SANTES Episode 3: Joss Barton

Chapter 1: Intro

[match strikes]
[solemn acoustic guitar]
♪♪

[long exhalation]

STORMMIGUEL (SMF): Hey, everyone. Welcome to Santes episode three. Santes is a podcast for future ancestors. I'm StormMiguel Florez.

LUNA: And I'm Luna Merbruja. Before we get into today's episode, we wanted to take a moment to talk about a few of the beautiful new ancestors who passed last year in 2025, including Miss Major, Alice Wong, Patty Berne, Assata Shakur, Lilac Maldonado, and Bianca Beyrouti, just to name a few.

SMF (takes a deep breath): Thank you, Luna. And as I personally grieve these comrades, friends, and familia, some who died much too young, I've been thinking about how all of these beautiful complex individuals, who are our modern day freedom fighters, have made the world more possible for us all. Even when things seem so impossible and when things are so dangerous. The danger is not new. We know that. It's a long haul, and we now have these incredible powerful comrades on the other side. I like to think of them together as a force of warriors who are no longer bound by bodies, laws, or doubts. A serious force to be reckoned with.

I also wanna acknowledge my dear dog, Beso, who passed on December 30. He was a handsome legend who loved butts and pets from strangers. I think he got that from me. So may Beso enjoy head scratches and all the butts he desires on the other side. He's got me thinking about the power of our animal ancestors as well.

LUNA: Absolutely. We have a lot of spiritual power we can tap into. And I appreciate you, our listeners, for holding space for our new ancestors in this new year. There is so much going on in our community, both here at home in The States and internationally, that I can sense this year is going to need all the strength and solidarity to stand together for what's to come.

And on that note, I'm really excited to present a powerful poet and dear sister to the podcast, Joss Barton. She's a writer, journalist, spoken word performance artist who explores and documents queer and trans life, love, and liberation. Her work blends femme fever dreams over the soundtrack of the American Nightmare. I'm such a huge fan of Joss, and by the end of the episode, I know you will be too. Without further ado, let's welcome Joss.

SMF: And welcome all of you to Santes.

Chapter 2: Welcome Joss!

LUNA: Hey! Welcome, everyone. Hey, Joss. How are you?

STORMMIGUEL (SMF): Hey, Joss!

JOSS: Aww! Hi, StormMiguel! Hey, Luna! I'm doing great. Thank you for having me.

LUNA: Yes! Cheers to the mimosa. What are we all drinking today?

JOSS: I'm having a Prosecco mimosa, light orange juice.

LUNA: Love that.

SMF: I'm having a very jealous cup of water.

[laughter]

This water wants to be that mimosa.

LUNA: Yes. Also having a cold glass of water.

SMF: Let's get this party started with some ancestors. We're inviting each one of us to bring in, to call in an ancestor to be here with us in the space today, if they so choose to join us.

JOSS: I wanted to call in maybe two people, if that's okay. Wanted to call in Cecilia Gentili, who I had the immense honor and pleasure of meeting a couple times. Her work has always really resonated with me and such an icon and inspiration and someone that I think so many trans people for a long, long, long, long, long time will see as an ancestor. So I wanted to invoke Cecilia. And I also wanted to invoke Patrick Haggerty. If you don't know who Patrick Haggerty is, he was the front man of the long running art collective, Lavender Country.

SMF: Yes. Yes

JOSS: Which was a country western queer punk anarcho socialist (laughs) band. And he has the immense honor of being known as recording the first openly queer gay country album in the 1970s that was also the first record to also be played on public air waves, radio stations in the 70s. And I had the immense honor as well of being mentored by Patrick in the later years of his life. And so I wanted to invoke Patrick because I wouldn't be the artist I am today without meeting him and being ushered into his work and meeting so many queer and trans artists that he, you know, had such a gift of creating these ragtag little familia, like troops and bands and artist collectives. So I've met so many people across the country through him that are queer and trans artists and musicians and creatives and activists. So I want to invoke Patrick Haggerty today.

SMF: Mm. Yeah. Thank you.

LUNA: Beautiful. Thank you. Welcome Patrick. Welcome Cecilia.

SMF: Welcome Cecilia, welcome Patrick. Yeah. How about you Luna?

LUNA: Yes. I have some incense burning right now, so lots of smoke coming in. And right now the ancestor who's calling to me is Mark Aguhar, who's an artist who was based in Chicago. And I knew of their work via Tumblr back in the Tumblr days in the early 2010s and, she was just a fierce, incredible artist, visual artist, poet, just said all the things that was inappropriate to be saying at the time, very sex positive, very fat positive, and just informed my young becoming as an artist, because of how bold she was and just unashamed, unapologetic. And, yeah, I really feel her presence to this day. And she passed about, 2014, I believe. How about you, StormMiguel?

Chapter 3: How soon is too soon to call in the ancestors? Patrick Haggerty, the Crisco Disco Queen

SMF: I have a question first. What are y'all's thoughts on calling in ancestors who have passed recently? Like, is it too soon? I've been thinking about that a lot lately. I think about Dia de Muertos coming up, and I've heard some folks don't put people on their altar that have passed in the past year, and then some people do. What are you all's thoughts about that?

JOSS: I actually have a story about Patrick that kind of relates to this question.

LUNA & SMF (in unison): Mmmhm?

JOSS: Patrick actually passed on Halloween in, I believe it was 2003, Halloween night. And Patrick had been in like a coma, like after having a pretty serious heart attack and stroke. And basically as the few moments and weeks where he was able to be lucid and awake, basically he had told his husband, JB and the family that he wanted to just rest at home. He was, you know, being in a hospital bed to have open heart surgery and doctors just was not-- that wasn't part of the gig-- (chuckles) the last gig you know, as artists, that it wasn't a part of his last gig, he wanted to be at home.

And so as they were preparing for the end of life kind of weeks ahead, JB and the family started reaching out to very close artists that have been in his performance family for years. And then the news started trickling down to everyone that he was slowly leaving this plane. And when I found out it was a couple of days before Halloween, I finally got the message and Patrick knew people from all over the world. So obviously a lot of people flying in the last minute to say their goodbye wasn't technically feasible, but we were all told that JB was very welcoming and opening for people to call and at least talk to Patrick even though he wouldn't be able to really talk back because he was in and out of consciousness and pretty much in a medical induced coma. And so, you know, people were making their plans to say their goodbyes to Patrick over the phone and have those last few moments.

And I had just had Patrick and JB stay with me when I had first moved to Chicago. The summer I had moved to Chicago, they had come to do some vinyl recordings and studio sessions in Chicago with some of their close collaborators. And so they were recording in a studio in Logan Square for about a week. And similar to what I told you, Luna, like, anything for you, Patrick was like, "well, they wanna put us up in a hotel, but, you know, I'd rather just stay with you, girl." And I was like, okay, I have this, like, 80 year old, like, queer elder and his husband and one of their other band members with me in a small Chicago studio apartment (laughs) for a week. For a week!

LUNA: Wow.

[Joss cackles]

JOSS: And I had a bed. I had a bed and a couch. The couch could sleep me and the other studio musician, and I made sure JB and Patrick had the bed. But it was a week of, like, four people living in a tiny Chicago studio. But like I said, anything for Patrick. I was like, we do have an elevator in my building, but, you know, I live on the top floor and, you know, it is small, but Patrick wanted to stay there. So I said, sure. So I was pretty much the doll hotel, and the doll valet and concierge for Patrick for an entire week, and it was one of the most beautiful final moments I had with him in person. We talked. We laughed. Oh my god. I might cry because I'm just thinking about, like, his final rants and raves and his (laughs) his rails against the system.

Whoo, okay, so that was my last in person physical moments with him. And that was the first summer I had moved there. And then fast forward, he declined pretty rapidly. 'Cause he went on tour. He was doing some shows after he left Chicago and he had that heart attack.

And so by Halloween, he was moving on to the next, the final next transition, right on this experience that we all share. And so I made plans to call JB, his husband, and JB was so happy to hear from me. He's like, "I really truly believe that he hears everyone that is calling, but he probably won't be able to-- he's probably not going to speak or say anything. He's pretty much, you know, in and out of it. And the few times he does have these little moments, he's not really awake. He's just kind of like, the body is like reaching out for some sort of comfort." So JB put the phone up to Patrick and I said my thanks. I said, "Thank you for creating the work that you created because it literally changed the world. Thank you for raising so many of us into this work. Thank you for teaching me how to be an artist, teaching me how to be a radical artist, teaching me how to stand in my principles of who I am and what I won't compromise on." So you know, I just said my thank yous.

It was a really touching and beautiful and private moment between us. And JB was like, you know, Patrick was making some movements and noises during my conversation to him and I kind of felt like maybe that was a little bit of him trying to say thank you back or you know acknowledging it. And this was Halloween. And Chicago, if anyone's been to Chicago, Halloween is a... it's a moment in Chicago.

LUNA: Right. Yes.

[laughter]

JOSS: So, Chicago is the city of house music, and so there is this long running house music, queer dance party called "Queen" that happens in Chicago. And so I'm having this moment with him before I am going to this party. So I have my moment with Patrick and I tell JB I love him too and I tell JB thank you for sharing Patrick with us and, you know, we have our moment and, you know, we hang up the phone and then I go to the party. In my mind, I'm like, you know, Patrick was a communist socialist hippie. (laughs) You know, like, you know, gay cowboy, queer cowboy, like, that grew up in the 70s and, you know, the 80s. So, you know, Patrick partied. Patrick had a lot of party life you know like so in my mind I was like you know I'm gonna do Patrick justice and like just really revel in my queerness and my transness tonight and try to have those moments. I am in the front of this DJ booth, in front of the stage, in front of these speakers, and like and yes, I am on a little-- I am on some what you may call 'candies.'

[laughter]

I have my candies. You know, I'm opening my portal, in the way that I do.

[laughter]

And the music is sickening and it's fabulous and I'm just dancing. When I am in nightlife and at club scenes and at raves, I definitely love having the music take control of me. But, like, there's always a sense of me being, like, in the room with it. But when I tell you, and I've never felt this moment before and I've never felt it since. But I was thinking of Patrick in this moment being surrounded by so much, like, blatant, brazen, filthy queerness. (laughing) Lots of horny gay men around me. Lots of naked dolls. Like, you know, like, that filthy queer joy, which we you know, it's not for everyone, but it's for me. (cackles) It's not everyone's tea, but it's my tea. And I know Patrick had lived that life too, you know, coming up in the 70s, you know, with the queer sexual revolution.

SMF: Crisco Disco, baby.

JOSS: CRISCO!! YESS!! And if you had ever talked to Patrick and heard Patrick's stories, some of the most beautiful and most poignant, you know, stories he would tell would be, like, what it was like losing so many of his friends and his lovers to AIDS. And how, of course that's a very sad story, but I think really the nuance of some of the things he was saying was like, there was so much possibility in those moments where they were really like being set free from these shackles of puritanism (laughs) that had been imposed on them for so long and really like stepping into so much queer sexual liberation. So like I'm in this moment, I'm dancing, I'm kind of thinking of Patrick and I'm just like you know, just like really kind of like holding space for him in this moment and I feel a presence enter me. It's like, I feel something come into me.

LUNA: Yeah.

JOSS: And I'm high and I'm dancing, and I'm dancing hard and I'm in heels. I'm in pleaser heels and I'm half naked but like I'm dancing, I'm feeling the music and I feel this thing enter me and I don't know what-- at first I'm like what? And then it's like, okay. And I just like something just tells me just to let it let it take over and just let go. And I didn't know it at the time, but Patrick had passed in the middle of the night, like early in the early morning hours of Halloween night. And this is the early morning hours of Halloween night. And I just let this thing in me and it just took complete control. And like I said, I've had these moments of being possessed by the music and possessed by queer spirituality. But like I said, I always feel like I'm kinda I'm still in the room with it. Like, I'm still-- I'm still, dancing with it, but this was the one and only time I feel like I was not there. It was completely embodying me, and it felt like maybe-- it really felt like it was in me for like probably a good 20 minutes, but it probably, let's keep it real, it was probably like a quick two minutes,

[laughter]

but it felt so much longer. And as easily as it came into me, it slipped right back out. And I kind of had this moment of clarity. I said, "I think that was Patrick!" I was like-- was that Patrick? I was like, I don't know. But it felt like-- it felt very familiar and I felt like maybe it was Patrick.

And I went throughout the rest of my night early into the morning, the party ends at 5AM and then after party, and people are still up and like into that next day, that's when we found out Patrick had passed overnight. And I really felt like that was Patrick. And I feel like she was a Crisco Disco Queen and I feel like if anything-- and she knew I was a party girl, she knew I was a disco queen too and that was one of the things that really like bonded us was our love for like just like dance music and like queer revelry and I felt like maybe if that was a way for her to experience one last like disco, I just felt so honored that she chose me as a vessel.

[laughter]

So to answer your question, I think it really depends. It depends and I feel like when our ancestors are in that space of being here with us and also not here with us, this liminal space of coming into something, bursting out of this cocoon that we are in here, and into something else, I feel like there's a lot of freedom that they have. And I feel that, you know, whether they're in that process of passing or right after they pass, like, I think it really kinda depends on the ancestor. You know. Do they wanna experience one last thing? Do they want-- do they have one last thing to tell us, teach us?

SMF: Yeah.

JOSS: You know, or are they still ready to get into that next space? So I don't-- I personally don't think it's a problem or an issue and I think it's very appropriate. I think it really depends on the ancestor, if they want to stick around for a little bit longer to just, you know, to have that, like, invocation or not. So that would be how I would kinda frame that question.

Chapter 4: Bless Your Vessel – Allowing them in? Or nah?

LUNA: Bless your vessel, Joss. Honestly, like, you were the party container, and Patrick was like, let me live it up one last time.

JOSS: One last time!

[laughter]

And that was so serious, like, 'cause some of our favorite conversations was us just dishing and gabbing and kikiing and gossiping, and a lot of it was about sex, you know and what it was like being in the 70s. You know, but like one of the things that I loved about Patrick was Patrick was very much like, although she loved to tell those stories, she wasn't someone that was like, "oh, we had it so much better." She knew what the kids were doing. And she had lived through very, very multiple generations of children. Gen x, you know, the millennials, now Gen z. So she had seen how queer youth finds a way to express itself. And so she never had that superiority complex. He never had that superiority complex. He just loved that we were still doing it. He loved that queer people were still finding a way to celebrate themselves and their bodies and their sexuality and their spirituality, whether it be through performance or dance or fucking shit up with activism. So I really feel like, I mean, that's just-- I don't have any tangible proof, but I really feel like, you know, she was a Crisco Disco Queen, and I feel like she would have wanted one last twirl on the dance floor.

LUNA: Yes.

SMF: Mhmm.

LUNA: I love that 'cause I-- one of my things about, thinking of ancestors and honoring them is honoring them as the people they were when they were alive and not just creating them as these holier than thou images that didn't have sex and never did drugs and played by the rules and like, no! They... some of them were filthy. Some of them were complicated.

[cackling]

Some of them were messy as fuck.

JOSS: MESSY AS FUCK!

LUNA: Some of them have some exes that never wanna fucking talk to them again. You know what I mean? Like, some of them have some complicated lives, and I'm not here to judge that. You know what I mean? Like, I am here to honor them as the whole being that they are. And I've had some sexual experiences where I feel like I've left my body and something else came in, and like whoever that bitch was that came in was having a field day and I was like, go for it.

[clapping]

Like, this is your turn. Enjoy this like fleshy body as yours. So that experience you were saying, I was just like in my mind imagining it, feeling it, and like so blessed that like our physical bodies can contain more than just our own spirit. And I think that when we talk about ancestors we talk about them as if they're like these ghosts in the room but that they don't ever like come in contact with us. When I think there's much more of an exchange that happens because like we have these out of body experiences all the time with sex or otherwise, right? But we have these out of body experiences when we're extremely joyful or proud or when we do an art project and, like, we have these moments where, like, the ancestors are blessing us and they're in our vessel. They're in our vessel sometimes writing the words onto the page. Sometimes they're making the music that we play. You know what I mean?

JOSS: Yes.

LUNA: So I feel like it's such an honor when I'm able to let go and let them in to be able to have a little fleshy experience for whatever their their purposes are. (laughs) So thank you so much for sharing that, Joss. And hi, Patrick. I hope you're enjoying this. I think this is such a beautiful honoring of their legacy. Like, feel like I know this person from that story, and it's so great to know there's other sexy ancestral sluts out there who are just living it up. I just need to know that. Okay? Because I don't know many. So I have Patrick on the list, and I'm putting that on the altar now.

[laughter and snaps]

SMF: Wow, y'all are just like, just vessels, like, I had never even considered, like, I'm like, all protective of my-- I'm like, nah, you stay over here, arms length. I love you. You can show up in my dreams. That's where I generally I think, have the most profound interactions with ancestors. That's when I know. That's when I know there's been a visitation. You can tell, right? The dream might just be very kind of-- they're out there somewhere, but then there's these dreams you're like, no, you came and visited. I felt you. You were you. We had a conversation, or you just looked at me a certain way.

I think the person that I've had that the most with is my dad. Like, full on hugs where I'm just like, oh, I just need to hug you. And I get these big, just warm, beautiful hugs from my dad. So sure. I'll invite my dad today, Joe, and then I'm gonna invite my little cousin, Denise. She was six, and I was eight when she passed. She was this badass little butch boss of me.

So one of the ways that I've gotten to work with her recently is I wrote a script, and I created a character who's an older butch dyke who's also the cousin of the character that's after me, and I named her Dee. And so Denise is one that I've just, like, interacted with a lot. That one would be more conversational. I don't have as many dreams about Denise. But yeah. So I'm inviting Denise and Joe today. And I was asking that because I've had recent people who've passed. One is our beloved Miss Major.

JOSS: Yes.

SMF: And that was just a little over a week ago. By the time this recording comes out, it will have been longer. And then my chosen brother, Kevin Indigo Anthony Flores, and, you know, just wanna mention them. But I'm actually gonna hold off. I'm gonna just let them rest a little bit, and then I'll feel when it's right to start invoking them more. But thank you for sharing your experience because I do feel like that transitional moment, too, is really-- I think, like, the first, like, days after someone dies, some people are still kinda figuring it out or they've figured it out, but they're exploring.

JOSS: Yeah.

SMF: They're like I'm gonna go over here and have a little dance. And who knows if they were visiting other people, how cool to know as an ancestor right away, I'm gonna go do these things.

JOSS: Right.

- One last hurrah, but Imma get on the dance floor with Joss.

[laughter]

Chapter 5: Personal and Cultural Practices

JOSS: Well, I love how so many different cultures and, you know, peoples have traditions honoring the fact that that space exists. You know, whether you're sitting Shiva or, you know, for some indigenous cultures doing like the altar work with ancestors. You know, so many kinds of cultures and societies have that concept of like, while this body is obviously no longer living, the spirit is still here. And how do we help the spirit find its way, the soul find its way? You know? And I think it's interesting that, you know, for queer people, you know, for queer and trans people, like, what are those rituals like for us?

LUNA: Mhmm. I love that we get to create them.

JOSS: Yes!

LUNA: I feel I know so many folks who've created their own rituals of remembering folks of invoking and as someone who, like, didn't grow up in a family that practiced, like, spirituality, kind of like witchcrafty kind of things in the way that I do, I've often learned from books, but then I take from my culture, take from friends I've met, I take from community, and I try to weave those practices and piece all of it together in a way that feels real to me and authentic. But yeah, I'm curious, Joss, do you have any rituals that you do? Any practices that you've picked up over the years?

JOSS: I think honestly, for me, writing. I will say, like, I haven't had a whole lot of close, close intimate death in my life. And so unlike some people who have so many close intimate relationships, like, shut off because of death. You know, I don't have a

plethora of those experiences. But the ones that I do have, particularly, like I said, Patrick being a big one, my grandmother, when she passed, I was incredibly close to my grandmother. And when she passed, that was an incredibly emotional time in my life. Also, I'm thinking of Bryn Kelly when Bryn Kelly passed away. Bryn Kelly was another sister of mine and an artistic inspiration and mentor. But when some of these people have passed, I find that I've almost always written something honoring them, eulogizing them, invoking them. So for me, it's the writing process for sure with my poetry and my writing. So that's my ritual.

[gentle acoustic guitar and chiming]

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Chapter 6: How to get Joss's attention after she lives to be very old and becomes an ancestor

SMF: Part of Santes, I don't know if you looked at the form that we put together, we're trying to think about how we think people will get our attention or how we want people to get our attention when we become ancestors. And so thinking of what your practices are, and the things that are important to you, what do you think would get your attention as an ancestor?

JOSS: I've already told-- I've already set this out.

[laughter]

SMF: Let's hear it! Yes.

JOSS: I've set this out. Like, obviously, I mean, this might sound morbid, but I hope I live to be very old so that I do have a long list of requirements for my passing celebration. (laughing)

I hope I get to have that experience. But if I don't, I have said one thing to people. I wrote a poem called "When the Oracles Leave" that is one of my most treasured pieces that I've ever written. And it was a poem that was influenced by some people's passing, but it's not necessarily about anyone in particular. It was more written in this moment of deep COVID, so deep quarantine when there was a lot of mass death, and a lot of the deep, deep understanding and realization what the Trump administration was doing and what they were gonna continue to do. It was this portal opening in my mind of being like, it's bad, but it's gonna get really, really worse.

We need our oracles. We need our leaders. We need our ritual workers. We need our shamans. We need our artists. We need our fighters. We need our warriors more than ever right now. So it's really a poem about what happens when the people that we know and we idolize or lionize as doing this work, what happens when they leave? So how do we take those lessons and that work that they've taught us and we become that ourselves and continue that work throughout this fight, right? That's kind of really what the poem is about and it's set within this concept of like when the oracle leaves, this is how these people fought against these systems of oppression

and these systems of fascism but they're gonna leave eventually. So like, you know, what do we do after they're gone? So that's what the poem is about.

[claps once, decisively]

And so I have instructed some of my most well respected poetry peers that if I am to pass, someone better write a poem called "The Oracle Done Left."

[vocal appreciation]

JOSS: The. Oracle. Done. Left. (laughing) So I have said that if someone does that and reads it, oh, I will be in the room. Trust and believe. I will fight. I will catch the bus if I have to, to get to the venue. I will be in that room. But it has-- I don't care what they say in it, it just that's the title, it needs to be 'The Oracle's Done Gone.' The Oracle's Done-- something in that frame, so--

LUNA: It's gonna be an anthology for sure.

[Joss cackles]

LUNA: We're gonna have a whole collection. Anytime any one of us reads from it, we're summoning you to the space. That's how we welcome you.

JOSS: So that is the one thing I think I have asked for, or I think that would invoke me if I were no longer here in this space. So yeah.

LUNA: That's beautiful. That's so powerful. I think it's the biggest gift you can give a writer, right?

JOSS: Yes. Yes.

LUNA: It's the biggest gift we can give to you. And I think that's such an honor to be able to know that ahead of time and to be able to do that for you 'cause that is something that's come up on this podcast is what, when people are passing, how do we show them love? Right? Because if they're not here to give you those instructions, then what can we do to honor you and the relationship that we have? So thank you so much for sharing that with us and everyone else. This sounds like this is a message you've shared far and wide. So we're putting people on notice now.

[laughter]

JOSS: Putting people on notice. And also really just reading the work. You know.

LUNA: Yeah.

JOSS: I would like to imagine that my poetry will outlive me even for a little bit. Even if it's just for a little bit, that would make me feel so so honored as an ancestor. So, you know, just reading the work, sharing it, and performing it, it can be as simple as that. But like you said, it is the greatest honor as a writer for someone to continue

reading your work after you've long gone, unwriting things in your-- in your honor, in your style, in your cadence. Like, it is, it is an honor. So, you know, that would be something that would just that really would bring me out of the ether.

[laughter]

Oh, yeah.

SMF: I love that you just name it: I wanna live to be old. And so I love the idea of you living to be very old and there being many generations of that piece, of that poem. And like that anthology that Luna said, you know, and every piece. Imagine. I'm envisioning that.

JOSS: Oh, thank you. Yeah, that would be amazing. Yeah, for so long when I was very young, I really didn't wanna be an old person. You know, I was very much in the closet and living in a very religiously oppressive environment. And then even when I did come out the closet and even when I did finally begin to transition, I still didn't have that forethought or that fore-dream. But now I really do feel that, you know. I think there's a couple of reasons. One, I think, I have a couple of very beautiful trans daughters that I feel like I want to grow old so I can see how they, you know, live and love and, you know, become beautiful beautiful, mature trans women. You know?

LUNA: She's mother now. She's mother now.

JOSS: I've been mother for a while.

[laughter]

I've been with her for a while. Well, you met you met my daughter, Sochi, my first daughter.

LUNA: Yes. She's bloomed beautifully, yes.

[crosstalk]

JOSS: Has she not? GORGEOUS! Gorgeous. I have a couple other daughters now too. So, like, you know, I think that is a big reason. You know, I'm like, you know, I would just love to, you know, continue living so I get to see how their lives change and become beautiful testaments of their resiliency. You know? Like I just want to see what they do. You know? So I think that's one of the reasons.

And the other reason is yeah, there's so much more I want to do as an artist. You know? There's so much more I wanna do as an artist. So I'm like-- and I'm an artist that takes a long time to do the things (laughs) that I do. I takes me a long time to write things. So I need the time. I need the time. I need the time.

LUNA: Yes. I am so excited for what you bring into the world because you brought such excellence before. And earlier, we had mentioned that there was a Chicago residency going on. Is there something--

JOSS: Yes.

Chapter 7: What’s Joss cooking up in her laboratory?

LUNA: What are you cooking up? What's happening up in the Joss laboratory now?

JOSS: Well, the residency in particular is I do a performance curatorial residency called "Transvengence," and I get to host and curate a trans centered performance showcase, which also has an open mic component. It's a collaboration with the Guild Literary Complex of Chicago. And they are a nonprofit literary organization in Chicago that works with writers and poets and other literary artists in the Chicago area to amplify writers and storytellers and poets. So they have a lot of different programming that covers primarily marginalized voices in the literary world. And so I am really grateful that I get to work with them. Basically what we do is, it's a small but mighty budget and I get to curate trans performers of all kinds. Like the one rule of Transvengence is really like you can pretty much do anything. The one question we ask is what does Transvengence mean to you or how do you enact Transvengence?

And so they're trans performers and then I book them and pay them to do like a featured performance set. I host a show and then we also have just a small little open mic in conjunction with it for the audience or whoever-- the community anyway. You don't have to be a trans person to be a part of the open mic, but it allows people to kind of get involved in the world of performance. And so we do the open mic and then we have the 'main show,' so to speak, with the feature performers and I get to curate them.

And being in the performance world for so long and in the 'reading world,' so to speak, it's a really cool, fun way for me to step back from that space and be more of a curatorial director, show director because I've done so many DIY underground show production already. So it's kind of fun, that history of my work, I'm still always performing. Kind of like the concept of like, I can't get booked, so I'm just gonna make my own show. So I've done that for so and you've seen me, you know.

LUNA: Mmmhm!

JOSS: But this is a great way for me to step back from having to do that and I get to give other trans performers a platform to showcase what they want to do and give them the freedom to really do anything. As long as you don't get this venue's liquor license revoked, we're good.

[laughter]

JOSS (yell-laughs): That's really the only rule. Just don't get the liquor license revoked and we're good! But I get to pay them and I get to host it and you know, and it's fun. It's a really fun thing. I really love and enjoy doing it, but it's more of a curatorial kind of, like, vein. So I have that going on. We do it about four to five times a year in Chicago. We're gonna take it to AWP for the first time. It'll be the first time we've done Transvengence on the road. We're gonna be in Baltimore at AWP in 2026. So if anyone's listening to this and they are in the trans expansive community

and you'll be at AWP and you want to jump on the mic for our AWP off-site show, please hit me up. But, yeah, that in the works.
And then my first actual collection of poetry is coming out next year, being published by Future Poem out of New York City, out of Brooklyn, and it's my first actual published collection of poetry written over the course of the last five years. So that's coming out.

LUNA: Yass. Finally! I've been waiting.

JOSS: I know!

LUNA: I've been waiting. Girl, no pressure, but, like, damn. I've been checking the gram being like, when is she going to drop this book?

JOSS: I don't have don't have an official release date yet. But when I do have an official release date, we'll have the preorders available.

LUNA: Absolutely.

JOSS: So it's still in the design phase. I haven't even got my galleys yet. So, like, we're still, like I said, which I kind of like with my work it does, my work always does kind of take a while. So I'm trying to remind myself like you know you're used to this so don't get too like you know stir crazy with it. But people keep asking me when it's coming out. I'm like, IT'S COMING! Trust me, it is coming. But yeah, the manuscript was actually solicited by Futurepoem to be a part of their open reading period, and I had already been turned down by another publisher.

And just to give your audience a little history on my work, so much of what I do is self published. So much of what I do is a DIY self produced platform. So whether I'm making my own shows, doing DIY underground performances, or doing my zine work, it's always just been me just doing it myself. When I started as a writer and a performer, trying to, like, put my work out there in the calls for submissions and stuff like that, it just was never getting picked up. It was just never getting the green light. And maybe it is my ego, but so much of it was just like, I was like, I know whatever they're saying yes to is not as good of what I'm doing. (cackles) So I just started making my own shit!

LUNA: I can attest to that.

JOSS: That's really what it was! I just knew in the heart of hearts of, like, whatever they're saying yes to is not good.

LUNA: Listen. If you can't tell, I am a Joss stan. Okay? I am a Joss stan, so I'm just gonna I may sound like a yes man over here, but that is exactly how I feel. I just stepped into the publishing field, Joss. So like your type of writing is exactly what I'm looking for, not to just like pitch myself, but like it's writing like yours and coming from community members where like I get where they're coming from. Right? You said that you came up in the DIY scene and you're trying to promote these other trans artists. We fucking get it because they didn't give us those opportunities.

JOSS: Exactly. Exactly. So like, it makes me so happy to know that you've stepped up from this role of like, producing your own shows to now curating that for other trans artists because one, you're a dream to work with. Like, you show up to the gig, you're a professional, you're fun, your work is so exhilarating. Like, it makes me so happy to know that the girls out in St. Louis and in Chicago are getting the support they need in the art field because those spaces don't exist.

JOSS: Yeah. It's hard.

LUNA: Yeah, and it creates those types of leaders who've been through it, who know the struggle, and then, like, creates spaces and capacity to build up art leadership and artists in the community. So just huge kudos to you for that.

JOSS: Well, thank you. And then also if, like, I'm not gonna shit on anyone who wants to live their Bitter Betty fantasy (yells) 'cause I've been a Bitter Betty!

[laughter]

I have. But, like, for me, I've only stood in that for just so long, and then I have to be like, fuck that. There's no reason to be bitter. I know I what I'm doing is good. I know what I'm doing is not what people are expecting. I know people gag, so I'm just gonna do it. So like for me, the Bitter Betty little headspace is cute for like a cute hot second, then you have to-- then I step out of it and then I just put it out there.

So for so long I was doing the zines and this collection that's coming out, the title of the book is called "Goodbye to a Dream Believed." And in my mind I really thought it was just gonna be-- I told myself this is gonna be my last self-published zine, and then after that, it's book deal or not. And I wasn't saying that in a sense of like, I'm done with writing, but it was like, I want to do one last little zine and then whatever I do next, it's going to be acknowledged by an institution of some sort. Right? So, it was originally just gonna be another zine. But when I was invited to add this collection to the list of people that they're considering, I was like, well, if they say no, they say no, if they say yes, they say yes. I'm still gonna put it out regardless. I had already had that in my mindset and so when I submitted it and then when it got accepted I was gagged.

But now, but it's so interesting because it's a different world. Publishing is a different world than just DIY zine life. So that's been a little bit of a change of scenery, like a new kind of headspace to be in. It's really great, though. I'm having a lot of fun with it, and I'm really excited for people to see the collection when it comes out next year. And in the collection, there's a poem that I wrote for Cecilia and Patrick. And that was one of the last poems that I added to the collection. So in terms of ancestor work, I'm super excited for people to read that piece as well. So that's in the works.

And then the only other thing I would say is, like, I was in a independent movie called "Dreams in Nightmares" that's been making the festival rounds. It was directed by Shatara Michelle Ford. It's a beautiful, beautiful independent film. It's a feature film, feature kind of queer dramedy, maybe? I would call it? Definitely like it's a queer road trip movie at its heart. And it's about queer Black radical love and chosen family. It follows a group of three Black trans and queer femmes. And they're on a road trip

across the country to find out what has happened to the fourth member in their chosen family friend group who has fallen off the grid. And along the way, they kind of have these interactions and experiences with other people and they try to kind of also follow like the Green Book kind of routes across America to stop in Black owned spaces and to, like, kind of really be connected to Black queer-- Black America. Right? Because the Green Book was this guide for Black travelers in the segregated South where they could be told where to stop and be safe. So it's kind of like a reimagining of that in our contemporary, like, nightmare-scape of America. (laughs bitterly) And I coincidentally play a poet that they encounter on the trip. And so I do an original reading and performance in the film. It's been making the festival rounds, for the last year, and it's an amazing film. So if it is in your city at your queer-- local queer film festival, or if you wanna get it, find out a way to get it, or go see it, buy a ticket. It's gonna be at Outfest in Los Angeles.

SMF: Ooh, Outfest is back?

JOSS: Yes. Outfest is back.

SMF: Yes. Okay.

JOSS: Outfest is BACK! And it's a part of Outfest, so... Those are the big things.

LUNA: Oh my gosh. Thank you so much, Joss. That was incredible. Your work is just incredible. I'm surprised and not surprised by how many different ventures you got going on right now because next time we talk, there's probably gonna be 13 more popping up, too.

JOSS: Oh god. I hope so! I hope so. But, you know, like, as you know, being a queer creative artist, like, it is fabulous but, you know, it still doesn't really pay the bills. I still work in the service industry. I still clock in, clock out. But I feel very happy that I am in a space where I'm still making the art that I wanna make and saying the things I wanna say. And I have the hope that I can just continue doing that.

[energetic house music]

♪♪

Chapter 8: Potluck for the dead

SMF: I'm so excited to learn more about your work and to see this film and to read your book in 2026. And we're gonna kinda wrap up here, but with a couple of--

JOSS: Yes.

SMF: wrap up questions.

JOSS: Alright. Let's do it.

SMF: So I used to do this-- more pre-pandemic, have a potluck for the dead. And so people would show up with a dish that honored someone that died that they love

deeply. And that dish might have been something they made or something they loved to eat. And so they would bring a dish and we'd all make a plate for the dead, and we would tell stories-- everybody would share what they brought, who it was about, and then we'd make this plate, and then we'd sit around and eat and tell stories. And so what would you want someone to bring for you?

JOSS: Some real good uncut Fish Scale Colombian Cocaine.

[Luna and StormMiguel bust out laughing]

'Cause if they gon have a plate talking about me, we're gonna have to talk about all the crazy shit I've done in the club, the crazy shit I've done in the streets... the crazy shit I've done with trade.

[Luna and StormMiguel DIE-ing]

Let's keep it real.

SMF (composing himself): Yes.

JOSS: Now and for the people that maybe are sober, for the people that are sober, I would say bring together... oh my god... Just come in your finest, your finest looks and just raise some sort of whatever, a toast with sparkling grape juice or champagne and just, you know, talk about me. (laughing) That would be all.

[laughter]

But when you said 'plate,' I said, well, my day ones know. Okay, a plate--

SMF: The ancestors are in for something that night.

JOSS: Yes. Yes.

SMF: Okay, So Luna and I, we're on our way to this party. Okay? We're on our way to this potluck for the dead. And we don't have time to pick up cocaine. We don't have any money for that.

[laughter and clapping]

Maybe we have the money. We just don't have time. And the only store nearby is the Best Buy around the corner. And I have to go in there to pick up something for my work. And it's just the only-- we don't have time. And so we're in the Best Buy, and that's the only place we have to pick something up for you to put on the altar. What should we get?

JOSS: "The Velvet Rope" by Janet Jackson.

SMF: Okay.

LUNA: Yesss.

JOSS: And the CD!! The C-D!!
SMF: She doesn't skip a beat. You just knew.

[crosstalk]

JOSS: That album-- like, I'm a big-- if anyone that knows my work, music is such an integral part to, like, how I perform my work and what inspires my work. But, like, as a child, like, some of the most formative moments of my development was around music. It wasn't music that my parents exposed me to. It was music that I actually had to seek out on my own because I grew up in a very religious household. So secular music wasn't really encouraged, but I would always find a way to sneak it and find a way to consume it. And one year we were doing Christmas present exchange with my mom's side of the family and on my grandma's refrigerator, everyone's name was on a list with a number corresponding. And, you know, we all had pulled a number out the hat over Thanksgiving, and that number corresponded with someone else and you had to buy what was on their list under a certain amount of money. You know, very Midwest, cheesy, working class family shit.

[laughter]

I wrote on that list "The Velvet Rope by Janet Jackson CD." The only reason I got it was because my cousin Matt had pulled my name. He was a musician at the time. But he didn't even play secular-- he played religious music. But I think he knew enough of who Janet Jackson was that he was like, you know, I'll just get it for her. And he got me that CD.

SMF: Yes.

JOSS: And I spent like weeks listening to it nonstop. I know that album backwards and forwards. Like, that album completely, like, altered my brain chemistry. So you at the Best Buy, ask for the music section, get the Janet Jackson "Velvet Rope" album on CD and lay it on the altar. And lay it on the altar. 'Cause that yes, The Velvet Rope.

Chapter 9: How to follow Joss

SMF: I love we know all these ways to get your attention.

[laughter]

How do people get your attention now? Where do you want people to find you? Where can people find you in your pre-ancestor form?

JOSS: Well, right now, if you use social media, I'm primarily and I'm-- I really hate using social media because, like, all these platforms are owned by fascist (laughs bitterly) Nazis. They're all being controlled by Nazis and white supremacists and it's so scary. So really the only platform I'm using primarily is Instagram. So you could follow me at @ganjacum_ underscore.

[Joss cackles]

Which that's a whole another story why I even have that screen name, but it's ganja CUM underscore. (ganjacum_) And if you follow me, I usually promote these upcoming shows I have, whether they be in St. Louis or Chicago or whether I'm traveling performing in another city. And it's also the main platform I use to announce things like when the book would be coming out, pre orders, when the movie is screening and showing or any other kind of like work I'm doing at the moment. And also if you ever just see me on the street, you can always just say hi. I love talking to people.

[house music]

or if you're on the dance floor, and you happen to see me,

[claps]

you know, raise a glass, let's boogie. Like, I love dancing. So that's another great way to get my attention, is just find me on the dance floor. So, yeah, I would say the two main places, the dance floor at the club or Instagram.

[laughter]

SMF: And we know that if it's at the club on the dance floor, they could be dancing with you, they could be dancing with a hundred ancestors.

JOSS: They could.

SMF: It'd be a good time no matter what.

JOSS: I really I mean, that's one of the things I love about nightlife. And, like, I feel like, you know, a disco ball is an altar, and I feel like there's so-- that I do feel like, you know, in those spaces, there are so many ancestors that have walked in and out of those walls that, you know, loved the act of dance. And so--

SMF: That's right.

JOSS: You know, if you want to commune with ancestors in the here and now, I always recommend a good queer dance floor. A good queer inclusive dance floor is, like, the best place to commune with ancestors.

SMF: Oh, love that. Well thank you so much for joining us today. Wow!

JOSS: Thank you for having me, this was fun!

LUNA: Thank you so much, Joss. Love you so much. You are brilliant and cannot wait to be in touch. Cannot wait to follow-up on all your projects. Mwah! Besitos from Seattle.

JOSS: Besitos! I love you all. Thank you for having me!

SMF: Thank you.
[house music]

Chapter 10: Outro with Luna and StormMiguel

SMF: Wow. That was otherworldly!

LUNA: Truly. Every time I work with Joss, I have these fabulous types of conversations. So it's such a blessing to be able to share it with you all.

SMF: Thank you, Luna. I'm so glad you brought Joss on. I really appreciate how she gave clear directions on how she wants to be remembered with the poem, "The Oracle Done Left."

LUNA: Mhmm. And as someone who cares for Joss, it's really great to know how a sister wants to be honored when she passes. And to just get real with you all for a second, this is really why we started Santes. We honestly want everyone to have guidance from our loved ones on how to honor them when they pass.

SMF: If you feel compelled to share how you wanna be remembered, please check out our Santes form on our website www.santesproject.com.

LUNA: And when you're done filling out the form, let us know what you think of this episode by commenting on our Instagram page @SantesProject.

SMF: We're sending you all so much appreciation and so much love. It's gonna be another bumpy year, but there will also be really beautiful things to hold on to. Please hold on to that beauty, take good care of yourselves, and take good care of each other. See you on the other side.

LUNA: And this one too!

[melodic acoustic guitar] ♪♪

END