



Interview with Lila Terry

Kathy Hersh: Today is June the 27th, 2017.

Lila Terry: Right.

Interviewer: My name is Kathy Hersh, and I'm interviewing Lila Terry for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. The first question I'd like to have you —

Lila Terry: Eighty-three.

Interviewer: Eighty-three.

Lila Terry: [laughs]

Interviewer: Okay. [laughs]

Lila Terry: [laughs]

Interviewer: What's your birthday?

Lila Terry: March 15, 1934.

Interviewer: Right. When did you come to the beach?

Lila Terry: I came here on vacation about 1968, and I said to my ex-husband, "Look how clean the grounds are, the gardens and the streets and the road." In the Bronx, where I was living, they were throwing the garbage out the window, and it had changed the area. Then they set a fire to the basement where I lived, and I really had to get out of there, but I didn't know where I'd go.

We came here on vacation, and I said, "You know what? When we go back to the Bronx, I'm packing my grip and the kids' clothes." He said, "I'm coming, too." I said, "I'm moving down to the Miami Beach." That's how I got here.

Interviewer: You made the decision.

Lila Terry: Yes. Not only that, I went to school and became a real estate associate, worked for the Keyes Company on Lincoln Road. I didn't know this. When you work for someone in the real estate business, if you sold three homes, then you could go back to school and take a test and become a real estate broker. Well, I was a land salesman, and I always top salesman of the month. I made extra \$300, \$500. I was a good saleswoman.

He said to me, "You want to be a broker?" I said, "It would be nice." I said, "I'm not opening up my own business, because you'd have to open up your own business if you want to be a broker. Can't be a sales



associate and do that." He said, "Well, I'll say you sold three houses for me. Go take the test." I went to school, and then I had to take the three-hour test.

I passed. Right till this day, I've kept the broker's license. There was more money in selling land up in Port St. Lucie, up in all the towns that we have now, that I can't remember all the names.

Interviewer: You didn't just work the beach. You did Florida.

Lila Terry: Well, I didn't sell that property. I sold it in Miami. In the Castaways, for example, they gave you breakfast or lunch, invited tourists to come have breakfast, and they gave them a spiel about Florida here, Florida there. Then we had 10 salespeople. We each got a customer, and we sat down at a table. We opened up a big map, and we said, "This is the property, where it is." It'd say, "Port St. Lucie." We'd sell them a piece of property. People would say to me later on, "Oh, they lost their money buying stuff like that."

They made money on that property. I sold it. Let me tell you. I was a top closer. They had three days with which to cancel, and many people didn't cancel. I can't remember what department is in charge of it, but they said, "Now they have three weeks to cancel." Three weeks. By that time, they went home. The people said to them, their relatives, "Quick. Call up, and cancel." We started to get a lot of cancellations. Again, I can't remember the name of the department that does this.

They gave people three months to cancel or, for sure, within three months' time, the people that bought the property. We got cancellations. Of course, I don't remember now if they took the money back. I don't think they did, but they had to rent your clothes to the closing room, because people canceled.

Interviewer: Why?

Lila Terry: Because they bought property without seeing it, only by what map I gave them. There were no pictures. They had a little movie on it. What did they do? The guy who owned the property said, "We're going to go to see the property that we're going to sell." We got in the car. We drove two hours away. We got out of the car. We went like this. "Okay. Let's go home." [laughs] That was seeing the property. At least we saw the property that we were going to sell, but what was there to see? Nothing really.

Interviewer: It was undeveloped.

Lila Terry: Nothing. It was all undeveloped. That's a long time ago. I'm going back 1972, '3, '4. I decided I'd like to do something else and went into the jewelry business. First, I started out with one booth. I borrowed \$5,000, and I didn't realize you could put \$5,000 in your hand like this. I bought a tray for the booth, and I spread it out. One bracelet here. One bracelet here. \$5,000 was nothing. Every time I made money at the end of the



week, I bought more jewelry. Eventually, I filled up a whole showcase. We moved to two booths, because I took her in with me, my ex-partner. Her name is Jill.

Interviewer: The booths were where?

Lila Terry: What?

Interviewer: Where were the booths?

Lila Terry: In the Flea Market USA.

Interviewer: In?

Lila Terry: In Miami.

Interviewer: In Miami.

Lila Terry: Overtown.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lila Terry: It's still there. They bought many, many stores that they opened up, and they put booths in. Then, next to it, four other stores went out of business. A lady and her husband — he died. She bought that area, and she put more booths in there. It was a very big place. My kids won't take me back there anymore. I was not afraid to go. I suppose, when you're stupid, [laughs] then you're not afraid of an area.

Interviewer: How long were you in the jewelry business?

Lila Terry: Well, I was there quite a while. I was there when they came in with guns and were shooting up and robbed a couple of jewelry people. Then, the guy in the front of the door, said, "Don't talk on your..." I don't know what we had to talk on. "Because that's what's setting off..." They had placed bombs in the bathroom. If you kept talking on one of these things or pressed a button, that set off some of the.... I had a lot of robberies. I'd give a guy a \$500 bracelet. He'd want to see it. I can't say "no" because I didn't like his whatever.

He wasn't a White American, maybe. I gave him the bracelet. He put it on. He said, "Very nice." He put it in his hands. He looked like this, and he ran. She ran after him, but he went across to a very bad mobile home park. We lost \$500. Of course, I went home with the jewelry. I looked through the rearview mirror in the car. I didn't see anybody behind me. I found out they were waiting for me. My neighbor said to me, "I saw that car there." She said, "It was waiting an hour." They must have heard me move, saying I was selling my booth.

They followed me home. I parked on the first floor. It's the Royal Atlantic Condo. Great place to live. Right on the ocean. I came down, and the car was a mess. They'd broke the windows. They finally opened the trunk. I



had about \$200,000 in gold. They picked it up. They were gone. She said to me, "I said to my husband, 'Maybe I ought to call the police.' He said, 'Nah.' He said, 'Don't do that. You're thinking too much of it.'" She says, "I didn't know it was you that they were robbing." I wasn't sure. I heard banging, things like that. I lost all the jewelry.

Interviewer: Did you decide to leave the jewelry business then?

Lila Terry: Yeah. [laughs] I didn't decide. It decided for me. My father bought an apartment on the sixth floor. I'm on the fifth.

Interviewer: Your father did.

Lila Terry: My father. My mother had passed away. Was my mother alive then? I can't remember.

Interviewer: Your father came down, too.

Lila Terry: Yes. Yes. My father eventually came down. Let's see. My mother was.... It was 1984, I think, that they came.

Interviewer: Where did your father buy the apartment?

Lila Terry: In the Royal Atlantic that I lived in on Fifth Street and Ocean Drive. I went up, and I said to him, "You know, Dad?" I cried. I said, "I've never been without a job my whole life. I'm without a job and money." "I know you," he said. "You'll do fine." I said, "But I never worked for anybody. I always worked for myself." "Don't worry about it, Lila. Don't worry about it." [laughs] You know what I mean?

I still owed two jewelry men who used to come by once a week. I owed each one \$1,000, but I told them. I said, "I'll pay you off." You know what I mean? "Don't worry, Lila." They were very nice that way. They would leave their jewelry attaché cases — I mean, there must have been 50 booths there — with me, because they were going to go to lunch, okay?

Interviewer: You were trusted. You were known.

Lila Terry: Yes. Listen to this, though, how sad this is. One day, one of the guys doesn't come around. "What happened? Where is he?" He killed an old partner he had in the jewelry business to steal some of his jewelry, obviously, because the guy was in retail. He went to jail. I don't remember now. I couldn't find out, "Was it for life or whatever?" It was terrible. I was so upset. The following year, the second guy that used to come in and leave his jewelry with me, I didn't see him. I asked somebody, "Hey, where's Joe Blow?"

Interviewer: You're still holding their attaché cases?

Lila Terry: No. No. They took them.

Interviewer: Okay.



Lila Terry: They only [crosstalk][11:28] went for lunch.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lila Terry: [laughs]

Interviewer: [laughs]

Lila Terry: They didn't leave it there overnight. They said, "He killed such and such a person." "What?" Two of the nicest guys that I knew that had a good business, because they went to everybody's booth that sold jewelry, and he would give me \$1,000 worth. I would pay him for last week \$1,000. They made nice money. They both went to jail. I never could find out. I really didn't know anybody that knew them personally, but it was very depressing for me that they both went to jail.

Interviewer: Tell us about your acquisition of the clubs.

Lila Terry: Okay. Her name is Jill. When we lived on 28th and Collins Avenue, I told her, I said, "I'm going to buy a condo." I said, "I understand there's one for sale. I saw it in the paper." There were two, I believe, Russian old Jewish people. He called him "Mrs. So-and-so." I can't remember their last name. She called him "Mr. So-and-so." I said, "I'm interested in your condo. He said, "This I bought for my daughter. She has cancer and is dying, and I'd like to sell it. That's why." He had a condo in that same building. "Let me show it to you."

It was beautiful. One-bedroom. We went up to his apartments. He said, "Okay. I want" — I can't remember now — "\$10,000 down, and the rest I'll give you." He had a \$24,000 mortgage, so I don't know what he paid for it. Of course, being that I was never a person to ask personal questions, I didn't say, "How much did you pay?" Anyway, I said to him, "Well, I don't have \$10,000," I said, "but I have \$5- I could give you." She said, "Mr. So-and-so." She said, "You can't." They had an accent. "You can't do that. \$5,000. Is she crazy?"

He says, "Listen. I like her. She's a nice lady, and I'm going to let her have it for her \$5,000 down. The other \$5,000 she'll pay me out every month." I said, "That sounds great." "I give you the mortgage." "That's great. I never had a mortgage." Well, I moved in. I paid him every month. I find out that he's gone. He died or something. I finish paying her the extra \$5,000. I went down. I knocked on the door, and a neighbor that was staying with her opened the door. "What is it? What do you want?" I said, "I need a paper that says I've paid her off completely, and I have to go file it."

Finally, she closed the door, and she asked. "I'll take her tomorrow." Thank goodness I did that, because I think a month later she died. If that had happened, I wouldn't have anything to prove that I paid her. I was lucky then. Not as lucky as I am today with all [laughs] problems. I paid off the mortgage with her, and I had the \$24,000 mortgage. I say \$24,000. I



don't remember what it was. I think it took me 24 years to pay it off, if I'm not mistaken. Anyway, Jill. I was introduced to Jill.

Interviewer: Tell us who Jill was.

Lila Terry: Pardon me?

Interviewer: Tell us who Jill was. Who is Jill?

Lila Terry: Jill is the gal that I was in partnership with in the bars. She was a printer. My son was a printer for 35 years, but she didn't do printing. She did a desk job in the printing business. I said to her, "I'm going to buy this condo." She said, "Yeah." She said, "Well, my partner in the business is leaving, and I have to pay her X number of dollars." I said, "Well, I tell you what. I'll put your name down, and you can have half the condo. We'll put my name down, and I'll be half the business with you. I'll be partners."

"Okay. Okay." That's how we got together to own the three bars. You will see in the advertising in David Magazine that we advertised. It will say "Lila and Jill." We're having a drag show. We had a lot of drag shows. We had who I think were famous gals that were drag queens. Of course, I haven't seen a drag queen anymore in a long, long time. It's not the same, but we used to know them all. When you look through the book, you will see all the names.

Interviewer: What book was that?

Lila Terry: The David Magazine. The David Magazine I'll show you here. I should have saved the books. Instead of saving the books, what I did was I cut them out. Maybe I have a David. See here. This is one of the girls. Erica Andress and Dana Manchester. Have you ever heard of Dana Manchester?

Interviewer: We'll look at the pictures later.

Lila Terry: Okay.

Interviewer: What made you decide to go into the drag business, [crosstalk][17:40] have a bar that was a drag queen bar?

Lila Terry: Oh. No. No. It was a gay bar. This is Jill. You'll see numerous pictures of her. This is called David Magazine, where we advertised. In here, instead of taking the whole book — here. By the way, I had another one called the Turf Pub when we left the Night Owl and the Middle Room and the Pinup. The Turf Pup was 22 Ocean Drive.

Interviewer: Why three different bars?

Lila Terry: Well, because the roof leaked. [laughs]

Interviewer: [laughs]

Lila Terry: I'm not drunk. I swear.



Interviewer: [laughs]

Lila Terry: The roof leaked. The owner wouldn't fix the roof, and I had to put garbage cans next to a customer. They didn't mind. It's not like it's a customer that walks in off the street. These are customers that came for years to catch the rain. When we sold the three businesses — actually, it's one business.

Interviewer: Were they side-by-side?

Lila Terry: It had three front doors, but when you went into one of them, you went into the back door, and the back door went to the bathroom, and then the bathroom went to the second bar, and the second bar went to the third. You didn't have to go out to go around. The police would come. Say they came at 8 o'clock at night. Someone would come running in and say, "Lila, they're coming! They're coming!" You would see people get off. They'd leave their drink. Everybody ran.

Interviewer: Why?

Lila Terry: Because all the cops came in, and they wanted to see their ID. They knew it was a gay bar.

Interviewer: It was against the law?

Lila Terry: No.

Interviewer: This was harassment?

Lila Terry: It wasn't very much of a harassment. There was nobody to ask, "Let me see your license," or, "Let me see your ID." There was nobody in the bar. [laughs] All the glasses were sitting on the bar. There wasn't a person there. The girls didn't run in the girls' bar. The girls sat. The girls had no reason. At one point, from the Pinup — that was the boys' room — someone came in, became friendly with a lot of guys, and every month was killing one of them.

The cops came in and said to us, "You've got somebody that comes in here that's killing the boys." One by one, every month, they were finding down in the Southwest, where we never went — that was like going from the Bronx to Brooklyn, which was another country. You know what I mean? [laughs] We never went down to the Southwest, but that's where they took them in the car.

Interviewer: This was a serial killer.

Lila Terry: Yes. They gave us a picture. I can't remember if it was a picture of the guy that was murdered or someone who they thought was doing the killings. I would tape it up in the Pinup. They never caught him. Never caught him. They later came back to us to report whether they may have someone or they don't have someone. I have no idea, but I know they never caught the killer.



Interviewer: What year was this?

Lila Terry: Well, it has to be in the '70s. I don't know exactly what year.

Interviewer: Just for people in the future who may be listening to this or watching this, the reason, when the police came in, that people fled was because they didn't want to be seen in a gay bar?

Lila Terry: I don't know. They just didn't want to hand them their identification, because maybe they had a warrant out for them. I don't know what the reason was, because they never told me. I got arrested. [laughs] They called me, for about a year, "Here comes the jailbird." [laughs]

Interviewer: What were you doing? [laughs]

Lila Terry: I'll tell you. I would come down to the bar. My partner was usually not able to get up in the middle of the night and call up the bartender and say, "Roger, need change? Singles? Quarters?" "Yes." I'd get dressed, and I'd go down, and I'd give them change.

Interviewer: The bars were open all night?

Lila Terry: Yes. Till 5 in the morning. I'd give him the change. They knew me. I was a prude, believe it or not.

Interviewer: You were a what?

Lila Terry: Prude. Prude.

Interviewer: No kidding.

Lila Terry: Yes. My Roger, the bartender, would say to me, "You got a roll of pennies?" I said, "Well, what for? You mean I should hold it in my hand and maybe hit somebody if they bother me?" He said, "No, to give change." [laughs] I said, "Thank you." To give change.

Interviewer: [laughs]

Lila Terry: Anyway, Sonny's Bar was diagonally across the way. It's an Italian bar. He had a restaurant at a bar. They were also open late. Maybe it was 1 o'clock in the morning, 2 o'clock in the morning. I don't know. I had had a bar maid who had an apartment a couple blocks away and had a fight with her girlfriend in the apartment. They called the police, and the police came. This is second. Someone told me. She told me the story. When the cop said to her, "Look. Cut it out. Keep quiet. Shut up." As he went out the door, she took a foot and slammed the door behind him. He got furious.

Interviewer: The policeman.

Lila Terry: Policeman. He came back in, and he grabbed her arm, and he went this, and he broke her arm. She was suing him. Okay. It was a quite a year



later, because she didn't have the broken arm anymore. I went down with the change for Roger. I went across to see anybody if I knew in Sonny's. These two girls, the one bartender and her girlfriend at that time, they were arguing across the street in front of that hotel. I can't remember the name.

I went across the street, and I said, "Hey, girls. What's going on?" The girlfriend went like this and hit me. Well. What would I do, right? I hit her back. The next thing I knew, I feel a tap on my back. I look. He said, "Just stay where you are. You're under arrest." I said, "What for?" He said, "For fighting in the streets." I said, "Didn't you just see what happened? The girl hit me, and I hit her back." Well, he wanted to arrest her, because she was suing him for breaking her arm. He couldn't arrest two of them and not me. That would show a prejudice on his part.

He arrested the three of us. Well, my bartender came out of the Night Owl and saw me getting in a police car. She said, "There's Lila getting in the police car." She got one of the cops, and she said, "What are you doing with Lila in the police car?" He's, "She's arrested." "What do you mean arrested? What for?" "Fighting." "Lila, fighting? Lila? You sure?" Anyway, they took me down to — the jail at that time was on First Street on Miami Beach. Then they took me into Miami. They didn't mind letting me out at 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the morning.

I went down in the backyard of the police station. I didn't know where the heck I was. I called my daughter. She said, "Where are you? What are you calling me for?" "I'm in jail." [laughs] Anyway, my daughter came, and they picked me up, and they took me home. I woke up Jill. She said, "Why so long you were out giving change?" I said, "No. I was in jail." She said, "All right. Look. Where were you?" [laughs] I said, "I was in jail."

She said, "Look. No kidding around. It's too late. It's 3 o'clock in the morning. Okay?" I said, "No." I said, "I was in jail." They called me for about two or three months. "There's the jailbird. Open the door for her." [laughs]

Interviewer: No charges were filed, I presume.

Lila Terry: No. No. I asked the cop. I kept saying to him, "Why do I have to keep coming back every month?" I can't remember the name of the judge, like Rainwater. He was an Indian judge. He told them, "If she's found guilty of fighting in the streets, I'm going to give her three months in jail." I said, "How can it be three months for...? I wasn't fighting." He said, "Well. We're going to drop the case against you. Every month, I kept saying to him, 'Drop the case already.' Six months now or something." He dropped the case.

He eventually retired from the police station and worked in a big drugstore on Lincoln Road at the beginning of Washington Avenue. Private. I saw him in there. "Clyde." Hugged me. "How are you Lila? So sorry I had to arrest you. We're moving down to the Southwest. I want you to come and



visit me and my wife." Of course, I never did, but I did go in every time I went to the beach to see him at his job there. We became friendly.

Interviewer: What were your relationships like with the police, being a nightclub owner? What was that like?

Lila Terry: No problem. No problem, because I even said to him, "Please don't arrest me. I have a real estate license. You're not supposed to have been in jail with a real estate license." He didn't care about that.

Interviewer: You mentioned some famous people that came in. You said Sinatra used to come.

Lila Terry: Well, Sinatra came in before Jill bought the club. It was the lawyer, the man, who owned the club. I can't remember his name.

Interviewer: What was it called, the club?

Lila Terry: Oh, same thing. Night Owl and the Pinup. We called the center one the Middle Room. [laughs] That's what it was.

Interviewer: What went on in there?

Lila Terry: Pool tables. Two pool tables. Machines. What do you call them? Slot machines? What are they? Anyway. Then some couches that the gals would come in. You'll see pictures of girls sitting on red — about so big — couches. It was a nice place. It was for everyone. It was nobody in particular. Not for all men. Not for all women. I ran the Pinup. I didn't like to go in there sometimes, because they had a go-go guy, go-go naked. [laughs]

Interviewer: A guy?

Lila Terry: A guy. Yeah, because the Pinup was for men.

Interviewer: Men, whether they liked guys or whether they liked girls.

Lila Terry: They liked guys. They were gay guys.

Interviewer: I see. Okay.

Lila Terry: I go in. They knew I ran the place. I gave them the money for the register. The last guy that left the bartender, he stole all the money that last night he left. He went to Greece, I heard. He took the money that he made that night, and he took the bank. It was an old bar, and it wasn't anything fancy. It was a local bar. You felt comfortable there. You didn't have to worry what you were wearing or what you were saying.

They got go-go boys. I got one go-go boy who was 350 pounds. We have pictures. You'll see his picture. Then one, I said, was naked. When I came in, I went, "All right, fellas. [laughs] I'll see you later." I left. I really didn't want to go there. Sometimes I'd go in. I'd see them. No shirt on. I could



see them a lot going down to their shorts. I didn't need this.

Interviewer: What was a prude, as you described yourself, doing [crosstalk][30:32] in such a business?

Lila Terry: Well, I don't know. I had people that I used to know who used to watch pornography. I wouldn't watch pornography. That wasn't my bag. I wasn't an alcoholic where you saw me falling down on the floor, drunk. I didn't go that route. I didn't do drugs. I smoked pot. Everybody. I don't think there was anybody — if you didn't smoke at all, that was different, but everybody smoked pot in those years. One of the guys that was my customer came running in. He said, "Somebody threw out in the ocean bags and bags of pot."

He came in with a bag this size. I said, "What are you going to do with all that?" [laughs] He said, "I'm going to sell it." I said, "Okay. I'll take a pound." [laughs] I think I gave him \$25 for the pound. They separate it and put it in bags. Not to sell it, because I didn't sell drugs, but I kept it in my closet. When you open my closet, you went... [laughs] You got stoned just from the smell of the pot in the closet.

Interviewer: You approached this as a business. It was a place where people, as you said, could come in and relax and be themselves [crosstalk][32:10] and have a good time.

Lila Terry: Right. Right.

Interviewer: You didn't pass judgment on....

Lila Terry: Never. Never. We had quite a number of transsexuals. Beautiful. I worked the bar in the Middle Room. There was one transsexual who could have been a model. I knew he —

Interviewer: This was male to female?

Lila Terry: He was male. Looked like a woman. I mean, looked like a model woman. I know he had a wife and two children. Strange people came in and sat at the bar. I said to him, "How's your wife?" Now he looked like a woman, right? "My wife is fine." Then he would go, "What?" We would put them on.

Interviewer: You were playing with him.

Lila Terry: Yeah. We would put them on. For quite a long time, he came as my customer. One day he came in. He said, "Lila, I'm not going to be a drag queen anymore. I'm going back into my men's clothes. I'm going to go back to my wife and the kids." Not that he left her. He wasn't going to be gay anymore. I don't know whether he was actively gay. The fact that he wore ladies' clothes doesn't really tell you anything. In New York, I was gay. I was 15.

I'll take you in the bedroom, and I'll show you a picture. I worked at the Club 82. 82 Second Avenue. East Second Avenue in New York. It was a



Mafia place owned by Mafia. They had a one-hour drag show, and I was a waiter, because all the girls that worked the floor — there must have been 15 to 20 — were waiters, because we had men's pants, men's shirt. People that came in that were straight thought we were guys. It was a great job. It was a great job.

Interviewer: To you, this was just part of life.

Lila Terry: Yeah. Like I said, I was a prude most of my life. When I got married, that was my first boyfriend, my first sexual affair. I had never had privacy or had boyfriends or something. Unfortunately, [laughs] you know how they say, "The wife is the last one to know"? I found out years later than when I got married — I had eloped from the Catskills, because I went up there to be a photographer and worked for my ex-husband. Then, two days after we got married, he was off screwing other women. [laughs]

I didn't find out for 20 years later. I worked in a restaurant — and I had never worked in a restaurant before — on Sunset Drive, California. The waitresses used to sit around the table and chat. They would talk about their husbands. "He's out with this woman. He's out..." I said to them, "You know what? I don't know if you'll believe me. My husband would never go out with another woman." They said, "What are you, crazy?" I said, "I would cut off my arm. I know he is not interested in that." "All right, Lila." They thought I was nuts. I believed it for 20 years.

Interviewer: Then when you found out?

Lila Terry: I flipped. I flipped. Actually, he married a woman before I divorced him. One of the girls that I was friendly with tried to get him to trouble. I don't know who she wrote to. They weren't interested that he was married to somebody else while he was married to me. Anyway, I told him, I said, "I'm leaving you." Of course, I was married, at that time, maybe 24 years. I thought when I said to him, "I'm leaving you," he would say, "What do you mean you're leaving me?" He said, "Well, Lila, if that's what you have to do, you have to do what you have to do." "What?" Then I realized.

Interviewer: You had two kids with him.

Lila Terry: Three kids.

Interviewer: Three.

Lila Terry: I have two girls and a boy. Yes. I was shocked. I thought at least he would say, "Hey. We're married 24 years." Well, as I said, I was really prudish. I didn't know much about cheating. I was never a cheater. I wasn't even a cheater when I lived with Jill for 10 years. She's so much like him. People say you marry or go with someone that's almost the same kind of person.

Interviewer: What happened to the businesses in the end?

Lila Terry: Well, what happened was, when we had to move —



Interviewer: Because of the leaking ceiling?

Lila Terry: Yeah. We had to move. This is what I heard, that she sold the licenses to the Cocaine Cowboys. They were supposed to be in a bar next to Sonny's or something. I didn't know them. I didn't go there. I didn't want to get involved if it were true. We went into 22 Ocean Drive. We called it the Turf Pub.

Interviewer: The Turf Club?

Lila Terry: The Turn Pub. That was the name of it. A customer would come in and say, "A cop stopped us on the way down, because it's First Street and Ocean Drive and said, 'Where are you going?'" They said, "'Well, friends of ours are in the Turf Pub now.'" They said, 'Oh, you really shouldn't go there. This is a bad neighborhood. You ought to stay away.'" This is what the cops were saying.

Interviewer: Was it true?

Lila Terry: Well, I didn't think so. I didn't think it was a bad neighborhood. As a matter of fact, I was able to walk home from the bars on 24th Street and Collins 2 o'clock in the morning if I wanted to go home. Walk. There was nobody that was going to hit you over the head or rob you. Still, the little old ladies and men sometimes sat out on the porch of the hotels, because they came down for the winter months. It was a safe place.

Interviewer: This was before the Mariel Exodus from Cuba?

Lila Terry: Well, when the Mariel came in, they all found the Turf Pub. [laughs] They broke my windows. They took the pool balls. They were playing with it. If they had a fight, they'd throw them through the window. We had a hard time with them for a while.

Interviewer: Did you have to call the police a lot?

Lila Terry: No. You can't do that if you owned a bar. If I call the police on a bar that we owned, I'll make more trouble for myself. Eventually, we had very few customers. Then again, my ex-partner, well, she found somebody else and told me she was moving to their apartment, which was right across the street from the Turf Pub. I said to her, "It's okay with me. You can come tomorrow morning. You pack everything you have," because she was still living with me, "and move in with your friend, but I want you to know, when you do this, it will be the last time [laughs] we'll probably come into that apartment."

I only had a one-bedroom. My father didn't know I was gay. I don't think he understand, although he found a letter that I had from when I was a schoolgirl that someone wrote to me. He asked me. "I read your letter," he said. "I should have kept my pocketbook by my side when I went to sleep. I didn't." He said, "Who's the person that wrote that letter?" I said, "This nice Jewish boy wrote to me." He said, "No way." "What do you mean?" "Listen, Lila. If that were true, you'd have told me a long time ago. I think



it's a girl that wrote that letter to you."

What was I going to do, lie? Look at him and lie? You didn't lie to my father. My father was a lightweight champion boxer in England. Tough guy. Very strict with his two daughters. When everybody had to be home at 10:30 or 11, we had to be home at 10. Very strict man. He said, "If you go out with women from now on," and I can't remember what he said, and I don't like, even I think about it, repeating it, because when my father said that to me, it's something I never thought I'd hear my father say. Something like, "You want me to kill myself or something because you go out with women?"

I went into the bedroom when my mother was in bed. I was crying. She's, "What's the matter." I said, "Dad found out that I go out with girls." She said, "So?" My mother. My mother. Talk about naïve. I said, "Well, Ma. You know how some boys go with boys?" "Oh, I heard about things like that," she said. I said, "Well, but I go out with women." She said, "I've never heard of anything like that." [laughs] I said, "You haven't?" "No." I mean, and even if he told her, it didn't mean anything. [laughs] You know what I mean?

"Don't worry about it," she said. Of course, that didn't stop me, because on the weekends I went down to Greenwich Village. I loved to go down there. I took 50 cents with me, because that was my allowance.

Interviewer: You were 15, 16?

Lila Terry: Yeah. Yeah. I went to a club. I can't remember the name of the club now. I probably remembered it before we walked in. They used to say to me, "Are you of age?" I'd say, "Of course." Well, when March 15 came, and I became 18, the next day I was in the bar. They said to me, "Lila. Are you sure you're of age?" I said, "I could take out my," whatever I had, "identification and show you I'm 18." [laughs] That was the only time I could have proved I was of age to sit there and drink a beer.

Interviewer: They didn't ask for it.

Lila Terry: Nah. They didn't ask for it, because I was adamant. "Of course I'm of age." It was not a good feeling to say I'm of age.

Interviewer: When you came down to Miami, and after your mother died, your dad came down.

Lila Terry: No. They came down together.

Interviewer: They came together.

Lila Terry: She already had Alzheimer's.

Interviewer: Your mother did?

Lila Terry: Yes. Yes. It was difficult, because if you know anybody that had



Alzheimer's, he'd turn around, and she was gone. She was sitting in the lobby. I think First Street and Ocean Drive, there was a home for old people. He took her there, because that was closer for him to go. He never drove, never drove. In New York, you didn't need to drive. They had a bus. They had a train.

I was reading David Magazine. It said, "Anybody that was in the service that was discharged because they were gay would have an opportunity to come to — I think it was — Tampa and make an appointment at this number." Especially if you didn't do anything. She was in the Marines.

Interviewer: Your mother?

Lila Terry: No. My girlfriend.

Interviewer: Oh.

Lila Terry: My father had put my mother in this place on First Street and Ocean Drive, and my sister, Jill and I went to Tampa. She made an appointment. I didn't go into the room, but there were two or three people from the service, and she told a story how one day they came in and they said, "You, you, and you, you." They picked out a number of girls that they thought were gay, and they gave them a [crosstalk][46:10] discharge, but not a good....

Interviewer: Discharge? Dishonorable.

Lila Terry: Dishonorable discharge. She said for no reason that they came in. They chose me. She never found out about any of the other girls. They took away that dishonorable discharge and gave her an honorable one, and she was able to join the VA, which was important.

Interviewer: In treating her alcoholism.

Lila Terry: Well, she had a bad heart. They eventually gave her a bypass in the VA. Thanks to me, because I read the David Magazine and saw the ad and had a call and went up there with her.

Interviewer: Tell me about the David Magazine. Was that for gay people in Miami?

Lila Terry: Well, you see all the ads in David. There were a lot of other clubs that advertised there. I really don't know now. I haven't looked at this book since you told me you were interested, because it's been sitting on that shelf down there. [laughs] I live here six years. Maybe it's longer. I don't remember. I haven't opened the book and looked at it. I haven't looked at the book in a long time. There are a lot of memories there.

Interviewer: I want to ask you about.... You mentioned your job as a teenager in New York. You were working as a waiter dressed [crosstalk][47:43] in male....

Lila Terry: I was. In March, I would have been 18, and this was like January. I was two months younger than 18 at that time. Of course, I didn't tell the



people that I worked for that I was the woman.

Interviewer: My question, really, is about the Mafia. We know that the Mafia were around in Miami Beach.

Lila Terry: Well, the guy that owned that club was Mafia.

Interviewer: Which club?

Lila Terry: 82.

Interviewer: The one in New York.

Lila Terry: Yes.

Interviewer: What about Miami Beach?

Lila Terry: I knew nothing about Mafia people here. Nothing at all. You have to remember. I didn't have anything to do with men primarily. As a matter of fact, if you looked to flirt with me, you scared me. [laughs] I'm telling you I was naïve.

Interviewer: Well it looks like you were a pretty good-looking woman.

Lila Terry: Yes. As a matter of fact, I'll show you a picture of me in a bathing suit, that I didn't know I looked so good until someone looked at it once and said to me, "Wow. What legs you have." [laughs] I went, "Really?" [laughs] I'll show you. It's over there. Not even my ex-husband said to me, "You're a beautiful woman." I never asked anybody, "What do you think? Do I look good?" He never said anything like that to me. Jill also was just like him. I had many, many, many girlfriends here that I had.

Interviewer: Yet you lived for 22 years faithful to a man.

Lila Terry: Right. Also to Jill.

Interviewer: Would you consider yourself bisexual?

Lila Terry: No, because the only man I ever slept with was my husband. The only man.

Interviewer: It sounds like you really were in love with him.

Lila Terry: Well, I ask myself that question. I wasn't at first. I worked for him as a photographer in the Catskills in all the big, big hotels. I didn't know he liked young girls. I'm not going to say too much about that. Young girls. I'll just say it louder, so you understand. I had no idea. I was 18, and he was 29. I don't think I was in love with him, but he asked me to marry him every day that I worked for him.

He said to me, "I'm going to New York this weekend. Do you want to go



see your mother and father?" This is before we were married. I was just working for him as a photographer. I said, "Fine." I took him to meet my mother and father. My father said, "I don't like that guy." When I told him we got married, after I eloped, he wasn't happy about it at all. I did finally have a religious wedding on the Grand Concourse, if you're familiar with the Bronx. Had his family come and my family come.

Interviewer: Was he Jewish?

Lila Terry: Yes. As a matter of fact, standing face to face with him while he's holding the ring, and I suppose it was the rabbi. I fainted.

Interviewer: [laughs]

Lila Terry: [laughs] I fainted. I went down. My mother-in-law was a woman who had a man's voice. She screamed, "Stop taking pictures," because nobody took a picture of me fainting. [laughs] That would have been a great picture, right? When she first called when I was living in the Catskills, and I said to my ex-husband, "There's a guy on the phone wants to talk to you." [laughs] He got off the phone. He said, "That was my mother." [laughs] She was a horrible woman. A horrible woman.

I was living in an apartment. I had the three children, and he went out. I didn't know why, but he had business to do. She came into the room. I had an 11-room bedroom. She moved in with us, because they were tearing down apartments in the Bronx at that time and putting that big highway through. She said, "What are you standing by the window for?" I said, "Mom, I'm waiting for him to come home."

She said, "He's out with another woman." I knew she was a nasty person. When he came home, I said to him, "You know what your mother told me when I told her?" "Oh," he said. "You can't listen to what she says. She just tries to upset you." That's the kind of person she was.

Interviewer: She was telling you the truth.

Lila Terry: Yeah. She was telling me the truth. They knew. She knew. His sister knew. His father knew that he liked women, young women.

Interviewer: It was a marriage of convenience for him.

Lila Terry: For me. Yeah, and for me. I didn't know it was a convenience for him. I didn't find out till much later and couldn't believe it actually. It was something that I was stunned. It was just hard to believe. Finally, of course, I had to come around and face it, that whatever they said about him was true.

Interviewer: At what point, then, did you decide to move down here [crosstalk][54:00] in the marriage?

Lila Terry: I moved here in 19 —



Interviewer: You decided to come, right?

Lila Terry: Yes.

Interviewer: He said he would come.

Lila Terry: Yeah. He said he would come. We lived on 98th Street and Collins Avenue. My son was 13 years old, so I made a bar mitzvah. I only had three relatives there. My father's eldest brother and his wife, a couple people. I had met a lovely lady whose family owned restaurants. If I told her the name, you would probably know the name of the restaurant. I don't remember it anymore, the name. I met her because I was selling something. She said to me, "What do you do with yourself?" I said, "Well, I stay home. My ex-husband is busy working." He wasn't my ex-husband.

Interviewer: He wasn't ex [crosstalk][55:05] at that point.

Lila Terry: Yeah. Yeah. "He's in Arizona, or he's in California, and he's working here, there." He says, "Well, what do you do with yourself on the weekends?" I said, "I stay home." She said, "Well, my brothers belong to all the big clubs on Miami Beach." She said, "Why don't you go one weekend on a Saturday? We'll have a couple drinks." I said, "Yeah. I'd love it." We became nice friends. Really nice. She had a young boy who was dying of MS, I think. He died.

Interviewer: Is this what got you interested in the club scene maybe?

Lila Terry: No. I didn't know anything about the club scene at that time. I didn't know — my son told me — that when anybody came to visit him for the bar mitzvah and handed him an envelope, my ex-husband was right behind him to take the envelope. I said to him last year, "I didn't know that. You never told me." He said, "Well, I thought you knew." I said, "I didn't get any of the money." Anyway, I call up. He goes back out of town.

That weekend, I call my friend on the phone. I said, "You going out Saturday night?" She said, "No, no, no, no. I'm not going this Saturday night." "Okay," I said. "I'll talk to you tomorrow or the next day." I called her again. She was very evasive. I called the following week. "You going out this Saturday night?" "No, no, no. We're not going." I said to my aunt — my aunt bought her an apartment in the building also, on Fifth Street. She said to me, "You didn't see your husband flirting with her?" "No," because she was a single woman.

Interviewer: Ah.

Lila Terry: She said, "You didn't see the two of them making eyes at each other?" "No." What did I know? I never saw her again. She slept with him. I don't know how long she had an affair with him. Never called me on the phone. We never went out again. Only — I don't know how much more — a year later, when my aunt said to me, "Didn't you see them making out?" I realized why we weren't friends any longer.



Interviewer: What do you think of the beach now? Do you ever [crosstalk][57:30] go over there?

Lila Terry: Well....

Interviewer: Have you ever? I know you've been ill, but....

Lila Terry: Well, I moved here six years ago, and I bought a condo in Davie. Jill had the heart attack and had the bypass and wanted to come live back in the apartment. I wouldn't let her. She said to me, "I'm leaving the hospital tomorrow. Can I stay in your apartment?" I said, "Okay." I felt bad. When she came in — it was a one-bedroom — she saw on the couch a pillow, a sheet, a blanket. She said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, you have to sleep someplace, don't you?" She said, "I'm going to sleep there?" I said, "Yes. You don't remember once what we talked about?"

I said, "You'll never sleep in my bed again," right? "That's where you'll sleep." She called a friend up, and a friend said, "You can come stay in my place for a month, whatever." I worked in the Lido Spa. Have you heard of the Lido Spa? We worked there winter, when people came down, and we had a dress shop on the first floor up. We had a jewelry shop on the ground floor. I was there maybe two years, and this was the second year. Naturally, I took Jill with me, and she didn't show up for work. That was not like Jill. I called my daughter. I said, "Can you find out? Maybe call hospitals."

Sure enough, she had had another heart attack. I knew that I couldn't stay open with the two shops any longer, because it took two people. I had to close the Lido Spa. She went to live with the gal that was the bookkeeper for that place. She'd call me on the phone. She'd say to me, "Get your ass over here, and bring me \$200." I said, "What do you need \$200 for?" She said, "Car broke down. I put it in, and that's what it cost." I felt bad, because she had had the heart attack and bypass. I went over with a friend of mine, Jack. I have a picture of Jack and I. We were friends 30-odd years. I slipped her the \$200. I didn't want anyone to see that she needed to take money from me.

A month or two later goes by. I get a phone call. I spoke to her previously. "Get your ass over here, and bring me \$250." I said, "Now what?" "The car broke down again." I said, "Okay." I took over the \$250. She said, "You know what? Remember Mary," she said, "that worked for us in the bar?" "Yeah." She said, "She bought a house in South Carolina from her sister," and she told me that a small house, two-bedroom, that I should come live there, and she'd rent me a room. She must have been getting Social Security. I don't know. I don't remember anymore.

She said, "I'm leaving Florida." She moved to South Carolina. I get a call from Mary. She said, "The VA is an hour away from my house. I live in the boondocks. Jill had another heart attack. She's in the hospital here." Through conversations, she told me she called her sister, who lived in Watertown, up near Canada. Watertown, New York. The doctor told her sister to come down. "Jill's very ill." Her sister came down. Her sister had



her husband and a couple children. She stayed a couple of weeks. She said to the doctor, "I can't stay here forever."

She went back home. I was in touch. I called Jill every day so she shouldn't feel lonely. After all, Mary couldn't come there every hour away. She said, "My sister's coming down again." The doctor called the sister and said, "It's time. This is it." The sister came down. A week later, she died and took her body back to Watertown. Her sister didn't talk to me. I didn't know her sister. There is a picture of standing in front of the Turf Pub with a woman and her daughter. They came down to see her on the beach. I believe I'm in the picture.

Other than that, we weren't friends-friends. I know [laughs] I said to Jill one day, "Where's your sister?" because she came down to see her. "Oh. I introduced her to Joe Blow, and they're spending the night together." I said, "Your sister was married, right?" She said, "Yeah." "She's spending the night with Joe?" "Yeah. How would her husband find out? He lives all the way up there near Canada." "Okay." [laughs] You know what I mean? [laughs]

Interviewer: I want to —

Lila Terry: Someone introduced me to Jill.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Lila Terry: I had a migraine when I met her, because I two migraines in my lifetime, and each one was three weeks of migraine. She introduced me. "Come. I want you to meet my friend, Jill." She said that she worked in a bar on Alton Road called the Mayfair. I went over. There were no customers. It was the daytime. I got friendly with Jill. She said, "I own this bar, a couple of bars." We started to go out.

Interviewer: Was that the time that you became interested in that as a business, is meeting her? Was that sort of the catalyst for that?

Lila Terry: For the bars, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, [crosstalk][64:18] for the bars.

Lila Terry: Yeah, for the bars.

Interviewer: She was central to....

Lila Terry: She couldn't handle the bar. The partner decided that she found a girlfriend, and they were moving up into Rhode Island together. Now she needed to buy the half of the business. She called her up in the middle of the night, and she said, "I want you to sell Lila half." That bothered Carrie — her name was — for her to call in the middle of the night. She said, "I'm not going to do anything you ask."

She told me, "I'm buying the half." I think the whole thing must have been



\$8,000 for half of the business. She said, "But you and I will have half." She moved into the condo. Of course, I paid everything. I paid for the mortgage. I paid for the food. I paid electric. I paid telephone. I paid everything.

Interviewer: You said you had regular customers.

Lila Terry: Yes.

Interviewer: Anybody famous who's dead now you can tell?

Lila Terry: No. Oh, yes. You'll see a picture there of what's-his-name. [laughs] His name is on the picture.

Interviewer: Tennessee Williams?

Lila Terry: No. No. No. No. None of the names I've heard before. No. This is a comedian. In the group of us, his name is there. I can't think of his name right now.

Interviewer: We'll take a picture of it.

Lila Terry: You'll see the picture. I gave you all the pictures, all the drag queens.

Interviewer: Did you go out to other bars? You said you would go to one across the street [crosstalk][66:05] to see who was there.

Lila Terry: Yes. We did. We go to one across the street.

Interviewer: Was there kind of an underground nightlife for gay people? Was it underground? Was it aboveground? Was it just accepted?

Lila Terry: I can't remember. One Halloween, they changed the laws. We had to wear three items of women's clothing. I always made sure I had on a bra, panties, and I don't know what the other third thing.

Interviewer: What was the law?

Lila Terry: You had to wear three items of women's clothes. I know New York, also, because when I worked at the 82 Club — 82 East Second Avenue — I always made sure I had three items on me, because I...

Interviewer: Why was that?

Lila Terry: Well, I don't know. The law came out Halloween that men could wear ladies' clothes, and they wouldn't arrest them. I went to the Mayflower. One of the gay guys that I know — quite friendly with him. I go into the Mayflower, and there's this gal. Tall. Six feet, probably. Gorgeous dress. "Hello, Lila." "Hi. You're who?" It was this guy that I know, but I couldn't recognize him with the makeup and the dress. I said, "You look fantastic." He said, "Yes. I'm allowed to now walk on Miami Beach in ladies' clothes without being arrested." There must have been a law there as well.



Interviewer: This was about what time? You said '70s? Late '60s?

Lila Terry: In the '70s. No. No. I came in '69.

Interviewer: Did you get a sense that it was starting to become acceptable, or was Miami Beach the exception?

Lila Terry: Across the street from — I don't remember what street I was on. They were tearing down the building. On the side of the wall of the building that was left was a huge sign, larger than the size of the TV, "No Jews or animals allowed." All right? I found cards when Jack stayed in a hotel that had information as to how much the rooms were renting for. "No Jews or animals allowed." I gave it to an organization — like yourself, it must have been. They were happy to get it. At that time, even though it was the '70s, that must have been 15 years prior that he had found it.

He worked behind the desk in the hotel. I forgot the name of the hotel. He found a couple of those advertisements, and I gave it to.... Because to me, it was a waste for me to keep it. To whoever had it, old items like you're looking for, they also wanted. They didn't have one that ever said, "No Jews and dogs allowed." They were happy to get that card, because it was a very well-known hotel. It was a small one. Then, of course, when I was there, that wasn't the truth any longer, because most of Ocean Drive was Jewish people coming for the winter, see?

I always said, "I could walk 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the morning, go home, from 22nd Street to Fifth Street, and not one of those Jewish people would come out and hit me over the head and steal my wallet." [laughs] I have no worry of walking home at that hour. Never entered my head.