Coccinelle and transsexuals that there were over in Europe. And that provided me with a name for what I was feeling. Because everything before then had been pretty vague. I mean, people would make snotty little comments like I should get an operation, and it was all like, well, there was no real information. It's not like you could just turn on one of these talk shows or something like that.

SS: So you mentioned Bambi and Coccinelle. Did you ever hear anything about Christine Jorgensen here in the States? Was that another point of reference for you?

SC: No, not really. I had heard the name, and had heard about her, and I had heard "sex change." But it would be just a little line here or there, and there was no real person to attach it to. She was used as a butt of jokes, as a punch line almost. But that's not being a real person. I encountered stories or pictures of real people, though. April Ashley—there were other role models coming up then. Jean Shrimpton—well, Jean Shrimpton came along later, but there were others, whereas Christine Jorgensen was almost like my parents. Christine Jorgensen probably was in her mid-twenties by the time I was born.

SS: Yeah, she had her change in the early 50s, when she was in her early 20s.

SC: Yeah, 1952. And I had the impression that she had had experiences, life experiences, like she was in the military, spent time wandering around. So as a reference, she was a generation before me. It was like the 60s were really sort of a sea change. Like, information about April was coming in—April Ashley—right at the beginning of the

British Invasion in fashion and in music. I mean the Beatles were just a year or so later. I mean, it was that whole influx of Paisley Power, British Invasion. Christine Keeler-- that was another big story around that period of time. So it's like I identified with her, not so much as being exactly my generation, but a lot closer generation than Christine Jorgensen. And as a real personal appearance idol, I was much more Bambi than April Ashley, and I was also really into Coccinelle. Then, the next big source of information was--that I really got--oh--my parents found my clippings. They held them up and said "Is this what you want to be? Is this what you are?" And I just looked at them and said "I pretty much think that that's what I am." I said something like that, or "Well, isn't that what you think I am?" I mean, I pretty much knew it as soon as I had the word. All of a sudden having a name for something that you have been experiencing that you did not have a name for before. And I knew as soon as I found out that that was what I was going to do. But it was still kind of vague. I found--I guess it was around 1965--I came across a paperback copy of City of Night.

SS: That was about the time you graduated from high school?

SC: During my first year of college.

SS: So where was that--wait, let's back up a second. You said something about your parents finding your clippings, but also that you had been tagged as "gay." Was that in school? What were your interactions like at school?

SC: I was targeted by a number of bullies and they would do mean things--whether that was picking on me, calling me names, writing things on my locker. One kid hit me in the eye with a snowball and almost took my eye out. That's when I realized that I was going to have to fight him, so I did. I just walked up to him and tagged him in the face really hard with a punch. Then I was forced to go in the gym and to continue to defend myself, and in there I broke his nose. I didn't know I had it in me--and it surprised the shit out of him. But then I had my own little band of freaks, too. There were a lot of kids, bunches of us who had guitars, who were into, like, well, one kid was into photography, we had a couple who were pre-gay, because we in a way didn't even have that word yet. I mean, there were a couple of teachers who had been talked about, teachers who were presumed to be gay. And it wasn't "gay" yet--it was "queer" and "homosexual." Gay came along a little later, about 66 or 67, as something that was talked about more openly.

SS: So where is this that you're talking about? Port Hudson?

SC: Port Henry. And Ticonderoga, and then in between I lived in a place called Potsdam.

SS: How big were these places?

SC: The biggest place we lived in was Potsdam, and it had a winter population of some 23,000. Ticonderoga had a population of about 8,000, and Port Henry had a population of about 2,000.

SS: And what was it that your family did?

SC: My father was a welder, an iron worker, and my mother was a nurse's aide.

SS: OK, good--I just wanted to get that information in here somewhere.

SC: My father was a high school graduate and my mother wasn't. She later on got a GED.

SS: So--you wound up in Port Henry in high school, and there were some kids who were into music and art and--

SC: And we were also the ones who would raise money and take and send it off to--it was then the "Negro" freedom, or civil rights, movement. So we were sort of the left-wingers of the school. It was a pretty conservative place. Now, Port Henry in particular was a pretty interesting place, because the area around there had blacks who had settled there since before the Civil War. There were also markers: "On this spot there was a barn that was a stop on the Underground Railroad," and John Brown actually lay mouldering in his grave not too far from there. So, sometimes I encounter, like, Leslie--who played this Southern dumbbell, right?--well, this was not my experience. See, this was stone Yankee country, Civil War memorials to the Union, all that. And school wasn't all bad. I had my moments, because I was brighter than most of the kids who were bullying me. And I was friends with most of the other kids who were brighter than the kids who were bullying me. So I had my moments. I had some fun. I don't want to paint it as being totally bleak. I think sometimes I have a tendency to do that, to focus on the abuse. But there were a lot of fun moments, too. Once--I was an academic over-achiever--I won a New York State Regent's Scholarship, one of five in a class of like 25, to win this scholarship. It was quite prestigious. It made me the first one to go to college in my immediate family. I had an uncle who graduated from teacher's college. But I had not been planning on going to college. I had been planning on leaving home and finding some way to get to Europe so I could work at the Carousel Club and figure out how to get my operation. See, we weren't doing that that I knew of here in this country. Now, no doubt there were American transsexuals all along, but I figured that if I stayed here I'd probably wind up being a drag queen. My parents had told all about drag queens.

SS: What had they told you about drag queens?

SC: That they hung around Greenwich Village and San Francisco, and that they were all prostitutes, and all prostitutes are low-lives in bars. And I just thought, well, this is what I am, so this is what I'll have to deal with. The idea that you could be trans or a queen and do something other than prostitution was not a concept then.

SS: So you're thinking all that stuff, but then you get this scholarship to go to college. Then what?

SC: I get the scholarship, I go to college, and it was roommate hell.

SS: Where?

SC: State University of New York at Cortland—it was hell. I got called into the Dean's office, and was told that I should change my major because education was not an appropriate major for "someone like me." I said "Oh?" And he said maybe I would be happier in liberal arts, or maybe theater.

SS: Interior decorating, floral arrangement maybe?

SC: Yes, definitely it was along those lines. It was funny—I mean, I was so innocent. I really hadn't had sex with anybody at that point. I didn't have sex until I was like nineteen or so. And here it was, my first semester in college, starting out with this information overload that I'm getting. But I did wind up rooming with a theater major who was very nellie—nobody would room with him either. But it worked out OK—he wound up introducing me to Broadway shows, went about introducing me to New York City, and we had a good time going to the Village. He took me to my first Broadway show that I ever saw, the first show that I ever actually saw on Broadway in New York. His name was Charles Deidrich. My name at that point was—well, do we actually need that?

SS: No, not at all, not unless you just want to tell me.

SC: Then let's not. It was at about that point that I discovered City of Night.

SS: Not in your college classes, probably? But where?

SC: I had read about it somewhere. I went into the college library and was looking up words, references, and I'd gotten referred to a review of it, and then read it. Then I came across a story in the Evergreen Review called "The Queen is Dead" and it had a story about the queens that he met in Los Angeles, and their carryings on and hustlings around Pershing Square. And I said "Ooh—this sounds fun! Dangerous, but fun." I didn't really connect with it then, because I still had the scholarship, but I was already

very dissatisfied with school. At that point I took the opportunity to get involved with SDS, because I was very much against the war.

SS: Was this in the City, or at college, that you got involved with SDS?

SC: At college. There was a chapter at Ithaca, at Cornell, and I brought—I had already gotten the powers that be coming down on my head at Cortland, and I got, I realized that I was not going to last for four years, so I brought SDS to Cortland. And just to give you some of the events—large teach-ins, and we got, wound up with Cortland sending a large contingent to the demonstration in 1967—October I guess it was—to the demonstration at the Pentagon. [makes hand gesture indicating levitation]. And I was one of the ones. Had there some of my first gay encounters, but it didn't really seem to fit. I didn't really yet have the tag to put on it. Oh—back in 1966, one of the other things that precipitated my flunking myself out of my classes, was in November—November 26 I think it was—the New York Times published a story on Johns Hopkins doing the surgery. All of a sudden being a transsexual went from being something you had to go off to Europe to do, and being a vaguely fairy tale-ish dream, and not very real, to being something that was very concrete. I get the feeling that it made a lot of things very concrete for a lot of girls who had basically been up until this point queens. Now Driscoll's article, the one in, in—

SS: Trans-Action?

SC: --Trans-Action, he mentions about that period of time and how all of a sudden a number of identities coalesced from being hair fairies and drag queens into being transsexual. Well, this was I guess late 66 and the early part of 1967. I was living at home for a little bit, then I spent a few weeks in New York and kind of rubbed shoulders with the Andy Warhol crowd just a little bit.

SS: Yeah, I want to get into that, but if we can back up just a minute, I want to ask you about any connections you felt or saw between your gender identity and your radicalism against the war. Were there connections you were making in your mind between the draft, and the anti-war movement, and how you felt about yourself?

SC: A lot of it was, I think, that I felt like I was being oppressed. Or that—well, I definitely did not want to get put in the military. I definitely had been through too many situations with the bullies at school to know that if these bullies had guns and I was off in the jungle, that the chances of my coming home alive were zero. If I had been drafted I would not be here today.

SS: Did you make any explicit connections between the way you sort of "did gender," you know, like presenting nellie or proto-transsexual as a way of, well, as a form of political resistance—consciously, deliberately?

SC: I felt that—well, the whole British new wave has happened here already by this point, all right? And you saw pictures of me in my high school yearbook, right? Well, the hair had grown about four inches since then. It was part of the whole British Invasion, and I was very much a part of this whole pop cultural thing, although I was more political than most of the people who were around the whole pop scene. I had made some sort of connection between how black people were being treated and gay people were being treated. At that time the Mattachine Society would hold these demonstrations, and they would go to the Capitol, and they would march, and they were all so straight-looking. All the men had to wear ties, and all the women had to wear dresses, including some lesbians for whom putting on a dress was a very unfortunate thing for them to do, because they did not pass in a dress. These sorts of things were starting to happen, where the Mattachine Society was having the little meetings in Greenwich Village, which was one of the things that I would do when I spent a little time in New York. I was also looking for Dr. Benjamin, because his book came out in 196—um, —

SSS: ix.

SC: —1966, and it was mentioned there, a New York Times book review or something, and I was looking for him, spent some time looking for him. He summered on the West Coast, and there I was on the East Coast. It was the summer of 1967, living with my family, incredibly, and refusing to get my hair cut. It wasn't really all that long, all the way around, but to them I was just constantly being mistaken for a girl. Well, not mistaken, but you know what I mean, being read constantly as a girl. Half the people I would encounter would just assume that I was a girl and then my father, if he was in the situation, would correct them. So it got real uncomfortable. In the summer of 1967 I was in upstate, but spent a little time in New York. Then, all the teenagers hung out at this one little soda shop. You know, it was hot, and it was summer, and people were out on the sidewalk, and this one cop who I had always called Barney Fife, whom he bore a remarkable physical resemblance to, came up and arrested me. At the time I was wearing one of those Mexican vests, and striped bell bottoms, and a little t-shirt top, and he said "I could arrest you for impersonating a woman, but I'm not. I'm just going to charge you with disorderly conduct. But if I see you dressed like this again I'm going to run you in and you're going to do six months. Don't you think you should just get out of this town?" So I got fined like 50 bucks on the disorderly, and had an arrest record, so now that made living there kind of impossible, plus I was labeled. I was told "Why don't you just go to San Francisco? That way you can be with your own kind." And San Francisco was about as far away as I could get from my family. If I lived in New York City they could pester me to come home to visit.

SS: So before we jump out to San Francisco, tell me a little bit about what you were seeing in New York City. Two questions—one, I still want to get to the stuff about war

resistance. Was there a conscious connection in your mind between your politics, pop culture, and your gender identity--specifically about the war going on in 1966 and 67?

SC: OK--going back to like 1960 when I first started getting busted by my folks, there were said things like "Nobody is going to want you. Nobody is going to love you. Not a woman, not a man. Not even a queer man or a queer woman is going to want you, because of the way you're dressing." So this gave me a very negative impression, and a great deal of guilt. And "They're not going to let you in the military." And already in my mind I was thinking, "Hm...this is supposed to be a negative selling point to me?" [Laughs] You know? But it was always "They're never going to let you in the military, you'll never get a decent job, and you'll wind up nothing but a hooker." They laid that one on me--nothing but a drag queen prostitute. Never get in the military, never get a good job. And some of the war resistance was about avoiding military service without getting the stigmatizing label of queer. But I kind of knew that I could run sort of wild without risking that. If they knew that you had become involved in the war resistance, they would draft you, if you got involved with encouraging others to resist and avoid the draft. They had you no matter which way at that point, because if you went to Canada you were no longer organizing and if you went into the draft you were no longer organizing. If you went underground you were no longer organizing. They got you out of the way that way. Now on the other hand, somebody like me--I'm sure I have an FBI file, because I was advising guys to tell the military that they were gay. Worked pretty good in upstate New York, didn't work so well in San Francisco. You pretty blatantly had to be trans, or a drag queen, to pull that off in San Francisco. You had to be really obviously gay. Again, it was almost like my involvement in the SDS had come from my high school involvement with the civil rights thing. I had made a connection between the black people's struggle for civil rights and the gay people's struggle for civil rights, as being kind of cut from the same cloth. I mean, they could shut down gay bars like that [snaps], at the drop of a hat, in those days. They would go in, jack everybody up, ask for ID, and in New York State I knew about this at 18, because back then the legalized drinking age was 18. So I could drink legally there for a month or so. And in New York City--it was kind of famous, down in the Alphabets--the One Eighty Two Club, or something like that. It was sort of the Finocchio's of the East Coast. It was in a real slummy part of town, like south of St. Marks and around Avenue C, I think, which put it right near this park, this really slummy park. I spent a few weeks down in there. This was like at the height of the summer of love, but only it was the East Coast version. People in the East Village didn't have much of a political consciousness. There wasn't the same sort of stuff going on there as there was on the West Coast. There was--it was more of the being glamorous, of being high all the time, of being hangers-on of famous people. There was just a lot of hanging out and trying to be in the presence of famous people. The same sort of thing that still goes on in New York maybe more than on the West Coast. Max's Kansas City came along a little bit later I guess, but still. And I used to hustle in the West Village. There was a White Castle's around--it was a pick-up spot--around Sixth Avenue, also known as Avenue of

the Americas, and 12th or thereabouts. But it was like a big hustle spot, and then you could drift over to the Christopher Street area. I was basically hustling as a very nellie boy, meaning that I made squat [holding up fingers in the form of a zero]. So I quickly decided that New York was not really a very viable place for me, and I had to get out.

SS: You said something last night, and I think started to allude to it again just a minute ago, about being on the fringe of Andy Warhol's crowd. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

SC: Well, Andy Warhol had this bar that the Warhol crowd used to hang out in a lot. It was where the Velvet Underground used to play. People from the Factory would go there, and the Factory at that point—

SS: This club—you're talking about The Dom?

SC: Yeah, The Dom. and the Factory at this point is in the Union Square area, like I think on 14th. It had moved there from downtown. It was all painted silver, silver foil all over everything. And there were people there like Billy Naiman, and this poet named Gerard Malanga. I didn't know any of the girls that later came along. But there was a Taylor Meade and—oh, what was his name? Somebody that went by the name of Lola Montez. There was this other guy I bumped into back in the eighties, and I said to him "You've changed a lot, and I've changed a lot." And then he sort of looked at me for a while then said "Yeah, you sure have changed a lot!" Because basically I had gone from this androgynous kid who had been taken in, who was running around looking very mod at that point, to being a girl. I actually worked at a place called the Both/And, which was a clothing store, and lots of pop stars would come in there and buy clothes. Because this was like in 1967, and people were wearing velvet jackets, and satin Nehru jackets, all that really bad fashion, the ruffled shirts—and so I could just get away with a lot. Some days you couldn't tell if I was a boy or a girl—because I was dressing up from the store, over-runs and some of their stock and stuff. So it was a weird six weeks, but it didn't last. New York was just too tough for a kid from upstate, especially at that point, as naive as I was.

SS: You said last night that Gerard Malanga wrote a poem about you?

SC: Yeah, about me being a runaway. Because even though I was like 20 at the time I looked fifteen. And everybody had fake ID, but nobody would necessarily believe it, you know? And here I had real ID and nobody would believe it. They would look at me, and look at it, and it didn't have a picture on it because it was a draft card, and they'd go "Eh, this is fake ID kid." I was getting a lot of shit in New York. I mean, New York City was just a little bit too fast-paced for somebody coming from my background. San Francisco turned out to be a much more human-sized city, though not a lot less rough. Plus, if I had stayed in New York I no doubt would have gotten involved in a lot

harder drug circles than I did, because everybody was shooting speed and shooting heroin, and I've always been afraid of needles that don't contain hormones. Especially the whole scene of putting it in the vein [pantomimes main-lining in the inner elbow.]. Those people kind of scared me away from New York City. Nothing like staying--crashing--with people and waking up to go to the bathroom and finding somebody passed out there, sort of turning blue, vaguely blue, and having puked all over the toilet and still having the needle there dangling from their arm, to make you think you are running with the wrong crowd. I mean, if you've got a shred of common sense that's a pretty good clue that you're in the wrong crowd. Worked for me!

SS: Now, you've also said that you were looking for Harry Benjamin that summer in New York.

SC: Right, right. I had managed to find his office and his phone number. Well, Harry Benjamin is in San Francisco at that time--on his exchange, right? And I was like "Oh! OK." And I so got his number in San Francisco, and thought then that I needed to do something to raise some money to get to San Francisco. I had some money in a bank account in upstate New York, and so I decided that I would head out to San Francisco. I had a bunch of musical instruments, and I also sold them. Sold my Martin, which was a really nice guitar, and sold some of my electrics, banjos, all sorts of accumulated junk, sold books and everything, and converted it all to money. Then I got in a fight with my father. He said "What are you planning on doing about the draft?" And I wiggled out and said "Draft!?! You've been telling me since I was 12 that they were never going to take me. I'm a drag queen. I wear women's clothes. I sleep with guys." And he said "Oh. [long pause]." And then he said "Well, I can arrange it. You know the guy who was your football coach? Well, the reason they kept you on the team even though you didn't play in a single game in two years, is that I was friends with your coach. And he's on the draft board, and I can make sure that you can get in." And I go "Are you out of your mind!? Huh?" And he said "I want you to get a hair cut and go into the Army or get the hell out of here." And I told him I would be leaving in the morning. I got on a bus and I left. I haven't seen him again. I haven't seen my family since then. That was in 1967. Have seen an uncle. Have seen a cousin. An aunt. A couple of aunts actually. But I haven't seen any of my main family since then. [Sighs deeply]. Ah, well. I took a Greyhound. Ended up hitch-hiking across part of the country and got involved in a terrible car accident that set back my plans considerably for a while. They wound up shaving my head. There I was in Tuome Valley, Utah. I'm wearing girl's boots, girl's jeans--cords--, panties, a little zip-up-the-back t-shirt, black leather jacket, and I'm in the emergency room! And I'm waking up, and they're taking my clothes off, and they get down to the panties and they are cutting them--because I had all of these--well, the seat-belt saved my life, but I had head injuries, and knee injuries, and cut legs, and they got the jacket off without destroying it, and some of the other stuff off without destroying it, but then they got down to the panties and cut them off and discovered that I had the wrong piece of equipment to be wearing those

sorts of clothing. And so that—and the guy I had hitched the ride with, he had been leaving for San Francisco, too, and he was on his own agenda, and this car wreck did not bode well for either one of us. All the nurses kept coming in and going [gestures indicating not-so-secret whispering] "wsh-sh-sh-sh-whs." They were not saying anything to me directly, but there was a lot of that, of the behind the hands whispering. We both had to go up before a judge. The judge fined us the price of bus tickets. He sent the other kid home on the bus, and sent me to San Francisco on the bus, and ordered his deputies to make sure that we got on the bus and left Tuome Valley. And while he assumed that since I was dressed pretty much as a girl that we were both probably people that they didn't want in Tuome Valley, Utah, in their Mormon culture. You know where Tuome Valley is? It's about 70 miles, maybe a hundred miles, west of Salt lake City. It's near—well, you know those salt flats where they have the high-speed races?

SS: Yeah, Bonneville.

SC: Right—it's near there. This judge even held court on a Sunday because that's when we got kicked out of the hospital. I can't remember—he might even have come to the hospital to order us out of town. "You're going to San Francisco! You're going to Kansas City!" Even back then there was this whole great portion of the US that was not a good place to be a person of indeterminate gender in. And that place pretty much started at Kansas City and didn't really end until you got into Reno. When you got to Reno, I've always joked how there's a sign that says "Welcome to California, Home of Fruits, Nuts, and Vegetables, Garden Capital of the World." So anyway, I got to San Francisco, went directly to the Haight. Boy, was I disappointed. I had been expecting more. I really was. I was expecting more. I was expecting all the gingerbread type houses, what you sort of got with the later upgrading of the old Victorians. It was pretty gray at that point. Of course, this was at the beginning, or maybe late November, so the weather was turning. And I got arrested the first night I was there for obstructing the sidewalk.

SS: This was in the Haight?

SC: Yes. Just the cops' way of getting to know me.

SS: Tell me some more about that.

SC: I was playing guitar with a bunch of people, and the TAC squad, the famous TAC squad that I was going to get to know a great deal better over the next year that I spent in San Francisco, they were like "You're new here. You're going in tonight. We're going to print you. We don't believe you're as old as you say you are. We're going to run you in and print you to make sure that you're not a runaway. You're going to spend the night in jail." So they got the pictures, they got the fingerprints and made sure that I was as old as I said I was, and—[end of tape]

SS: OK, you were telling me about Haight Street and the TAC squad and getting arrested.

SC: OK, yeah, well this was just sort of standard operating procedure, this checking for runaways. They were picking up and taking in and sending home maybe about 50 runaways a day who were coming into San Francisco, into the Haight.

SS: And you say they knew you were new? Not a regular?

SC: Yes—"You're new." They knew who was an adult and who was probably a runaway.

SS: So tell me about the specifics, about the TAC squad—how did it work? How many cops? What did they do, exactly?

SC: I mostly had bad encounters¹⁴ only about a dozen or so. Now the TAC squad would patrol with just a regular car, but then--

SS: Now, what did that stand for, TAC?

SC: Umm, Tactical Alert Core, or something like that. Basically they were all involved in the SWAT teams. But what they would do at that time, they would have a paddy wagon, and they had like two cars, and a driver and two cops would get out and check everybody's IDs. Now, this was totally illegal harassment, as far as the ACLU and those kinds of people were concerned. But they would say they were just looking for runaways. And you had all these do-gooders that wanted to keep the runaways from getting stoned on acid and all that, and--well, basically it was just a run everybody in and finger-print them. This all went on against the hippies. Now, I had not heard about the Tenderloin. This was an area that I had no knowledge of at this time.

SS: So, where was it that the TAC squad operated—was it just in the Haight?

SC: Oh, no—it was all over. But mostly it patrolled the Haight, parts of the Fillmore, another group of the TAC squad patrolled the Mission and Hunter's Point, and then another branch patrolled the Tenderloin and North Beach. So there were three main branches--and I might be mistaken, that maybe they alternated, or rotated around or something.

SS: But they had designated areas that they operated in?

SC: Yes, designated areas for this sort of stop-and-harass sort of operations. And you could get marked as a drug dealer, marked as a prostitute. I sort of wound up being labeled a drug dealer. But I was also labeled as being out of my neighborhood by them.

SS: In the Haight?

SC: Yes.

SS: They told you what part of the city you should be living in based on what type of person they had you labeled as?

SC: Yes, that's right.

SS: And they said you should be living in the Tenderloin because of the kind of person you were?

SC: Yeah, I should have been living in the Tenderloin.

SS: Because you were a drug dealer or because you were a tranny ?

SC: Well, probably both. I mean, they didn't say it in so many words. They were like, "Well, we usually don't see your type in the Haight." And later on I sort of figured out what they meant. Because you see I thought I was passing perfectly as this sort of androgynous boy. But after the first night I got picked up on the stop-and-harass, or maybe the second, I met this boy, and he was like this very, very attractive guy, and my heart immediately did the little pit-a-pat, did a little somersault--

SS: What did this guy look like? I mean, butch or femme? Did he look straight? A freak? What?

SC: He had a Jewish afro, big blue eyes. His name was Maury Bauman. He played guitar, and was sort of--he was from Canada, from Montreal--and he was a very, very attractive young man. A hippie. And we got to talking, and I asked him if he was straight. And he said "Oh, no, I'm not straight." So I said, "Well, I've got a place to stay, you can crash with me." Then I got him home and I realized that when he said he wasn't straight he meant that he smoked pot and dropped acid! [Laughs] This was rather crushingly disappointing to me. But we started hanging out. And I was looking rather freakish at this time, because I still had the bandage on my head, right? From this accident. I still had bandages. But anyway, we wound up getting involved in the Haight Ashbury Self-Defense Unit--something like that--which met in the Unitarian Church that was one block over from Haight on...um--

SS: Page?

SC: Yeah, Page, I think that's it. The Unitarians were like real open to the hippies. They were having nightly coffee-houses, you know, it was a place where you could go and get a little more street-smart. And the Hare Krishnas, they were feeding people, until they figured out that hippies were coming there and eating all their delicious vegetarian food, but that was about it. They weren't into the chanting and everything, they were just into the dahl! You know there are still a couple of Hare Krishna restaurants out in Venice that I go to every once in a while. It's good vegetarian food. But there were all these services. There was--you could get into the straight theater for like maybe a buck. You could see all these great bands like Almond Joy, I saw Santana there, Blue Cheer there. Anyway--we got hooked up with this guy named Steve Totter who was, last I saw of him he was running a record store in the Mission, an alternative record store, but he was like, not our age but a little older, and we went crashing in his garage to save money to get an apartment with like six other people, and were all getting involved with these major demonstrations. This was in 1968, which was a pretty grim year. Martin Luther King got killed, and um um--

SS: And Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy.

SC: Yeah, Kennedy, but just wait. King. Martin Luther King got killed. And through this strange twist of logic, blacks in the Fillmore came up because they wanted to get whitey, and the easiest whitey to get was hippies. In the spring there was this riot in the Haight, well let me make sure, what was the date--?

SS: I'm not exactly sure of the date either, I'm trying to remember where I was. It seemed like summer, or maybe late spring. I know it was before Kennedy, and that was in June. So May--April or May?

SC: No, I think it was March.

SS: Maybe March or April? And then Kennedy in June.

SC: And then Warhol got shot by Valerie Solanis right about the same time. I remember that I was in jail at the time. Well, we moved to a bigger space--

SS: No, wait, tell me more about the riot.

SC: OK--I'm trying to place when that particular riot was.

SS: But after King was killed?

SC: Yes, after King was killed, but there were several major riots that year. Now, I had gotten arrested in January throwing blood at the Fairmont Hotel, because I guess J. Edg-

-no, it was McNamara, McNamara was going to be there. And I got arrested. In that one I was charged with viciously and savagely beating this police officer's club with my head, and with destruction of city property for bleeding on it, and so I spent a weekend behind on that one before I got bailed by some Berkeley peace group. Again, it was probably one of these church groups that wined us and dined us, and I was probably the last one out, because they got all the leaders out first, right away, right? But with that little arrest I kind of made my stones with that particular little radical community in the Bay Area. Then, like I said, there was Martin Luther King. And we had been doing this haphazard sort of organizing, something about doing surveillance back on the cops, because by this time the panthers had marched into Sacramento with their shotguns and there was definitely a step up into a much more violent sort of confrontation, in the movements, between the demonstration at the Pentagon and—well, you didn't see anybody carrying Viet Cong flags at the protest at the Pentagon. But by about April or May of 1968 you were starting see them, and to get the chant of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Min, Ho Chi Min is going to win!" And the whole thing had just taken a decided turn towards the more violent—well, Bobby and Huey had gotten thrown in jail by that time, though this is still pre-shoot-outs. But they were in jail for something. And there was a riot in the Haight, but now I can't remember if it was in the spring or in the summer. Because there was also a riot in Berkeley in there somewhere in support of the French students, and also a riot in support of Prague Spring. Plus then there was this riot in the Haight. And I don't know how, but it somehow all ended up with the Grateful Dead playing a bunch of free concerts and dropping acid, and then by the fall of 1968 the Haight was really this pretty miserable place to be. Charlie Manson had breezed through. I met him on a place up on—what's the first street you come to when you're coming into the Haight, where the drugstore used to be, it's one street away from Ashbury, I guess, maybe to the east?

SS: I'm not really picturing it. But anyway, you met Manson?

SC: Yeah, at these people's house, where I had come to either buy or sell some weed. I didn't think much of him.

SS: Yeah—but what did you think of him? What sort of impression?

SC: That he was nuts. I was pretty astute. I mean, I had been taking a lot of acid, and I was using the acid to do some pretty deep self-exploration. At this point I was trying to reconcile all the parts of my life. Because like, by day, I'm hanging out with this Maury, in this totally unrequited love, and everybody else thinks that we are this item—which certainly doesn't help him with getting laid! And these sexual girls would always be coming on to me, to try to save me from homosexuality, and telling me I was really, really cute—which I was—and I was taking tons of acid and hanging out with this serious shit-disturber group. Then in June I got busted. It was a mistake. They had raided this house I was living in, but actually they had meant to raid the heroin dealers

living upstairs, but I got busted, and I got thrown in jail, and I got raped, gang raped. I uh-, I, well, I had had questions about my identity up until this point, but getting gang raped meant that I would never again let them throw me into a non-queen tank. I mean, I had been through it--Oh, I forgot about the incident at Maud's, that had happened back in January--but about the gang rape, I was in jail, and it was when Bobby Kennedy was killed. And a lot of us in the anti-war movement, the guys had gotten all shaved and--well, not necessarily straight hair cuts, but--well, we had gotten what we called "Clean for Gene" meaning Eugene McCarthy. Most of us didn't like Bobby Kennedy. I still don't. Bobby Kennedy had actually been counsel for Joe McCarthy. And a lot of us believed that Kennedy had a lot to do with King being surveilled and possibly with being assassinated. So none of us were really friends of Bobby Kennedy. Anyway, there were just a lot of things going on in the Haight. But we should digress back to Maud's, even though we're trying to keep this in chronological order. I just forgot about it probably because we talked about it last night in the restaurant.

SS: Yeah, please, go ahead and tell me about it again for the tape. And I have to say that I'm just really interested in general in all the changes you're talking about going on in the counterculture--

SC: Well, I can certainly talk more about that--

SS: No, no--go ahead with Maud's, because we're talking about arrests and harassment and stuff, police operations and such, and that will fit right in.

SC: OK--remember, we're talking about fashion here. And there were a lot of people who were dressing all of a sudden very androgynously. And the cops in San Francisco were not very model in those days. They were some of the worst cops in the country. Worse than the cops in New York City. Worse, in my opinion, than the cops in Los Angeles, which has this horrible monster reputation. But San Francisco cops were the worst. Not only were they mean and vicious, but they were corrupt. You got arrested, and you could expect that if you had twenty dollars then only three of it would turn up in property. That kind of thing. They were pretty much--well, they pretty much had their minds blown away by the whole hippie influx. All of a sudden there girls wearing jeans that zipped up the front. There were girls wearing black leather jackets. There were guys in beads with long hair and waist-shirts and Victorian type shirts and bell-bottoms with velvet, and some of those kids who became the Cockettes were already running around doing genderfuck drag--and these cops, well, their minds were just gone at this point, already. Anyway, I had just gotten to the Haight, and I had been over to a friend's house, because I couldn't drink in bars legally yet--which didn't stop me from drinking or smoking dope, I did it at parties. I was coming back from this place, and I was wearing a black leather jacket and boots and jeans and a turtle-neck t-shirt. Semi-longish hair. It had grown out from the accident. So it was still kind of a

boyish cut, kind of along my ears. Then the good old ID TAC squad boys came rolling along. And sometimes they would—well, later they pretty much always would—park a cop car right outside Maud's. Or near Maud's, as a form of intimidation. And they knew who the regulars were at Maud's. They had the cameras out. Because there was still at this time a "let's keep track of the queers" mentality. This was, though, when everything was all stewing up and stirring up and getting ready to boil over. Stonewall did not happen as an incident without lots and lots of development. There was lots and lots, tons and tons of development. Anyway, I got stopped, the cops get out of the car, and it's "Hey, baby," something like that, you know? something really respectful. "Hey, baby, where you going?" "Home." "Oh, really? And how old are you?" "Twenty." "Yeah? Let's see some ID." "OK." "What's this, a draft card? Come on, we know you're coming out of Maud's. Do you really think we're so stupid as to think that you're a boy?" I go, "Well, I am a boy." And they say "All right, that's it. You're coming down to the station." They got me to the station and, under brighter lights, they decided that I probably was a boy. But they still called a matron to search me, though I don't think I really got searched much at all. I think maybe they had the matron just do a pat-down. But I didn't get subjected to the strip-search. And again I got hauled in for mopery with intent to gawk, obstructing the sidewalk, failure to produce ID, the trivial stuff that they would always charge you with to hold you until the next morning when the judge would kick it out. But this time they added impersonation. And the judge said "This is what you were wearing?" "Well, judge," I said, "Yes." And then he says, "Enough is enough. I've seen enough of you hippies. I'm just sick of this, and I'm going to order a court order, a bench order that this has to stop." Now I didn't really get 650.5 off the books, but it meant that cops were going to have to be a lot more accurate in applying it. There was probably a lot of other things going on around this, too. I understand that Melvin Belli had some cases on this, and Jose Sarria had actually done some stuff on this, having queens wear little tags that said "I am a boy" and the like, so they couldn't really lay impersonation on you. A lot of the use of 650.5 was just when you were a little too butch or a little too femme. Your clothing was such in 1967 or 68 that you could harass the hippies on it. So you see the counterculture probably inadvertently helped to move 650.5 from being actively enforced.

SS: So just to recap what you were saying: You got picked up outside Maud's because they thought you were a butch woman--

SC: A baby butch.

SS: --an underaged butch woman, and then when they found out that wasn't the case they turned right around and busted you for impersonating a woman.

SC: Yes, that's exactly right.

SS: And when they tried to charge you with that the judge just threw it back in their face. So you think that your case was one that pushed the system along to--

SC: Yeah, I'm sure that other cases like this had come before the judge, and he was just getting fed up with them, because he obviously said to the effect "I don't want to see any more of these cases." Maybe it was just because I was so obviously not dressed as a girl, for me to be charged with that--well, the only thing to it was just me being really androgynous. At the same time, maybe they had also been picking up women who wore jeans that zipped up the front, because before they zipped up the butt. Up until 1967 women did not wear jeans that zipped up the front. They did not wear pea coats--well, if they did they wore a feminized version of the pea coat that was absolutely distinct from the pea coat that you'd buy at Navy Surplus. You were starting to see a lot of stuff in the Haight where the criteria for clothing wasn't which side the buttons were on but whether it looked cool, fit, and was free--especially free. Free was really important. There was a lot of thrift-store chic going on there. A Purple Heart down on Mission, Mission and--not Duboce, but around in there, that used to be a source of clothes for a lot of people. I got some really cool things there over the years. And there were lots of other things happening, too, that I wasn't necessarily in on.

SS: So did you keep up your SDS connections?

SC: The SDS sort of broke for awhile. Then my group--this Haight group--we decided that we were catching too much shit in the Haight, so we moved to Berkeley.

SS: This is in '68?

SC: Yeah, November of 1968. This attorney who went on the lam, who was running because he'd been blowing up towers--power towers--in the East Bay, just left us this house with three or four months rent on it, and then we ran it out further through the eviction processes, and other things you did like that to exist. And I was facing being called back up for the draft. I had already been called up once, and had just gone in and played crazy with them the year before, told them that I was gay and that I did all sorts of drugs and didn't mind being drafted because then I would be around lots of guys and they'd rape me, and then I'd go to Viet Nam, and there would be lots of groovy drugs, and I'd learn to shoot real good and come back home and kill lots of pigs. They decided that they didn't want me in the military, but that they would call me back in a year because at that time I was still in my bandages, and was presenting a very crazy appearance, so they said they'd call me back later. But that was just an excuse. And I had also been doing a lot of acid, and really working things out. And then December 31st, 1968 I took something--I don't really know what it was--but everything just collapsed. I said, "This simply cannot go on." To Maury and the other people that I lived with, I said "I don't care if you hate me, but I'm just going to have to do something. I'm going to have to work it out over the next couple of months, and that it

doesn't matter if you reject me, I just have to do it. I'll move over to the Tenderloin if I have to." Because you see, while I had been in jail I had made contact with the queens. I got stopped and harassed a few more other times in the process of 1968, and so I had insisted on being thrown into the queen's tank after the rapes, and that's where I started really meeting the queens—who were just transitioning into being transnies, a lot of them, right about this time. I guess the Center for Special Problems had started handing out hormones, and the consciousness was there, because in 1966 it had become part of what was going on in America, and wasn't so strange. So all the queens were starting to get their little breasts and everything. And so I had met a lot of queens by the time I had this little breakdown, and I just knew that I had to move on to a different situation. As it was, the people in my commune took it very well. I introduced the cross-dressing a few days later as a way of avoiding the draft. And they were just taken aback at how much just putting on the clothes made me into a girl. I mean, hardly any make-up. A little blush, a little shadow, some gloss, the right clothes, padding. I passed. I passed really easily in public. They were all a little dubious at first, that maybe this was just some sort of illusion being pulled off because I was just quietly sitting around and being dressed rather than interacting with people. But you see I had had years of practice moving around, rehearsing this—I had been rehearsing gender for ten years by this point, albeit in secret. This is like a few months before Stonewall. Anyway, in February we got evicted and so we moved to another building. And by this point I was dressing up often enough that people were used to seeing it. And it occurred to me that I could just go on welfare. The office was down there on San Pablo, and I just went down there and gave them a boy name, and filled out my papers that way, but then when they called my name, and I got up, they were like "Hey!" I lucked out and got a gay social worker. He was all like "There, there, we'll take care of you. We understand. We're going to get you some help immediately [makes gesture of patting knee]." And I said "Oh, thank you! I mean, I don't want to have to prostitute myself right here on San Pablo Avenue, and I don't want to sell drugs. I need some help in taking and getting through this." And they did help me. They got me some immediate assistance, got me food stamps, got me—well, I can't remember, but I think also got me Medi-Cal. But got me food stamps, got me assistance, even got me money for shoes and the like, plus a social worker. And the social workers, a couple of them, they always made sure that they had sandwiches there. It was like "Well, I'm going to take a break for lunch—you want to join me? Here—have a sandwich. Let me get you a soda." They took an immediate interest in my case. Like I told you last night, I sort of became a poster child for transsexuality because I wasn't in the Tenderloin. I was the first one they had seen in Berkeley. And I was so sincere. And I had some education. It was almost like they didn't treat me as a client, but almost like somebody who could be working there in the office next to them. So they got me all this assistance and they sent me to this—well, it was this gay thing—and gay really started happening there right after People's Park, which was just before Stonewall. And feminism, too, that was just starting. And 1969 was when the SDS went to being Weather. And there were demonstrations for Bobby Seale, and Huey, demonstrations going on at the Federal

Building. So let's see, I got to Welfare in February of 1969, got--found this public health place in Berkeley, this gay place, and I had also checked out SIR. SIR was not too helpful the first time I went there, but I just did not talk to the right person. Anyway, the place in Berkeley sent me to the Mattachine Society, and--

SS: So what was this place in Berkeley?

SC: It was on University Avenue and it was just--between Shattuck and Sacramento. It was just this little public health clinic where they gave vaccinations and had gonorrhoea treatment, maybe. I can't quite remember the address.

SS: But they're the ones who said you should check out Mattachine and SIR?

SC: Right. I had already sort of vaguely breezed by SIR, but like I said, I didn't speak to the right people.

SS: So when was this, earlier in 1968 that you had gone by SIR?

SC: No, January of 1969.

SS: So this is when you're starting to change that you first go by. So how did they treat you at SIR? How were you received?

SC: Well, there was only one guy there, and he said "You know, I don't personally know where to send you, but I have heard that there's a place that you can go." And things were happening pretty quickly for me about then. So anyway it was an OK reception but it wasn't very helpful. "If you want to come back," he told me, "come back at a later date." And I didn't really do that immediately. Because I was dressing as a girl now and taking the bus from the East Bay, and it was still a little bit nerve-wracking, especially considering where the SIR Center was.

SS: There was no BART at this point, right?

SC: Right--no BART. And considering where the Center was it was a little unnerving to walk that block or so down 6th to get there, and not feeling super confident about myself. I felt confident as long as I stayed on Market, but 6th was a pretty heavy-duty mean street at that point. Mattachine Society was off--they had this little office--well, it was in a building right near the Chinatown gates. I can't remember who I met, but he said, you really should give SIR another chance, but you should also go to the Center for Special Problems. Now, this is like March of 1969. So I made an appointment for the Center, and I also went back to SIR. And SIR mentioned this organization, but they didn't know where it was. But they did know Louise and Jerry, who lived just down the block.

SS: And they had CATS.

SC: Right, they had CATS, which was actually not the first group, because there was one called COG, which stood for "Change Our Goal," which somebody once told me was based on some sort of 12-step principle. But I don't really know.

SS: Well, what I know--and the name I've seen is "Conversion Our Goal"--and that Louise had started that, too, actually. She had started organizing in the Tenderloin, getting people together, originally at Glide Memorial--

SC: Right, right, Glide, of course, I'd forgotten about Glide.

SS: --and Louise had then come in to Don Lucas at the Anti-Poverty Program, and to Elliot Blackstone--and Elliot has told me that he's actually the person who came up with the name Conversion Our Goal, that Louise had been calling it something like the National Sexual-Gender Identification League or something like that, and he had said they needed something short and sweet, and that's why he proposed Conversion Our Goal. But that it came out of the Tenderloin, and had gotten started at Glide.

SC: That actually sounds good to me. I'll buy that. Because I sort of had some interactions with that. Like I said, I had been meeting these queens in the tank, and they were just at that time transitioning from being hair fairies to being trans in the city jail. And this is all in response to the 1966 announcements. Because prior to that people were content to be hair fairies, they were content to be drag queens, even if it wasn't a very good life. At this point there were places, there were big clubs on Turk called, let's see, there was one particularly nasty place, then there was the Frolic Room, and, well, there was just a lot of street life going on, and it was confronting the police, they were losing their grip over the harassment of it all, because people were bringing lawsuits and the like. Probably the thing that most changed the law was that Melvin Belli stepped in, but I don't have any of the details of this.

SS: I have seen some newspaper articles from that time about him helping transsexuals change their legal papers, clear up their legal gender status.

SC: Yeah, I think that's right, but he also helped get 650.5 off the books. Now, Jose Sarria is still alive, right?

SS: Yeah, he's still alive. We've actually been doing some pretty extensive interviewing with him. So what did you think of Jose back then?

SC: Well, I didn't know a lot about Jose back then, I met him later, at a SIR function, I think in 1971. No--I might actually have him earlier, at the conference in Berkeley.

That's where I first met Troy. And it's where I first met Kepner, and Morris Kight, and Richard who was head of SFR, and Del and Phyl.

SS: This is at the Berkeley Gay Lib conference in the fall of 1969? The one at the church?

SC: Right. I was there. I was the only one trans there. And people really didn't know what to make of me. And because I was figuring that I was going to get the surgery right away, and I told Maury, and it kind of freaked him out, and I said "Now that I'm Suzie, and I'm going to be a girl, would you go out with me?" Well, everybody was saying "We thought you guys had been a couple all along!" But he was like "Ciao!" [makes whooshing noise indicating a fast departure]. He went back to Canada. But we also got word that if he had stayed in the US he would have had to register for the draft. So immediately, once I became Suzie, I had food stamps, and I urged everybody else to get food stamps, and I took over the kitchen and vastly improved everybody's diet. I did it with a magic little book—let's see, it's probably here on the table somewhere—ah yes, the magic book!

SS: The Co-op Low-Cost Cookbook, by the Consumers Co-operative of Berkeley. That's great.

SC: Yep—that and bulk buying, it vastly improved our diets.

SS: So you shopped at the co-op? That was one of my favorite places, such a cool thing while it lasted.

SC: Yeah, we shopped there and also at bulk food places, for the really big cans of stuff, for I was feeding eight people on like 20 dollars a week.

SS: You know, I have to say that I'm finding this interview just really, really rich, and want to continue spending a lot of time exploring the late '60s, because all of these connections you're bringing up between the politics and the counterculture and the antiwar movement and transgender—well, there's so much to talk about here that we could spend a long time with it. Now, let me get a handle on this—it's 1969, early 1969. You say to yourself that you've got to change. Now what had happened to your earlier idea of connecting with Harry Benjamin? You came out to San Francisco in 1967 and now it's 1969.

SC: OK—all through the end of 1967 and the whole year of 1968 I was just wallowing in the happiness of having a lot of friends. I was afraid to rock the boat. Here I was being accepted, this kinda cool/sorta goofy hippie kid. I was being accepted by all these heavy radicals, I had this boy that I was in love with although it this sort of love where I was never going to get laid by him.

SS: So you were just caught up in it all?

SC: Well, caught up yes, but also I was afraid. I was afraid because of that trip my parents had laid on me that no one would like me. And here I was, I had been rejected by my parental family, and I had never found a family at the college, and now here I was with this family of like 8 people all surrounding me. And as it turned out, even some of the girls that I had slept with were thinking that this was a really cool—[end of tape]

SS: OK, so you were saying that all the girls would donate clothes to you.

SC: All the girls would donate clothes to me, And I thought "Wow! This is kinda cool!" I really had not been expecting this. I had been expecting rejection, I really had been. And I was really very pleased and surprised. Because I thought that if I did this then I was going to have to go off and live with the queens. And I didn't. So it was a surprising moment, and it also wound up being a very character-shaping moment for me. Because it made me—well, not necessarily one of the first non-Tenderloin transsexuals, but one of the first really young non-Tenderloin queens that people had encountered—which is why I sort of refer to myself as having been a poster child. I was vastly better educated than all of the Tenderloin queens, even though I only had a year and a half of college. Most of the Tenderloin queens at that time, except for some who had come out a little later, and Louise Durkin, and Cathy Grennier, and oh—what's her name? Wendy Kohler—ninety percent of the Tenderloin queens did not have high school educations. They were kind of condemned. The reason I later got the position at the Counseling Center that I did was that I was better educated than anybody else who would take the job besides maybe Jan.

SS: I do want to get into that whole scene with you in just a little bit, but for now let's stay with this other. I'm still wondering about Benjamin.

SC: So I had wandered into this family, and then about the time I was starting to come out I contacted Benjamin's office, only this time it was reversed—that he was in New York, because he did his winters in New York, right? But he will be back they said, so I made an appointment. And I think when you were looking through my things you saw one of the appointment slips, for one of the appointments I had with him. I think I just had two overall. But I wound up getting sent to the Center for Special Problems, which was an incredible resource. And then I went back to SIR, and from SIR I found out about Louise and Jerry, who were only like a couple of blocks away.

SS: They didn't tell you about COG, or what was going on through the Central City Anti-Poverty Program?

SC: Well, Louise and Jerry were living just maybe two blocks away and were probably dropping in to SIR, and this time when I went in this guy knew something and told me about them, but he said "I understand that there's this other program going on but I don't know where it is or how to get you there, but if you go and visit Louise Durkin she'll help get you there." Now actually 6th Street as you go down it gets a little nicer, and they were living there in a one bedroom walk-up similar to what I'm living in now. And I was going "Aw, man!" I mean, this was like my worst nightmare of what I was going to turn out to be. I mean, not that I thought that I would personally look like that, but when I was 11 this was my image of what it could be like. I mean, Louise Durkin—women's clothes, and had long hair and long nails, and make-up, and not the least trace of femininity at that point.

SS: Do you know if she was pre-op or post-op?

SC: I assume that she was pre-op at that point. But now a lot of girls were going down to Mexico to Dr. Barbossa, who was doing things in two stages. And--

SS: The Mexican two-step.

SC: Also referred to as the Tijuana Tuck-and-Roll. Because they did an orchietomy and then basically sort of constructed the labia, but left the penis, and then once you had that it made tucking real easy. Especially if you were pickled out on hormones. I mean somebody with a Tijuana Tuck-and-Roll could quite easily get away with having anal intercourse with somebody without them knowing. Especially in the dark. Very seriously—so a lot of girls looked at that as a significant improvement over the original upholstery. So Louise may have had the tuck-and-roll, but as far as I know she never got the surgery, the full surgery. But then neither did Kathy Grennier. And that's OK as far as I'm concerned. It does not cause me to judge people one way or the other. Although it often did back then.

SS: No, the reason I was asking was that, as I told you, in this earlier interview with Aleshia Crenshaw she was describing this woman who had been her building manager at 860 Geary, and that she thought this person was post-op, although she never saw, but that her friend Stormy, or Kathy, and Louise had done the tranny show-and-tell—"I'll show you mine if you show me yours." And that Kathy said Louise had had some surgery. And Aleshia also said that this woman Louise that she knew got challenged all the time as to whether she was a woman, because she did not pass at all, and there was this one incident where a neighbor woman had challenged her, and Louise threw the woman down on the ground and pulled up her dress up and her panties down, and said "I'll show you" and "I shoved my cunt in that bitch's face blah blah blah." And from what I've heard about Louise Durkin from other sources, this would perhaps not be entirely out of character.

SC: No probably not. Now, she was receiving welfare and partial disability payments from the Navy, and I know that they were hustling as well. And not only did I wind up giving Jerry a blow job, as I've said, but I also gave them \$5, which in those days was money I was hard-pressed to come by.

SS: You said earlier, while we were off-tape, you said that you went to their apartment after getting the referral from SIR, and that you were trying to access information about services, so you were not yet in contact with the Center for Special Problems--

SC: No, I was already in touch with them--

SS: --but you were looking for this other group, which would have been COG, or the Counseling Center?

SC: Right, and you have to remember that I was doing all of this pretty much at the same time. I went to the Center for Special Problems, had just walked in, had made an appointment with a psychiatric social worker for a week later, which was like a thirty of forty-five minute conversation and a California Personality Index. His name was Ron Lee. He did all the basic initial screening. Then a week later I was to come in to see Dr. Leibman. And it was like, well, at some point in one of those trips to the city I made it to SIR again, and then I made it to Louise and Jerry Durkin's on that same trip. Then on the next trip back over I think I saw Ron Lee, and then--well, on one of those trips I managed to connect with the place on Third Street. It was all happening at roughly the same time--let's say between March 1st and April 15th, 1969, OK?

SS: So you meet Jerry and Louise--tell me a little bit more of their story.

SC: They were into controlling people. They seemed rather jealous of this other group. I was very put off by them, did not like them at all. I felt used and taken advantage of by them. They were sort of an introduction into the sorts of things that surround the sisters.

SS: So tell me, just narrate your encounter with them, if you will.

SC: Well, I went there, and got there about two or so in the afternoon. They were sitting around drinking wine, so I wound up sitting around drinking wine. And then at some point the wine ran out, so that's probably when I got hit up for five bucks. When Louise went out to get some more wine, that's when Jerry hit on me. He said "Louise doesn't want you to know about these other people, but I got to see if you are really qualified--"

SS: These other people being Elliot Blackstone and associates?

SC: Right, and "I've got to see if you really want it, so if you give me head I'll give you their address and phone number, but don't tell Louise anything about it." He was a sleaze-bag. I mean, of course I gave him the head.

SS: Well, I can certainly see how all of this would create a bad impression.

SC: I mean, just what a sleaze-bag. I was still pretty innocent at this point. I hadn't had a lot of sex with men, had probably actually been with more girls than boys at that point, and this was just not a good introduction--these were not good people. Last I heard they were up pulling some number along the Russian River.

SS: Yeah, I've been trying to track them down up there, but so far with no luck at all.

SC: I understand they hang out, oh, west of Guerneville. What's the name of that place--"Where the sleaze meets the trees?" They really were just very sleazy. From what I've heard they always were running scams, and that's why they weren't allowed to have anything to do with Elliot's group, later on. And around Elliot were people like Amanda Taylor--Mandy Taylor--and Cathy Grennier, Wendy Kohler, and this girl whose name keeps escaping me, I'm trying to remember. She was also really young. And what was going on was that the EEOC and the OFO still had it. They were essentially cranking out girls that were learning ten-key, and were learning typing, and learning file clerk, and those sorts of things, and were actually getting their very first jobs through the war on poverty. So I was on welfare, and I didn't really connect with this group. I was actually kind of put off by Wendy Kohler. At the same time, here I am in Berkeley, with feminism, being flooded with Feminism 101, 110, and courses in Advanced Feminism, and they're trying to break me into total femininity, total womanhood. The roles, and the very stereotypical ghettoized sorts of employment. I'm surprised they didn't have me going out applying for hair school--which was, by the way, one of the things that got funded for transies through the EOC. I did actually wind up working as a sales clerk at times. I worked at the Emporium and at Macy's. I worked at Emporium during the Christmas season and at Macy's during the post-Christmas sales through January, in the year of 1970. All they wanted was your social security card number. Changing your social security card was a snap. I also had two or three other social security card numbers, you know, just in case, because it was very easy then to get more than one, but I later took and turned them all in, and they said I really hadn't needed to do that, and I said yes, I know that now, but really I just want to straighten out all my identification so that there are no repercussions. I turned them all in. The Center for Special Problems issued me that card that I showed you last night, and that was the sum total of my ID at that point.

SS: No driver's license?

SC: Huh? You couldn't get a driver's license back then. You couldn't get any kind of state card. Well, you could get a state card, but it had your picture looking like a girl and it had your boy name and it had male sex on it. You couldn't at that point legally change your name. You could use the name, but you couldn't legally change your name for purposes of driver's licenses until you were post-op. That didn't come around until like, oh, I guess 1975 or so. I have a clipping somewhere about it. So you were flying blind, but people were much more trusting back then when it came to hiring people back then. You could do it just on the strength of having a social security number. Since then there's been this whole rightward drift to this country, or partly maybe because the population has just gotten so much bigger, but people used to be a lot more trusting. So I could go in, and say who I was, and be accepted as being who I said I was. But that Center for Special Problems card that I had—I opened bank accounts with that. I opened bank accounts.

SS: Now, what you are describing is a little paper laminated card that has your photograph on it—do you have it handy somewhere here? We could just read it into the tape.

SC: It's right here in this box.

SS: Here we go. It said "This card identifies" and then it lists name, address, which is written in by hand, and then printed on the card is "San Francisco, California," as if they assume that everybody who is coming to the CSP is from San Francisco. Then it has spaces for height, weight, eyes, birth date, this is all written in my hand, signature of the person carrying the card. Then on the backside it says "This is to certify that (blank) is under treatment at the Center for Special Problems for transsexualism." Then there's a place for the doctor's signature. And then under that it says "San Francisco Department of Public Health, Community Mental Health." Then it has the CSP address.

SC: And that was the sum total of ID for a lot of us. Of course, you could get a library card, a voter registration certificate, all of which you took and you got. And bank accounts—I had like ten different bank accounts, keeping them all small to avoid, well, to avoid—

SS: Let's just say any unwelcome governmental intrusions into your financial affairs.

SC: Yes, let's. But I also tended to keep them small just because I had them for different purposes—here's my bank account for electrolysis, here's my bank account for surgery, here's my bank account for household expenses, here's my emergency money bank account, here's the account that I put money in each week because I want to be able to go to school again—I was always taking classes at UCB extension. And another reason that I didn't really interact well with the cast and crew of what had by that point had become, um—

SS: The National Transsexual Counseling Unit?

SC: No, not yet. It was the Transsexual Counseling Service at that point. It became the NTCU under Jan and myself. And I just did not interact too well with those people who were into the stereotypical feminine roles because I was in Berkeley, and I was part of this communal thing, and I was part of the radical movement. Cathy and Wendy were both veterans, OK?

SS: Military veterans, or veteran transies?

SC: Military veterans. So my being radical left and my being involved in SDS, which was about then converting into Weather, and my being—well, one of the things that put me off to them completely was that I identified with the gay and lesbian community. And that was like absolutely no-no. And I didn't really need them at that point, and I didn't really care for them as people.

SS: This is Wendy Kohler and Cathy Grennier you're talking about?

SC: Right. Didn't care for them, didn't care for their whole scene. Particularly Wendy Kohler.

SS: So what was she like—and what was not to like?

SC: Well, like I said, here I am, this Berkeley chick, this radical feminist who's coming in getting involved with the gay and lesbian movement, and here they are, saying "If you're transsexual, if you're a real transsexual, then what your goal should be is to get the surgery, if you must work you should work at a traditional woman's job, but that your real goal should be to get married and have a husband, and maybe adopt children, and settle down in suburbia, and never ever ever tell anybody about you." And I was like, "What if I want to get involved in the arts?" See over there? That's a drawing of mine, so's that. I was taking drawing classes. I was involved in drawing, I was trying maybe to go to art school, I was doing some inlay work on the necks of guitars. So the last thing I was really into doing, especially since I was on the forefront at that point of this whole new wave of trans, they were just the last people I wanted to deal with until I went back to the Center—well, I just didn't really connect with them regularly until well after the Louise Durkin thing. And in between I had seen Dr. Benjamin a couple of times.

SS: Yeah—tell me about that. What's your story with him?

SC: Benjamin was fun. I bought a nice little hippie dress, some lacy tights, stepped into his office looking really cute, all transed out. And—remember, he's the big transsexual

doctor, right?--and he goes "Eh, can I ask why you've come to see me?" And I said, "Well, I want to change my sex." And he looks at me and goes, "Why would a lovely young girl like you want to become a man?" And I go "Um, no. This is not exactly how things are." And he couldn't believe that I had absolutely no contact with the Tenderloin.

SS: He asked you questions about that?

SC: Right. He goes "So, do you know many of the other girls in the Tenderloin?" And I go, "No. I don't go in that place. I'm afraid of the Tenderloin." Which was true--I was scared of the Tenderloin at that point, scared of the queens, because the few that I had met in jail were very rough. I was just radically different than they were. I mean, had I had the resources, I would have maybe gone on to a Ph. D. I was just a completely different mind-set. I don't want to claim that I started that mind-set, but it was like--because, well, I consider myself part of the first wave--well actually the first part of the second wave--I was discussing this recently with Diane Mancuso--describing how there was a first wave of transnics in this country, most of whom got their surgeries elsewhere other than the United States. Then there was sort of an overlap of people, who came into the scene and had sort of gone through it. But then there was the second wave of people who had never been part of that, of that whole Tenderloin street scene. Or if they had they were just on the peripherals of it and were more involved in something else.

[break in taping]

SS: OK, we were more or less in the midst of talking about your interactions with Harry Benjamin, but you were also talking about these different waves of transsexuals. Like, there was the first wave, primarily after Christine Jorgensen through 1966.

SC: Well, even past 1966. In places like Minnesota and Stanford where they had started these programs. But by then you had also started getting the less traditional sort of transsexuals, the ones who were influence by the pop culture of the sixties, who were influenced by feminism, who were influence by--

SS: You're calling all of this the second wave?

SC: Right--they were the ones who were influenced by Stonewall and the whole gay liberation thing. Because that first generation, that first wave, they would not even consider interacting with gays. They just would not.

SS: And you're saying that you saw the Tenderloin Center as being something that came much more out of the first wave?

SC: Right, until Jan Maxwell took it over. Then it became a second wave group. Because we radically infused it with some pretty intense feminism, and some pretty intense trans consciousness.

SS: Wow. OK, but I want to get back—

SC: Right—we don't want to go that fast yet. Because 1969 was a real pivotal year for the world in general. SDS broke up and—

SS: But wait, even before we do that, I want to get off Benjamin. You saw him twice?

SC: I saw him twice. First in 1969, and he gave me a hormone shot. I discussed with him about possibly going to Mexico and he said first I had to live for a year as a girl, and he also said I don't really think you should go to Mexico, but if you really want to I will write you a letter next year when you are ready. But if you wait—and you have to wait because you've just been on hormones a couple of three months—but you should wait because there's going to be this program opening at Stanford. And he said Stanford is a very good hospital, and you will receive much better treatment and be much safer than you would be in Mexico. And I didn't have the \$2000 then anyway, so it really didn't matter. And I did go and check out the 3rd Street place on more than one occasion. I went there just to pick up little tidbits of advice because they were the only other trannies I really knew at the time. But I was just so put off by their anti-feminism. Then in the fall of 1969 was when they had this first West Coast Gay Liberation Conference in Berkeley, that I had sort of mentioned earlier. It was a real gathering of the tribe. And I had always in my mind made a connection between the trans community and the gay and lesbian community. Not necessarily the same, of course, but queer oppression has always struck me as queer oppression. A lot of time gay people who look really straight and act really straight don't get any of the oppression. It's the too-butcht woman or the butch-femme couple, it's the queens and the trannies that suffer the oppression, and they catch shit more for gender than for who they sleep with. I had made that connection really early on. I was connecting a lot of the oppression that trannies suffered—and I'm talking all male-to-female at this point. I had read in Benjamin's books that female-to-males existed, but it was exceedingly rare at that point in time, and it doesn't really get mentioned by anybody in the context of gay and lesbian things. Male-to-females were supposed to be straight, but female-to-males were imagined to be sort of like Ubermensch. The concept of female-to-males becoming gay guys that would not have flown at that particular point in time. For that matter, I caught a lot—well, my being bisexual was more problematic than if I had announced that I was simply a lesbian. Then, it was like, politics aside, the major social support for most of the girls in the Tenderloin was prostitution. Or dealing, petty theft, welfare. The programs did help, but as soon as these program really started helping Nixon was elected in 1968, and one of the first things he did was to start tearing down the war on poverty. He cut out a lot of programs that helped not only trans folks, but a

lot of other people at the bottom end of the social spectrum that kept them, helped them avoid, from being criminals. There was just a ripping away of things that had sort of grudgingly been made available not just to trans, but also all sorts of programs. One of the few things that survives from all that to this day is Head Start. In those days, if you were a tranny prostitute, you were not a call girl. You were a street-walker. I wasn't particularly into being a street-walker. I had been involved in these very radical things about the time that I transitioned—well, that's a modern term, I would have said when I came out as Suzan--

SS: Wait, let's just make a note of that. You said transition is for you a more modern term, sort of a newspeak, but that you originally thought of what you did as coming out?

SC: Yeah, we referred to it as coming out.

SS: Coming out as a tranny ? A woman? A queer? A new legal entity? What exactly?

SC: All of the above. But we referred to it as coming out. This was the language of sexual liberation, we didn't use psychspeak—that's what I call it—our language was the language of the queers and queens. One of the first persons to use the newspeak was Virginia Prince. I mean, she wanted people to keep away—she wanted to distinguish the heterosexual transvestite from the queen, so she came up with words like "femophilia" and stuff like "cross-dressing" instead of "transvestism."

SS: And so you think of "transition" as being part of that whole straight impetus?

SC: No—that's from the post-APA gender identity disorder bullshit that came down in 1980. That's all the language of that. There's another term though that just makes my skin crawl, and that's "new woman." Oh, man, I hate that term! You want to get me slashing and burning just throw some of that sort of trans talk at me.

SS: Well, we'll get to the 80s later, but—

SC: Right—OK, the language, the language at that point [in 1969] was the language of the queens. A lot of "Hey, Mary! Hey, girlfriend! What's the T? What's the beads?" That sort of thing. Getting read. Getting clocked. You could also do clocking, which meant shop-lifting, but you could get clocked, which meant getting read. Beads were also about getting read. T was gossip. The language was really that of the queens at that time, and that's part of why I had trouble seeing any vast separation between trans and queens. I mean, to me, queens were just sisters who didn't get whittled on downstairs. God only knows that most of the queens have their own tits and are on hormones so how the hell do you distinguish, really? They didn't play with sharp objects around their genitalia, that's all.

SS: OK—so, 1969, when you're first coming out, what was your introduction to feminism at Berkeley? Tell me a little about that.

SC: I was involved in this rent strike program, and there were some women there who were aware of my transition. I had sort of gone—there was also this Gay Women's Liberation—and I had gone to a couple of things. I had been told that I really didn't belong there.

SS: Couple of things like what?

SC: Just meetings, feminist meetings.

SS: Any particular groups, or particular people that you can remember?

SC: For the most part I don't remember any particular names, though there was this one woman that I sort of knew who wound up with Patty Hearst and that scene. On the other hand, while I was told that I didn't belong there by some women who were one part of one group, I was friends with other women who were in the group. So, they said "Here, kid, you're going to need this—and they handed me Sexual Politics, and they handed me The Second Sex, and they handed me Feminine Mystique, handed me Shulamith Firestone—they handed me all these books and gave me a reading list and said basically read these and call us in a year or two." There was once when I was in a jam and had to crash for a couple of nights at this feminist commune, and I was permitted to do so without any problems. It was just that I didn't make a nuisance of myself like Beth Elliot did, and I didn't try to crash into the lesbian thing. I didn't go to events that were marked lesbian only—I only went to events that were labeled gay and lesbian. Or gay liberation events. It was probably at that point not the West Coast Gay and Lesbian Liberation meeting, but just West Coast Gay Liberation.

SS: Meaning that gay included everything or that women—

SC: No—that it included everything. The whole separatism of the gay and lesbian was something that started a little bit later. At first it was all that we were all working together, all queers in the same boat. That was very much a part of the second wave, too, because—well, I don't know how she ever thought she could brazen herself into it without causing shit for years, could delve into DOB. Either she was painfully naive or totally oblivious to some of the forces that were going on around her in a way that I wasn't. I just didn't push, and because I didn't push I got accepted, whereas she didn't. She pushed and created this horrible tension. I was more into being like air, or being like water, taking that air or water posture, and flowing where you are allowed to flow, and only gently pushing on certain things. But as we know, water can erode rocks, and wind can turn mountains into sand. You'll have to excuse my hippie philosophy.

SS: No--I totally understand what you're talking about.

SC: I got purged from the radical left when SDS transitioned into Weather. All of us were thinking we were very Red Guard, and were only just realizing what utter hell the Red Guards were actually making of China. I got called to a meeting and told that I was very bourgeois for being involved in the feminist movement, and the gay liberation movement, and that anything I was doing as far as being Suzy was a manifestation of bourgeois values, diverting my energies from the revolution. Plus, I was bringing undue attention to myself due to my medical needs, and because I was becoming increasingly unwilling to participate in riots--well, I was simply no longer welcome. The reason I didn't want to participate in riots was basically that I didn't want to get raped, and I was unsure about how I would be treated in jail as a tranny .

SS: So this was a pretty formal hearing that we're talking about here?

SC: Yes, I was brought before the cadre. That's what we called it. We used that term--cadre. And also there was just some pretty radical shit going on by then, and I didn't really know if I wanted to be party to it anymore. One of my last appearances at Weather, this was right after I got purged, actually, I was involved in a street trashing. I just put on my helmet and leather jacket, and a hockey stick with the end cut off, because that would fit in a picket sign. And I got up there and said "Let's go trash a street." And we went out and trashed a street. That was pretty much my final appearance. I wound up a couple of months later leaving the commune.

SS: Was there any discussion in the Weather Underground about precisely how being tranny was a counter-revolutionary position?

SC: [Laughs] Well, not any that I was ever in on! It was already decided when I was told "Come to the meeting, comrade." It was like that that--Come to the meeting. Get in the back of the car. There were people on either side of me. I tell you, I was actually kind of scared. I was scared that maybe I was going to be killed. There weren't any people that I had actually known that had been killed, but there were some later, especially in the Panthers, who I heard had been killed. The way that this went down was that I just got fucking denounced. And a few months later I had pretty much disappeared. I wound up selling Berkeley Barbs on street corners. Then around that time The Tribe came into existence, and started denouncing the sex ads in the Berkeley Barb. Then I came across an ad in the Berkeley Barb, that was I think the first one that I had ever seen, of a transsexual advertising. Her name was Regina Dobkins, and she had a house out in East Oakland that she had rented, basically to try to get away from Berkeley and from San Francisco, where she had piled up too many arrests, and she apparently had come across this paper too, and thought "Why not?" and started advertising.

SS: Yeah, I know that the way the Barb pretty much stayed afloat was to run its "Unclassified Classifieds," that it was really one of the first papers to do that, and that there were lots of ads for massage, and escort, and call girls. That sex advertising really helped keep the thing afloat.

SC: Oh, yeah, that keeps most of these underground papers afloat. Even the LA Weekly, which has lots of mainstream advertising, has 10 or 15 pages of sex ads. There are papers that exist solely on sex ads.

SS: Well you know Spectator, up in the Bay Area? That's what the Bekeley Barb eventually became. They split it, because so many people objected to sex ads due to their feminist scruples, that they split the paper in two, one with politics, one just sex ads, distributed completely independently. But the sex ads paid for the political analysis and reporting. And then when the paper got bought out by new owners they just sort of canned the political rag, and left the sex ad tabloid, which was Spectator.

SC: Oh, OK. I guess I had left by that point.

SS: Yeah, this was in the 70s.

SC: Yeah, I was probably already down here by then. But anyway, I met Regina and really liked her even though she had a heavy mink. That was a term back then for beard, as in [rubbing her chin] "I don't need for somebody to buy me a mink—I'm growing my own." [end of tape]

SS: So you were talking about Regina?

SC: Yeah, I wound up less than a week after meeting her moving into her house with her. After the purge, life around the commune had become rather chilled. Besides, there was this new guy who had moved into the commune who was a deserter, and he hit on me. Then everybody in the commune, especially a couple of the concerned comrades—you see I wasn't purged by my friends from the commune, but they took it upon themselves to take this guy aside to give him the whole long line of information about me, which I thought was not cool.

SS: About your being purged, or about—

SC: No, about my being trans. I was livid. I mean, here was this guy that I was kind of turned on to, who was coming on to me, and I just told them all in no uncertain terms that it was not up to them to tell him, but up to me to tell him, and they said, well no, we don't look at it that way. So I said fine—I'm out of here. I packed up my stuff and Jerry—he was the deserter guy—he got hold of a pickup truck and he hauled my stuff

over to Regina's. And I also took out an ad and started making beaucoup sums of money. I had been through the whole welfare thing, which was sort of an on-going thing, which had been my main source of income. And I was actually working on my paperwork for ATD, which would at that time actually pay for the surgery.

SS: Now I know that ATD is what became SSI, but what exactly did that stand for?

SC: Aid to the Totally Disabled. It was--I got these three different psychiatrists, two of whom wrote me these letters that were perfect surgery letters, but that were not good ATD letters, saying that they didn't think I was disabled at all, that I was perfectly rehabilitatable, that all I needed was to get surgery and that they should just pay for the surgery for me and be done with it. But the third one said, "Well, this obviously isn't working. I've got to get you the ATD, so let's say that you're chronic depressive and all this other stuff, but don't worry--I'm just saying this so you can get your surgery through ATD. So I wound up getting this lump sum of some fifteen hundred or two thousand dollars. And by this time another sister had moved in with us into the house, and Regina had gotten this brilliant idea that in my case at least there was no point in telling customers that I was a transsexual. Because back then if you had tits and not much beard--well, let me put it this way: I simply stayed on the rag for about two years. I would tape and tuck and wear a Kotex. Anyway, the house got busted because we were all turning twenty dollar dates, and seeing a lot of guys. I was off at electrolysis when the house got busted, and I wound up taking my ATD settlement and bailing them out and renting us a house in--of all fucked places in the world--Pacifica. Where, I mean, this was the last place you would want to put a whore-house. It was at the end of God's fucking earth as far as getting there. Wound up with that house lasting only about a month. I wound up in a fight with Paris who accused me of stealing one of her tricks. I still had enough money so I took the bus up to Berkeley and rented this summer rental walk-up in a purple building that had some very strange painting combinations in it, including a bathroom with a nude mural, this sort of thing, and I called up Jerry again, this deserter, and I said, "Jerry do you think you could get your hands on that pickup truck with the sides on it again?" And he helped me move my stuff back up from Pacifica to Berkeley. And I had to do something. I said, "After you take the truck back why don't you come over?" And I had copped an ounce of pot, wasn't particularly planning on having sex with him, but took him out to dinner, spent a little money on us, and then came back to the apartment to drink wine and smoke dope. And we just wound up fucking. Two days later he was living with me. And once again, I wound up being totally isolated from the whole trans community. I saw Regina again, but I was just doing my thing by myself in Berkeley.

SS: So when was all this, still 1969?

SC: By the time I was with Jerry it was July of 1970.

SS: So you got purged in 1970?

SC: That was January of 1970, also when I did my last street trashing. Then I started hooking, learning how to be one of the first tranny call girls, because like I said, everybody else was a street walker. And just by being off the streets, and by virtue of being settled down with a husband, that meant I was focusing on being a material girl, that I was little miss housewife—even though I was paying for everything and taking care of him. Then we flew down to Tiajuana in about September, and I had the \$2000, and was going to do it, I was going to get the surgery. But he had upped the price to \$2500 at that point, and frankly, I was appalled by the conditions. So instead we just went back up, and I bought a car, went to Yosemite, did a few other things. Found us a different apartment. This took us up into 1971—you know, just doing all the little domestic things, Christmas dinner, having friends over, even had some people from the old commune over, those I was still associating with.

SS: Let's go back a bit and wrap up a few thing before we enter into your period of domestic bliss. One—the conference in the fall of 69 in Berkeley, and the people you met there, and how—or if—trans issues came up there. And two—what impact did the Stonewall Riots have in the crowds that you were running in? Because that happened in the summer of 1969, and I just wonder what its immediate effect was out here.

SC: As I've said, the Stonewall riots were seen as being a part, just a part of what was going on, which was an intense radicalization. And then there was the West Coast Mobilization Against the War, which had over a million people in Golden Gate Park. There was a Washington DC mobilization at the same time. So if you think about it, you had maybe one or two percent of the whole population of the country getting up and marching on the same day, which may not seem like a whole hell of a lot, but let me tell you—it was a whole hell of a lot of people. Now, when the West Coast conference happened at Berkeley, there was a lot of discussion about civil rights, and a lot of talk about employment. But there was an awful lot more talk about the simple joy of liberation. There was an intense wave of joy. You're looking puzzled?

SS: No—not at all. I was just listening to you and thinking about what it must have felt like.

SC: I mean, there was just lots of hugging and lots of laughing, and lots of fucking going on. People just being here and being queer and being open about it all. There was lots of talk that focused on coming out—this is why I associate what I was going through as coming out. And it had kind of a weird effect on me in that I have never been real closety about being trans. The whole liberation energy was not yet at that point about building a movement, but simply a celebration, almost—a celebration of all these people. Because the Mattachine Society, and even SIR to some extent, were these quiet little groups that met behind closed doors. And here we are out on Sproul Plaza, holding

hands and dancing around in this very public sort of thing. We were doing things like picketing television stations that were saying bad things about blacks and gays. Somebody crashed one of the talk shows back East--wait, I've got to show you Arthur Bell's Dancing the Gay Lib Blues. Can you pause that thing a second?

SS: Sure.

[Break in taping]

SC: Now, in November, in New York, there was the GAA--Gay Activist Alliance--Arthur Bell got on television, and this is what it was like. People were just coming out in public all over the place and saying "Hey--I'm gay." I mean, it took Ellen a while to do it, but back then that was really important. At that point I don't think a lot of us recognized that Stonewall was as important as it was. It took a year or two for it to sink in. But it did--it marked the transition away from everything being done behind closed doors, and it also sort of marked the hippification of the movement. It turned from being the homophile movement to being gay liberation practically overnight. I mean, SIR--that stood for "Society of Individual Rights." And Mattachine--Daughter of Bilitis? They had totally innocuous names. Then all of a sudden--Gay Liberation Front. I'm just trying to show you the connection to how big a change that really was. How some of these older institutions were really already dead at that point. They may have walked around for a few more years, but they were already dead. In 1969 you couldn't same-sex dance in clubs or bars in San Francisco's North Beach. By the end of 1970 you could. You saw same-sex couples holding hands in public. The scene back then was really North Beach and Polk Street. There was no Castro at that point. I can't particularly mark the year, but--

SS: Well, you see the beginnings of it in 1970, 71.

SC: Yeah, there was this club up near Castro that I used to go to, down in a basement. It was real mixed. Trannies, queens, dykes, glitter kids, heterosexual hipsters. And they were all also going to the Stud, Hamburger Mary's, and this club that I can't remember the name of--

SS: The one that was near Castro before it was "The Castro?"

SC: Yeah, right. Then hanging out on Polk Street there was this place called the Haven. Then there was a club over where the Black Cat was originally, that was just up the street from Melvin Belli's office. Then there was another club in North Beach. And--

SS: Do you remember the name of the club in North Beach?

SC: Not off the top of my head. But they did drag shows there. Almost nobody was hanging out at the Frolic Room by this point. There were also a few sleaze pits in the Tenderloin however, where other people did.

SS: Know anything about the scene on lower Turk Street, just above Market?

SC: Yeah--and I was scared stiff of it.

SS: Tell me what you know.

SC: There was this bar at like the corner of Masonic and Turk--man, that place was rough.

SS: Name?

SC: Don't know. But up the street was Compton's. And I never really hung out much at those places, and by the time I really started spending any time in the Tenderloin, I was too busy making money, too busy to just hang out and spend money in those sorts of places. About this same time the Cockettes were performing--starting around late 1969--started performing at this place, I can't remember the name--

SS: The Palace?

SC: I can't remember, it was this abandoned movie theater near Chinatown--anyway, their whole carryings-on. That was a whole different scene. And that scene actually grew out of the Haight.

SS: Now, you sort of mentioned earlier that you sort of knew some of the people who became the Cockettes, from when you were in the Haight?

SC: I knew Pristine Condition. But I knew Pristine Condition from after the Cockettes period, when she was forming her band. And I knew Johnny, who became Dahlia, and who was absolutely gorgeous. There are pictures--if there is an archive that has the Barb in it--with lots of pictures that you should see. And there is a video from 1968 that you can rent--well, probably have to buy, but it was called The Queen, and it was all about the pageants. You have to remember that all of these big pageants were going on at the same time, and that was a whole other scene--

SS: I do want to talk about that in just a minute but first, more about the Cockettes.

SC: The Cockettes had formed in the Haight, and in those days there were some pretty radical--well, I don't mean radical fairies like in the modern sense of radical fairies, but some, by fairies, I mean people wearing little fairy wings, and downy costumes, and

glitter and beards and makeup and strange hair, and lace clothes, and spouting poetry in some of the coffee houses, and doing impromptu street theatrics, and house parties. And I met some of these people sometimes at parties, but I was never invited into the Cockettes. Although I knew some of the people I was not really a part of that scene. I was considered too straight to be part of the Cockettes. I mean, they would get on stage and lift their dresses and wave their wee-wees. It was really cool. And I did go see some of their performances—which, to call them chaotic, would give them too much credit for organization. They were insane little theatrical pieces. If you ever get a chance to see Tricia's Wedding, you really should.

SS: Yeah, And Elevator Girls in Bondage.

SC: Right, that was another one. Oh, and there was one other person, somebody who was in the Cockettes who later helped form the Angels of Light, which came a little later. I knew that person too, but can't remember their name—though they used a male name.

SS: Sylvester?

SC: No—though I knew Sylvester too, if only in passing. No, this was somebody else. I can't remember—usually wore a beard, white guy, I'm trying to attach the label of Jack to this guy for some reason. But he was one of the founding members of the Angels of Light. I knew him, again, mostly just in passing, because he was very active. They didn't last very long, the Cockettes, as a whole, too much drug use, and general insanity, and too many ego conflicts, that sort of thing.

SS: Did you ever know Bobby Cameron? She was in the Cockettes, and later transitioned MTF. Ever run across her?

SC: No—she sounds familiar but I couldn't put a name with a face.

SS: OK—so you've been saying that you sort of knew some of the Cockettes, some from your days in the Haight, and some from later—

SC: Right, I would sometimes party with some of them but was never really part of their scene.

SS: Right—now you said that there was also another scene—the pageants.

SC: Yes, the balls. They still go on, you know, but they were just evolving it then, the Imperial system. You could probably get a lot more of this from Jose. Apparently, at one point in the early to mid sixties—and remember that these grew out of the bohemian beaux arts balls of the 30s—because San Francisco has a long gay history—

though actually many of the beaux arts balls were attended by straight people, within the arts community as well. But these were all people who had a tremendous theatrical skill and flair, and the gay balls grew out of that. Now I imagine there was a period of quiet around the 40s and 50s, with some sort of resurrection probably not happening until the late 50s. Because the gay scene was very suppressed at that point.

SS: Since you weren't actually there in San Francisco at that point, I was just wondering what your source of information was for all of that. Did people you know talk about it? Or had you just read about it?

SC: Well, some reading, of course, but I talked to people who were there. These were old time queens and gay guys, who gave history presentations about it. How the police backed up their paddy wagons and hauled people off, and how they ran everybody in. This was like a presentation I saw done by some people about the gay history in San Francisco. About how that ball, and some other raids and a few other things helped mobilize people out of their complacency. So I don't know an awful lot about them directly. And very little actually about the whole imperial system--though there is this. This always struck me as funny. At one point there was--you couldn't be involved in the imperial system if you were on hormones. You could be involved with some of the balls, some of the other titles, but you could never be an Empress if you were involved with hormones. You also couldn't live full time as a woman. You had to only--and it also, remember, involved these elaborate costumes which cost a fortune, so you had to have at least a bit of money--and that cut most of the girls on hormones right out to begin with. But then there were balls that you could participate in if you had hormones, but that you couldn't participate in if you had had surgery, because then you were a real girl. But if you were living full time, on hormones, and without surgery you were not considered a real girl, so you could go to the balls. I participated in one little contest in my entire life. I did it down here under the sponsorship of Reina, Queen of the Universe. And I did it some three years post-op. I had to sort of, well--

SS: Pack?

SC: No, not pack, exactly. I wore a gaff, because I had to change back stage, so I pulled the costume off, and the underwear off, but they didn't ask me to pull the gaff off. [Laughs] It was fun. And the balls are important, and it really doesn't get mentioned in the whole trans tradition, because it was queer.

SS: It was a gay thing.

SC: Right, it is considered a gay thing. Now in New York it's all more intermingled.

SS: Right, in San Francisco it's very separate. Now, I've seen some photographs--this was in Lee Brewster's Drag magazine, of some people from the Tenderloin Counseling

Center-like, for example, Leslie St. Clair—at the Coit-tillion Ball. Can you tell me anything about that, about the Coits? Were they perhaps a little more open about trannies?

SC: Well, they were open to Leslie, because Leslie was not considered really a tranny at that point.

SS: What—she was considered more of a drag queen?

SC: Who, Leslie? Well, yes, they were open to her because of her queenishness. She was very much a social person, a queen bee type. And because of her whole flamboyance, she was accepted in places where serious Suzy was not. I just lacked the social queenly ability that Leslie had to take a room and pull its attention to her. Well, I always felt that, even though nobody ever said this to me, that I was regarded as her fag hag genetic girl side-kick in those situations. And that's not necessarily how it was—but that was sort of how I got treated. You know—"Oh. How nice that you have an, um, girlfriend." So I wasn't really invited to a lot of these things, whereas Leslie was, and she really put a lot of energy into some of them. And you know, when the time came down at Stanford, and Don Laub told me that he didn't think Leslie was really ready, he said "I think she's more of a drag queen than a transsexual." I told him that I thought she was absolutely sincere, and that she was just a rather flamboyant person, and that she would always be a rather flamboyant person, and that she was simply taking part in and participating in things as an outlet for her flamboyance—and that there were many flamboyant genetic women. I'm just noticing the time. We're going to have to pause while I think about making this roast.

[break in taping]

SS: OK, we've shifted locales, we're now in a coffee shop on Hollywood Blvd. getting a bite to eat, and we've been talking about Leslie and the Coit-tillion and some of the gay drag balls of the late 60s and early 70s. And I just wanted to note that in the car on the way over here you remarked that you were enjoying the interview and that you thought you made a good interview subject because you always tried to be very aware of your circumstances, and kept your eyes open to what was going on around you, that you thought of yourself as a kind of participant/observer, paying attention to things that you weren't necessarily involved in, and thinking about the connections between things. You kind of had your feelers out, your antennae up.

SC: Right I would read all the time about current events, because there really was a very wide spectrum of events that were happening. The first gay parade that happened in San Francisco was in 1972. The year before, the big thing that happened was a gathering out in the park--

SS: Actually, that was even earlier, in 1970, out in the park. In 1971 there was the march and rally in Sacramento, in support of the consenting adults bill, then the next year was really the first parade.

SC: OK—I was at the rally in Sacramento. But in 1972 I was in the hospital, and I was in the hospital again for the one in 1973.

SS: Oh right—you said you tried to schedule your surgery as close to the summer solstice as possible.

SC: Yeah, but this was something else. Remember how I told you about kissing the steering wheel on my way out to California? I was having my nose fixed, and my chin fixed, nothing major, just having a few things taken care of from where I went into the steering wheel. But there were a whole lot of other things going on for me around then. You remember I was talking about Jerry, my boyfriend, and back in 1970, no—I guess the spring of 1971, and there was a knock at the door [knock, knock, knock on the table] and it was the FBI, come to take my hubby away. So I got an attorney right away. And the attorney said, well, we need you to try to make yourself look as much like a boy as possible. So I butched myself out, and we went through a bunch of hearings and appearances, and we got him out of jail and transferred into Oak Knoll Naval Hospital. And I went to visit him there the first time, and they had us totally supervised. Then about a week later they were letting him walk around on the grounds unsupervised. So I put on several layers of clothes—and we've got them thinking that I am a guy, right, so that they'll think he's gay?—and went to Oak Knoll to visit him, and snuck him into my car, and then took off some of the clothes, and I was Suzy again, right? And he laid down in the floor, and I drove him out to the gate, and the ticket said there was only one person in the car, and as I handed the ticket to the guard I sort of dropped it [makes exaggeratedly feminine gesture, like dropping a lace hanky] and when the guard bent over to pick it up I popped the clutch and off we went. We went down to LA for a while, hiding him out. Then we went back up to a safe house in Berkeley, and within about three weeks I was back in business. That whole episode is probably also something in my FBI file, I'm sure. Anyway, this was all by the summer of 1971, which is when I met Jan at the Center.

SS: The Center for Special Problems, or—

SC: No, the counseling center. One day I just couldn't deal with what all was happening to me any more. I couldn't deal with being on the run from the FBI, Warrants were outstanding, and I just needed some advice. And Jan was a whole different person, a whole different ball game from the Wendy Kohlers, and the Cathy Grenniers. Jan was hip. She'd been around. She'd been in the Haight, been around the Dead. She knew people like Sandy [Stone]. So basically she was just hip.

SS: Do you happen to know how Sandy and Jan had gotten together, how they hooked up? Was it through the center or was it through the scene?

SC: I believe it was through the scene. Actually through a person named Christy Staats.

SS: Who was that?

SC: That was actually Sandy's old girlfriend.

[becomes too noisy to tape]

SS: OK, so we are back at the apartment. And we have been talking a little bit during lunch about Jan Maxwell and Sandy Stone. So--Jan?

SC: Well, she had been around the Dead, been around the Haight, been around the scene. She was hip. But I also just figure that as a guy Jan was very closeted, and has been more closeted afterwards than most. And just projecting a real butch attitude that seemed to be covering up a lot of internal fears. Jan is a large woman, probably around six-two, and heavy, probably 260-something pounds. But she was really sincere.

SS: And you say you also met Sandy Stone about the same time?

SC: Well, that came a few months later.

SS: You had said something earlier, at the coffee shop and I can't remember if this actually made it onto the tape, but something about Christy Staats being the connection?

SC: Christy Staats was a roommate of Jan's, who wound up being Sandy's lover, while Sandy was going through transition. Jan was doing volunteer work. She was able to keep the center open only like three days a week.

SS: And do you know how she happened to come in contact with the center, and wound up doing volunteer work there, and effecting that transition from what you were calling old school to new school?

SC: Hm. Well, this will be a little bit iffy, but basically, to my understanding, Wendy Kohler had gotten her surgery and quit. Then of course the OEO money had run out, they stopped funding it basically as soon as they realized they were funding pervs. One they knew they were funding pervs the government just said "Oops, we're sorry, we can't do that." And they stopped funding us. So that was that. Plus, the funds for the job training were gone too. Nixon was just slashing all the war on poverty programs left and right. They went in with a broad-axe. In two years time, three years time, they

were simply gone. And they had been really constructive programs. But anyway, Jan had met Elliot, and had met Wendy, maybe there had even been some overlap, but Jan offered to work on a volunteer basis, with the idea that funding would be sought. And funding was actually found, but it took a while. I was there for six months before it came in. As I said I had gone in to try to clear up some legal matters, and I offered to volunteer. I thought it would look good on my papers at Stanford, and maybe even on my c.v. And even though I was still hooking at that point, and was making a lot of money with the old in and out, and I was taking a class at UC Berkeley extension, they insisted they I have a straight job. So Jan fixed me up with this job at the Pink Pussy Cat Theater, as a cashier.

SS: Where was that?

SC: That was on Mason. It was right up the street from the Original Grubstake, and right across the street from the Frolic Room, basically. The first night there I was almost busted, because the vice squad decided to run a raid on the place, and nobody had clued them in yet that I was one of Elliot's girls. So I almost got taken in. That nearly ruined my relationship with Jan, and with the Center. But about that time we changed out name to the NTCU, and sought out funding from the Erickson Foundation, and had to write a grant proposal, and had to submit it, and then we were told to rewrite it and resubmit it, and we did, and we got it. We got funded. They were paying us about 200 dollars a month. I can't remember if it covered the space or not.

SS: Elliot told me that it did--that it covered the counselors' salary and the rental, and a little mimeographing and postage and what-not.

SC: What was it that we had--a Gestettner? I think we had a Gestettner. We didn't have a copy machine. We had one manual and one electric typewriter, both of which got stolen. So we had to go steal a couple of others--we lifted them from one of the closed OEO offices. Because those typewriters, those were our--I mean, we were probably dealing with as many people by mail as on a walk-in basis. I mean, we were mentioned regularly in the Erickson Foundation Newsletter. And I think we were mentioned in Drag. And I can't remember if we were mentioned in any of the underground publications that were around. Plus we were leafleting the area, and not getting much of a response from the Tenderloin queens, who didn't need to be told what to do by a couple of college educated ones, or having any college-educated ones acting at all superior to them. Even though I probably would have told them to get off the street and into the paper, that really wasn't exactly what was going on. So then we moved from 3rd Street finally to this same building with this cab company--I think it was on Turk Street, but what are some of the other streets around Turk?

SS: Golden Gate?

SC: Maybe—but actually I think it was on Turk Street.

SS: Now, the Helping Hands Center was on Turk Street. That was the Ray Broshears/GAA outfit. That was on Turk just above Market.

SC: Yeah, Ray was our neighbor and would drop by regularly to shoot the shit with us. He seemed to think that because he had a collar—which I always thought was of dubious, um—

SS: Origin, or provenance?

SC: Yes, exactly. He always thought because he had a collar he was [inaudible]. But I always thought he was a bit of a quack. But we shared lunches, and he would send us some of the more complicated cases he came across. There was one who was like the Munsters, the Frankenstein character on The Munsters. This person so badly wanted to be a woman, but I'm sorry, never had a snowball's chance. And in addition was psycho. We had our losses, too. We had one who was like a schiz. Who was Johnny/Molly. Who was just very mental, and wound up--was a Mensa person, right?—and she wanted permission for surgery and I wouldn't give it to her, and so she went to Brown, or to Gaunt, and was dead as soon as she got out of the hospital. She killed herself because she couldn't reconcile what she had done with the fact that she had two basic personalities. She jumped. Splat.

SS: That's really sad. We've been following so many different threads of your story, though, and it's all so complicated, that I want to go back, and maybe cover some of the same ground to pick up some of the threads that have been dropped. Now this is going way back but I'm still interested in it, about the gay lib meeting in Berkeley in 1969. You said you met most of the leaders—

SC: Yeah, most of them were L.A. people.

SS: Was there any discussion there at that meeting about the role of trans people in gay liberation? Was there any discussion at all?

SC: No. I was the only one there, and I didn't really have a formed political opinion right at that point. Now in 1971 there was a meeting at SIR, and there I did have some formed political opinions. And I went to DOB and said that I thought lesbian trannies should be allowed into DOB after they had had their surgery—which didn't exactly back Beth's position. And I was talking to—[end of tape]

SS: OK—we've changed tapes here now, and you had been saying that as of 1969 you hadn't formed any firm political opinions about trans liberation, gay liberation—I mean about the relationship between the two.

SC: By that time I had been so independent, had been on my own so much, so separate from the gay community and from the trans community, and from so different a space than so many of the other, that I just saw that there was a connection that maybe others didn't see. Because I was coming at it from the angle that so much of gay oppression is about being too masculine or too feminine rather than who they are sleeping with, because most people don't ever see who you are sleeping with. And I had just come to these conclusions on my own. It wasn't until this conference in the fall of 1971, winter of 71/72, that I had even found the ability to voice some of these concerns. I went to one with somebody named Carol Schneider, who was somebody who had had a penectomy, got a castration, but then allowed the vagina to close and went back to living as a man, because he was never able to pass even though he tried for about ten years. He's married to a woman now and they are quite happy. But he was somebody who suffered from what I always called testosterone poisoning--body couldn't handle testosterone. He would have done evil things to himself or others if he had not been castrated. By the time of the '71 conference Beth had already pissed people off at DOB. That happened, I would say, about 1970.

SS: Well, I know that she was not thrown out until 1973, and was involved until then quite extensively with DOB--was vice president of the SF chapter, and editor of the newsletter.

SC: And she was writing down here for the Lesbian Tide, but she had already pissed a lot of people off by then. There was already an anti-Beth faction. There was an anti-Beth faction in the community that involved the feminist lesbians rather than the older school butch/femme dykes that had made up DOB. And DOB was being inundated with the new lesbians, the lesbian feminists. If you have read Feinberg's book--at one point Jess goes to a bar, and it's all like these women look all the same, and there's no place for the old time butches, and a femme comes up to her and says "Jess, what's happening? It's all gone." Well, this is pretty much what was happening. If you were a tranny you got attacked for being too feminine--and if you weren't too feminine you were accused of playing out the male role in the women's community. So you were damned if you did and damned if you didn't. It was like--you've read, no doubt, the Empire?

SS: Sure.

SC: That was a line of thinking that you simply couldn't defeat. There was no point in debating it, you just couldn't win. Of course that was later.

SS: Well, that view was certainly building by the early 70s.

SC: Yes, it was building. And you know trans theory came into direct conflict with feminist theory at that point. Because trans theory said that we were identified as being feminine, or just as being women, because of something within us, not something that we learned. When feminism took over and started saying that it was all learned behavior, that we should be giving our little boys dolls and our little girls--well, not guns, but trucks, because nobody was supposed to have guns--and they will learn to be more similar. And that only works up to an extent. And if it works too well I bet you'll be raising a lot of tranny kids! Which I was going to hope for at the time, but which proved to be too much to hope for. Jan and I, we just basically did a lot of education. We started the thing of going to the police department, and just talking with the police, which I don't think had happened before Jan and myself. We did a radio interview or two. We spoke in numerous classes--City College, SF State, I think one at UC Berkeley extension, or maybe even Berkeley proper. And we wrote to tons and tons of people, giving them advice, telling them where to go, compiling lists of doctors, local doctors in various major cities around the country. Holding hands. Went to check on people after they got out of the hospital, making sure that they were able to take care of themselves, helping them get through it. Literally teaching them how to do it. Nowadays, practically anybody can read the Standards of Care and bake themselves a tranny, but--and that was the weird about fuckin' Paul Walker--and I think I've got some photographs in there, well, I'm not actually sure they're Paul Walker, but I'll show you in a minute. But funny thing about Paul Walker and that whole ilk was that they objected to this. They'd say "The transsexuals have prepared themselves for the questions you're going to ask them." It was like we were being so fucking dishonest or something, right? Because we'd lie, you know?--which just flies in the face of logic. I mean, you really have to want to have your pee-pec turned into a pussy to take and go through all this. And even the ones I considered to be actively psycho, who wound up regretting having it done, did not go through the two hour or interviews that would determine if you were sane. They went to chop shops. I got--Leslie was our first client in the new place. I had just gotten there--we had just opened. We had moved all the stuff on Friday, and were really sore, it had been Miller time, and we went out for pizza afterward. I think Jan had given me a lift home afterwards, and I invited her up. Jerry wasn't too fond of her, because she was loud and opinionated and knew as much about anything as he did, but we drank some wine together and smoked some pot, and then she went home. So anyway, I came in Monday morning to open up and who should be camped out there but Leslie. Ron--who's coming over tonight, and you should ask him about some of this if you can get him to talk--he had arranged for Jan and I to take in and watch out for Leslie. I mean, he'd be nice to us, and in turn say "please look out for Leslie." And so Leslie came. She was so ultra. Very ultra, in fact. She had--well, her first impression of me was that I was a {makes scare quote gesture} "real girl," and she told me she was a model. First thing I said was "Oh, Wow! that's totally fabulous! Can I see your portfolio?" Which of course totally fucked with her, because she didn't have any portfolio. I was going through the work-up for getting my surgery at this point, and so it was a very hectic time for me. I got the OK and then had to come up with a bunch of

money, so I stopped working at the Pussycat, though I still worked at the Center, and I managed to crunch through. I borrowed some money from the Co-op, and--

[gets distracted by looking at some photos: Suzy as a boy, just before transition. Regina the call-girl. Sally. Jan. One of the NICU clients.]

SS: Well, since it's hard to see the pictures on tape, maybe we can either turn this off and continue or talk about something else.

SC: OK--what I'm trying to get at, you see--right about this time there was a lot of stuff going on. Jan was trying to scrape together some money, she was getting a student loan, and trying to take her finals. And we were trying to keep the center going, which meant doing reports, doing all this correspondence, logging the correspondence, logging the phone calls, and doing all the stuff that you needed to do to maintain your grant. Because maintaining your grant was as of much import as everything else in the process, of taking and doing the counseling. Sad but true.

SS: Well, it's just a necessity.

SC: Yes, but you had to kiss ass to the grant providers, and you had to provide actual services--

SS: So how was it for you being funded by the Erickson Foundation? Were they easy to work with, were they supportive, or were they old fuddy-duddies? Was there a first wave/second wave conflict?

SC: They let us have a lot of freedom. We were, after a certain point, taking a lot of responsibility, doing a lot of the initial intake for the Center.

SS: This center being--?

SC: The Center for Special Problems. And so we were doing a lot of the stuff for them which was like the initial screening. And we were also telling them when to red-tag certain people, which we had--somebody found out about it, and it caused quite a little shit storm, a tempest in a teapot, so to speak. Because "Oh--what right do these people who don't have psychiatric degree have to make decisions about me getting hormones, and saying that I need more psychiatric help, when nobody else is having to do that? Laura tells me I don't have to go through these people!"

SS: This would be Laura Cummings, at Fort Help?

SC: Uh-huh "Laura told me that these people are NOT professionals!"

SS: Well, that would make sense, because she was in school to get a psychology degree, and was a little older, and had a military background. Do you know anything about her, or what ever happened to her.

SC: No clue--no fucking idea.

SS: What was the relationship between the NTCU and Fort Help? Were you guys--

SC: We had no contact. There never was any real connection, and whenever there was any at all it was always at each other's throats. There never had been any between Elliot's girls and Fort Help.

SS: That's interesting. Joel Fort--who had founded the Center for Special Problems, he also founded Fort Help after he had sort of been driven out. He got driven out of the CSP some time around 1966, I guess it was, and Ron Lee took it over. And after doing a few other things, Fort founded Fort Help. And when I talked to him about it, he said that he never really knew anything about the Tenderloin Center.

SC: Who--Joel Fort?. Yeah, well, like I said, we were working with the Center [for Special Problems] and not with Fort Help, but what little things we had that would go on with Laura would produce these conflicts. And I can't say that they were doing bad things. It seemed to me that they were not doing much of anything. It was just a cult of personality, personality conflicts. So--I don't know what to say. [Looking through pictures] Now is that Paul Walker?

SS: I don't have a clue as to what Paul Walker looked like. I just know him by name. But I do know people who could identify him if they saw a picture.

SC: Now this guy, he would--wait, here's a picture of Leslie and me when she first came to California.

SS: Is this outside the NTCU?

SC: Yes.

SS: OK, I can probably find the address. It's right across the street from Old Joe's Place.

SC: It was a big garage that the building was in.

SS: And the date is April, 1972.

SC: And this is Johnny, who became Dahlia—oh! the Cinnabar! You were asking earlier about tranny bars in the Tenderloin, this is the one at that corner that we were discussing. And the other one I believe was called the Turf Club.

[break in taping to look at more pictures]

SS: OK, we had been discussing what the scene had been like around the counseling center, and who some of the people had been. You've mentioned in passing a time or two something about Sandy Stone, and I'd be interested in hearing some more about her since she's become such a big figure. What was her role in the scene back then?

SC: She didn't really have a role in the scene back then. Sandy was a professional. She was out making money, being a recording engineer. Running the boards. I got to go down a couple of times to watch her work, can't remember who I saw her work with, though. But I got invited to a couple of recording sessions. You know, she had this big black beard at this point.

SS: Yeah, I've seen pictures of her then.

SC: And I never was able at that particular point to picture Sandy as a woman. I guess that big black beard just got in the way. I was surprised. I mean, I didn't know that about Sandy when we first met. Then I got my surgery, and Sandy started coming out to me. Sandy was in a serious, serious accident with Christy Staats, while driving a Volkswagen bus, and had some severe leg problems, fractures—you know, when you plow into something with a Volkswagen, the only thing protecting your engine and your passenger compartment is your legs. Not one of the marvels of German engineering. Anyway, I sort of kept in touch with Sandy because we kept on going down to visit her in the hospital. At that time what's now Silicon Valley was full of fruit trees, and orchards, and was a much prettier place to live. That was during the summer. Then came along the summer of 1972. Jan and I had been having this guy come to the center, he was one of these guys who is not a tranny but he just hung out there and drank our coffee, and occasionally brought some dope by, or occasionally sold us uppers, he was just sort of a hanger-on. And once I was celebrating something or other, don't remember what, and I brought in a few lines of coke. Coke had just started making its inroads in those days. 1972 was really the year Cocaine was starting to become a popular drug. I mean, it had always been around, but it was inaccessible. It was something that you got into only if you hung around with rock stars. But it really hit in Berkeley in '71, '72, when the Panthers started peddling it. Now—I won't particularly buy the old line that the FBI turned the Panthers into drug dealers. But. Well, other things had dried up. Things that had been funding the Panthers had dried up. I mean, the Panthers were funded by the United States government for a number of their programs—not their gun-toting program, of course, but some of the other stuff.

SS: Like the meal programs, and schools, and--

SC: Right, exactly. That was all funded by good old Uncle Sugar. It was all part of the Oakland anti-poverty programs. And everybody--I mean everybody--had been supporting the revolution by dealing at least pot. So it wasn't necessary really for the FBI to start it. And too, there were a bunch of dirty little things going on. Particularly in South America. In Chile, Pinochet disposed of Ailende. I think there was some other sort of dirty little war in Peru. I think most of the coke that was originally coming in was from Peru. Plus, there was a lot of drugs coming in from Nam, not coke but other stuff. The drug scene was definitely getting harder. They cut the acid off and the drug scene became a much harder scene. You know, they had this whole big thing about cocaine and the contras? I don't know--I mean, I don't want to sell our brothers in the ghetto short. I think they can be every bit as creative about screwing over black people as white people can. I think that sort of thing happened a lot. [still leafing through snapshots] Here's one of the first female-to-males that I met. I can't remember his name.

SS: So, we're getting up to the story of how the center got busted.

SC: OK. I had a little coke, and I had brought it in, and I turned the guy on to it. And then about a week later--so you can see that there was no unseemly rush to take and sucker me in to this--this guy says "Could you get maybe a gram of that stuff? I could sell it and maybe make enough off it to pay my rent this month." So I said sure, but I said also that I would be putting the money up front, and that if he screwed me on it, I'd be the one taking the loss. So I went out and picked up a gram of coke for him, and when it came time for him to pick it up from me, he brought this other guy with him. I said "What's this? I don't like this at all. I'm not going to do this." So we went out to lunch, and I said I wouldn't sell. But then I took this guy aside and said look, I'll sell to you, but not with the other guy around. I don't want to have anything to do with him. I don't want to know him, I don't want to see him, I don't want him in on this transaction. So this other guy stays at the bar, and we go back to the office, and in the bathroom, out of sight, where nobody can see it and hang it on me, we do the deal. Then about a week later he comes back and says "Can you get an ounce?" I said listen, Mike--the guy I get it from doesn't even get it in ounces. Which was true--the guy I was getting it from was getting it in eightballs.

SS: So you were getting it from the Panthers?

SC: Not directly. I was getting it from a Panther hanger-on. A guy we used to call Accu-tron. He went on to be sort of a minor actor. But he was a Panther wannabe, and an actor wannabe, as well as a musician wannabe. He was a fun person to be around, but nobody ever took him very seriously. He liked being around the Panthers, but the Panthers' violence scared him shitless. As soon as the Panthers started pulling some

harry shit—like jacking up the prostitutes and robbing the pimps around Lake Merritt—he scooted. But yeah, he was probably getting it from the Panthers. There was a lot of co-mingling of the hard drug scene and the radical politics scene right about that time, and I would have to say that the hard drugs really sapped some of the radical energy. Also the winding down of the war in Viet Nam sapped some of the radical energy. A lot of us had been in it simply because of the war. Feminism actually sapped some of the real radical end, just as gay liberation sapped some of the radical end. People growing up and having children sapped the radical end.

SS: So if I understand you right you're saying that feminism and gay liberation, in your opinion, weakened the more radical elements of the anti-war, anti-statist political movement? How so? Just by pulling people into more narrow concerns, more special interest?

SC: Yes, exactly, more special interests. And a lot of people, you have to understand—well, the killing fields happened right about that time. That turned a lot of us off to radical communism. Word started coming out about all the excesses of the Red Guard in China. A lot of us started questioning that, too. And the violence—just the level of ultraviolence that the left was getting into. Blowing shit up.

SS: You mean that the left itself was dishing out, or that they were being subjected to?

SC: Blowing things up—the Wisconsin laboratory where the guy got killed. The townhouse, which we did to ourselves. The gunfights, the blowing up of stuff—I mean, I was willing to march, even willing to riot, but I was not willing to kill anybody. And they were starting to talk about killing people.

SS: What about the backlash against the revolution?

SC: Oh sure—that scared the shit out of those of us who thought it was a rite of spring to go out and march and throw stuff at the cops. But we had been shot at two years earlier.

SS: So that would have been '69—People's Park in Berkeley.

SC: Yeah—I was at People's Park in Berkeley and they shot at us with real live shotguns, firing up and away, firing high—one guy got killed and one guy got blinded, though both of those were probably by accident. They were shooting over our heads but they were shooting live ammunition at us. It's pretty scary to have the windows above you get broken from shotgun pellets. And I had started taking hormones by this point, and those hormones really cut into the adrenaline needed to go out and fight with the cops on a personal level. I also had to raise a lot of money—the price of a medium-priced new car—to pay for surgery. And by that time, of course, I was working for a police

officer. I mean, after I busted Jerry out I said "This is it. I'm not going to do this shit any more. I'm going to resolve my legal issues to avoid arrest. And if it breaks us up, well, so be it." That was a nerve-wracking experience, busting him out of there, out of this hospital, and going on the lam with him. I had my own needs. I got sick of having what society needed take precedent over what I personally needed. I got sick of my needs always having to take a back seat for the greater good of the revolution. Especially since I didn't see anybody dancing—in the words of Emma Goldman, "If I can't dance after the revolution, I don't want to be in it."

SS: So tell me more about some of the people—some of the trans people that you met at the time, in the period that we are talking about. You mentioned to me once that you had met Angela Douglas. What was your take on her?

SC: My take on her was that she was nuts. My further take on her was that as far as making radical noises, she was sort of the Holly Woodlawn of tranny politics. She was funny. She was offensive. She had some nasty cleanliness problems when it came to matters of her physical presentation, and I knew right away she was going to cause us trouble with the feminists. I could see that coming a mile away, because there were so many humorless people, and she had this sense of humor where, if you didn't share it, you were going to be in a conflict with her. She was—I don't know how to put it in a polite—well, I just didn't much care for her.

SS: I know that when she was down here, in LA, she organized the Transsexual/Transvestite Activist Organization, which she later moved to Miami—but I read in one of the Moonshadow newsletters that she put out, that she was calling Leslie and somebody else at the NTCU "West Coast Directors of the TAO." And she also told some crazy stories that she was being pressured to work for the NTCU and that Elliot Blackstone had put out a contract on her if she didn't work for you guys.

SC: That's all total bullshit.

SS: Yeah, I know, I was taking all of that with a grain of salt, but I was wondering how much of a connection there was between the TAO and the NTCU.

SC: None. Absolutely none. As far as I know the TAO had one member—her.

SS: Well, it did actually have other members. It was certainly cranky, but it was for real. But to the best of your knowledge Leslie or any one else there never had any significant contact with the TAO? No one on staff had any contact?

SC: No. Leslie didn't come along until after any contact had been made, as far as I know. Angela and Jan and I met a few months before Leslie came on the scene, as far as I remember. I would have to say that any bullshit that Angela has been spreading

about Leslie is just purely wishful thinking. And maybe because Leslie isn't around to say anything back about it.

SS: Well, what I'm talking about is stuff that was in print back in about 1974., '75. That's when she was saying this. I have no idea if she's still saying such things today. But she was saying back then that she was in touch with the Queen's Liberation Front in New York, and with Lee Brewster and Bebe Scarpi and that crowd, and also with the NTCU in San Francisco. And that she talked about a lot of bad blood between the groups.

SC: In 1974 and 75? There was no NTCU by that time. It was over by the earliest part of 1974. See, Leslie got her surgery, and between the recuperation and the grant running out and her not getting it renewed—well, now she might have brought somebody else into it, but to the best of my knowledge she didn't—

SS: Oh wait, I remember—Wendy Davidson was the other person Angela Douglas mentioned.

SC: Wendy Davidson? OK. Now Wendy Davidson might well have been brought in on it. By that time I had pretty much moved all my shit down here and I was out of it all up there.

SS: So just to try to straighten out conflicting stories—there's a possibility that in late 1973, early 1974, that there might have been more connection between Angela Douglas and the NTCU, and that in that period Leslie and this Wendy Davidson might have had some involvement with her?

SC: Yeah. Because that Wendy Davidson that you mention does ring a bell, though not a very direct bell.

SS: OK, so that's enough, though if you have any more stories about particular personalities I'd be happy to hear them. Let's try to start wrapping up some stuff. You talked about the drug bust a little bit but we've kind of gotten away from that. Let's talk about it some more, and how it was involved in the clinic starting to unravel.

SC: Well, Jan got suckered in to this, because she was desperate. She was not hooking. And this guy was good-looking in a rough trade sort of way. And she fell for him—she fell hard. She was telling me that she was in love with this guy. And I was saying "Jeez, Jan, he's kind of rough isn't he?" And she was all like "Oh no, he's really sweet, he's really nice, he's a biker." "A biker?" I said; "More like a sidewalk commando." Because that's what we called bikers that didn't have bikes. But she's like "No, he's a really good guy, a really good guy. I'm going to make a lot of money off this. I'm going to introduce him around. I'll be able to afford to do my surgery in the spring." Now, we had been scheduled to speak that afternoon at the police academy—and you know she

was really taken with this guy. Well, all of a sudden a bunch of cops--including some of my old TAC squad buddies--come walking towards the door. And I looked at Jan, and I said, "Jan, you know, in my heart of hearts I simply do not believe that these guys are coming in here because they think they are women trapped in men's bodies." And sure enough, they weren't. So it was off to the stoney-loney, where I got really messed with again. Now I need to pause again while I check on the roast. [break in taping] OK--as I was saying--Jan was really suckered in. The only reason why I didn't get suckered in was that I was nowhere near desperate. I was post. It was like, well, over the years she has thought that I did something to get off, and I really didn't. And people have accused her of deliberately fucking up, and she didn't--she was just suckered. And I felt really sorry for her. It wrecked a lot of her plans, wrecked her as a person in a lot of ways. She became really mean afterwards. It meant that I wound up spending a week in jail--during which time I was alternated between different sections of the prison, which meant that at times I was around some pretty hard criminals. And fortunately thank god for Joe Fong.

SS: Oh yeah--you told me some of this last night. Please tell me again for the tape.

SC: Joe Fong was head of the Joe Boys, a Chinatown gang, of American-born Chinese gangsters, as opposed to the Wai Ching, which was Chinese born. And he was in for like 18 murders, a whole horseshit load of murder, and he was kind of our protector the one night that Jan and me was in with the men. Well, the next day--

SS: I'm sorry, but could you tell it for the tape the way you told it last night?

SC: Ah! So Joe Fong stood all of about five feet tall, and weighed all of about 100 pounds, and there were some big, big, big nasty men in that cell block. And Joe Fong took a long look at Jan and myself, and he waved his finger at all the other men, and he said "Listen everybody. Nobody touch these girls. They're mine." And nobody touched us because little itty bitty Joe Fong killed large numbers of people. And the Joe Boys, they would kill you as soon as look at you if you ever tried to fuck with them. Anyway, Jan got out in the morning. Nobody put up bail for me. She had a car she could put up as collateral, all this, and Jan had money. I, on the other hand--well, I insisted on being put on the women's side, so they threw me in solitaire.

SS: Even though you were post-op at this point they had put you on the men's side, and they punished you for wanting to be transferred over?

SC: Right, they put me in solitaire, and after two or three days of this I freaked at being in solitaire. I said "Hey--put me in the queen's tank." They said "'We can't do that; you're a woman." I said "Bullshit. You've already had me in the men's lockup, with the guys, and now I want you to put me in with my queen sisters." So they did. Anyhow, Jan had arranged for somebody from DOB to come and bail me out--well, actually just

to sign. Like, I had the money, it wasn't that much, but I had to get somebody to sign for the bail. So, not only did I pay this woman back immediately, but I wound up spending the night with her, and Jan got all freaked out, and she went off and almost jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge. And of course, we were both immediately suspended from working at the NTCU. I mean immediately. So I gave it over to Leslie because I didn't know who else to turn it over to.

SS: Who suspended you from the job?

SC: Elliot.

SS: And what was his reason for that? Just to not draw heat? Was it punitive?

SC: Because we had been arrested, and had felony charges pending. We were suspended without pay. About five weeks later we went to the preliminary hearing. They had no evidence against me. They had a considerable amount of evidence about Jan. My attorney moved for dismissal. It was granted. And I demanded my job back. Well, by this point, my enthusiasm for it has seriously been taxed. I was always faced with the expectation that after my surgery I would move on—that the trans portion of my life would be past history, that this was just what was expected of you. And then getting busted was just like a kick in the head at that point. I had other things I wanted to do. I came to Los Angeles. I had just started getting into photography and was starting to take a lot of pictures. I fell in love with LA, I came down with Jan, because she had pled to a reduced charge, which carried a year, which was lowered to six with a kick, which is what she served. So anyway, I came down here with her, and she got castrated--[end of tape]

SS: So you guys came down here, Jan got castrated—

SC: Yeah, she got castrated, and she got breast implants down here from a guy named Gaunt, who was operating in a building right across from the Chinese Theater, which at that time was owned by Max Factor.

SS: The theater was owned by Max Factor, right, not the chop shop?

SC: No, the building the chop shop was in was owned by Max Factor. And he actually did some surgeries, including some that had less than fortunate outcomes. Now this takes us in to 1974.

SS: OK, though I want to clear up some things before we move on down to LA. Elliot told me that when the raid happened, when you guys got busted, that the cops also planted narcotics in his desk.

SC: In his desk?

SS: Yeah, in his desk. He started to get a little cagey in answering me about it, which is why I want to ask.

SC: He didn't really have a desk. He had a desk that he used.

SS: That must have been it. Anyway—he got transferred away from his job as the liaison to the homophile communities in the aftermath of this, and gets reassigned—and he's a sergeant, right?—he gets reassigned to a foot beat, a year before he retires, essentially a demotion. So he gets reassigned in 1974, retires in 1975. He was a little cagey about it, but I'm pretty sure from what followed that he caught a lot of shit for the bust, and what happened.

SC: I'm sure he did.

SS: So did you see, working with Elliot, any real serious conflicts between what he was trying to do, how he was policing, and with San Francisco cop culture in general?

SC: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It was radical. They just did not like what he was doing at all. You've got to understand that these were cops who were four years before, five years, six years before, were "busting for being." Now, they were no longer even supposed to take you in and bust you for impersonation? They were no longer able to hit you with moperly with intent to gawk. And not only were they losing control, but we were gaining in respectability. I mean, that whole police culture in San Francisco was undergoing some pretty radical changes at this point. They had been these real Irish good-old-boys, and you're going to have to look back a bit, but it was a very corrupt police force. They had always pulled all kinds of shit. And for Elliot to be doing all this, and to be helping us to move into respectability, was not exactly pleasing to them. I think they actually liked it when we had to be street walkers. I'm sure a lot of them were getting kickbacks from the bars though that's nothing I can prove. I'm sure a lot of them were jacking the girls. I had been intimidated by the image of the Los Angeles Police Department. I came down here and thought, man these guys are like knights in shining armor compared to San Francisco's police department. The San Francisco Police Department is fucking horrible. Worse even than New York City Police.

SS: So to your direct knowledge, you can't say if SFPD planted—

SC: What they produced as evidence was this empty leg-stocking thing that supposedly had residue of marijuana in it.

SS: That's what they got Jan on?

SC: Well, no—they got Jan on dealing. But that's not what she pled to.

SS: So you can't verify Elliot's story that the cops planted narcotics in the desk he used at the NICU?

SC: Yeah—what I'm saying is that it was this empty L'eggs container that maybe had some pot residue in it. I don't think it was planted, I think it was something that we actually brought in, because like I said, we were occasionally smoking a joint in the back room. But that's what Jan eventually wound up pleading guilty to--possession of marijuana. All the dealing charges were struck down in exchange for her plea. Also in exchange for her ratting on a bunch of other people. But we won't talk about that one. But no—it was all basically to bust the center, and to bust Elliot. Jan was more vulnerable to taking and getting suckered in than I was. I mean, we weren't making spit. That may not be justification, but considering how much the surgeries cost and everything--and like I said, I was hustling, I was going to school, I had borrowed some money, I was working in a theater, and I was working at the center at the same time.

SS: And someday you just needed a little chemical assistance to make it through, and a little extra green?

SC: Yeah—to just keep going. Many nights I was getting, like, four to six hours sleep. Get home at two and--and plus I had a boy friend, and he was high maintenance. I mean, I could have definitely used not having somebody living off me then. But when people blame Jan--they shouldn't do that, especially considering how this guy sort of took her romantically, too. I mean, it was a really, really nasty sort of thing to do. Get her involved, and get her to really liking him, and coming on to her. She was really emotionally vulnerable, too. She was feeling real lonely at the time, had the ol' pre-op too-long blues, and I couldn't particularly say that I knew what that felt like, because I had been in a relationship for the better part of three years by this point, and I was getting a lot of good emotional support from it. There's no two ways about it. I was feeling good, I was happy about myself, I had a guy--all the girls needed to have a husband, that was kind of a status symbol, like your giga-pet. Bring him out and show him off with the other giga-pets. Not that these men were any great prizes, mind you. For the most part they weren't. For the most part they had just got out of that place that rhymes with gale--or, in my case, I had busted him out of the military. And then, Leslie was on welfare. At one point she was living in Project Artaud with this person-- [handing over a photo]--also named Susan, whose last name I can't remember. I really should have written more down on the backs of these pictures. Anyway, her name was Susan, too, and Leslie wound up exploiting her, because Leslie was really popular and this girl really wasn't. Nice girl--can't quite remember, but I think she did some sort of art, or craft. But she was making money off this craft, plus she was welfare cheating. A lot of us were on welfare in those days. Getting it was really easy.

SS: Trying to wind up this period, this 1973-74 period, let's see--Beth got pitched from DOB in 1973, and that's also the same year back on the East Coast that Sylvia Rivera gets drummed out of the liberation movement back there.

SC: Right.

SS: Did you feel anything change--and of course also this political bust we've been talking about--but did it feel to you that that period was sort of a turning point? You know, that a lot of shit had been going on since the mid-to-late 60s--did that feel like it had sort of come crashing down around then, by '73? Was it a backlash? Because it seems to me that all the trans stuff that had been going on previously got more isolated around then.

SC: Yes, definitely. Because you're having your rise of the Castro clone about this time. You're having the cult of macho. The short-hairs. All of a sudden you're having these beautiful gay guys with this beautiful long hair, and these gentle, beatific beards, these looks--all of a sudden turning into these little Aryan close-clipped mustache, tight t-shirt, tight jeans, shaved head looks. They all looked the same. There was a definite backlash on the gay thing. Because tranny was really starting to take, and there was more than two of us now. It was like a zygote that had divided and multiplied--boom, boom, boom [makes hand gesture indicating geometric expansion]--and trannies were all over the place. I mean, in 1973 and 74, we had all these bars--particularly here in Hollywood, where I was spending more of my time by then than in the Tenderloin--in 1973 I moved down here, and by 1974 they had started closing all the bars up by then. But 1973--I was out of it by then. I was nine months post-op, I had written the last of the grants, I had gotten Leslie, I had gotten us through the break-in at the center--which I sometimes think the cops were behind--and she had moved into the YMCA, or YWCA, or whatever it was there on Leavenworth. And she was only working it like two or three days a week, it was only half-time, she wasn't getting a lot of money. Then she moved up to Larkin Street and--who's that name you mentioned?

SS: Wendy Davidson?

SC: Yeah--I guess she's the one that took it over once Leslie got her surgery. Maybe had been taking and doing some volunteer work already. But like I said, the whole culture of it was against my staying on, post-op. I was making money hands over fist--I was doing things like getting facial surgery, flying off to visit this friend in Orlando, getting labiaplasty, going to Barbizon modeling school, going weekly to Los Angeles--so I was not real involved anymore. Then came along Shannon O'Hara and that whole crowd along with Brown.

SS: OK--now Shannon O'Hara is the tranny woman who worked for John Brown?

SC: Right, John Brown and Richard Spence. Richard? Well, Spence anyway. I've got them all on tape, I can let you listen. So like I said, I was pretty much out of it by then. I was making money. I was recreating like crazy. I was living a very fast-paced life. I was sliding into anorexia, living on Obitrol and Quaaludes, and was also trying to learn 35 millimeter photography, buying cameras, just doing this whole scene--my life was very, very full doing non-trans stuff. Although half of the non-trans stuff I was doing I was doing with Los Angeles trannies--not so much transsexuals at this point, as just tranny .

SS: Back to John Brown--tell me more about how he got started.

SC: OK--if you look in TNT #6, there's an article by Gail Sondergaard. I was sort of out of it by then. But he was suckering a lot of people into getting surgery. He was suckering a lot of people away from the center, especially by early 1974. I suspect that Wendy Davidson, who I guess took it over--well, I suspect that Leslie even didn't have the talent to write the grant proposal--I mean, I had written it before, but she didn't ask me, nobody asked me, and if they had I probably would have told them to go screw themselves anyway, because there was definitely a little bit of cliquishness going on there, and I was feeling very "real girl," because that's what they were telling me I was. Even though I wasn't necessarily--and even though I was fucking all these trannies at this point. That turned a lot of people who were so involved in being pre-ops off, because I was just too weird. Not only was I ki-ki, but I was running around dressed like this--[hands over picture of herself in jeans and boot, wearing a black Patti Smith t-shirt]. That was actually a little bit later, but still.

SS: Very androgynous. Sort of Patti Smith, sort of David Bowie--very interesting.

SC: So I was running off and hanging out with rock and rollers and they were all--it was such a cultural difference. I mean, they were into fucking Diana Ross, Barbara--I'm listening to the New York Dolls and the Tubes and David Bowie. Later on Patti Smith, and Television and the Ramones. I was really into Lou Reed. There was such a vast cultural difference. This culture that I had come from, this Berkeley and hippie and radical culture, separated me off from this mainstream drag/tranny culture which has its own little rituals--and back then there were a lot less people who--I mean, like then I could not imagine slipping a little Tribe 8 into the dance mix at a party with a bunch of trannies.

SS: Another thing that perhaps we could touch on a bit more explicitly before wrapping up is sexuality. You said that you slept with a lot of tranny girls.

SC: That's right.

SS: Tell me more about that. You showed me those pictures, the ones from the photo essay in Vector [September, 1975] that Jan Maxwell had done, of you and somebody else kissing.

SC: That was Stephanie—we were pictured in Vector making out. She was my girlfriend—I met her at Suite 39 on Cuahuanga on one of my first trips to L.A. My introduction was—she came up and said "What are you doing in this bar? Don't you know it's a drag bar?" I said "Yeah, I know. I'm a sex-change." She said "Wow! Can I see it?" I said "Sure." So we went into the bathroom and she shoved her hand up my cunt. I thought "Oh, boy—I'm in love. This is great. Let me get rid of the john." So I took the john, had him buy me this expensive ring, I extended my stay by a few more days—that sort of broke things up with Jerry. He goes "I thought you were coming home on Sunday." I said, "Well, I met somebody here in Los Angeles, and we wound up partying around"—I didn't tell him that this someone was another tranny who had just fisted me.

SS: Was that your first real experience with another tranny?

SC: Yeah—well, no, that's a lie, because Regina and I had been having sex when I first moved in with her in Oakland, a few times. So I had had the experience, but it wasn't something I particularly boasted about. Most people assumed that Jan and I were a couple and that she was the butch and I was the femme. But that wasn't the case. I wasn't having sex with Jan then. That didn't come along until later.

SS: That you had sex with Jan?

SC: Yeah. And when I moved to L.A., I was still sort of trying to cling a bit to heterosexuality, but I was winding up with more and more women at that point. I had been in LA about a year and wound up hooking up a woman named Leslie—not San Francisco Leslie, this was Leslie Beauchamp—who was—politically incorrect term coming up here—a genetic girl. And I moved her in and we set up house together, which lasted about three years. I seem to have a three year cap on relationships. And I was getting involved in the women's movement down here. When I first came down here I wound up speaking on Gay Day—which was the first gay day on the west coast that had been a parade that I wound up marching in, because the other two I had been in the hospital, except I had gone to that Sacramento thing. You know, there may be some date inconsistencies in here, that I'm not exactly pinning down which month things were in, but I know they were in spring, or summer, or whatever. And actually, I think I need to take a break for a while.

SS: OK--this is a good stopping point anyway--the transition from San Francisco to Los Angeles, right about the time of the anti-tranny backlash.

Suzan Cook--Addendum
Conversation with Dinner Guests
January 10, 1998
Hollywood, CA

SS: OK--tape's rolling. We have with us tonight Ron, Amelia, Suzy, and Susan, and we're just sitting around talking over dinner. Now Ron--Suzy tells me that you have sort of just been around the trans scene for thirty some-odd years.

R: Well, what I have to offer is that in the '60s and early 70s--all the way back to about 1963--I had some experiences, and observations, and just saw some things happen. On the East Coast, Washington DC area, and Virginia--which is the South--and in San Francisco.

SS: Well, why don't you just give me a thumbnail sketch of the stuff on the East Coast, and let's spend more time talking about San Francisco.

R: Talking about what?

SS: Just what your connection was with the trans scene.

R: No official connection, just knew girls. Knew lots of them. I was working in the Washington, DC area. There was a bar--

SS: This would be about 1963?

R: Oh, no--this is 1968. That would be the year. Through 1972. That was where I met Leslie. I knew Leslie before Suzy knew Leslie, before she moved to San Francisco.

SS: But you said something about having experiences back to 1963. What were those experiences.

R: I was going to school, and during breaks in school, both at Christmas and at Easter, I would take trips to San Francisco, and during the summers I would go to San Francisco to work, or down to Southern California to work, to earn money to go to school.

SS: Where were you going to school?

R: In Utah.

SS: Mormon background?

R: I am Mormon.

SS: Oh, wow—that's my background, too, sort of.

R: Yeah—I know. Suzy told me. I was born and raised in Utah.

SS: Whereabouts?

R: Orem. But to go back to '63, I was in school, and every Christmas I would take a trip to San Francisco. Spend a couple of days, then drive down to Los Angeles, see a couple of relatives down in Los Angeles, and spend my Christmas down here. But when I was in San Francisco I would participate—I would go to shows, shows meaning drag shows, lip synch type things, and I knew a few people, but not very well, because I was just always passing through.

SS: Who did you know and where did you see the shows?

R: One of the shows was on Geary, and one—well, it's kind of interesting, actually. Back then they knew how to put on a show in San Francisco. This was in the Tenderloin, and the Tenderloin was still going hot and heavy back then. And they knew how to put on a show. It was not like the East Coast girls. Now they can really put on a show, too, but in San Francisco they had a bar on—hm, I can't remember—but it would go from about nine o'clock until one o'clock, one-thirty. And it was just a typical drag show. Lip-synching, the whole ten yards. But it was kind of different. They weren't doing the whole Madonna or Liza Minnelli sort of stuff that seems to have gone on forever and ever and that I've seen a million of. They did things like Madame Butterfly, OK? And they did a really good job, actually. It was very interesting. You'd go to the show and sit around and have drinks, and some girls were working, and then about one o'clock they'd close that bar, and down around the corner on Turk Street, or maybe on Eddy, there was a bar, and upstairs there was a bar called the One Eighty One Club, and it went until about six o'clock in the morning. It was the most interesting one. Because you've got to understand, back then, that was when the most interesting trans and t-folk would come out. You'd go to the One Eighty One Club, and they'd have a show, too, but they also had the girls who were working. And hey, back then, I was rather a novice as to what the girls were doing—because of my background, OK? But they had a good show there. They had a stage, and would have the show there, but afterwards all the girls would be in the back and they'd be working. That was what was interesting. Because back then—back in '63-'64-'65—you almost think that—how do I say this?—well, the world was different than it is today. I first saw the first sister I ever saw walking the street in San Francisco in 1963. She was nervous as hell because they just didn't allow that sort of stuff back then. I was walking down Market Street and she came holding on to the arm of this guy, and she didn't look that good—hadn't gotten her look that much together—and she was very nervous, and calling a lot of attention to herself. She was the scene to be seen. That was on Market Street. Because you see, the

girls usually lived at night, came out only at night. This was the first that I had ever seen in daylight. I thought it was some hell of a breakthrough that she wasn't arrested. Because back then, if you look into the San Francisco newspapers, the girls were arrested for wearing women's clothing on the street. And there was an important lawsuit—well, not lawsuit but a court case—in which—who was that lawyer?

SC: Melvin Belli.

R: Right, Melvin Belli--defended, which basically opened up the way for the girls to wear whatever clothes they wanted to wear, at least in San Francisco. But I guarantee it though, whether it was on the books or not, the San Francisco Police Department did not tolerate that kind of stuff.

SC: I was telling her (SS) about how they were busting people up in the Haight because of clothes that weren't necessarily girls clothes but that were clothes that were lacy or velvety.

R: That was in the late '60s.

SC: Yeah, that was in the late '60s, and also Melvin Belli's case came along a little bit later, that got 650.5 off the books. But they were still doing that in the late '60s, because I got popped outside of Maud's.

R: Well, this person I saw walking down Market Street was in about 1965.

SC: She probably got away with it because all the cops who knew to bust her just weren't on duty.

R: Probably true.

SS: Did you happen to know who she was, or was she just somebody that you saw.

R: Oh, just somebody that I saw. And she didn't look that bad. She was wearing a skirt and a blouse—you know, not androgynous, but really women's clothes—and she looked like she was about to pee her pants. She was hanging on to the guy for all she was worth. But she was making a statement, in broad daylight. Everybody looked at her, but nobody hassled her. It was not an easy time. Whereas, back at the One Eighty One Club, you go in there, and there were some really gorgeous girls in there. This is back in '63-'64-'65, and it's been so many years that I don't remember any of their names, but, you know, I would sit and talk to them, and they would talk, you know, like "Take a look at my hands. Aren't they small? Aren't they feminine?" They were very proud of their features. But you'd never see them in daylight. They were taking hormones. They looked pretty good. I've often wondered what happened to those girls. Because I was

just passing through town. But they were pretty good looking, those girls back in the '60s.

SC: They were part of that first wave that I was telling you about--the ones who got their surgery in Mexico and overseas. Would you agree with that, Ron?

R: Yeah, they probably did. Probably in Casablanca.

SS: There was actually a guy down here, in LA, a guy named Elmer Belt, who was one of the few people doing surgeries here in the United States, back in the '50s and '60s.

R: Well, I don't know that he would have been doing anything in the '50s, but he probably would have been in the '60s.

SC: Actually, a lot of them got their surgery from Jose Barbossa. He was the big doctor on the West Coast. And he actually did some pretty good surgeries. He did them in the two-step I was telling you about. But he sort of petered out when Stanford came in. But the word on Barbossa was that you should speak some Spanish, or take a friend with you who did, not because Barbossa didn't speak excellent English--nor for that matter, there was usually at least one or two nurses on the day shift who spoke excellent English, but on the night shift none of them did. So you were very iffy on the communication should you run into a problem at night.

SS: You know, I may be wrong on this, but I think Barbossa is still practicing. He doesn't do full-on genital surgeries any more, no vaginoplasty, but he's still doing orchidectomy, I think. He's Eight-something years old.

SC: Well, he doesn't practice from what I've heard, but he has a kid, a son who does.

SS: Well maybe that's who I've heard about, then.

R: No, that's Brown. He's got a son who's taken over the practice.

SS: No, this is somebody other than Brown that I'm talking about. But anyway--so, Ron, you spent time down on Turk Street in the early 1960s?

R: It was on my trail of travels in and out, but I never lived there.

SS: Did you ever go to a place called the Chukker's Club? There was a room upstairs called the Orbit Room? That had a drag show.

R: Never went to either one of those. Now the Black Light--that was there.

SS: The Black Light--OK. Never heard of that one, good. Remember the names of any others?

R: No.

SC: What about Compton's? Tell him about that.

SS: Yeah, Compton's Cafeteria. It was an all-night place. Sort of a drag queen/street kid hang-out.

R: No--never heard of that, never went there. Now if you want to talk about Los Angeles in the early 1970s, I've got lots of remembrances of that. You have to remember that I was just passing through for a few days a couple of times a year.

SC: Compton's is where I took Leslie to breakfast the first day that I met her.

R: How long had she been in San Francisco then? See I met Leslie in Washington, DC, and I basically sent her to San Francisco.

SC: And you also put in a good word for her with me. You mentioned her to me, first by letter, saying watch out for her and take good care of her, and I did. We had just the Friday before moved the office from 3rd Street to where ever it was there on Turk Street, and I had gotten there bright and early on Monday, I guess at my 10am start time, or maybe 9am, and there was Leslie out front waiting for me.

R: Yeah, I told her about you.

SC: And she wails, "There was nobody here over the weekend!" And I said, "Well, that's because it's sort of a Monday through Friday sort of operation." But we didn't have a whole lot of people coming in that morning, so I said "Have you had breakfast?" And she said no, so I said "Well, let me take you down the street here to this cafeteria and buy you breakfast." And that was our introduction.

SS: So, Ron, in the early '60s did you go up in North Beach at all? Like to Finocchio?

R: Oh, yes.

SS: Yeah, so what was that like--there were lots of other clubs besides Finocchio's up there, and I was just wondering if you could tell me if the neighborhoods had really different kinds of feels to them, if you noticed different sorts of tranny stuff going on?

R: Well, they're still the same kinds of neighborhoods that there are today. You still have the Tenderloin, there's still North Beach. Back then North Beach was Carol Doda

and the strippers. And of course Finocchio's was there, but Finocchio's has always been a tourist trap.

SC: Was there a crowd that hung out just around Melvin Belli's office, up around Montgomery Street, just below North Beach?

R: Could be, but I really don't remember.

SC: Because Leslie and I used to go to shows there. And it had been a traditional place where there had been a trans club, that originally it had been sort of like the Black Cat.

R: That may well have been, because originally, back then, San Francisco had a lot of clubs that put on shows. As compared to now, when there are hardly any. The Motherlode.

SS: There's a few, still. Have you been to a place called Marlene's? That's one of the big tranny places now. There's a lot of girls who had been--well, what I tend to think of as gay queens, more the Imperial Court sort--some of the more trans-identified folks to come out of that scene, they tend to hang at Marlene's--which is actually owned by an old queen.

R: Is it a hooker place?

SS: Not really, not predominantly, anyway, though I can't claim to know everything that goes on there--more like a neighborhood bar. It's in Hayes Valley, which is a neighborhood that seems to have a lot of old queens in it.

R: I haven't been up to San Francisco in a long time. Anyway, the only clubs that I can think of, back in the early '60s, and they had been there for quite a while, they weren't In-and-Out Burgers, the two clubs that I was talking about were there for two or three years at least, and I went to them four or five times over a three or four year period. They always put on a good show. Of course, back then I hadn't been worn out, lip synched out if you will, but I still remember that they put on some really decent shows.

SS: Anything stand out as being particularly memorable?

R: Just the one that I mentioned, that stands out even today, thirty years later, Madame Butterfly--and actually it was an Oriental queen who did it, and she did a real good job of it. Like the East Coast. See, back on the East Coast in the same period of time, I went to New York a couple of times, and there was a club there called the Jewel Box, and the Eighty-One Club, where I went a couple of times. Now the thing about the Eighty-One Club--it was live, they did their own singing, they did their own dancing.

SC: And they had people like Rickie--Rickie somebody. You'd see the pictures of them in the advertisements, but it was always Mr. So-and-So.

R: Yeah, but that was really more back in the '50s, when the queens went by Mr. This and Mr. That. By the middle sixties, the girls who worked at the Eighty-One Club in New York, they didn't go by Mr. anything. They were living their life. They would have your balls on a platter if you tired to "Mister" them.

SC: This place was over in the Alphabets, around Avenue--

R: It was on Fourth Street, 81 Fourth Street, that's how it got it's name.

SC: Yeah, but it was right at I think Avenue A.

SS: But basically East Village, right, sort of out around Tompkins Square?

R: Yeah, East Village. The shows they put on out there--and I know this is a diversion from San Francisco--

SS: No, no--that's fine; let's hear it all.

R: The shows they put on there at the Eight-One Club, at places like that in New York, they were real professional jobs. They were just gorgeous. And they had real good voices--and they must have paid them all right, too, because they stayed there forever.

SC: And they didn't let street trash like me in.

R: Well, I don't know, I'm sure they'd let in street trash if it had money. It cost money to get in, and it cost to stay in. And money is relative--I mean, back in 1965, five dollars would--

SC: In 1965 you could see the Rolling Stones for five dollars.

SS: Instead of Eighty-five.

R: Right. On the other hand, you got somebody coming in from Utah with 20 bucks in their pocket, five dollars was not a lot of money. But the girls there, they were professional, some of them lived as girls off-stage, some of them didn't. Some of them would arrive as guys, and get dressed for their show, and leave as guys.

SC: Holly White was there, right?

R: I really don't remember. But the stars were more full-time. I guess you could do that in New York City, whereas you couldn't do that in San Francisco, or in the South. But New York was certainly the place where I first saw girls on stage with female breasts. Some of them had had surgery. And they really looked pretty good—they looked damn good, in fact. There was a bunch of them. There was a couple of twins, who had been brothers, who were now sisters—they were born twins. They looked really good. And the way they worked, of course, was they'd put on their show, then go backstage for a bit, then come out and mingle among the patrons, and in some cases they were trying to pick guys up. But nothing blatant—it was real subtle.

SC: Was there also like, where you would buy them drinks?

R: Of course.

SC: And of course their drink was just as strong as your drink.

R: Oh, I would say that their drinks were not nearly as strong as my drink, but cost twice as much.

SC: Yeah, that's what I meant; that's what I was subtly alluding to.

R: Yeah, OK. And they would come at sit at your table with you—it was a lot like what the hostess girls do in Japan.

SC (to SS): Like I was showing you in that photo album from my trip to Japan.

R: Just like you were saying earlier, they expect you to buy them a drink, conversation goes along, sometimes you ask them for a date—date meaning then what it means now.

SS: And here you're still talking about New York, not San Francisco?

R: Right. This was New York. But the same thing happened at the One Eighty One Club. There were the girls who were in the show, and the girls who weren't in the show, and the girls who weren't in the show would try to pick you up. That was just the way that it is. And some of them were really gorgeous.

SC: The One Eighty One Club went on a lot longer than just the sixties, when a lot of other places had folded—it was still going in, I would say, at least to 1980. After the Frolic Room had folded.

R: Frolic Room—that's the name of that other place I was trying to think of!

SS: That was the one up on Geary?

SC: No—that was on Mason.

R: Mason, right. Yeah, the Frolic Room, that was the one that I would go to all the time, that had the early show, then--

SC: Yeah, the Frolic Room was right across the street from the porno theater where I worked as a cashier.

R: Is that right? Well, maybe we passed in the night some night back there.

SC: Oh, probably not. Actually, I started out as a customer at the Frolic Room, because they advertised, and—also I just didn't care for the Finocchio's scene—and I knew a couple of girls who worked there. One of whom worked during the day across the street at the Original Grubstake, because you really didn't make a lot of money at the Frolic Room by the early 1970s, and it was something that you did as much for fun as for anything else. You worked mostly for tips, and for the potential picking up of a date for afterwards. This gal was pretty clean cut, didn't do really hard drugs, and had a nice place, nicer than most, and she worked by day as a boy flipping hamburgers at the Grubstake—may even have been a part owner of the Grubstake—and then worked as a queen at night at the Frolic Room. I was going in to work at the Pussy Cat Theater when this—oh, he used a boy name, a pretty, pretty blonde guy, wasn't living as a woman, and I think went on to own a club or two, something like that, later on—Randi, Randi Johnson, that seems to ring a bell, R-A-N-D-I.

R: Well, that's really the sum total of my—Um, I had my first encounter, my first run-in with the sister, was actually in Salt Lake City.

SS: Do tell.

R: Ha! Do tell indeed.

SC: You mean they had Mormon sisters? Yeah—do tell.

R: Well, it turns out they weren't Mormon sisters. There was a club on State Street. And somehow they had an ad in the Tribune, and I saw it down in Orem. It was apparently a gay club that had brought in some queens for entertainment, and I saw this ad, and decided that I had to go see this.

SC: Did they serve liquor at this place? I thought Utah had these really strict liquor laws.

R: Oh, it was a bottle place.

SS: Yeah, they've got this system where you can't buy liquor by the drink--you have to bring a bottle of your own stuff, and pay a set-up fee, and they sell you the mixers. It's still like that.

R: But that didn't really matter to me, because I didn't drink. I was a good little Mormon.

SC: Yeah--I was just curious about the mechanics of it. Because a lot of places, a lot of states, actually control drag bars through their alcoholic beverage control people.

R: Well, I don't think this was really a drag bar, but just a bar that had this drag act once.

SC: Yeah, I'm just trying to figure out how it would work. Sounds like having to buy the package and bring it in and drink there--so the regulation might have to have worked differently.

SS: But anyway--you saw an ad for this bar having a drag show.

R: Yeah, and it was kind of interesting. They had a black queen in the show. And another queen who was really heavy. The black queen was really pretty. She tried to pick me up. And to be honest with you, that was my first experience with trying to be picked up, and I didn't have the slightest idea what was going on until it had gone on for quite a bit, and then that scared the shit out of me--that was just not part of my world back then.

A: I was just wondering about the atmosphere in that bar--was it really different than what you saw in other places?

R: Oh, yeah--you've got to understand Utah to understand how it is. But it honestly wasn't as bad as it was in Virginia in the early 70s. Virginia really has blue laws. It's not a Mormon state, but everything was really uptight and out-of-sight. Whereas in Utah, things just didn't exist. Every once in a while things like this drag show would just come through, and then leave town before the cops could get organized enough to do anything about it. It was strange, really strange. The truth of the matter is that everybody there was looking over their shoulders. You know, when you're living in Utah--and Utah back in those days in the middle sixties was probably 90% Mormon, whereas now in Salt Lake City it's more like 50-50. The Mormon Church ran everything. So if you went into a place like that bar, and you were a good Mormon, you'd always be worried, because if the place got busted then your name would probably be in the newspaper--so it was really a case of that you could never relax.

Later on, in the 70s, I did get to know some of the Mormon sisters working in Salt Lake. It was really tough on them--in fact I know that one of them committed suicide.

SC: There was this group out of the Kansas City area called the Jewel Box Revue--

R: Never saw them.

SC: Never saw them? I was just curious, because they traveled, and I thought--

R: Well, not to Salt Lake City, they didn't!

SC: Well, it's just that I've heard of them performing in places like Texas and Denver, and other places in the Rocky Mountains area, and I just thought--

R: Well, I'm sure they did, but they never came to Utah.

SS: So what made you curious--good Mormon boy that you were--to go see drag queens in the fleshpots of Salt Lake City?

R: On no, no, no, no, no. Don't get me wrong--this wasn't just an out-of-the-blue sort of thing. I remember Christine Jorgensen from back when she had her surgery. My interest in the sisters goes back to when I was six years old. This was not something that, when I was 25 years old, I suddenly--

SS: Well, that's exactly what I'm asking. What was the interest--you know, what was your six-year-old interest in Christine?

R: Well, actually Christine was more from about the time when I was ten. But I was interested in that she'd had a sex change. I thought she was gorgeous. I saved every article I could get my hands on. And you know, everybody has got a different story. My story is that--well, see, I used to be a woman. No, that's really not true. That's just a little joke.

SC: Well, we'd all believe it, wouldn't we? Does he not fit the stereotype? Look at those little hands.

SS: Oh, I could see it, definitely. Small feet, about the right height. But seriously, I'm curious about what your interest was in the sisters, even from that early age.

R: You have to understand that things evolve. What your interests are at one time--well, you have to understand that people change, that everybody is a product of their environment, as well as a product of their genes, and my interest early on was probably the same as yours and Suzy's. Gender confusion. I didn't know whether I was one or

the other. But I was raised a good Mormon, and not being around the girls--well, eventually I decided that being a girl was not what I was--that being around the girls was more what I was interested in than being one of the girls. There was a time when I wondered if I was interested in women's clothes, and I tried them out a few times, never got a real kick out of them. I was wondering whether or not I should have the surgery. But I didn't have any fire in my belly, if you will, to actually go out and do it. The fire in my belly that I always had my whole life was not actually to be a girl but to be with them. And that probably makes no sense to you. I'm really not interested in being the significant other to a sister, but I'm not what you would call, well, what do they call, um--

SS: A trans fan?

R: Yeah, I'm not what you would call a trans fan, I--

SC: Well, it is true that you have played a significant role in the lives of several girls, almost a brother role, a supporter, a guardian angel to a number of us. And you have insured that at least two or three of us have gotten over some serious rough points in our lives.

R: My interest--well, I don't know whether to say that I outgrew it, or decided I didn't want it, but being a transvestite just didn't turn me on. Being a drag queen didn't turn me on--certainly not the lifestyle. But I was interested in post-ops. That's what I eventually evolved to--my interest is more to be the male partner of the post-op. That's hard to describe. You know, if you're the tranny, then you can say this, this, and this is what I want. And not this, this, and this. If you are a drag queen then you want this and this and not this and this. Everybody can put themselves in a little box and say this is what I am, and this is what I want. I don't really have a little box.

SC: Except a lot of us are finding it harder and harder to put ourselves in neat little boxes.

R: Well, that's true--and the boxes are getting bigger. It used to be you could define a transsexual by a nice 3x3x3 box. Now you need at least a 9x9x9--because all of a sudden there are lesbian trannies, and all kinds of things. And everybody calls themselves a transsexual these days. The girls that work in the clubs, and the show queens, they call themselves transsexuals, and they'd never think of having surgery. And they'd never call themselves homosexuals. The definitions are becoming blurred.

SC: Or if they do have surgeries, they are more likely to have surgeries on the parts of their bodies that show.

R: That's right. Anyway, that's sort of where I come from.

SC: I want to ask you a little bit about Washington, DC. You were there for what—two or three years?

R: I was there for four years, 1968-1972. I'll tell you stories about Washington, DC, but more important is stories about the South, the mindset of the South. I lived in Maryland. Washington DC had a bar called Dolly's, but then there was another bar way out in the boondocks, out on the Chesapeake Bay. I have no idea why they stuck a bar way out there so off the beaten track. I mean, it was in no city—it was way out there in the woods. You had to fight the bears to get into the door. But they had a pretty good show, actually. But it was in Dolly's in Washington, DC that I ran into Leslie. The reason why—how it worked out, was that, well, you know, I'd go up to Dolly's and just hang out—because you know I'm really not into picking girls up—I'm really more interested in relationships than in one-night stands—but anyway, I ran into and started talking to Leslie there, just conversation-wise, and I noticed that she didn't drink. And I thought that was very strange. And she also didn't smoke, and I found that extremely strange—I'd hardly ever run into a sister that didn't smoke and drink. And so I asked her why she didn't smoke and drink and she said that she was a Mormon. I thought that was rather exciting, because I was, too! And, you know, I had to go in the next day to teach Sunday school. So, we started talking, and that's how Leslie and I got together, and we've been friends ever since. But Leslie was from Virginia, southern Virginia. And after I had know her for a while she wanted to go to this contest in Virginia—and this story is to show you the mindset of the South at this time, this is in 1971—to back up a little bit there was another girl who was in the show, very pretty—and you know, this being the late '60s, early '70s, nobody dressed on the street, nobody—

SC: So what had happened to me in upstate New York, that getting run out just a few years earlier, that was pretty typical of this small-town mentality.

R: Well, this is in Washington DC that I'm talking about, not a small town. This girl, one time I went out to dinner and there she was, sitting in a booth with some guy—and she was dressed, and looking really good—very, very good—and it took a lot to do this at that time, and she went full time not too long after that—but this story is to illustrate, well, I took Leslie and Phyllis to this contest, where they were going to participate in this drag ball—where they would get up on stage and compete for a prize. She wanted to go back home and show the old folks how far she'd come, you know?

SS: Do you remember what city this was in?

R: I'd rather not say; let's just say a city in southern Virginia. Oh, what the hey—Virginia Beach.

SC: It's OK--she's (SS) seen the pictures of Leslie in Drag magazine; she knows all about her.

R: Oh, so she's seen the pictures of Leslie with all the glitter, and the shimmering white hair? OK. So anyway, I was there, and I took them down to Virginia Beach, I was the one that took them down to that ball. And the ball was fine, as far as balls go, but nothing like they had in New York, just something for the locals--I mean, the drag balls in New York City, well--anyway, I took her down for that. And after the ball was over some of the people went to this little joint that had a bar, and we had gotten ourselves a booth, but at the bar there were four or five girls sitting there at the bar, this is about midnight, and all of a sudden these cop cars and a paddy wagon pull up and they came walking in, and one of these cops was really drunk. They hauled all the girls away from the bar--these girls were all dressed from the ball in formals and things, and these cops hauled them away for disturbing the peace, and they were getting them into the paddy wagon, when the bartender came over and said you'd better get these girls out of here while you can. So I went out and got my car, just walked right past the cops and got my car, drove around the paddy wagon into an alley that ran behind the bar, and there was a back door, and--

SC: This wasn't that inconspicuous yellow Hornet that you used to drive, was it?

R: Yes it was! [Laughing]

SC: [Laughing] That bright, screaming yellow Hornet!

R: Anyway, turned into the alley and parked by the door, and zip! out the door they come, and down the steps and into the car, and zoom!--off I go for Washington DC as fast as I can go, and we never looked back.

SC: Ron, that car was not what you could call non-descript.

R: Yeah, it was a big yellow banana, but on the other hand it got us the hell out of Virginia Beach.

SC: I always loved that car.

R: But they were arresting people. I mean, those girls got arrested and hauled to jail, and their only crime was wearing a dress in public.

SC: This is what I always refer to as mopery with intent to gawk. They just make up stuff to bust you. They'll call it disturbing the peace or obstructing the sidewalk, but--they even used to pull people out of this restaurant, the Grubstake, if they were dressed

too—they even hauled a queen out of there once to the sidewalk then busted her for obstructing the sidewalk—

R: Weelllll, now I don't—

SC: They did, they literally did—I saw it. This was in like fall of 1971. Now they may have had something else on her. But they hauled this queen out to start questioning her and they wound up hauling her away and charging her with obstructing the sidewalk when she had been inside this little hamburger stand next to where I was working.

R: Yeah, those San Francisco police were pretty brutal.

SC: And corrupt.

R: But the South was—these girls weren't just arrested, they were beaten up. One of these cops was drunk, and two of the queens were manhandled as they were taken out, and—well, they were just treated pretty bad. And it has changed some over the years, but between 1968 and 1972 you never saw anybody on the street in drag. But now, you take New York at the same time—I'd go to New York all the time. New York was just fabulous. Because at that same time you'd have some of the most outrageous drag balls you'd ever see in your life.

SC: That's where that Queen video I was mentioning earlier took place.

R: Now--this is way before what you saw in Paris is Burning. These were mostly Puerto Rican girls. They were the ones who really put on a ball. [End of tape]

SS: So we were talking about drag balls in New York, mostly Puerto Rican.

R: Right. These were really big balls, and the girls were serious about winning. You go to a ball these days and it's pretty boring. The same thing all the time—evening gown competition, or what have you. But these girls really put on a show. They'd have these big headdresses that went up eight or ten feet. They put ever dollar the could ever put together into putting together their outfit. I mean, they would literally vie with each other—they would put everything they had into these balls. This was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that is pretty much gone now. Those were the days when there were real balls.

SS: So let me ask you—in this period 1968-1972 that you've been talking about, one of the really big events, especially on the East Coast, was of course Stonewall. Did you see that making any change in tranny culture, because of the gay lib stuff?

R: Not really.

SS: Do you just think they were two totally different scenes?

R: No, not really. At this same time period--I remember when Stonewall happened. It made a difference, but--again, remember that the New York cops were no easy crew either. The only time I ever saw any girls on the street in New York was at night, or at balls. They just didn't go out in the daylight. And the cops would use any excuse to be able to hassle them. You know, it could be that they were having a slow night and would say "Let's go out and bust some queens." That was not an unusual thing to do--they were doing that on a regular basis.

SC: They do that everywhere.

[portion of tape inaudible]

A: From what you are saying, it sounds like one of the things that we are really talking about here is class. That the drag bars were forced to be a kind of lower class environment.

R: It's the same way now. That's what it's always been like. You go down here to Peanuts--a Peanuts-type bar would never have existed back then.

SC: But a Plaza might.

R: Yeah, a Plaza might have. But the difference is that one of them has a show and one of them doesn't. You can get away with having a queen bar if you have a show, and the people that come there are there for the purposes of the show. But you go to Peanuts, and although they have a show, the purposes of people going there is not for the show. The cops would never have allowed a bar like Peanuts to have existed back then.

SC: Not too long after that they had the Speak 39 over here--

R: Oh, now! Now you're getting into the flower children of San Francisco sort of thing-

SC: No wait, before we get into that I wanted to ask you about something. Nowadays Georgetown is considered kind of a very gay and trans friendly area of Washington DC.

R: Back then it wasn't. Back then it was just the high-price area of Washington DC. It was where the Kennedy's hung out.

SC: Actually, in Gore Vidal's first novel, oh, what was that?

SS: The Pillar and the Salt?

SC: Yeah, I think that was it, it mentioned the gay bars in Georgetown. I imagine that it must have been what I would call a straight gay bar, a power bar, and I say straight gay bar to mean that it was all men in there, and they're just smoking their pipes and cigars and snifting brandy.

R: Right, there never would have been any queen bars in Georgetown.

SC: OK, so the gay bar scene that Gore Vidal was mentioning back then was pretty much limited to these high-powered closet cases.

R: The gay portion of Washington DC then was the northeast. If you were gay you went to the northeast, and that was it. There was a pretty large contingent there. But the only drag bar was down on L Street. The only drag bar in Washington DC.

SC: Basically, they put the drag bars in ever city in the low-price district.

R: Of course--because basically they don't even want them to exist. They're like porn shops--you know, you don't allow them to exist near schools.

A: They were confined to the parts of the city where the marginalized people of society already lived.

R: Exactly. The drag bars were always in the Tenderloin-type areas of any city. Whether that be the Tenderloin of San Francisco or the Combat Zone of Boston, or L Street of DC or State Street of Salt Lake. Or Hollywood.

SC: There was that little golden era that I miss so much of--but, well, I first came to Hollywood in, maybe March of 1973. And on Cuahuanga, right around Hollywood Boulevard, there were three drag bars. There was the Alley, there was the Speak 39, and the Onion II, right?

R: Uh-huh.

SC: Then there was a restaurant. It was down around Hollywood and--it was this late night place.

R: That was later.

SC: No it wasn't--it was in '73. Now what was the name of that restaurant? Was it Danielle's?

R: Danielle's sounds familiar.

SC: Well, there was Arthur J's—that was an all night one. Then there was one right next to the Bank of America, it's right where the McDonald's is now. I've got notes on it. It's where Stephanie and I first met—and she's (SS) been introduced to Stephanie's photograph. And then there was like a closure on all those bars. They closed them just before I moved down here—they closed the Alley, then they closed the Onion, then they closed the Speak. And then they opened one that was on Ybarra—do you remember the name of that one?

R: DePaul's.

SC: DePaul's. Then the whole scene shifted into being at that point—1974—in North Hollywood, the C'est La Vie—

R: No, that was later.

SC: No it wasn't—I remember hopping on over there.

R: Well, it was there, but it wasn't—once DePaul's—see, the sisters have a way in Los Angeles of being their worst enemy. What they will do is run a bar until it is forced to close, then move on to another bar. What happened then, at the Speak 39—

SC: Boy was that a rough place.

R: Well, all these places are rough. You know, they don't put them in Beverly Hills. The Speak 39 was a wild, wild, wild, West place. Then it closed down and DePaul's took over. And that went on for a couple of three years and then the girls became outrageous—

SC: Tranny fights.

R: —and they closed that place down, and they started going to C'est La Vie, until it got to the point that Buddy and his lover just weren't willing to put up with it any more, and they just quit.

SC: Had to—there was that shooting in the parking lot that wound up driving the nail into the coffin.

R: Well, Buddy had said that they were just sick of it all.

SS: Question—do either of you know anything about Los Angeles in the mid-to-late 1960s? No? Ever hear the name "Sir Lady Java?" No? Well, all I know is what I read in

the papers, but I was looking through the early issues of the Advocate from 1967-68, to see what connections I could come across between tranny stuff and early gay lib and homophile stuff down here. And there was this big case that got a lot of attention in the gay press at that time involving this queen named Sir Lady Java who had a gig at Redd Foxx's club on La Cienega.

R: I remember that. Of course, I was not in Los Angeles at the time but rather in Utah.

SS: Well, she was not allowed to continue performing. The club was threatened with losing its license. There was this thing called Rule Nine, through which LAPD claimed the ability to regulate public entertainments. This actually became a California State Supreme Court case, about this Rule Nine, which basically said that there could be no full female impersonation on stage, that it was illegal. Now, the situation was that by 1967 the anti-cross-dressing laws had been overturned state-wide. People could legally cross-dress on the streets, but people couldn't do it legally on the stage as entertainment. There were a number of shows at clubs in L.A.--but they couldn't do what was called a "full drag" show--and the performers had to wear pants under their dresses, that sort of thing.

R: Well, now, I don't know if--

SS: I'm just telling you what the papers were reporting at this time. And Lady Java--she was trans, lived as a woman all the time--and her argument was that--"Look: I can live this way legally, I can dress like this on the street, but I'm being barred from my field of employment because of Rule Nine." And she organized pickets outside Redd Foxx's club, and she--

R: Well, you see--

SS: No, let me finish. She was picketing, there were other queens picketing, the ACLU was involved in it, the ONE Institute was involved with it, members of the homophile groups were out on the picket line over it, and it was getting all this coverage in the gay press. The ACLU wanted to take the case, but because of how the rule was written it had to be the club owner, rather than the performer, who filed the complaint. What basically had to happen is that a club had to be shut down under Rule Nine, and the owner had to challenge it. And nobody was willing to lose their license just to test this rule in court. About a year later somebody did get shut down for doing a full drag act, and the case went to the Supreme Court, and Rule Nine was overturned. This was like in 1968. As a result, the way that LAPD regulated entertainment in bars was overturned. Basically, the court decided that an appointed administrative body could not essentially legislate, or pass law. That that was unconstitutional. And it was after that ruling that the Queen Mary and a few other places started doing full drag show.

R: Well, the Queen Mary was here in 1963.

SS: Yeah, but what I'm saying is that until 1968 it was illegal in Los Angeles to do full drag as theatrical entertainment, and that the shows until then had been partial drag. And then right after the Supreme Court ruling there were five bars that started up doing full drag. The Queen Mary was the only name I recognized in the stories I was reading.

R: Probably the Redwood Room.

SS: So anyway—it just seems like there was an awful lot of activity going on down here in the period 1967-69 about the way that LAPD regulated public space, and I just wondered if you guys had any memory of it, or had heard people talk. And granted, all I know about this is what I've read in some of the press coverage of the time.

SC: The thing is, some of the addresses you're mentioning are not under the jurisdiction of LAPD. They're county

SS: Huh—so maybe the articles were talking about the Sheriff's Department.

SC: The Sheriff's Department and LAPD operate under quite different rules.

R: But she (SS) was saying that LAPD was the ones regulating public entertainment.

SC: Yeah, but in the West Hollywood area where Redd Foxx's club was, LAPD wouldn't have had jurisdiction.

R: Sure they would have—West Hollywood didn't exist then.

SC: Yes it did. It wasn't part of LA proper, but it was in the unincorporated county. So it wouldn't have been LAPD, but LA County Sheriff—which has always been a lot more viscous than LAPD, in a certain way.

R: I'm not sure that all that is accurate.

SC: And the Sheriffs cover a much wider area than LAPD. And Sherman Block has been in there way too long, and is getting way too old—but that's modern politics. Part of why Sunset Strip exists—and this has nothing to do with the trans scene—but why Sunset Strip exists, and why it starts at Crescent Heights is because Crescent Heights is where it becomes West Hollywood. And all the clubs—we're talking about really outrageous clubs operated by some serious gangsters—Cero's, which later became what-the Comedy Store?—all those places were outside LAPD jurisdiction. This goes back to the early '50s. People like Bugsy Segal were controlling the money, and these were all

people trying to get outside the environs of the LAPD. That's why the whole La Cienega Strip and Sunset Strip areas developed. And that's sort of an aside, not particularly relevant here, because most of the drag clubs really weren't operating in Sheriff's territory, but were in the city and fell under LAPD.

SS: That's really interesting, because in the Advocate I'm pretty sure that they were talking about LAPD, rather than the sheriff's.

SC: Well, this could be a touchy thing. Because you see, some parts of La Cienega actually--well, one side of the street is in Los Angeles, and the other side of the street is county. So it could be--because West Hollywood actually stops at Beverly, or somewhere around that--there were some weird jurisdictional things that allowed some clubs to stay open vastly later than some others. This went on though the 70s, at least. Like they would allow all-night clubs on one corner--like, down where we were, down where the Beverly Center is now--there were a couple of clubs that could stay open all night--that is, could serve alcohol. Whereas others had to close their bars or turn into a juice bar, or else at the stroke of two o'clock had to shut their doors entirely. So they had these weird little jurisdictional things going on. Now, you were mentioning the Queen Mary. That's been open for centuries. It's like the oldest surviving one. And the Plaza has been open for a long time, too, hasn't it, Ron? At least the early 1980s. The thing is, they don't allow prostitution there.

R: Weee!!!....

SC: No, it's true--they really don't allow open prostitution there.

R: You go in there, if you speak Spanish, you can do it. The thing is, most of the patrons are gay boys and they are not interested in picking up the queens in the first place.

SS: OK--I want to ask you another question about San Francisco. Down on Turk Street, did it seem to you a really racially mixed scene, or was it mostly white?

R: The One-Eighty-One Club was almost all white. There was very little Blacks and Mexicans. Now the Black Rose, that seemed racially mixed. And I have always noticed that the sisters, especially the queens seemed to be more tolerant of racial mixture at an earlier date than society in general. Back then I thought--well, I definitely remember seeing black girls there. As to whether or not it was more racially mixed or not I can't say, because I never went over into the Black neighborhoods--like the Fillmore--to see if there were any queen bars over there. But I remember that the Tenderloin seemed pretty tolerant of almost everything. Except that the Black Rose did seem to be a black bar.

SC: But the Black Rose, by the time that the 80's rolled around, that was real integrated.

SS: Well, there was Black Rose I and Black Rose II, and I assume you're talking about the first one here?

SC: Um--OK. And now, on the other hand, there was a lot more language segregation than--there were several Latina queen bars over in the Mission, and that crowd didn't really hang with--well, it was more of a language problem than segregation. Because people of Latin ancestry who didn't speak Spanish hung out with the whites.

R: That's really true. Back then, what you would have to say is that the Tenderloin was English-speaking.

SS: Yeah, there are several bars in the Mission. I'm not sure how far they go back, but the one that is still really big is Esta Noche, on 16th near Mission. And there was another one two doors down.

SC: I've been there. Must have been 1985.

R: But you were asking about integration, and I would have to say that for a nice white guy from Utah, the scene was as integrated as anything that I'd ever seen. But keep in mind my point of reference. I was about as white-bread as you could get.

A: What about the class mix?

R: Well, if you lived in the Tenderloin--

SC: You were low class.

R: Right, you were real low class. Now, I knew a couple of sisters who lived up on California Street up on Nob Hill, and they were working girls, but--you know it seemed like the nicer looking girls were the ones who could make it out of the Tenderloin. And if you could live outside the Tenderloin, well, just as with all things having to do with the sisters, there is a strata. The street hookers lived in the Tenderloin, whereas the bar workers might just come in at night.

SC: As a call girl, I never played much in the Tenderloin. I played on Polk Street, I played South of Market, I played at that one club that I was telling you about that was the underground club up off of Castro on Market.

R: Didn't you also go to North Beach?

SC: Yeah, I also went to North Beach sometimes. And when I did go to the Tenderloin it was usually to drag a trick to a show at the Frolic Room. And I wouldn't take him to the One Eighty One or any of the other rougher ones because I didn't want any of the other girls hitting on him.

R: Now, I always thought that the One Eighty One Club was actually pretty classy.

SC: I'm just saying that when I took a trick to a show, I took him to this place in North Beach, or I took him to the Frolic Room, because when you took a guy in with you the girls there had enough class to not hook on your john.

SS: Remember the club in North Beach?

SC: Well, that's the one whose name I can't remember. The one that was between North Beach and Melvin Belli's office. And they used to have the famous one--that retired a few years ago--Charles Pierce. Charles Pierce used to perform there. I would occasionally get guys, who even though they came to me pretty often, to my ad, which was pretty much a straight ad, and I would tell them that I was on the rag, they would say "Oop--I know this scene. I think it's really cool, and can I take you out? Can I still date you?" And because it meant a big score, and to not have to wait around and hassle for somebody, even though I had Jerry around at the time I would give him some money and tell him to go out with some of his friends for the evening.

R: Just to finish up with the early 1970s. In Los Angeles there was one place that really hasn't been mentioned yet, and that was the Redwood Room. It was down on 8th Street. And it was sort of like the One Eighty One Club. The entertainment was live, some of it. It had some really nice-looking girls there. Andrea Nicole. This blond girl that sang country and western. I went there quite a few times. The entertainment was always very good. They had a couple of Chinese girls who just blew my mind, they were so beautiful. I've never seen anybody else who had their shit together that much.

SC: You took me to a show once where somebody was doing Liza Minnelli and somebody else was doing Barbara--

R: Everybody does Barbara.

SC: I know, but it was at this place that was really off the beaten track--off of my circuit anyway--and I was wondering if it could have been this Redwood Room. But it was synch.

R: The Redwood Room was live.

SC: No this was a really good mimic show.

R: Well, Redwood was live.

SC: OK, so it must have been another place. I've got pictures of it. I'll have to show them to you another time and see if you can help me identify it.

R: Sure.

SC: Because this was professionally lit, professionally dance-trained people, not like—well, I've seen some pretty good acts at the Queen Mary.

R: I was about to say, this sounds like the Queen Mary.

SC: No, it was not the Queen Mary. It was like definitely south of Sunset. Very much south of Sunset. I don't know, it might even have been—well, I can't place it. It was just some place you dragged me off to once and I was never able to find again. I just got so lost because I did not know LA particularly well at that point.

R: You know the Redwood Room was owned by a couple of lesbians? Eventually the just sort of gave up on it.

SS: Let me ask you another San Francisco question. You said, Ron, that Finocchio's was always a tourist trap. But you said you went there—so I was just wondering if you'd give me your impression of it.

R: I only went there once, and I wasn't impressed.

SS: Was this early 60s, or later?

R: Late 60s. The thing was, you couldn't live as a woman and work at Finocchio's. It was impersonators.

SS: Yeah, good—one of the reasons I was asking is that another interview I did, there were two women who worked there—two transsexuals—one of them left in 1962, the other one in 1963, and based on their experience—Finocchio's experience with them—they refused to hire any more trannies. This policy of no full-timers, no hormones.

R: Exactly. And that's why I just wasn't interested.

SS: In the late 50s, early 60s there was definitely something more interesting going on there, as far as transsexual things are concerned. Finocchio's actually has a really long and interesting history, though. It started in the 20s as an illegal speakeasy. It was always something of a tourist bar, but also always something of a place that had a

significant gay presence, at least through the 30s and 40s. And by the 50s it was certainly one of the big nightclubs in San Francisco. They had a lot of LA movie stars come up, and society people. I've seen a lot of Aleshia's photographs of all this. It was a much bigger deal in the 40s and 50s than it was later. Aleshia claims that, from her point of view, the place really went downhill by the mid 1960s.

R: I'm sure that was certainly the case.

SS: So anyway, that's why I was wondering when you were there, and what your take on Fin's was.

R: Like I said, it was later 60s, and they would haul the busloads of tourists in there. It was on the Grey Line Tours, and you'd go by there and just see bus-bus-bus outside. It was just on the circuit. And the girls would come out and do their show, and people would buy a couple of drinks, and then they'd be on their way, and then another show would go on two hours later.

SS: Was Lavern Cummings performing when you were there?

R: I'm not sure, but I think so.

SC: Now, you know it's like that quote about homosexuality, "The love that dare not speak its name scarcely shuts up." It's kind of like that with us. People look at us and think "Oh. OK. Whatever." But back then it was different. Back then we were rare.

R: There was just as many back then as there are now.

SC: There was just as many back then, but there weren't as many that--

R: There were just as many but they were scared.

SC: Exactly. They were scared.

R: Anyway, that was my only experience of Finocchio's. Went there once and wasn't impressed. Just a bunch of guys in dresses with slicked-back hair. Wasn't what I was interested in.

SC: Now that Charles Pierce, on the other hand, I found genuinely entertaining. I really liked his shows. He didn't really do lip-synch--he did take-offs. He did live humor. Stand-up. He was a really primo comedian. Did, you know, though, do the standard characters. Another one like that, who I may still have a record of, is T.C. Jones, who did a similar sort of thing. You know, they didn't necessarily have to do that "grab the wig off" thing, because you knew that they were being impersonators--it was really

kind of uncanny sometimes, with some of the vocal things that he did. It's almost like you were watching a movie of some of those people as they actually performed. Especially when he would do somebody like Judy, and especially when he was younger. But I haven't seen him in years.

SS: Ron, you said that you started coming to San Francisco in 1963. Did you ever have a chance to go the Black Cat before it was shut down?

R: No—that seemed like pretty rough territory to me. Remember that I was this virgin from Utah, and all of this was pretty strange to me. I saw a couple of fights outside the Black Rose that pretty much scared me off from there.

SS: No, not the Black Rose, the Black Cat.

R: Oh, the Black Cat. No, I don't know anything about that. I never went there.

SS: Yeah, it was more of a bohemian bar, but that's where Jose Sarria held court, and did a gay drag show on Sunday afternoons. It was closed down in 1963.

R: I don't know anything about Jose Sarria. I really wish, though, that I had spent more time in San Francisco in the 60s. But I would say that until I left Utah and went to Washington DC that I was really conservative. It was only then that I really discovered that there could be life outside the Mormon church. And still, even to this day, my life is to a large extent shaped by the Mormon church. Oh, I might have a glass of wine now and then, but in terms of the principles, and the things I grew up with, they are still with me. You can't just wash that away.

SC: That's just like me being shaped by my Catholicism. I may be a Buddhist nowadays, though not a very good Buddhist, and I may have gone through my periods of atheism and witchcraft, but the Catholicism I was raised with is still very much there.

[The rest of the tape contains a discussion of personal religious backgrounds]