

Interviewer: John Kearns

Interviewee: Frank Constantino

Interview Date: 2002-03-16

Description: Interview with Frank Constantino where he discusses his life in Dobbs Ferry, his relationship with Sylvia Rivera, and with his brother.

Audio File Name: Center_Kearns_3

Audio File Length: 12:10

Date Transcription Completed: 2023-03-02

Disclaimer: This transcription omits vocal fillers (e.g., “um” and “like”) for clarity and flow. Sensitive and/or personal information has been redacted.

[00:00:07]	Interviewer	Alright, I'm with Frank, what's your last name?
[00:00:13]	Constantino	Constantino.
[00:00:13]	Interviewer	Constantino and it's March 16th, 2002 in Terrytown. This is the second tape, this will help me so I don't confuse myself.
[00:00:21]	Constantino	Continuation!
[00:00:23]	Interviewer	Yeah, so is that when you decided to look up your brother again?
[00:00:26]	Constantino	No. Well, no he did. Because that's why he helped me out. So what happened was, believe it or not, I made a deal with him. I said "The deal goes like this: you get me out of this and I swear I'll never touch stuff again." You know, because I was really getting tired of it back then, but you blow all your money all in one night and it's like, well now you're high. Now what? Where's the career in this? And he kept telling me "You got to do something quick because I'm getting tired of this." So I turned back a week later, coming out of a job on another Saturday and one of the cooks at my job there, cooking a duck sauce and everything he says, "You got a brother?" and I said "Yeah" and I said "Why?". "Well, some guy came asking for you" but see this is a Spanish guy and he sees anyone American he goes "That's your brother" so I paid it no mind, so I go "yeah, yeah, yeah." So, a little while later I went out for a cigarette and I see this guy blowing a horn, sure enough it was my brother sitting in the car. I hadn't seen him in five years. I told him my situation that I was on the street and I just got off the drugs. But he helped me out and said "Well, I can help you out but I can't help you find a job. Well and I got this other thing. I have a cat, can you deal with that?" and well I'll take it. He says "On one condition, you don't look back 'cause it will haunt you for the rest of your days," because he was into crack back in the day.
[00:02:20]	Interviewer	He was?
[00:02:21]	Constantino	Yeah. He stopped so,
[00:02:25]	Interviewer	He did?
[00:02:26]	Constantino	Yeah cause he almost OD'd, almost stopped his heart a couple of times. And so I'm like, wow. So, he hooked me up in his basement and he lives in Dobbs Ferry. He is a caretaker and he lives in a mansion but he takes care of everything and he lives there rent-free. He kind of hid me down in the basement in a women's club.

[00:03:01]	Interviewer	Really?
[00:03:02]	Constantino	Yeah, it's funny
[00:03:04]	Interviewer	Like a country club kind of place?
[00:03:05]	Constantino	No, just a bunch of old ladies run it and they own it. But it's funny because when I used to get up for work I took a cab from the train station sometimes and I said "ah there's the women's club" and the guys looks at me and goes "Wow you're a lucky guy you're a man and you live in a women's club" and the youngest lady is 65 and he goes "oh, okay" no getting excited over it. But--
[00:03:35]	Interviewer	So then you found your own place after a while?
[00:03:37]	Constantino	Yeah, cause he said "I'm not gonna charge you any rent because I want you to save your money for your own place." And eventually I did because he gave me a deadline because he was going on vacation with the family, he's married and he's got two daughters.
[00:03:54]	Interviewer	Oh really? Oh okay
[00:03:55]	Constantino	Yeah.
[00:03:56]	Interviewer	And they all live together in that place?
[00:03:57]	Constantino	Yeah
[00:03:58]	Interviewer	Oh nice.
[00:03:59]	Constantino	Oh yeah. Great kids, great family, it's really good. And, so he explained to me "Hey look I'm going on vacation I'm taking them to Virginia for a week" and I'm not supposed to be here anyways and he says "I can't count on these old ladies coming downstairs and if they see you there I'm going to be in trouble, so you're gonna have to find another place within 10 days." and it's like the last day and this one place that I got, I finally got and it was a tiny little place, a little studio but it was exactly what I asked for. [unclear] I'm not asking for much. Just give me a kitchen, bathroom, and a place to sleep and I'll be fine. I get to keep my cat and she has a yard to play in and everything.
[00:04:56]	Interviewer	And how many years ago did this happen?
[00:04:57]	Constantino	I'd say about 5.
[00:04:59]	Interviewer	5 years ago? Okay

[00:05:01]	Constantino	And we've been there ever since. So it was funny because the guy heard that the landlord kept showing it to people and they would said "it's so small" and people got turned off but for me it was perfect. The guy said "I'll take it!" At first I called him up and he said "well, I don't know" but I'm like "Look, the place I'm at now I gotta be out by tomorrow." and the guy is like "I don't know" and I say "I got cash money, I'll see you in ten minutes." I had \$800 for him there, no I had \$1,000. [unclear]
[00:05:53]	Interviewer	So do you just commute back and forth on the train everyday?
[00:05:55]	Constantino	Yeah
[00:05:56]	Interviewer	So that's not that bad.
[00:05:57]	Constantino	So then when I found that place because he was saying "I hope you're looking for a place in Dobb's Ferry, it's too high priced over here," you know which he was right and when I told him I found this place he said "How much?" and I said "\$350 a month, utilities included" and that's a steal. He said "Oh I got to see this in Dobbs Ferry." and he's a painter, he's a carpenter. So he said "you need any work done, you know"... it's all paneling and wall to wall carpeting.
[00:06:31]	Interviewer	So it was all set for you?
[00:06:33]	Constantino	Yeah, it was great.
[00:06:37]	Interviewer	That is great. So your life right now is pretty stable?
[00:06:39]	Constantino	Yeah.
[00:06:40]	Interviewer	Oh that's good.
[00:06:41]	Constantino	And what's funny because when Sylvia came up she's like "Oh this is great you got to give me your keys" and "I don't think so." and she "What do you mean no!" and I was "No no I'm through with that." [unclear]
[00:06:55]	Interviewer	What did she want the keys for, is she gonna come on the weekends on her own?
[00:06:57]	Constantino	Yeah she said "Why?" and I said "No honey I'm through with that shit." and she "With what?" and I said "Coming home to a house full of people with cans and shit all over the house with my money missing or something asking who took my money" and someone saying "I don't know, oh by the way what's your name again?" and I'm like, you know you got people in the house and you don't even know their name. I said "No, no, no. Look, you just call, I'll be there. Just call, come up."

[00:07:30]	Interviewer	But it was also nice you got to know Julia too.
[00:07:33]	Constantino	Yeah I was very impressed with that. It was funny because Julia touched me. They lucked out, I looked to Sylvia and say “You didn’t go that way,” and she says “Yeah, I know” and I go “Are you happy?” and she says “Yeah” so who cares, that’s all. And, yeah Julia is alright. As long as it makes her happy. She was, she really was.
[00:08:04]	Interviewer	Yeah, I hope she’s alright.
[00:08:07]	Constantino	Yeah. I felt really bad for her, Julia though. At the service, I can understand why she got upset, the way she spoke the way she did “it’s kind of hard to love somebody when they die on you.” But actually what she was saying, I know what she was saying actually but because you figure everybody who spoke on her behalf knew her for a lot of years and Julia just started to know her and it’s kind of like geez, I got my lover that I barely even know but everyone else knows her. But she got a prize there, she got a good deal on that. A really good deal, because she stopped drinking.
[00:09:01]	Interviewer	So I’m sure it was a lot easier.
[00:09:02]	Constantino	You know I used to tease her when she used to call me up all the time and Julia and her used to go to functions and rallies, and I would say “Let me guess, you want to go to jail” “Of course you wanted to go” “You got to go to jail, otherwise there is no purpose to even be.” That’s the way she was, “We made a difference! Let’s go” [unclear] but that is the way she was.
[00:09:33]	Interviewer	Did she ever end up in jail up here for trouble making?
[00:09:36]	Constantino	No.
[00:09:36]	Interviewer	That’s good.
[00:09:40]	Constantino	And that was one thing where she got a lot of respect from a lot of straight people because she never hit on nobody and there was that one time I called them at the house that impressed me, I got off of work and I’d always met her at the bar. The bartender asked her if she wanted another drink and she said “Yeah, I’ll take it, another beer but leave the bottle,” but the bottle is empty but she said “leave the bottle, give me another beer just leave the bottle.” and I look at her “the bottle is empty, what the hell do you want” and she “just leave the bottle.” Okay, leave the bottle. No problem. And it turned out, I found out why, it was because there was some guy stirring up some stuff down at the end of the bar “faggot this faggot... throw them out of here. [unclear]” She never

		bothered no body, she just listened to it and listened to it and say nothing, and I guess the guy felt a little frisky or something and felt that Sylvia wasn't going to do anything and was gonna be a scared little rabbit so he made his move and walked over there, to Sylvia, and went to go say something or put his hands on her. And she took the bottle on the bar and turned to him "you got a problem?" and he wasn't ready for that and they became best friends after that. They got a lot of shit-
[00:11:15]	Interviewer	Really?
[00:11:17]	Constantino	Yeah. And she looks to me and says "Now you understand [unclear]." Yeah she was pretty aware of things. Not too much got by her. This might be our train, no? No, I think this is express. What time is it?
[00:11:52]	Interviewer	5:43
[00:11:53]	Constantino	No, no this is express. Well if you want to take this one.
[00:11:57]	Interviewer	This takes me to Manhattan?
[00:11:58]	Constantino	Huh?
[00:11:59]	Interviewer	This will take me to Grand Central?
[00:12:01]	Constantino	Yeah, you wanna take this one now? I can't take it.
[00:12:05]	Interviewer	Yeah alright I'll take it. Alright?
[00:12:06]	Constantino	Alright.
[00:12:07]	Interviewer	Alright and can I call you if anything else comes up?