

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

DAPHNE BANKS

Interviewers: Aviva Silverman

Date of Interview: March 17, 2023

Location of Interview: Queens, NY

Transcribed by Lauren Holt

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #218

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Aviva Silverman, and I will be having a conversation with Daphne Banks for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It's March 17th, and it's being recorded in Queens. Hello.

Daphne Banks: Hi.

Silverman: Hi. Welcome.

Banks: Thank you so much for having me.

Silverman: Of course. And we were just talking about the forms, and you said you had a really long name.

Banks: [laughter] Yes.

Silverman: I was wondering if you could express the whole name and tell us about it.

Banks: Okay, thank you. [clears throat] Well, I do have to say that it's-- I was born and raised Christian, so how I received it's, it's biblical. So, not every name is biblical, but Daphne is the first name, Evangeline, Eve. Um, Daphne Evangeline Quiana that's my nickname on the streets [laughter], Rahab, which is also a biblical name, and then Banks, so.

Silverman: Okay, and so how do people, different kinds of people refer to you different kinds of ways?

Banks: It's either Daphne or Quiana, but yeah.

Silverman: Okay, and you said you were raised Christian.

Banks: Yeah.

Silverman: Can you tell me more about that?

Banks: So, both sides of my family, my mom and my dad, they grew up Christian. My dad, I think both of my grandfathers were pastors, definitely on my dad's side. On my mom's side, he was working on becoming a pastor before he passed away. So, it was like I've kind of been born with that going to church Wednesday, Sunday, even if that means not going out with your friends during the week. You know.

Silverman: Wow.

Banks: But yeah.

Silverman: And how did that impact you as a child?

Banks: I didn't have any bad memories as a child. I was feminine. I was different than, you know, other beings that looked like me, and that was it. I was just different. A lot of people said that based upon, I guess, what I looked like on the outside instead of who I was on the inside. I should be doing this, or I shouldn't be doing that.

Silverman: What kinds of things did they want you to be doing?

Banks: They wanted me to play basketball and sweat, and I wasn't going to do that. I wanted to play with the dolls. I wanted to dress and look pretty. I wanted to do hair. I wanted to cook. And those weren't necessarily attributes of like, what boys were doing or what they were trained to do, but I stood out, definitely.

Silverman: And can we place this? Where were you?

Banks: Oh, this was in Buffalo, New York. Shout out to 716. [laughter] Sorry.

Silverman: What was Buffalo like?

Banks: Buffalo? Oh, my goodness. So, you're talking about weather, or are you talking about like, socially?

Silverman: Whatever you want to talk about.

Banks: Wow so, in terms of weather, Buffalo has the association of being freezing cold, because I think it's close to Lake Erie or something. So, it was definitely cold. The winters were harsh. Socially, [clears throat] it was a bit of a racist town. I really didn't experience racism like that, but I do remember having a racist incident happen during Halloween. So, we were going out trick-or-treating, and we knocked on this one door, and this older lady, she was like, why aren't you in your own neighborhood? [pause] And we had been trick-or-treating there for maybe one or two years, like on that side of town. It wasn't too far from where I was living, but you know, they gave more candy. They were nicer. And so, we were out there, and um I remember a lady was saying, no, you should stay in your own, stay in your own neighborhood. And even then, as a child, I knew that it was restrictive. I knew that it was something that was hurtful, but I never really reacted to it. Also, socially. Like I said, I was different. So um, I didn't really grow up with friends, because I was different. I remember it was interesting, too, because they say sometimes a child can like say things, even though it might be a little mean, there might be a little truth to it, because not everybody else sees it. And you know, I was in school one day, and one of the girls was like, she was talking about our teacher at the time. She was like, why does she keep calling him a boy? That's not a boy. That's a girl. But it was just the way that she said it. You know but, I mean, I guess she knew what everybody else didn't know, that I really didn't know

how to articulate at that time. At that time, I just knew how to be, and not necessarily you know, be concerned about what the outside looked like. But yeah, it was difficult, in a sense of like not really bonding with other children and not being invited to birthday parties and stuff like that. But you know, it all worked out for the good, so I can't complain too much.

Silverman: So what did you do as a kid, if you weren't hanging with other kids?

Banks: Video games. [laughter] I loved PlayStation. Crash Bandicoot. What else? I was part of a drill team. So a drill team is like similar to like a step team. More feminine. [laughter] It's more feminine than a step team, so I definitely stood out. I was good at it. What else did I do when I was younger? Um? [pause] I did my schoolwork.

Silverman: Right.

Banks: Yeah, yeah that's pretty much it.

Silverman: And what was your class background growing up?

Banks: Class background? I would say probably lower middle class. Yeah, we were definitely middle class, but we weren't middle class in a sense of having everything that we needed and that we wanted. Just-- we had what we needed and just a little bit of what we wanted.

Silverman: That's a nice way of explaining that.

Banks: Thank you.

Silverman: And so people externally were telling you how you appeared. Were there ways that you connected to, I don't know, stuff in the culture that felt like you were connected, that that was a way of bonding with or seeing yourself?

Banks: I'm so happy that you said that because it's-- it really, for me, it's about representation. And so, when you get to know other people, and I'm sure that you know, as you start to talk to more people, when they talk about having a Christian background, it can be a little hurtful. For me, I was able to see my first trans representation in the church, and that it made it easier for me growing older, knowing that God still loves me, that I still have a place, that I deserve to you know, exist just like everybody else. Yeah, there were like, one person attended my dad's church, [laughter] and I believe she was more impactful than anything, cuz I, my dad attended, in the black community it's called Kojic, Church of God in Christ, and my mom attended Church of Christ. So the denominations are different in the sense of like, Kojic plays music, so it's more active with the clapping, people running around, catching the Holy Ghost, you know, all that. But my mom's church was much more conservative. No music playing, no women preachers, it was very restrictive. You couldn't clap, you could sing out loud, but you couldn't like really express like that. And I remember this beautiful trans woman, she had-- I'd seen her before her

transition, and then after. So it was like I was able to see her grow through that process, and with her being so active and engaged in the church, that helped me understand that even though people have negative and mean things to say, you're still a child of God, you're still important, your life still matters, and you deserve to, you know, exist.

Silverman: And has your relationship to God changed since?

Banks: It's gotten so much deeper. [laughter] It's gotten deeper. And by that, just being in dangerous situations, like I've, um, when I moved out to LA, I spent time in Miami as a college student, you know, protected the environment. When I left Miami as a student and an employee, I moved to LA, and that was like the first time that I really experienced what the other trans girls talk about, having their lives put in dangerous situations, with dangerous people, gangs, and I didn't have my Bible at the time, and I remember I was working at a job, and I was like, let me get back connected to God, and as soon as I started reading my Bible and praying more, it's just like things started to happen for me in a positive way. I was protected in certain situations that I believe, had I not have gotten the message that you need to leave right now, and this is what you need to do, I probably wouldn't be here, so it's definitely deepened my faith, increased my faith, and um also, you know, since I moved to New York, they say that it's not—it's not pretty common that people can move to New York and get an apartment within three months, [laughter] and you know, for me, I credit that to God, because it was like, I didn't know anybody here, my cousin is here, but you know, that's a little family thing that we don't you know, really talk as much as we used to, so it was literally like, I was in LA by myself, with no friends, no family, and then it was like, I couldn't stay in LA, and I received from God that I needed to come back to New York State, so I'm originally from Buffalo, don't go back to Buffalo, but try New York, and I didn't know anybody else here, and it was like, you know, when I came, my steps were ordered, and things started to fall into place for me quicker, you know, but faith had a lot to do with it.

Silverman: When you said you received the message, what does that look like?

Banks: Receiving the message? I mean, I can receive messages at different times, but it's just, for me, it's a message from, [sighs] it's an internal message, but it's not a message that's generated from within, if that makes sense. It's a message that is like, okay, you're here, and then all of a sudden it's a thought, but it's a bit more deeper than a thought, like you can feel it. It's sort of like intuition, your gut feeling, but if we're talking about LA, is that what you're talking about?

Silverman: Oh, just like generally like how one receives that transmission. Like what it, yeah--

Banks: Yeah, it'll be—it'll be a feeling that, it'll come through your mind, but then it'll start to like wrap around your body. You can feel it internally, if it's good or bad, but yeah.

Silverman: Mmm, and I was also wondering if there's certain stories or lessons that you turn to in the Bible when you need support?

Banks: Um [laughter] Plenty. One of my favorite stories is about Job, where he lost everything, and it was like he still had faith despite losing his family, his riches, his children, pretty much everything, everything that he had, and it was like, it's different now, because it's like somewhat here, and I guess like, in a modern sense of living in the U.S., if you lose something, there's always a place that you can go to, some type of safe haven. He didn't have that, and his friends didn't come to see about him until later, and it was like all that he had was God at the moment. There's a story of Job, there's a story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, where they were thrown into the fiery furnace, and it's you know, the promise of God that he'll never leave you nor forsake you, so he was in the midst of them, and the three when, the three of them were in the furnace, and then I guess some people looked into the furnace and they saw four people, and it was like, where's this other person come from? Just so many stories. I can't say that one is more important, because like I think that with Genesis Revelations, it's like every book has its own sense of exploration, and you may not have a Genesis experience just yet, you know what I mean? You may have a Samuel experience, and you know, now that I say that, Samson, Samson and Delilah. Delilah was a beautiful woman, [laughter] and I was—I was thinking that you know, I'm no longer on the dating apps anymore, but I was thinking, I was like, I should call myself the loyal Delilah, because I'm beautiful and I'm loyal. [laughter] But yeah, it's just so many different stories that are applicable at different times.

Silverman: Yeah, and why aren't you on the apps?

Banks: Um ooh wow. Honest answer, I was recently attacked.

Silverman: I'm so sorry.

Banks: Yeah, Thank you. But I was recently attacked by, and I didn't meet him on the app, but it was just, it struck my sense of security, and I'm 35, and that's the thing too, like with, trans girls have different experiences at different ages, and they can be attacked at you know, younger ages, I never would have thought that it would have happened to me, but this was someone that I was dating, not necessarily in a relationship with, and he attacked me, and it was really unprovoked, you know, we had exchanged words, but never had he ever gave an inkling that he would ever attack me, and he choked me, and it was, I mean, that's why I'm coughing now and whatever else, but yeah, that happened Sunday. Yeah, so, I'm sorry, I don't want to deviate from your question.

Silverman: No, it's whatever you want to talk about. I'm so, so sorry.

Banks: Thank you. But yeah, that was my first time ever, I guess, experiencing violence in that sense, although I like to say, I like to talk a lot of stuff, but I'm not a fighter. I haven't been in a fight since like third or fourth grade, so it's like, you know, and I'm pretty, so pretty girls don't

like to fight. [laughter] But yeah, it caught me off guard, and it was just, when it happened, I was like, okay, so this is what it feels like.

Silverman: Mm mm mm. Yeah, I'm so sorry.

Banks: Thank you.

Silverman: Well, I think I'm getting a sense of all the places you're living, because you mentioned a few, so I just want to kind of put it on the map. So you were in Buffalo, and then you left for college.

Banks: Well, so, thank you.

Silverman: Set the record.

Banks: So we were living in Buffalo, New York. My sister got a job with Bank of America in Tampa, Florida, so my mom wanted us to stay together. It's always been me, my mom, and my sister, so when my sister got the job and moved, my mother was like, we're coming too. So I moved, and this is a triumphant story. I-- Wow, powerful story. When I talked about, you know, you asked me what I did when I was a child, and I did my schoolwork, I was really good at math. I tutored people in math for free. I didn't get paid for it, I didn't know any better. But this was my freshman year of high school, and I loved math, I loved schoolwork, and we moved to Tampa, Florida, and I attended Chamberlain High School in Tampa, Florida. Go Chiefs! Um but [pause] but they were mean. They were really mean. I think in New York, you can kind of have popularity in high school based upon how good you can dress, so I always make sure that I dress good. But in Florida, it's much more about like relationship-wise, like who you know or who you grew up with. And of course, I was different, and so, um, I didn't have a good time in high school. And my mom had found, oh my goodness, my mom had found a love note before we moved for my boyfriend, and it was just like, he wrote like two pages front and back, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you. So she found the letter in my underwear drawer, and things changed because it was different. You know, I had the feminine mannerisms, so you could kind of assume, but to read that, okay, your child is in a relationship with a man, and on the outside, I you know, look like. But, yeah, so we, me-- the relationship between me and my mother, it has come a long way, we're speaking, but it was really hurtful in the beginning. She would call me freak, she would say I was abnormal, she'd took me to speak to the minister of the church and all of that, and you know, even with having those conversations, I knew what it was for me, so I'm not going to tell—I'm not going to let somebody tell me who I'm supposed to like or whatever. I know what feels right for me. And so when we moved to Florida, it was like I lost my whole support system, I lost my family, we didn't talk as much, I didn't have friends in Florida, so just a complete restart with nobody, and I completed one year of high school, so I completed freshman year in Buffalo, I completed sophomore year in Florida, in Tampa, I dropped out 11th grade. That close to the finish line, but the reason that I dropped out was because I was trans, and they weren't supportive, they weren't nice, like I was, I was wearing

lipstick, lip gloss, lip liner, I would get my nails done, I got my eyebrows done, I would wear you know bell-bottom jeans, all that, but I was being myself, and the environment, you know, when you go, when you're at home and it's not a good environment, and when you're at school and it's not a good environment, where do you have peace, you know? Where do you get that from? And so, I moved out of my mom's house, and I stopped going to high school, and I guess essentially you could call me a high school dropout back then, and um, but I always had a thirst for knowledge. You know I loved to read, at the time I wanted to I guess get involved in the medical field, so I'm like, I have to get a high school diploma, but I couldn't stand going to high school and being made fun of, so I took a GED program, finished that, passed that, and by the grace of God I was able to save myself from that, but that's not the case for everybody, but yeah, that was part of my high school growing up, so this was in Tampa. Then I moved to Miami in 2013, so that's a bit of a gap, but just to let you know where I've been, I moved to Miami, Florida, to attend Florida International University in August of 2013, and I've been there since, well up until maybe December of 2021, yeah, so I was able to get a job with the school, attend college, get a bachelor's, work on a master's degree, and have the school pay for it, [laughter] which is great, but yeah, they-- it was Florida, it was Florida essentially, so it's like, you know, and I could sum up all of what that experience is by just saying, it's Florida, and you know, I experienced bad things that I couldn't take, and I was like, you know what, I deserve better. I'm pretty, I can make a way for myself, so I was like, you know, stretch forth my hands and leave. And after leaving Miami, I went to L.A., that was like mmm [pause], because I spent some time in like D.C., but Lord Jesus, I don't even want to talk about that, it wasn't anything bad, but okay, fine, I spent time in D.C. from like maybe January of 2021, no, 2022, up until maybe March, and then in March, that's when I moved to L.A., and in L.A., you would think so, L.A., L.A. is so cool, L.A. is so laid back. I never really had, I never had any type of social bad interactions in L.A. like that, meaning that I haven't, I wasn't misgendered, it was like, I was treated so nicely, it was like, oh my God, really, you're being this nice to me, but employment wise, no, it wasn't a good situation. I worked with other members of the LGBTQ community, but it wasn't a good situation, and that's the thing too, I wanted to touch on that too, like, it's not necessarily a community. It's just, it appears that every group is by itself, but there's no unity, so because there's no unity, I can't necessarily call it a community, and--

Silverman: And when you say every group, is it divided between what intersections?

Banks: So, by that I mean, like, gays, gays like having their own identification, bisexuals having their own identification, lesbians having their own identification, transgenders having their own identification, and then the non-binary having their own identification, and the questioning having their own identification, and from what I've experienced, not too often does one group kind of stand up for the other, or kind of support the other, but that's just my experience, but um--

Silverman: Like, where did you socialize in L.A.?

Banks: Where did I socialize? Um...I didn't! [laughs] I didn't, I mean, I was on, everybody knows Grindr, I was on Grindr, so most of my socialization came from that, I was still pretty, but I met a lot of people in person, like, when I would go to, I would go to the mall a lot to pick up makeup products, beautiful malls, but, I went to the library a few times, but mostly it would just be, you know, either the apps, or if somebody sees you in person, if they say hi, and, you know, it grows from there. Um, and then from L.A., I came here, to New York. I came in, like, late July, which is practically, like, August, I think August was, like, the next day, but yeah, since then I've been here in New York City, and I love it, I like it.

Silverman: Tell me about the Bronx.

Banks: Oh my God, um, the Bronx. The Bronx was the first borough that I lived in. Um, I've had good and bad experiences, but with the bad, you know, that brings me back to my faith, God will never leave me nor forsake me, and he protected me in those moments. But, the Bronx, um, [laughter] it's so active. It's diverse in a sense of, like, you can see, like, black people, you can see Spanish people, you can see, like, white people, you can see, um, um, um, maybe people from Iraq, or, you know, but it's a melting pot, really. And usually people are nice. Usually you'll find people cursing each other out on the middle of the street, which is so hilarious to, like, walk by and see. The only difficult borough that I've been in, cause, oh my goodness, living in the shelter system, so when I came to New York, it was going to the shelter system. I didn't have any type of plan, um, no type of, like, resources here other than the homeless shelter system. And so, first I was in the Bronx, then it was Manhattan, then it was Brooklyn, and then glory be to God, I was able to get an apartment, and then that was back in, back in the Bronx. So, out of those three boroughs, and this is my first time in Queens, [laughter]

Silverman: Okay, welcome

Banks: So Queens is cute, I like it, Queens for a queen. The only difficult borough that I've experienced, I'd say, would be Brooklyn, which was the last place that I moved before I got my apartment. And that really let me know, like, Dorothy, you're not in Kansas anymore, but for me it's like, Daphne, you're not in L.A. anymore, because in L.A., they were really respectful, like, just being on the street, and like, if you go into a store or whatever, they acknowledge you as you are and who you want to be. But in New York, when I was in Brooklyn, I went to a grocery store, and, I had on lipstick, no facial hair whatsoever, I had my nails freshly done, and looking how I feel, looking how I look, looking how I am, and the security guard kept referring to me as a man. And it was so insulting, but for me, because I have more of a professional background, so I know, I'm not going to argue with you in person. I'm going to come for your job. [laughter] I'm going to, you know, let your supervisor know, you know, by sending letters or calling into a 1-800 number or whatever, but I, I was amazed at how deep the, the hatred and the dislike was, to just disrespect me like that in person. But, you know, I went back to the store, and I spoke with the manager, and he's not there anymore, so I was told that, you know, he was either transferred to another store or whatever, but the more important thing was that, you know, he

wasn't where I was shopping, which meant that other trans women, whenever they go to that store, they won't have to deal with that issue. But, yeah.

Silverman: And what was it, how did it, yeah, what were some of your experiences living in the shelter system? Was that your first time?

Banks: Yeah, it was my first time. And, you know, most of my, I want to say most of my real adult experience has been like on a college campus, you know, so if you live on a college campus, it's safe. But when I left the safety of the college campus and was exposed to the real world, um, it wasn't too kind. The shelters system, um, there's a lot of drug use. Um, I haven't experienced rape, but, yeah, it was just, you know, just being surrounded by, like, people that are doing different things, and I've never been around that type of, environment before, so it was different in that sense.

Silverman: Wow. And how did you get your apartment?

Banks: So how I got my apartment, so first of all, God gave me my apartment. I have to give all credit to where it's due, but, um, you know, with the shelter system here, you know, they have some thing called like a psychosocial type of evaluation, and so when you're, when you're living in a shelter, of course you have like a case manager and, you know, they're passing along different information to you about what apartment is open or maybe sharing real estate, agent information, and really it was staying on top of them, um, and then also, you know, reaching out to like other organizations. The New York Public Library has really been very helpful. They actually have, a, a social work intern, I think the, the lady that was assisting me before, her name was Katie, so shout out to Katie. Thank you so much for your assistance. But it's, yeah, it's, it's reaching out to different organizations and if, if they have those type of resources, letting them know what you need, and once you plant that seed of, you know, this is what I need, have faith that you gonna get it, and I remember, it's-- it's so interesting because while I had, when I was living in Manhattan, we had toured one like housing complex, and I didn't like it. I was like, oh no, I'm not doing that, but I was like, I just wanted to get out of, out of the shelter system, and I think that's another thing too that like, um, from what I hear, if you get an apartment that's extended to you, whether it be a studio or a one bedroom, if it's just you, you need to take it, because from what I hear is that, you know, people are wanting to, you know, be expecting of getting a two bedroom, this and that, this is just something to get you through, you know what I mean?

Silverman: And also, if you can live alone its--

Banks: Yes, if you can live, hey, no, no roommate, you know, the mess that you make is the mess that you make, you know, but it's the mess that you have to clean up instead of being frustrated that, oh my God, I live with somebody else, and you know, it's dishes in the sink, whatever, whatever, whatever, but, you know, taking what it is that, that's being offered, if

it's in a safe area, and if it's nice, you know, but you, how they say beggars can't be choosers, you know what I mean? If you're in a shelter system like that, if you're not working a job, you don't have, you know, the access to say, no, this is what I want, or this is what I demand, maybe as long as it's safe, if you can get clean water, if you can get heat, if you can get electricity, that didn't run with it. But the first place that we toured, it wasn't in a too safe of an area. The guys were cute, but I was like—

Silverman: What neighborhood was it?

Banks: This was, I don't even remember where it was. I think maybe it might be in like a different part of the Bronx, I'm not too sure, I'm not, honestly, I'm not too sure, because I wasn't, I wasn't focused on it like that, but when I saw it in person, it was very, it was older looking, but I was like, yeah, but, okay, I'll also say that too. The reason that I didn't, or I couldn't take that apartment was because when I was in the Bronx, so I told you about how the Bronx has been a little mean to me, my apartment was robbed. And, um, they took my ID, they took my social security card. They went through different documents that I had with the state of California, and it was crazy, they changed my PIN number for my food stamp card, all of that, and so it was like, when I first saw that apartment, yeah, I didn't like it, because I didn't like the area, but I couldn't, I couldn't get it because the documents that they were requesting, I didn't have my physical ID, I didn't have my physical social security number, well, my social security card, so that complicated it even more, on top of me not liking it, but where I am now, you know, they were able to like really work with my case manager, because when you get signed up initially, they already have these documents, I didn't know that they still had access to those documents and they were able to share them or whatever, so that really helped me in terms of getting this apartment, but yeah.

Silverman: Wow, yeah.

Banks: [laughs] What a journey. It's been a journey. Yes, but, it's been good, and God has been good to me.

Silverman: And how are you supporting yourself now?

Banks: Oh my goodness, so right now, how I'm supporting myself? I guess with public assistance, the food stamps, the cash aid. It's different. It's definitely a humbling experience, because when I was working a regular job, like at the university, every paycheck I got clothes, every paycheck I got shoes, you know, so it's different to like, you know, go from having financial access to just living off of the bare minimum, but you make it work, and that's also scripture. It talks about, you know, I've been hungry, and I've been fed, you know, I've had money and I've had without, but I've learned how to be content, so in the waiting period of what I plan on doing next, you know, just waiting and being content. So yeah, that's how I'm taking care of myself. Nothing illegal. Nothing. Yeah.

Silverman: And so you say you're waiting on something to come next, what is that?

Banks: So I truly believe that I have the spirit of an entrepreneur, and so now it's just focusing, like laser focusing on the ideas that I want to bring forth for myself, and then I've also noted, you know, if I am interested in getting a job again, I really don't want to pursue anything that's more than part-time, because one, outside of how they treat you in the work space, but you know what I mean, you still have to have your own vision, your own goals, what pushes you, you know what I mean. You have to have something that you want to do for yourself, not to want to work and be a slave for, you know, a corporation that doesn't give a damn about you. So yeah, so should I talk about one of my ventures?

Silverman: I would love it.

Banks: Oh my god! Okay. So one of my ventures is I'm looking to become a personal chef. I love to cook. That's all that I can say right now about like that part, but definitely, because I've been looking at it, and you know, New York State, medical marijuana is big here, and so there's also treatment methods that you could, you know, infuse your food with medical marijuana, so that's another, you know, extension that I could -- probably will -- you know, drift off into, but that's one. Modeling is the other, but yeah, it's just, you know, really taking the time to, before shooting an arrow, making sure that the timing is right, making sure that you have all your resources in place, that you're contacting different agencies that help you open a business or start a business or start a business plan, and then they talk to you about different funding options. So I have zero interest of dedicating myself to somebody else or to another organization when I know that I can go much further and much higher with my own.

Silverman: Wow.

Banks: Yeah.

Silverman: And what are some things you love to cook?

Banks: Oh my god, I love to cook. I love pasta. I love soul food. I mean, everybody loves soul food. Yeah, mostly I would say soul food, but it's good that you mentioned that too, because that is really a big thing with cooking, so I'm actively revising what I eat, and I'm doing it for a reason, mostly because of health reasons. My mother and my father, you know, they've experienced weight challenges. Oh my goodness, if I dare say this, my father has to have his colon removed. And so I knew, you know, way back when I was a child, you know, I knew that he was eating unhealthy. But it's like, it's different to know that you're eating unhealthy and know that you need to eat better and you don't. And so it's like, you know, I've seen it throughout my family and, you know, throughout different friends and their family members and whatever. It's like, you really have to take control of what you're eating. And so, you know, what's been working out for me is like, so I used to love making cakes with a lot of butter, with a

lot of sugar, but then it's taking away that and eating like strawberries with like sour cream, or eating raspberries and sour cream, or blueberries and sour cream. So it's like, it's basically making that transition or that substitution of, yeah, I could have this, but I know it's so fatty and, you know, it's not going to break down in my system correctly. So let me try this, you know, but yeah.

Silverman: And thinking about, okay, so.

Banks: I'm sorry, I threw a lot.

Silverman: Yeah, no, it's helpful. We need to know, you know, where you're at. And so you've landed here and you're here for, you feel committed to trying it out in New York for a long time.

Banks: Yeah. And it's so interesting because I was saying, I was having a conversation with my mom and I'm not, I'm not a person-- I'm not a nomad. I'm not a person that likes to move around. I like to stay put in one place and grow. And New York City, it's the spirit of New York City. It's, it's, it's what New York City is. It's like, if you look at the Statue of Liberty, right. And even for people that don't even live in this country and how they view New York as the land of opportunity, it is the land of opportunity. And Jay-Z says, you know, if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere. And I'm like, you know, I'm making it here, but it's, it's such a feel of like an entrepreneurial spirit. And then to like really study like different, different businesses that started here. And, you know, I mean, Donald Trump started here. [laughs] So, you know what I mean? It's like, well, if it wasn't, maybe it was Jersey, but you know, New York. So it's, it's something very special here. It's the land of promise. So there's, there's opportunity here.

Silverman: And have you connected to other communities here or scenes? Like who are you in the mix with?

Banks: With other communities? No, really what I've done, I've tried to really stay grounded, like with myself. So going to church, I do attend church in Brooklyn.

Silverman: That's a community.

Banks: Well, yeah. Yeah. So I, I worship, you know, in person sometimes. Most of the time I worship online, but NYPL, that's pretty much it.

Silverman: Yeah.

Banks: That's, that's, I mean, to be honest with you, church and the New York public library. That's, that's it. Oh, and you know, I am interested in going back to school to finish my, my graduate degree. Even though, I think for me just to do it because I started it, you know what I mean? It sucks to have to start something and you don't finish it.

Silverman: Right.

Banks: So the same program is offered here.

Silverman: What's the program?

Banks: Higher education administration. So the same program that I was in at FIU, it's here. It's not on my list of priorities because I'm my priority now. This is my time. But before I die, Lord's willing, I can finish that degree. Just to complete what I started. Yeah.

Silverman: And what has been your relationship to hormones or any sort of HRT in New York? How's that been?

Banks: Um, [laughs] honestly, [laughs] wow. You got to be careful where you go. And because I've dealt with some providers that really didn't necessarily have my best interest at heart. So that's what I would say.

Silverman: And what do you mean by that?

Banks: [laughs] I mean, I don't want to call it-- should I call them out by name?

Silverman: If you feel comfortable, you don't have to. It doesn't matter.

Banks: I, if you're, if you have a doctor that is limiting your potential. Now for me, you know, I've already had feminine features or whatever, so it's not, you know. But I've experienced care here that they've been, they, they, I was going there for a series of months. So I'm going there, you're taking my blood, you're giving me medication or whatever. So why biologically, like in, within my bloodstream, why my levels are still male levels and not female levels, which is where I'm transitioning. It wasn't okay for me. So, um, I would definitely say I love the hormones now that I am where I am now. Perfect, perfect team. Absolutely, no complaints at all. But you, you really have to be careful because not a lot of providers may be happy for you. You know what I mean? That's just, I mean, even though they're working in the field and they say, you know. But that's the thing too. The organization itself may have the value and the vision of, you know, we want to be a safe space, we want to be trans inclusive, all of that. But your provider may not be.

Silverman: Right.

Banks: They may not necessarily share that same vision. And so, you know, for one of my providers here at one of the places that I went to, like they were giving me like 0.5 in estrogen. Maybe it was 0.05. It was something like that. But it was like this small ass little pill. And meanwhile, I'm still growing facial hair. I'm still doing this. I'm still doing that. But when I went to where I am now, all of that changed.

Silverman: I'm happy you moved.

Banks: Thank you. I am too. It was a blessing. But yeah, so it's just really, but you know, part of that may come with some sense of like accountability too. Because it's like you are going through this change and you see yourself in the mirror every day. You, you, you carry you everywhere as you go. So if, with the accountability piece, don't just go to get your blood drawn and then your doctor just tells you something. Ask to see those records. Like as I mentioned before, like when I first, when I, you know, was a high school dropped out and then I went back into school, I wanted to pursue medicine. So I know things to look for in the blood. So what exactly am I looking for? And if you start to see, okay, one month I've been here, there hasn't really been much of like a, an improvement from one month to the other, whatever, what have you. You start to measure your progress and you start to take ownership of it instead of just entrusting it in the hands of someone else who may or may not have your best interest at heart. So, yeah.

Silverman: It's a minefield.

Banks: Yeah, it is.

Silverman: I was wondering what people in your life have been most important or things or scriptures or whatever felt like a guide.

Banks: People, I'd say, so definitely that one trans woman from church. It's, it's two of them actually. One was in Buffalo, New York. I'm not even sure if she's still living now. But this was in Buffalo, New York. Should I say the name of the church?

Silverman: If you want to.

Banks: Greater Emmanuel Temple in Buffalo, New York. Years have passed, so she may not even be there anymore. Secondly, when I was in Tampa, Florida, there was a church there that had a trans woman that was really impactful for me and to me. God bless her. The third, I would say, oops, I'm hopping around a little bit. When I was young and when I lived in Buffalo and I talk about being on a drill team, there was this trans woman who started her own drill team. And she was good. She was beautiful. She was sexy. She was everything. Her name was Ja. And wherever you are, Ja, I hope that God is taking care of you and all is well.

Banks: Oh my goodness, who else? I went to church in Miami, Florida, and there was a trans woman there. So it's, you know what I mean? It's like, in spaces where people try to shut you out, I think God will have like a representation of just to say, you know what I mean? She may not be your example, but she's there too. So it should let you know that you're okay, that you're loved, you're in a safe space, and you know, her name was Adriana in Miami. And I would say Bishop T.D. Jakes. I've been following his ministry for a while, several years. Who else? Scripture. You know, I think everybody has their own area of uniqueness, and I think being trans, you're

already unique in that sense. You're different, and your difference is your influence. So like, you have to find some way to grow within it and expand within it and to shine within it. So speaking about shining, Jesus in Matthew says, let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. And so, you know, being your best and letting people see you at your best, doing good things, that's kind of like, I rely on.

Silverman: That's a good one.

Banks: Thank you.

Silverman: I was wondering how you see yourself like in this moment of trans visibility where there's so much more trans representation in the media.

Banks: [laughs] I don't see myself, and that's why I think that it's probably meant for me to do what I want to do. So one of my second, I guess, ventures would be in modeling because I don't see people. It's crazy now because society has gotten so critiquing and so negative and so bad, and to like, there's really no good role models out there, I would say. Because when you start to look at television or when you're on Instagram or when you're on Facebook, you can find more stories about drama, about fights and confusion and chaos. And it's like being shady and being [unclear]. We're not-- If God tells us not to judge one another, period. That, I really think, should take away the whole, like, shade movement. Because it's like, if you're not, once again, if you're not getting love from your home or whatever, the person that you could be, quote unquote, reading or throwing shade at, you know what I mean? So there's really no building up of, like, character, no building up of, like, personality and who you could be. So I don't see any good trans role models, or I haven't seen any, so I'm not going to say that they're not out there. I just haven't seen them. And so, I think that there should be more representation of trans girls that have gone to college, that have went to college, that have finished, that have either started their own businesses and are soaring within those businesses. Maybe ones that are involved in the church, doing positive things and not being, like, catty, like, bad girls club and stuff, you know what I mean? It's-- It's terrible, like, there's so much negativity in the world. And that's why I have to come back to, you know, what Jesus says in Matthew, let your light shine. You know, so see your good works, not your messy works, not your shady works, you know what I mean? Because that's what's ultimately going to make a difference in, in the life of, you know, so for instance, Zaya, and hopefully I'm pronouncing her name right, Zaya Wade, Dwayne Wade's child, she seems to be a good example for our trans youth. She's gotten involved in modeling, very beautiful girl, head, you know, held up, headstrong. So she is a good example, but yeah.

Silverman: I love that.

Banks: Being positive, yeah.

Silverman: So do you use social media or how, what's your relationship to it?

Banks: I have a love-hate relationship with social media. Right now, I am on, do you want my social media?

Silverman: We'll write it down.

Banks: [laughs] But yeah, I'm active on social media and I follow a lot of influential people, notable people, but yeah.

Silverman: Okay, we'll leave it there. I guess because we're wrapping up soon.

Banks: Okay.

Silverman: Oh no, we can keep it going then. Yeah, I want to know what other things you want to add to the record that feel important to kind of leave in this space.

Banks: Wow. With you saying that, there's just like sparks of tears. Find out, what I would say to young trans girls are to have that time to silence the noise around you. Because you're not what other people say that you are. You are what God says that you are. You are who you want to be. [pause] You're not a freak. You're not abnormal. You're a beautiful expression and you have to find the best way of expressing that. I want you to go to school. [laughs] Because I believe that going to school, it opens up your mind. And that's also another scripture, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And you know, it starts in the mind first and then the body follows. I pray that, you know, they have the time to get by themselves and think by themselves and find God and find out what it is that you're meant to do here.

Silverman: Mmm. Mm-mm-mm. Beautiful.

Banks: Thank you.

Silverman: Thank you so much.

Banks: Thank you for having me.