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**LAKEFX + STORYCORPS  
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

**Interviewer: Lavon Pettis / Dawn Posey**

**Interviewee: Larry Scott**

*Lavon Pettis: My name is Lavon Pettis. I am 35 years old. Today is April 17<sup>th</sup> and we are broadcasting from StoryCorps here at the Chicago Cultural Center for the Lake Effects Festival. My relationship to Larry "Cowboy" Scotty is a spiritual one where he's like a godfather, an aide and security, and a lifelong companion.*

Larry Scott: My name is Larry Scott. My age is 64. Today's date is April 17<sup>th</sup> and we're broadcasting from StoryCorps. Relationship to my partner is that of a lifelong friend and a spiritual thing also as well. We have Dawn sitting in with us and she's also a spiritual contact with me, that we have close contact with God. Thank you very much.

**Dawn Posey: I'm Dawn Posey. My age is 45. Today is April 17<sup>th</sup> and we are currently located at the Chicago Cultural Center for the Lake Effects Festival, and my relationship to Larry, better known as "Cowboy Scotty" to all that know and love him is he is a spiritual guidance. He is a mentor and a father figure in my life.**

*Lavon Pettis: We invited Cowboy down here today to talk about the life of an artist. Cowboy is someone who was raised here in Chicago. He's known as one of the original 64<sup>th</sup> Street drummers, and if you know about Chicago and you know about the drums you might go to 63<sup>rd</sup> Street now, but back in the day people went to 64<sup>th</sup> Street. Can you tell us about that, Cowboy?*

Larry Scott: Yes I can. We started out actually from The Point down on 57<sup>th</sup>. It was called The Point in the Hyde Park area. Also we had a whole lot of chaos back there. Martin Luther King was doing a thing – Chicago – we had the Black Panthers, we had Fred Hunting [ph]. By the way I'm one of the original Black Panthers in the Chicago chapter, 2250 West Madison.

**Dawn Posey: Salute.**

Larry Scott: Thank you very much. Also we weren't the unity of all the street arrivals. I would say tribes. I wouldn't say gang, thank you very much. These people are my brothers and my people as well, and we'd like to continue to have the unity – bring back the unity. It's not that we are not a people that stick together. It's a thing that we have been institutionalized. And I'd like to say we bring back the unity and all power to the people. Thank you very much.

*Lavon Pettis: Power to the people.*

**Dawn Posey: Can you tell me how this actually all started for you? How did you initially get involved?**

Larry Scott: We was at Wilson Junior College back in 1968. I think we was on the corner of 71<sup>st</sup> and Stewart [ph] – somewhere in that area. We went to Chicago State University, where we was with Bobby Rush [ph] and a few more original Black Panther members, and we got together and everybody told they story as well, and we realized we have to foundation out here to help feed black people and bring them back to the world in a legit way. But everything backfired according to this government, and they smashed everything that we did. They smashed our papers, which was called the *Black Panther Press*. Thank you. All power to the people. Also we had the food program going on and we wanted to get all our people together and stop the abuse of drugs that was being pushed down our lane, and it was gonna be pushed down our lane whereas it would cost less than cigarettes. And now they have happened and our people have been destroyed. We are under cover and we are still doing a great job bringing our people back to the unity of the black people and we love Chicago. Thank you very much.

*Lavon Pettis: Wow, free lunches. The whole free food program, that's one of the reasons why I received free lunches when I was going to elementary school, and I will say that I'm very thankful for that because that program that originated with the Black Panthers went nationally, and then was adopted federally. And now you're seeing it to where a few years ago with Chicago we were – there was some legislation pushed to get school children to be able to have breakfast in the classroom because the reality is that a lot of people don't have the basic resources, and so there are a lot of youth who miss a meal.*

Larry Scott: Absolutely.

*Lavon Pettis: And they don't get what they need, and at least by the time that they get to school something is served.*

Larry Scott: Of course.

*Lavon Pettis: Now it's a whole 'nother issue about making the food nutritionally viable, and I hope we can go back to that, making sure that they're getting the essential nutrients in the meals, because they're not getting it right now.*

Larry Scott: We gotta cut out the high cholesterol and the fried and lets' get back to the vegetarians and let's eat more vegetables and fruit. Thank you very much.

**Dawn Posey: You're absolutely right. It is very essential—**

Larry Scott: Thank you.

**Dawn Posey: That everyone eat, but there's nothing more important than making sure that our children eat—**

Larry Scott: Correctly.

**Dawn Posey: They eat first and they should be given the most nutritional food that there is available because that's what their growing bodies need.**

Larry Scott: Absolutely.

**Dawn Posey: And it cuts down, as she said, on future diseases and everything, but it's very important that kids have everything that they need to be able to grow up healthy and strong. So thank you so much for that. It's very important. Very grateful.**

Larry Scott: Thank you, Mrs. Dawn.

*Lavon Pettis: So you mentioned the Panthers, and you also mentioned the fact that they were a tribe in your mind, but you also know that all of these different gangs came into effect during that time as well. What do you feel like was lost as far as if at one point the gangs were about some kind of protecting their neighborhood or looking out for their people or just being regulated to their block, almost like a block club in some instances?*

Larry Scott: Absolutely. Actually the situation was set up for the black people not to have a gang, but more so a club of unity and watch over it and mastermind taking care of our neighborhoods wherever they might have been, east, west, north or south. But we wanted it to be clear that it was a unity thing the way it started out. It was not started out as a gang or to kill one another. It was to bring unity to the black community.

**Dawn Posey: Where do you think it went wrong, where as the word got out about who you are, what you're representing and what you're trying to achieve? Where do you think it went wrong where people totally took, tried to change it into something very negative and very much about violence as opposed to about being a family, a brotherhood, a community and sticking together and helping each other? Where do you think it went wrong?**

Larry Scott: We needed more people to step up to the plate and say you got the right string but the wrong yoyo. We needed people that would continue the unity. Jeff Ford [ph] tried it, so did Barksdale [ph] and a few more of the great people of Chicago. These were very great people with the right idea but the wrong concept of people that was

surrounding them. An apple is not gonna fall that far from the tree, so therefore we had to pick them apples up that was rotten and throw them away. Thank you very much.

**Dawn Posey: Why do think that people suddenly viewed this as an actual threat as opposed to being something that was positive? It turned into people viewed it as the word got out as a threat to the community and to everyone. How do you – why do you think that that happened?**

Larry Scott: For the last 200 years that I know about here in the United States black people have always been a threat just being black.

*Lavon Pettis: So systematically we're looking at 1968 and you have these different fractions – the power movement, the art movement, all of these things were happening here, and Chicago was one of the hippest and hottest places.*

Larry Scott: It was called the land of the cool gents – Chi-town.

*Lavon Pettis: The land of the cool gents – really.*

Larry Scott: Right.

*Lavon Pettis: Are you giving a shout out to Herb? Hey Herb. How you doin'?*

Larry Scott: I can give a shout out to Herb. The brother knows very well back in the days of the Times Square in the '60s and all the nice music coming from Motown. Hello Herb. This is Larry Scott speaking to you. God bless.

*Lavon Pettis: God bless you, Herb King [ph]. So when it came to all of that, in Ready Rock crack cocaine started and turned the neighborhoods. Wasn't that more so one of the reasons why all of these different organization, and I'm not talking about the Panthers, but some of these organizations, that they started fighting and eating their own young – drugs, money, resources?*

Larry Scott: Right. Actually it altered the whole situation, the way it was planned, and when it was infiltrated into the neighborhood it was certain branches of certain people that I would dare not speak about because they were all my beautiful black people. But they were misled, misguided; they were gave the buildings by people and power of politics. It was a lot of things done that could've been done differently, but only if you can see into the future.

*Lavon Pettis: I hear you on that. So when it comes to the future, where we are now, what made you resilient with all of this going on and that was happening?*

Larry Scott: I was educated to bring back the freedom fighters and fight for your rights like Martin Luther King said. We've been to the mountaintop, come on now, give us our 40 acres and a mule. Thank you very much.

*Lavon Pettis: So you're a freedom fighter.*

Larry Scott: Absolutely.

*Lavon Pettis: Absolutely.*

**Dawn Posey: So do you see – how do you see things picking up where it left off and being viable in the community again but in a positive way where as the word gets out and more people get involved that it becomes something very positive so people don't view it as a threat in any way? How do you see this coming back?**

Larry Scott: A lot of this is actually politics. And you gotta look to the politicians and see how they act before the city reacts, because the people of the street react to the way the politicians running them. If there's no jobs they will take. They have no choice but bring something to the table. Thank you.

**Dawn Posey: Do you feel that it became that way because people saw us coming together and standing up and being strong? Do you think that that probably had a lot to do with why?**

Larry Scott: The way the government did it – we were took and we were slammed in such a way – just like modern day slavery. We were thrown into these places and convicted of crimes that over 80% of the people are innocent on, and they still sitting there. And this thing is called politics, and we got to live with that now. Just like I said once before, we mastermind our own police, we must say to the people [FOREIGN LANGUAGE] and let them know, just like Mohammed Ali did it. We must stand together and bring back the unity. This is the freedom fighters of Chicago, and Reverend Jesse Jackson, keep doing your good work. From Larry Scott. Thank you.

**Dawn Posey: What part are you playing now in bringing all this back?**

Larry Scott: The major part is being experienced as I am – I would like to take the time to tell people put God first, you second. If you do that all your answers will be answered. Thank you very much Miss Dawn.

*Lavon Pettis: So you have so many young people out here who grew up renegade, unable to take direction, unable to listen to any kind of authority figure, don't know how to share, don't know how to play well with others, there's this core value system that's not there. So how do we restart those essential things if they don't have it by the time they're 19, 21?*

Larry Scott: My theory of that would be to create more community services for the kids. Give them their playgrounds. Give them a basketball court. Give them a swimming pool to go to. Stop destroying our schools in the black neighborhood and putting it in other neighborhoods. I'd hate to say where they're putting the money, but it seems like it's leaving our neighborhood. Thank you very much, Immanuel.

**Dawn Posey: What do you feel is the best way to reach the children now? Because it's a totally different generation of children right now that – how they're being brought up, all the things that they're being exposed to in their everyday life and every shape form or fashion through music, through television, through everything. They're being exposed to something totally different. How do we bridge that gap and reach them and give them more of a sense of pride and value and more sense of community as opposed to overtly violent or negative? How do we bridge that gap?**

Larry Scott: I would say the fathers should step up to the plate and start being fathers and don't just be a daddy. That's #1. #2 would be have the mothers take courses to learn how to cook and keep they house so that the kids can see that guidance and live off the way we raise them. Because you can raise a kid – you can take a horse to the water but I'm sorry, that don't mean he gonna drink it. So therefore it's all in the raising. If you raise your kids and you stand behind them and discipline the way coordinated as you should, I think we have better results with our children of today's future. Thank you.

**Dawn Posey: Tell me more about the term “63<sup>rd</sup> Street Drummers”. Tell me more about that and where it came from and what it really – what it totally encompasses – what it means.**

Larry Scott: It was the unity of the world. We played the same music as played around the world. You can go to Cuba, you can go to Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, anywhere you go, and how is it? Is it strange that we're carrying the same music, the same rhythm around the world and never met them people overseas 5,000 miles away? But yet and still God is traveling cosmologically to us and we are carrying the tribe on through our drums. The first telephone was the drum. Thank you very much.

[SortyCorps facilitator: How has music played a role in your life throughout all of this?]

Larry Scott: Music – the drum was one of the first instruments of the gates of heaven. You heard me say “one of the first”. They don’t know which one it was, but we know the drum was one of the first instruments of the gates of heaven. Then you have the harp. So we know the drum was one of the first instruments of the heavens because God created man and he created woman. He took man’s 13<sup>th</sup> rib and gave us woman, and I thank God for that. Can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em. Just love ‘em. That’s what I’d have to say to the world. [INAUDIBLE] be fruitful and multiply. Have many children as you can while you can while God give you the strength to, and take care of them kids. Be responsible. Just be a brother. Be a black king and call our sisters queens. Please call them by their first name. Thank you very much.

*Lavon Pettis: So who are some of the musicians you’ve collaborated with?*

Larry Scott: We had brother Oshamwa [ph], Bruce Crosby hello, Will Crosby. We have some of the people of Chicago lakefront – Kimaho [ph]. We have brother Glen. We got so many different brothers out there that ride the boat with me.

*Lavon Pettis: And what about the dancers?*

Larry Scott: And the dancers. Lavon Pettis, you should know. You’re one of them and a few more like Kitty and a few more – Miss Flojo [ph] absolutely. And then we have not just the Shakerays [ph] such as Lynn that makes them over at Jackson Parkfield House. Momma Edie [ph] and then we have our art culture over on 47<sup>th</sup> and King Drive. Your girl. Alpha is another one of our sisters that creates our art exhibits and do a fine job. I think she’s over 100. Let’s give her 101. Thank you very much.

*Lavon Pettis: Phantom gallery Chicago network.*

Larry Scott: That’s what I’m talking about.

*Lavon Pettis: Continue to do your thing. Actually the Phantom Gallery right now – Alan and Alpha have an exhibition in Stockholm, Sweden, so let’s intersect to that. Let’s look at how the arts – did it take you anywhere?*

Larry Scott: Yes.

*Lavon Pettis: Did you leave Chicago?*

Larry Scott: Yes.



*Lavon Pettis: Were you able to do anything with it?*

Larry Scott: Yes.

*Lavon Pettis: Did it provide an income for you?*

Larry Scott: Well, in such a way – art I think took me to the gates of heaven where it gave me a look at the insight of what heaven is really like. Heaven is a place where you feel younger, you look younger and you don't have to worry about starving and eating. I think it's a place where you are so calm you have no bad thoughts. And that's the way that God created and I think that's what he had put into my mind and I know that's where I'm going in Jesus' name. Thank you.

**Dawn Posey: Where did it first start for you musically? Where were you first exposed to music and learned about music? Was it at home? Was it through schools? Where did you first learn?**

Larry Scott: I started out – good question – I started out at Antioch Baptist Church. I think the year was 1956. And I think Mahalia Jackson was doing a thing at Antioch Baptist Church. It was Reverend Daniels back in that time. My mother had bought me a drum and I brought that drum to church. I was so attached to it. It was something God gave me and I didn't realize why am I doing this. And He lead my hands to do certain rhythms, and now any rhythm you put out there I can do with the drum. So therefore I think it started at Antioch Baptist Church. The year was 1956.

**Dawn Posey: Did you actually take any formal lessons?**

Larry Scott: Yes. We took music lessons at Yale Epigray [ph] Center and a few more places. King of the King. Yes we did, and we followed through and the more I went at it the more I realized it just was a God gift. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: How much do the drummers rehearse?*

Larry Scott: A real original Chicago 64<sup>th</sup> Street drummer will rehearse every time he see a drum. He will touch his drum every day. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: And are there any women drummers?*

Larry Scott: Yes there is. My sister Diane Dunn [ph] is one of them, and then you have Wanda Ralstad [ph] served in the Black Panthers with me. She's also a drummer/pianist and she now have a DVD online.

**Dawn Posey: Shout out.**

*Lavon Pettis: So with the drummers – to play with an ensemble, to play with a group you have to know how to collaborate with someone else.*

Larry Scott: Yes.

*Lavon Pettis: You have to be able to hear the other person and do the call and response.*

Larry Scott: Yes.

*Lavon Pettis: So tell me about what that's like on the beach with 50-60 people. Someone might be amateur and the other one might be more experienced. What's that like?*

Larry Scott: It's a great feeling to me because I know how to take people that start from the beginning like Jesus Christ did. We must walk amongst the thieves and everything else – the criminals – and take them and put them in a good world and give them music – something to put their mind into instead of being institutionalized. All they walk around and is talking about is jail. Let's take that out of their mind and put them back on track. So what do you do? You teach them how to play the drum and teach them how beautiful it is to look at the water and see the moon shadow come up across the waters.

*Lavon Pettis: But I want you to be honest with us here. Realistically do the drummers – are they always able to hold the one together?*

Larry Scott: We hold one another together. I'd have say it's all about the unity thing. You can have 50 drummers and if you coordinify everything right you will hear a unity that you haven't heard in a long time, and it's around the world played that way. It's called the circle. There's no smoking in the circle. There's no drinking in the circle and there's no nakedness, nudeness, in the circle. It's a think of the heavens.

*Lavon Pettis: So what happens if there's discord? Like let's just say someone wants to play like a Latin rhythm, more a Latin influenced rhythm, and someone else is maybe a little bit too hot? Like how do the drummers figure out how to work that out with one another?*

Larry Scott: Play what they are playing. That way that will bring them to play what you are playing. Thank you.

**Dawn Posey: Tell me one of the fondest memories that you have. Tell us a story about one of the most fondest memories – one of the experiences that you have had.**

Larry Scott: We was at the lakefront. I think the year was 1969 or '70. We had [INAUDIBLE] tunes on the lake and we made [INAUDIBLE] sounds like: chingobah] And we created that from The Point. And a few more good activity – who else was out there with us? Wes Montgomery used to come visit every now and then. He played on the north side up in old town. As a young man I got a chance to be around some of the good people like Marshall and the Sidelights [ph]. I went to school with The Emotions [ph] – did some numbers with them. Then further down the road got to meet Irv Winterthi [ph] and a few more good people in the music world such as Chaka Chan, who I grew up with on the south side of Chicago, 79<sup>th</sup> Street. Hello Chaka Kahn. This is Larry Scott. And a few more good members of music from Chicago that rode for the best from that mess, and they're living good now and they are spiritually inclined. And I'm so proud of my black people for carrying that name and that flame. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: Wasn't there something that happened where the drummers and a group of other people had to get together to save South Shore Cultural Center? It was a country club at one time.*

Larry Scott: Yes.

*Lavon Pettis: Can you tell me about that and who all came through for that?*

Larry Scott: If I'm not mistaken they wanted to take the lake front and put a casino out there, which I believe the mayor and the politics had a lot to do with that, but after finding out that DuSaba Museum [ph] proclaimed this land over here as a black cultural center, I think that was erased immediately before it went any further. Just like Meg's Field [ph] went down and it was told not to destroy because it was a landmark. Now they took pals [ph] and Xs and put on May Field [ph]. Now we have no lake front airport. It's the same thing – politics. Thank you very much.

*Lavon Pettis: So I heard Sammy Davis and Eartha Kitt and other individuals who would be considered to be international status celebrities put their own money, came back, they held fund raisers with like Carol Adams [ph] and Phil Koran [ph] and I'm sure there were a lot more people – and Geraldine DeHaas [ph] involved in that effort. But they were able to raise the money themselves to save the cultural center. And then something happened politically and they decided that the owners wouldn't sell it to them?*

Larry Scott: Absolutely.

*Lavon Pettis: And so that's how it became acquired by the Chicago Park District.*

Larry Scott: Right.

*Lavon Pettis: But you all put the effort forward to raise the money to even save it.*

Larry Scott: Yes. We had aldermens – we had mayors that allowed things like parking meters to go in the park. Now if you look back in the past there was no parking meters there. We'd go fishing or you'd have your fishing license and everything was in order – go down to city hall and make sure everybody had their vending license and set your vending out there and just – it was really to have a good time and listen at the music of the world, which is part of my culture, and that part of my culture is the drums.

*Lavon Pettis: Yes I was saying I second that motion. I totally disagree with there being meters in the park districts. I was born in Chicago. I wasn't raised here, but one thing that is a really good memory for me is spending summers here with my father or my grandmothers, and we would hang out at Garfield Park or Douglas Park or even coming down Rainbow Beach. All of these places – and it was such a great thing to do to gather and be communal and see all the other families of the neighborhood. I don't think there should be any parking meters in the park.*

Larry Scott: It was a sell out. Like I said, it was politics and they sold out our parks and for the next 100 years this is what we're gonna have to go through – the crisis of politics. That's what I mean when I say politics. A lot of you listeners out there understand what I'm saying when I say politics. Leave the names out. If you're very intelligent don't get in no trouble. Don't have them pick you up because you used names, and there's plauses in the law, so watch out out there and just keep guiding your path. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: One of the things that we wanna hit on that sometimes happens to many different artists no matter what stature you are in life – you can fall, right?*

Larry Scott: Yes.

*Lavon Pettis: And when you take that fall you might have a unforeseen circumstance – unemployment, a loss of revenue – anything could happen. But in Chicago you have many artists that experience people in general the homelessness factor. And so can you speak upon that or us?*

Larry Scott: Yes. Right now presently it's a sad thing to say. I might not look like it, but I'm homeless now. I had a lady up in St. Paul put me up because I was misled and misguided. I was in Chicago burying Mr. James King, which was the bodyguard of Elijah

Mohammed [ph]. And I came here to put my people away. When I got back to St. Paul I had a eviction notice. Why? Because somebody pushed my motorcycle over and when I had my son come remove it they said I violated it. How could I violate it when I wasn't even there to violate any of the rules? And this lady's name is Miss Julianne Quest [ph].

*Lavon Pettis: So let's go into for you, now you're homeless.*

Larry Scott: I am homeless now presently.

*Lavon Pettis: And so can you please just share with us how you maintain during winter?*

Larry Scott: It was a hard winter for me. Now one of the strategies that I used – when your homeless, if you getting any kind of income and you wanna survive out here, get you a Greyhound bus or a Vega [ph] bus. Move around. Move to the heat parts of the United States instead of lingering in the coldest place like Minnesota. That's where I was evicted in 40-degree weather, and I don't understand it right now, but I have my lawyers working on it because I think it's unjust. And if her had heard my call when I called him I wish they would fly back at 773-449-0989.

*Lavon Pettis: We'd like to say with that I'm glad Chicago has some kind of clause in place to where people can get evicted during the winter months for a certain amount of time if the weather's over I think like 30 degrees or something like that. Maybe it's like November until around April.*

Larry Scott: You gotta look at this, Miss Pettis. Minnesota is a world of its own. They got they own rules. It's nothing like Illinois. So I was put out in 40-degree weather – didn't care where I went or how I went, just get out my building. That's what I was told.

Lavon Pettis: And this led you back to Chicago.

*Larry Scott: It led me to a warmer climate where I knew a few more people, because all my people have ceased to exist. They are all gone and buried.*

**Dawn Posey: Can you tell me about any organizations along the way that may have helped? Because there are different organizations out there that do help artists while they're going through all types of financial struggles and things like that. Have you ever been aware of any of those organizations, tried to take advantage of them?**

Larry Scott: Yes I have, Miss Dawn. You have the SNAP program going on. You got the Wilder's program going on up there, and you also have the EBT program going on – human resource going on. And you got to know these things. You got to do your

paperwork before you can walk anywhere, especially homeless. You must have a current ID up to par, so that if you're stopped and harassed by any officer you have perfect ID to show, and what's your purpose of being there. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: So what kind of resources do you need right now?*

Larry Scott: The sources would be – I was under the HUD program for lower income. I'm a senior citizen now and I've learned survival. And survival means day by day. It don't mean week by week because there's no guarantee you're not gonna be incarcerated. There's no guarantee that you make it to the next day. All you know is you have God in your heart and you know how to treat people and you want people to treat you as well the same way. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: And so when you came back to Chicago did you find housing? What happened?*

Larry Scott: Thus far no. I am still searching and I've still got applications out in St. Paul, hoping – they scrutinized my record. It was another Larry Scott here that scarred my name and I have to clear that up.

*Lavon Pettis: That guy.*

Larry Scott: That guy named Larry Scott. It's another Larry Scott that really screwed me up.

*Lavon Pettis: The infamous.*

Larry Scott: Right. But I have proof of that. I have no federal cases against me, so why should I be held back from having my own apartment like I was at Ravo [ph] high-rise in St. Paul – downtown St. Paul?

*Lavon Pettis: So now you're working towards—*

Larry Scott: Getting a new spot for me to survive in. It would be a place I would call home. Yes. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: And are you finding the resources you need here?*

Larry Scott: In Illinois, no. My income comes from St. Paul, Minnesota where I go and check all my business from time to time. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: So are you looking for housing in St. Paul or Chicago?*

Larry Scott: I'm thinking about trying Chicago. Something gotta give sooner or later. I would prefer sooner than later.

*Lavon Pettis: So right now you have temporary housing here, but you're trying to see if something opens up in St. Paul, but if you have to—*

Larry Scott: I will come back to Chicago gratefully and say that I'm one of Chicago's very own, and knowing I'm a musician and an artist, I'll get in where I fit in anywhere in this town because I know I'm part of Chicago, the great Chicago.

*Lavon Pettis: Would you get paid?*

Larry Scott: God will pay me.

**Dawn Posey: What are some of the ways that you think that people can help artists? What do you think some of the things that can be done to help artists as they go this transition and to help them maintain some stability so there is not a lull in homelessness and things like that? How do you think people can help?**

Larry Scott: I think people can start by let's let these homeless people give fundraisers. Let's make it legal for them to have fundraisers. If they a good cook, the can cook a good cookie, I say sell it. Let them homeless people in the door and let them share the grandchility [ph] of living out here in the world. All we have to do is believe. You got a lot of people homeless that's got great skills and they're held back because of the politics of the paperwork. All we need is people to let them people – give them vending license. Give them a way. Show them to the Salvation Armies where they can get clothes and boots and shelter themselves. And if we create more shelters that also would help. Thank you very much for the homeless.

*Lavon Pettis: Would you be willing to work on some kind of project like that? You talked about with the Black Panthers like you guys were self-sufficient and you created the lunch program, and you provided the—*

Larry Scott: I was part of it.

*Lavon Pettis: And you provided the after school programs and these other resources. So do you think you and a group of your friends – associates—*

Larry Scott: Constituents. Yes, we can put together something. All we have to do is use the park districts to have meetings – a place we can meet that’s legal and tender, and what we can get together one by one or two by two we put it together and let’s bring unity back in our community. By the way, everybody is invited to this. It don’t matter what tribe you ride with. Let’s get the unity back together. Thank you.

Lavon Pettis: That’s thoughtful.

Larry Scott: Absolutely.

**Dawn Posey: Tell me this. What’s next for you? What do you currently have going on? What’s next? What do you see next?**

Larry Scott: I’ve been doing a lot of live entertainment on my Congo drums. Trying to push that on my artwork and just to get a little better and more defined. If I push it through the churches I think that would help also. If you homeless, go to the church. People don’t realize the power of the church. Go to the church and you’ll find food, shelter, you’ll have food to take home wherever you call home. You can create a grill. You’ve been out there. You know what I’m talking about. You can take rocks and refrigerator grills and make yourself a place to cook and at the end of the day, believe in God. Have faith big as a mustard seed. Thank you very much.

**Dawn Posey: What is it that you like people to know most about you completely?**

Larry Scott: That I’m a Gemini. I’m very versatile. I can change channels with the government just as quick as they can change channels on me. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: You’re gonna have this filed away. Co-intel pro. He’s gonna be on the black list.*

Larry Scott: You kinda get good at that. When you learn what survival’s really about. It really gets rough. What the rough get going when it gets a little rougher. Just believe in God and I think God will make a way. You’re never homeless if you have God in your heart.

*Lavon Pettis: So I think the message that you’re projecting here is – because I don’t want people to get caught up on the whole church and all of these different things, like seek some kind of spiritual health. Seek some kind of organization, no matter – as long as it’s something positive and again, offering you some kind of helping you – supporting you.*



Larry Scott: Right. Also I spoke – all the tribes – get together, go to these churches, have your meetings at these churches or community centers so we can have unity back in the black neighborhood. You see, we never lost it. We were told that we lost it because we was misled. We've been misled for 200 hundred years, my brothers and sisters, so let's get that unity back and watch the rest fall in place, and we can raise our children to believe in what we are doing as adults. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: So we're gonna be looking for that unity at 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Beach, making sure that y'all drummers are playing together.*

Larry Scott: 64<sup>th</sup> Street.

*Lavon Pettis: And being nice and making sure that y'all holding the rhythm.*

Larry Scott: Absolutely. You can dance – bring grandma – bring auntie out there, bring the uncles out there. Bring the great-great-uncles out there – the kids for 1-2 all the way to 99, let's bring them out there and just love the world and barbecue and cook and feed the people. If you see some needs to eat, give them something. The good book say be fruitful and multiply. Let's do that. It's time for the unity to come back, and Larry Scott is telling you right now as a Black Panther, we can do this. We did it then. Let's do it again, and the underground is fine, but let's bring it back out in the open. Let's put it on the front page. Hello.

*Lavon Pettis: You have a message for the younger artists? Chicago has a lot of great talent – some really budding musicians. Anything to say to them?*

Larry Scott: Yes. Like an example – hypnotics – very good group of mine.

*Lavon Pettis: Hypnotic Brass Ensemble.*

Larry Scott: Yes, absolutely. I watched them grow up and now look at them. They're on world tour and they're doing very good and I pray to God that they do even better. And also know this – when the young people are out there and they're doing their music, know this – have the unity. Don't worry about the oppressor. He's gonna be there anyway. You must do the oppressing now. You must police yourself. Watch your little brother and your little sister. I guarantee you God will come into you and it'll be a better way for us. You see somebody needs something, help them. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: That's our StoryCorps for today. We thank the Lake Effects Festival and Google and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events for inviting us into their booth today and giving us the opportunity to even share our story.*

**Dawn Posey: Thank you so much for sharing your story and telling us so much about you.**

Larry Scott: Thank you very much, dear. Also I'd like to thank StoryCorps and the Lake Effects for being involved and bringing me to this point, and all I can say for the people of Chicago and to the United States and around the world would be all power to the people. And respect your black people. Thank you.

*Lavon Pettis: We love you Chicago. Stop the violence. Put down the guns. Get yourself together. Pull your pants up. It's a whole like that we can do. Even I can do myself. So we're gonna try to put our best foot forward and show the world why we have these talents.*

Larry Scott: Let's have these meetings.

**Dawn Posey: Take care of the kids. Embrace the children. Take care of the kids. They are our future.**

Larry Scott: Yes. Community service. Thank you.

**Interviewer: Leah Urzendowski**

**Interviewee: Jay Torrance**

**My name is Leah Urzendowski. I am 32. This is April 17<sup>th</sup> at Chicago Cultural Center and Jay Torrance is my friend and collaborator.**

My name is Jay Torrance. I'm 41 years old. It is April 17<sup>th</sup>. We're at the Chicago Cultural Center and Leah Urzendowski is my friend and also collaborator in theatre.

**It seems like there's a better name than collaborator, doesn't it? I wanna be like—**

We make plays together. We perform and write plays.

**We sweat a lot together. I think that brings you closer. Like I know if Jay didn't shower today.**

I usually do, but surprisingly there are lots of people who don't.

**They don't.**

You're good at having conversations with people who don't though onstage, like you need to put some deodorant on.

**I think when you become – after a while you're just like hey this is just for everybody. I'm not mad at you. Do what you want in life, but shitskies, if I gotta have your crotch on my neck, do a sister a favor. I mean it's physical theatre for God's sake. You at least have to wash your clothes once a week, that's all I'm asking. Two weeks even; I'll give it to you – ever. So you said you have a very specific memory – so we've worked together for 10 years.**

In Chicago, yeah. Because I came to Chicago and started performing with the Neo-Futurists in 2002. But my specific story about remembering exactly when I met you was because we were in an audition that Leslie Buchsbaum [ph]—

**Buchsbaum Danzig [ph], yeah.**

Who was at the time the artistic director of 500 Clowns brought us into to audition for the Blaire Thomas [ph] *Ox Herder's Tale*, right?

**That's right.**

So I go in this room at Link's Hall [ph] and it is filled with the most wonderful performers who I would ever wanna work with.

**It's true. Everybody was there.**

It was a great clown room, and I had just taken a class with 500 Clowns, and that was really fun with Leslie and Molly, but anyway I walk in this room and it was just fun audition because everyone there was a blast to play with, and basically we were just like playing around as clowns. But I distinctly remember you writhing on the ground and they had us in some circle like some – I don't know – we were free form in circle, but you totally were – it's like who is this black girl who's going nuts.

**Somebody get her a napkin.**

It was fantastic. And the other thing I remember about that audition is because at the end of it we went to it all and it was very fun because you saw like all these people playing around and it was just a blast. But the last thing they made us do was each of us individually had to stand up in front of each other, and then we had to – they told us—

**See God.**

See God. Look out the window and see God. And you're not allowed to use words, but tell us what you see. I remember sitting there and all these different clowns like looking out this window and seeing God, and it was pretty terrible. That part I thought was terrible. It was hard. Some people did really great, but the idea of it terrified me. It was just like I don't know how to do this.

**Right, because you're sitting there because you're all like God, I hope I see God as good as they do.**

They really saw God.

**But then you could also be like that was bad.**

I don't think it was so good.

**I don't know what they saw – maybe a praying mantis, but it wasn't God.**

I didn't get the show, but I remember that, and then the very next day I was walking into the Neo-Futurists theatre, you were on your bike on Ashland and Foster, and you were so memorable because of your look because you've got this awesome look.

**Because I'm 8 feet tall. Huge breasts, just huge breasts, giant feet, billowing hair down my back. I'm like a gypsy, but taller and prettier.**

And you're bedazzling. It's like what really sets you off.

**Also the face tattoos and horns.**

I thought it'd catch on.

**These are all choices we make in life. I thought it would catch on.**

I'm walking into the Neo-Futurists, you're on your bike, and I look over and you look at me and you scream, "I know you." I just started laughing, so you left a really big impression on me. And then like a year or so later we got cast in Red Moon's show, and before that you had started dating your now-husband and I had then got to know you a little more than that, but then we got to work together in about a year.

**Yeah, because you guys did *Daredevils* together. That's right. Was the first show we did – was that *Hunchback*?**

*Hunchback* was the very first show we did.

**And then we did *Picked Up*, right? So we did *Hunchback* at Red Moon.**

We did *Picked Up* because of we were doing *Hunchback* at Red Moon and this is a remount of a very fun show, really physical, beautiful – Leslie Danzig [ph] directed it and they would stuff us before the show up in this dressing room.

**It was their dressing room, but they used it as like a – it was their costume room, but we were there in the dead of winter.**

Dead of winter, no heat. *The Hunchback* is a really physical show. We're trapped in this room.

**Because the bathroom is behind the audience, so we can't even use the bathroom.**

And they don't want anyone to see us because I don't know it was like a secret or whatever.

**That there was a show gonna happen that they paid to see with people.**

So we're all trapped up in there and we'd be trapped up in there for a good hour and a half more.

**Yeah, because we'd warm up really heavily and then they'd be like the audience is coming in so everybody goes up in that tiny room together. Sorry, costumes are wet.**

We'd be trapped in there, but we'd be trapped in there, and the whole time was very entertaining and fun because – mostly because of you. You're very entertaining and fun, but during that whole time I was just sitting there going Leah, you need to write your own; you need to write a 1-woman show. You need to do it. But then right after that is why *Picked Up*, because we were together and it was so fun just to hang out with you.

***Picked Up*, that was like—**

I wrote that character for *Picked Up* specifically for you.

***Picked Up* – this was a show that was born from you and Dean Evans and Ryan Walters at the Neo-Futurists, so this is their prime-time shows, and the idea was that each week you would have six writers that would write a TV pilot episode for the stage.**

Brand new.

**Then they would show the pilot for that one weekend.**

Onstage, performed live.

**And then – onstage, performed live – and another thing – to at least 10 people.**

Probably producers; we're not sure.

**They didn't say they were. It wasn't [INAUDIBLE sounds like: job] recommended. So you would write a pilot episode, and then the three head writers – we had head writers because there were six episodes.**

We had a team of head writers, like a writing team, and they pitched ideas. We chose six of them, and if your idea got chose then you were the head writer with a staff of seven writers in the writing room to finish your script – this pilot script that would be staged and performed.

**Ben and Jay and Ryan and Dean would do like this dance in the beginning about having to write these pilot episodes, and then at the end of each episode—**

Mostly it was about being 30-something and not having health insurance.

**Someday—**

Really wanting like a break. We made a divo song about it.

**It was – it was so good though. So then each episode would premiere and the audience would decide whether or not it would get picked up.**

They'd judge it.

**And the funny thing it ended up being six weeks of tech weeks essentially because you had a new episode – I don't think you guys had thought about that.**

Brand new frickin' show every week.

**I don't think you guys thought about that at all.**

We didn't think it through.

**So your episode – and this is the first thing that – you wrote the Sheila character because your episode was called "Unitards".**

Which sounds offensive, but it was really heart-moving.

**It really was, because this is why I love your writing, because there's a line, but you write it so well, and I think it's because you write for each person in mind all the time, that there's no – you know who you're writing for and you know what you want them to say, and you know their capabilities and it's matched so well, but this Sheila – so "Unitards" was a wrestling team in high school of special needs.**

Yeah, it was kinda like a spoof off of '80s television show styles that would always attempt to have a moral. It was almost like television whenever in the '80s like *Facts of Life* and – where they would take on big issues and they were using the medium to like we gotta tackle this issue and we gotta get American aware. It was the kind of episode where at the end of it like someone would be real casually sitting on a stool and saying like if you wanna read more about abuse, then you go to your library, and then they'd

hold up books that you should go read. I actually saw that on *Different Strokes*, like whenever Arnold Treng [ph] got abused by the neighbor.

**Whenever they tackled like – they were like this is a big one, guys, we gotta have a closer.**

We gotta like debrief.

**If you wanna run away, don't. Ting.**

“Unitards” was attempting to pay homage, but also mess with that.

**Fuck with that, yeah.**

Like that intention of like can you really instruct through TV or like is this responsible. So it was about a – how do you politely say it?

**Special needs wrestling team. We didn't make fun of them. It was more—**

And the school wasn't gonna let them wrestle because it was too high risk of insurance policies. The principal was a real jerk but the coach really believed in the kids. And then there were – and it was a sitcom, so it was supposed to be funny, but you had Ronny, who was played by Brendon Buel, who is an amazing barrel of monkeys and just performer in town. Ronny was kinda the leader of the gang, and then you had someone else who was put in the special needs classroom, but he was actually just a foreign exchange student, but no one could understand.

**He just had a heavy accent, so they put him there.**

And then Sheila – I think you didn't have special needs other than – you just had a cleft lip.

**I wanted to be on the wrestling team but I wasn't special enough to be on the wrestling team.**

And you were a girl, which then the issue became about – the special needs kids were sexist and so it really got layered.

**Jay, the layers, the layers.**



It was problematic. Then the whole episode had all of these double entendres where the coach kept being misunderstood as a sexual predator, and then the whole episode looped around to this plot turn where everyone thought the coach had naked pictures of Sheila, but really the coach had pictures of Sheila's Shetland pony that was from the Make A Wish Foundation.

**That's right. You wrote that beautiful monologue that was—**

You killed it.

**I had to tweak it though because you wrote this beautiful monologue about my Make A Wish Shetland pony – I had Shetland pony.**

And the Shetland pony's name was—

**It didn't have a name.**

Yeah, it did. Because your replacement one was Locker Room. It was Anniversary. Your Shetland pony's name was Anniversary.

**Did that make it to the final cut?**

Oh, it did.

**You mean now.**

Bingo.

**I came out and did this the first night of three; I did this monologue and it was the pit bulls ate my Shetland pony, and that was the only Make A Wish – this thing that I got, and it was so devastating and I was like “the neighbors, they ate my Shetland pony”, and I was like this is gonna be so funny – everybody's gonna be laughing. And then I look out and people were horrified and crying, and I was like now what in the shit happened? I don't understand. And then I came off and you were like it's too good, pull it back. You can't act that way.**

You really went for the reality acting, and you just nailed the emotion and everyone was just horrified that the neighbor's pit bulls ate your Shetland pony, and you're like there are feedbags strewn on [INAUDIBLE]

**The whole audience was like oh my god this is bad. I was like that was a load of doodoo that I have to pick back up for the rest of the show. I was like sorry , guys.**

You might need a little wink and a nod, and then [INAUDIBLE] this is insane.

**It's too real. It's too damn real.**

[Unknown participant: So why the physical theatre?]

**Physical – that which we both do – I'd say that's what we call what we do, right, because—**

I always think with you – you say it well because there are some stories and even ideas you get, that you don't get them in words; you get them in your body.

**I think that's why a lot of times we – because you – I'm always envious of your words on paper all the time. You're eloquent and precise and you have such good ideas, and I never – I don't write like that. It all comes from the body first, I guess. So when I discovered that physical theatre was a thing I was like thank God. I thought I was screwed. But also because we're physical people, though. That's how we collaborate. That's how we create.**

I for sure see it as one more – dance and then stunts and acrobatics, and it's like one more really important story telling tool that can really move an audience or really convey a moment that's beyond words, which is really fun. And it's fun to do.

**I also think that's how we create too. With the exception for you because a lot of times you're the script writer, we don't create by sitting down and you send a script and then someone looks at the blocking and someone blocks it and then someone directs. We get in a room and we figure it out physically together, and sometimes it takes a few minutes and sometimes it takes a few hours, but that's – I'm of the mindset that we could talk about it for a very long time, and then get on our feet and it's total caca. Or we can get on our feet and figure it out now and know it's gonna work. I'm always so impressed by our communication physically, like when you hurt yourself before *Burning Bluebeard* and it was like OK everyone, there's some stunts that Jay can't do tonight, so we got in there and in 20 minutes we had re-blocked some things and re-choreographed and fixed things, and that's just because I think that's a tell to the way that we communicate well together when we need to.**

Physical theatre that I've done – there's a cool connection and presence being on stage between the performers which is exciting either because you're doing difficult things

that are dangerous or just because you're in contact with each other. I just also find it really satisfying to exert and emote through your body. Our work with The Ruffians – we try to do that in the theatre, but then also I feel like I – 500 Clown and Red Moon's experience with *Hunchback* was like oh, I really enjoy this.

### **The work, yeah.**

You were a dancer and I did gymnastics growing up, but like telling that whole story of *Hunchback* with a mask on, just through your body and breath, I had to go out there and do this set path of movements and stunts, and then by the end of it, like everything was out of me in terms of physical exhaustion, emotion, all of it. It was cathartically satisfying.

**That's the cool thing though too, like in any teaching too is finding out what's on the other side of exhaustion is usually where the gold is. I'm just like I can't actually think anymore. I can only move; I can only do; I can only show with my body, and that's generally the most truth you will see on stage or in a story or embodying something.**

And you're good at traditional acting, but we do talk about like how – and this is in our shows a lot – where physical theatre – because we will purposefully create physical tasks on stage that lead us physically toward on a journey where we reach an emotional point because of the physical exhaustion, and then we use that emotion that's very real because the audience just saw us do a bunch of physical actually tasks that aren't being faked, and then you see breathing hard, you see – then you give like a Shakespeare monologue or you give some sort of monologue, and you are just affected, and then you're just there with the audience present and affected, and I like that acting. In terms of a performer I like that. It doesn't feel like faked, or like some nights it's there some nights it's not. No. You give it and then it's there. I enjoy that.

**It's nice too because I think in terms of people usually like split up – there's physical theatre and there's normal theatre, and having just done a show that I hadn't done in a long time, like normal acting, and then being like I wonder if all this stuff that I actually believe in in terms of bringing your whole body on stage and being present physically is actually working. Can that work, and how do I bring that to my words that aren't my words – some of the words that someone hasn't written for me? And it's true. It works. Because I think once you've studied physical theatre, once you've found that exhaustion or found those levels in your body and then understanding you can actually tap into the words and your whole self is on stage. And then if your brain is somehow not there some night, if you're not mentally focused, you can physically focus or physically be more present – not like a fake it, but you can trick yourself into being OK now I'm here.**

Yeah, because I felt that way in 500 Clowns where you're way more exposed. I don't have a mask on, but there's this physical path. But then in 500 Clown *Frankenstein* that we got to do together, like there were moments where it was like you do have to push the rock up the hill or whatever, but since there's tasks around it and there's breath to it, those paths connected and were easy to do because most of the story was in physicality and clowning and then in fun.

**Just being with the audience will naturally happen then. If you're that tired and they're there, you wanna share that. If you're that exhausted or your story is that strong, like in *Burning Bluebeard*, like if you are as a performer needing so badly to have that audience be there with you, that emotion will be there and so will the physical stress and duress paired with your writing. Do remember when we went back to the script and we were like what are all these words? Can we just cut these out on our own? Thanks, Jay, but I don't need those lines anymore. I've got something better.**

I do the same thing though too. Like your mind finds better ways to connect the words or make it conversational.

**I think a lot of the plays, having done the Neo-Futurists stuff – all those plays – then you kinda work that play over 8 weeks and then you're like go and do it at a gig, and you go find the script so you can remember – you're like that's not what I did.**

Like it evolved.

**That's good though. That's how the work should be. It should never stop. Like having done *Mr. Burns* for 14 weeks, people were like are you tired of it? I was like I'm not tired of that because it's never an end, which I think is the exhausting part of being a performer – or a process – there's no end to your process, technically. You're also getting better, and then it's kind of over, but really like you have a few performances where you go that was the one – damn, that was the one. Oh, that felt good.**

I like that when it clicks.

**And the same token you're also like sorry about that, guys.**

It's interesting when that varies. Sometimes it's a consensus in the room that like we just nailed that one, or we really made that sing. And then sometimes it's wildly different, depending on each performer. I like noticing that, because I'll come off stage and be like oh, I just missed it. But then other people in the same dressing room are like that was the best one – I nailed it.

**Goddamn it, I cannot. Somebody get me a cheesecake. Somebody put a submarine sandwich on top of this right now. I love it.**

That's interesting.

**That's the process though. That's just the way it goes. I like that tough.**

[StpryCorps Facilitator: What have been some of the more challenging experiences you've had in your work? I get the sense that this is something that you don't just know how to do; it takes a lot of practice and drive.]

One thing that's challenging now is as I get older, things that were easier – my body's limitations, like that's kind of sometimes a bummer, but I don't need to talk about that. One thing that was crazy—

**Oh, I do. Go ahead.**

I guess I've never felt a lot of fear on stage, so that's not really a challenge, because sometimes I'd think like is this scary to do, but no, usually the process takes care of that. But I have to tell you when I broke my hands on stage doing a stunt where I'm in a mask like Quasimodo—

**Not "like" – is.**

It is. I can't see. There were these tiny pinholes that aren't even right in front of my eyes. One of them's like a cheap bone and then I'm climbing a 2-story apparatus with swinging ladders. I got seven layers of burlap on my body and I'm like jumping from ladder to ladder or whatever. I do this one stunt and the ladder swings around. I don't let go of the bar fast enough. This full force ladder swings around and just crushes both my hands. I fall to the floor because I'm supposed to. It's supposed to look like I got hurt, but I actually got hurt, and I almost throw up in my mask, and I try to look at my hands, and the music is still going and I gotta climb up to rescue Esmeralda. So I climbed up with my elbows, got her, and then luckily the next thing is I come down and they beat the crap out of me and pull me offstage.

**I think what was amazing about that moment, as awful as it was, is the show – because we were all so close in building that show – we were having a good time all the time. But when you hurt yourself it all got very specific. People – we were able to communicate on stage without saying anything really, that Jay had in fact broken his fingers, and we were all quick – I got goosebumps thinking about it – we were all**

**quickly figuring out what you could and could not do, how we could help you, how things happened, when you didn't need to be on, when we could get you off and just be like never mind, you're not in this scene. But you got through the rest of the show.**

Anytime I was off stage the stage manager was back there with this big bucket of us and they were just putting my hands in the ice. I thought that was an amazing – it was challenging and it was an amazing click of focus that I've never experienced in a show with the people around you who like physically we needed to get through these stunts, and at any moment everyone knew that if something is impossible I'll just walk off stage and we'll have to call the show. But we made it through. And I can't believe we got through that one – the biggest stunt was I had to hang on one hand on an extended ladder that was 20 feet above the stage and then circle twice hanging from one hand, and my fingers were broke, and in the moment someone grabbed a noose.

**You left the noose in and put your foot in and swung around, yeah.**

I still swung around, I still got the puppet, and I just remember getting through that show and they were like you gotta go to the hospital right away, and I was like no, I'm gonna take a bow, because we really did it.

**This one's for the ladies.**

I need my bow. I also was afraid I was never gonna do the show again because I'd never seen my hands look so gnarly. I'm like I'll never play the harp.

**It's just that now I have to go get my hooks put on and I just can't.**

I just wanna bow.

**I never even played the harp. I'm never gonna be a teen hand model.**

Or they'd weld my fingers together.

**I'm going out there and I'm bowing.**

All I see are ceilings.

**He only threw up four times. That was cool, but that's like there's a certain amount of risk involved in any physical risk. I'm not interested in shows that I might not be able – I'm not interested in safe whatever. It's not exciting, and probably to a fault of my own when I always wanna push against what's the safest or the easiest way to do**

something. But it is scary to get older though. I'll admit that though too. I'm just coming up on 33 but noticing things have like – I can't really drink that much whiskey and just pop up in the morning and be ready to go. But you also just notice how you have to take care of yourself more if you want to preserve what you have. And what becomes more important. Like I have to go home. I have to take a mustard bath. I have to drink three liters of water and go to bed. I have to take my vitamins and all that. But also because I don't – it's not like we're ever gonna retire. I don't have like a sweet nest egg. We paid our taxes this year. That was great. Got enough left over for a Dyson vacuum.

Are you getting one?

We got it. Yeah we did. We sucked one of those little things out of our floor, like the wood plugs that goes in your little hardwood floor – sucked it right up. I was like [INAUDIBLE] he said I think the Dyson [INAUDIBLE] thing doesn't lose suction, does it.

They call it The Shark.

**But we're never going to retire. We're probably gonna be working for a long time, so—**

I wanna win something. Even if I won something I'd wanna make work. I'd be like oh it'd be great; now I can make work.

**We just wouldn't have to do all the other stuff too. I wouldn't have such busy weeks.**

That's what challenging.

**Yeah, all the other stuff.**

Does that sound like complaining? But whatever.

**It's not complaining, it's being realistic. I think it's being honest about what your lifestyle is, deciding that you'll probably – at least in this world for now – because we choose to make the work that we wanna make and devise and put on stage what we believe in, then we're always gonna have to supplement otherwise, just because that's the way it is for now. That's the way it is.**

I think it's pretty exciting that like we spend a chunk of our lives that we just really wanna do and are passionate with. Sometimes I gotta remind myself that though, but it

is really true. I don't have any regrets about the awesome fun work that I've been able to be a part of in theatre.

**And also choosing the work that we wanna create together and to collaborate with people we wanna collaborate with, tell the stories we wanna tell. That means that I can be fulfilled as an artists, and if it also means that I have to work front desk at a hair salon, that's just the way it goes. And you just have to make peace with that, otherwise you're just gonna be so mad all the time, and that sounds like a little stupid after school special remark, but that's true though.**

I love Obamacare.

**Did you just say that [INAUDIBLE]?**

I am so serious. I was like how can I – I wanna work that in every conversation.

**It sounds like someone came in from another room to be like mention Obamacare. Mention it so we get \$10.**

I'll go to Ohio and they're just like screw that Obamacare, but I'm like this is the best thing that ever happened to me.

**It's a little weird for me, but that's alright.**

It's not working out?

**I don't know yet. I haven't been to a doctor. I don't know how to use it. It's like all of a sudden you got insurance and there's no manual – I'm sure there's a manual but it's thick.**

I think I met my deductible already this year and I'm getting every mole checked on my body.

**What was your deductible?**

I think it was \$500.

**Take a look at Miss \$12,000 over here. I'm gonna have to lop off my left leg and get some—**

Yeah you will.



**Sorry about that.**

We don't have to talk about that.

**That is important. That's the stuff I think I got crotchety about. Can I see a doctor? I don't know what this is. It's been here since 1984 and I just once I'd like to get it checked out. Also is this gap in my tooth getting bigger or smaller? I don't know. It's been 10 years since I've seen a dentist too. God help me. But I do have a Dyson.**

Why don't you guys just split that Dyson on some of your [INAUDIBLE]

**Pick and choose your battles.**

What else can this Dyson do?

**And we have hardwood floors and like a rug. Really? Do we need a Dyson.**

It's clean. It's spic and span. We gotta hit the rug again.

**I'm sad. You mind getting out that Dyson – run it around a little bit; make me feel better.**

Can you use it on a hardwood floor though?

**You're damn right you can. It's beautiful. It's got a long cord. This has been a public service for Obamacare and Dyson.**

Thanks, Dyson.

**It's not a problem.**

Support your troops.

**Can't fix my teeth, but I can vacuum.**

What else we got to talk about?

**Whatever you want, Torrance.**

When's the first time you ever met me?

I'm trying to remember that. Hold on. I'll whip somethin up – make you feel good. I do remember the audition, but I think the first time wasn't – my first time was being in the *Hunchback* room with you. I was excited to be – because I'd just stepped out of a show and I was really scared about – the show I'd stepped out of – I'd never dropped out of a show before but it was an awful experience and I didn't know and I remember feeling like you're too yourself onstage, don't be such yourself. And I was like this is who I am. I don't know what else I do with this. And then I remember going to the *Hunchback* audition and Leslie was like just be you, just come from who you are first. And I was like goddamn it, thank you. I remember seeing all of you guys in the room and just – I'd known you through I guess – I don't know, probably some Neo-Futurists stuff that I'd seen or heard of your name and known that like—

You would have seen *Roustabout*.

That was before *Hunchback*? God, it was. *Roustabout*. Fuck. I saw that – I was like weeping sitting in the chair because it was so beautiful, and at this point I was like what is this work? What do you call this? I still don't know [INAUDIBLE] call it. I think we invented it. You invented it. [INAUDIBLE] But I remember being like this – how do you do this? I remember watching it and I was just weeping at the end and I was like am I just moved by this because I know you, I know these people and I love this work and this story and because I'm this? And I remember bringing my dad to it, who was in town visiting, and we came inside – I was like I just wanna see my dad, and my dad is a wonderful man – blue collar worker from Omaha, Nebraska who is – he's a tough guy – oldest of 11. And he came and at that end part there that song played and I looked at my pop, and whenever my dad cries it's as if it's happening to him. He's like ugh – he's touching his face like someone put those tears there. He's like what's going on. Help me. I can't breathe. And I was like no this is beautiful. This works. This is amazing. So I remember knowing you at that point. I was – I want to – this is the stuff. This is what I wanna make. This is what I wanna create. And then knowing more about you and then joining the Neos and spending more time with you and creating. It's so lovely. I'm so happy to work with you.

That's nice.

It's true though.

I feel the same way.

**I know. I like it. It's hard. But also we know each other's families. That's the people I wanna make work with. I wanna go to your house and hang out with your mom and stuff and fly to see your nieces.**

Right, we flew to see my nieces. High school production of *Little Shop of Horrors*.

**I love it. It was great. What was that, four acts, five acts? They're doing all the songs.**

It wasn't short.

**I don't remember this from the Broadway show. When did they go to Saigon?**

It was better than *Shrek*. Remember when we saw *Dirty Dancing*? That was such a trash show.

**It's not like it went anywhere.**

That was a fun night tough.

**When you put down that much tequila on the train ride there it's bound to be a fun night. Then we came home and ate mozzarella sticks and pizza balls and whatever and then washed it down with a glass of Metamucil. If I can just get honest for a second—**

I really thought that was gonna help. Did it help you?

**I don't wanna talk about it.**

No.

**Everybody knows what happens. Everyone knows the end of that story. That's the way it goes.**

What was the most challenging moment on stage for you?

**Like in life all the time.**

No, like onstage or in work, or is there? Or even like the most rewarding moments onstage? Is that too broad?

**No. I think I felt in doing *Burning Bluebeard*, knowing that was successfully told the story of these people and this tragedy in many different ways, and knowing that we**

took the audience on a journey and gave them permission to feel and gave them permission to laugh about a tragedy and gave them permission to sit in a room with other people and experience something in a way that maybe some of them wouldn't ever before. That's the stuff. That's the most rewarding, and knowing that I can look back at my people onstage with me and know that we're all experiencing that, and that they're there and we did it together, because it takes all of us to do it. That show was pure joy even in the sad moments. It's just pure joy and I couldn't – doing that every night – fuck. And it's an hour twenty. In and out. Easy on the tune of our shows, people.

Git 'er done.

**We get it.**

Nobody wants to sit there that long.

**They don't. Some of them do, but they're sleeping.**

They're stoned.

**They're stoned and they paid \$25 to sleep, and that's not my problem. But that's the good stuff. That's magic. You don't get that a lot, if ever. That comes from following exactly what we believe in and staying true to that and not saying sorry for putting onstage what we do, and just trusting the process and trusting the people on the outside to say yeah, do it. That's rewarding.**

And a little bit of luck or something. Something that clicks.

**It's always luck, but you can also make your own luck. I think somebody said that. Was that Theodore Roosevelt?**

Who was that, Buddha?

**You can make your own luck.**

Wow, Charlie.

**You can put any accent on, I suppose. Why don't they say, Mary? You make your own luck. And then there's a gunshot. What's that, Sandra Bullock?**

I think it was, actually, yeah.

***Miss Congeniality* is a good one.**

[StoryCorps Facilitator: Any last comments?]

**Ah, Jay, lets' keep making work.**

I feel lucky that we're in Chicago to make theatre at this time. I think that there'll be a thing where people look back at the art going on in Chicago, specifically in theatre, that's run from the late '80s till now that's kinda unique to the country and maybe to the world.

**Come here if you wanna do the work, ride a bike, have an audience, explore something, make something new, be supported and challenge yourself.**

It's cool.

**Interviewer: Sara Zalek**

**Interviewee: Alessandro Pintus**

**My name is Sara Zalek. I am 45 years old. Today's date is April 17<sup>th</sup>. I'm at the Chicago Cultural Center, and I'm here with Alessandro Pintus, who is visiting. He's a friend -- dancer and friend.**

Hello, I'm Alessandro Pintus. I'm 43 years old and today is 17 April. We are in Chicago Cultural Center and meeting with my best friend, Sara Zalek.

**Alessandro I asked you to come here – actually find you online, and I asked you to come here and be part of a festival that I was putting together, and it's about Butoh Festival, so I wanted to ask you first why you dance Butoh?**

Why? I still don't know this answer – why I dance Butoh. Let's say I can say how do I met with Butoh. I met during my college. I was studying psychology in Rome and I was doing theatre, but I was not very good in acting, so the director said please find your way through the body, because maybe he saw something in my body that could be better than just use of languages. And we were doing Shakespeare play, *The Tempest*, so he suggest me to watch a movie from Peter Greenaway, *The Last Tempest or Prospero's Book*, and there was this dancer that was playing the role of Caliban, and actually he was not acting; he was just moving his body, and his name was Heeds [ph], and Michael Clark – he's an English dancer – and part of his biography was Butoh, and I never heard this word, so I became curious and start to study. First three on books and then I met some teachers, and I just find myself and I forgot theatre and I started dancing. So I start to be part of some workshops around Europe, but then it was not enough for me, so I decide to move to Japan for two years. What I can say about Butoh is that it's just a true way to find myself and to be more conscious of myself. There's many things that I can't explain about my being, but the body, it's already into this kind of feeling, so let's say the dance, especially Butoh dance, is my way to find the truth.

**Thank you.**

You're welcome.

**I also found my way through Butoh not in a very direct way, but was performing in something like *Strange Way*. I think I was performing, and people – I didn't really know how people took what I was doing, but it seemed very experimental and maybe I didn't even understand myself what I wanted to say or how to say it. So then when I found Butoh through Nicole Leggett [ph] actually was bringing people to Chicago and she was talking about Butoh, and I said wow, this is very true to my spirit somehow.**

**There is something like that hit me the way – moving through the body, finding this truth. That resonates with me when you said that. There is something shifting about identity in me all the time. I don't know why. But Butoh helps me explore that, helps me maybe not understand it better, but be OK with that. I'm very emotional right now.**

Yeah you are, but that's just true.

**Yeah, it is. I was also interested in – we were talking earlier about the NONcompany, which is your company or the part of the company you have. Can you tell me more about that?**

While I was in Japan I was a pupil of Tanakamen [ph]. He lead in Cantricide [ph] and near the center of Honshu Island. The town is Hakshu [ph]. Actually we were just guests of a farm and we were farming in the morning and then also dancing the rest of the day, and the training was starting 5:00 in the morning right into the field picking up tomato or green beans or cucumber, and then continuing with body training the whole day. And there was one night where Tanakamen invite many friends including a man called Amario Gohda [ph]. He is one of the most famous Japanese researcher about Butoh. He wrote many books and he is giving many lectures. He is still alive, but he is quite old. Anyway, that night we were talking and he introduced me to him, saying that I was his friend and he said he is a young dancer, he has some potentiality, and I don't know why, maybe because he drunk too much beer – he gave me a hit on my forehead at some point and he said you have to realize an anonymous body. And I didn't understood what he was. I thought he was just drunk, but he hit me, so it's like he put on myself and kind of notes like this and he stained his body since few years, and then with a friend we realized this company, which in the beginning as called Anonymous Company. Then we reduced into NONcompany, which is like saying that the company is non – it's nonexistent. So we started this company with two English guy, a girl and a woman, Beth Partridge [ph] and Richard Harding [ph], and then an Israeli girl called Ayalet Franco [ph]. But after a few years they let me alone because they change their life. They want to be different. They didn't want to continue with dance, so I kept the name and with their approval I continue to lead this company, and it's a group with – the main important thing is to exchange relation through art and put together our skill to – especially on dance, but even on other art, so many now the member of this company is my students that I have all over Europe and especially in Italy, and then other artists like musicians, painters, architecture and video artists, and sometimes we have a project together, and next will be the 15 years of life of this company and we're gonna have a big production. I hope so. Everything I can say this start from a punch in my forehead from Tanakamen. That's how NONcompany started. He liked blessed me like a kind of baptism.

**I see, like a baptism.**

And he shocked me because suddenly he did this. I do understand what he meant. I think we were talking about the marathon because before to be a dancer I was a marathon runner, but he said, "And did you like to win"? And I said, "I never won." And I said many times I run at the last. And then he said, "You don't need to be the first; you don't need to be the last; you need to be just anonymous." Then he punch me – hit me in my forehead and he said, "You have to realize an anonymous body." And that's why everything started with NONcompany.

**Thank you.**

You're welcome.

**Also one question that came up, which comes up a lot for me around the body – this anonymous body maybe is how Butoh – a lot of the training and the work that we do has some relation to the earth or the cosmos or these environmental – it's the body in space and also when you talk about this hitting on your head, this is also the way the body contains memory, like where it's not just in our head. Memories are all over the body, and I think through Butoh dance we can explore those memories, those associations, those connections to this cosmic body or the earth or all these elements that we feel. We can be them for even a moment in our imagination. Do you wanna speak to that at all?**

Let's say that about memory to the body, I think that most of the time in our dance is just memory that come out from the skin. I remember a famous painting from Salvador Dali and there is this – I think it's called "The Burning Giraffe" and there's a [INAUDIBLE sounds like: fuel] body which many draw coming up from the body and look like that the draw collects kind of memory, so I can say that every cells of the body has a kind of memory which is not understandable through the conscious mind. Do you know here in my forehead there is a kind of like cut, yeah? And it's exactly the place where this Tanakamen hit me, and in 2001 I hit my head. At that moment I remember that time that he hit my head. It's like that here there is a memory and a fact that keep my memory back to what it was few years ago and let me realize something. And there's some memory – special childhood – the [INAUDIBLE sounds like: frudents] come easily out, so sometime through the Butoh, where it's just like let this memory move myself. And relation with the earth is just I can't consider myself into the space where I'm not occupying the space when I'm dancing. I'm just – there's a moment where I realize that I became the space, and often I dance in nature and I work and make worship in nature, and I can guarantee you that the relation which is created is so organic, so natural, and I



can see that the macro is in the micro. So I can find an element of the nature inside the body and I can relate this to outside. So when we dance we just moving with the cosmos, if we can say like that.

**Yeah, I feel that it's definitely energy that we're working with, and energy is what? How do we explain? Science is attempting all the time to explain how energy works and why, but still we don't know. We may never know. Part of it is maybe some mystery, but we know we have it and that we can share it. We can transmit through our bodies like this feeling, energy. We don't even have to touch. A whole room, a whole space can be – I think about sometimes like the monks that are continually praying or doing mantras for the whole world, and think about that balance, and if they were to stop what would happen.**

Something bad.

**I don't know.**

Maybe we should start to consider dance a kind of body pray to help the monks.

**Yeah, to support them.**

Yeah, to keep this task.

**Because it must be a daunting task. Do they feel the weight on their shoulders? There is also something about Butoh which you spoke to a little bit – the subconscious world, and maybe that's where the darkness comes in. Dance of darkness is kind of what Butoh means.**

I don't know what Tatumi Hijikata, the founder of Butoh really mean in the end because he was really a mysterious guy. The way how I understood is that the darkness is not the evil part of us, it's just the unconscious part of us, so I consider the dancing as moving the energy around in order to transform the yin into the yang and the yang into the yin continuously so there's always a shade of my body, and I cannot catch it. I can just perceive and respect and move with it. I have to upset my darkness, but my task as a human being is to find a connection between this visible and invisible part of myself and create a balance. That's why I dance, just to continue to keep this balance. It is the way how the life energy is moving, and I think it's our task as human being to know it a bit more and to establish a contact.

**I agree. More and more too I'm fascinated by the research, and in know that you do some, and I've been reading more research about psychoanalysts and also about how**

**Butoh dance might help mentally ill. It helps – I know Evangeline works in New York with incarcerated men and women. I know that other Butoh dancers work with the blind or – there's a lot of real resonance with almost like a dance therapy in some way. There's some kind of dance therapy in Butoh or—**

You wanna know something about that?

**Yeah, can you talk about that a little?**

I heard many people use Butoh method as a therapy, and I know they teach in Japan and also other dancer all around the world. I know that Mitzuo Takaishi [ph] one of the starter with Hijikata did, and I am a psychologist but I never work as a psychologist, and I don't know if I will be good as a dance therapist because I never really relate with this word. Many people come to myself that need this is a self therapy and I accept it, but I think it's a very big responsibility, and I think this science need to grow up much more, to be sure, and take the whole responsibility of helping someone through a body therapy to care, and I think in the next future maybe I will go this way, but for the moment I stay where I am, because I think it's really serious things and I appreciate the people that are doing, but speaking for myself, I think it's not the time. I did theatre and dance and workshops in jails, and some disabled people association, but I just did it pro bono and was not there as a therapist, just as a social facilitator – something like that. That's my experience. What's yours about this?

**Actually now I've been teaching more, so in the last two years I've started teaching, and more and more I'm teaching, and I find people come to my class and they definitely get a lot of things out of it to discover for themselves – healing, transformation, the discovery of hard things, difficult things, and it's interesting because I do – I notice – I'm taking a lot of responsibility in that. I don't have to take the responsibility but I have a great deal of empathy, so I think there's a lot of things to learn for me in that way and how – in what way I want to continue, because the more I get into it, the more those things come to the surface, or even go deeper than the surface, and so how to negotiate. But I think I really enjoy just offering the space for someone to explore this and know that they can come into the space and spend two hours inside their own body maybe exploring the subconscious world. And then bring them back in some safe way and say here you go, now go live your life. Over time people come – it's amazing because we do a lot of drawing in my classes and some people have put all their drawings then together on a wall and be able to see these connection and find what images, symbols, even color things, shapes coming for them, and they find some evolution, and I think that's amazing. It brings me joy. There was something more about the subconscious though because that was – Hijikata I know was very interested in surrealism and the dream world. He also took a lot from**

poetry, and I believe this new book that I have “Costume en Face” – it was put out by Ugly Duckling Press. I’ll share it with you. It’s a lot of his drawings, his original writings about his choreography and notes about his process. So maybe we should talk a little bit about what he was drawing from because I think we do still draw from those same things when we work.

How so?

**Definitely I work from poetry. I read poetry sometimes in class or for myself. I try to dance a poem or I use a visual image. There’s a place called haptic space – the space right in front of your eyes – and if you can imagine something there – so if you look at an image and then close your eyes and imagine that image in the space in front of your eyes you can dance that image. I think it’s very helpful because sometimes our imagination needs these tools like a little more concrete than just dance energy. That seems really vague for a lot of people.**

When I was in Japan I visit the Hijikata archive, which is in a university of Tokyo, and this archive – at that time it was only for invitation. Now I think it’s more free and everybody can go and tour – have a look through the Butoh-fu, the Butoh dance note from Hijikata and saw a friend who helped me with translation because of course I couldn’t read Japanese, and Hijikata also has a weird relation with words, so he liked to invent words. And I know that he took a lot of inspiration from fine arts and also poetry. He was very interested into the poems like from Porlurland [ph] or Transportlar [ph] or Chancerimbo [ph] and I think there’s a good relation with this kind of art. Me myself, I use a lot of draw also and students maybe bring some painting or picture they drew, and we use as a stimulus, so mainly we try to just realize into the body the stimulus, to embody the stimulus. We also do this with music, so we are just – let the music and the sound and the image, the color and the lines get inside the body too – just realize. And I also use a lot of poems but we use Italian language in Italy because it’s more connected with the inner landscape, and I know that Hijikata used to spread words to the students just to impress them. He was like on the back of the student and whispering something to the ear just to stimulate his dance, so actually he was not just saying you have to move like that. He was just spitting words like a volcanoes and sometimes not really understandable words or sounds, just to create a visceral reaction into his students, so I try to create a system similar, but making a bridge within this two different culture, because Japanese language is really onomatopoeic. You know this?

**Yes.**

And Italian not so much, but our language has very interesting sounds that remind our memory, especially a childhood memory, so I need to keep the language in Italian when

I do this class in Italy, and I try to do the same in English, which is more difficult because it's not my homeland. But I found there is a very deep connection within words and body, because I think that words come from the body, not from the intellect. When a child just needs something it just need to use the voice as the body – crying for milk or crying because it needs to change the diaper or smiling because he's happy just because he is clean or because the lights and the sound is good. So I think there is a very strong connection, but we use words just as stimulus, not just as an understanding. So because we need to keep this [INAUDIBLE] 0:27:19.3 an intellectual dance to a dance which come from words but has nothing to relate with the something which is understandable for the mind.

**This is a very rich topic. I find the thing that came up for me as you were speaking was sensitivity. This is something I work with a lot. I think all Butoh dancers work with this sensitivity. We tend to – in our culture now it's very busy, very fast, a lot of working, a lot of stimulus always coming in. Butoh helps me to remove those barriers or layers that I put up to protect myself from all this stimulus, so it makes me more maybe raw like a child so that I can use language in a way that comes from the body rather than the mind, because as we go through life, we get older, we tend to forget that connection, and we can just kind of top-down everything. Everything comes mind first, then body, but we need to keep remembering, and the practice of Butoh is so beautiful for me for that reason that it just reminds me, yeah, it comes up from the earth, up from my body and out, and it can be expressed and shared and then you create this loop. You can then create a loop. That's really beautiful. Thanks for reminding me of that.**

Thanks to you for asking.

**Do you have any questions for me?**

How do you start with Butoh?

**I started with the workshops from here, but I think I was making Butoh before I knew what it was, and I even was in some other peoples' performances and I didn't know. I was that naive. I came to art in a very naïve way, mostly young. When I was young I was thinking that when I went to the museum, those were artists in the museum. So I couldn't relate, even when I went to look at art schools when I was making a lot of art in high school. I was – that's it. I was thinking there is no way these artists I'm seeing in the museum – I'm not that, so I must not be an artist then. So it actually took me quite a long time to begin to be comfortable in making art as a profession – I guess a professional – and finally that's how I ended up in Chicago actually. Came to go to school at the art institute, and as I said earlier to you today, I just didn't expect to stay**

**in Chicago because my heart belongs in the mountains and the ocean, but here I am in the flatlands and the prairie making do in a big city. That's another interesting thing for me too, is to dance becomes very important to recover my maybe pagan self or something. I feel much more at home just in nature – all in nature. So I can keep coming back to that natural body somehow even here in a studio or even on the street. Somehow I can go back to that body even though it's not as natural.**

Another question for you. What's the picture of your future through the Butoh? How do you see this work develop in the near future for you or for the Chicago community or USA community?

**That's a great question. I am – the more I do it and the more I bring people together around it, the more I want to keep the researching. I'm very interested in like kind of this – some of the scientific things, some of the art connections and just keep exploring and keep changing. I actually hope – my dream since I was a child, and I think this dream is not being – like I am seeing how Butoh is actually a way for me to see the world. I've always wanted to see everywhere, so maybe through Butoh, because we – as we know Butoh is traveled on kind of underground and it shows up in every culture pretty much now, and so maybe that's my way. Butoh is not my way to see the world.**

I think for me I need to relate this artistic process through Butoh to our society because I think Butoh can be very helpful to be more mature in our society. It's a way how to be more responsible for your life – the body. So that's why I really like to establish the work considering this fact – that art is not just an aesthetic way. Art should be really related with our society. I think art can be helpful for our society, so I try to establish my research in creating links within dancers and within dance art to what is need into our society. This is I think is my future overview about how we can continue with this work, so I don't want just people come to watch performances in theatre or students come into the studio to do dance research or workshops. I want kick out people from theatre into the streets, into the nature, and maybe more workshop into the natural environment instead of into building, not just because I don't like it; because I think it's the moment to come out from the cave like Plato said one time. Plato? Platoni?

**Plato.**

That's a legend about Plato is people live into the cave and doesn't know how is the world outside. And the world outside is just different from the world inside, so there was one time when one man came out to watch the light, and it was an amazing view, so he came back inside the cave and said, "Hey, everybody, we have to come out.

There's a beautiful world out of the cave." And people don't believe him. They say no, we stay here in our shade.

**I'm so glad you said that because it just made me realize like I said yeah, I wanna see the world, and felt very selfish suddenly I realized. But yeah, I love sharing this dance. I love sharing just the create process. Every human on this planet is capable of being a creative being. We have – every person. So when I hear someone say, "I'm not an artist. I can't draw." I think you might not be an artist trained, but you have creative capability, and we all need to use, and some people – it just needs to be awakened, so I want to continue to awaken the creative spirit of anyone I come in contact with. So yeah. Thank you, Alessandro, so much for being here today.**

Thank you, Sara, to hosting me.

**And I look forward to spending the weekend with you and performing together on the same place. We're performing right next door at the dance center in the cultural center tomorrow and Sunday night.**

It will be a pleasure to share with all of you my body.

**Thank you.**

Thank to you.

**Interviewer: Nicholas Ward**

**Interviewee: Fatimah Asghar**

**My name is Nicholas Ward and I am 33 years old. Today's date is April 17<sup>th</sup>. We're at the Chicago Cultural Center, and my relationship to my interview partner is that of my relationship partner. She is my girlfriend.**

My name is Fatimah Asghar. I am 25 years old. Today is April 17<sup>th</sup> and we are at the Chicago Cultural Center and Nick is my love.

**What is your first memory of me?**

My first memory of you is about three years ago I moved to Chicago to work as an apprentice for Steppenwolf and I walked in the first day and I was really nervous, and we had to go sit at our cubicles where we would be working for the rest of the year, and you were sitting a cubicle away from me and I sat down next to you, or sat down near you, and then looked over at your and then you snapped at me like what, because I was looking at you, and I got really nervous, so I just didn't talk to you for like a week. But I think my first memory of you, I remember thinking that you were really attractive, but then I found out that you had a girlfriend, so I was like I guess that's it so I'm just gonna stay here in my cubicle next to you.

**Did you think I was mean?**

I did. It took me a long time to think that you weren't because you had a very sarcastic – or you do – you're sarcastic and I'm not, and so sometimes it's hard for me to register sarcasm because I think it's real or I'm just not very good at it. But what was your first impression of me?

**I don't know that I remember meeting you, though I do remember snapping at you, and I remember that it was very obviously a joke on my end. I was very obviously being funny and playful and I didn't really think about it landed at all. I think I probably just moved on. I don't remember – though I think we sort of started talking at work over time, and so then I remember as the months wore on, growing to think that you were really smart and really cool and a sort of kindred spirit in that office, as we were two people who didn't really like being in an office environment, or maybe it wasn't the best fit for us, and maybe the job wasn't exactly what we thought it was gonna be. That's what I remember. Did you ever not like me, or are there times when you ever don't like me?**

No. There's like no way that I've never not liked you. I think sometimes when we fight I'm really angry at you, but I'm not not liking you or actively not liking you, and actually I remember when we first started dating I told someone that we weren't super close, but I [INAUDIBLE] 0:03:48.6 and I thought that I was dating you, and her response was, "Oh, Nick? Everybody loves Nick." And I thought about it and I was like I don't really know very many people who have voiced dislike of Nick or anything like that. Have you ever not liked me?

**No.**

You can be honest.

**I am being honest. I can't imagine – I think yes when we fight things can be hard and frustrating, but I don't think there's any loss of love in the room when we're upset with each other or having a difficult moment. No, I can't imagine not liking you. I think you're great. So you're someone who thinks about yourself and your art and what your art does in the world, and you think about how to love better and be better and more patient I think. How do you think that you wanna be remembered?**

That's a good question.

**I know. It's on the card here.**

That's a great question on the card. It's interesting as an artist thinking about what your legacy is or what you want, like what the work you're doing in the world is, and I think for me I grew up without parents and I grew up with a very hard relationship to family and what family meant and what home meant and things like that, and I think the thing that when I write – because I'm a poet, and the preliminary impact of my work is when people read it, so a lot of times people read it and I won't be around or something like that. In that way my work can outlast me in this very weird way, and I think that I want to be remembered as someone who was kind and generous with their heart and with their definitions of what it meant to be human, and that people will be able to find a kind of home in that. So I think that that's more than being remember in that way, is the legacy I wanna leave behind is one in which people can feel less lonely, like being in the world in some way by relationship to my work. What about you?

**I think in many ways it's something that we have in common, that maybe the quality of the thing differs, but I'm also a writer, though I don't write poetry. I write essays typically about my life, and when I think about looking back at things that I've written, and thinking about the things that I'm working on and how they work, in a general sense I think they're a lot about connection and the ways that people do or do not**



**find a chance to connect with each other, and so they are about fighting through loneliness or understanding loneliness or how difficult it is to actually find another person – any other person in any sort of capacity that really can be there in a general sense, and I think it's really important that people in the world have other people. Loneliness is something that we really fight against.**

The older I've gotten, the more I've noticed how lonely everybody is in the world, like even through reading or writing or watching movies or consuming art, but I feel like there's such a profound sense of loneliness and lack of connection and even like being able to stare at someone for a while and make eye contact is a daunting thing in our current world today. I think part of the loneliness thing – what makes me think of when we were filling out our papers to be here one of the questions was what is your own identity in your own words, and that was very interesting to me partially because like so many of the factors or so many of the reason why we are lonely are because of definitions or of people asking you to define yourself in a certain way that maybe feels like really counter to who you are as a person, so to have to fit into a certain kind of mold or something like that.

**Sort of like the process of distilling your entire self into a few words feels incomplete and therefore feels like a way that people naturally isolate themselves.**

Right. But I think also working with youth and stuff and kind of seeing – hearing their stories and seeing in a lot of ways in which like the high school cafeteria can be such a terrible place, such a terrifying place. Kids who don't feel at home in their own definitions, whether that be queer or whether be trans or that be a different race – a non-white person when that's a way that society makes you think of yourself as this is the right way to be human, and then suddenly you're not that, and the loneliness that stems from that, and it's like very interesting to me because I feel like in some ways if we got rid of some those definitions or those rules around how to be a human or how to be in a relationship even, we would have a much easier time not feeling so lonely.

**What do you think the worst cultural rule about how to be in a relationship is?**

That's a great question. I think it's the kind of around owing someone something, like owing someone something for their time or the time they've invested in you or something, or being like this is because we're in a relationship this person should buy me flowers, or this person should pick me up somewhere, or something. What about you?

**I think similarly, but I think it's this assumption or notion that people have that all relationships are the same, particularly because – we've talked about this before in**

**regards to something like monogamy. There's this notion that all monogamous relationships are exactly the same, and then all non-monogamous relationships are the other, or they're all the same, or that's different and weird and "acceptable" in our society, but I actually think all relationships of any sort of human interaction, whether they're intimate or friendship or mentor/mentee or even work related, have and require different definitions that people don't oftentimes talk about, and they don't oftentimes start from a place of shared knowledge and vocabulary, and I think it can doom certain relationships in that way.**

It's interesting because lately I've been out of town a lot, and so I've been seeing a lot of old friends and catching up with them, and they've asked about us, and a lot of them are like are you and Nick open. And I think that that's a really interesting question because it's hard. There's not a real – for me there's not a real answer for that because it's like it's not that we're not open, but it's not that we are open either. It's like a very – and I was trying to explain it to my sister, and I was saying it's like a case-by-case basis. It's a thing that comes up when it comes up and we talk about it. But it's not like – there's not necessarily a rule pattern that we fit into or something like that. It's like really based on a system of communication, and she's like I don't understand that, and I was like I don't know if that's something I can explain to you. But I think that's interesting, like what you were saying that there's a very clear idea of what it means to be in a monogamous relationship and there's kind of a nebulous idea or what it means to be in an open or a polyamorous relationship, but a lot of times it's also like not talked about in society because it's not deemed as OK.

**I also think – without naming any names – both of us have had people in our past who have made assumptions about the practical tenets of the relationship that, as the relationship wore on we realized this isn't something I'm interested in, and this assumption was made really early on. We didn't have a conversation about it. And now I feel like I've sort of tacitly agreed to this assumption that was made without my knowledge.**

Can you give an example?

**Yes I can. I was trying to be as vague as possible and you called me on it.**

It's easier with examples.

**You're right, it is easier with examples. I, previous to meeting you, I had dated a woman for three years and we were in a monogamous relationship and without understanding or knowing how to put vocabulary into things like polyamory or into things like open relationships, I felt very acutely that the what we'll call hardline**

**monogamy wasn't totally for me, but I realized that the relationship that was in and the person that I was with would not be open in any sort of capacity to expanding that conversation, and one of the reason I think is because we started the relationship and an assumption was made that it would be completely monogamous relationship. And we never had a conversation about what kind of monogamous relationship to you want this to be? What kind of relationship do we want this to be? What sorts of terms and condition, for lack of a better phrase, are we interested in? What can we talk about? What can't we talk about? And I think that got really dicey towards the end of our time together because ultimately there were things that I did wanna talk about, and there were things that – avenues I did want to explore, people I was interested in engaging in a sexual way outside of that relationship and felt like there was no way that I could ever bring that up.**

Do you feel like you have any regrets either with that relationship or just in general?

**Yes. I think everybody has some regrets. I have a lot of regrets, whether they're like really big or really small. My current regret today is that before we sat down I didn't text my manager to see if they needed me to work this evening because I'd really like to not work because it's really nice outside. But I think within that relationship I think that I was not open enough and I didn't talk about and I wasn't communicative enough, and I think because I was afraid of how I would be perceived or I was afraid of the relationship immediately ending, which it did anyway, so that fear was no unfounded, but I think that fear motivated me to keep silent, and that is definitely a thing that I regret. What about you? Do you have any life or relationship regrets?**

Yes I think so. At the end of the day you're like I'm fine with everything.

**We should say like we're really happy. I am.**

I'm happy too. I think that for me the thing that – it took me a really long time to realize that I was worthy of anything, or that I could advocate for myself. And I think that that – I grew up a lot and I used to think of – very approach kind of relationships with a lot of gratitude that like someone is bestowing their attention on me and therefore I'm very lucky vs. being no, I'm actually great and I deserve this or I deserve to be treated well. And so I think sometimes in past relationships the things that have been the most painful have been things that my other partner might no have even realized until it got too bad, like until it got to the point where I had to leave. And I think that it was just because for a while it was always very hard for me to bring up any kind of conflict or to bring up any kind of feeling of being mistreated or discontent with the situation or the way that things were going. And I think that had I learned earlier on in life to be a better advocate for myself in relationships but also professionally or just for anything. I think

that it would have been a lot easier for me to let go of the things that didn't actually matter, to be able to just shed some of that heartbreak with that confidence that I knew I was worthy of a lot.

[Unknown speaker: Can you talk about when you were first getting to know each other?]

The first time that anything really happened between us was [INAUDIBLE] 0:19:24.2 we started to become friends and we would hang out with some of our colleagues after work. After plays we would go out and grab drinks and I knew that we had a budding friendship, and then my apprenticeship ended so I left Steppenwolf and we had this shared bond around literary events because we're both writers, and live literary events – both of our writing lives very much in the spoken tradition vs. just the page, so you would invite me to come see shows and I would invite you to my house shows and we would kind of do that. And then the fall of 2013 was a particularly rough time for both of us. We had both just ended relationships and were in a great tumultuous heartbreak, and you invited me over once for dinner and I came you cooked this amazing steak salad, and I was just like whoa, that's fancy. And we talked for a really long time, and then—

**You have to tell the real version of this next thing that you're gonna tell.**

I'm gonna say it. And then I invited you over to my house to make paxani meatballs and then—

**And so what I'm thinking is not necessarily like there's an exchange, but like that last dinner went really well. This next dinner maybe something will happen. That'll be really nice. It'll be nice to spend another evening with this woman that I'm interested in, without really knowing if I was interested in what that meant. So then she invites me over for dinner, but then also—**

But then I got nervous because I thought that maybe you didn't like me, and so I invited a bunch of my friends over too, so then it became – it went very quickly from being a one on one dinner with me and you to being a group dinner with five people, a bunch you didn't know, and I also think I didn't tell you until an hour before or when you came over or something.

**Oh, I guess this isn't really – I guess we're probably not gonna date.**

And then there was a couple more times when we tried to hang out, and then you invited me over for dinner another night, and I came, and you made like a whole chicken

and I stayed really late and it was almost 1:00 or something. We both had work the next day, and you were like so I'm gonna—

**So it's 1:00 in the morning.**

And I'm tired and I'm gonna go to bed now and you're welcome to join me if you would like. You're also welcome to leave if you want. It's up to you.

**Neither of us has any game whatsoever.**

And then it was really awkward for a while because I thought you were kicking me out of your house. I didn't exactly understand what was happening, and then you were like I'm going to the bathroom, and then I washed the dishes and then it was like a couple more awkward minutes and then I walked over and then we kissed.

**We're so awkward.**

Now we're dating and still awkward. That's kind of what happened.

**And then we started dating, and then a couple months later I went away.**

You were gonna go away before we started dating. You had bought a 1-way plane ticket to Europe in the midst of your heartbreak. You were like I'm not in love with Chicago; I don't wanna be here anymore and I'm gonna leave. And I remember that was the night we made paxani [ph] meatballs and it was a group dinner at my house that you told me that you bought this plane ticket.

**And you encourage me to go for a really long time.**

I said you should just go. You should just live there. You should just sell all your stuff and go. And then we started dating and we had three months until your departure date or 3 ½ months maybe, and I kept trying to be like it's cool, we're just gonna date, and it's gonna be fun for the three months and then he's gonna leave and I'll never see him again and it's gonna be fine. And then it just happened so fast that we got really close and fell in love and then the end date started to feel really crazy, that this had happened and you were gonna go. But then you decided to come back and to be together, and so you cut that time down and spent the summer abroad in Europe traveling, and we were apart for a summer.

**I was gonna spend six months I had set at the longest till November at one point, and I couldn't do it. I got there and I couldn't do it. I was so adrift and really lonely, and I**

**missed you and I also missed Chicago, and I missed my friends and I missed my parents, and I missed my cat.**

But mostly you missed me.

**Yes. And so then I screwed up my understanding of the visa laws. There's a thing called the Shengen treaty, which I – which understanding is like I think particularly difficult, or at least I had a difficult time finding the correct information, but essentially it says you can only spend 90 days inside the whole – it's not the EU, it's like the EU plus a few countries – minus a few countries? It's weird, like Switzerland is part of the Shengen, Ireland is a part of the Shengen – or no, Ireland is not a part of the Shengen but they are a part of the EU. Something like that. But basically you have 90 days inside it and then you have to leave for 90 days before you can come back. So I just decided I would cut the trip off at 90 days and just go wherever I wanted, and that's what I did. And so I came back in mid-August in the heat of summer.**

It was great. And it was interesting because this year we were talking about some major potential for some major life decisions in terms of I applied to grad school and was considering leaving, and like last summer when you were gone, especially I missed my family a lot. My family is from the east coast and I missed my family and I was wondering if Chicago was the right place for me, and so I was this whole week debating if I was gonna move to New Jersey to go to Rutgers for my MFA, but decided the this year because of a lot of factors it wasn't the right decision for me, and so decided that we would spend another year in Chicago at least to see what was gonna happen.

**And I would have gone with you to Newark, New Jersey. I really would have. I'm really glad we're staying in Chicago. Not gonna lie about that. Let's talk about religion.**

Cool.

**Do you wanna talk about – do you wanna tell me what religion you were raised with?**

Yes. I was raised with Islam, so I was raised in an Islam household and I still identify as being Muslim. And you?

**I was raised Methodist, which is a part of Protestantism. I do not identify as religious. I identify as atheist although I refuse to align myself with any of the atheist movements because I really don't like them and I think that a lot of their mission statements and the people who are their figureheads are hateful people and I don't like that because that's not what atheism is about for me. How do you think that how you feel about**

**your religion now has changed from when you were a kid and what you thought when you were a kid?**

I was raised in a pretty – my family was really religious, and so for example my aunt would wake me up every day at 5:00 to read Namas [ph] and we would read the Koran almost every day. My aunt also made me wash my hands before touching any books because of the belief that there was – maybe God’s name was mentioned in them of that books were holy in that way, and I really firmly believed in God and also in organized religion and in Islam for the majority of my life, and in high school to. At this point I read the Koran in English a number of times. And in Arabic. So I read it in Arabic less, but I think I read the Koran in English at least 10 times over and over again, and then in high school I was super religious and then – but religious in a weird way, like I was religious but then I would sneak out of my house and go out on dates with boys, or I would drink. I had all of these kind of things that were very at odds with each other and myself in the way that organized religion was, but my family always taught me that religion is your own – the mosque is not an essential component to Islam and that your relationship with God is your relationship with God. And that’s why you pray directly and that’s why you read the Koran directly, and that’s why your interpretation is important and not anyone else’s. And then I went to college and I was still pretty religious, and it was hard because I went to Brown, which was a pretty secular school, and to the point where religion was left out or something if you were religious, and that was hard for me because I didn’t think that that was real or fair or whatever, and I felt like that was a little bit of academic bias. And then I lived in Jordan and that was really complicated for me because it was the first time I lived in a majority Muslim place. It was amazing in a lot of ways and it was also terrifying in a lot of ways, like the way that random people felt like they could just come up to me in the middle of the street and say I wasn’t a good Muslim because my hair wasn’t covered, or question my moral integrity because I didn’t look the way that they thought I needed to look, which I think became a very – as we started this conversation with isolating and lonely experience around like I’m not fitting the definition of what this is meant to be. And then I lived in Bosnia and that was very complicated for me because it was a lot of stuff around the way that organized religion has played into the mass murders of people, and that didn’t sit well with me. It was hard to have a lot of faith around that. And I think now I identify – I’m really spiritual and I believe in God, but I don’t necessarily believe in religion to the same extent that I used to. Do you feel like you’re relationship—

**I feel like it’s ever evolving, and I think perhaps I’m making an assumption here, but I do think that sometimes when religious people think about atheism they think of it as a fixed point or a non-evolving point. I think that my own relationship to religion and belief is constantly evolving. I was raised going to church every Sunday and I did Sunday school. I have not read the Bible though. It was just kinda gross to me, but**

that's a whole other tangent. It's surprising to me. I don't think my parents have read the Bible. I would be very surprised if their brothers and sisters have read the Bible, and yet – I'm sure my one aunt has read the Bible. Anyway, tangent aside, I was raised going to church and going to Sunday school, and rejected that in high school and probably – not probably – definitely became the kind of person that looks down on religion throughout my later high school and college years. It has evolved in that it seems – it doesn't seem that I can be the kind of human that I wanna be, by which I mean a kind and generous person if I am looking down on or rejecting most of the world. And if religion is – or a belief in God is something that has value for a lot of people, but more importantly something that has value for people that I love, then I can find value in that. And that's how my relationship to it has evolved. I don't believe in a God, and that's OK. I believe in other things that no one can prove. I believe in the simple power of great storytelling, and that it makes the world a better place. I think it would be hard to quantify that in a data sense, though I'm sure that there are people who try. I believe that my mood is changed by the seasons. I believe in these things that could be defined as more spiritual or mystical. People tell me that I'm spiritual and that's OK. That doesn't bother me. I think it used to bother me a lot because I wanted to reject all of those things. But I think partly I was just rejecting the institutions of them in the same way that you have complications around organized religion. I think that I was rejecting that organizational model more than the belief.

But I believe in magic.

**I know you believe in magic, and I don't believe in magic, and that's OK because you can believe in magic and I can not believe in magic. Or we can just call it different things.**

That's true.

**How do you think your family feels about you dating a Christian white dude? Or a Christian-raised white dude?**

You came home and you met the younger generation of my family, who are like 40. We're super young – me and my sisters, and then the generation above us is like in their 40s, and they all loved you and they're great, and a lot of them aren't super religious or kind of hard to tell where everybody is on the spectrum. My older generation, which is like my mom's generation and my aunt's and all of them – you met my auntie, who's very funny.

**I did. She chastised us for holding hands, which was cute.**



She chastised us for very gently holding hands under the table, and then she also – the next time I went and visited was Thanksgiving and I went by myself, and she handed me a stack of how-to-be-Muslim books, and then asked me to give them to you in the hopes that you would become Muslim, and then sat down next to me and was like is he good, does he treat you well, is he Muslim, and I was like no, and she was like is he going to be Muslim. It's very important that he becomes Muslim, and then I kinda wandered away.

**What did you answer to that?**

I just was like auntie, that's not gonna happen. She's also hilarious, like I have a big tattoo of a penguin on my forearm that's a watercolor tattoo, and I showed it to her and I explained the significance of it, and then she asked me if it was bird poop. She didn't understand. She's old and from a very different world. But I love her and you might have to pretend to be Muslim at some point in the future, so just know that.

**I'll read those books.**

I didn't bring them home.

**I know you didn't.**

I left them there.

[StoryCorps Facilitator: What is something that you really value about your relationship?]

I think that I value your constant support of me and the way that that actually allows me to be a greater person, a greater artist and explore more. I think that really came across in the grad school conversations and talking about if I was gonna go or not, and just like you were like you should to and I'll come with you even though it wasn't necessarily the thing that you wanted, but you were like this is a good opportunity and this is something that you should do, and I think that kind of support and faith makes it easier to make decisions that are scary, that are fearful, and just to be like yeah this person is here at the end of the day and I can come home to you, and that makes me feel like I can do a lot.

**I value your patience with me above all. We can be very different people, and I have a remarkable ability to not think before I speak, and often say the wrong thing, and your patience – the way that you are as a person – your patience in that space helps me remember to be patient. But then also your patience with me if I perhaps say the wrong thing or perhaps act a little impetuously – and you still love me, and I still feel**

**like I'm worthy of being loved even though I've messed up, and that to me is a lot of value. Plus you're funny. And I know that you think you're the funniest.**

I am the funniest person ever.

**Not ever, but definitely in the relationship.**

It's true. I am.

**Interviewer: Carl Atiya Swanson**

**Interviewee: David Schalliol**

**My name is Carl Atiya Swanson. I am 30 years old. It is April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015. We're located in the StoryCorp booth at the Chicago Cultural Center and I'm acquainted as an artist and professional with my partner here, my conversation partner.**

And I'm David Schalliol. I'm 38. Today is April 17<sup>th</sup>. I'm at the Chicago Cultural Center and my relationship to my conversation partner here is we're acquaintances.

**I wanna know how one goes from being a sociologist to a photographer and what the relationship is with that.**

Sure. Whenever I think about the relationship between sociology and photography I always think about – within myself I think about it as being – both of them as really coming from the same place. And so when I think back to when I was a kid and particularly when I started being interested in the world in a way that I was sort of aware of it as a social system, I feel like that was the birthing moment. And so for me in particular I think there was this period of time between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade when I moved from California back to a place that I'd lived before in Indiana. And when I did that all of a sudden I feel like education systems became clear, social systems became – it was an amazing, mind-blowing experience where in California, because they did Southwestern history in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when I came back to Indiana they did Southwestern history in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and so here I am, I'm bumping into this system. The other classes that I was taking also had this amazing overlap in this way, and I feel like all of a sudden I'm thinking about education system, so I'm thinking about the school districts in Solana, California and Carmel, Indiana, and my gosh isn't that interesting. And the kids I'd known when I was a kindergartener and a 1<sup>st</sup>-grader and so on had now grown up and they were – they're not grown up – as much as you can be when you're 12 or 13, but it changed quite a bit. And so here I am seeing these people again, but seeing them in a totally different kind of way. And I feel like that moment really shocked me out of my experience as a kid.

**Was the moving experience difficult for you even if you were coming back to Carmel where you knew people? That's a high-level realization for a 12-year-old to have.**

I feel like it was a difficult experience, but it was a difficult experience because of these kinds of realizations. And so it was the social system that I – I knew these people from before, but a lot had happened in the few years that we'd been apart, and so much so that now I'm in a situation where I really don't know these people anymore. So they're people I knew, and know they're people I don't know, but somehow they're the same

people. And I feel like that realization right as you're going through adolescence is probably – it was a good thing, but made it more difficult.

**Were there any specific experiences that really hammered that home?**

I feel like I started out with this example of the history class and the Southwestern history just because I feel like it was such a – it just made everything so clear, where like I've already learned all this. Not that there isn't a different take and you're in somewhere else and of course someone's gonna emphasize different points of view and so on, but up until that point I think I had thought of school as being challenging in a particular kind of way where you're constantly being presented with fresh information, and obviously you're augmenting that with your own reading or whatever, as much as you do as an elementary school or a junior high student. But it's something to – my experience up that point was it was this engaged thing where I was constantly getting fresh information to digest, and all of a sudden I'm in this situation where no, that's not the case anymore. Now I've got -- more or less it's the same thing. And what do you do with that? And so it's a funny experience. It's a funny thing for a 6<sup>th</sup>-grader to be thinking about, but it just, for whatever reason, it was just really a revelation to me. And so when I go back and I think about sociology and photography and where all that interest came from, it came from this interest in knowing that different places are different and culture and social differences and all this stuff happens depending on where you are and who you're connected to, and that they have tremendous ramifications for what your life is gonna be like – not just your social circle, your immediate group of friends, but something deeper in some other kind of way. And so I think that really kind of set me on this course towards being interested and understanding the social world – understanding those differences that keep people apart and also draw people together.

**That's definitely a sociologist talking in there about where you are and the location – how it really affects what your circles are and how it grows. Can you talk about Chicago and what you do here and your neighborhood and the work that you've done?**

Sure. Chicago I think is another continuation of that in a way, in a sense of when I'm in a new place I'm interested in discovering what makes that place distinctive, what are the special elements of wherever it is. And I think moving particularly to the south side of Chicago for graduation school in sociology – so obviously I carried this interest through. But I'm coming in and I had these I think really important experiences in Chicago as a kid and even as a teenager where we'd go up to the art institute and we'd go see a play or we'd go to the Museum of Contemporary Art or we'd do the Museum of Science and Industry sometimes with school, sometimes with my family. And so I have all these

really clear memories of Chicago before I lived here, and I can remember by the time I drove and my parents were OK enough with me going somewhere else – I remember driving up with friend, up to the city, and to do all those kinds of things – have a full day at the city. And so I had a really narrow experience of Chicago, but it was also a really powerful one. I can remember coming in on the Dan Ryan and seeing not Cabrini Green – seeing Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens. You're kind of coming up and growing up for the most part in a suburban environment, whether in Indiana or in California. That was just totally shocking. And then sort of driving around the city and going to the Museum of Science and Industry and experiencing the south side, again as a high schooler, was really important. And so then flash forward however many years – 8 years later, 9 years later, when I come to move here, I had a lot of pent up curiosity and interest in the city, and particularly in the south side of Chicago. And so here's my new home. How am I gonna learn about it? And I figure the best way to do it is to actually get out and start to explore it.

**And were you taking photographs, and were you documenting things in that way at that point? Which came first, the sociology and social systems discovery, or photography?**

I feel like I had an interest in art and I had an interest at that point – so in high school I did a lot of drawing although I also found photography. I took a dark room class, and after that point just did a bunch of independent studies in high school. I was always fortunate enough to be in a high school where they let you do that kind of thing, and so I borrowed my father's camera and went out and I learned to shoot on film and go do that. And so I did some of that in high school and I was doing some documenting at that time, but for the most part I think the documentation I was doing at that time was about the things that I saw as being really pertinent to my life, and so that was this hardcore punk scene in Indianapolis, primarily in Indianapolis, and then also the sort of rural suburban edge. And so we lived in this neighborhood that was – at that time it had been built and was sort of literally on the edge of the farmland, so you went outside of the subdivision and then it was just farms basically for miles. And it had been that way for several years, but during the time that we were there it started to build up. And when it started to build up, then I went out and I photographed the farmhouses before they would be demolished, and spent a lot of time exploring those kinds of places. So that's what I was doing in terms of photography then. And so again, I saw that as what are the big transformative things that are happening around me, and I should document them. But I wasn't so much doing that in Chicago until I moved here, and when I moved here, like I was saying – that I just felt like the best way to understand the city was to go out and explore it, and so that meant going everywhere. So that really meant going everywhere, but it meant particularly spending time on the south side because I felt like here I am, I'm in Hyde Park, we know that there's a legacy of institutional – at least

class-based divisions on the south side, and of course there's persistent ethnic and racial issues too. And so I just felt like it was critical for me as someone who was claiming identity as someone who's living on the south side, who's literally is living on the south side of the city, then I should have some deeper connection with what was going on around me and try to become part of a broader set of communities. So I wasn't satisfied with the idea of just being part of the university community, and so a piece of that meant while going out to explore and to photograph – to use the camera as one tool, as an excuse to get to know people and to get to know a place, and walking down the street it was easy to say I'm here because I'm a student; I'm here because I have a camera, and it gave a really helpful opening for conversations. And so not to say that I went in with that kind of deliberative idea of I'm gonna use the camera as a tool, as a way to open up a community, but it turned out to be that kind of way, that kind of experience. And so that's really how that piece of it started to merge with the city – was just getting to know what's around me.

**And it is being an artist and wanting to capture people and get into conversation with people – a camera is a great tool to pull that off. Did you find that people were open to talking to you? Did it become a willing exchange when you presented yourself – hi, I'm here, I'm a student, show my camera – what are those interactions like?**

Almost always positive. People ask me all the time, and I think part of that has to do with the privilege of being a white guy wandering around a neighborhood and particularly in neighborhoods where I'm not always – I don't demographically match the people around me although there are plenty of places in the city, particularly on the south side, where that is true. I get that question a lot. Usually the question is do you feel safe, and my answer is always those experiences are always good experiences. I've had a handful of times where someone's been unhappy with me being in a particular kind of place that usually something else was going on that I wasn't privy to at that point. I think part of that has to do with the way that I try to be really open and totally straightforward and totally honest. I'm not surreptitious about anything that I'm doing, so I'm walking down the street or I'm driving down the street or whatever it is that I'm doing – it means that when I'm gonna engage with someone I'm gonna do it in an honest kind of way, so I introduce myself, I say who I am, I say – try to get a sense right off the bat if this is the kind of person who I may wanna have a bigger conversation with, or if it's the kind of person I might wanna photograph or something else, but – or just enjoy the pleasant conversation. I feel like a big piece of that is just being open and honest and totally transparent about everything.

**If you're open and honest and trying to integrate or have a really base level honest conversation with somebody, is there a tension with the sociology – sort of a systems**

**observation? If you're in it can you observe it fully? Do you feel like there's a tension there?**

I do think that there's some tension, but for the most part when I'm in the process of having a conversation I try to drop that in a way. In a way it's impossible to totally remove that from the conversation, but I think a lot of that also comes into the assumptions that I might make about someone before I see them, or right when I see them, before I start talking to them. And I feel like that's where a lot of that – the sociological weight really is at that moment, and then I feel like once I'm in the conversation, particularly if I don't have some sort of specific objective beyond just trying to understand them, then I feel like there's no problem there. It doesn't pull me out of the conversation because I genuinely just wanna know what's going on with them and what's going on. And so I think as long as I'm at that level, then it's never an issue. And then I feel like once – if I am working on a research project where I'm talking to people I do think there's a little bit more of a pressure, a little bit more of a weight in that kind of experience, but still I feel like I'm able to set enough of it aside that I'm really in the moment, and it's after the fact that I begin to reflect and try to think more critically or try to make connections between conversations I had with them before or with other people or whatever.

**Have there been any experiences where you've started a conversation and had any assumptions – had the moment of realization where I was completely wrong about what I thought this conversation was gonna be about, or that changed you as you've been having the conversation?**

Surely that's happened. I'm having a hard time thinking of a good example right now. But I do feel like the change is an easy – I suppose the easy answer is yes, absolutely conversations fundamentally change the way that I experience the world and I think about the main project I'm working on right now, which is an ethnographic documentary project about a neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, and it's become part of my life. I've been working on the project for three years now. I've become friends with people who lived in the neighborhood. I've developed close relationships, so it's not just my way of thinking about something has changed, it's that when I wake up in the morning I wonder how so-and-so is doing. And because this neighborhood is a neighborhood that's historically had quite a bit of problems for a variety of reasons, many of which are beyond the control of local residents, that I also wake up in the morning and I think maybe I should look at the news and see if something happened over the night. Probably I would've heard about it already; I would've gotten a phone call or I would've gotten a text message or an email or something, but there is this new level of fear that permeates my life in a way that didn't before.

**Can you talk more about this project, like some specifics about what you're doing and where you're at?**

Absolutely. Do you wanna ask that question?

**Yes, I was gonna ask you do you wanna get into some of the details around the emotional responses that you developed around it as well?**

Sure, and I can tell you a little bit about the background as a way of getting into that. This is project that's roughly centered around 57<sup>th</sup> and Normal on the south side of Chicago. It's the sort of northeastern corner of the Englewood neighborhood, and it's a neighborhood that, like other parts of Englewood, started in the 1950s and '60s, became an African American community. It primarily is people sorted migrated from the South as part of this second great migration into Chicago, and really established a new community and a place. And one of the things that's so special about this specific neighborhood community is that it's literally bound by railroad tracks, and so to the north on 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Garfield there, there is a giant wall, and that's where an intermodal terminal begins – a freight yard terminal where trains come in and the bring in shipping containers and trucks come in and they bring shipping containers and they swap, and there's a massive yard just north of it. On either side of it, on the east and west sides there are railroad tracks that then run down either side and they're also raised, and so they have giant embankments on both sides of the neighborhood. And then on the southern side of at least the sort of northern portion of this neighborhood there's yet another embankment and there's yet another railroad bridge. And so this portion, particularly between 55<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Street is a neighborhood that is almost a walled city, so there are only a handful of places in and out. I think in Chicago we tend to take for granted the grid system and there are always openings no matter which you go. You can always just go north or you can go east or you can west. Maybe the lake gets in the way or maybe there's a railroad track or maybe there's something, but for the most part we think of the city as kind of limitless in some kind of capacity. And this is neighborhood where it's extremely limited in its scope, and the result of that has been I think a particularly tight knit community. And so the reason I got involved in this project was I was working on a project where I was photographing building that were being demolished in the city, and so I photographed every building that was – not every building – but so I photographed hundreds of buildings that were demolished in the city of Chicago in 2012. And at the same time I put together a document record where I pulled in a bunch of city data and other data to build out a database for that period. And one of those days I was working on the project. I was driving along and there not one, not two, but three houses all being demolished within eyesight of each other. And that never happened. It certainly hadn't happened up to that point. Hasn't happened since.



Clearly something was going on in the neighborhood. So I started asking around – what’s the situation? And found out that this intermodal freight yard that’s defined the community for so many years at least physically and to a certain extent socially, has decided that it’s going to expand, and it’s gonna expand south. And so what it’s doing is it’s buying up all the parcels in the neighborhood, so at that time there were at least 400 families in the neighborhood, and buying up these properties or working with the city to buy up public housing and other vacant parcels and so on that were in the neighborhood that weren’t privately owned – clear them and then build this intermodal freight yard. At that point a chunk of the neighborhood was still there, it still was functioning like any other neighborhood in the city, but change was coming, and it was coming quickly. And so I reached to a number of people in the neighborhood and really just started developing relationships and decided I wanted to do my dissertation on the topic and also wanted to make this documentary film, really an ethnographic film about the experience of living in a changing community. And so emotionally I think there are a number of things that can go into the changes that happen as a result of working on a project like this. One piece is you’re understanding the city starts to change, and so it turns out that this neighborhood is more or less – it’s really due west of where I live. It’s just a few miles away, so I can get in my car or hop on my bike and I can be there within a pretty short period of time, but it feels like a very different kind of place for a variety of reasons, and now primarily because there’s very little human activity in the site. But at the time it was pretty active, and so my sense of where I was spending time as the city changed, but then on top of that the communities in which I was spending a lot of time changed, and so while I’d been doing other work on the south and the west sides of city, I hadn’t decided to do a project that would be longitudinal in this kind of way, in the sense that I really wanted to spend as much time as I could in the neighborhood until the neighborhood wasn’t there, and at that point spend time with the residents when they went somewhere new. And so just that daily experience of going literally every day into the neighborhood and spending hour upon hour there, spending time at peoples’ houses, walking – hang out in the street, doing all the sort of things that people in the neighborhood were doing, just really changed my experience of the city. I think the emotional effect of that is wide ranging. I feel like I now have close connections, emotional, personal connections to people I didn’t know before, and I feel, in people who are going through a tremendous transition in their lives because of this expansion, and so I feel like I carry some of the that weight with me too. It’s impossible not to be that involved in a neighborhood that’s being displaced in that capacity and not have some sort of deep empathetic experience. But in a way it’s beyond empathy. It becomes a personal experience because this is now a neighborhood that’s not my community, but it’s now a community where I’ve spent so much time and in so many peoples’ homes and with so many people that my experience in that community is also going away, and so I’d say it transcends that notion of just simply feeling what other people

feel because they're feeling it and you have a deep connection with them. It actually becomes a personal experience of that emotional loss.

**How are you dealing with that emotional loss? What is gonna be the hardest part of that?**

It's hard. I think this is one place where the sociological element of it and the documentary element of it I think is helpful in the sense that it does give me a space to enter in which I have some level of distance, and so while I experience it I really wanna leverage my emotional experience as a way of understanding what's happening in this place. I think you really wanna dig into those things and really use them to understand, and as a way of better expressing the experience of people in any particular kind of community. But at the same time I do think that it makes it – having this sort of – I'm trying to think of what the talisman for a sociologist is or something, but anyway, having this camera and having some sort of thing in sociology that gives you a little bit of a reason to step back and think a little more analytically – to step outside of your own life in a way is something that can make it a little easier to transition between other parts of my life and that part of my life. And so in a way I feel like I'm kind of dealing with it, but I'm also kind of not dealing with it, if that makes sense. It's not a great answer but I feel like it's something I'm aware of, and it's something that I feel more intensely sometimes and less intensely other times. But I think that the project-based piece of it gives me something to grab onto even when – I don't wanna say even when or despite – but it gives me something to grab onto.

**The people who you've come to know, who you've worked with who are now your friends who are being displaced, what are they grabbing onto, and in the transition how are you as an artist, as a sociologist, are you helping them move? Is your work also giving them something to look back on as a documentation of something? What's that transition like for them?**

I hope so. I never wanna go too far in saying what my work is doing for someone else, because it's hard for me to really know that. I feel like I've got a sense of what that is, but maybe I don't wanna say it. I don't wanna be on the record as saying this is what it's doing, but I think – so I've got a pretty good sense of the way that the work is helpful, and I think one of the ways that it's helpful – and I see glimpses of it when people ask me to document something as part of their experiences because they see the importance in doing that, and when I think that's helpful for me, and it seems to helpful to them.

**And there's a very fundamental desire to be seen, and so having some sort of documentation, does it play into that here's my story and I can see it now?**

I think there's some of that, although I think that most of the people in the neighborhood are not motivated by a desire to be – their participation in this aspect of the project is not motivated by a desire to be seen. Certainly there are people who I've worked with who really wanna be on the camera and they wanna be heard and they really want their story out there. There are people in the neighborhood who feel that way, but I feel like many of the people in the neighborhood – I don't wanna go too far in providing some sort of interpretation of their motivation, but I will say that I think for the most part it's not about that – being seen – although I do think there's a sense of saying that I'm going through this experience and I want other people who may also go through this experience to understand what they have coming. So I think that that's one piece of it, and so the piece is I'm working with so many people in the neighborhood. There are several families and I've gotten to know a lot of people in the community that there are so many different kinds of reasons that people want to be there. And it also depends on if they're there by themselves, if I'm with them by themselves or if I'm with them around a group of people. That changes their reasons for participating and so on. So I just think that's a really complicated kind of thing to get into, and I guess I don't wanna push that too far. But I will say there's some sense that other people should know what this experience is like, but I think it's coming not from that sort of self-centered desire to be recognized, but it's coming from a concern for others.

**We talked a little bit about being here and the longitudinal being engaged with the community for three years, but you also travel and you do work around the world. You move around when you have not three years to get to know somebody and how do you emotionally connect? How do you generate connections that way?**

I think that's a really fun thing to do. They're both really fun, but they're fun in different kinds of ways, and I feel like one of the exciting things about going around the world over the last several years particularly spending a lot of time in different cities throughout the United States is just this – there's an excitement, particularly if it's a place that I've never been to before. In a way it's almost like that sense of like I want to get to know the south side of Chicago because I'm gonna be living here and I wanna understand it in some kind of greater kind of way and I wanna be part of it in some other kind of way. In a way there's a narrow version of that that I carry with me, so I want to be there, I want to understand, I want to be part of this other kind of place as much as I can as an outsider. And so that's a big piece of that, and so whenever I go somewhere else I'm always looking for what's the project – what's the best way to express my experience of a place in whatever limited amount of time that is?

**I bounced around a lot growing up and I think that one of the greatest benefits of that is that I feel comfortable being lost in cities or in spaces that I don't particularly know.**

**That often has the result of people asking me for directions in cities where I am for the first time. Is that something that you get, where you feel like you're alright with not knowing everything about the space?**

Absolutely. I think that's part of the fun of it. I do research before I go places, and if it's a project that has a really finite time period and there's a particular kind of outcome – a really finite outcome – then some product that needs to happen, then I may do a lot of preparation. But the ideal way is to really go in and have a background knowledge of what the general issues are and whatever, but then really try to figure out how to negotiate that space and think about it as exploring and trying to figure out where it takes you, and so not really knowing what you're gonna do that day other than start out in this place that seems kind of interesting – I looked at a map or I read something about it or whatever and I wanna go there and I wanna talk to people and then see what they want me to do, and then move from there.

**What's been a standout experience in that mode of working for you as an artist, as a sociologist?**

There's so many of them – right now the scary ones are coming to mind.

**You can share one of those.**

There should be a better one though. I think one of the things that's really exciting, and I think this is a general experience but I'll anchor it with something more specific, is that I feel like when you go into a place and you're really open and you're honest and straightforward and you're just there and you're honestly present, that it provides all sorts of just amazing opportunities, and I feel like one example would be I was out with some friends in Detroit and we were out in a part of the city that I didn't know very well, and we'd been there for the summer and we were really trying to get to know another part of it and sort of stopped in the street and saw these murals that someone had made and asked someone on the street about them. They said I think that guy's connected to the church over there, so I wandered over and talked to the guy at the church and the guy at the church got really excited. It turns out he's the minister and he knows the person who made it and he commissioned this artist to make a painting of his wife on the side of the church, so he took us all into the church and played music for us that he had recently recorded and was just – that experience of this openness, this sharing, this just like let's connect in this place is the kind of thing that happens all the time when you have the capacity to be open in that kind of way. And I think there are a lot of people who don't have the privilege to be able to do that or don't have whatever it is that underlies that sort of openness, but when you are in a position to be able to have that I feel like there's just this amazing opportunity for new kinds of connection,

new kinds of experiences and windows into other parts of the world that then can be built in some small way into your own. So I haven't kept in touch with that minister, but there are a number of people who are like that who I email with or maybe I have a phone call with, or I even write letters to a guy in Birmingham, Alabama sometimes. So there's people like this where I establish these connections, and I always try to give back, so if I'm making photographs I wanna make some prints and send them to them or send them digital files or I do whatever it is that's gonna be most convenient for them because I always make sure that it's not like I'm not just there as some voyeur. I wanna be there and offering something and so I'll do that. It becomes the foundation for long lasting relationships.

**Awesome. Great. I think that's perfect place to wrap up I think. I don't have any – I wanna end on a really good – like I put myself out there and build relationships with people and that's how we change the world together – slowly and in small incremental steps.**