





Michael **ALIG** *In the EARLY '90s, he was the KING of the NEW YORK CLUB KIDS, LEADING a TROUPE of BEAUTIFUL MISFITS and ARTISTS who TRANSFORMED the city's NIGHTLIFE into their OWN BACCHANALLIAN FANTASYLAND. But 14 YEARS AFTER it all CAME CRASHING DOWN in a HAZE of DRUGS and MURDER, MICHAEL ALIG is SEARCHING for a DIFFERENT KIND of LIBERATION*

By CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN *Portrait* GRANT DELIN

THIS PAGE: MICHAEL ALIG AT COXSACKIE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY IN COXSACKIE, NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 2010.
OPPOSITE: MICHAEL ALIG IN NEW YORK, 1992. PHOTO: MICHAEL FAZAKERLEY.

MICHAEL ALIG (RIGHT) WITH CLARA THE CAREFREE CHICKEN AND FRIENDS AT LIMELIGHT, NOVEMBER 1991. PHOTO: © PATRICK McMULLAN.



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: MICHAEL ALIG, FERNANDO (REAR), AND KEOKI AT PHOTOGRAPHER CATHERINE MCGANN'S EAST VILLAGE APARTMENT, MARCH 1991. PHOTO: © CATHERINE MCGANN.



ABOVE: MICHAEL ALIG (RIGHT), AMANDA LEPORE (LEFT), AND FRIENDS AT A DINNER PARTY AT LIMELIGHT'S DISCO 2000, AUGUST 1991. PHOTO: © TINA PAUL.



FROM LEFT: JAMES ST. JAMES AND MICHAEL ALIG AT THE STYLE SUMMIT AT PALLADIUM, MAY 1993. PHOTO: © TINA PAUL.



MICHAEL ALIG AFTER AN OUTLAW PARTY AT BURGER KING IN TIMES SQUARE, MARCH 1990. PHOTO: © TINA PAUL.



THE EXTERIOR OF CLUB USA, JANUARY 1993. PHOTO: © TINA PAUL.



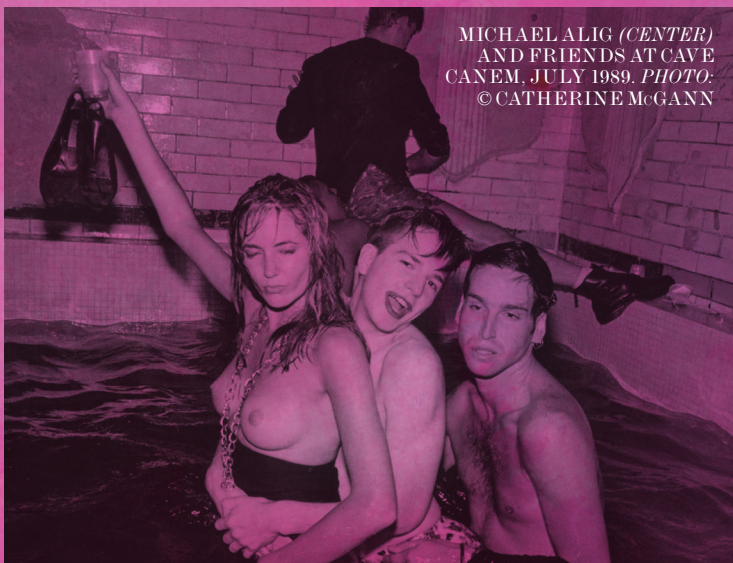
FROM LEFT: JAMES ST. JAMES, MICHAEL ALIG, AND RICHIE RICH AT LIMELIGHT, JUNE 1994. PHOTO: © PATRICK McMULLAN



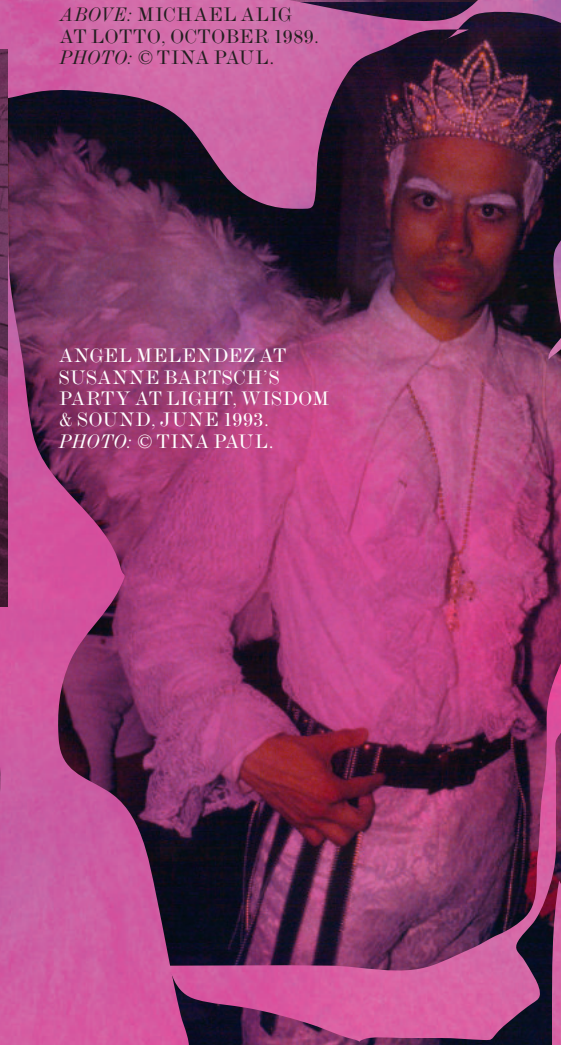
ABOVE: MICHAEL ALIG AT LOTTO, OCTOBER 1989. PHOTO: © TINA PAUL.



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: KEOKI AND MICHAEL ALIG IN THEIR KITCHEN, MAY 1992. BELOW, FROM LEFT: MICHAEL ALIG, CHRISTOPHER COMP, AND WALT PAPER AT A RAVE AT MACY'S DEPARTMENT STORE IN NYC, OCTOBER 1992. PHOTOS: © CATHERINE MCGANN.



MICHAEL ALIG (CENTER) AND FRIENDS AT CAVE CANEM, JULY 1989. PHOTO: © CATHERINE MCGANN



ANGEL MELENDEZ AT SUSANNE BARTSCH'S PARTY AT LIGHT, WISDOM & SOUND, JUNE 1993. PHOTO: © TINA PAUL.



ABOVE, FROM RIGHT: LAHOMA VAN ZANDT, MICHAEL ALIG, HIS MOTHER ELKE (IN BUSTIER), AND FRIENDS CELEBRATE ALIG'S BIRTHDAY AT RED ZONE, APRIL 1989. BELOW, LEFT: MICHAEL ALIG AT THE OPENING OF RED ZONE, AUGUST 1988. PHOTOS: © CATHERINE MCGANN.



MICHAEL ALIG (THIRD FROM LEFT) WITH SOPHIA LAMAR, JENNY TALIA, AND FRIENDS AT TUNNEL, MARCH 1994. PHOTO: © PATRICK McMULLAN.

Coxsackie Correctional Facility is a three-hour drive north from Manhattan, located in the low outlying hills of the Catskill Mountains. While the architecture of the facility is reminiscent of a boys' prep school—complete with a long driveway leading to a red-brick Federal-style main hall with a bell tower—the ribbon-razor wire and double-layered chain-link fence wrapped around the compound immediately identify it as one of New York State's maximum-security prisons. Coxsackie is, in fact, what is known as a "Max B" prison (differing from a "Max A" on levels of security, surveillance, and inmate record), and it had, for the month and a half before I visited on February 17, been home to prisoner 97A6595, Michael Alig, known more prominently as the King of the Club Kids but also, for Coxsackie's administrative purposes, as the perpetrator who pleaded guilty to manslaughter in 1997 for the March 1996 murder of former Limelight employee and reputed drug dealer Andre "Angel" Melendez.

The lurid Club Kid murder of Melendez is by now one of New York's best-known cautionary tales, a sort of lore story explaining the recklessness and insanity of the downtown party scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s and, by extension, the official death of nightlife in the city, which has really never been resurrected. While many have equated Alig's sensational downfall to a latter-day East Coast version of Charles Manson and his Family's—having begun so promisingly with a band of young misfits hoping to change the world and ending in cold-blooded murder—it is really much more a story about the downward spiral of drug abuse.

Alig's rise has all of the irresistible tokens of New York City success: He moved from his hometown of South Bend, Indiana, for college in 1984. After Andy Warhol's death in 1987, when writer Michael Musto famously declared the "Death of Downtown" on the cover of the *Village Voice*, he took the reins, reorganized the hierarchy, and recalibrated the price of entry. By 1990 Alig had become the rambunctious, boyish, polka-dotted heir to Manhattan nightlife, a scene as wild as Warhol's but one that replaced the Hollywood fame and aristocratic surnames with a more democratic belief in youthful freaks turning into glamorous personalities, based purely on how shocking and inventive they could be. The Club Kid aesthetic was very much Leigh Bowery meets the East Village Bowery, and Alig and his gang—which at various moments included such self-manufactured creations as James St. James, Jenny Talia, Amanda Lepore, Waltpaper, the It Twins, Richie Rich, Keoki, Sophia Lamar, RuPaul, Gitsie, and Mathu & Zaldy—became both local celebrities and national sensations. As their control of clubs went from throwing small parties in side rooms at Tunnel to running Peter Gatien's entire New York City nightlife portfolio—including Limelight and eventually the notorious Club USA near Times Square—Alig and the Club Kids became more outrageous and renegade in their promotional efforts. Their impromptu Outlaw Parties at various unexpected locations around the city (and always near a club) perfectly demonstrated the movement's mix of juvenile hilarity, illicit bravery, and ability to claim total possession of anyplace they occupied.

Alig and his followers were not initially addicted to drugs—they were addicted to fame. Alig's friend and onetime assistant Walt Cassidy (previously known as Waltpaper), now a visual artist, explained to me that the Club Kids were far from a casual underground collective intent on constant partying. At their prime, the Club Kids operated like an ersatz Warhol Factory—or perhaps even more of a Factory than Warhol's ever managed to become—

simultaneously working on *Project X Magazine*, promotional development, a syndicate of club nights scattered around the country, shock appearances on both *Geraldo* and *The Joan Rivers Show*, Club USA commercials on MTV, films, music, and more. Far from a bunch of Ecstasy heads lost in strobe lights, the Club Kids created a youth movement that was an entrepreneurial corporation set upon changing society while working within its preferred strategies. It must have seemed for a while like the Club Kids really could take over the world.

The optimism, however, was buried one hazy morning in March 1996 when Alig and his roommate Robert "Freeze" Riggs killed Melendez after an argument which different sources claim was about either clothes or money. Freeze would later confess to hitting Melendez over the head with a hammer; Alig may have bound him with tape and injected him with Drano. The pair left his body in the bathtub for a week before Alig, in exchange for 10 bags of heroin, dismembered Melendez and dumped his remains in the Hudson River.

Melendez washed up on Staten Island a few weeks

"MY HEROIN USE WAS ALREADY OUT OF CONTROL. I'M SURPRISED THAT I WAS EVEN ALIVE. . . . JUST A MONTH BEFORE, I'D OVERDOSED TWICE. IN THE HOSPITAL, ALMOST DEAD, NOT HAVING ANY MEMORY OF MY NAME OR ANYTHING. IT WAS ALREADY AT THAT POINT."

later, but Alig and Riggs were not arrested for nearly nine months. It must have seemed that the Club Kid dictum of turning everything into a joke could even clear one of a murder charge. But, as Cassidy explained to me when I was trying to understand that particular period of time, "New York was a very different place than it is now. You could never do the clubs today that we did then. You used to be able to pay off the police so the club wouldn't get busted. New York was a much more outlaw place. It wasn't entirely impossible to think someone could even get away with murder in those days."

Alig, now 43, enters one of the cinder-block conference rooms wearing a dark green uniform. He seems slightly speedy from his medication but says he is much happier to be in Coxsackie after being sent to Southport—a Max A—as punishment for previously being caught with Percocet in his system. Alig has a quick smile so reminiscent of a boy's that it is not hard to imagine him back on the dance floor at Limelight, leading his young apostles into another spontaneous Club Kid spectacle. He wears wire-rim glasses now, and while he's never used a cell phone or surfed the Internet—two technological

advancements that would have made much of the Club Kid ethos either impossible or much more viral—he keeps up-to-date by reading magazines and talking to the friends he has kept since the early '90s. Alig tells me that after he has completed a compulsory drug-treatment program, he may be released as soon as this fall. In truth, his future is in the hands of the parole board, and he could remain in lockup until as late as 2016. (Riggs, who is currently at Woodbourne, also upstate, is up for release, maybe as soon as this spring.) In the meantime, Alig has been making paintings and writing a memoir and has stayed in contact with Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, who directed and produced the 1998 documentary and 2003 feature film *Party Monster*, which chronicle Alig's rise and fall.

It is immediately evident how intelligent and charming Alig can be. Some former friends have called Alig a sociopath; others—like Cassidy—a very good human being who made a terrible mistake while under the hold of drugs. Alig does seem genuinely contrite. He clearly knows that it will be his good behavior—not the bad behavior that made him famous—that will bring him back into the world. He tells me after the interview, "I don't want it to sound like I'm sensationalizing or glamorizing the past, because that makes me sound like I don't care about what I did. And I do care." One day, Alig will be back on the streets of downtown Manhattan. He may be as surprised by what he finds there as those who once knew him as the master of the Club Kid universe may be surprised by what they find in him.

CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN: There's been a lot of confusion about when you're getting out of jail. When is your release date? What's the plan?

MICHAEL ALIG: The plan is that I have to complete a six-month drug program. It will start in about two weeks, so I may leave in August or September or October. Something like that.

BOLLEN: You've moved around to different prisons a lot—depending on your sentence and where you are with behavior. How many in total has it been?

ALIG: Honestly, I can't even remember. It's been a lot of times. At least 10. Sometimes my classification changes, so I go from a Max A to a Max B to a Medium.

BOLLEN: Are you happy at Coxsackie?

ALIG: It's not a bad place. [*laughs and looks at guard and says loudly*] It's a great place. [*under his breath*] I'm wearing a belt that gives me an electric shock anytime I say anything bad. [*laughs*] Before I was here, I was in Southport, which is a disciplinary facility. My urine tested positive for Percocet.

BOLLEN: Now how did that happen?

ALIG: I took some Percocet. [*laughs*] You know, I have a drug problem, obviously.

BOLLEN: I was talking to a mutual friend, Walt Cassidy. He said he worries that the most difficult part for you after you get out will be staying sober. Do you think that will be a huge concern?

ALIG: Gee. Yeah, I think that will rank high up there. It will be difficult. But I'm on medication now for the first time in a long time, and I've been taking it the way I'm supposed to. I'm taking Wellbutrin and Buspar.

BOLLEN: I took Wellbutrin a few years ago to try to stop smoking. It worked for a while, but I didn't like the feeling it gave me. It made me too happy in a synthetic way.

ALIG: That's always been something I've been craving, though—happy in a synthetic way.

BOLLEN: So what are your plans once you get out of prison?

ALIG: I want to go into film production, definitely. I want to work with World of Wonder. Actually, I have a lot of projects I want to work on. I'm a painter, and

I've been making a lot of work. I've been painting these series of pharmaceutical-company ads, as if the company hired me to make its products seem cool. And I'd also like to open a restaurant—you know, something that doesn't entail staying out until seven o'clock in the morning.

BOLLEN: So nightlife is off the job-hunt list?

ALIG: Yeah, at least for now. I'll be on parole, so I don't think my parole officer would take too kindly to it.

BOLLEN: I wanted to save this question for later, but I'm so curious. What do you think New York nightlife is like now? You left in an entirely different moment. In fact, I'm not sure it ever recovered from your moment.

ALIG: As far as I know, there really isn't a nightlife. There's sort of a skeleton of what was there but nothing substantial, nothing to be proud of. Maybe there are little pockets here and there of something going on. I read in a few magazines every once in a while about something happening in Williamsburg or whatever, but none of that seems to last very long.

BOLLEN: It's entirely different. I actually moved to New York in 1996. So I showed up right at the very end of the whole Club Kid experience. I only saw the immediate aftereffects, when everyone was starting to reject dressing up and big clubs and instead started isolating themselves in smaller bars.

ALIG: Yeah, 1996 was right when everything fell apart. That's like when James St. James and I first moved to New York, and Studio 54 had just fallen apart. It was that same sort of feeling. I moved to New York in 1984, and I started off as a busboy at Danceteria. To me it was a really cool place, like, the best club I'd ever been to. But looking back and thinking about what people told me, Danceteria was already over by the time I got there. I think the reason I actually got the job was because nobody else wanted to work there.

BOLLEN: How did you go from a dying scene of the '80s to owning a whole scene by the end of the decade?

ALIG: It wasn't done consciously. I didn't go out and plan to do it that way. I remember being at the Kohshin Satoh fashion show at Tunnel, which was Andy Warhol's last public appearance. And then the next thing you know, Warhol died. I remember when that "Death of Downtown" article came out by Michael Musto. We were all just floored. Warhol was going to be our ticket out of there. We were all going to become Warhol Superstars and move into The Factory and re-create the whole thing. I was furious at Michael Musto for writing that article because he was ruining it for all the new kids. He and his crew had had their fill, and now they were ready to move on, but we had just gotten there. So me and some friends—Michael Tronn and Julie Jewels—met with Rudolf Piper, who was running Tunnel at the time, and we said, "We're not ready to pack it in yet. We want to do something." Rudolf saw nightclubs as a place for social revolutionaries to meet in an uninhibited forum. He was very subversive and was always looking for the next big thing that would topple the mainstream. He always told us that something new will happen when enough people get bored and fed up with the fact that there's nothing going on. He thought that there is a reason for downtime, for a lull. It's so people can gather their strength and build something new. Only we were too anxious. We didn't believe in downtime. So we basically got together and said, "Let's start something new now."

BOLLEN: That sounds like a pretty conscious decision.

ALIG: We asked for one tiny room at Tunnel. You remember how at Tunnel there were those rooms off to the side? We asked for just one of those and a guest list and an open bar. The rule to get in was you had to dress up. You had to put some effort into what you were wearing—how you looked, how you presented

yourself, and if you did that, you could come inside this room and drink for free.

BOLLEN: Did it work?

ALIG: The first night, we had about six or seven people who dressed up. The funny thing was that everybody had the same idea: not to dress up but to make fun of people who dressed up. I guess we were making fun of the Warhol Superstars. We changed our names like they did, and we dressed up in outrageously crazy outfits in order to be a satire of them—only we ended up becoming what we were satirizing.

BOLLEN: Do you remember what your look was that first night?

ALIG: Yes, it was Little Lord Fauntleroy, with velvet knickers and a white ruffled collar. All of the costumes were completely homemade. Rudolf was very happy with the results and said we could do it again the next week. Every week the numbers basically doubled, until we had to move to the basement. At that point, we were bringing at least 200 people into the club, and they were all coming in for free, and they were all underage. They were also drinking for free, so the club was making zero dollars. The club was crowded

"I DON'T KNOW WHETHER I WILL EVER BE ABLE TO FORGIVE MYSELF FOR IT. I KNOW I'M GOING TO HAVE TO FOCUS ON DOING SOME GOOD THINGS WHEN I GO HOME TO BALANCE OUT MY KARMA, BECAUSE I DEFINITELY BELIEVE IN KARMA."

with 15- and 16-year-olds, and the guy who owned Tunnel was freaking out because he had visions of VIP rooms with men in tuxedos and Liz Taylor. And Rudolf, god bless him, argued for us to do it one more week. But he eventually said, "No more Club Kids. No more Michael Alig. I didn't spend \$5 million on a club for this. . . ." So we had to change our names and make our own invitations to keep it going.

BOLLEN: That's when you started doing the Outlaw Parties as promotion?

ALIG: That was a gimmick to get people to come to the clubs. Vito Bruno had done it before us, and I started doing mine with him so it wouldn't seem like I was stealing someone else's idea. People weren't coming for the free drinks anymore, so Outlaw Parties were a great draw, which we always held suspiciously close to the club. When the bust happened, there would be 2,000 great people two blocks away, and we would have a surprise open bar for them, and the club would get a rush of people. It was a marketing tool.

BOLLEN: Where are some of the Outlaw Party locations you remember being most successful?

ALIG: Dunkin' Donuts, the train bridge that is now

the High Line, one of the piers. When the World was paying, we did one party at the Pitt Street pool. When the Red Zone was paying, we did one in a building that had recently exploded. It had been cordoned off with yellow police tape, and we did a party right inside the building.

BOLLEN: Walt told me you had one party in a crack house called ID that was off the Hudson River.

ALIG: It wasn't a crack house. It was an abandoned building where some homeless people were living. Like a squat. We paid them in crack.

BOLLEN: So you made them into crack addicts.

ALIG: No, they were crack addicts before that. At first we gave them \$100 to have the party there, but we noticed they would run out and buy crack with the money, so we just made it easier for them and gave them the crack.

BOLLEN: So the club nights were a pretty off-the-cuff operation until Peter Gatién came along.

ALIG: That was August of 1990, after Red Zone, The Palace, The Palladium, World, Tunnel, Area, Danceteria—we basically bankrupted them all. We ran out of clubs, and we were living to pay the rent and keep it going. The Club Kids needed jobs, so I approached Peter. He said, "I've seen that you've bankrupted every club in the city, and I'm not going to let you do that to me. But I see something of value in what you're doing, and if you're willing to work with me, then maybe we can make a club that is not solely fabulous and not solely bridge-and-tunnel. We can do something in between. Then the club can afford to support these young artists—

BOLLEN: And also be commercially viable. And your relationship with Peter worked for a very long time.

ALIG: Yeah. [laughs] Until we ruined him, too.

BOLLEN: By the time you hooked up with Gatién, the Club Kids had already become a cultural phenomenon. You had built it up into a really well-established, incredibly organized cultural machine. Before, you mentioned aspiring to be the Warhol Superstars. Were you trying to follow the Warhol Factory formula?

ALIG: What we were doing was very similar. It was really the mass-ification of the Warhol thing, because we were celebrating and mocking the notion of celebrity at the same time. We knew how ridiculous it was, but we wanted our share as well.

BOLLEN: That's what I always admired about the Club Kids. They were much more democratic than Warhol's gang because you didn't have to be rich or beautiful to be one. For the Club Kids, you could really be a kid from the Midwest who had a lot of creativity and still be part of the scene. You're from South Bend, Indiana. Were you feeling like you had become the King of New York during the Limelight days?

ALIG: I never felt like I was at the top of anything. I never felt like I had actually made it.

BOLLEN: But meanwhile, you were making the Club Kids into a national movement. You were branching "the brand" out in every which way.

ALIG: Oh, yes—and especially with Peter's money. I wanted to turn Peter into Colonel Sanders, that character with the patch, on all of the invitations. He had a Limelight in Chicago and in London, and we were very conscious of becoming a real brand.

BOLLEN: And you went on Geraldo's and Joan Rivers's talk shows.

ALIG: We would rehearse before going on the talk shows to try to come across as really bored and also pretend to be these superficial celebrities. Again, we were pretending to be these caricatures of celebrities, but most people didn't get it. Most people thought we *were* the superficial celebrities we were satirizing, and they hated us for it.

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CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN IS EDITOR AT LARGE AT INTERVIEW. SPECIAL THANKS: WALT CASSIDY.

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more ALIG

Continued from page 111 BOLLEN: But certain teenagers all around the country saw those spots and saw your group as some sort of escape portal and decided to follow you.
ALIG: Yes, they were quitting their jobs and moving to New York—all of these kids. I felt responsible for getting them all jobs, so we had to keep opening clubs to give them work. After Disco 2000 started, Peter realized he could refurbish his club and make it into this fabulous place. The weekends took off. We were getting so many people, we couldn't fit them through the door. Peter had this number that meant we had reached critical mass. He was used to grossing \$20,000 on the weekend, but now suddenly he was grossing 50, 60, \$70,000. Peter knew he had reached critical mass one night, because he said that unless they widened the door, he couldn't fit any more people inside. He knew he was going to make \$72,000 that night, and you couldn't possibly make any more than that without widening the door. So

that's when we decided to open a new club—USA.

BOLLEN: Were you making a lot of money then?

ALIG: I wasn't making nearly what I should have been making. But I was never really doing it for the money. I was doing it for the fun, and I enjoyed giving people jobs. And the notoriety, of course. The fun and the drugs. The drugs actually weren't a big problem yet.

BOLLEN: When you started out, you were actually a pretty clean character, right?

ALIG: At first we weren't using drugs at all. We were making fun of people who used drugs, and we'd go out pretending to be high, pretending to fall down stairs—we were caricatures of drug-addicted celebrities, like the Edie Sedgwicks and Courtney Loves. We were making fun of them . . . until we became them.

BOLLEN: Walt was telling me that everything in the clubs was performative. So the first time all the Club Kids tried hard drugs, that was performative too. It wasn't about hiding in a bathroom stall in secret. Everyone in the entire club knew that the Club Kids were all trying heroin tonight or Special K. That was part of the shtick.

ALIG: Oh, definitely. The Emergency Room parties, which were our famous drug parties, were caricatures, too, with gigantic novelty hypodermic needles and IVs with cocaine. It was all sort of a joke. These started in 1992, and we did them once a month. They were so popular we did them once a week, then two and three times a week. Eventually, every night was the Emergency Room at all four clubs. The problem was it became this idea of, "If you're not giving us free Ecstasy and cocaine and Special K, we're not going."

BOLLEN: Were the core group of Club Kids chosen by you, or did they just kind of happen?

ALIG: Some were handpicked, and some just happened. The ones that just happened usually ended up being the best ones. There were clubs all around the country. We made up something called the United States Club Federation. We had this logo made that was just like the USDA seal, and we put together a contingent of experts, a group of fabulous people from New York, who, if these clubs were willing to pay us \$1,000 and give us 15 plane tickets, we would send to investigate their nightclub. And if we thought it was cool enough, we would give them permission to put "USCF approved" on their invitations. [laughs] They fell for it. We were flying all over the country and doing everything possible. We would go there with notepads.

BOLLEN: But a lot of the Club Kids came out of that, right?

ALIG: Yeah, Richie Rich and Sophia [Lamar], a lot of the best ones came through that. When we opened USA, we had an idea of going to every major city and picking two people in a contest—like a Willy Wonka Golden Ticket contest—for the two coolest people from each city and taking them to Club USA. A lot of them ended up moving here after that.

BOLLEN: How do you see the evolution of the Club Kids look?

ALIG: At the time, we called it "aesthetic sampling." There was nothing new going on, so we were basically stealing bits and pieces from Leigh Bowery and Andy Warhol and a lot of the Pyramid people and East Village punks. I get a lot of flak for copying Leigh Bowery, but it wasn't a direct rip-off. I never copied anything without putting the Club Kid spin on it.

BOLLEN: What was the Club Kid spin?

ALIG: To make it a joke. And once you say it's a joke, you can get away with anything because it's a joke.

BOLLEN: What were some of the more extreme looks you remember doing? Obviously, as the drugs started worming their way through the group, the looks did get noticeably more morbid.

ALIG: It was still satire until we weren't satirizing anymore. My most extreme look was probably going out nude covered in bloody sores and stuff like that. The whole process of getting ready was taking a lot of drugs and smearing yourself with corn syrup and red food coloring and using makeup to make bruises and wrapping yourself in bandages.

BOLLEN: Can you remember the moment when it turned dark for you? I imagine the drug use spiraled in part because of all the pressure to be on all the time. Is that true?

ALIG: Yes, the pressure had become intense, and at some point we did feel that we needed to be on something because you're up all the time. You're up for days on cocaine and Ecstasy, and then you need to go out the next night, so you need to take something to come down, which would be Rohypnol or Special K or heroin or something like that. So you get on this roller coaster to get where you have to be on something all the time in order to suit whatever is required of you.

BOLLEN: And that pressure included a lot of Club Kids whose mouths you were feeding. How many worked for you at that time?

ALIG: There were probably 750 in the early '90s at different levels. Peter basically gave us whatever we wanted, and I could kick myself now at the missed opportunities. He gave us a recording studio at the Palladium where me, Jenny Talia, Richie Rich, Tobell [von Cartier], and David Alphabet started our own band called Dynamo. Again, it was a satire of a pop band, and we were more interested in how we were going to look on the CD cover than how we sounded. And there was even going to be a movie about the Club Kids.

BOLLEN: Did you see the film *Party Monster*?

ALIG: No.

BOLLEN: I went on set when they were filming a nightclub scene at the Angel Orensanz Center in 2002. Macaulay Culkin was all done up, and he looked really amazing.

ALIG: I've seen pictures. He did look like me, but I don't think he acted like me. I think he was a little too flamboyant and more like Richie Rich than like me. But I'm sure he did a really good job. Randy and Fenton knew what they were doing.

BOLLEN: When did you feel like the world you had built began falling down around you like a house of cards? Was it really only when the murder occurred?

ALIG: It's interesting you say "house of cards," because at the time it was falling apart I had actually designed a house of cards right on the Lime-light dance floor. It was a three-story structure like the Winchester Mystery House [in San José, California]. The story is that a ghost told [rifle heir-ess] Sarah Winchester to build it, so it has all these secret rooms. I wanted to re-create it on the Lime-light dance floor, but we couldn't spend that much money. So Peter said I could build a three-story structure with hidden stairwells and rooms, and we built it to look like a house of cards. We had these giant cards covering it. It was built haphazardly to make it look like it was falling apart. Everyone kept joking, "Your house of cards is about to collapse, Michael." And it was.

BOLLEN: And it did. Do you remember the actual incidents of Angel's murder?

ALIG: Yes, I remember it, more or less. I remember it like it was a dream. I remember it the same way I remember a lot of those mornings of the after-hours parties.

BOLLEN: You were on a lot of drugs at the time, and when you're on that kind of stuff for so long, nothing really seems lucid.

ALIG: When I look back, it is very hard for me to delineate what is reality and what is a hallucination.

BOLLEN: Has time made that distinction more or less difficult?

ALIG: Less difficult, but in some ways more. It becomes more real, you know. The further you get away from it, the more real it becomes.

BOLLEN: How often do you think about the murder?

ALIG: Every day.

BOLLEN: I'm curious if you ever get to accept what you did. Is there a stage of mourning or grief that you brought about the loss of a human life? How do you moralize that?

ALIG: I have had no choice but to accept it. I haven't forgiven myself completely yet. I don't know whether I will ever be able to forgive myself for it. I know I'm going to have to focus on doing some good things when I go home to balance out my karma, because I definitely believe in karma. I know I need to do something to help people. Do you know Jenny Dembrow? She's a director of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. She and I have been talking about this at great length, and she's going to help me get into something like that—maybe to help with young people who are addicted to drugs. I know it's a cliché, but I need to do something like that in order to be able to move on with my life.

BOLLEN: What do you think would have happened to you if Angel hadn't been murdered? Where would your life have gone?

ALIG: Probably into the grave. My heroin use was already out of control. I'm surprised that I was even alive at that point. Just a month before, I'd overdosed twice. In the hospital, almost dead, not having any memory of my name or anything. It was already at that point.

BOLLEN: You were past the option of even saving yourself.

ALIG: Strangely enough, I really saw it as taking this art project to its extreme. I was thinking, How far can we take it? I was the kind of person who says, "Let's see how far we can take this. Let's see what happens."

BOLLEN: So prison actually saved your life in a really demented way.

ALIG: I try not to look at it like that.

BOLLEN: What about the other Club Kids? Not even Angel, but some of your closer friends and accomplices who didn't make it, or who got lost in drugs. I guess I'm thinking about your friend Gitsie [Cynthia Haadje], who died of a heroin overdose in 1998.

ALIG: I vacillate. Sometimes I feel slightly responsible, and sometimes I feel completely responsible. No one is responsible for my drug addictions. You know, people have to take their own responsibility. But I was older than they were, so I feel like I should probably have been a much better role model than I was.

BOLLEN: Do you feel like certain former Club Kids have turned their backs on you? That as soon as you were in trouble, they just cut their losses and distanced themselves?

ALIG: I don't know if I'd say they "turned their backs on me." I'd understand if they did. I've gotten the sense that some of them felt like they'd gotten on the wrong course. You put a lot of time and effort into somebody who doesn't care enough about himself to take better care of what's going on. A couple of people haven't written me. I would understand why they turned their backs on me if they did.

BOLLEN: Have you been able to have romantic

relationships with people in prison? Have you dated any other inmates?

ALIG: Actually I did. I had one long-term relationship that lasted about eight years. He's home now.

BOLLEN: Do you keep in contact?

ALIG: No. We're not allowed to. It's the rule. He's on parole now. We're not allowed to write or anything. But eventually I'll be home, and he'll be off parole. And one day I'll be off parole, so . . .

BOLLEN: Do you feel like there's been any personal animosity toward you from other inmates?

ALIG: I think for the most part, people have been surprisingly accepting and nice and helpful. This whole image of people being raped and extorted in prison might have been true in the '70s and '80s, but it isn't like that anymore. It hasn't been difficult in terms of being personally attacked. I would say the biggest difficulty has been just feeling like an alien. I don't feel like I connect on very many levels with a lot of inmates here.

BOLLEN: I guess it's hard to imagine oneself as just a criminal locked in with other criminals—

ALIG: But I do see myself as a criminal. I've killed somebody, and I'm a criminal. What I meant was that the inmates don't understand my sense of humor. They don't understand sarcasm or irony at all. The more sarcastic you become, the more they believe you. I was a porter once at Attica—a porter is a person who sweeps and passes out food. A lot of the inmates in my company didn't want me as a porter because I'm gay and they figured, "He's gonna be jerking people off and serving food with his hands." There was a lot of animosity there. I remember I was sweeping one day, and I swept dust in this guy's cell, and he came up to his bars and said, "Get that out of my cell!" I walked right up to his cell and screamed in his face. He said, "You wouldn't scream at me like that if these bars weren't here." And I said, "But they are, Blanche, the bars are there." *[both laugh]* I was the only person who understood the reference.

BOLLEN: That's sad. But you've really never been personally attacked in prison?

ALIG: In the very beginning, in the first couple of days after I was arrested, I was beaten up a little bit by these Spanish guys. The phones in these facilities for the inmates are separated into races: White people use one phone, black people use another, and Spanish people have their own.

BOLLEN: Really?

ALIG: It was as foreign to me as it is to you right now. I'd been in jail for one day. I'm calling my mom on the phone, and these guys come up to me and they say, "You're on the Spanish phone. You have to hang up." I didn't know what they were talking about. I just kept talking, and now there are more Spanish guys, and they're like, "You're on the Spanish phone." I'm like, "I'm talking to my mother right now. Can you please leave me alone?" The next thing I know, they're dragging me off the phone and kicking and punching me and stomping on my stomach. I thought they were going to kill me. So I get up, and I run to the front of the company. There's a gate there with officers on the other side. Again, I don't know anything. It's my first day, so I don't know what the protocol is in this kind of situation. The officers pull me to the other side, and once the gate locks, I'm like *[pointing]*, "He did it, he did it, and he did it." *[both laugh]* The sergeant was like, "No, you don't want them to see you. They'll label you a snitch." But that was the only time something like that ever happened.

BOLLEN: Have you made any close friends in here?

ALIG: "Close friendships" is probably pushing it a little far. But there are people in here who I'm

friendly with. In fact, the people you'd think I'd have the biggest problems with are my closest allies. Like the Bloods and the skinheads—all the people you'd think would hate me. I think they see me as a kindred spirit. Especially the Bloods. They are leaders of this kind of cultish, anarchic, underground, subversive movement. They see me as the same kind of thing.

BOLLEN: That's amazing. Who knew prison is where everyone would respect each other as equals?

ALIG: We all like to stick it to the man, you know. I have a friend named Murder. That's actually his name. Murder.

BOLLEN: Is he here because of murder?

ALIG: I don't know. It's probably just his name. But even the changing of the name is sort of the street version of a Club Kid, you know. We did that too.

BOLLEN: I don't know how much you keep up with New York politics, but I was thinking the other day that there would be no way now that you could do those clubs and those nights the way you did them in the early '90s. Since Giuliani, they are so strict with rules and laws and violations. You can't get away with anything. Now they close you down if people are smoking.

ALIG: It's true. But on the other hand, there was so much outrage over the Giulianis of the world that we worked twice as hard in order to be twice as crazy. That was kind of an inspiration for us. I remember when cops tried to close all the clubs at 12:30 A.M. They put a proposal in to close all clubs in New York at 12:30 A.M. We protested. We picketed outside of City Hall in Club Kid outfits. I showed up in a little red dress and pigtails and a Groucho wig and Groucho glasses with a sign that said MAYOR KOCH SUCKS A BIG DICK. *[laughs]*

BOLLEN: There is no localized community anymore, and it's partly due to the Internet. You don't have access to computers here, and I know you've never been on the Internet. Do you know what the Internet is?

ALIG: Yes, I know what it is. It means you can have sex with people and they don't have to be in front of you. *[laughs]*

BOLLEN: That's true—or at least one positive side of it. But it also has been a detriment to subversive youth culture in a way because now everything is so easy to access. You don't have to learn about anything on your own. You don't have to work to find things out.

ALIG: That ruins a lot of things. Rudolf was always at the forefront of everything. In 1989, he saw this coming, and that's why he named his club Quick. He said that things were going to be happening very, very fast from now on—satellites and MTV were just the beginning—that it would be impossible to keep anything secret and the notion of the underground would be flipped on its head. And that's exactly what happened. Rudolf predicted that the Club Kids would be the last large subculture to come out of Manhattan, because a subculture needs time to germinate and build. And there won't be time anymore, because as soon as something happens it will be assimilated instantly. I think the Misshapes are a good example of that because they became assimilated instantly. And if the Internet had been around in our time, the same thing would have happened to us.

BOLLEN: But with your club nights around the country, your magazine, your TV talk shows, that's exactly what you wanted.

ALIG: We did not want to assimilate to the mainstream; we wanted the mainstream to assimilate to us. But Rudolf knew that in the future there would be more niche-market scenes, but they would be

over very soon.

BOLLEN: The biggest phenomenon of the year is a pop singer called Lady Gaga. But, really, if you look at her style, it's a page ripped straight out of the Club Kids handbook. And it's amazing that no one else seems to notice that.

ALIG: I love Lady Gaga. She would have fit right in at Disco 2000. A lot of people don't understand what she's doing, but she is a satire of a pop star. She is making fun of it, and at the same time, she's going to go out and get everything she can by doing it.

BOLLEN: And that was your mission too.

ALIG: We saw the whole fame thing collapsing. We wanted to grab it quick, while there was something left to grab, because we saw it all coming down.

BOLLEN: Do you think young people are missing some idea of a community that scenes like the Club Kids offered in New York? Maybe they don't know what they are missing.

ALIG: It's sort of like the mid-'90s, when Ecstasy was becoming kind of not Ecstasy anymore. And all these kids were coming into New York and taking what they thought was Ecstasy, and it wasn't. You couldn't explain to them what they were missing.

BOLLEN: You can't afford to be a freak and live in New York. It's gotten so corporate.

ALIG: Because of real estate, it costs so much money to open a club. You need to make the money back, which means you can't let those kinds of people in for free. You have to have bottle service. Is it me, or should the government subsidize nightlife? It's the lifeblood of the city, and I don't know why it's taken them so long to realize that. Anything stylish or hip or cool or creative that's come out of New York City in the past 25 years has originated in nightclubs.

BOLLEN: As you get closer to getting out of here, is there some nervousness about being out on the other side again?

ALIG: The more sober I get, the harder it definitely becomes. There's a reason you take drugs—so you don't have to think about these things. There's an anxiety about coming home. I'm just lucky I have some kind of support system waiting for me. A lot of guys in here don't have any prospects when they get out. I feel extraordinarily lucky, because I can't imagine going home to nothing.