



Oral History Interview of Viola Johnson
by Sarah Humble

June, 2010
Atlanta, GA
At SouthEast LeatherFest (SELF)

Please note that these transcriptions are unedited. As oral history they represent the speakers' remembrance of past events. Please excuse typos and errors. The original tape recording is part of the collection of the Leather Archive and Museum, Chicago, IL. © Leather Archives & Museum

Key words:

odalisque, algolagnist, blood fetishism, vampirism, psychic, mentoring, "leather generation," 12th Night, New York, New Jersey, Oklahoma,

Organizations/Events:

Montclair State, Eulenspiegel, 12th Night, SELF (SouthEast LeatherFest), Black BEAT (Black Expressions Alternative Tastes), Frolicon, Screw Magazine, The Village Voice

People:

Jill Carter, Jack, Tom & Jerry McNicoll (sp?)

Summary:

Vi engaged in this interview when she was 58 years old. She was born in New York City and grew up in Roselle, New Jersey. The interview begins with Vi explaining why her mother is her hero, and how she self identifies as an "algolagnistic odalisque," a pain-lusting female slave often (though not always) used for sexual purposes. The pain she receives often brings joy, but it does not always result in "getting off" sexually. She then relates her first S/M experience, which occurred in 1973 with her current partner Jill Carter. At the

time they met, Jill worked for her as a Resident Assistant (R.A.) at the college; they became friends at a time when Vi was engaged to two different men. One night, after one of Vi's boyfriends left money on the desk for Vi to buy "something pretty", Jill stopped by Vi's room, saw the money, and spontaneously enacted a "pimp scene" with her. They have now been together for over 37 years. Her identification as kinky/leather evolved from there. Vi discusses how, prior to this, she had never had sexual fantasies before. Through engaging in and embracing Jill's fantasies, Vi began to get in touch with sexual fantasy. By the late 1970s she began to write erotica and fantasies, and, by the early 1980s, she had published erotica.

She proceeds to elaborate on her meeting and relationship with Jill in graduate school while Vi was a housing director and Jill was a R.A. at Montclair State University. Vi grew up poor and, as an education undergraduate at Rider College (now Rider University, New Jersey), worked in housing on campus. While applying to graduate school (in education/student personnel), Montclair was looking for graduate assistants who already had experience in housing, and Vi's supervisor recommended her for the position. She was given a scholarship to work as a housing director for the campus house where Jill resided.

Within the larger context, Vi and Jill met and were attending graduate school during the radical 1970s during the era of Black Power and campus liberation movements--Jill was heavily involved in the politics and, because of her actions, perceived as a "thorn" in the side of Dean of Women. At the time, Montclair had been a predominantly white school that suddenly had a large influx of students of color on campus. Vi's job was to look after over 200 students in her housing unit, and she was charged with keeping an eye on Jill--the one particular student and R.A. whose political activities created stress upon administration. Vi then explains how she and Jill became involved in the Leather SM scene. She discusses how, in 1974, she and Jill visited an adult bookstore in New Brunswick (something Vi notes was rare for women of that era), where they found a Screw Magazine and a Village Voice. It was in the back of the Voice where they found a one-inch ad for the Village People (Eulenspiegel Society).

She recounts how, after many discussions, Vi and Jill decided to attend their first SM meeting in New York.

[NOTE at the 16:26 time mark, this interview disc now freezes and stops. The information below is a portion of the interview one volunteer was able to retrieve; however, as of July 27, 2012, the disc will not allow viewers any further. ~Christina]

She recounts their first meeting in New York where they met a man named Jack, who became a mentor and guide. Then she discusses her blood fetishism and introduction to the practice at age 17 through a family friend, a warlock named Alan enlisted by her mother to mentor her in magical arts. This segues into discussion of Vi's own mentoring history, the differences between "leather generations" in the 70's and today, the origins of her legendary "12th Night" parties, and why her three favorite events are SELF, Black BEAT, and Frolicon.