

Collection: Thee Black Pride in JXN Oral History Project
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Narrator: Joshua Knight
Interviewer: Destiny Sears
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[00:00:00] Sears: Alright, so today is October 25, 2021, and it is 6:13 PM. My name is Destiny Sears and I will be interviewing on behalf of the Margaret Walker Center for Thee Black Pride in Jackson. Do you mind stating your name for the record?

Knight: Oh my name is Joshua Knight.

Sears: Alright and may you spell that, please?

Knight: J-O-S-H-U-A. K-N-I-G-H-T.

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

Knight: You sure do.

Sears: Alright, so we're going to go ahead and just get started on some basic questions just to get some background information on you. So what are your pronouns?

Knight: He, him, his.

Sears: Alright, and when and where were you born?

Knight: Jackson, Mississippi, August 10, 1993.

Sears: Okay, so can you paint a picture of your neighborhood that you grew up in and talk about your childhood a little bit?

Knight: It was the hood [laughter]. My childhood—are you talking about like as a queer person or?

Sears: Um just give me a—

Knight: Well, we don't come from poverty, but you know. We did struggle, but you know my mother made sure that we didn't go without. I had a very traumatic childhood, but you know that made me—those issues made me who I am today. I am the oldest of three. One passed away in 2014, unfortunately, so it's just two of us on my momma side. 'Cause my daddy's side, girl, that's another story for another day. But yeah, my childhood was pretty much—I'll have to say it was, it was traumatizing, but the issues that I faced made me into who I am today, especially into the Black queer man that I am today.

[00:02:08] Sears: Alright you said she stayed with your mom. So was it just your mom in the household or was there other adults? What was your family dynamic?

Knight: Oh, at first it was my mom and my stepdad—which is my sisters, both of their dads. Until of course, some domestic violence issues occurred and she end up leaving and so it was just us, me, my mom, and my sisters. And then of course I went off to college and it was just them and then my sister died. So, now it's just me, my mom, my sister, and my grandmother who randomly moved in with us one day. Um, so yeah.

[00:02:59] Sears: Okay [laughter] and can you describe your relationship with your sister?

Knight: My baby sister. She is my world. Like after losing a sister, I learned to cherish my siblings. I mean, I've always cherished my siblings, they're actually my first best friends. But I've learned to cherish the time that I spend with my sister, even though we stay in the same house. You know? My world. She is my rock. My rock, -ock, -ock.

Sears: Okay, and do you mind talking about what happened to your sister, how she passed away?

Knight: Oh yes, so. She had sickle cell. Both of my sisters have sickle cell anemia disease. I have the trait, but they have the full blown disease. She was in and out of the hospital a lot. And my sister, my baby sister, is also still suffering from sickle cell anemia, and she'll have random pain

crisis. And God, it feels like—I hate when she goes through them because the pain that they feel is unbearable. It's like somebody's stabbing her. But my sister—her name is Dominique. It's kind of a weird way, how she passed away. It was a tampon and it was toxic shock syndrome. And my mother doesn't allow them to use tampons because, you know, you could forget they're up there. And so I guess she was in a bind at school, 'cause she went to Terry High School. She was in a bind at school, and I guess she used a tampon and I guess she forgot it was up there. So with the toxins and stuff from the tampon and her sickle cell anemia that killed her immune system and so she—One day, I talked to her on the phone, the next minute she's in the hospital, I talked to her, then the next minute, she's gone. And in the autopsy, they found the tampon in her vaginal area and they said she died from toxic shock syndrome. So.

Sears: Okay, I'm sorry for your loss. One thing.

[Recording restarted]

Sears: Wait one second. Say something.

Knight: Hello. Hello. Hello. [Noise]

[00:05:44] Sears: Hold on, it's making a weird noise. I think that's fine now, I'm gonna reintroduce. Alright, we're gonna go ahead and start. Get started on part two of Thee Black

Pride in Jackson. We're here with Mr. Joshua Knight. Alright, so growing up you said that you had a traumatic childhood, do you mind explaining that?

[00:06:15] Knight: Oh well yes. So, as I told you before, my mother suffered from domestic violence. That not only you know affected her, but it affected us as well because he would beat on us too. Because he had anger issues—which he still has anger issues, by the way. He had anger issues and he would take his anger out on really me because I was the only boy of the family. My sisters, of course, suffered some. And I guess by him beating on us and, you know, taking his anger out on us, it kind of made me stronger. [Laughter] Yeah it is. From that and then, of course bullying, of course plays a part in it as well. Bullying for being gay. At the time I didn't really understand what the heck gay, you know, really was, or whatever. I didn't really know what—I didn't know what I liked. I was just like, “Oh hey, I think he's, you know, cute,” or whatever. But of course, I would beat myself up because I come from a very religious background and my mom and ‘em, they don’t play that. And so growing up in, you know, a household like that is very traumatizing, especially when they make you go to church and you're constantly being told “you're going to hell” and stuff. So it can be kind of traumatic, you know. But over the years, of course, I learned to stop caring and to dance to the beat of my own drum.

Sears: Alright, what schools did you attend growing up?

Knight: All of them or just?

Sears: Yeah, you can start from elementary.

Knight: Okay, so in elementary school, the first school I went to kindergarten through first grade was Bradley Elementary, which is now Jackson Public School District office. Third through—no second grade, I went to G. N. Smith Elementary. Third grade through fifth grade I went to Boyd Elementary. And then middle school I went to Byron Middle School and high school I went to Terry High School and then I graduated.

[00:08:44] Sears: Alright, and then what was your favorite subject in line school like? What did you like in school?

Knight: Girl, lunch, and recess. [Laughter] lunch and recess. But I would have to say in elementary school I didn't really have a favorite subject 'cause it was just like I really hated school. Middle school, however, I enjoyed drama class and art class 'cause I could draw. In high school it was theater. It was theater. I think this is kind of where I found my love for theater and arts and all that.

Sears: Alright, and what about college? What all colleges or if you attended college?

Knight: So, of course, I attended college [laughter]. So my freshman year through my sophomore year I attended Hinds Community College in Raymond. Then I transferred my sophomore year, so my second sophomore year I was here at Jackson State University through,

of course, my bachelor's senior year. Now I'm getting my master's at Jackson State University. I don't know about my Ph.D. here, I don't know.

Sears: And then how would you describe your college experience? What did you do?

Knight: Oh my goodness.

Sears: What is it like?

Knight: My college experience was amazing. I think for me 'cause I'm the only boy in my family. I kind of had high expectations for myself. Especially—I'm the only boy in my family and the only one that went to college. The only one with—about to have now—three degrees. I had a lot of expectations. Of course when I was in high school, I participated in, like I was a dance major at Hinds. And so I was a part of their dance company and theater company and of course, we put on shows. We did shows like The Lion King, The Wiz, etcetera, etcetera. Then I came here to Jackson State and I joined—the first ever organization I have ever joined while I was here was Spectrum, the LGBT alliance group here. I joined that, then I joined MadDrama Performance Troupe. Of course, we do performances there. I was a theater major my undergrad here, so of course, we did plays, it was part of the curriculum. Then I joined the Delta Psi chapter of Iota Phi Theta fraternity, incorporated. The greatest of them all. And I also am a part of the Alpha Psi Omega Theater National Society. And so I'm pretty sure I did something else here. I just can't remember. I did so much while I was here. Yes, that's about it. That I can remember.

Sears: Okay and how do you identify yourself?

Knight: I am a gay Black male [laughter].

[00:12:05] Sears: Okay. And then, when did you? First, can you explain—describe and explain what that means to you being a gay Black male?

Knight: I like other men [laughter]. It's a [pause], it's a sense of liberation. Freedom. I get to do what I want. And it's the beauty of it for me and my. I'm not bound by stereotypes. I'm not bound by—what's the word? What's the word? Social norms. Social norms. I'm not bound by social norms. Yeah, I think that's the beauty of being a gay Black male. Is that one I'm Black and two? I can do whatever I want. There's a sense to where you know social media now has this thing where straight Black men can't do anything without being gay. It's sad and unfortunate for them, 'cause we get to do whatever we want apparently. And you know this, I guess that's why they hate us, cause we get to do whatever we want.

Sears: Alright, and then when did you first acknowledge your sexuality?

Knight: When I first came to terms in it? To—with myself? My freshman year of college. Well, no. I take that back. It was my senior year of high school where I was just like, well, you know, this is who I am and especially with my, you know, coming from a religious background, and stuff. It

was kind of like, ugh. But when I actually like, just started just feeling myself, it was freshman year of college.

[00:14:03] Sears: And then, like what's the timeline between you finding out and then you deciding to come out to other people around you?

Knight: Oh. Elaborate that question so I know.

Sears: Like when you really came to terms, it's like, "Okay, this is what I am, this is what I like," and then that timeline between that and then you coming out to your first person, like telling them, "Hey this is what I am, this is what I like."

Knight: Um the first person I ever came out to with my best friend Kayla, our senior year. We were on the phone. I was like, "Yeah girl, I'm gay." She was just like, "Oh, okay," and we just went on about our business. This is literally how the conversation went. She was like, "I mean, I accept you for who you are," or whatever. And so I guess by me telling her that, it kind of made me feel a lot better because I had someone to confide in and I had someone to find comfort in, you know, when dealing with these issues. Because it's not an easy thing to come out to anybody, especially a friend. And then once I came out to her and, of course you know, everybody knew, of course, but I didn't apparently. I didn't know myself, you know what I'm saying. It's kinda one of those things. But I mean people, I guess they accepted it and I just had to accept it myself. And so when I got to Hinds. Of course, you know, when you come to college,

you ain't at the house no more and that liberation and freedom. I actually met my other two best friends because at the time I was still trying to find myself. I didn't know who I was as a person. But they—I had low self-esteem at that time. Like really really low. So what they did was they sat down with me in the gym, I'll never forget and I still have this to this day. They wrote me a letter saying, you know, you are somebody, you know, you're beautiful, etcetera etcetera. And of course, my friend, her name is Ariel but we call her Frenchie, she introduced me to fashion. And she showed me, you know, like I guess gay culture in a sense. And then my other best friend, his name is Charlie. Now before me and Charlie were best friends, I had the biggest crush on Charlie ever. But as more as we hung out, he became my—we became best friends. And of course, Charlie introduced me to gay culture or whatever. I didn't know what the heck a top or bottom was. I actually got the two terms confused. I mean, I knew what they were in college, but I really knew—not college, high school—but I really found out what it was in college. I was like, “oh, I've been getting this wrong all these years.” So, yeah, and really ever since then I just been killing.

[00:17:25] Sears: Okay [laughter] So you said they expose you to gay culture. What is gay culture? What is it for you?

Knight: Like the lingo. Gay culture is like it's a whole other universe within itself. Like my God [laughter]. It's the—and it's kind of cool, in a sense. Like we really are a community. We have our own lingo. We have our own everything, really, and it's a beautiful thing. They introduced me to like—Ariel actually introduced me to this movie called *Paris is Burning*, which I think every gay

male and person should watch because it gives you history about gay lingos like read, shade, all that. And it was actually where Pose—the show Pose got inspired from. It's a very beautiful movie by the way. I'm actually going to go watch it when I get home. But, yeah, they introduced me to like gay culture and all that. Now as far as the gay scene, when I was at Hinds I befriended, this group of gays. Their names were Quan, Jayreid, and—somebody else, I can't remember who it was—oh, Jorah [check spelling] and they took me to my first gay club. It was Metro and I was just like, "Oh wow!" I was so amazed 'cause I was just like, "Oh my God. What is going on here?" And at first, I was like, I used to be scared of drag queens 'cause I'd never really just seen one in person. And I was just like, "Wow." You know they are people like me. it's a community. And so, ever since then, I've just never left that place. They see me. They see me faithfully. The next after then, like faithfully. I mean, of course, until now. Nobody really goes there anymore. I mean people go there, but it's a long story.

Sears: Where is Metro? Where is it located?

Knight: It's on Highway 80.

Sears: Okay.

Knight: Yeah, it's on Highway 80.

Sears: Alright, and is that the only place or are there more places here that you've experienced?

[00:19:57] Knight: There's an [pause] okay so, it's a white [laughter] part of the LGBT community and it's a Black part of the LGBT community. Now the white people, well, I mean everybody goes here, but it's really white people. They go to Bar 3911, which is also known as Wanderlust, which is also known as Bottoms Up, they done changed their name so many times. But now it's Bar 3911. That's the white people's side. And it's also this white gay bar, I don't know if it's still open, it's called JC's. Now I only been there once and that was just the spur of the moment. It was like a coming-together meeting for all gays.

Sears: Okay and where is these places located?

Knight: Okay, so Bar 3911 is located off Northside Drive. JC's is not too far from it. It's off Northside Drive too, not far from the cut. Now for the Black people, we have Metro Reloaded it's off Highway 80. And Club Couture, which is the new gay club downtown which is very beautiful on the inside, by the way, with nice bathrooms. But I'm going to get into it. But Club Couture is Mill Street. It's off Mill Street, on the corner of Mill Street, down the street from Freelon's. I know, of all places. It's down the street from Freelon's which has its pros and cons, but that's another story for another day. But yeah, those are the only gay spaces in Jackson, unfortunately.

Sears: And then, so you've experienced all of these places?

Knight: Yes.

[00:21:47] Sears: Okay. And then which one do you feel the most safest in?

Knight: I feel safe in all of them.

Sears: Okay.

Knight: And that's the thing. Nobody really messes with us. It's really our safe space now. Oh 'cause I first am gonna feel comfortable anywhere I go because I have that right as a Black male, Black gay male. But now 'cause Metro is under new ownership and that's a whole mess within itself, so everyone goes to Club Couture now. I love it, they see me every weekend [laughter] because this is literally a safe haven for gays like and it's a beautiful thing. Like this is safe haven. You could be yourself. You could wear whatever you want to—I mean don't wear whatever you want to— but you can wear whatever you want to. You literally can do anything you want to. Crack, coke, it's a no judgment zone, I mean I'm gonna judge, but it's a no judgment zone there. Now at Bar 3911, they don't play that because you know it's white people you know. I mean, it's fun, but it's, you know, they have rules. You know they have rules, you can't really just smoke weed in there or whatever. But it's a nice and fresh environment. You know, if you wanna get away from you know [laughter]. But it's a nice environment. I love it. But as far as like Metro and Club Couture like I love it. It's a safe Haven. It's like a getaway if you had a long week, you really can just come, turn up, and just let all your frustrations out.

Sears: Okay, and then do you feel that you need more like spaces in Jackson?

Knight: Um yes. Because, one, the gay community here is too small and I'm tired of looking at everybody. I'm so tired of looking at everybody. It's too small. And after visits in Atlanta—they have a gay club off every damn corner. They have, they literally have a shopping center of gay clubs. Like, yes, the shopping center of gay clubs and I love it 'cause you don't see the same people every weekend. 'Cause I get tired of looking at the same people every weekend and it just seems like it's so small which also conflicts within the dating pool in Jackson. Because it's so small and everybody just seems like they done talked to everybody. And it's just like God, man what? So yes, I think we need at least one more. That'll give us a variety of what we want to do on the weekend instead of everybody just going to Couture or Metro.

Sears: Okay and then. Let me think about a question. So okay, so you said that the dating pool was small here in Jackson, so how does that work? Like how do you make that work?

Knight: Um, so how they make work, there are hookup apps, called Jack'd, Grindr, and Adam for Adam—which is for the white people. And some people find love on Jack'd and Grindr. I'm not one of those 'cause I, you know. But, or you know, just if we see each other every weekend, you know, “you fine and I wanna talk to you.” But you know? He talked to somebody in the club already, or they cheating, or, you know, he talked to about three folks in the club and we don't know about each other. So it's just, you know, it's kind of one of those things where you just

have to do background checks nowadays.'Cause it's one thing about the gay community, is it's gonna come out. Somebody knows something and you know if somebody knows it's gonna get out. Unless you tell it. Unless, you know, you just on the hush hush. For me, dating in Jackson [pause] [laughter] that's all I have to say about that [laughter].

[00:26:49] Sears: Okay, so do you think like dating in another city—do you think it'll be different as a gay Black male?

Knight: Yes, especially in Atlanta because Atlanta has this like gay capital of Black people. And I know everybody ain't talking to everybody now, 'cause it's like a whole buffet full of people. I know you know. I know you ain't talking, you know. It's a huge community where it is to compare it to Jackson. Now. Memphis. Memphis is like Jackson. Only ghetto-er. But the dating pool, I'll say, in Memphis is pretty much the same as Jackson, because for some odd reason, people in Jackson also date people in Memphis and they also date another person here in Jackson. So it's just like, "What!?" It's crazy. It is very crazy, but like if I go to like Atlanta or Ohio or San Francisco something, of course, it's gonna be 'cause I'm new meat, nobody knows me, which is also good. Texas, now from experience, the scene in Texas is kind of messy too. But how? I don't know 'cause Texas is like huge. But the scene in Texas is kind of—it's not like Jackson, but it's very messy in a sense. Oh, so yeah, the dating pool. I don't really wanna date nobody in Jackson no more.

Sears: Alright, so I do have another question, so what is it like being a gay Black man in the South?

[00:28:40] Knight: Oh God. I literally have to fight for my life every day. It's a full-time job like people don't understand. It is a full-time job. I mean women have it hard too, but us? Oh my gosh like, for me, I don't know why, but for me like it is really a full-time job. I gotta watch my back every 24 seconds. Everywhere I go, people staring. I gotta worry about getting lynched. Gotta worry about getting an angry mob after me and I'm like dead ass. These people will do that. I remember when I was at Hinds and I was, you know, still trying to find myself and they used to try to bully me. Like I had rocks thrown at me. I have. I remember I was coming down the little walkway where the cafeteria was and I was minding my own. I was walking to my dorm and these group of guys, they was like, "You Fag!" And they was throwing rocks at me and stuff like that. Like yeah, you would've thought it was the civil rights movement or the civil rights era. That's the way they were acting. Or I would get on the elevator in my dorm and it was a group of them and they was just, "Fag! Fag! Fag!" Literally, and I was just sitting there, you know, just like calm. Like the Black people were when the white people was calling them niggers. Yeah, that's how it was. But, um, I have to say being a gay Black man in the South, that's openly, you know, gay—it's a tough job. Like it may seem easy, but it's really not. Especially if you really have to have a tough backbone, thick skin, and a mouth on you, if you want to survive down here. And the attitude to man the confidence because these people would eat too. A lot of. They will eat you alive and I'm not going to be one of them 'cause you're not gonna eat me alive. If anything I'm gonna eat you alive.

[00:30:40] Sears: Wow this, wow that's crazy. So do you think your experience would be different if you were a different race?

Knight: Yes.

Sears: How so?

Knight: White privilege. People—white gays—they have this thing and I've noticed that they still think they're better than like the Black gays, especially when they come to our spaces. I notice the behavior like that. You know, they'll act snobby. That's not all of them, but you do have white people—white gays that are elitist and think that they're better than everybody. Better than this community. I'm like, “girl, no.” It was very inappropriate what I was gonna say, but it's another story. But the point is that if I were a white gay I think my experience as a gay male would be different, especially familywise because [pause] I've noticed like white people treat their gay children with love and, you know, compassion and respect and stuff. Whereas the Black person it's at first like, “Ohh,” or especially if you are male and you know your dad is in your household and you tell your dad you're gay and he going off ballistic and stuff like that. So I do think that if I were white and gay, my life would be different. I probably would still be dating Black men though, but my life would be different.

Sears: Alright, and then have you, well, you already told us that you've experienced homophobia, but is there any more instances that you would like to talk about?

Knight: Oh, girl, I could write a movie.

Sears: Wow,

Knight: I could write a movie about the homophobia I face on a daily basis. Like I work in retail and the guys that will come in there, they won't want me helping them. They'll—straight men have this thing where they just start laughing when gay people come around. And I don't be knowing what be funny 'cause we literally just be walking, like minding our own business. Even within Iota, I face—and well D[ivine] Nine period—I face homophobia, but now they know not to play with me because I'm not one of them, of course.

[00:33:14] Sears: Now when you say “D nine” you mean Divine Nine, Black Greek letter organizations, right?

Knight: Yes. Sorry. Yes, even within my own organization. And I remember when I first crossed there were issues like [sigh]. I made controversy when I crossed. It was so much like I literally had to. It was a night. I'm not gonna lie. It was very, like, it hurt, you know, 'cause I was facing backlash from a lot of people. Old heads especially. But my dean, which was the late Walter Lee Tabb Jr. [spelling?]-God rest his soul. You know he talked to me, he was just like, “Don't worry

about these people.” You know, “They're beneath you and they don't matter because at the end of the day you're still a part of this organization. They can take your letters from you.” You know what I'm saying so. And that instance, it fueled me to, one, fight even harder for my organization as well as me and other queer men who want to become a part of a Black Greek letter organization. Because for some odd reason people in these organizations they shun up on gay people. When like 95% of them are gay or down low or etcetera, etcetera.

[00:34:48] Sears: Can you explain what down low means, please, for the record?

Knight: Down low means, an undercover gay person or lesbian person that is afraid to be themselves, has had encounters with the same sex but don't want anyone to know. Or they're just ashamed of who they are.

Sears: Okay.

Knight: So just like 95% of a lot of these people. That's another story for another day, [pause] right [laughter].

Sears: Alright, and so I want to talk a little bit more about being gay in a D Nine Black Greek letter organization. Do you feel that it was harder for you to join your organization because of your sexuality?

Knight: No, because Iota is an open-minded organization, even though we have butt heads in it, but Iota is one of the most understanding organizations. Which is why I was drawn to Iota because we have this principle of individuality. And I know when I first came to Jackson State I was a loner. Like my friends were still at Hinds. I only had one friend here. I was always by myself and I was different from everyone and that made me stand out. So that's also what made me drawn to Iota. But as far as joining, no, because you know I have the credentials. But as far as like any other D Nine organization, like male-wise, I know it's hard for them because people talk to me about their experiences all the time. And I, you know, give him words of encouragement, of course. But I say as far as Iota and who was all over me in my chapter? No, because we had great leaders.

Sears: Alright, and then [pause]. Huh, so do you believe being a gay Black man—do you think that has impacted your college experience?

Knight: Yes.

Sears: And do you feel that Jackson State is a safe space for gay Black men?

[00:37:28] Knight: Um yes, but only if you make it safe. The only way it won't be safe safe is if you let people, one, run over you. Two, run over you, and, three, run over you. Like I said earlier, you have to have a backbone and what I've learned through my college experience here in undergrad, these people will run over you. Especially if you gay and Black because they look at

you as like you're nothing. Which is why you have to not necessarily be extra, but just make a name or statement for yourself—in a positive way—a name and a statement for yourself. And you have to—your voice has to be heard. Especially 'cause I remember a time where Jackson State really wasn't going for like the gay stuff. Like with Spectrum we had to pull teeth to do stuff around here. And now seeing that there was a lot of gay activities going on here, it kind of made me happy. It was like we came a long way because they weren't going for that here. But I would say, as a gay Black man, one, people will respect you because you are true to yourself. And you're free, you're free, your freedom, the liberation. I love that we're in liberation.

Sears: And then at any point have you felt repressed? And if so, did you have an outlet and what was it?

Knight: Well, for me, no, because I've always been an outspoken person. And, you know, I never let—the only time I was repressed was before I was fully out. Because, of course, Christian background and you know, I was in a cage. But now I'm out that cage and I'm roaring. I'm roaring and I'm attacking people, not literally, but you know. So no, I have to say no, for me. I've never been the type to become repressed when it comes to me being gay because it's a part of who I am and nobody can change that. Or take that away from me.

Sears: Alright, and then you spoke about your Christian background. I want to get a little bit more into that. So as of right now, do you ascribe to a religion or spirituality?

Knight: I mean, I believe in God still of course. Like all my Christian principles and stuff like that you know I still have to keep those in mind. I'm not an atheist or anything [laughter], but as far as like being a Christian, I would have to say I'm not a Christian. But I, you know, 'cause Christians are holy and I'm a heathen so [laughter]. I mean just calling it for what it is, I mean just, I'm a Ho. So I wouldn't have. I would say I wouldn't attach myself to a religion. You know?

[00:40:45] Sears: And then at what age did you decide Christianity wasn't exactly you?

Knight: Age nineteen.

Sears: Okay, and how did you come to the decision?

Knight: I guess [sputter] [laughter]. I'm free now, shoot. Can't nobody just tell me what to do anymore, I guess. I guess life experiences

Sears: Okay.

Knight: Life experiences. I guess for me because it's—and I say this because I speak from experience. I can say you know, although I'm not in church anymore, God still has his hand over me. Like especially making mistakes, especially in 2015. Oh my God. So in 2015 I was dating this guy and I was crazy about this boy and I end up moving in with him actually. But after that we ended up—I ended up being homeless, moving from floor to floor couch to couch. After me and

him kind of went our separate ways 'cause he was crazy. And I never forget nne day, I was staying in Tiger Plaza, but one day the bus driver—'cause I think God sent her for me 'cause honey, baby. The bus driver stopped me one day and she was just like basically, I need to leave him alone 'cause he's going to end up killing me. He's going to end up killing me or I may end up dying foolin' with him and she was right. The boy, he did coke. So you know they crazy. So it was just a lot of drama with him. A lot of baggage that I carried for him. And it was weighing me down and I was stressing myself out trying to please him and make sure he was straight when I was dying literally. And I'm glad I sent her because after that I cut him off. Now he still be trying to come back and I just like no 'cause “back then you didn't want me, know I'm hot you all on me.” But I just—it's one of those things, just like no. Just no. I don't want to go back. I forgot what I was talking about. I think that was the end of the question though.

[00:43:43] Sears: [Laughter] Okay? So when that happened, like how did they make you feel knowing that the person that you were with could basically kill you or would be the cause?

Knight: I kinda knew it. I just didn't want to let him go in a sense, because of the stuff that we were getting into, the stuff he put me through, I was just like, “Oh my God.” But I'm glad I did because it taught me a lesson about especially dating. I can't take care of people. And I still have that problem, but I always use him as a blueprint to be like, “Oh no, I'm not doing this no more. I'm not.” I think the dating experience is learning lessons. And everybody that you encounter is teaching you some type of lesson. Now sometimes those lessons take a little while to kick in,

you know. Sometimes the lessons make us dumb. But you know after the lesson we be like, "Golly, man! Golly!" But [pause] yeah [laughter]..

[00:45:00] Sears: Do you think the dating experience is different in the gay community than it is in the heterosexual community?

Knight: Um, no. And I say that because no matter your sexuality, everybody's the same [laughter]. Everybody's the same. The only difference is that we like the same thing. But other than that everybody is the same.

Sears: Alright, and then you know how people, they have—they make it were it's like in the heterosexual relationship you have the masculine and then the feminine. In the gay community, is the relationship like that?

Knight: It depends. So like I said it earlier, you have the bottom which is perceived to be the non-dominant one. And the top in the relationship is the dominant one. Now, you have this thing in the gay community where it's called verse, where you're both. But as far as like the masculine presenting, because we have masculine bottoms and we have feminine tops. But in the—how do I explain this? God. What was the question? I got sidetracked. [Laughter]

Sears: If there was masculine and feminine roles within gay relationships?

Knight: Oh! Bottom and top. Top and bottom.

Sears: Okay.

Knight: Or verse.

Sears: And the verse is the person who is dominate—

Knight: Both.

Sears: and non-dominate.

Knight: Right. So the bottom is the person they receive and the top is the one that gives. But you have those that like to do both and, you know.

Sears: Okay.

Knight: So the bottom in the gay world would be like the fem in the lesbian world or the top would be the stud in lesbian world. I don't know what verse is the lesbian world. [Laughter] I don't know but, right, I don't know, but yeah, so those are them

Sears: Alright and is there any more lingo that you feel that people need to know about?

[00:47:30] Knight: Other than like “shade” and “read,” I don't think people should know.

Because- and I say this because those lingos were created for us to use in our safe spaces. And I feel like if straight people—one, if they found out about it they will run out with it, like they did “shade,” “read,” or “yass” or other gay lingo that we came up with. Then it wouldn't be unique anymore. I think the lingo that we use should be only used within our spaces, you see what I'm sayin'? Because it's our own language, really. Which is also cool 'cause we have our own language, um linguistics. So no, everybody, they don't need to know all of that [laughter].

Sears: Alright, and then I have another question about the gay organizations and stuff. Have you heard of those?

Knight: Yes.

Sears: Are you in any of those—

Knight: Girl, no [laughter].

Sears: Okay, so how does it feel being a D9 member and witnessing those gay Greek-lettered organizations?

Knight: Girl, when I tell you, I be reading them folks down every time I see them stroll. Or every time—because I get it. Everybody—this is our safe space, and when I tell you, we literally do whatever we want, we literally do whatever we want. By seeing them do that, I guess this is for me, being in a Greek letter organization and what I had to go through to get to where I am now. It's kind of like, what are y'all doing, like [Laughter]? Why?! What are you doing? You know, even though they are their own separate organization. They're not going around, you know, with the actual letters on, because then that'll be an actual problem, but it's—it's unfair.

[00:49:48] Sears: Why do you feel like it's unfair?

Knight: Because one, y'all aren't women. These were organizations made for women. Real women. And, by y'all just going into a store or just going—not saying that they wear the actual paraphernalia, 'cause they don't. But just by y'all doing this stuff just freely, it's kind of like a slap in the face, if you will. 'Cause people really went through a lot to get to, you know get—earn these letters. You know these letters are earned and not well—right, these letters are earned and not given. So, it's just like to see them doing this stuff is kind of like—I just let them do what they do. I know there's nothing I really can do about it, but it's just. And it's vice versa like the lesbians also have these organizations. And what's crazy is, it's really nine of these. It's really nine of these organizations and we even have one and I was like “Whoa, they have our sign and everything.” It is like, what?

Sears: So they mimic the signs of the actual D Nine Greek?

Knight: Girl yes, from the calls to the strolls to everything and it's crazy because it's not a new thing. This has been going on since the eighties. The eighties. Which is mind-blowing to me. And you know what else is mind-blowing? You have people in these actual organizations helping bring these people through. Yes, I was mind blown when I seen this.

[00:51:57] Sears: So, people from the D Nine organizations are helping bring in the people in the gay Greek organizations?

Knight: Yes, now for the lesbian groups. I don't know nothing about that. But as far as like the male groups. Especially this just one particular one I know because she even said it out her own mouth. You know I was there. Yes. Which made me look at her like, you know? But [laughter] you know, yeah, they would just—it's weird, okay. It's very weird. Now when I first came on the scene, and I've seen them do that. I was like, "Whoa," like, "They could do this?" But there's nothing really, we could do about it. But it's just, it's sad in a way 'cause it's like me being Greek now and knowing what people who go, you know, what we go through to get these letters it's kind of like disrespectful. Very disrespectful. Because I wouldn't want nobody going around "Ow, Owing" and diggin' saying that they an Iota and they not and I know what I had to go through to get my letters. So, it's kind of like a slap in the face.

Sears: Do you feel that some of these people have created this org to be that safe place that they couldn't find within the D Nine?

Knight: That's exactly what it is. This is exactly what it is.

Sears: So do you think if? The D Nine made gay people and people from the LGBTQ community more comfortable in joining their orgs, do you think that will be a—

Knight: Solution?

Sears: Solution, yes.

Knight: No. Yeah and no, I would say. The reason I say no is this has been going on since the eighties and if it's been going on this long, I know it ain't no stop to it now. But I would say yes to the other question because that is the reason why some people joined these underground organizations because they weren't welcome in the regular orgs.

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

Knight: In Jackson?

Sears: Have you been to a Jackson Pride?

Knight: Yeah, I've been to some. Honestly, I really don't consider Jackson having an actual Pride. Like if you wanna go to a Pride, Pride, go to Atlanta or San Francisco or Texas or Nashville. Jackson? No. 'Cause, it's only so much we can do. One, 'cause we're in Jackson. Two, we're in the South, and three is Mississippi. So you know it's only so much we can do. But I have been to like a couple of Pride events here in Jackson.

[00:55:13] Sears: And what about any other Pride events? Like have you been to any out-of-town?

Knight: No, which is very shocking because, one, it's me, two, it's me, [laughter] three, it's me. But no, I wanted to go to Atlanta Pride. But every time Atlanta Pride comes around funds be acting funny. So you know I had to take it. Now, Pride is not like a set date or anything. It's actually kind of random. And I know Jackson, we got like two or three Prides, 'cause every time you look around it's Pride week, like, "Oh my God, we just had one." But [laughter] yeah, I've always wanted to go to Atlanta Pride. I may go one year. I want to go to New Orleans Pride, maybe next year. But as far as like a major Pride Pride, no, I want to though.

Sears: Alright, and then I think we're gonna go ahead and start to wrap up. Is there anything that you want on the record?

Knight: As far as being a gay Black man? Um, just embrace that freedom. Like freedom is—being Black and gay is really, it's freedom, there's no other way around it. Like just being able to do whatever you want, when you want. Wear whatever you want when you want, do whatever you want, eat whatever you want. 'Cause you know, straight people can't eat hot dogs, apparently. It's beautiful man. I enjoy it. I love it. Being able to listen to what you want.

Sears: And if you could, if you could tell the younger you something, what would it be?

Knight: One, you're beautiful. Two, get a taser [laughter]. Three, it's gonna be okay. Everything is going to work out. Um, what else would I tell that little boy? Oh, your time is coming. Your time is coming. And I still have to tell myself that 'cause I know I'm still evolving. I'm still evolving, we're all evolving, but I like the butterfly that I'm becoming. I probably have to get some new wings, 'cause you know, I'm a little burnt out but yeah man, just love yourself. I think that's the biggest one, is loving myself 'cause back then I did not love myself at all. Which you know sparked from internal family issues and stuff like that. But I think that was more so of what it was. I didn't really love myself and once I start loving myself then that's when I start finding myself.

Sears: Okay, and then I got one more question. What was the first step in loving yourself?

Knight: One, coming to terms with some stuff in your life. Confidence, building your confidence and I think confidence plays a key in anything really. But if you want to be in this gay lifestyle,

you gonna have to have some type of confidence in you. 'Cause like I said before, these people gonna eat you alive. They will eat you alive with no crumbs left. And so when you have that confidence and that spark you know then they go see that you not to be played with.

Sears: Alright, well thank you for coming out, and thank you for allowing me to do this interview and I will make sure to send you a copy.