

Collection: Thee Black Pride in Jackson Oral History Project

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Narrator: Aaron Walker

Interviewer: Destiny Sears

Transcriptionist: Alissa Rae Funderburk

Sears: Alright, so the day is November 15, 2021. The time is 5:56 PM. My name is Destiny Sears and I'm here doing Thee Black Pride here in Jackson and I'm here with—

Walker: Aaron Walker.

Sears: And can you spell your name for me, please?

Walker: A-A-R-O-N. W-A-L-K-E-R.

Sears: Alright, and then do I have your consent to record?

Walker: Yes.

Sears: Alright. So, I'm gonna go ahead and get started with some basic questions. So, what are your pronouns?

Walker: I'm just gay.

Sears: [Laughter] Okay, so he/him.

Walker: He, him, it doesn't matter [laughter], I don't get into the pronouns thing.

Sears: Okay, okay and when and where were you born?

Walker: I was born in Fort Hood, Texas on a military base. I was born July 13, 1995 and I moved to Jackson probably when I was like six months old.

Sears: Okay, and where else have you lived outside of Jackson?

Walker: Only in Jackson.

Sears: Okay, and what part of Jackson did you grow up in?

Walker: I grew up South Jackson, but most of my whole family's from like Northwest Jackson Shady Oaks, so I went to school over there till probably my ninth-grade year. Well, end of my ninth grade year. Tenth-grade year I came back to my school district in South Jackson, so.

Sears: Okay, and do you mind telling me like, what schools did you attend growing up?

Walker: Okay, I attended Jim Smith Elementary School. I loved Jim Smith. I actually transferred my school district, so sixth grade year I went to Peebles Middle School, cried to my mom like, "I

don't like it here, I want to go with my friends," and she transferred me back to Brinkley where all of my cousins and stuff was. And then left Brinkley, went to Lanier High School and in a year I was marching in the band. My actual band director is now the director of bands of the Sonic Boom, so. And after ninth grade year, I went to [unclear] High School from there stayed til twelfth-grade year and graduated.

Sears: Alright. And then you spoke of your mom. So, what is your household dynamics like? Who all was in your house growing up?

Walker: All in my house? It was really just me, my mom, my sister. My mom, when I was like six months old, my mom was married to my father. He moved us back here to Jackson when he had to go to South, North? North or South Korea 'cause he's in the military. And after that, you know, he came back and well whatever he and my mom had just didn't work out. And so we stayed here in Jackson, he went back to Texas, married someone else. And yeah been here. My mom then again, remarried and that didn't last long [laughter]. So, basically you know, just my mom, my sister, me. She actually brought her husband is her second husband is back now. They're not officially married, but they just been together, so. But he's most of time he's just out on the road doing construction, things of that nature, so.

Sears: Alright, and then how old is your sister?

Walker: My sister is 29.

[00:03:04] Sears: Okay so, what is y'all age difference?

Walker: Three years apart. Now she's 29, I'm 26.

Sears: Okay and what is y'all relationship like?

Walker: Me and my sister really close, very close. If anybody came to bother me, mess with me, she's ready to fight. That's my older big sister. She's tough. My mom, she only has two of us, so it's me and my sister, but my dad has a total of seven. So yeah, my sister is the oldest, like the first first born out of all of my siblings and I'm like the oldest boy on my dad's side.

Sears: Okay and then how's your relationship with your siblings on your dad's side?

Walker: The siblings on my dad's side, I can admit that I have a relationship with all of them. I'm the one that they everybody call and asks, "How this person doing? How this sibling doing?" 'cause they don't talk to each other. So I'm the person that like kind of keep all of my siblings together.

Sears: Okay, so you the glue.

Walker: Yeah.

[00:03:57] Sears: Okay, and did y'all have any set religion or anything in your household?

Walker: Oh yeah. My—we went to church every Sunday. My granddaddy was the assistant pastor at the church I grew up in. Now my dad's a pastor. And so yeah, we in church every Sunday, Sunday school, Wednesday night Bible class. That was just a must growing up in my household.

Sears: Okay, and is it a church here in Jackson? Do you know the name of it?

Walker: Yes, so the church that I grew up in is called Tabernacle of Praise Baptist Church. And I just recently moved my membership by like going on three years now, to Jackson Revival Center.

Sears: Okay. So, what would you say your religion is now?

Walker: I can say I'm really not religious but more spiritual.

Sears: Can you elaborate on that?

Walker: Spiritual is like I don't get—so like the church that I grew up in, they was really caught up in like religion, like the customs of like the old school how church really was. And so basically I became more spiritual when I start really branching out and going to Jackson Revival Center and whatnot and like start building my faith more. And really get to know God for myself. Who he

was, and not what my parents, like my grandparents, or my church tried to establish. Like they had a good foundation but I had to build on that.

Sears: Alright, and as you stated before you identify yourself as a gay Black male.

Walker: Yes.

Sears: Alright and then can you describe and like explain what that means to you?

Walker: To me, you know so many people think like, especially in my family, they think you know when you're gay you kinda like real like nails, hair, like all of these things. But like me, I'm just, I'm me. Like I don't—if you come up asking who I am, if I'm gay or whatnot, I'll tell you but like other than that I just personally, just do me. Like I don't really get into all that.

Sears: Alright. [Laughter] Alright. And then when did you first acknowledge your sexuality, like you realized like this is me?

Walker: [Pause] When I first realized like that I was officially, officially gay. Like I can admit, around middle school, I started having like those urges. Like I was still trying to figure out who I was, so I like messed around, like dated girls. But like I kind of had this feeling towards guys and like high school is like—my junior year, like really ninth grade was like, “okay what’s this?” But like by my junior year like, yeah, definitely gay.

[00:06:36] Sears: Alright, and then from your junior year, when did you come out to those around you? And who was the first person you came out to?

Walker: Oh wow. My coming out stories. I have several different coming out moments, which is crazy. But the first person I think I ever came out to was like my sister, my sister that stays in Texas. And the only reason I came out to her because she was already out. So she was already out, open, gay, living her truth. So I came out to her first. Then secondly, I—the second time I came out—and it wasn't necessarily a coming out—I end up, I was in high school, my twelve grade year, and I end up having this incident in high school and I told my auntie about it. And she was really like start preaching the Bible to me. Oh, really just like, "I'm disappointed in you. Why you do that?" And after that I kind of went into like a really really deep depression. Very deep depression. And so by that time, my auntie called my mom. It was like one morning and I was getting up getting dressed for school, she called my mom, she told my mom what happened. And by that time yeah, my mom, it went down hill from there. I got suspended from school my first time. In twelve years of going through school, like high school and all that, I got suspended for the first time like my twelfth grade year. And so at that point, my mom, she was like you know, it's okay and she got me therapy, she got me counseling and after that I kind of like stayed off until I really got in college like around 2015. I was like, "Okay, I'm really going to explore my sexuality and see who I am," and so I just started doing me, exploring it, started dating, talking to guys doing this, doing that. But I officially did not, just like if you knew you knew, if you came up and asked me, I would've told you. But like officially come out to the

public was actually this year. I made a whole Facebook post and posted the person I'm talking to now. And just like if you know, this who I am, this me, not hiding no more and that's that.

Sears: Well congratulations on that.

Walker: Thank you.

Sears: So you said in college that you decided to experiment. So can you tell me your college experience as a Black gay male?

Walker: Okay, I'm trying to figure out how to say this without it being very x-rated [laughter].

Because my college experience is, I must say it was experience, alright. I learned a lot like I never had. I would say this, I never had a person to teach me all the different terminology out of different things that go on in the gay community. So by me getting out there and everybody knows, just trying to find people to talk to, dating apps and all of this. I learned fast and I mean when I say I learn fast, you learn real fast. And I was like, "Okay. Maybe I, maybe I'm like this." I was like yeah, it was a lot. It. I don't know how else to explain it. It was a lot that I had to learn fast. I came across many different people. Some was cool, some was weird. I can say when I did decide to explore my sexuality, I end up meeting one of my best friends. Like we end up becoming cool, chill, and we still friends to this day. Like he was one person there. Like 'cause at that point I never really had a actual gay best friend. So by me meeting him, like I really learned



a lot and we just like this. He get on my nerves, I get on his nerves. It's just what it is. But like my experiences in college, it was, I would say it was an experience.

[00:10:45] Sears: Alright, and you said that you learned a lot of terminology. Do you mind elaborating on the terminology that you learned?

Walker: Wow, the terminology I learned. Okay, especially when it comes to gay males. Are you top, verse, verse top, verse bottom? I'm like—Are you sexually fluid? I'm like, what is all this terminology, what does this mean? And I'm like okay, you learn fast. And I caught on fast. The difference between transsexuals, what they like to be called. Do they want to called their name or their new name? Like how do you go about that. And so yeah, just it was a teach—it was a learning moment. Very teachable, very teachable moments to my experience. Some moments I can say I did regret little bit. Like what was I thinking? Why did I go do that? But I wouldn't change none of it. It was very, it was a very meaningful experience.

Sears: Okay, so is there any terminology that you think that people should know?

Walker: I think for one, and especially this happened today. The person I'm dating, he asked, he posted online, he asked a question. He was like, "For when it comes to like transgenders or transsexuals do they? Would they rather be called their new name, the new name they identify by, or like the regular name that they have?" And some people get confused by that because if it's somebody that you grew up with, like what do you call them? I have this—my cousin now is

transitioning and so it's like what do you call him? Do you call him by his old name, or call him his name? My mom's like, "is he still my nephew or is he still my niece? And I think that, I think, when it comes to that part of the LGBTQ community, I think a lot of people don't understand.

Sears: Okay, and [pause]. Okay, so you said one of the first people that you came out to was your sister. What was her reaction? How did you feel afterwards?

Walker: Her reaction, "I knew it. I knew you was gay. I knew it. I knew it." I was like. I guess yes. But me and her always like this. Like when she came to town, if you saw me, you saw her. If you saw her, you saw me. We was always together, one couldn't move without the other and it's still like that to this day. So basically, me and her always talk, chill or whatnot. And yeah, so when she said she knew it, I kinda figure she did know because we just know each other.

Sears: And then you said, and then you came out to your aunt and you told us her explanation—well, her reaction. What about your mom? Was your mom's reaction?

Walker: My mom said she was just gonna love me regardless, whatever I chose, you know, even though she don't agree with it, she still, you know, respect me and you know still love me with the decision that I try to make in my life.

Sears: Alright, and then have you ever been to any Pride events?

Walker: I have not.

Sears: Do you plan on attending any Pride events?

Walker: I really do. I really want to. I always said I want to go to Dallas Pride and then my auntie, she has this big—she's big in the gay community in Houston and she threw Pride Houston this year. And she was the whole like vice president over it. So I was really upset that I couldn't get out there to that because I had just started my new job where I work at now.

Sears: So, alright and speaking of your new job, where do you work now?

Walker: I work at WJTV.

Sears: Alright, and that is a—

Walker: News station, 12 News.

Sears: Okay, here in Jackson?

Walker: Here in Jackson.

Sears: Okay, so what is it like being a Black gay male in your work environment?

Walker: I mean it's comfortable because I'm not the only. Well, I'm not going to say I'm the only gay male, but I'm not the only one. It's a lot of us in the newsroom. And it's a lot of us in news that are gay now and very openly gay.

[00:15:00] Sears: Alright, and then what was your experience being a Black gay male here in the South?

Walker: My experience, I could say, here in the South we have come a long way from like the early 80s, 90s, around that time. When it was really coming forward, especially around the AIDS epidemic or whatnot. So I could see, I could realize that we have come a long way, but I could really still see like that we still in the Bible Belt. And that religion is very, very strong here in the state of Mississippi. And I guess that was one reason why I left my home church is because my pastor, he was always preach on homosexuality. This, that, down to that and like you have other sins, like fornication, adultery, getting pregnant before marriage. You had all these other things, and I'm not gonna put anybody out there who was doing it in the church, but you had all these other people doing certain things, but you keep preaching homosexuality. But you got your own family that's around here doing certain things in the community. So I guess that was one thing and I was like, you know what, I got to go somewhere where I feel comfortable. And that's one thing that led me to do what I do. And also I didn't like people questioning other people about what I did in my life. And that was another problem that led me to leave, so.

Sears: Alright, and then what is it like being a Black gay male here in Jackson, Mississippi?

Walker: The community is very small. I can say that being a gay male, gay, lesbian any type of form in the LGBTQ community here in Jackson. It's small, so everybody, it gets around.

Everybody know everybody. It's very small. So I can know, I'd be like, "friend I want to talk to this person," he like, "oh, don't talk to that person. Don't do that." Like, it's very very small. And that's one thing I did learn when I was in college, that this community is small. So like I always knew like the profession that I want to go in or how I wanna go into my career, I always knew how to conduct myself in not participating in certain things within Jackson. Whether it was like in the gay community or just period.

Sears: So, you would say the dating pool here is small.

[00:17:29] Walker: Yes.

Sears: So, how do you feel about dating in Jackson?

Walker: And that's the point. My significant other does not stay in Jackson. I literally—he's in the state. I literally went three hours away from Jackson and dated somebody.

Sears: Do you mind elaborating on where he's from?

Walker: He's from Tupelo, Mississippi. He's from Tupelo, he's actually gonna be here this weekend for the game, and so yeah. It just worked out that way, like and it wasn't really nothing that we really was trying to get into a relationship. It just happened that way. I can say that when I was in college I did date. I did have my first relationship. My first boyfriend in college. Actually my first relationship, my first love, my first heartbreak.

Sears: Do you mind telling us the story?

Walker: Wow. This story. I met him through a friend. I was initially posed to talk to someone else. And so they was playing games and so my friend, she was like, "I got somebody else over here for you." And so, I said okay. So he actually stayed in Canton. So one of my friends, my friends who was having like a kick back at the hotel, at this hotel in Jackson. And she's like, "Okay, let's ride up here to Canton and pick him up." So I drove to Canton, picked him up, and literally I stayed out all night with him. I had to tell my mom, like "Mom, I ain't coming home. I'm here." And so basically we sat out there til probably almost three, four, five o'clock in the morning talking. We end up going to Whataburger on County Line, sitting there, eating, talking or whatnot. And like I remember the day was April 14, 2017. Literally, like it was Easter weekend matter of fact. And so yeah, we sat there, we chilled and we dated probably to the new year. Until you know, we decided like you know we still had certain things me and him both had to work on. But like I tell him, like me, him right now are still really, really good friends. We talk all the time and you know. I always said like if we didn't workout we would always be friends and if it was meant for us to get back together, like we'll get back together. But that's still the love

that, I still love him deeply. Even though I'm in the relationship I'm in now, I really still have like deep feelings for him, and still care for him, and still wanna see him thrive and do well.

Sears: Alright, do you feel that dating in the gay community is basically parallel to dating in the heterosexual community?

Walker: It's like the same? Yes. I really do. The person that I date now, he like—I get upset. He get upset by like certain friends that I have, certain gay friends that I have. He like, "you can't be friends with this person, that person" and I feel like it's the same way in the heterosexual community like can a guy and a female be friends. No. I feel like it's the same, so. Amd my momma, used to always say growing up, she's like, "same sex, same problems." So.

[00:20:49] Sears: Your mother is very smart. So what are places in Jackson that you feel the most comfortable in?

Walker: 'Cause me, I'm really much of a homebody. I love being in my house. I mean, I go out but like the most comfortable, like I'm chill. So like I go to my friend's apartments, we'll have kickbacks or whatnot. I've never been too much of a clubber or a person like go to clubs whatever. But like I go to like bars. I go to Sweet Spot sometimes, 4th Avenue, but like I never been to the gay club. Never been. Never been to the gay club here. So, I'm really chill, laid back.

Sears: Okay, having do you know all the gay clubs that are here in Jackson?

Walker: There's only one. There's only one [laughter] Metro. Only one. Well, Wunderlust but that's more so a bar.

Sears: Alright. And then have you heard of the gay Greek organizations?

Walker: Here underground or? I have and yeah my ex actually wanted to pledge underground. Which is crazy. He wanted to be a underground AKA. I told him no.

Sears: Okay, so that's what they call them? They call them underground orgs? Okay.

Walker: I know. I know a couple of people that are, they pledged underground.

Sears: Alright, and then how do you feel about those orgs?

Walker: I mean, to each his own. If that's the decision that you want to do, pledge by all means. Do you. Never been my cup of tea. Like I said, my ex wanted to pledge. I told him no, don't do that. 'Cause when it's underground it's no control over what you have to go through to cross. So don't do that. and I said you in relationship so uh huh. If you were single, by all means, do what you wanna do. But when you in a relationship, not all of that finna fly.



Sears: Okay. So, my next question is, do you feel like your experience would have been different if you were of a different race?

Walker:[Sigh] I'mma say no. Because it all depends on your family. What type of family breakdown you come from. 'Cause I might be like some people of different races still experience the same thing from their parents about being gay. Now when it comes to being Black and gay, that's a different story on top of that. But like, just if you just come from, like just family background, I'm gonna say no. It all depends on your family.

[00:23:50] Sears: Okay, can you speak on the being Black and gay and that experience?

Walker: Okay. Being Black and gay. I mean like one thing about being Black, a Black male in America is way different 'cause we see it when it comes to certain police brutality and certain things. And then adding gay on top of it, it's a whole stigma of like judgment. Especially when it comes to like Black males supposed to be hard, tough, not supposed to cry, we're not supposed to do that. And then you add on, oh your gay and you like doing this and all that, it's a judgment from your own people, the Black community, that looks down on you for being gay.

Sears: Alright, and then have you experienced homophobia?

Walker: I'mma say this, maybe, probably in high school when people probably thought I was gay and did not know better. But like, I feel like now no. I mean like it's everybody cool, like you do

you. Like I have a lot of straight guy friends like, “oh I forget that you were gay anyway.” Like I just, I'm cool, I just chilled.

Sears: And, what are the circumstances that you think changed that? From you being in high school and experiencing homophobia, then you now and nobody really, you know, having a problem?

Walker: People grew up. You know it's all about maturity and just growing up.

Sears: Okay, and at any point have you felt repressed?

Walker: What you mean?

Sears: As if you couldn't fully be yourself?

Walker: Oh yeah, especially around my family. Coming from like a Christian background family, I always knew I had to shelter who I was. Like even though I came out on Facebook and made a whole facebook post, like my grandparents, they don't—they're not on social media so they don't know. Well, at least I think they don't know. I'm gonna say it like that. I don't know 'cause my dad found out and my dad is really against the whole life. He gets upset when you talk about me, my sister, my cousin, my aunt, like he gets really, really upset about it. Why? I don't know? But he gets really upset and I guess he goes and confides to my granddaddy who is associate

pastor. And so, I think my Granddaddy know and my grandmother know, but I just let it be. Like okay, we don't talk about it, I just go with this like it's normal.

Sears: Alright, and then if so, did you have an outlet when you were oppressed? What was your outlet?

Walker: My outlet for like for me just to be myself to talk about my problems will be my godmother. I met her and what's so crazy is I met her when I met my best friend. And so he was always around her, and we all just end up becoming cool. And it's amazing the type of people you will meet just through other people and to this day it's just like inseparable. I literally call her my second mom. Like that's mom. And she's somebody like I call and like she just know me. I can call and she'll be like, "what you up to, what you doing?" I sense you doing some wrong, what you doing? Like she just know me

Sears: Alright, and when you were talking about your college experience, you talked about apps. The dating apps. What are the dating apps that you use?

Walker: Oh wow.

Sears: Or that were popular at that time?

Walker: I mean they're still popular. Jack'd, Grindr, Tinder, Plenty of fish. Yeah, I think that's about all of them. You know I never got it. Never start using the Facebook dating app. That's just really new. The Facebook dating app. So I haven't gotten into that because by that time I realized I was in a whole relationship, so. But yeah, but the most one I really used, was Jack'd. Jack'd was very popular.

Sears: Can you explain what Jack'd is exactly?

Walker: Jack'd. It's a gay dating app. I ain't gonna say you do a lot of dating on there [laughter] but yeah. That's what it was made for. what it's meant for. But, yeah it ain't no dating going on.

Sears: Okay.

Walker: We gon say it like that.

Sears: Alright, and then—woah. So, if you could tell your younger self anything, what would it be?

Walker: My younger self that as you get older it gets better. Life gets easier. Well I ain't gonna say life gets easier, but everything works itself out like. My younger self, I'd tell him, you would be surprised where you be at when you're actually 26. From looking back from when I was

fifteen, sixteen to now like, yeah? I'ma grow up and be able to be positive. Be full of joy and just enjoy life.

Sears: Okay and then is there anything you want to put on the record?

Walker: On the record. Mm hmm.

Sears: Nothing, no lingo, no nothing?

Walker: No, no nothing, I'mma keep it simple. I'mma keep it chill.

Sears: [Laughter] Alright, well I wanna thank you for coming out tonight and I will make sure that you get a copy of this interview.

Walker: No problem.