NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

GYKYIRA SHOY

Interviewer: Michelle Esther O'Brien

Date of Interview: February 15, 2017

Location of Interview: NYU Sociology Department

Transcribed by Justine Ambrose

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #031

Michelle O'Brien: Hello my name is Michelle O'Brien, and I will be having a conversation with Gykyira Shoy for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with The New York Public Library's Community Oral History project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identified people. It is February 15, 2017, and this is being recorded at the N.Y.U. Department of Sociology in Soho. So, tell me about growing up: where were you born, and where did you grow up, and what was it like?

Gykyira Shoy: Okay, so I was born in Denver, Colorado. Growing up in Denver, Colorado was okay. I never knew my mother. I only had my father. My mother abandoned me and dumped me in a dumpster when I was three days old. A homeless woman found me and took me back into the hospital. So growing up I was very sick. Months wasn't developed so I normally stayed in the house. My father took care of me, with one other sibling which is my sister Angelina. We grew up kind of confined, because he was so worried about the world hurting us, because we was mixed. Mother being Puerto Rican and white, and father being Dominican and Black, so he was really worried about how the world would view us. So about six, I think we moved to Texas, which is really different from Colorado, because Colorado the schools are not all one race. Well, as far as Texas, Texas schools was all black, and then there was an all white school, so it was really different for us to adjust because we didn't understand what slavery was. We didn't get that far in our education to learn, like, what slavery was because we were still young, but in Texas they teach that, like, right in elementary school, like, you learn exactly what Black history is, you learn exactly what slavery is. We stayed in Texas with my other siblings, which is on my father's side. He had a daughter and a son by another lady when he was younger. We stayed there until he got sick, and then we moved into a little place of our own. Around ten my father passed away. So at that time it was really rough on me because me and my father carried the same name. And because we shared the same name I was the only living relative at the hospital. It was my decision to take him off life support. So it was very hard growing up after that, because you had your siblings blaming you for killing your father, but you also had nobody to go to during the time of being depressed, and definitely the time of figuring out that I was gay. So it was like there was nowhere to run. There was nobody to talk to. There was nowhere to go. Your family didn't want you being gay. So you just had no way of knowing. So after my father died, my brother was really, like, he was really abusive towards me and my sister. But mostly me for being gay. He said there will be no punks in this family. One day we went for a ride and he was like, Imma teach you how to drive. So I was like, okay, and I'm thinking like this is the car. He pulled over to a dark alley. And he told me, well if you're going to be a punk, I'm gonna show you what bein a punk is, and he rapes me, several times, and then took me home and put me in water and covered it up. So I was ten going on eleven. So after that I really got into the mentality of building my mindset of getting stronger and understanding that the world's going to view me as some disease or some un-normal person and I'm gonna be targeted for the rest of my life. And I was right. We left and went to our stepmother's in Alabama. Things just got worse. The boyfriend didn't like me. He locked me in the room with the padlock on the outside of the door and only let me out during the day to go to school like I was some kind of animal. When I came home I was back in the room. He gave me a bucket to pee in. And it was just like I was the prisoner. Eventually he decided that he didn't want kids there, so my stepmother made the decision to drive us to Mississippi and

drop us off at a bus station in Jackson, Mississippi, where everything else just went upside-down, like, the only person I had in my life they took from me. They separated me and my sister. I want into a group home where I was bein beat by the other kids for being gay, then into the foster home.

O'Brien: How old were you when you moved to Mississippi?

Shoy: I was twelve at that time. So from twelve to about almost thirteen I was in the same foster home where I was being hit, beat, talked about, called names. Nobody is never gonna see me, nobody's not gonna know who I am, nobody really wants gay people in this world, you gonna die from HIV, that's where it came from, you homosexuals caused this. So it was mostly like every day seemed like I had to build my self-esteem because of the verbal abuse and emotional abuse I was getting. Well, at the age of thirteen, I decided to transition. I left this foster home and went to another foster home through Catholic Charities. And luckily the foster family that Catholic Charities put me with, well—the young—the father of the house was gay. Which let me know that everything was gonna be okay. So I transitioned, started dressing like a female, started living my life as a woman. Why I didn't happen to go back to the foster home that I was in first was because Mr. Hinton died. They found him in the building, he was cleaning up, dead. So I went back there, transition and all. And I think summer was over, it was the first day of school and I was a ninth grader. I had advanced to ninth grade. Which was good, because, middle school, like, I didn't know how else to deal with middle school but advancing was easier. Went to school in a pencil skirt, a nice blouse, and a pair of six-inch pumps. And the first thing I remember is, homeroom, the teacher calling my name. "Johnny McClinton," and all I would say was, "here!" and she would say, "where?" She said Johnny McClinton, and I said, "Here." She said, "I'm not into games, quit playing." I said, "I'm sitting right here," and she said, "Go to the principal's office." All of a sudden I had to go to the principal's office. So it was a debate in, am I allowed to dress this way in school, or is it against the school conduct? And that's when activism set in. I advocated for myself and had the handbook and showed them there was nowhere in the rules that I cannot dress like this. There was nowhere in the rules I cannot express myself. My skirt was eight inches below my knees, my shirt was long, my shoes was close-toed. And my hair was well-groomed. So nowhere in the school conduct was there that I cannot dress like this and express myself as who I am. So I went in front of the school board and the school board said the same thing, like, we can't tell her or him how to dress because it's nowhere in the school conduct. And she's following the school conduct by the skirt being eight inches below the knees, shirt being over her ****, hair being well-groomed, and nails being at a certain length. So that set a trend for me to move from D-class to A-class. And if nobody knows what D-class is, D-class is where you don't exist in school. Nobody knows who you are, nobody really cares who you are, and if they bump into you in the hallway, you just get bumped into. So I moved from D-class to A-class that year where all the cheerleaders wanted to learn, who dress you, who do your hair? I'm like, y'all do realize I'm gay, right? And it was like nobody cared because—I was—I learned how to blend in. And I think that was the scariest thing for me, like, I blended in so well to where people honk the cars and stop and, like, hey, how you doing? So it became a dangerous game. A dangerous game, and to fear for my life because these people were all stopped honking their cars, trying to pull me over, trying to get me to get in the cars. But then going to school was, like, so much fun because I wind

up dating the quarterback. So I was like, can my life really be like this, or is this just an illusion for the time being because these people at school accept you, but is society going to accept you? So I started working at this club called Club City Lights in Jackson, Mississippi. A couple of my friends was leaving the club, and I was held at gunpoint. A friend of mine tried to help me and was killed. A couple weeks later, a couple of my friends was out, we was in the gay club, and these guys we didn't know was straight picked them up, and we found them chained to a fence, killed. And I felt like eventually that was going to be me. Because where, like I said, people at school accepted it, society still wasn't accepting people being gay. Definitely not Mississippi. And this is like the early nineties. So when I turned fourteen, I ran away. I went to California. Ended up in a shelter in California. It was Beth Haven Shelter in Richmond, California.

O'Brien: Richmond?

Shoy: Yes, Richmond, California. And I stayed there for a while, and they gave me my own room because I was trans. They helped me figure out what I wanted to do. At this time, I still wasn't taking hormones, but they was confused as to why I had breasts. And so they took me to all the right doctors. I was diagnosed with an extra chromosome that allowed me to develop breasts like a normal female at the age of twelve. So everything was just going wrong. Like, everything was just not where I wanted to be. It was like I have breasts, and then I'm still in a shelter. Well, shelters you can't really, you know, get the things you need to get your hair done. So, I was just like, I don't know what to do, and so I start performing at—in—Vallejo at one of the clubs as a female entertainer. I performed there for two years before realizing that's not what I wanted to do. I ran into a lady name Judy Tate which was a trans woman. Who was actually, made it in the same business, who lived in Richmond, and she got me in touch with a lady named Thora in San Francisco. So I went to San Francisco. And started working as a volunteer at the LGBT Community Center for the youth. And I worked there for like, maybe three months before I was traumatized. A young lady—well, young man now—that wanted to transition went home and told her father. The father beat her and threw her out of the car at the Community Center with broken ribs, a broken leg, and a broken arm. And right there, as I looked at this young person laying there, I realized that day that I want to speak for the people who did not have a voice, the people that could not stand up and speak for themselves, the people that didn't want to be seen, and been hurt. That I could be strong enough for them to speak for them. So I started my activism work that day. And we went to court, we won the court case, the young man was moved from the home. He converted back over to being a boy, because of being traumatized. But I got him to safety. And through getting him to safety, I started my journey from San Francisco, California to Atlanta, Georgia. I started working at the We Care Clinic. And this was like in early—this was about 2002, 2003. I stayed there for a long time working. I went back home to Mississippi. In 2004 I started a nonprofit organization called The Future Hope Center and that ran really really smoothly for two years where we was training and teaching about LGBT rights and LGBTQ rights as well as TG and C. And getting people to understand that HIV didn't come from the LGBT community. It was a disease that was caused, and way before any of us were born, as far as my generation. It started in 1983, which was the year I was born, so it's like, we didn't cause this disease. This disease happened, it's out there, and we're trying to find a way to get rid of it, or to at least help.

O'Brien: So this project you started in Atlanta, Georgia.

Shoy: I started this in Mississippi.

O'Brien: What was it called?

Shoy: The Future Hope Center.

O'Brien: Future Hope Center. And was it a physical space?

Shoy: It was a physical space. Luckily for—luckily the lady that was my foster mother, she had several homes. And we became better friends than mother and daughter. And she donated her house, James Garfield, on James Garfield Circle, to the cause. We gave out toys. We linked up with Toys for Tots. Toys for Tots gave us thousands and thousands of toys every year to give out. We linked up with Walmart, who gave us food for Thanksgiving, and for Christmas that we gave out, and we linked up with the health center in downtown Jackson, it's run by Jackson State University. We linked up with them, that allowed us to bridge access to care for the LGBT community. And not be discriminated towards. So after I felt like my journey was done there, I went back to Atlanta.

O'Brien: How long were you working on the project?

Shoy: I was working on this project for quite a while—so I started this project in 2004, I went back to Atlanta in 2008, so I worked on it for four years. Like I said it ran smoothly, it was successful, but I wanted to do bigger and better. So I went back to Atlanta, Georgia. I met my first husband. And we decided in 2009 to leave Atlanta, Georgia from Peachtree and Pine Shelter, and go to New York. Well at that time none of us had any money so we went to Travelers Aid, Travelers Aid contacted a friend that I had in New York, and they paid for the ticket. So we went to New York, went to the shelter system again. And where everything was going okay, my husband started heroin. So I left my husband, went to the single women's shelter, Franklin Avenue, stayed there for five months. While staying there—well, I went to Franklin, and went to—then I transferred in thirty days to Park Slope, which is the shelter in Brooklyn. Ran into my mentor which is Jay Tool. And Jay was like, we're going to do Gay Pride this year, we're going to do all of these great things for the LGBTQ. I'm looking at Jay like, okay, who is this little old guy? And just start a conversation with Jay about, like, how do I get involved? I want to do—I've been doing activism work for a while, I want to get bigger and better, I want to stay connected, I want to get involved, I want to—I just want to make sure I'm helping and connecting with the right people. Jay said come in and fill out a volunteer sheet for Queers for Economic Justice. I did that in 2010. And started an amazing journey with Queers for Economic Justice, was in the shelter in Park Slope for five months, got my own place, then started working back in the shelter that I just got out of, running the shelter pilot program, support group for LGBTQ. And then we started in Lower Manhattan. At that time I was working in five different shelters, running groups five days a week. And then I looked around and realized I'm the only trans in this organization. Where is everybody else at?

And as I look around I realized, like, well you're getting funding for trans—led programming, for a trans staff which I have not hired. I'm still a volunteer. Still not making no money. But because I love the work so much, I just said, okay, I'm going to do it. People need to help. People need to know. So yeah I did that from 2010 and continued to do that all the way through 2013, when they shut down but also was able to enroll into TransJustice Community School at Audre Lorde. And graduated top of my class in April 2013.

O'Brien: Tell me about the school.

Shoy: So the school is—it's a select of four trans women and four trans men. They select—they selected people out of a lot of people, but me not knowing that I was nominated from, by the whole building, which is FIERCE, SRLP, Queers for Economic Justice and Audre Lorde, for collaborating and helping them with a lot of events, I was shocked when I got the letter saying, you have been accepted into TransJustice Community School. I'm like, I didn't apply. They was like, somebody else applied for you, but, okay. So the school teaches us how to—mobilization, community organizing, and how to understand the spectrum between racial justice, discrimination, social justice, reproductive justice, and trans justice. So also teaches about Marsha P Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, teaches about the people who stood—all the great advocates and people that started the Stonewall Riots, who advocated for us for so many years, and the legacy they left behind for us to continue to build on top of, so that we want to leave a legacy behind for the younger generation to continue to build off of what we have worked for. And knowing that and understanding that, I was, like, honored. I was honored to be part of that school. I was honored to bring my knowledge of, the welfare system started in the early sixties, and how it was designed not for people of color but was actually designed for the white supremacists to go in and take people of color's children to actually start what we called population control as well as eugenics, with Sir Francis Gallatin, and all these other people who felt like people of color should only be limited to having two children, and if they had more, then you will find them and take their kids from them. Or as well in California in the early seventies, when people who came over from Mexico and other places, they didn't know how to speak English, and the doctor would tell them, if you sign this paper, it will take the pain away, and not knowing they signed a paper to be force-sterilized. So, knowing all this and bringing all this history in, and then just knowing, like, where we stand in this community as being people of color but also being discriminated towards and being LGBTQ, it was, like, an eye-opener to where I felt like, what more is there for me to do? Well during that rough time I actually lost my sister in 2013. Not my biological sister, I lost her too, but my sister I called Deja. She was—she someone who went to TransJustice School with me. After graduation, we got to graduate in April, she died in May. Her heart stopped, and we were supposed to change the world together. But we never got that chance, so everything I do now is in honor of her, is keeping her memories alive. And that year in June I went back to Texas.

O'Brien: Tell me more about Deja, what was she like?

Shoy: Deja's originally from Texas, she's originally from Houston. She was a Southern belle, and her spirit was just like—once she walked into a room, you knew there was a burst of energy. You

knew that everything that she wanted to work on, she did it with love, she did it with kindness, she was helping people, she was out all the time, she had a hole in her heart, she would sit, but she didn't care. Only thing she cared about was continuing the movement and continuing to help the transgender and gender nonconforming community. And like I said, I only known her for a few—for a—few little while, but really never got a chance to really do what we set out to do. Me and Deja was like the girls from Sex and the City. Once a week, we'd have lunch and wine at Olive Garden, and sit down and just talk about how we see the vision for what we want to do, how we're going to start our own organization, and how are we going to implement it and change policies, and change it for the better. But that never got a chance to happen, and like I said, everything I do now is in honor of her, because it was our dream to change the world together.

O'Brien: Were you living at the shelter in Park Slope when you were at the TransJustice School?

Shoy: No, actually, I was in my own apartment by then. I had my apartment in the Bronx, 213th Street, last stop on the 4 train. But then that was different too, me being a trans in a Puerto Rican, Dominican area, I never got discriminated towards in my community. I never was disrespected. Not even by the younger generation, like, they had so much respect for me. And that meant a lot to me just to know that people are changing. But are they changing the way we need them to, or are they just being accepting? And that's always the question I ask. But living there was good, I mean, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed every bit of it. But like I said in June I left and went to the Texas. My sister died so I stayed there for a while. By then, I've already had two strokes, I had my third one after she died, and started having seizures. I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, as well as crippling arthritis in my back with sciatica and [inaudible] and nerve damage from my diabetes—being juvenile, having diabetes since I was ten. And I laid there in ICU. After my blood pressure dropped to sixteen over four, thinking about, like—is this the end of my journey? Is my work done? Have I done everything that I set out and I wanted to do? And that was no, I wanted to do so much more. So luckily a few days passed, my blood pressure went back up, and I hit the ground running. I came back to New York. A friend of mine I met at a focus group—and it was funny because we don't—we never go to this focus group, we never go to the group with [inaudible]—it's so funny that we both ended up there—and she's like, 'Hey, how you doing?' I'm like, 'I'm doing good!' She's like, 'So, I just wanted to ask you, I started an organization called NYTAG, which stands for New York Transgender Advocacy Group.' I said, 'Okay." She says, 'I need your help.' I'm like, 'I'm there!' So we started running around. We got incorporated within the first year. We became a 501c3 in the first year. And we started looking for funding.

O'Brien: What year was that?

Shoy: This was in 2015. So later that year in 2015 I had to leave. Because I wasn't feeling well, so I went back home. I was diagnosed with stomach cancer. So I went back to Texas to spend time with my two beautiful nephews and to spend time with my brother. And at first I thought it was gonna be like, 'Okay, I'm going to stay here.' And then I was like, 'This is not what I want.' So I came back to New York in July. And was like, 'Okay, I gotta figure out what I'm going to do.' I'm sick, the cancer came back twice. And the cancer stopped me from doing what I want to do. So at that time, Kiara contacted me again, and was like, 'You know we just got awarded funding.' I'm

like, 'Okay, cool.' She says, 'But I need you back.' I said okay. So we executed the contract and we started working from there, and this was in 2016. And we started working from there and we just started really staying on top of it. I'm part of the ETE Roth Collective. I'm also part of the ETE meetings throughout the five boroughs.

O'Brien: ETE?

Shoy: End the epidemic. So I stood on that coalition. And I'm all the way around now. I'm not just focus on trans issues, I just executed a contract for MSMs. As an expansion program to NYTAG. Now I'm still working on ETE work as well as working on Angel Advocacy program that we started, Youth for Change that we started, and our own CAG group, Community Advisory Group that we started. So my work is still going. I'm still sick. The cancer has come back. But I'm OK. But I'm battling it with an outcome of understanding that the work that I'm doing means so much more to me than to lay in a hospital bed and be sick.
So it's more—it's more now that I need to do this work. It's more now a need to—for change.

Shoy: Because the four years that we're going to face are going to be hardship and I feel like if we can't come together and continue to do this work then a lot of our progress is going to die off. And we can't let that happen. So you know I'm in this work to continue this work. I leave in April for the CLPP conference to continue reproductive justice. And I'm just...

O'Brien: What is the CLPP conference?

Shoy: CLPP is Civil Liberation and Policy Programming.

Shoy: There we go. So I do that every year. Just because I believe in the work that they're doing and because the first year I ever went to the conference Hampshire College did a—so they did, like, a little—they took one of the wings of the college and did a mural of trans life matters and they really really want to learn more about trans issues and how they can help and what can they do to be part of the movement. And that hit me really big because, like, for so long trans people had problems in colleges. So for this college to understand, like, trans people are here and their lives do matter, and they deserve education is a big thing, is a huge thing. I feel like for so long we've been fighting and fighting and fighting for so many years, we look and we don't see what was the outcome. But this is the outcome.

Shoy: And we'll continue to fight for more and more years before we see another outcome, but doesn't mean that we have to stop fighting. Because once we start fighting, that's when our people die off. And we owe it to our people as activists to continue to fight, and NYTAG owes it to our community as a policy change, an organization, to implement policies and bring them to action, and to change the policies for the trans agenda as well as the LGBTQ community.

O'Brien: Tell me more about NYTAG's work. What have you guys worked on, what have you—where have you put energy, what have you accomplished, what do you hope to do?

Shoy: So NYTAG—when we first started, and before we even had funding, we was doing the lobbying at the State Senate and working on GENDA. We've been working on GENDA for quite a while. It hasn't been passed but we've also implemented policies, to do a cultural competency training with the Department of Health as well as Public Health Solutions, Housing Works, Mount Sinai, Callen Lorde, so part of what we do is we do cultural competency trainings around trans and gender nonconforming, and how people should treat them and know that they still exist and be respectful of their needs, because so many times we see that the reception at the front desk can be rude, and the trans person will turn around and walk away, as well as the gender nonconforming. So what we try to do now is we try to—we're building—we're widening our perspective of how to take our trainings and put it into our policies, to where now when you look at a handbook, it is your policy, it is your right, and it is your responsibility to be respectful at all times with pronouns, how the person self-identifies, as well as the person's username. Because what happens so much is that people see a name on an ID, and the person could say my preferred name is this, and they won't use the preferred name. That's problematic, and it's such a big problem. Our goal is, like I said, we're expanding our programming to MSMs for youth for change, and we're targeting thirteen to thirty-nine. And the reason why we're targeting thirteen to thirty-nine is because so many youth programs are thirteen to twenty-four. But what are you offering them while they're in them?

Shoy: So what are we offering? We're offering educational training programs. We're offering peer advocacy programming training. We're offering, if you want to go to school, linkage referral program we're offering a linkage referral program to health care, to HIV prevention, PrEP and PEP, Hep C trainings. So NYTAG is forming these trainings so that people can understand and know that they can be trained and they can work in this field and they don't need to be scared to do it. And one of the things I tell them and I tell everybody—I sit here today as a program director with no credentials, no high school diploma, no GED, no college degree, no vocational training. It doesn't take a college degree to do this work. It takes dedication, life experiences, and knowing that you're dedicated to doing the work and knowing what the work means to you. So NYTAG is opening up doors for people to understand that, and opening the doors so that people can understand, like, we can help you get to where you need to get, as well as we do have referral programs for housing and HIV prevention and HIV counseling, as well as our trainings and how we see it.

Shoy: And our board is with it.

O'Brien: How has NYTAG received funding? Where does support come from?

Shoy: So our support comes from PHS, which is Public Health Solutions, the Ryan White Foundation funded NYTAG three years at $133, 879 a year. It's the first grant ever for a trans-led organization. It was a new project they decided to do, and if it works successfully they'll continue to do it. But we also just did an RFP for MSM capacity-building through PHS again and with DoH, with Department of Health to expand our programming to all of the LGBTQ as well as MSMs and gender nonconforming and trans community. So that's where our funding is coming from right now but we are looking at other funding through Arcus Foundation, Astraea, NoVo, Robin Hood

Foundation, and others. We just landed a deal with Microsoft Word where they're letting us utilize their space for fundraisers, any trainings, as well as training us in their programming and giving us certificates after completion, as well as letting us utilize their volunteers and donating whatever time the volunteers spend to NYTAG. So our next goal is to contact Google. And to see where they could fit in with what we're doing. And just understanding that Google and Microsoft are competitive. So any time that you want to utilize Google and you already have Microsoft if you let them know that Microsoft is helping you then Google's going to be competitive and tell you what they can do. We have started our fundraisers, which the first fundraiser was February 11th, think next one will be March 23rd. Our youth symposium will be March 4th to kick off Youth for Change. So these are things that are in play, these are things that we're very happy about and we want to continue the work within the community and create bigger and better programming.

O'Brien: Who are some of the leaders and staff?

Shoy: So, NYTAG, you have the CEO and President which is Kiara St. James, you have the Program Director, which is myself, Gykyira Shoy, you have a co-founder which is Tanya Walker, you have a Trans Coordinator which is Karima Fatima, you have another trans outreach coordinator which is Anya, you have a MSM leader that have created the program Youth for Change and there's a program manager which is Watson Williams, you have the event coordinator which is Leo Williams, and we also have a relationship with the House of [inaudible] through Leo Williams and you have the Outreach Coordinator which is James Blunt.

O'Brien: And what's your relationship with Housing Works the organization?

Shoy: So Housing Works helped us bridge what NYTAG is today. We started talking about NYTAG out of a focus groups out of Housing Works on West 13th Street. Well, Kiara was working for Housing Works as a consultant. And they believed in everything we was doing, so they was paying us to go up to Albany, they gave us space to utilize in Housing Works on Willoughby, just for our groups, as well as space where we can work out of. Charles King is amazing, he has been supporting us ever since. So has Carmelita. And one of our board members is a Housing Works worker, his name is Reed, and he is the co-chairman of our board. Bali White is the chairman, and she's out of D.C, Caton Farrow is one of the board members, Carmelita Cruz is one the board members, and Ewen is one of our board members. So our board is pretty strong, pretty strong. I think like we have one of the strongest boards possible right now and we're gonna start our youth retreat—I mean our board retreat. And that's gonna be in April, for the board to get to know each other, and connect with Kiara as well as just making sure that they're helping her build her capacity, and what she can do and what she can bring to NYTAG.

O'Brien: I'm interested in hearing a little bit more about employment. So you are working as a program director now, you talked about doing performance in California, tell me a little bit about how you've made ends meet over the years.

Shoy: Well, so how I made ends meet over the years, when I first started I started off on PA, which was public assistance, I was making 83 dollars every two weeks and I lived off that for a while,

and then after my second stroke I was fully favored for disability. And I made ends meet with that, but I'm also still performing, I perform as the housemother of the House of X, so that brings in money. And I've made it basically just off being on disability and taking the majority of my money and putting it back into the organization. Just off that, I mean, it was tight, it wasn't a lot, but I was able to sacrifice a lot. I was able to make sure I knew what was important. And I did it. Performing brought, like I said, some change in, it wasn't much because you make a hundred dollars here, a hundred dollars there but I think my biggest thing was understanding—understand that—I enjoy the work that I do and that there was gonna be sacrifices and those sacrifices include—included—making sure I had a monthly Metro Card to get back and forth where I need to get to. Making sure my bills was paid. Making sure my cell phone stayed on at all times. If I was broke at the end of the day, then, I was okay because that kept me on the path of getting to where I am today. And being a program director and still performing—it's hard, don't get me wrong—but it gives me a chance to take everything that I'm feeling, all the emotions I'm feeling, the work, and let me put it on stage and just release it.

O'Brien: Tell me about performance, about the scene and your experience.

Shoy: Sure, so, like I said, I'm the house mother of the House of X. Performance is—lip syncing is one of the things that I would say is not as easy. But my type of music is Latin pop and and R & B. So the music I pick is really things that I can relate to. I like music that I can relate to so that dealing with work I can release whatever negative energy that is. It's my place of healing, it's my place of sanctuary. When I'm on stage I think about nothing but pleasing the audience. Performance coming into my life helped me cope with everything I was dealing with. It helped me cope with being raped, it helped me cope with being sick. It helped me cope with not having enough money to do the things I wanted to do. It also helped me cope with understanding that for so long our generation had been—has been described as drag queens performing and now it's a new—it's a new thing as being just female entertainers. So performance allows me to—it's like a burst of energy, it allows you to rejuvenate. It allows you to look at the world differently and knowing that I'm a program director over here, I'm a female entertainer over here. And I'm doing two things I love to do that I thought I couldn't do because of the work, but then I'm still helping everybody with doing both these things. I'm helping the people that just need somewhere to go by performing. I'm helping people that actually needs help in their everyday lives by being a program director, so for me they go hand-in-hand. Performance is one of the things that I would tell people I don't think I could be the best program director I am today without performing. I don't think I would have been able to understand and be able to relate without performing because performance helps you relate. It helps you relate to the music but it also helps you relate to everyday life. And being a problem director and performing allows you to be more sensitive to people's needs and understanding just because you don't have that need people have these certain needs that need to be met and it's your job as an activist and community leader to sit down and really not dictate and not judge but be like, I'm here with you and I'm here for you. And that allows me to sit here today and be able to tell my story without tears, without a place where I was five, six years ago. Because music have healed me, and it's continued to heal me and performance continues to heal me. Through the work I'm doing and

through not being a victim of rape anymore, and taking my life back, and living my life so that other people could see that there is something positive comes out of all of this.

O'Brien: Tell me about the broader support and community for trans women in the ball scene, in the house scene.

Shoy: So my dealings with the house scene is I am a show in pageant house. And what we do is—so what we do as a house, we're actually performing at the CK Life Event Gala which is a wonderful program run by Kim Watson. And that helps for hormones and helps for surgeries. People do not have the insurance to get that, as well as scholarship programs. So the House of X is providing entertainment for that. We provide entertainment and we do fundraisers to raise money for the transgender community, as well as gender nonconforming and the LGBT community. The money that we raise is to help with hormones, is to help with resources, is to help with food, is to help with clothing. The Kiki scene, the ballroom scene, is more towards HIV prevention and helping people with PrEP and PEP. Helping them afford it, helping—letting them know that if you can't, you come to—you come and let us know. And what we'll do—excuse me—what we'll do is we'll raise money and we'll do events to make sure that this medicine is affordable for people who cannot afford it. These are support systems we give. We encourage the transgender and gender nonconforming community to be part of the ballroom scene. Because it also is a place where you can go and you can belong without anybody judging you. It's a family. It's not people coming together and friends—no, we utilize and we talk about the space as being a family space, a space of—a space of peace and safety-ness, where people will love you for who you are and not judge you for who you are. And this is how we see the ballroom scene, as well as the drag scene. It's a place to belong to, and be a family, and understand that if you're ever in a time of need, your family is always going to be there for you.

O'Brien: And I asked you about your own experiences with work and making ends meet and financial support. Tell me some about some of the kinds of ways that you see trans people that you work with in New York and elsewhere making ends meet.

Shoy: So trans people and gender nonconforming as well as LGBTQ people—we tend to go to sex work because that's where you make the majority of your money. Backpage, Adam4Adam, UrbanChat, BGC. And we wanted to understand—okay, we understand this is how you make your ends meet but we want you to be safe. We understand that you're out here selling drugs or selling hormones or out here selling yourself. But we want you to be safe. We find that people in our community feel like the only job they'll ever get is being a sex worker. So why do people try to take that from them? But we want to give them a different outlook on life and that let them know that, yes, sex work is a way that we make money. We've all done it. And we don't judge you for that. What we ask is that you be safe within. What we ask is that you come in and you get tested or that you take PEP [Post-Exposure Prophylaxis] or PrEP [Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis]. Or that you make sure your viral load suppressions are low, or you make sure that your T cells are low, you make sure that you're healthy. That's what we care about. We don't care about being sex workers because we understand. We're not coming to you as a white supremacist or high class supremacist and saying, we look down on—we frown upon you because you're doing that. We

don't do that. We just want the safety of our community. We want our community to be respected. We want other people to understand that just because our community is doing sex work, does not mean that they don't have the right to care. They have every right to care. But these are some of the things that we're facing and these are some of the things that our community does to make money. Yes, they sell their food stamps. Yes, they sell hormones Yes, they even sell their—their—their viral medicines. Why? Because there's no housing. There's no jobs. And everybody wants to tell them, well, you don't qualify, you need to come back with more credentials. So the only thing they have is sex work. But like I said, I want to say again, we're not here to judge them for that.

Shoy: We want them to be safe. We want them to understand that we're here to make sure they're safe and that if anything happens then we're here to advocate.

O'Brien: What's your understanding of why trans people you work with have difficulty getting formal jobs?

Shoy: Well it used to be discrimination towards, okay, they come in, they say their name, it says one thing, but then the ID says another thing. It used to be, well, 'cause we do have some trans people in the community might come to work today dressed as a female, and might tomorrow feel like, I don't want to dress as a female, I'm just comin in. That's fine, but what happens is that people start judging them for that. Then people—then they—our community feels like, okay, they don't have a GED or high school diploma, nobody's going to hire them. Or they feel like if they get hired, people are going to talk about them. So they choose not to do—they choose not to put themselves in these situations. They choose not to go out here and get these jobs because they don't want to be discriminated towards, they don't want to be judged, so what do they do? They do the only job they know, that nobody's going to judge them for because it's money. And everybody—everybody's pleased at the end of the day so they go out and be sex workers. And we want to change that. We want to change that with starting educational programs. We want to change that with starting scholarship programs. We want to change that with doing vocational trainings. And starting sustainable income. Sustainability is big in our community. And that's one of the things we're going to start within our second—just going in between our second and third year as a co-op initiative, as creating sustainable jobs for the gender—transgender and gender nonconforming community as well as the LGBTQ. By starting coffee shops, book stores, furniture stores, thrift stores. And we're starting this, and we're working on this now to have this implemented and in place within the third year so we can create more jobs.

O'Brien: What do you see as the future for trans communities?

Shoy: The future, what I see for the future for the transgender community, I feel like we're here to stay, I feel like with everything that NYTAG, Destination Tomorrow, [inaudible] place is starting, and Translatina Network is starting, I feel like with everything that we're doing, that we're going to survive. And we're going to be in placed into where there's going to be more trans-led corporations—not organizations, but corporations. There's going to be trans-led businesses, and

we're going to be here, and we're going to have our own money to do it with and we're not going to need the money of government officials or organizations, people to tell us how to spend money, what we need to spend money on and what we need to do with it. I feel like this is starting to mark for us to have our own businesses and it can happen and it will happen.

O'Brien: I'm interested in how trans organizing is connected to other social movements. So you've mentioned this reproductive justice conference, the CLPP Conference, you've talked about—a lot about the connection between AIDS services and trans organizing. How do you see the connection of your work to things like Black Lives Matter or the protests against Trump or immigrant rights work or other movements in the United States?

Shoy: Well, I mean, as far as the immigrants rights, we have transgenders that are immigrants. So we're very connected to that. Why? It's because trans people come here for sanctuary. They come here from all over the world for sanctuary. So we're involved with that, like we're connected because—we—their issues are our issues. Why? Because we're trans, for one, two, because we're immigrants. Black Lives Matter, we are people of color. We have African-American trans, we have Asian trans, we have Latino trans. We have a lot of—the trans community is wide, with different races, so we are connected with Black Lives Matter. The other movement as far as social justice—social justice is a social justice movement. Just because we're trans doesn't mean it's not a social justice movement. It is an economic justice movement. Why? Because we need money. It is a reproductive justice movement. Why? Because trans people want to have kids too. So we have the right for reproductive rights and reproductive justice and reproductive health and all that. Everything—and this is what I tell people when I talk—is that everything that is everybody else's problem in this world is ours too. We're connected to everything because we're still human. And we still matter. Just because people want to separate us doesn't mean that we're not here fighting for cisgender people, or we're not here fighting for the LGBTQ community, or we're not out here fighting for MSMs [Men who have Sex with Men]. And people won't know that because when the Stonewall riots started, it started because of a trans person. But what did we do? We fought for not just the transgender community but we fought for the LGBT community, because at that time, transgender was nothing to be named. It was a new thing happening. So we're connected all the way around. But we always stand here and we fight the fight by ourselves because nobody wants to jump on board and fight our problems with their problems because they say that we're different from them. But we're not. That's why we're fighting your problems, our problems, and everybody else's problems. Trump? Yes. Are we aware that he's going to make it tough for us? Yes. But is he going to make it tough for the LGBT community too? Yes. So what does the transgender community do? We write policy—we provide policy to implement them for everybody and not just the transgender community. Immigration laws that are being passed, we're trying to implement them for everybody and not just transgender community, as well as mobilizing with other organizations. NYTAG got a chance to do the AIDS walk in DC. And, I mean, it was wonderful. NYTAG also did the Women's Day March in DC. I mean, mind you, my toes got stepped on like sixteen times. You know, we're not a community that doesn't fight for the rest of the world. We are a community that continues to fight and understand that we are part of this world whether they want us to be part—a world that wants us to be part of it or not. We're part of all these communities. Just because we're trans, doesn't mean we're not part of the LGBTQ

community. We're still part of that community as well. Just because we're trans doesn't mean we're not part of black lives community—of Black Lives Matter community. We're part of that too, because we are—some of us are African-American. Some of us are immigrants, so we're part of that movement too. But the problem we find is, when are people going to realize that they're still part of the transgender community. Why? It's because we're one community. Because we're trans doesn't make us any different than anybody else. Because you're cisgender or LGBTQ or even white class supremacists, it doesn't make you any different from us, because at the end of the day, if you don't get out there and work, you have no job. If you don't get out there and bust your ****, you have no food on your table. If you don't pay your bills you have nowhere to stay. So how does that not correspond with economic justice? How does it not correspond with social justice? And how does it not correspond with the LGBTQ TGNC community? Because we're fighting the same fight with you. But you want to separate us. But that's fine. But we look at it from a bigger picture. We look at it as all lives matter, not just Black, not just Asian, not just white, not just cisgender, not just LGBTQ, not just trans or gender nonconforming. All lives matter. And until everybody understands that and jumps on board with that, the rest of them will be fighting separately. But the transgender community is going to oversee a lot more than what the other community is going to oversee, because we could—we're not going to continue to look at it as fighting alone, we're going to continue to fight for everybody. And we're going to continue to be part of these movements. We're going to continue to be there and understand that this movement is bigger than one community.

O'Brien: Is there more that you'd like to add in this interview?

Shoy: No, I mean, I feel like this interview has been very successful. I feel like I got my point across, and I feel like people listening to this will understand where I come from as being a trans person of color, but also where I come from as just being a human being, and want to live my life and fight for other people.

O'Brien: Thank you, Gykyira. I really, really appreciate speaking with you.

Shoy: Thank you for having me.