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**Contact:**

Archives & Special Collections  
Waidner-Spahr Library  
Dickinson College  
P.O. Box 1773  
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

[archives@dickinson.edu](mailto:archives@dickinson.edu)

**Interviewee: Shaka Hudson**

Interviewer: Don Fitz

Videographer: Lonna Malmsheimer

Date of Interview: August 3, 2015

Location of Interview: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Transcriber: Sara Tyberg

Proofreader: Sarah Goldberg

**Abstract:**

Shaka Hudson was born in 1949 in Harrisburg as the middle of five children. An artist his whole life, Shaka attended John Harris High School and Penn State University before unenrolling in college and leaving Harrisburg to join the Washington D.C. Repertory Dance Company and Theatre Company as a dancer. There, he met his first male partner, and together they moved to New York City in 1975. While modeling for an art class at the Art Students League, Shaka met and fell in love with a woman who he later married and had one daughter with. After they divorced approximately 10 years later, Shaka moved to Richmond, Virginia with a new male lover who, unbeknownst to Shaka, was sick with AIDS. Shaka contracted HIV in 1987. After his lover's death, Shaka moved back to the Harrisburg area and had one more major relationship. In this interview, he thoroughly discusses his journey as an artist and a dancer. Shaka also discusses the AIDS epidemic, his relationships with family members, and changes he would make to the Harrisburg community. Additionally, he expresses his concern that the younger generation is too carelessly promiscuous as well as the importance of citizens exercising their right to vote.

**DF:** Good afternoon, my name's Don Fitz. I'm an interviewer with the LGBT History Project of Central Pennsylvania. Today is August 3, 2015. Today, we're interviewing Shaka Hudson of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Shaka, can you give me a little bit of backstory about Shaka Hudson?

**SH:** Backstory? Okay, I was born here in Harrisburg in 1949, was raised here in the city. What can I tell you? Okay, during my child—my early childhood, I was—during my early childhood summers, my grandmother raised us on a farm in West Virginia, so our—my childhood summers with my brothers and sisters were spent on a farm in West Virginia—Kearneysville, West Virginia, in particular. Not too far from Charlestown, where the races are. Very interesting. Needless to say, we [laughs] we had very early mornings getting up and, you know, feeding chickens and slopping hogs and that kind of thing and raising corn and working in peach orchards and cherry orchards. It was a lot of hard work on a farm, but in retrospect, it was very rewarding. It taught me work ethic very early. And it taught me also the love for the outdoors. I love outdoors, and I fell in love with birds at a very early age as a result. I spent a lot of my time in West Virginia. I will say this also, I went to the local parish here in Harrisburg. It's St. Francis of Assisi. I was raised Catholic. Shortly before that, I went to kindergarten in St. Patrick's Cathedral, and then my family moved from Boas Street and 7<sup>th</sup> street here in Harrisburg to here, the Hill, Allison Hill section of 14<sup>th</sup> and Walnut, and... subsequently, I was—me and my brothers and sisters were—went to school at St. Francis of Assisi. It's very difficult in the beginning. I was [laughs] I was—I laugh at this now, because it was a blessing in disguise in a way. I was failed in the first grade and the third grade. [laughs] So, needless to say, I was like...

sort of kind of introverted and very low self-esteem at an early age, because I... I guess I got my idea—of course, I said, you know, an impressionable kid is that I—I failed at something, and it was hard to—it was hard to adapt and adjust. I could certainly work through all that kind of thing now as an adult. I could have been able to do that for a long time. However, back then, it wasn't easy, and—but the one thing that was really interesting about that whole thing was that the second year that I was in the first grade, we didn't change classrooms back then—or Catholic schools didn't. So, it was the same room the second year, but this time around, they sat me beside a window, and the only—I was kind of bored with the subject matter, so I started drawing birds. Those were the things that—they flew by the window, and I sat beside a window, so I started—I had this interest in birds, and so I started drawing birds. That's when my calling as an artist took off, I guess, 'cause I started drawing all—I started drawing pretty soon insatiably, I would say. Almost like—what do you call it? It was... compulsive? Impulsive? I mean, I drew. And one of the things I think it represented at such an early age. It gave me an out to deal with things I didn't understand at that age, so... up until the seventh grade, I stayed in Catholic school. The year President Kennedy died in 1963, we had this huge fight at the school which I was involved in.

**DF:** At the Catholic school?

**SH:** Yes, St. Francis. And my—and my home group—in my homeroom, I can remember this like it was yesterday, everybody was crying, because of the assassination of President Kennedy, and even though I was sad, you know, it—I knew who he was, but I didn't relate to him as I would have, let's say, somebody I was more familiar with. Like, in my immediate family, like a family member had that happened. I didn't relate to him as a political figure or—even though I knew who he was, and my parents, of course, loved him and blah blah... but, anyway, what happened was I was... one of three Black children there, and some kids of German descent suggested that we go back to Africa, because we weren't—we weren't feeling this angst, and so I suggest they go back to Germany, and Germany wasn't the most popular country in the world at the time. [laughs] So, of course, then we—this huge fight ensued, and I—I pleaded with my parents to take me out of school—out of that Catholic school. I had had it. In fact, I had threatened that if they sent me there, I was going to flunk this time deliberately, and so they—they did, and I went to Edison from there—Middle School. Public school. The world opened up. It was like a whole new world for me. I was amongst children—more children of color. I was a—I was like a flower had bloomed. I remember experiencing this sense of freedom that I had never experienced before, because in Catholic school—I mean, it was like really regimented. It almost felt like a military school in retrospect. You could go nowhere without walking in single file or escorted—even to the bathroom, you know? There were a lot of wonderful nuances here and there in Catholic School. I don't want to demonize it or anything like that, but it was difficult. One of things that I really discovered at an early age also is that I had—God had given me a lot of gifts. One was drawing. The other one I thought was singing, and I wanted to—I wanted to—when we went to Mass, you know, I experienced the sound of this choir, and it sounded so angelic, I said, “Ooh, boy, I'd like to be a part of that,” but they told me I couldn't. They told me I couldn't, because—and they told me right out that it was because of the color of my skin, and that was that. It was never talked about or... never talked about again.

**LM:** What year are we talking about here?

**SH:** 1960... probably, excuse me, 1950—probably 1958, 1959.

**LM:** Okay.

**SH:** 1959, because I was 9 years old.

**LM:** Okay.

**SH:** Yeah, yeah, it was 1959. But then after that, I had an opportunity to be an altar boy. [laughs] That was interesting. It was interesting, because I—even though I couldn't sing, I could—I had a—I had a fascination for language. I guess I picked it up on—at the time, my favorite TV show was Zorro. [laughs] And they spoke a little Spanish here and there, and so I—I was fascinated with Spanish. I was fascinated with—I was also fascinated with Indians very much, because I have Indian roots. Very, very...

**DF:** American Indian?

**SH:** Yes. Yes, Cherokee. My great-great-grandmother was Cherokee. And—anyway, I had this fascination for language and so, I tried out for an altar boy, and I became an altar boy. [laughs] Until—until me and this kid, we were clowning around one morning. We were lighting candles, right? And for some reason, we weren't paying attention and set the altar on fire, and so that was the end of my altar boy career, but before that [laughs] before that, I was given charge of teaching other altar boys Latin, which was wonderful for me. It built up my self-esteem, but it wasn't enough to keep me in Catholic school. [laughs]

**DF:** [laughs]

**SH:** And I remember right before—right before I—I left Catholic school, another major incident happened. I would come home. Well—we're like three, four blocks away from school, and I would notice sometimes—I would notice a Ballantine truck coming to the back of the convent, you know, and I knew every now and then my mother drank Ballantine beer. I said, "What are they doing there?" You know, at the back of the convent. [laughs] So, I decided I was going to ask if the nuns drank. Why did I do that? Major mistake. So, I asked a kid—I asked a kid that, and he reported me to the principal, and I went to the principal's office, and she decided to wash my mouth out with soap for asking the question, right? I sort of kinda—of course it was—I was not happy with that, but for some reason, I started laughing at the idea at first, and then all these bubbles started coming out, and I started laughing, right? And so she thought, you know, that wasn't funny, you know, and so she put more mouth in my soap and made me swallow it, so... anyway, it was in the same year that I had had enough.

**LM:** This was while you were in Harrisburg?

**SH:** Yes, yes. So, after that, John Harris High School. After Edison, it was wonderful.

**JF:** You struggled in elementary, were you still struggling academically?

**SH:** In high school?

**JF:** Mhm. Or at Edison?

**SH:** No, no. I did pretty well. I did pretty well. I felt a lot more at ease. I sort of did have this impediment about math at an early age, 'cause I was really deathly afraid of it. My—my—my father in particular was asked to help me with math problems. He wasn't very patient with that, and so... I—I got by with math, even in high school. I—but it was—to this day, is an—I have a huge impairment with math, but the one thing I really excelled in, believe it or not, was algebra and geometry, and I understand geometry—why I probably did good at it, because I'm an artist, and I sort of kinda related to shapes and things, and algebra, just because I—at the time, had a really good memory, and the teacher always asked, you know, the class who wasn't paying attention much, if "you can remember what I just said?" [laughs] You get an A for the course, and he did that a couple times, and I remembered everything he said, and I—I was able to tell the class verbatim what he said, so I got by that by a miracle, you know. Just because I remembered everything he said, so—but I really had no understanding of math, and I really—this day, I'm getting ready to go take a couple of courses, because I'm really curious, and I think that it—it could enhance my artwork and some other things that I'm doing, so... high school. High school—John Harris High—I went to John Harris. Wonderful. My high school years were phenomenal. Went to high school—of course, back in those days, it was very, very popular—sports. John Harris and William Penn [High School] were rivals—the uptown school here, and also Steelton, and it was huge on football. Well, me and this other close friend of mine—two close friends were artists, and it—we were very popular in high school, because we—we drew a lot and gave away a lot of our work. So this school was noted for—it didn't have a huge art program, but it opened doors for artists in the future, because of... I think me and my friends—my two friends, 'cause we—the one friend who's no longer with us—this extremely fine, fine artist, and he was—we were very popular, and—besides the football thing, and so... what else?

**DF:** Besides the football thing, what do you mean?

**SH:** When I say that, because it was so popular, you know, like everybody paid attention to football, and—and if you were—you were popular at any school, it usually was because you were an athlete.

**DF:** And were you?

**SH:** I was not, I was popular because I was an artist. And that was something new in high school, you know, at that time, so... and of course, you know, the Woodstock thing happened, which I did go to. I went to the original Woodstock right before college. I went to Penn State, but before

Penn State, I want to tell you about the Woodstock thing. Went to Woodstock. High school friends, we rented two U-Haul vans. One for girls, one for the guys, and we went up there. We got tickets, but by the time we got there, we didn't need tickets. They had torn down all of the fences and walked all over it. It was an incredible experience. Incredible!

**DF:** How old were you at the time?

**SH:** 19. 1969, I was 19. I was the oldest one in the group, and I had a wonderful time. My first experience with drugs. I had Yellow Sunshine [slang for LSD], and some other things.

**DF:** What is Yellow Sunshine?

**SH:** It's an acid. It was acid, and I was introduced to...

**DF:** And this was about what year?

**SH:** 1969.

**DF:** Oh, 1969.

**SH:** 1969. That was a—the year I graduated, the year I went to college, the year the first man walked on the moon—it was an incredible year. Went to Woodstock, came home, went to Penn State University. State College of Pennsylvania. I—I was so happy to go there. I mean, all of my closest friends were going. I went there on a scholarship, and—but I was really disappointed my first year, because I've always known I was an artist. That was my calling. I knew that about me, so when I went there, they insisted that I take all this academia first, and I wasn't anti-academic. I loved—loved all the subjects that they were going to give me, however, I wanted to be immersed in what I went to school for which was, “No, no, no, you're not doing it that way. You're doing it our way.” So, they insisted that I do it. I—I held on as long as I could, and I became interested in dance, because I had dance as an elective there. So, while there, I saw a dance company in Washington, D.C. that was—just blew me away.

**DF:** From Washington D.C.?

**SH:** Washington D.C.

**DF:** Or in Washington D.C.?

**SH:** In Washington D.C. And I saw them on the television. My dance instructor at Penn State [cellphone ring tone goes off]

**LM:** Oh, that's me, excuse me.

**SH:** Sure. [sings along to the ringtone]

**LM:** Why did I do that?

**SH:** That's okay.

**LM:** Okay.

**SH:** Just a little editing, right?

**LM:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. Actually, it's all like that.

**DF:** So you didn't dance in high school?

**SH:** No, I did not dance in high school. My first dancing experience was with a—a gentleman my oldest sister had known through her friend. He was here from Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. He used to dance with—he used to dance with Judith Jamison, who was the artistic director for Alvin Ailey in Philadelphia. So, he was here in Harrisburg. He had lived here—he had a family and was raising his two sons, and he had his wife here, so he was my first dance teacher. His name was Richard Wilson.

**DF:** At Penn State?

**SH:** Here, in Harrisburg, my first experience.

**DF:** This was before college?

**SH:** This was before college. I'm taking back a little bit, but in high school—right after high school.

**DF:** What got you started with that?

**SH:** With dance? I've always loved dance. That's something that I—even when I was in—as early—as a kid, I always loved dancing. It was just...

**DF:** What does that mean, you always loved dancing? How did you know?

**SH:** It was nat—I mean, my sisters were very popular in high school, too, because we had a 45 record player, and my sisters—they would go to this place called Kresge's [?] which was downtown Harrisburg. Was a record store. And every weekend with the money they got for chores—they would get 45s, and so they were very popular. We would—there were lots of dances, when I was a kid growing up, and so my sisters—my older sisters always took me with them, and I used to love to dance, and so that's—and then—in fact, in high school, I got best dancer for the year and best dressed. [laughs] Whatever that means, and so, anyway, I was always in the back of my head, even though I knew I was an artist. A graphic artist, and I—dance

was a part of that as well. And... where was I? Richard Wilson—my first dance teacher here. He taught me how to fence first. He was a fencer also in college, so as a precursor to dancing, he taught me how to fence, 'cause that way, he wanted to get me an idea of turning out, and when you're dancing—you're you know, you learn how to fence with the foils and sabres, so that was really interesting. Here in Harrisburg on Market Square, there used to be a dance studio right across—this is where the existing Hilton is. Right there, that was Market Square, and right across the street from Market Square where City Hall is now, there was a building there—they had studios there, and in fact, the women who had—was the artistic—I think she probably still is the artistic director for the Pennsylvania Youth Ballet started out there, and Richard Wilson was a part of that and had a dance studio there as a...

**DF:** About when was this?

**SH:** 1967 through 1969. And so...

**DF:** I took lessons there.

**SH:** You did?

**DF:** Mhm.

**SH:** Indeed. Do you know Richard Wilson?

**DF:** No. My—

**SH:** Did you know him?

**DF:** No.

**SH:** You never heard of him?

**DF:** I'll tell you the story when we're—

**SH:** So, is there any—I'm trying to think of her name. I can't remember her name. Was it Erika? Do you know the artistic director of—for the Pennsylvania Youth Ballet?

**DF:** I don't know who it is. I'm familiar with the Ballet—with the company.

**SH:** Whatever her name was, she—yeah, she shared the same building, and Richard had a dance studio there, so that's where I—

**DF:** They're in Carlisle now.



**SH:** Yes, so I was invited to take dance lessons there after we—he taught me a little bit about fencing, and that’s where my dancing started, and then I... when I went to Penn State, as I said before, I took dance as an elective. And after being there for about a year and a half, managed to flunk out, because I wasn’t interested in going to classes anymore, and I saw a dance company up there through a dance instructor. Her name was Pat Heigel [?]  
—Patricia Heigel [?]. She was my dance instructor at Penn State, and I... I told my mom and dad, I said, “I’m going to Washington D.C. I’m not coming back, because they’re going to take me.” I was so—it was like, it was like one of those things that you see on television, you know, somebody just goes to New York—well, I had the same experience, but it wasn’t that far away. I—it was Washington D.C. which was far enough away from home. I said, “They’re gonna take me, ‘cause I’m not coming back until they do,” you know, so they did. They gave me a four-year scholarship.

**DF:** Who is they?

**SH:** I’m sorry. Washington D.C. Repertory Dance Company and Theatre Company. There was an actor. His name was... Robert Hooks, who had a television show. He was detective. It was some television show. He started a school on Georgia Avenue in Washington D.C. It was a school dedicated to Black artists. There was a school of dance. There was a school—a theatre school. There was a graphic school. There was an acting school. All in one. It is now—it has now become the Duke Ellington School of Performing Arts. It’s the precursor to all that. In that, I had some great teachers. Great teachers. The name of the dance company that sprung from that was the Washington D.C. Black Repertory Dance Company, and one of the directors was named Louis Johnson who was a very popular dancer on film and did some Broadway—choreographed some Broadway plays. He was in *Damn Yankees* with Jimmy Cagney—James Cagney, and he was—he was the artistic director for this dance company that I was apprenticing for and went to school—Debbie Allen—have you ever heard of her? Debbie Allen. Well, she was one of my dance teachers. Vicky [?] Baltimore was another one. Charles Augins. Mike—Mike Malone—Michael Malone was another artistic director for this school—for the dance department. I was in the right place at the right time. They have this extraordinary, extraordinary—I... I trained for four years, then I—the major dancer for that company—his name was Clyde-Jacques Barrett. We fell in love with each other. He was my first male lover. We moved to New York in 1975, and—

**DF:** This was from D.C.?

**SH:** From Washington D.C.

**DF:** I was just thinking right before you said that—that this is your—that you hadn’t mentioned anything related yet to your sexuality.

**SH:** Right, right.

**DF:** So—I wasn’t sure if it didn’t happen before then, or?

**SH:** Yes—yeah—yeah, I forgot like in my high school—excuse me, even before high school.

**DF:** You can go back.

**SH:** Yeah, I want to go back to grade school.

**All:** [laughs]

**SH:** If I may. Yes, I forgot. I'm going to have to go back. [phone rings and picks it up] I have to call you back, alright? Yeah, I'll have to call you back, baby, bye. Bye! [ends call] One thing that was fascinating for me as a kid that I didn't mention which was very—this is—you're going to find this extremely funny. When I went grammar school—Catholic school, the one thing I thought that was so very elegant with the nuns was their habits, so I wanted to grow up to be a nun. [laughs] I—just because I thought they were just so beautiful, you know. I just liked their uniform, and I said, “Well, the men—the priests aren't wearing those uniforms, so what does that mean about me?” You know what I mean? And I said, you know—and my mom used to hang... a sheer curtains here, right? So, I guess that particular year, she didn't hang them, and she stored them downstairs, and I used to put them over the top of my head, and we had overhead ceiling lights, right? And so they created shadows on the floor, so I used to put this curtain over my head, and while I walked, I could see my silhouette on the floor, right? And I looked like a nun. [laughs] What a story, right? So... I was—I was really fascinated with it to the point where in the summertime one time when we were in West Virginia, my grandmother caught me doing that, right, and she embarrassed me. She took on a walk to break me out of this habit.

**DF:** Habit? [laughs]

**SH:** The habit of—the habit—I was in the habit of thinking that I was a nun, right? So, she marches me down this road with my brother and sisters in tow, and on this road—it was—it's a very, very country, but on the road, she knows everybody, of course. We're passing by, and people are questioning her why—what does he have that thing on his head? And she tells them, and I start crying profusely. She gives me—

**DF:** Again, how old are you?

**SH:** I was really young. I was probably eight or seven—seven or eight, and anyway, it was—it was embarrassing, of course, and then I stopped after that. I didn't stop completely, but, you know, when she—she was living here for a while with us, and she had taken off and went back to West Virginia, and so I—I quelled that part of my liking the nuns, you know? And—but I discovered then that I had a liking for men. I—I was attracted to this one—a priest, too... at the... at St. Francis, he was new, and he was really young. He was gorgeous. You know, I thought he was very handsome when I was a kid. Gorgeous wasn't part of my language, but I—I thought, you know, this—this liking for men, was it abnormal? When I think about it, it was just natural for me. People were people, love was love as far as I was concerned. But, I think love

had its place in terms of the sexes, and—and in terms of how we view the world, you know, be it procreation, blah blah blah. But anyway—

**DF:** When you say you were attracted to him, what did that mean?

**SH:** Attracted? It meant that I felt something—I felt a closeness to my father, but it was something beyond that, you know? My father wasn't very vocal to me or to my brothers and sisters. They—both of my parents worked very hard, and when they came home from work, it was dinnertime, and it was TV time. There was very little time spent with the children, you know, so we sort of had a sense of raising ourselves, in a way. Except for my grandmother. My grandmother was very key in helping raise us. But it's the things—the thing—the things that I was missing in my childhood with my father that other men I sought... or the possibilities were taking place. My grandmother's friends—older friends became a part of that. She had a close friend. His name was Reverend, and he was like more of a father figure to me. Almost like a grandfather. My grandfather had died—both my—my mother's father had died before—when I was three years old, and my grandmother, her mother had died when I was—before I was born. So, I—on my father's side, my grandfather was here. In fact, he lived around—my father's sister lived right around the corner here, and my grandfather and my grandmother were still living when I was a kid, and we were close. I'll just say, I—I still didn't have a sense of a closeness with men, like I didn't have a grandmother figure, except for my grandmother who was a surrogate grandmother. My... anyway—yeah, so I—I wanted to experience this closeness other men, you know—a nurturing father, you know, that was lacking in my own home, so I started reaching out, and then—and reaching out, I discovered something about myself. It didn't slap me in the face or anything like that, you know, like I was gay. You know? Or that something was wrong with me. I just thought that it was natural. I guess I thought it was natural.

**DF:** So, it became a sexual thing?

**SH:** It didn't become sexual. It sort of—it did, and I discovered that I—in grammar school, there was a kid that I liked. I didn't know why, but I did, and there was a sexual attraction there, and I didn't understand it, but I knew it was there. I never—I never—Yes, I did, too, when I think about it. I did—we went to the bathroom once, and I asked if I could hold his thing, and he did. He let me do that.

**DF:** This was grammar school?

**SH:** This was grammar school in St. Francis, and that was the end of that, you know, and then I guess my first sexual experience was in high school. No, it wasn't—it was junior high. There was a kid—I went to Boys Scouts in St. Francis, and my uncle was the scout master. My—my father's sister's husband was the scout master, and we went to—we went camping. There were a lot of great camps around here when I was a kid, and we—there was a Jamboree at Hershey Field right across from the—right behind the park, and we pitched tents, and it was like Boy Scouts from all over Pennsylvania. It was a wonderful experience, and in that, my first experience—besides me touching that person in—but this is my second experience, and my

second experience was I was paired with this kid in Boy Scouts, and we played around, you know, the whole circle jerk or whatever. That was, you know, it was innocent, you know? That's what boys do. We—I mean I've said natural things, I think. Girls and boys they all explore, I think, in retrospect. But anyway, that opened up a can of worms. [laughs] There's possibilities! [laughs] There is a possibility.

**DF:** Did you date—did you date women?

**SH:** Not until—I had like a—I had a little girlfriend in—in grammar school. It was like a flirtatious little things. I did—in grammar school, but that's just flirtation. And then in junior high school, no. In high school, yes. I had a girlfriend. I had a girlfriend. My friend who I was telling you about who was an artist friend of mine—my closest friend. We both knew that we had some sexual gayness about ourselves, but we never talked about it, but we knew it was there. We both knew it was there. We just never talked about it. We wore masks instead. We did—we did the next—we did things—not to call that to our attention, you know. We dated like “normal” people did, you know? But, by the time Woodstock came around, we started—we started our little dialogues here and there, and I said some sexual encounters when I went to college. I—they were very... they were—how would I put this? I wasn't out as a gay man certainly—not back then, but they were experiences that one experiences when they're exploring, but not until I went to Washington D.C. and joined this dance troupe that I become, you know, I chose to be with this man, and he chose to be with me, and so we—we were lovers—partners.

**DF:** In an exclusive relationship with someone?

**SH:** Yes, yes, and... then there were several other men in the company—well, most of the men in the company were gay, but—

**DF:** Openly so?

**SH:** Pardon?

**DF:** Openly so?

**SH:** Oh yeah, yes. And Washington D.C. at the time—

**DF:** And this was like 1970?

**SH:** 1970, yes. 1972, I'm sorry. 1972. After I left Penn State. 19—

**DF:** I'm going to take you back again.

**SH:** Okay.

**DF:** You talked around family, but you didn't talk about family in terms your relationship with them growing up and brothers, sisters...

**SH:** My brothers and sisters? Okay.

**DF:** Who are they?

**SH:** I have two older sisters. I had two younger brothers. One of them died—he was 18 years old.

**DF:** There were five of you?

**SH:** Five. I was the middle child. Two older sisters, two younger brothers. My youngest brother died in 1965, the year I moved to New York.

**DF:** As a young adult?

**SH:** He was 18 years old. He drowned in Hershey. It was very hard. I was in dance school at the time, and I remember coming home, and it was just very, very hard time. He was my —and I love all of my brothers and sisters the same, but [whispers] he was my favorite. Yeah. I thought that—I thought that I was influential as a big brother in some positive way, but he chose to—and I wasn't big—I was not a big drug user or, you know—I mean, I experimented at the time with, you know, LSD, but that was a one-time deal or not—not many times. Anyway, my brother decided he was gonna smoke some pot, you know, and hang out with his friends, and they were in a swimming situation in Hershey, and he was a wonderful swimmer, and wasn't able to—she was with some other people, and they weren't able to save him. He was—they were in a turbulent water thing situation, and he went under and didn't come up. Anyway, so... after that happened, it was—it just happened to be the year that I moved to New York, so sort of kinda distanced me from Washington D.C. and here, you know.

**DF:** Was your family, any of your brothers and sisters involved in your social life?

**SH:** My sisters—as I said before, they used to take me to the parties that they'd go to. That's when I really stood out as a dancer. I mean, I loved dancing so much. It was just really natural for me. Me and my—the younger of my two sisters, we were really close. We—I used to do their hair sometimes before they'd go out to parties. Both of them. When I say do their hair, well—women—Black women in particular, like used to press their hair with hot combs, and I—they entrusted me to do that, and I could do it, you know, I just had some pretty interesting gifts that I never knew I discovered until I did it. So, anyway, we were close.

**DF:** When did they become aware of—?

**SH:** My sexuality?

**DF:** That part of your life.

**SH:** I think they always knew, sort of kind of. I never openly told them until after—I mean, they certainly knew after 1972, or before that. I would say 1972.

**DF:** How was that – how was was that certain?

**SH:** When I went to dance school. When I went to dance school, I—and I told them who I was living with, they fi- they knew. You know?

**DF:** And how were they with that?

**SH:** How were they? They were fine. They acted fine, anyway.

**DF:** How about mom and dad?

**SH:** Mom and dad. They knew that I was an artist—and they expected—their expectations of me were, “I’m going to do what I’m going to do.” You know? They were just—they just wished me well, basically. My father would have preferred me to—

**DF:** Be a doctor?

**SH:** Not a doctor necessarily as much as—his brother was a very popular barber. They had a barber school here. Hudson’s Barber School, and there was a possibility of me doing that—or picking something to do other than going to college. But he always—everybody knew in my family that I was an artist, and that could mean a lot of things in terms of—they let me walk my own beat, basically, you know, because they knew I was going to do that anyway. Because they knew that I was an artist. You know? Always. So, I had a lot of freedom. I had a lot more freedom than my sisters. Right up the street here, there was a Weis Market right here on 14<sup>th</sup> and Market, and I was the first own in the family to have a job, and because I had a job, I was... 16, 17 years old.

**DF:** The first child?

**SH:** The first child to work. I had a lot of freedom. I didn’t have to be in—I didn’t have to be in—even though I did, of course. I mean, I had a curfew, but I—my parents were very lenient with me, ‘cause I worked, and I brought, you know, things home from the grocery store, and... I was very selfish, too. I mean, I wanted to go to New York all the time. You know, spend my money and go get shoes and stuff—platform shoes, that was like... I spent a lot of time in Philadelphia, going to Philadelphia—and then my best friend who I was telling you about who’s an artist. His brother was also an artist—commercial artist in New York. We would go—sometimes play hooky and go to New York, so that was really interesting, but yeah—I had a lot of freedom as a teenager right before college, and—because I worked. My brothers—my brothers—my dad was very machismo. He—I remember when I was a young kid—younger,

me—my brother next to me—my father wanted to teach us how to box, because he used to box as an amateur. He was an amateur boxer and wanted to teach us how to box. [laughs] While he put boxing gloves on me and my brother—my brother was a lot tougher than me in that respect. He punched me a couple times, and I started crying. So, that was the end of the boxing thing. My dad said I wasn't going to have it. He said—he didn't push it. He tried to for a minute, but I wasn't having it.

**DF:** Did either of your brothers pick it up?

**SH:** Pardon?

**DF:** Did—

**SH:** Oh, no, no. My one brother did—I mean the one next to me that I was describing, he... he was sort of kind of—not delinquent, but he was—he started trying to get into trouble, you know, he ran with a gang, you know, and blah blah blah. But he wasn't... he didn't do anything major. He—he suffered at—when we were in high school—excuse me, junior high school. He had a curvature of the spinal cord, so he started bending over, so they had to take his fibula out of his leg and put it in his back. So, he was in Elizabethtown [Pennsylvania]—yeah, Elizabethtown down here, near Lancaster—or E-town [slang for Elizabethtown]—yeah, E-town, and—for two years in a cast—in a body cast, and so we would go every weekend and visit him. He was spoiled after that of course, everything has to go to Alfred. And so far as my brothers are concerned in terms of my sexuality... they didn't buck about it at all. They accepted it, and we didn't talk about it much, but they accepted me. They loved me. If anybody bucked about it, it would have been my sister—the one sister who was next to me, that I was closest to. The younger of my two sisters, and I say that, because... we—even though distance has separated us—we were no longer close, and when I moved away, even when I came back home to visit and blah blah blah, I felt closer to my other brothers and—my brothers and my other sister, but then I saw my other sister. We sort of kind of drifted apart in a way.

**DF:** Was there ever a point with any of your family members where you told them or they asked you?

**SH:** No. Well, yeah. Hold on a second. Yeah... I'm trying to think. There was something that happened... Well, there was a time that I told everybody that I was, you know, gay. I'm trying to think what the circumstances was—I think it was when I came back, right before I went to Washington D.C. I—after my brother had died, something had come up, and I'm not—I can't remember exactly what. I'd have to dig into my subconscious, but there was an incident that I—I outed myself. And...

**DF:** Not intentionally?

**SH:** Not intentionally, no. It's just that I felt that it was the time to—I was defending something. It have something to do with something political, and I said, "I'm gay, god damn it!" So, but

anyway, yeah... my family has been supportive. Not outright supportive. It's something that I didn't talk to them about. I didn't, you know, I wasn't effeminate, you know, particularly. And I think because of that, maybe they had more respect for me? In terms of that.

**DF:** Did they meet your friends?

**SH:** Oh yeah, yeah. And then on top of all that—here's another story. Well, here's a—when I moved to New York, I decided after having have my lover—we separated. I—this thing came over me, I wanted to be with a woman. I wanted to see what that was like again. I mean, I—I—in high school, I had a girlfriend, and she and I both went to Penn State University, and then—I still—I was still... she assumed and everybody else assumed that once we went to Penn State, that we were still boyfriend and girlfriend, but I had this other idea. I'm in Penn State—it's time to explore! Right? Other women and other possibilities.

**DF:** Did you have heterosexual relationships?

**SH:** I did. While I was at Penn State, and then I also had homosexual ones, too, so I was like feeling everything out, you know? I wanted to know who I was, and I wanted to feel everything, and I wanted to, you know I wanted to find out what all this was coming from, and if I was making the right decision based on what I was told, how I was raised—I'm a man, men are supposed to be strong, you're supposed to want this, that, the other—I wanted to find how Shaka ticked. So, I had a lot of exploring to do. And what better place to explore than college? Right? That's my first stomping ground. And so, I did. I discovered a lot of things about myself. [laughs] And then, as I said, I moved to Washington D.C., met this man, we were lovers, moved to New York, decided I wanted to be with a woman. I—I—when I wasn't dancing, I—I'm—this is very interesting—this is very noteworthy, I think. This is one—how—I was self-taught as an artist, but I wanted to fine-tune it, and I wanted to go to school. Rather than pay to go to school, I had this wonderful plan, and the plan was this: Since I was a dancer, I was going to model for all the major art schools, and I did that. And while I was there, I took notes as if I were a student, 'cause I had the best artists were all around me. They—they were teaching at the Art Students League, Parson's, FIT, you name it—all the art schools I modeled for, and I made sure they were going to call me back, because I would do things so difficult, you know? I would be sore afterwards, but I—they would request me back, so that I could continue coming back, so that I could be a student as well. They didn't know I was a student, but I was. I mean—the professors did, 'cause I was like taking notes more than the students were. I was soaking up as much as I could,' you know. And at the Art Students League, in walks this woman, she's an Indian woman. Born in British Guiana. I fell head over heels over her. Never felt that way about any woman before. In fact, it's a really interesting story. I—and this is how I knew that I was attracted to her. I was modeling nude, right? And this class was crowded. It was about 50 people there. It was a huge class, right? I get this boner, right? I see this woman, and she's just this tiny little thing with these big eyes, and she's just gorgeous, and I just get all excited, right? I get this boner up on the stand, and I started laughing, right? And people started fidgeting and stuff, right? I said, "Excuse me," and I ran to the dressing room. She turned red, right? She was like, a light complexion. And



it was love at first sight. We got—we got together. We got married. We have a child—I have a child. She was born out of love. But then, I thought, you know, knowing that I was homosexual.

**DF:** She knew that?

**SH:** She knew that.

**DF:** Upfront?

**SH:** Upfront. I—she thought, and I thought that she could change me. We thought that this is like a passing phase—it's not going to last forever kinda thing, but it didn't. All these desires started coming back, and so, we were married for almost 10 years. We really were in love, but then I decided, you know, this is not fair—I had these—I was still attracted to men.

**DF:** And you were dancing this whole time?

**SH:** I was dancing, and I was modeling. And—

**DF:** What was your bread and butter?

**SH:** Modeling and dancing. Dancing and modeling. And then she was working for the Met, Metropolitan Museum of Art. So, I decided that this is unfair to both of us. So, I ended it, and it was—she understood. My daughter, she—she never contested anything with her. She let me have her for all the whole summer. She made sure my daughter—she was three years old when we separated. I had her the whole summer. I had her all the major holidays, up until she was a teenager. I mean every holiday. All Christmases, all Thanksgivings. So, she never—she was always very wonderful about that. And, so we—we parted amicably. And, yeah, that was one of the love—I've come through my life with the loves of my life, you know? I don't have one single love of my life, you know what I mean? There's loves that are in my life, and my experience is that I've had many loves of my life. Wonderful people that have come and gone. She was one of them. She's the mother of my child. Still love her very much, and—

**DF:** Do you comm—do you have a relationship?

**SH:** We do not—we do not have a relationship, and the reason—one of the reasons why we don't have a relationship is because I took on a—my next lover after the one I was telling you about—who is white, who is from where I spent time in Mount Carmel [Pennsylvania]. He was of Italian-German descent, and he was extremely—he was 14 years my junior. Mistake. [laughs] Made a few of those, but that was pretty major. Anyway, I thought I was in love with this person, but we clearly—the distance in age or the difference in age was something I wish I would have looked at a little differently, but it taught me more than, you know, than I have regrets about, you know what I mean? We're the best of friends now. In fact, he just called me while we were sitting here. He was extremely jealous of her, and I said, "You know what, she's a part of the package. She's..." and he loved my daughter, you know. When she came for the summers and

stuff, we—he would treat her just so wonderfully and spoiled it—spoiled her, and I let him do that, and it was fine, but then he was really jealous of—how are you going to be jealous of a woman? You're not a woman? You know what I mean? But—and I said, you know, but if you can't accept this, you know—her—he accepted my daughter, and I said, you know, so they met, and he was fine with it after awhile, you know, he was just young and stupid. Anyway, from there, I was with this man for almost 19 years. 15 years—I would say 15, 16 years. I—[phone rings]

**LM:** Okay, we have to stop for a minute. Sorry about this. I think I've had a battery go on me.

[part one ends]

[part two begins, half way through conversation]

**SH:** Okay, so that was not in New York, that was here.

**DF:** Oh, that was back here?

**SH:** Yeah, that was here. Yeah, when I --

**DF:** Came back to Harrisburg?

**SH:** Yeah, hold on, let me back up here. After—after me and my ex-wife divorced—

**DF:** Are you on?

**LM:** Yeah, we're alright.

**SH:** After we divorced, I met a fellow up there through a friend of mine who lived right around the corner.

**DF:** In Harrisburg?

**SH:** In New York City, and he—this guy was mad over heels in love with me for some reason. Anyway, I—and I was splitting up with my ex-wife, and so they—he lived in Virginia. Richmond, Virginia. So, he offered me sanctuary in Richmond, and so I moved—and it was perfect, too, because I didn't want to come back here. I wanted to leave New York, because I just didn't want to be there anymore. I had had enough, you know, especially—I—I didn't take—even though I knew it was best for both of us, you know, to—to part ways, it was very difficult. Very difficult. I fell apart, actually. And—this person comes and grabs me from out of nowhere. I mean, through a friend, and he was in love with me and offers me sanctuary as I said in Richmond, Virginia so I moved to Richmond, Virginia. Took everything I had, and what I didn't take with me, I sold. Moved to Richmond, Virginia and took this person on. He was from Minnesota. Minnesota. I'd never been to Minnesota in my life, and I still haven't been there—I passed through it, but all to say that when I went to Richmond, Virginia—one of the reasons why

I was so thankful about Richmond is because I didn't want to come back here. I thought it was too small. From New York City to Harrisburg. Wasn't ready for that. I wanted to go someplace that, you know, it turned out that it was gonna be Richmond, and I went there.

**DF:** This was about when?

**SH:** 19... oh my god. Oh, 1987? 1987, I moved there. '88. 1988. Anyway, it was there.

**LM:** This was the first person after your marriage?

**SH:** Yes, yes.

**LM:** I gotcha.

**SH:** So, moved to Richmond, Virginia, discovered this person was very loving at first, but he was very—what's the word I want to say? He was very promiscuous, and... promiscuous to the point where it was very noticeable, and we lived together, discovered this—that he was very sick, and I didn't know what he was sick of, and we would be having dinner, and all of a sudden, he would just black out. In the middle of sentence, and I said, "What's the matter with you?" I need to take you to the hospital, blah blah blah. He had AIDS. And didn't tell me until he was dying.

**DF:** He knew it, but he didn't tell?

**SH:** Yeah, and then he passed it on to me. And one of the things that I'll never forget is "We're all going to die—meaning we—all of us gays are gonna die from AIDS," is what he told me. I said, you know what? "What a gift. Thank you." You know, we have choices, you know? And I mean—you know—I just thought it was extremely selfish of him, and I forgave him and all that, but—

**DF:** Did he die?

**SH:** Yes. He died while I was there. That was very difficult. So—

**DF:** How long were you with him?

**SH:** Two years. About two years, yeah. He passed it on to me. And...

**DF:** Were you exclusive when you were married?

**SH:** Toward the end, no. Exclusive in the beginning, yes, but then that—that thing emerged. My insatiable—not insatiable, I said my appetite for men reappeared, and I said—and I told my wife that, you know, that this is not fair for me or her. That I still have these feelings, and we parted.

**DF:** But you were married during the early onset of AIDS.

**SH:** No, this is after that. This is after that.

**DF:** But you were married during—

**SH:** Oh, yes! The onset of AIDS, yes, but I didn't have it then. Yeah, this is not until after my marriage that I moved to Virginia. Anyway, he infected me, and so I was—I knew exactly how I got it. It was from him. This was 1987. So, I been having—I'm HIV positive at the moment. All of my friends, I will say, all my major friends are gone because of AIDS. All of them. I mean, all of my best friends—my best friend in high school is gone. The last of my best friends in New York a couple of years—five years ago, died. I've had—I mean, I have new friends, but all my friends of yesterday are gone. I'm the only one that's surviving. It's amazing.

**DF:** You're doing well?

**SH:** I feel well. I feel really good. Yeah. I—and it's interesting, too. I—at a point when I have had this cocktail that I've been on for the last ten years. One of the ongoing things is that I've asked my physician—my doctor to change it, because I'm experiencing side effects, right? And he's done it for three years, and he doesn't change it. I said, "It's time for a new doctor," and I'm thinking—I can't help thinking it's a money-related thing, because I could be taking this one pill that I'm eligible for and have been eligible for for three years, and every time I see him every three months, I said, "Why hasn't this happened?" "Oh—I'll get that done right away." He never changes it to the one-pill cocktail, which leads me to believe that the three cocktails that I am on are a lot more costly, and it's—he's getting some kind of kickback from it. Pardon?

**LM:** Could be.

**SH:** Yes, but anyway, so he hasn't changed, so it's time for a new doctor, obviously, because I'm feeling lethargic a lot—more than I should be, and this is one of the side effects of one of the meds that I'm on. So, anyway, that's going to change soon. [laughs]

**DF:** So, you moved after Virginia?

**SH:** Back here.

**DF:** To Harrisburg?

**SH:** Back to Harrisburg, yeah. My father—

**DF:** Were you working when you were in Virginia?

**SH:** I did. I was doing construction—construction work.

**DF:** Dancing on the job? [laughs]

**SH:** And no. Actually, after—during—I was doing construction. I was also teaching rope jumping to boxers in a boxing situation. Just ‘cause I knew how to jump rope. I guess it’s one of the effeminate things—

**DF:** Your dad would be proud.

**SH:** Yes, but yeah, I really learned how to jump rope well. In fact, outside, upstairs, up and down stairs, that kind of challenging thing, and I taught rope jumping to boxers down when I was doing construction work. Moved back to Harrisburg. My father—on—right after his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, he died in 1993. We were never really super close, but we became close during his last year. He had a therapist—a physical therapist come in and give him massages. He dismissed her, because I gave him better massages, and it was a way of us connecting. So, we did. And it was wonderful. It was wonderful I’ve always loved my father. I never hated him. I always wished that he could’ve done a better job.

**DF:** They were together the whole time?

**SH:** My parents, yes. Yeah. Absolutely. But anyway, yeah, we said our goodbyes, and...

**DF:** So what happened?

**SH:** He died of prostate cancer. So...

**DF:** [mumbles]

**SH:** Pardon?

**DF:** What happened when you moved back here? Had you been back since?

**SH:** No, no. I—the lover that I was telling you about that I met here—that I lived with in Mount Carmel, right? We moved back to Harrisburg once—

**DF:** How’d you get to Mount Carmel?

**SH:** He lived there. He lived there.

**DF:** You met him here?

**SH:** I met him here in Harrisburg, but he was—but he lived in Mount Carmel, so we lived in Mount Carmel for two years, and I came back here. We got a place together here. I lived up there with him and his grandmother.

**DF:** This was the white boy?

**SH:** The white boy? Yes. Yeah, the white young man.

**DF:** Of German...?

**SH:** Of German-Italian descent, yes. And oh boy, he had a life. He was molested at an early age. Should I say this? Yeah. He was molested at an early age, and—by a priest. And we had occasion to work while we were up there. We not only worked in a tomato factory—we commuted every day to King of Prussia to work at restaurants. We were servers. And he runs into the priest that molested him.

**DF:** As a server?

**SH:** As a server. We're in the middle of serving at this hotel that we worked in, and—and this priest is there. We're serving, and the next thing I know, I hear all this breakage, you know, [imitates the sound of breaking glass] and he's standing in the floor shaking like this uncontrollably, and he was carrying some food, and he saw this priest. The priest didn't recognize him, so he runs out of the restaurant. I go get him, he tells me what's going on, we start going to see a therapist, and he didn't follow through with it, so... I will say this, with that, not only was that present by—that was part of his story with the priest. It was also within his family. He was molested sexually. And it manifested itself through our relationship, too. I—I this is not a pity party in terms of that. It—it's a lot of his—his unable—his inability to work through that with a person from an outside source, like a psychiatrist or whatever manifested itself with me, you know, in terms of our relationship. It was really unhealthy. And—

**DF:** How so?

**SH:** I'll get to that. It was unhealthy, and it was toxic, so as a result of that, we started using—we starting drinking pretty heavily. Sometimes—and it would—we had our run-in with drugs.

**DF:** Were you now in Harrisburg?

**SH:** Harrisburg here, yes. And then after working here as servers, we decided we were going to try Baltimore [Maryland], so we lived in Baltimore for seven years. I lived in Baltimore for seven years. He did for eight. I came back. I could not do it anymore with him, so I moved back here with my mom. He—

**DF:** Which was about when?

**SH:** 2005.

**DF:** Okay.

**SH:** 2005, I moved back here. So, I've been back here exactly 10 years. 10 years as of May of this year. So, anyway, his new lover blah blah blah—we get along.

**DF:** He's in Harrisburg?

**SH:** He's in Baltimore still. He had moved back here. They got a house together, and they moved back to Baltimore. They wanted to be in Baltimore. I—have never lived a city that I've lived in before—a second time around. He came back—let me back up. In 2005, I moved back here. He comes back after being in Baltimore, still. He chose another person to be with, because he cheated on me incessantly, and I still kept him—I mean, I still took, you know, I still loved him. But anyway, I said enough is enough, you know, I had enough. I prayed. I prayed really hard to get me out of that, because I didn't -- I was stuck in stupid. I was in one of those relationships that you know, I didn't know how to get out of it, and you know, but anyway, that happened. We—one of his friends invited us to South Carolina, and we went down there. He did some outrageous things, and he sent us—he sent us back, because we had ran out of money. He—he gave us plane tickets to come down and visit him, and my—my partner then abused all that and ran up a bar bill of his, and he sent us back by bus, but—and by the time we got back here—he was cheating on me down there, and I said, you know what, I had had enough. So, we parted. So that he moved back to Harr—back to Baltimore. Came back here. We started up a relationship again, then—I'm sorry, I mixed this around. After he came back here—after I had moved back, he moved back a year after me. And then that year, when he came back, we decided to get together again, and we moved—we got an apartment, and old behavior started reappearing, so—so I—and then that's when this story happened when we went to South Carolina. His best friend's mother had died, and he came into some money and sent for us, and my—my ex-lover—my ex did some horrible things down there, and this friend of ours decided to send us back by bus. Once we got back here, I ended our relationship. I had enough. So, he met a fellow. They became lovers, and they are together still in Baltimore. We all hang out together. I mean—I go down there to visit them, you know. We're friends. And things are fine in terms of that. He's also—he's also HIV positive. Now, even though I knew I was HIV positive since 1987, he was diag—we were both officially diagnosed in 1996. And, yeah... he's doing fine. He's doing fine, and I'm doing fine, too, thank God. I will say this, too, let me mention something since I mentioned—I put it out there that this generation right now, they think because—because HIV positive people have a good chance of surviving, which we do, that they don't feel threatened like—they don't think it's as threatening as it used to be. You know, they don't have—people died in record numbers as in the on start of this, because—people were dying like flies. I was a part of it. I mean, I can attest to all my friends are gone. But a lot of young—this generation right now. Some—they're coming around now, and I think they're getting better at it, but there's a lot of people still out there who are very careless sexually, you know, thinking that, “I can act this way. I can be unprotected, because I'm gonna—there's a cure at the end for me,” which is a horrible attitude.

**DF:** Yeah, people aren't dying now.

**SH:** Yes, they still are. It's still an epidemic as far as I'm concerned.

**DF:** Yeah, but they see—they see that as—people aren't dying now.

**SH:** Exactly, not like in record numbers as they were, which is very sad, because it's better to be informed than it is not to be informed. So anyway, what else can I say here? I want to say...

**DF:** Are you working now?

**SH:** I am not officially. I'm doing my artwork. I'm an artist. Everything on the wall is mine.

**DF:** What's your medium?

**SH:** Everything. I mean—I... I do pen, pencil—I did that [pointing behind camera].

**LM:** That's great.

**SH:** It's a self-portrait. In 1980.

**LM:** That's really nice.

**SH:** Yeah, all these—those were in high school, over there.

**DF:** Are those your nieces and nephews?

**SH:** Yes. Interesting, too, they're—I have a niece. My niece is—both my nieces are married to white men. So it's really interesting to see this interesting—it's a very interesting to see this dichotomy... just the encompassing of races here. Or the marriage there or miscegenation, and the attitudes that come with it. Because in my day, it was more if you were mixed, it was... you know, it was basically—you were still Black. You know? These days, you still are, but it's a little—it's more—the acceptability is a lot more acceptable. And, it's interesting to see how my—my grandnephews and nieces complement both of their mothers and their fathers, you know what I mean? It's—you know, they're not one particular culture. They're a combination, and they love it. You know, it's—and it's a lot more. That was another thing that I mentioned either. When I was in high school, it was a very, very popular thing to date out of your race. It was very pop—it was very popular also that, you know, when I was a kid, also... it was not unusual for young girls to have children. I mean, it was—especially here in Harrisburg, there were a lot of young mothers when I was in high school, you know. Out of wedlock, you know? Harrisburg is a very interesting place. It's—as much as—I've been away from here for 40 years, and I—I love it here. I absolutely love Harrisburg. There's so—there's incredible possibilities here. To me, it seems like there's a spark here right now, you know—I—I would love to see—I would love to see industry come back here.

**DF:** Where's the spark?



**SH:** The spark is—there’s artists here. There’s people here that are opening businesses. There’s—

**DF:** Do you show?

**SH:** I’m going to. I’ve had—

**DF:** At the LGBT Center?

**SH:** I’m—I’m looking at that possibility. I’m—but I’m excited about the possibility of staying, ‘cause I, you know—I’m here to make—

**DF:** Of what?

**SH:** Staying here in Harrisburg.

**DF:** Oh, okay.

**SH:** Because everyone not being a caretaker—I wouldn’t be here. I’d be in—in Spain, ‘cause that’s something—a place I’ve always wanted to live, and I’m still going to live there one day, I’m sure. Just as sure as like I knew I was going to one day live in New York, ‘cause I’m a dancer. That’s going to take me there, but my artwork is going to take me to Spain eventually. The other reason why I would love to go to Spain is because I have a—I have this insatiable thing for flamenco, and one of the things that I mentioned earlier—in my childhood, I loved Zorro, and one of the things that was introduced to me was some flamenco dances every now and then, and there’s something about flamenco—I don’t know, maybe I have some Spanish past [?] something, but there’s something about—

**DF:** Probably with sheer[?]

**SH:** That the fire—it’s very fiery. It’s very... passionate, and I love—I love tap dancing, and I love that kind of tap dance, so—

**DF:** Do you still dance?

**SH:** Oh yeah. I dance every day. [laughs]

**DF:** What was your—what was your—

**SH:** Ballet.

**DF:** Ballet?

**SH:** Ballet, modern dance, a little tap...

**DF:** So a little bit of everything?

**SH:** A little bit of everything. On Broadway, you have to do everything. On Broadway, I was more—I wasn't a major, major dancer. I didn't have any major dance roles as much as I was a hooper, which means—in some circles is a tapper, but it's also—it's also a dancer who is an understudy for other dancers, and that is so stressful, 'cause that means, when you have a show, like *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, for instance, or *Ain't Misbehavin'*, which I did, you have to learn all of the men's parts in case somebody calls off. You have to be on standby. You get paid well for it, but you should get paid well for it, because it's stressful. You know, "Shaka, you're needed to dance! You're going to do Tony's role tonight," and you gotta be prepared, you know, that's what they pay you for. So anyway, I still dance. I would love to open a dance school—not dance school, I would love to open—what I'd really like to open here is—I would like to—I don't know if this ever existed, but if I had the money, I would open up a school where people with creative abilities could come and—and—and do something for this school, you know, whatever your particular talent is—I would have to discover some criteria for you to get there and stay there, but like you know, for me, if I had a place where I could go to and get all of this stuff out of my head as an artist, it—I—I would be the happiest person in the world. Do you know what I mean? Where I could go and express—let's say, chorographically, what I would like to do, you know—I can't afford to do that right now. I can't afford—well, I am affording to—I'm getting my stuff -- I'm going to get things together enough for an art show—I'll open my own show soon. I'm—I'm also a sculptor, and what I like most—I mean I've done -- I've done clay—I'm a modeler, and a modeler as opposed to a—what do you call it? The opposite one. A modeler is a model art that works in clay. He models, you know, as opposed to taking away—chipping away. So, I currently—and the last time I was really into was papier-mâché, because paper was everywhere. I mean, I don't have to buy paper. I can just get newspaper, and I would take armatures, you know, made out of wire and build it up with, like, for instance—I would have vats of wallpaper paste with newspaper, and before that, washing machine lint, so I'd keep building up and building up and I'd end up with corrugated cardboard, because it has those little arches in it, and it—once it gets really wet, you still have the arches in it, but when it's wet, it's very flexible, and then you put it over top of the newspaper, and it becomes like this—it becomes very hard, you know? Anyway, I'm also—I'm working on a series of masks right now... using car parts, things that I find—I walk State Street Bridge every day, because I go to the Y[MCA] to work out, and people like throw all kinds of stuff under that bridge, so I collect it. [laughs] And I use it in my sculpture. I also use—I use bones—all of the bones that I ever usually eat, I save, and I polish them with dremels. I soak them in Clorox, and I incorporate them in my—my mask making. So, I'm recycling bones. Interesting, right? I think so, too. So, one of these days, when I have a show up, I'll make sure you guys get an invite. What else can I tell you? My life is very rich. To me. I've have many, many experiences—I mean, New York alone was an incredible experience. Washington D.C.—I—I was going to say. In Washington D.C. I went to—my teachers told me, the first day I showed up to school, they told me "You're going to have to eat, sleep, and breathe dance," and I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" and they were right. It is—I mean I'm sure it happens in all art forms, but particularly dance, you really do have to eat, sleep, and breathe it. I mean, I had to put bars on my apartment to stretch, you know,

constantly. I had no social life whatsoever in Washington D.C. That's a lie. What I meant to say—I had very little social life. I lived in Adams-Morgan part of Washington D.C.

LM: That's a great area.

SH: I love it there. I lived on 16<sup>th</sup> Street. 104 Northwest. Meridian Hill, I guess it's also called around—from Adams Morgan. It was wonderful, but I remembered just being in classes all the time. After three classes a day, you can't do anymore. Not in class, anyway, but at home, I did. So—but anyway, very little—oh, let me tell you about this other thing that I didn't mention. While in Washington D.C. I met Rudolf Nureyev. You know who that was? He was very, very openly gay, and very, very, very promiscuous. And I saw him at a lot of parties there. He was a wonderful person, though. Gorgeous man. When I first moved to New York, I used to take class with Mikhail Baryshnikov, 'cause he used to dance for ABT—American Ballet Theatre... my memory of that is that this man was so phenomenal that I couldn't take the class—I just stood there. I mean, I couldn't—I just was too much in awe. I mean, he was gorgeous. He was like a dancer I've never seen. He—even though him and -- he and Rudolf Nurveyev were Russian—their body types were completely different. Rudolf, he was more elongated. He was more linear. Baryshnikov was linear, too, but oh my god, he had this absolute—I've never seen anybody, including—what's the basketball legend? Michael Jordan stay in the air that long. And in ballet, it's called *ballon*. It gives you the ability to stay in the air while—[dramatically drops mouth open] When is he coming down? I mean, amazing. You couldn't believe. I mean he would be in the air and pause. It seemed like pause. He was traveling, but it was unbelievable that he had this amazing gift. So—and in, there's another ballet dancer from—well, from Pennsylvania—her name was—she was from Bethlehem. Her name was Gelsey Kirkland. She also danced with ABT at the time. Just awesome. Awesome crowd. But, let me tell you a little story about my experience with dancers. The least people I want to be around. Assholes. [laughs] Just because—and this—and not by their own design necessarily, but this is the reason: dancers are such an interesting breed of people that—and I—I say that because we're so—when you're in the dance world, you have very little time for anything else. Your social skills become nil. Your social skills only involve other dancers, usually, and they—they can be some vicious, vicious people. I mean, vicious. I didn't know what vicious was until I became a dancer. So, all to say this—when I was in dance, and I did not hang around dancers. I didn't. I deliberately—and actors also, they're another one. [laughs] And—it's not to take away from their skill—I mean, their skill is wonderful, and when you think about the sacrifices that they go through, like you would say, okay, you're excused and stuff, but some of this stuff is—from another dancer's point of view, no. I can't live like that, you know? And it's so cutthroat. I mean—I mean, the humiliation on a cattle call. You know what a cattle call is, basically? So, in cattle calls—and you know there's always going to be someone better than you. You know that. You know that's on the outside, that's a given. But still—it doesn't feel good to get rejected. You know? So then, you're like in these massive auditions up in New York, and it's like, “Why did you pick that bitch over me?” and somebody has something that the producers or directors want that you don't have—you know, panache or whatever it is they're looking for. So, you get over it. You get accepted, and you get on with your life, because there's a thousand and five dancers at every audition. And somebody's not—somebody's going to get chosen, somebody else is not. But the other thing,

too, is that there are the best bodies in the world, too. Which that—that door was—that’s not the door that I like that was open to me as a gay male, I met some wonderful, you know—but in my life, I think in terms of encompassing everything that I can as an artist, I always have to check my ego, because egos can get out of hand, and when my ego gets out of hand, what I mean by that is I have to make sure that I’m in balance to be healthy, and when I mean healthy, I mean all-around healthy. Mentally, spiritually, physically, you know? I have to balance all of those things and make sure they all work, and that I’m not giving any one of those things more precedent over the other, because if I do, I become unbalanced. Do you understand what I mean? So, that’s the thing that keeps me breathing, number one, and number two, it keeps me healthy. I make sure that I eat really well. I consume large amounts of blueberries, not because it’s popular. This is because I’ve always loved them. I have nuts in my diet. I try to stay away from anything white, usually because it’s means—it’s just, it’s processed food. You know? Like white bread, I stay away from that. I eat a lot of grains. Lots of vegetables. Bananas are my staple. I make sure she eats well [pointing off camera]. Now, we all have occasional fried chicken every now and then, like once a week, [laughs] But not much—I try not to fry food. Steam a lot of stuff and make sure we eat a lot of vegetables. I think it’s so—

**DF:** Does [\_\_\_\_\_???] cook?

**SH:** I would love for her to cook. She doesn’t—it’s because I love to cook so much, she doesn’t cook at all. And I would just love to come downstairs one morning and smell something cooking. I got her to cook one thing. She—I adore her chicken dumplings, and I got her to make those for me about a year ago for the first time I’ve been her. It’s the only meal she’s ever done since I’ve been here since 2005. ‘Cause she knows I love to cook, and I—so she lets me do that. But she’s—I’m starting to give her a little more things to do. I told her by October she’ll be running a marathon. I’m taking her for walks. She cannot stand the heat. She cannot stand the heat, so I’m waiting for fall—fall’s right around the corner, so that’s her time, and I’ll take her out for walks. She goes to church—

**DF:** Yeah, we turned off our air conditioner.

**SH:** What’s that?

**DF:** Now we turned off our air conditioner.

**SH:** Yes, yes.

**DF:** Have we missed anything?

**SH:** I—probably you have, but I don’t think anything major.

**DF:** Really? A very, very good interview.

**SH:** Thank you, thank you very much. I don’t think anything major.

**LM:** Have you any connection with the gay community here in Harrisburg?

**SH:** Very interesting that you bring that up, and one of the things that I would like to say about that—I know without a shadow of a doubt, there's a huge gay community here, but I'm thinking when I went to—when I went to the—the Pride this year, I was so horribly disappointed. I'm thinking, "Don't we have sponsors? To sponsor this thing or don't people come together in such a way that well in advance of a year time for Pride that things will be in place?" I would love to be—to know something about that committee who does this, because it needs—

**DF:** Get involved with the Center.

**LM:** We would love to have you.

**SH:** Yeah, it needs redoing some rethinking or something. I mean, I've never known any Pride without a parade. Where's the parade?

**LM:** And until up to a couple years ago, there was.

**SH:** I know. The last time I went at one there was a parade. Was that true? Yes.

**DF:** I think part of the problem is that it's so expensive.

**SH:** It is—

**DF:** Like, just to rent the park.

**SH:** Here's one thing I have really questioned. The one thing that comes off the top of my head—even though I know people need to show their support for the LGBT Center and blah blah blah, but I'm thinking if you close off—if you charge people--\$9 is nothing, as far as I'm concerned, to charge—but then you're excluding a whole city of people who could be supporting the whole thing as a whole.

**DF:** But it's \$10 grand just to rent that park.

**SH:** Is it that expensive?

**DF:** \$10 grand.

**SH:** That's ridiculous.

**DF:** Which is one of the reasons they don't have the parade, because it would be even more expensive.

**SH:** That is so ridiculous. You know what I would love to see—I would like to see this at the state level. The Pride—that we could have communities from all over Pennsylvania come here, assemble here, and not even have it at the park, have it at the Capitol, or near the Capitol grounds. I would love to be a part of that committee, and me and some friends are—

**LM:** Well make contact with—

**SH:** From New York—who’s also lived in New York—

**DF:** You’ve already mentioned Louie. Talk with Louie.

**SH:** Yes, yes. I’m going to come down and find out and be a part.

**DF:** Louie or Pat down at the Center.

**SH:** And I also want to see what’s going on in the city. I think [Harrisburg Mayor] Papenfuse is doing a pretty okay job, as far as I can tell, but there’s some other things that need to be—there’s a lot of things that need to be addressed in this community—our community as a whole. One of the things for me that I really, really miss as a kid is when we—when I was a kid here, the police and the firemen were an integral part of this community. They walked up and down the street. I—we knew all their names. They didn’t come in from away—when there was trouble, because they were already here. They were already part of the community. People did not have to lock their doors when I was a kid here. [scoffs] You do now, that’s for sure. But you know, I think that’s one the things that’s missing about—they’re not a part of the community, and I think they need to be. Instead of implementing the—and I don’t think this is just particular in our area, I think this is across America. I—I’d like to be a part of that resurgence of—of a police, because they’re human beings not—they’re human being like we are, you know what I mean? And they need to realize, just because you carry a gun doesn’t mean that you have that kinda power to, you know, shoot first and ask questions later. It’s not that kind of—

**LM:** Do you see this is what’s happening?

**SH:** Yeah, it does. More and more. It’s ridiculous. We gotta turn that around. And it’s not about me complaining about it without offering a solution, either. You know, people will say, “Well, this is—the world is like this. What the hell are you doing to try to change it?” you know, “We can—everybody knows what the problems are. What are you doing to change it? Do you have a solution? This here is a solution. What’s your solution?” You know what I mean? “You don’t have solution.” “Shut up!” [laughs] It’s not about shut up, but you exercise your right to vote—like it’s the same thing for voting. You know how long it’s taking us for me as a Black man to be able to vote? I’m using my vote every time I get a chance, you know what I mean. You know? And people say, you know, “You have to exercise your vote.” You know the thing is—and it’s a privilege to vote in this country. We can’t assume that it’s—well, it’s our right to vote. You know, we’ve earned it. We fought for it. You know, use it. Don’t complain. You know, get out and vote. Anyway, I think that’s it.

**DF:** Do we have your permission to—to record this interview?

**SH:** Absolutely. Could I see it first? [laughs] Is that possible? I need to get my glasses.

**DF:** This is the consent form.

**SH:** Okay. Let me get my specs. Where those—where's my bag? Pardon me for a minute—is that okay?

**LM:** No, that's fine. I'm going to go off.