

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

JOSEPHINE PEREZ

Interviewer: Anna Keyes

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Transcribed by Maggie Hong

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Anna Keyes: Hello, my name is Anna Keyes and I'll be having a conversation with Josephine Perez. For the New York Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is the oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is March 23rd, and this is being recorded at Bedford-Stuyvasant. Josephine, um, can you tell me your name and age?

Josephine Perez: My name is Josephine Perez. My age is 38.

Keyes: What are your gender pronouns?

Perez: My gender pronouns is her, she, miss.

Keyes: And how do you describe your gender?

Perez: My gender is a unisexual transgender woman of color.

Keyes: When and where were you born?

Perez: I was born in Metropolitan Hospital.

Keyes: What year?

Perez: Eight nine, 1979.

Keyes: Um, tell me about an early encounter you had with the trans community.

Perez: When I first encountered the trans community, I was signed out of the foster care system, and I encountered myself with a transgender who was a sex worker. And I became a sex worker myself for survival.

Keyes: Can you tell me a bit more about that? And if you remember her name?

Perez: I don't remember the trans person's name, but I know the trans person said, "You look good in women's clothes, and I don't want you to be out here homeless" as you know about the youth shelters at the time or youth services so I took a risk by being a sex worker. Then I started dressing up in drags and from there I went further in my transition step by step. It's still a process of going through the transition still today.

Keyes: Absolutely. When was the first time you heard the term "trans"?

Perez: The first time I heard the word "trans" was at the age of 16. Any other time that I didn't hear the word "trans" I was in the closet, and when I did come out I was considered a feminine gay man, a feminine bisexual man. When I first actually came out it caused me to realize I was actually trans. That was at the age of 16. Like 14, 15, 13 I was different identities, different

sexualities. But when I first realized I was more made out to be a woman that was the age of 16. So at the age of 16 is basically when everything about me felt like a woman, 'cause at 3 years old I was playing with rainbow bright, kid sister, GI Joes, Barbie dolls. So at 3 years old I was already feminine, I had femininity in me, and I was always teased as a child growing up. I was called names and so on, so I didn't realize I was trans until I was 16.

Keys: Tell me more about your childhood and family background.

Perez: My childhood and family background... well in schools I was teased as a uh... in schools I was teased because I had all the girlfriends; I was a pretty boy, so basically that's the feminine side of the start and beginning of being trans. When you're teased and called names, you know what I mean? "You look like a girl", "You look like a faggot", or "You look like a man in women's clothes" you know 'cause I was wearing tight bell bottoms. I was wearing tight jeans always in school. So boys used to tease me, and girls; boys and girls used to tease me because I had girlfriends. Then when I first had encountered a relationship with a gay man that's when I was teased even more. So growing up I was like not too familiar with friends in schools, and I didn't have very much of friends when I was bullied. I was thrown into special ed. Most of my life encounters with my family, foster homes... my foster mother and foster father, Mrs. Andrews and Mr. Andrews, molested me. It shouldn't matter if I was gay already, or trans, or bisexual already. They had no business to molest me, you know what I mean? Gender and age and sexuality has no name because when I was molested by a white family, the foster mother and foster father, I felt very emotional and I felt very traumatized from that. But my regular biological family, when I came out to them, it was quite shocking to them. They didn't believe me and my brother that we were molested by a gay uncle, my brother Peter Perez. My aunt Dana Meyers and my uncle Albert didn't believe us when we came to them and told them our Uncle Bernardo molested us; and my biological family. My mother and a drug and alcohol issue when she was a sex worker, my father was abusive to us and my mother. He threw me across the room when I was 3 years old when I tried to intervene when my mother and him were arguing. Most of my life I didn't think of survival, but it was more than just survival. I felt like a girl when I was young, but I didn't know how to come out and say that to my family. I was behind closed doors. I didn't know how to come out to my foster family, my real family, I didn't know how to come out to people to say that this is what I wanted to become. Most of my life I was abused physically, mentally, sexually, emotionally. I was verbally bashed at people from me being gay, bisexual, or transgender. When I became transgender fully, you know going through a hormone change process, my butt getting a little bigger, facial hair removals getting removed, looking more feminine in the face and the body and all that. It just took me to a whole different level you know what I mean? And I still got a lot more process to do end of transition of becoming a woman. Anybody, it's steps you have to take. Phases for the transition. Beauty makeup supplies; painting your face you know. Then starting to wear women's clothes. Then going from wearing women's clothes to taking a hormone shot injections and taking pills. Then coming out to your family with these things. My family knows I have breasts, but they don't allow me to wear women's clothes, and I felt that was discrimination. Some of my family I had a close relationship with, my real family, and some of them I didn't. Some of my foster family abused me. For one instance a family

member, Mariam Santiago, locked me downstairs in a basement for a month with nothing to eat and drink. Whenever I peed [inaudible] we'd chew on the grass.

Keyes: Wow, that's terrible.

Perez: Yeah.

Keyes: I'm so sorry you had to go through that. Thank you for sharing this with me. What is your current relationship with your family?

Perez: Well right now I'm trying to get in touch with my family, like my mother Valerie Straw. [Inaudible] I'm hoping that people that know my mother can contact me because I do have a number 134-724-3961, and she can also reach me, my mother and her boyfriend Franky, can also reach me on my cell phone. As they call the facility I can give them my cell phone. Because I don't know hers. And when it comes to my family, I'm also trying to reach my Spanish side of the family also that lives in the Bronx. They live somewhere around the Bronx. Robert Perez, as in Spanish "Chava", Mariam, my cousin Ariel. I'm trying to contact all of them that lives in the Bronx. I'm trying to wonder if my family in Puerto Rico are still alive because of the hurricane. You know the sandy thing in Puerto Rico? I'm just hoping that my family members there living in Puerto Rico are alive. My cousin Chili, my grandma, my aunt Blanca, my aunt Lillian, whoever is in Puerto Rico I hope that they're alive.

Keyes: I hope so too.

Perez: Because it's hurtful if they're not. Because they're close to me. Most of my aunts are lesbian or bisexual or heterosexual. Like I said, I have a bisexual brother who's in the closet. Then I have a gay uncle, Renardo. Then most of my family members are gay members. I have family who work, or jog, or go to class, or rich, or poor. I have like my Aunt Dana Meyers and Uncle Albert, they have two beautiful cats, two dogs, a mixed chihuahua and two dogs that were pugs. One was named Pepi that they gave away. They mixed chihuahua they gave away too. I was so upset with my Aunt Dana and my Uncle Albert gave the animals away. We used to have two big dragons in their own tank, and it was so amazing. I loved the animals that were in my aunt and uncle's house. I loved them dearly, I love animals. I'm an animal lover. I love kids, I loved kids as far as babysitting or taking care of them. When the parents let me take care of them as a transgender woman because I have a close relationship with the community than they. A lot of the heterosexuals respect me because I respect them. I tell them the truth, I don't lie to them. I tell them I'm a transgender woman. [Inaudible] When I jump in and out of cars [inaudible] and that was in the past. Sometimes I get tempted back into prostitution, but I'm trying to get a job. I want a job and after June, July, August, and October I want a job so I'm trying to also be hired. I have a lot experience in the activism outreach, lots of experience answering phones, and working environmental maintenance.

Keyes: Speak about your history of activism and your location here now. Can you tell me your earliest memory of New York City?

Perez: My earliest memory of New York City... I was child of abuse, a child of neglect, a child of abandonment, a child of sexual abuse inside the foster families, a child of mental abuse in foster families and biological family. Also by my biological family and my foster family members, foster homes. I was abused mentally, sexually, so with my experience growing up I just wanted to be a normal child with a future. A job, a career, finish college, finish high school, but my dreams were hopeless. Because I never accomplished them goals, but today these days, years later, I'm trying to accomplish these goals as a young transgender woman and a woman of color that's 38. I'm nowhere near my 50s or 40s yet, but when I reach that point I wanna reach my goals before then.

Keyes: Sure, so can you tell me a bit about the communities you're part of now and communities you've been part of in the past?

Perez: The communities I'm a part of now I'm a part of Last Trans Justice, I will be working for them starting April 1st all the way to June. I will be working [inaudible] Project, Nicole, Lilliana, and everybody else who works for the Project: Tasha, Miles, the director, Lilliana, and I'll be working for also Cleo and many other workers at work in the field of Trans Justice. I'm also part of Safe Outside the System. I'm also a member. I'm also a graduate of Here to Be Powerful. I'm also a graduate of Leaders of Transformation [inaudible] exponents. I'm also a graduate of Positive Health Workshop health department, and I'm also a part of... a graduate of Boom Health woman's horizon program. Right now, I'm just with [inaudible].org. It's an organization for policies in planning, and laws to be in placed. Also focus groups, and I'm also a part of [inaudible] Trans Justice, but my position there would be a housing coordinate, housing campaign specialist, and outreach specialist. I'm also involved with Trans Latina Network. I do a lot of outreach jobs for them, but not a payroll job. Which is ridiculous because the grants are funding, but they're not providing for trans latina network to be able to get paid. As [inaudible] workers, which is doing volunteer work as trans people, which is ridiculous. Anybody else doing volunteer work for Trans Latina Network are immigrants as LGBT we're not getting paid to work for them. It's kind of funny how sometimes trans people have to come out their pockets to pay trans people because of the fact that grants and funding are not being provided for the trans community, or not being spent right, or not being given to the trans community, or they're not trying to put little money for the workers out there doing outreach. The outreach that I do, I do very good work. Christina Perez would tell you that everybody in Trans Latino Network will tell you that I worked outreach before volunteer, and I would never got a [inaudible] job.

Keyes: So, just to step away from the present, I'd like to talk more about your experiences with activism. In a little bit, I'd like to step away from the present.

Perez: Ok, no problem.

Keyes: Can you speak about what communities you were a part of outside of activism networks?

Perez: I was born in Metropolitan hospital in New York, Harlem. I was involved with group homes, I was involved with psychiatric children facilities. Basically I was involved with heterosexual, bisexual, gays, lesbians, inside these facilities. You didn't see much trans people in group homes, or foster homes, or whatever. I was one of them that experienced them back in the days; back in my days because I'm 38, but now they have trans people in the foster care system. I wouldn't want no trans person to suffer what I had suffered in the foster care system, or suffering the teasing and the bullying that I had suffered in schools as a trans person. Or even as a person being gay or bisexual before they became trans. I wouldn't want any other LGBT person, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, to suffer the stuff that I had suffered in schools. Public schools, or having friends then my friends going against me because other friends of theirs were teasing me. So they didn't want to be my friends no more so they had been bullied by the system of schools. So I feel that there needs to be more protection laws for transgenders in public schools. Not just transgenders in public schools. Gay, lesbian, and bisexuals also. Because the system is so messed up, there's no protection laws in school. In my day, and in today's day years later.

Keyes: Can you tell me over the course of your life, what are the places that you hung out with other trans people? Tell me if you can remember [inaudible] places.

Perez: Yeah, I can remember. Roosevelt Queens, all up and down all of the trains station, all up and down in Roosevelt in general. Everywhere where Roosevelt was was packed. The whole Roosevelt area, from up and down, from the trains station, and different corners of the trains station was the strip. Then you had 3rd Avenue, 1st and 2nd Avenue, 125th and Lexington, and you had Park Avenue, then 3rd, 1st, and 2nd Avenue of Harlem. Where the baseball field was, and the bridge you would go to La Bronx. Then you had the sex working area, then you had another sex working area which was Brooklyn which was... what's it called? Oh, Broadway and Brooklyn right under the J train. Then you had Sta Allen, terrorism poor Richmond. There's places in different areas where you'll work in Sta Allen. Not just one specific area. There was a lot of sex workers in that area too. Women and trans. Women of trans experience and women of [inaudible] experience working in the area of that area. Then in Bronx you had hunts point [inaudible] Avenue on [inaudible] road all up and down them areas you would see sex workers. Then you had these areas that we trans people need to target to be able to do outreach to them, and get them hooked up to combine with services, get them hooked up with jobs, school, education, and job programs. Which we don't have much because we've been left out in our own community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and people who are heterosexual who say they're going to so call give us this and give us that or say they support us. They're our allies... where is the support really when you need to get the money for the trans community, for when we need to go to school, get job training programs, get the training education we need? Getting paid for scholarships and how can we get, y'know, jobs also? What about that? We turn to sex work because we don't have a choice but to turn to sex work. This is why we need the government officials. The countrymen, the governors, the senators, and all these people of elective officials to work together. The police department, the police commissioner to work on transgenders being able to get jobs. To work on transgenders to being able to get housing, and all these things they don't have to sex work for.

Keys: So I want to hear more about... some memories you have being in these locations over the decades. Maybe specifically in the 90s?

Perez: Basically memories of these ages and centuries that I've been around. Basically, like I said I was born in Metropolitan hospital in [inaudible] and was a part of the 80s and 90s basically up. So, within the 80s and 90s and up, right? I have experienced being raped, I have experienced being molested. Even inside jails and prisons, and even inside on the streets being a public worker or a sex worker. I have been raped, I have been robbed, mugged, I had a gun stuck to my head in Jersey City. Jersey City was another sex working area. I had a gun stuck to my head by this guy. He told me to do everything that he said, or he's gonna shoot me. And this was a steel gun. It looked like it was steel metal, it looked like it was real. So I was terrified and scared and panicky. And ever since then I've been more traumatized, even being raped by [inaudible], inmates raped me, [inaudible] raped me. I was scared and petrified. So I've been raped by inmates and correctional officers. It's just horrible. No protection laws in the jails and prisons, no protections laws outside in the communities for trans people and it's horrible.

Keys: Can you tell me more about the kinds of relationships you had with other trans or non binary people?

Perez: Well I had a close relationships with my family, who is Chelsea, Rusty, Julia, Julie, Christiana, Cecilia, Tanya Walker, and [inaudible] Johnson, Kim Watson, Kiara St. James, Shawn from Destination Tomorrow, and Giovanne Martin, and Maddison and Mariah Lopez.

Keys: What kind of relationships did you have with Kiara or Tanya?

Perez: I had relationships with these people for so many years for activists and political work. For fighting civil rights, equal rights, liberation rights for all transgender people all across the nation around the world.

Keys: Can you tell me, just kind of focus?

Perez: They're like family to me. They will always be family to me. Whether they're alive or not. And here's the [inaudible] of my aunt that I never got to meet, Marsha P. Johnson, but I got to meet Sylvia and she became my first gay mother. Then Maddison was my adopted mother. Maddison [inaudible], and then Kim Watson was my step mother, and mother Tanya was my god mother, and everybody else that I mentioned were like aunts, sisters, brothers, and uncles.

Keys: Tell me... what are some memories you have with some of these members of your family?

Perez: Just being at barbeques and gatherings, conferences, town hall meetings, or being in Washington DC. Also being at an awards ceremony where I was honored with an award by Givonne Martin the principal in [inaudible]. They both honored me and I was very grateful and blessed because of that. Housing Works honored me also for the advocacy and political work that I do and everything else that I do in life. I wish I could be acknowledged by many other

organizations that I have worked with throughout the years since the age of 16. Like Safe Space, Street Works, and many other organizations and agencies that have been involved in Harlem. I wish I could be acknowledged by them to get an award too as much work as I did in advocacy and politically for them, but when they acknowledge me they acknowledge me. I haven't gotten no awards from them, I haven't gotten no jobs from them. J O B's. So, it is what it is.

Keys: So what are some memorable positive experiences that you've had? Are there any moments that you've had?

Perez: The love and support from my transgender community. Whether they disliked me, whether they liked me, or whether they didn't like me. The love and support that I had from my community. The understanding and communication. When we had misunderstandings with each other, and we didn't understand each other, we didn't know each other; we got to know each other and build that close relationship. Because there were some trans people who didn't know me like that, and I didn't know them like that. We had some, how can you say, disputes? Where we got in fights and arguments, but then we worked it out years later. Months later, weeks later, and we apologized to one another. So I had some discrepancies, y'know? Fights, arguments, but one way or another I still advocate politically and fight for my transgender community. Whether I like them or don't like them, or they like me or don't like me. Because this is about unity, love and respect. Empowering one another and understanding one another, and learning from one another's experience as a transgender community. Because there's people out there watching us as a transgender community on how we will react to one another, how we speak to one another, and how we talk to one another. So, unity comes in and the unification of understanding every part of the transgender umbrella, and different parts of the gender of the transgender community. There's many parts of gender of the transgender community. You know, you got same gender loving, you got [inaudible], you got gender nonconforming, you got transwomen, transmen, transgirls, transboys, then you got trans [inaudible], trans drag queens, and then you got the other name. Women or men, boys or girls of trans experience that consider themselves women or men, or boys or girls. So that's why I say of experience. That's the other one added because there's women of trans experience, there's men of trans experience, there's boys of trans experience, and girls of trans experience. So there's so many names.

Keys: Can you tell me?

Perez: There's also fem queen, and transexual, and intersex, and [inaudible].

Keys: Can you tell me who you have partied with, or who you party with?

Perez: Party with as for as what, clubs?

Keys: Yeah.

Perez: Well I went to a... I went with my girlfriend Rio Channel. I love her so much, Rio Channel. I went to a sex part with her, it was so great. You meet all these guys with money. They're looking

to pay girls, y'know? It's like you got top list tops, you got nice cute little [laughter]. That kitty wants your sweater bad.

Keyes: That's true.

Perez: So, yeah. I went to a sex party club. Where it was private. I went there with Rio Channel, and me and here have this close relationship bond. Everytime I see Rio Channel, I love seeing her when I don't see her for a while. I love Rio Channel because she's a money maker, and she's very discreet, and she doesn't be in areas where police can harass her or arrest her. One thing I love is that she stays with money in her pocket, and she stays with a bank card and a credit card, you know? So that's what I love about Rio Channel because she keeps it real, but she also don't mind you hanging with her. She has a very good personality. No matter how many people throw shade at her, talk about her, I don't care. She's one of my best friends as a sex worker. She doesn't do sex work in the streets like she used to because she does private. Through the phone or through private sex parties. Basically she's my best friend, I love her, and I need her to know that I will always love her. She's one of my best friends, and I have many other best friends, but she's my best out of all of them. She doesn't judge people. She doesn't look down on people, and if you ever needed something to eat she will buy it for you. Or if you ever need a cigarette she will buy it for you. She did things for me that I wouldn't expect her to do for me.

Keyes: Do you have any... I mean you spoke a little about inner general relationships with trans people. What, um... let me think about this for a second. When you were living here in the 90s, what did the relationships with other generations with other trans people, what did those relationships mean to you?

Perez: They was like break dancing, it was much different than the ballroom scene. Much different than bulging and walking the runway. Back in the 90s you had like modeling, you had like... because the ballroom scene comes after. You had break dancing, modeling, then the ballroom scene came after. Where people bulge, walked the runway, different categories that they would do. But back in the days, if you was in the ballroom scene... like gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender. You had to have a job, you had to go to school, be in a job training program. Or you'd have to have some type of career degrees or the bachelors. As you were young, young or old, middle aged, or senior citizen. You had to have a job, go to school, and you had to basically be in some type of job training program and have housing. These days a lot of days, a lot of them are getting high, drunk, messing up their lives, sleeping in the piers, sleeping in the streets, homeless. This is where we need to get a lot of them don't go to drug and alcohol treatment because of discrimination in substance abuse programs because a lot of trans people are discriminated. Gay, lesbians, bisexuals, they might go, but the youth can't go in substance abuse programs. One time in life they didn't have no youth programs in those days, but substance abuse has always been discriminatory against trans people because of their gender. They didn't know where to put them. The first thing they would say in the 90s all the way 'til now is, "We don't know where to put you. With the women, with the men, or by yourself". Because they used all types of excuses to not put you in the detoxes we had. TCs, halfway houses, or substance abuse programs in general. In the 90s all the way on. Until today.

Keyes: You mentioned some scenes like break dancing how that was before the ball scene. Can you talk a bit more about that and any memories you have? Did you participate in that?

Perez: The break dancing I didn't really participate in that because I was really a young kid.

Keyes: Yes.

Perez: But I was basically into other things.

Keyes: What were you into?

Perez: I was basically into, well, I told you one time I had a gay boyfriend at my school. I was mainly into him, and I was mainly into protecting myself; not being out there. So I was mainly with my family. I was mainly locked down in the basement for a month. Other foster homes I was molested and blah blah blah. Because when I was molested by Mrs. Andrews and Mr. Andrews I was in Rochester, New York. I lived in Virginia before, I lived in Florida before, I went to Disney World one time with one of my foster family members. I was in Puerto Rico at one time too until my mother took me away from my grandma and grandpa in Puerto Rico. I would've lived with my grandma and grandpa in Puerto Rico, I would've had a good life growing up if I had lived with my grandma and grandpa in Puerto Rico. But I was abused mentally, physically, emotionally because of what was done to me mentally and physically.

Keyes: So, how... can you tell me just a bit of, I don't know, you spoke earlier about collaging?

Perez: Oh yeah, my thing is art. I've always liked art as a child. Like glue sticks, regular glue, where you make collages. So my collages are where you, these collages today, my collages are collages that have a lot to do with the trans community. I made a collage of Rainbow Heights. If you go to Rainbow Heights you'll see my collage. It's all dealing with trans. Or pictures of trans people, the meaning of trans. Like it has "trans" and it says, "Transgenders turning it up". You know, trans community turning it up. [Laughter]

Keyes: Yeah, she's needy. (Referring to cat).

Perez: So yeah, basically I like doing transgender collages, Black history collages, Hispanic history collages, collages of different colors, like mini faces on the earth, mini walks of life.

Keyes: What does it mean to you to make these collages?

Perez: And the meaning to it to: freedom, love, and respect. I even write it with a marker and put the people and the faces around it and the bodies.

Keyes: How does it feel like to make it?

Perez: It feels good, it keeps you busy. I also like coloring in a coloring book. My thing is coloring in coloring books. I like color pencils, I like markers, I like crayons, I like coloring books, I like doing collages. I don't like painting that much, but when it's painting I have to do a community painting. It has to be all of us working together. I like stuff like that. I did hand paint, that was easy. I did hand paint for a garden down by Brooklyn with Zina, my sister that's trans. Me and her were working in the garden. It was her birthday, and we had a birthday party for her. They were doing a painting on the walls, so I helped them paint the walls at a garden. I forgot the name of the garden, but it was somewhere by Broadway.

Keyes: So you just mentioned a bit about black history, and maybe the other parts of your identity outside of being in the trans community.

Perez: Well, my father was Hispanic Afro American. Because he's dark skinned black. He's darker than my family. Some of my family are dark, and some of my family is light skinned. Some of them are in between the Puerto Rican color. Like peach beige. Then you got the light skinned Puerto Ricans, like me, light skinned. So I'm basically Black, Hispanic, White transgender woman of color. So I got my mother's side who's Irish, Scottish, European and Italian. My father's side is Puerto Rican, but there's Blacks in my family. Not married in my family but made babies with a Black male or female. And some just had black and darkness in them, and some just had lightness in them, and some had in between color skin like beige peach.

Keyes: How does being trans relate to these other identities?

Perez: How does trans relate to the color of my skin? As a person who was light skinned in my family, I felt uncomfortable. Like why is all my family on the Spanish side darker than me? And I'm the lightest one? Why am I my mother's color? And why is my father darker than me? Why is my father have and afro back in the days? Why did my mother have longer hair than me? It was down to her butt, I was jealous about that. Or why did my cousins and brothers don't have to go through the foster care system, but I had to go through the foster care system. That was why everything was "Why, why, why". I went through a rough life.

Keyes: So I just want to pause for a sec, the cat's getting really angsty.

Perez: I know. Should we let her out?

Keyes: Yeah, open up the door. She has some dry food out there.

Perez: Come on, come one. That's what you wanted? You wanted your dry food? Yeah, she was getting moody. She was like, "Let me out!"

Keyes: [Laughter]. So, how... you've talked a lot about many traumatic experiences you've had in your life. How do you cope with that drama?

Perez: I do art, support groups, for transgender support groups. Women support groups because now trans is inclusive or women support groups and women programs. Well, not all. Many of them do support us trans women because we are women too. So when you say women of all walks of life, you mean cis women and trans women. We call them "cis women" as trans people. So, as women of all walks of life it means trans women, lesbian women, bisexual women, and heterosexual women. But also women of all walks of life could mean chronic and severe illnesses, HIV, right? It can also mean employees, it can also mean substance abuse. So women of all walks of life. So we are all women in walks of life in a triangle if you really look in reality. Trans women is inclusive.

Keyes: Yes, so how, you know you were born here, so you've been in a lot of other places of the world but?

Perez: I've been to other places. I've been Baltimore City, to Elkton, Maryland, I've been to Atlantic City, and I've been in... what was the other place? I've been in Maryland, Baltimore City, oh Delaware.

Keyes: So when you come back to New York City, how do you see it change over the years that you've lived here?

Perez: I know that nothing has changed. I know that you get more services and more benefits out of the city. The only services and benefits that you don't get is part time jobs, full time jobs for trans people. Employment is a big thing in the trans community. Substance abuse is number one in the trans community. A lot of times transgenders don't want to go to substance abuse programs because of discrimination. So there's a lot of lawsuits on that. I feel like they need to get tougher as commissioner of human rights. They're not doing nothing about it, not that I know of. I could file a complaint with a commissioner of human rights at... it was a program called ARC. Right on 125th on Lexington by Park. There's one by Park Avenue, and there's one by Maddison. There's two different ones. There's one on Park and one on Maddison. The one by Maddison is right by a school. So I was living at that one, and a guy was touching my breast and touched on my butt. I didn't appreciate it, so I wrote an instant report. Staff wrote an instant report, and they didn't throw him out. They still kept him there, and I was still there with him. They shouldn't have put me on the male side first of all. I wasn't supposed to be in the male side. I was supposed to be with the women, or make a combination. And that's for all the trans people who have lived in these drug and alcohol treatment programs like ARC and ACI and whatever. I'm the one that spoke up in the ACI, and ACI started bringing in people to detox and rehab and asked the transgenders, "Where would you prefer to be? With the women? Or with the men?" for their comfortability and their safety. Because safety does count.

Keyes: Do you think they've gotten better about trans being inclusive?

Perez: Substance abuse programs? Never. Some of them are private owned, some of them are non profit, and some of them are paid by the city and the state. And they don't respect what [inaudible] say. They don't respect what commission on human rights say, and they don't respect

what the transgender community says that are activists or law policies, or like lawyers and people like that. They don't respect the policies of the laws for transgender people. Same thing with job employment. And even if you're in an LGBT setting of LGBT services. A lot of times when transgenders are looking for a job in these LGBT settings, they won't hire transgenders, but they'll hire a gay man, or a lesbian or bisexual man quicker than you. Or a heterosexual man that has no experience with LGBT, but has experience for themselves for being trained, by being trained for being a heterosexual. Then you got the, um, the most part that I hate. It's when you got some transgenders who work in the field, but you're working volunteer for them doing this and doing that, but you're not getting paid. Or they're not advocating on your behalf for not getting a job because you already have a job. So a transgender woman, I don't care if you're an immigrant and I don't care if you're American. I don't care what color you are. You're a trans woman, you should speak up for other trans people that are trying to look for employment. Who are trying to look for substance abuse programs, trying to look for treatment, trying to look for immigration, human rights, and civil rights and liberation rights, trying to get their green card and all that. You should be advocating for us trans people. You shouldn't be a trans person just there to be checking and forget where you came from. You was a sex worker at one time, you was this at one time, that at one time, you came out of jail and prison at one time for your substance abuse or whatever. Or being a sex worker or whatever. So, a lot of transgender women and men, and boys and girls, forget where they came from once they get a job. Or once they get in the field, or once they get into treatment programs, or once they get into recovery, once they get into mental health treatment. They start taking medication and they get a job for mental health program. These are the things that they forget. They forget where they came from. I never forgot where I came from. I don't care what job I have, my job is to help people. My job is to care about my community, and my job is to advocate for the human rights, civil rights, equal rights, liberation rights. Whether they are trans people, because I don't just advocate for my trans community. Whether they're trans people, gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual community, or Christian or Muslim community. My job is to help all causes of all walks of life.

Keys: So how does being trans in New York City compare to being trans in other places?

Perez: Other places are a lot more ridiculous with services. They don't have mental health and chronic and severe mental health services like New York does. They don't have trauma clinics like New York does, they don't have HIV services like New York does, job employments like New York does, they don't have access to... and I'm not just talking about the transgender community. I'm talking about in general in other states and counties. They don't have what we have in New York. New York has more services, but I feel even though some transgenders got hired we need more transgenders that are trained and educated. More transgenders that are trained, educated, bachelor's degree, or whatever. Or are looking for a job to be hired, and to be accepted in these programs and agencies, and better services within these agencies and programs and organizations.

Keys: So to speak to the communities that you've been a part of here, you mentioned the house that's in park slope? Can you tell me what's the name of that house?

Perez: Transy House.

Keyes: Can you tell me about Transy House?

Perez: I lived with Chelsea, Rusty, Christianna, Cecilia, and Sylvia Rivera when she was alive.

Keyes: When was that?

Perez: And Julia her wife. And Sylvia Rivera was my mother. I loved everybody that lived in there with her. This was... I can't remember what year specifically, but Transy House would have more of that year. That's why I was telling you if you contact Transy House, you could interview them.

Keyes: Well I'd like to hear more about, y'know, this is more about?

Perez: Yeah I know, but when I was living at Transy House I was there for shelter because they, Sylvia, had seen me in the streets. I needed a home and a place to come to, and they took me in Transy House for a while, but eventually with time I had to go. I mean, I get SSI, but I had to go because I was staying there too long and wasn't handling my business. Sylvia Rivera was always there for me no matter where I went. Chelsea and Rusty had a problem with too many people staying in the house. They only could have a certain amount of limit of children or adults living in the house. So they made it possible for me for a little while; temporary housing. What was it like living there? Very nice, loving, caring. You had things to do around the house: clean, eat, socialization, have a few drinks, smoke a little herb like weed, and just love one another. Respect one another, understand one another, learn from each other's experiences, and communication. Chelsea and Rusty always had a heart, but they would keep it real with transgender people. You have to do what you have to do otherwise you'd have to leave. Because I don't want you just stuck on being here and you're not having you're health and exercise, or finding a job. So they would give you that tough love. That tough caring love. Because Chelsea and Rusty and Sylvia and Julia was no joke, but I miss Julia. I'm just hoping that she's ok after my mother's death of passing on, Sylvia Rivera. I miss my mother, and I still miss her today and I think about her everyday of my life. Because she was the closest I was to anybody in this world.

Keyes: Can you tell me more about that relationships?

Perez: I went to a lot of rallies with her. I went to a lot of protests with her, I did a lot of volunteer work at the pantry program with her. I talked to her a lot even though I helped her with pantries. One time I was judging the gay, lesbian, bisexual community and the heterosexual community. I said if they're not for trans people we need to stick together as trans people. She said, "Never judge a book by it's cover because when you judge the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and hetero sexual community, you know what grants or funding they can give you. You never know what they could do for the trans community". She was so right, and that made me have a close relationship more with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. And these made the gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals treat me more with respect and dignity and power and understand me. I've had some times and moments where I had an attitude or had a tantrum tantrum, and an AOP Orgy Low Projects/Transjustice. Or I had a tantrum with a lot of organizations and agencies. A lot of

the organizations and agencies that are LGBT related told me that I have changed. I have improved throughout the years. Like where I lived at 454 Lexington every time I have inspection day. Whenever the people from the organization or the agency comes to inspect my room, my apartment, basically I passed inspection. I make sure I get all my stuff done the day before or two days before the day of inspection. Wednesday is pre-inspection at my housing facility, and Thursday is the main inspection with all the head honcho. A ministrant comes into my housing program and checks the place out. They said, "You did a good job" so I don't just do a good job on my apartment. Annette, who is very close to me too, she has taught me how to clean my room. So ever since she taught me life skills, I have learned to clean my room a little better. My apartment, my room, wherever I live at.

Keys: So besides Transy House, are there other... can you tell me any other?

Perez: Any other agencies I've lived at?

Keys: Well not necessarily agencies, but maybe even more generally just places or spaces in New York City that are most important to you?

Perez: Divine Lighthouse of Hope, Zucina Dean, and Ms. Agia, and many staff of Divine Lighthouse of Hope. They tried their best to help me and tried their best to give me the love and care that they can, but they wasn't able to deal with me without taking my medications. I hurt and injured a female staff. Me and a transgender got into a fight because I'm diabetic, so the lady came and brought me some diabetic cakes and stuff. She said, "You can't take that diabetic cake that's for the community" so the transgender said that. I was like, "What? I'm diabetic. She brought this for me" and she tried to take it out of my hand, and me and her got into a physical fight. I picked up a table and injured the female staff, and I regret that I did that. If that person sees me on the website, I thank them. I thank them for all the help they gave me, and I apologize for hurting that female staff, and I hope she forgives me.

Keys: So are there any?

Perez: And that was the recovery/shelter for mental chronic severe and developmental disabilities. There were all types of situations. It was like a shelter.

Keys: I see.

Perez: A housing shelter. And that was in Philadelphia, I also lived there.

Keys: I see. So are there any aspects of the trans community of New York City you either in the past or the present that you want especially remembered that maybe you think that some people won't remember as time goes by? That it might get lost in history?

Perez: Places that used to be around?

Keyes: Oh no, but just any aspects of the trans community. Whether it be activities that you all would do, or event you all would have, or people in the trans community?

Perez: I feel that we need more grants and funding to go on trips. To have fun with one another as a trans community. So we can learn how to socialize with one another and get to know one another. Like the movie theatres, Applebee's... like a trip. Not a gift card, a trip.

Keyes: Are there?

Perez: Or a retreat. We could go on retreats.

Keyes: Are there moments... yeah speaking to that are there any times of socialization? Like any times that you've socialized in the past?

Perez: No just support groups, or political groups. We never go on retreats, we never go on trips, and that's not good for the transgender community. We need to be combined with one another. Community, love, power, respect, and understanding and learning from each other's experience. So it shouldn't just be support groups or political groups. We should be able to go on trips or retreats to talk about issues that need to be addressed. Things that we need to get done. Sometimes we could have picnics, go to the beach, go to the [inaudible] rides and have fun with each other.

Keyes: Let me put this in another way. For the younger trans generation, what do you want them to remember about the trans community in New York City? As it existed in the past?

Perez: I want them to know the history about the trans community. Like history of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's stone wall. I want them to know the history, centuries, and ages ago of the LGBT community of color and LGBT community as a whole.

Keyes: In your experience though?

Perez: And the trans community and their history as a whole.

Keyes: But in your personal history, are there things that... do you get what I'm saying?

Perez: If they're in [inaudible] school, or if they're in a regular public school with heterosexuals as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. I would want the youth to look at their future and worry about finishing school. Not being in relationships. And if they're gonna be in relationships use safe sex, know what you're getting into, but know that you're education comes first. Know that having food on your plate you need to be grateful for and blessed for. Whether another transgender is older than you, or whether you're living in a youth shelter, a youth program, or facility you're living in, be grateful for what you got, be blessed for what you got, and be happy that you're alive. Be grateful and blessed that you're alive. Because some transgenders that were youth, adults, or senior citizens wasn't able to make it to see another day. Of time and life. To

think about their future basically, and know the history of LGBT community, know their history if they're trans youth about the history of trans youth and the umbrella. The trans umbrella.

Keyes: What are somethings that... I think I know. I think it's more publicized about Marsha's history?

Perez: I didn't know much about Marsha P. Johnson because I came all late in the scene, but I knew of Sylvia Rivera and my mother. But Marsha P. started everything, and when she started Sylvia Rivera went off with her. They started throwing bottles at the police. That's all the history and I know that Sylvia, Marsha P., and many others slept on the pier. Many other old girls of the community, and they slept there when they was young and older. When they slept there when they was older it was supposed to teach the community a less about, "I'm tired of nothing being done. So I might as well just lay up in the slump at a pier". To show these people that we are people that are activists trying to fight for causes. Ever since Marsha P. died all these transgenders that chose to slept on the pier with Sylvia. The youth didn't have no place to stay or no shelter or nothing. They slept with Sylvia. They slept in the area with Sylvia. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender. Then Sylvia came and said, "Enough, I'm tired. I'm going to start some justice. I'm going to make some moves ever since Marsha P. because if she was still alive she said, 'Pay them no dust and no mind'". That's what Marsha P. would say. I also feel like in the transgender community, I'm gonna speak for my mother Tanya Walker and [inaudible] Johnson, I feel that there needs to be more services for veterans that are trans experience. Just because Trump said this shit about he supports the veterans, but what about the trans people that are veterans? That fought in the navy, military, or the army? What about the trans people that are senior citizens, elders? What is being done about them? Not really much. So we need housing for them, shelters, we need rent to be paid for them, help paying rent, you know? Cause for the senior citizens that are veterans. We need a whole lot of things for veterans and senior citizens. You could be a young veteran or an old veteran in the LGBT community, but gay lesbian, bisexual, and transgender is a big thing when it comes to being a veteran because they're not acknowledged.

Keyes: Ok, so... have you ever been homeless?

Perez: Yes, I have slept on the pier from the age of 16 all the way to my twenties. After a while I started getting housing. I lived in shelters back and forth in and out of shelters. In and out of temporary housing programs or permanent housing programs. I was a part of the transgender transition housing program when it was opened up. Arlene Humprin, Maddison Sinclara, Tanya Walker and [inaudible] Johnson, and Lauren. I was a part of the TTHP which was the Transgender Transitional Housing Program. Now I'm a part of the Women's Transition Housing Program today. I've been there probably like over 6 months now or 5 months. 5 or 6 months. It hasn't reached a year yet because it isn't 2019 yet. I'm trying to find a permanent house right now as I'm speaking. For places that are willing to give me permanent housing, I'm waiting on them for giving me the ok. I've been homeless on the streets back and forth. I've slept on the pier 34th Street by Penn Station. I slept by Port Authority. Cops would wake me up and stuff saying that I can't sleep here. So I would sleep by the turmoil by 42nd. I would sleep by Penn Station inside, I would sleep

outside of Penn Station. Then I would have cardboard boxes where I would sleep on because I was homeless since the age of 16. Then I would go to places to take a shower to smell good. That way I could sex work and make some money. Sometimes I would stay at hotels with men. Sometimes I was raped in the hotels, sometimes I was raped in the car, and sometimes I would have to fight to get my money and not get raped. Sometimes I would have to fight for my money and not get taken advantage of my body. One girl, female from where I lived at now, she said was with a trick and she was giving him head and she heard loudness and she heard my voice, Josephine because I was fighting the dude that was a trick and I punched the shit out of him. When he came out of the car, I punched the shit out of him and ran with the money. Because I was defending myself. Oh, they are fighting the cats. Her and him. Basically... and I don't know if I told you the history. I have animals in my life too. Animals keep me whole because animals are like my therapy and like my service. I'm wishing to get a service animal. A service cat, a service dog. A therapy cat, a therapy dog, whatever I can get through approval through a psychiatrist. Now you have to go through a psychiatrist to have a service or therapy animal to allow you to have them. I love animals, all types of animals I love. I dream always to become a veterinarian, but I never accomplished that. I dreamed to become a police officer and never accomplished that. I always dreamed to become a doctor; never accomplished that. Because I always wanted to help people, and I always wanted to help animals. And I always dreamed to become an employee, to become my own director in a business to work with LGBT and heterosexual youth. Along with Christians and Muslims. I wanted to run a youth program where I was the director of it and people were under me, and I never accomplished that either.

Keyes: Are there any, particularly positive memories that you have living under your peers?

Perez: I remember... I'm gonna be honest, my history was... it started with weed and alcohol. I was hanging with my brother on 79th Street in York Avenue. He got me started on smoking weed and drinking with friends, then he snuck me into clubs like the Sound Factory at the age of 16 or 17. I started waking up with men and women I didn't know. I was homeless back and forth in different shelters. Psychiatric children facilities, group homes, in and out of housing programs. I would come to 79th Street in New York and visit my aunt and uncle. Lot of the times my brother would sneak me into clubs like the Sound Factory and many other clubs. I would wake up with many of these men and women: White, Black, Hispanic; I didn't know. I was a minor, so they was probably a pedohpile. I didn't know what the hell they were. Because I didn't know at the time that people who slept with minors were pedophiles or sex offenders. I didn't know. Men and women who do that to kids. So I was a traumatized child at a very young age. Traumatized being homeless, traumatized waking up in these people's houses I didn't know. I lived in shelters where I was raped. Men shelters like [inaudible] America and [inaudible] which no transgender should live in. No transgender should live in a men's shelter because a lot of these people are sex offenders, rapists, attempted murderer, or a lot of them have warrants, or a lot of them have been to prison and come out and rape you. There's not type of protection law to protect you inside the shelter; systems. When women and men rape transgender people in these women shelters and men shelters, there's no type of protection laws. When women and men are phobia, and they have a hate crime towards you, and they beat the crap out of you, there's no laws and policy protection laws inside the shelter systems and protection laws. Security needs to be

trained and staff need to be trained in these shelters. And people in the community, when people are homeless they need to be trained and educated on how to treat homeless people period.

Keyes: So, you spoke a bit about?

Perez: And people that are visiting from out of town, y'know tourists, need to be educated too and trained about homelessness, transgenerness, all of that.

Keyes: So you spoke a bit about your experiences with sex work? Can you talk to me more about that and also other forms of employment?

Perez: Well, sex work... I would basically sex work my whole half entire life. Even through homelessness, even through shelters, even through housing programs because I felt whatever I couldn't get that I needed or wanted I felt that I needed to make a little more money. There was always a job available for me, but I just didn't have the training or education I needed. I graduated with 5 different job training programs. I graduated Here To Be Powerful, Women's Horizon Program, Moon Health, Leaders of Transformation Exponents like I said once again, and I graduated Trans Latina Network, and all this experience I've had and never got a job until [inaudible] Low hired me in April. So I started April all the way to June, and I didn't expect to be hired ever. Now, through my childhood with my gay uncle, he molested me. I was gang raped in jail because I was an ex crip. What I mean by an ex crip is I was an ex gang member. When I was raped by the crips there was officers that let these crips rape me, and correction officers even raped me at the same time that were crips. Employees that are gang members inside the prison and jail systems that are gang members, and they raped me just as much as the inmates raped me. There's no protection laws inside the jails and prisons so I was raped. Gang raped in jail, I was raped in the streets in New Jersey City when I was HIV positive. I caught the virus from either being raped, molested, or domestic violence relationship. Where it was horrible, and it wasn't my fault. I always thought that it was my fault. Then you got a lot of guys out there who are nasty, who said they don't wanna use condoms or protection, but they need to use condoms. They nast son of a f-ers. I feel that these men are so nasty when it comes to cis women, lesbian and bisexual or transgender, but when it comes to cis women a lot of the time they don't give a fuck about being HIV positive. But when it comes to us transgender women they'll have a reason to lock us up, or put us in jail behind bars. Like they'll say, "This transgender did this to me. Or gave me this or gave me that" or sometimes they won't even say it. They'll just kill you if they find you or see you. A lot of my sisters have been murdered through... of their gender. A lot of my sisters have been murdered because their man had arguments with them and thought they was doing this and kill them; boyfriend or husband. Or a lot of the transgenders were killed because they guys wouldn't give them no head or you know, the girls wouldn't give the guys no head, or the girls wouldn't give the guys their booty you know... anal sex. So they would kill them. Like Amanda Milan's death, a guy came 4-3 days later and killed Amanda Milan. Slit across the throat. Then you had many other [inaudible] like Sasha Valentine. She was killed by a drug dealer. There's a lot of transphobia. Like in our communities gay, lesbian, bisexuals, and there's a lot of transphobia in the heterosexual community. Extremely, but I feel like if you're transgender, how would you think you're disrespectful like gay, lesbian, bisexuals and heterosexuals. When all

transgenders are not disrespectful. How you carry yourself, how you walk the streets, how you talk, how you're educated, trained and all these things. And how you know safety tips and other things. Education is the key in the transgender community, and education and training for people who are not of trans experience is the key.

Keyes: So something you've spoke to me about before [inaudible] is your experiences with mental health.

Perez: Yes, I have chronic and severe mental illnesses. There's not much service for people with chronic and severe mental illnesses. We're misgendered, we're mistreated. We need more transgenders to work and psychiatrists. My psychiatrist that I got now is a transgender. We need more transgenders.

Keyes: Where are you getting your services?

Perez: Housenworks. I feel that more transgenders need to be hired as psychiatrists, doctors, lawyers, judges, elective officials like they need to go for senators, governors, mayors, presidents, whatever. Because transgenders need heart and guts to do what they do, but without policies and laws how can we get these types of jobs you know what I mean? They said they passed the gender bill, but does it still exist? Are they going by it? Are they respecting it? No. So when the gender bill was passed on, I suppose the misgenderers whether our legal name is changed or not. Look at his claw. His claw is right on your glass cup, he's going to break it.

Keyes and Perez: [Laughter].

Perez: I love animals.

Keyes: What would you say are your everyday safety concerns?

Perez: Safety. Protection laws for the transgender community, what I mean by that.

Keyes: Well I mean what are your?

Perez: Police need to be more alert when it comes to protection in the transgender community. They need to be more... of not judging or discrimination. They need to respect you with the gender you identify as. They need to not laugh at you or make fun of you because that's not a part of their job description. Their job description is for them to protect you and serve you.

Keyes: Let me pause you for a second. For your everyday life what are your?

Perez: Safety tips?

Keyes: Not safety tips, what are your personal safety concerns?

Perez: Safety concerns is me protecting myself, my health using condoms, and using any type of way to save my life and keep my [inaudible]. And keep my health in good state. Because right now I'm [inaudible] and I'm living a healthy life. I use protection, and if nobody wanna use protection I don't deal with them no more because what I used to do with people is not today because I have to protect myself. I suggest if you ever deal with me you get on PREP, because PREP protects you from catching HIVs or AIDs. If you're consistently taking your medicines I ask people to get PREP. To get on PREP. It's not like you're dead because you slept with someone with HIVs or AIDs. Now they got a medicine called PREP to protect transgender people, to protect partners, to protect gay's partners, lesbian's partners, or heterosexual's partners. So use PREP, it's the key to protect you from catching HIVs or AIDs if you're taking it consistently and following up with it.

Keyes: So do you feel like you've ever had to?

Perez: AIDs and HIVs is not a killer. You could still survive and live with it. Chronic and severe mental illnesses is not a killer. You can still be normal if you get it treated. Basically you can treat it, but it's not curable. Chronic and severe mental illnesses. HIV you can treat it, but it's not curable. Now, as far as PREP it protects you from getting HIVs and AIDs, but if you're not consistently taking it it won't help. You'd be HIV positive with AIDs, but if you take PREP it can protect you from catching HIV or AIDs. It's a new medicine out to protect people of all genders and sexualities.

Keyes: Do you feel like you've ever had to choose between expressing your gender identity and your economic security and safety?

Perez: Yes, I've had to protect my gender a lot of the times. Just by speaking, sometimes defending as far as fighting, or sometimes teaching and educating people about the transgender community. We've had the gender bill passed on a long time ago. Long before time, but now Trump wants to take it away and many other elective officials want to take it away. We gotta put a stop to that. We need our communities of gay, lesbian, bisexuals and heterosexuals to understand in everyday living. It's not our fault that we became transgender. It's no one's fault becoming gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Because some of us felt like women from childhood, some of us were feminine through our childhood. And some of us were molested, raped, or tormented. [Cat meows]. The boy's being mean right?

Keyes: Yeah a little bit.

Perez: What'd she did to the boy though?

Keyes: Sometimes she's aggressive. Ok, cats aside. So, I'd like to talk to you about medically transitioning, and if you've accessed that how did you access that? How did you how did you cover cost?

Perez: Well, I didn't start at the age of 16. I started at the age of 17. I started taking premarin and spironolactone. Now I'm taking delestrogen. So at the age, I'm thinking my twenties, 21 or 22 or 20, I started taking injection hormones I think. Or in my twenties getting into my thirties, I can't remember because I have short term memory. What happened was these two men were trying to rob me, homeless. When I wasn't homeless they were trying to rob me, and my head split open so I lost a lot of my memory. I was lucky enough, blessed enough, and grateful enough to live. Through them homeless men who split my head open, and it was wide open. Blood coming all over the place. I was in the EM house and they had to put stuff on me it was extremely horrible. I couldn't take it, there was blood all over me. Then me and a gay guy after pride was attacked one time in my life. So I was raped two times in Jersey City, one time I was robbed and raped, and another time I was just raped with a gun stuck to my head. He threw me out the window with just \$10.

Keys: Oh my god.

Perez: So, that's my story.

Keys: Yes, well you're so resilient. I'm really happy to be talking with you.

Perez: Mhm. Oh, and I wanted to say transgender with developmental disability lives matter too. I have a developmental disability, I don't just have chronic and severe mental illnesses and HIV. I don't just have high cholesterol and diabetes. Dramatically, I have a developmental disability called ADD, ADHD, [inaudible], and I also have a learning disability. That's why it's called developmental disability because these words I'm using they don't use no more. So developmental disability trans lives matter too. And chronic and severe trans lives matter too, and senior citizens trans lives matter too because they experience more experience than us youth, young adults, or people in their thirties and forties. People in their fifties and up have experienced a whole lot than us. So senior citizens trans lives matter too. And so does veteran trans lives matter too. So does chronic and severe mental illnesses and developmental disability trans lives matter too. So until them lives matter, the other rest of the transgender community needs to hear our voices, needs to hear our expressions, needs to also hire us, and needs to also have the understanding and communication and learn from our experiences. Because we have stories too as senior citizens, as veterans, as someone with chronic and mental illnesses like myself, and transgenders with developmental disabilities like myself.

Keys: So when you were talking about accessing the shots?

Perez: Hormones, I started at the age of 17 years old.

Keys: Did you access this outside of legal contacts?

Perez: No, I accessed it through doctors because I didn't want to take anything illegal. I was always scared, but I had some girls tell me, "Take it illegal. Take it illegal", but I wasn't trying to. One time I had sold two bottles because I needed the money bad. Sold two hormone bottles. Really, I should've been using them for myself if I wanted to become a woman. But one time I

injected hormones illegally. I overdosed. My prescription that my doctor ordered for me prescribed, I overdosed so that's why my breasts are a little bigger today because I overdosed. Now I'm taking hormones by a nurse or a doctor injecting them in me instead of me injecting it myself, or having another trans person injecting me. Because when I did that overdose I said, "No I wanna overdose!" so she gave me the overdose because I screamed about it; the trans person. So illegally I wasn't supposed to do that because it can harm my body, and I'm hurting my body by saying, "No give it to me!" and that person could probably go to jail if I was to die, or I could end up in the ambulance in the hospital and they're gonna tell me I wasn't supposed to overdose. They're gonna ask questions like, "Did you use more than that" yeah. So I never told nobody that I overdosed on hormones. Like a doctor or nobody until I felt comfortable saying it because I don't want them to think, "Oh you're addicted to hormones". It's a drug and they find out you're addicted. And I don't want recovering addicts or alcoholics talking about me either. I also had a recovery process. I'm not in recovery right now. I drink alcohol socially and I smoke weed here and there, but I don't do crack no more, I don't do heroin no more. I used to smoke and sniff heroin; never shot it. I don't do club drugs like ecstasy, special k, LSD, acid no more. All I do is smoke weed and drink. I do a lot of activist work, political work, outreach work. I answer phones and volunteer for Housing Works at 57th [inaudible] and 454 Lexington at where I live at. Thank you Annette Laco, I love her very much. Annette Laco has been close to me throughout the years from when I first became a client at Housing Works. She was a young lady working for the transition housing program when they was opening up. She has advocated for me throughout the years for every Housing Works site program that I have been in. Because of my outburst behavior and many other things, but I always thought they didn't understand people with developmental disabilities and chronic mental illnesses. But they accept all walks of life in Housing Works. They give you a lot of chances as clients, patients, and residents. Housing Works would never deny nobody a home to live at, or deny nobody services. I been acknowledged the first time in history by Housing Works with a trophy and a star. Gold star and a gold trophy.

Keys: That's great.

Perez: Saying Josephine in Housing Works. All in Housing Works. Josephine all in Housing Works. Plus I was acknowledged by [inaudible] as I told you earlier. So two organizations that acknowledged me this year. I felt so grateful and blessed because of it. Because of the good advocacy work I do, activist work I do. When it comes to Annette Laco, Tanya Walker, and [inaudible] Johnson. When it comes to life insurance and a will, I prefer my death when I pass on or whatever, or what happens to me ever, that Tanya Walker, and [inaudible] Johnson, and Ms. Annette Laco as a cis woman, be under my will and under my life insurance. Because I know they're gonna do good jobs putting my woman's clothes on and making my makeup. Because I don't want my biological family doing my funeral, or my awake, or any of that. I don't wanna be burnt in ashes either. I want a coffin.

Keys: You spoke a little earlier about your experiences using substances?

Perez: Yes.

Keyes: Has that been important in your life?

Perez: It's been important because in the fellowship of recovery in [inaudible] or in alcohol drug treatment substance abuse programs, they consider alcohol and marijuana still a drug. Even though marijuana is a medicine. Even though alcohol is not illegal because they sell them at bars and clubs. And they consider if you're on a methadone program they consider that a drug too because when you walk into the room with psychotics anonymous and alcoholics anonymous and you walk into a drug and alcohol treatment facility. Like one time I was high off of heroin mixed with crack and they told me that I was OP for positive and I said, "What the hell is OP positive? I'm not my mother a heroin user". When they told me I was a heroin addict I said, "Not me". They had me on detox and off of methadone. I said, "Why do I gotta take this?" and they said, "Either you take it or you don't complete the program. It keeps you off the high of heroin". So I completed the program and I got back into my life of recovery. Eventually in time I plan to get back into recovery, but for now I've just been going through a lot of stress and stuff with the transgender community that needs to be done and needs to be challenged. We need a lot of support. We need funding, we need grants, we need a bill to be passed on. A gender bill. Nationwide, worldwide. We need housing. We need more housing programs, safe shelters, safe housing programs. HIV housing programs for people living with chronic and severe mental illnesses or developmental disabilities. We need several programs, but we need the money. If the elective officials don't show the money, how can we build understanding and communication and training in our community. They also need trainings, fundings, and grants for people to train people. Whether you're an employee, or whether you're a person picked out of the transgender community to train people on what transgender is, it'd be great.

Keyes: Tell me?

Perez: A lot of times I don't get to speak at panels. I don't get to speak at conferences, or any of the Washington D.C. events. When it's the transgender event, and a lot of other people don't get to speak either. Only one or two. But a lot of the times I don't feel that gays, lesbians or bisexuals, or heterosexuals should be speaking on transgender issues if they're not of trans experience or transgender days that are just for trans people.

Keyes: Yes I agree. Can you tell me about a time that you felt seen?

Perez: What?

Keyes: Seen. Like a time where you felt people...

Perez: Are looking at you wrong?

Keyes: Someone who saw you for who you were.

Perez: Annette. She saw me for who I was and all of us transgenders as women. Annette Laco. Annette Laco has great experience in loving and caring to all communities of all walks of life.

Mothers with children, fathers with children, she has a heart for her own family. Her kids. She loves her kids, she loves her family. She loves her work, she loves her job. She got promoted to work at 5-6 different housing sites for Housing Works now. Everyday she's starting to move up on and on. I just wish her and her family the best because they're a beautiful loving family of the community. When it comes to friends, when it comes to neighbors, when it comes to someone being abused, attacked or raped, her family and her are very protective. They'll call the cops right away. They're very concerned about people's mental illnesses or HIV, being healthy, or any other type of medical issues being healthy. Aaron is another one. Good case manager, I knew him for years. He's my case manager now, and he does very good works at Housing Works. Excellent. All the staff that works at 454 Lexington are excellent. All the staff that works for Housing Works are excellent. All the residents, clients, and patients get [inaudible] positions are great and excellent. They do nothing but a good job and support. As [inaudible] workers, as regular workers, as employees, they do nothing but help the community; Housing Works. Same thing with [inaudible] Crisis. Same thing with... it was called Help PSI one time. It's called Brian Point now. They're very great also. Those are the three programs that I can name that are very great. And [inaudible] Project and Transgender to LGBT People of Color. And Kim Watson CK Life and another LGBT organization would be [inaudible] Place. And Destination Tomorrow. They need grants and fundings because it's ridiculous. We need more and more housing programs. Destination Tomorrow needs a housing program in La Bronx. CK Life in La Bronx. Kim Watson needs a program in La Bronx. Shawn works for Destination Tomorrow. We need housing programs, we need shelters, but we gotta be sponsored. Someone has to sponsor Princess [inaudible] Place to have shelters and case management services and to be able to pay their employees. So Princess [inaudible] Place and Destination Tomorrow and CK Life [inaudible] Project/Transjustice and Star Mariah Lopez. In order for these people to run these organizations we need people to sponsor us. We need grants, we need fundings, we need a gender bill. Nationwide, worldwide all over the world to be passed on. We need protection law; safety counts in our transgender community.

Keyes: If you want people to hear one thing from you what would it be?

Perez: It would be listen to our voices. Trans people. We don't wanna hear from you, we want y'all to hear from us. Or transgender people's voices speaking on the mic, or speaking at rallies, protests, speaking at programs, agencies, panels, speaking at conferences, speaking anywhere out. Letting our voices be heard to these people who are not of trans experience. What I mean by that? Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual. It's time that they listen to us, and we don't listen to them.

Keyes: Yes, yes. If you, Josephine Perez, want to be remembered for one thing what would it be?

Perez: The love, the dignity, the kindness, the generosity, and the fighting for my community and supporting communities who are not of trans experience. Because I have gave money to gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual organizations. I donate money to them, and I feel like it shouldn't have to come out of my pocket. It's hard to survive as it is as a transgender woman. You go straight to sex work because of not having money or giving money to organizations or agencies. So to remember me as giving, loving, caring, kindness, generosity, giving to other

organizations that are not of trans experience, money, donations. Helping other organizations and agencies that are not of trans experience. And to remember me as a political activist with heart, guts, and courage.

Keyes: Is there anything else you wanted to add? You said you wanted to speak more on housing was it?

Perez: I wanted to speak more about housing, yeah. We need more housing in America. All over the United States of America. No one in the United States of America, or in this world, or on this planet or this earth should be homeless. Housing for all, and that's how I feel. Especially for the LGBT community. Housing for all, housing for all. Including with treating their mental illnesses: chronic and severe, including with treating their HIV care, including with treating their developmental disabilities, but housing for all. No one should be a homeless in America.

Keyes: Is there anything else you wanted to say?

Perez: And we need to stick together as a transgender community and unity. [inaudible] love and respect and communication and togetherness. Until we come to them terms, the communities of not... the communities that are not of trans experience are not gonna support us or give us what we want. So I'm hoping that all the transgenders out there: transwomen, transmen, trans boys and girls, gender non-conforming and many other parts of the transgender umbrella hear me and where I'm coming from. And we need to educate them about the different parts of the transgender umbrella. The heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual community so they can understand us a little bit more. Communicate with us a little more, and I think communication in our community is a good thing too. And seeing eye to eye and working on justice for all transgender people all over the United States of America around the world. Clockwise. Thank you.

Keyes: Well thank you for talking to us today.

Perez: [Laughter] You're welcome. Thank you Anna.