

## APPENDIX D

*The Interview Transcriptions***Olivia**

[1]

Can you tell me when the possibility first occurred to you that you were sexually attracted to women? *I think I was about...23. I was asexual...for a long time. Through undergrad and the first part of grad school. A woman approached me. Many women would approach me. And um...a lot of people assumed I was gay before I even acknowledged or even dealt with it. Once I left my father's house, I just was not sexual.*

[2]

So you were 23 years old, and then what happened? You were out of the house. *I was out of the house. I was in graduate school already. Her name was Sara Lincoln. She befriended me. There were a couple of women but I didn't really know what the response was. To give you some background on that, my mother left my father when I was ten. Okay? Um, So he...there was four of us, and he raised us. I took her place in the household. Okay, um ... [pause] and I was a chubby child. I was bulimic. And as a young adult, I didn't want the weight. I didn't like um "you have a fat ass" type of thing. So even now my sister goes through this thing about how I eat. Um...If I gain, you know, too much weight I [shifted around on the couch with a deep breath] get real paranoid-hysterical? Because I don't like the attraction of the body. um...[Mouth puckers and air explodes out, reminding me of purging sound] ooh. So when we connected with my mother, I hadn't seen my mother for about twelve years, and when we connected with my mother, my mother was a lesbian. And I never knew that. And at that time, I didn't know women could be lesbian. I was 20. Maybe, yeah, 20, I was at Maryland. I was in...no...wait a second, I was 19. And um my mother was living on Long Island with her lover, and my sister was at LIU, in New York. And my sister had found my mother. And so as a kid, I idolized my mother, even when she wasn't there. I internalized her values. But when I saw her, I was angry. And I sort of freaked out. I really had no conversation ... and she never said, "I am gay." What she said to us is that her and her friend, her lover, were nurses. And they were there to take care of each other. That was the reason they slept in the same room, and things like that. Um, my mother died the next year, and my brothers overheard Marlene, which was her lover, tell another friend of theirs that we wouldn't let her have anything to do because there was something about their relationship that just wasn't said. And when my mother died, she wanted to have something to do with the arrangements and we wouldn't allow it. Um ... and she said she was my lover and she was saying this to a friend, and my brothers overheard it. So we proceeded to punish this woman. Um [explosive sound]...um, so we told her mother [laugh]. Um...and then I left NY and I came back to Washington, um...and like I said at that time, I didn't...the whole thing around sex, I just didn't like um...the approaches from men. It's like with my father, um, he can be out of this household, mentally I was so controlled...um and he would always say don't let another man touch you...um...so I didn't. Um...and, I really didn't like um...I guess sexual advances from men. Um...my...my father would like to come in my face. Um...so it was a thing...um...[breath] where I wasn't...I really just, the whole thing about a penis, the whole thing about it, I really um...didn't embrace um...[explosive sound]. I had gotten married. I have a daughter, Danielle. Um...Danielle lives in Virginia [swallow]. Um...her father was nice to me. I had no perception about love. He was just kind to me, and he was older. And in a lot of ways, he resembled my father. Um...but that whole sexual thing, I think I was frigid. Um...So Franklin had girlfriends, and that was ok with me. I always knew wherever we would live I would bring my sister, my sister with me. Even though she was younger, she was like my protector because she would fight back. And I wouldn't fight back. Um...so when I wound up with Franklin, Renee lived with us. And that was okay with him, cause then he could go out and do what he had to do. When I got pregnant um...with Danielle, um...let me break that up. Franklin, we separated...um... separated for about five years, and it was during that period that I was introduced to women. Okay?*

[3]

So you had Danielle before you were 23?

*No. I had...no, I didn't have Danielle until we got back together. Okay, okay. No. We had separated um...and then I was introduced to women. Um...and at some of the introductions...um...which principally he perceived that I was gay. So he had girlfriends that were bisexual. Um...and he had asked this one lady, Betty, and she introduced me into the life. But I wasn't attracted then. I really didn't understand. And it's almost like I was stupid...um.*

[4]

Your feelings make sense to me.

*[laughter] Even the come-on, the what ever, we were friends, but I just couldn't perceive, you know. She said come sleep in my bedroom. And she would go to touch me, but you know, I just didn't feel right. So I'd get up and sleep on the floor. And she knows I would be friends with her, but it never became sexual. Um...she...her friend, one of her girlfriends, who was not her lover, was Sara Lincoln. Um...[explosive sound], Sara and I were...I guess more alike than Betty and I, in terms of work. Um...like for instance...we used to like some things...mostly work and study. She worked for the government, and I worked for the government. And we had a lot in common. I enjoyed talking to her. I just enjoyed...um...but I did not perceive her, you know, um...being gay. I didn't think, this you know, she had boyfriends too. And then one...I don't know was bisexual. That...that crowd that I went with, most of them were bisexual. Um...so she wanted to come over one day, she wanted to come over for dinner. So I said okay, and we ate. We smoked marijuana and um we were in the bedroom watching TV and she touched me. And, I didn't move because...uh, but it was comfortable. Um...and she continued to touch me and um, and I thought in my brain that um somehow, from that encounter that I must be in love with this woman. Um...so I became obsessed. Um, but it wasn't that way for her. Um...but that's how I got introduced to women, and in that circle of women, to Sara and Rachel, you know.*

[5]

So from that time on you weren't exclusively with women?

*After that, um...let's see, I was obsessed with Sara for about six to eight months. And then um, she had to meet me at a mutual friend, Rachel, a Jewish girl. Um...and um, Rachel was attractive. She said she can [ ], but she's domineering. Um...somehow, she just led that friendship. You know what I am saying, I was living with her out in the wide open. We stayed together for about 3 years. Um, then my father was alive, and I thought I was going to marry her. It's very...I didn't put the restraints, the social restraints on what could happen, and what couldn't happen, and I brought her back home and introduced her. I don't know, my father by then, was somewhat senile, I don't know if he truly understood, you know. His thing, part of his thing is that he wanted to go to bed with her. Um, [explosive sound] we came back, there was a conflict. We came back to Washington and just continued our lives at that point. It was that type of thing. You mentioned therapy. I went into therapy. I'm in therapy now. My doctor is doctor Dr. Marks, and so she's a lesbian too, in Silver Springs. I go there once a week. I've been going there for, I guess, I'm with her for about 6 years. But I spent, [pause] um...when I was 12, I guess, I'm digressing, [laugh] I'm sorry, from my father's abuse, I think I had a breakdown. I went the first time I think I was institutionalized, was at 12. And I was put into Bellevue. I used to shake and my teeth would shake. And people would come and touch me and I'd just freak out. And I think I stayed there for about a month. Then I came back home and um [explosive sound] my brother Michael just told me go along with it, just don't make waves. Because he perceived they would separate the four of us. Or something worse would happen to me. Um, so I just did what I had to do. And like Michael's thing was just don't make waves. My brothers and sister and I are close, even my older brother. Michael's in New York, my younger brother Mark is in Sacramento, and then me and my sister here um...[explosive sound].*

[6]

Where was Danielle?

*Danielle was born, uh, I was going out with this girl Toni, and Franklin, I think I was living on Massachusetts Avenue, on 13<sup>th</sup> and Mass, and Franklin showed up because he had heard I was living this gay lifestyle. And by then, it was pretty much a lifestyle. I was 30. Um...and Franklin showed up...and*

again he was nice. But first he...he brought the Bible, and told me I was going to go to hell. And I would go into the clubhouse, and I would think like the rapture was going to come, and I was going to be locked up in there, and I was going to hell. And all kinds of things were going to happen to me. And...and...the whole thing was just freaky. And then...and so he told me he was my only answer. So, the next year we got back together, okay. But the relationship was like it was the first time, you know. The sexual part of it was, you know, there wasn't a lot of violent sex, you know, at his privilege. His compensation was that I could bring my sister. Renee was in NY somewhere. He said Renee could come down and live with me [laugh] again. I got pregnant. I was 32 when I got pregnant and had Danielle at about 33. Um...that's when Sara came in. We stayed with Franklin for about six months. Danielle was 6 months old and my father got sick, and he was dying. And when my father died, it was November. I left Franklin by January. I was working for Health and Human Services. And I just asked for a transfer to Region 9 and they moved me and Danielle. But Franklin he managed [talent agency], he was a road manager, and so they went out on a trip, while they were gone, they moved me, and government came in with a truck, and they packed you up, and we moved to San Francisco. And we stayed in San Francisco for about nine years. I moved my sister out to San Francisco [laughing]. And my sister got out there, I was living in San Francisco, me and Danielle. [explosive sound] My sister called me up one day and um told me she was HIV positive and pregnant. At that time, you know, what I had known about HIV, I thought she was going to die. And I just wanted whatever quality of life, and I just wanted her with me. So she had two sons and she was pregnant. Um so, they came out to San Francisco and I was living with a woman named Jeanette, in Oakland, across the Bay. So um Jeanette really didn't like the idea of me bringing my family, so she moved to another apartment in that apartment complex. Okay, um. [explosive sound] Throughout the years I have had even, sort of substance abuse problems [explosive sound] um.

[7]

How are you doing now?

I still have an eating disorder. There is something good about living out here. I don't drive. My sister drives. And like I said...I don't particularly like NAAA, type of thing. I think I'm work obsessed. You know, my obsessions just take root in another way. Like if you saw my room upstairs, it's obsessive. You know, like 150 pair of shoes, and then I don't wear shoes, I just want to take them off. It's just a habit. But I'm obsessed...and paper. I got paper everywhere, I write something, I have stacks, copies of it. You know keep one copy and have thousands of copies. So but I mean I still have obsessions. The disorder is compulsive-obsessive disorder, with major depression, posttraumatic stress. Um...that's... that's... and some of it is because I liked the women, or the company? Like Woodside Women's Hospital in Coppucino, California. Rosalind Carter started it, and it is the best place to heal. I just loved to go there. And I when had good insurance, you go for 30 days, they have 45 days stay. I went there 3 times. I've been to Betty Ford's. There was a time they think I was obsessed with just going to the places [laughing]. I've been to lots of them. You know I think I've been to the best and the worst of them. And I finally grew out of that [laughing]. But it would almost be like every year I relapse, and I would have to go, would have to go [sound with her lips]. It's even on the outside that um...my sister is a heterosexual. Right now the HIV is manageable, cause she's on meds. She works, she works at Women's Collective, but um even though, surface, she accepts my sexual orientation, um I don't think she likes to see it. So...

[8]

And yet you chose to live with her?

Yes. Um...it's like having two lives. It's true it's just like having two lives. When I live away from her, I'm more comfortable in coming out. When I live with her, I'm just not sexual. Um. And it's like um...Renee's always fought my battles. And I'm 50 years old, 52. And um...there's still this need, you know, um...where [explosive sound].

[9]

Does she kind of protect you?

Right. In the sense that, I mean, um, there's no, it doesn't have that emotion that you would have with a lover, but, there's that protection, that other part. And we can build things together; we can buy together, we can...you know, so I get some of one and some of the other. When I go out, sometimes I just go out, or

go away for the weekend, and come back. And she goes, in a conversation, "Like what happened." And I'm not comfortable. I'm comfortable talking to Dr. Marks about my secrets and what I do. I just don't talk. Even since...since...see like um I started um my own HIV company, and so most of my um associates, I went to undergrad with, they're really good girlfriends, mostly women, but I've not even told them that I'm gay. We go back 30 years in a friendship. And they may assume, but I just don't say the word. Okay? It's like, some people know, and some people don't know. Um...those people who I would think I've been with thirty years, and I said "This is what I want to do," and my friend Carol, she's an attorney, Kathy's an MSW, Debra's a Ph.D., and I told my friends I want to do this and they said "fine we've been friends for thirty years." Um, Debra I think I had a crush on all during undergrad. But you know, never said it. You know what I mean? I've never said, "I'm gay." But then there's something about her that said, just be wary. But I never had the discussion of saying "This is who I am." I think one of things, I think that bothers me about my life, when my mother died, and um...they read her eulogy...um I didn't know her. And that was one of the things I think that disappoints me most. It's that to know somebody and not know them. My daughter knows I'm gay. I talk to Danielle. Um, cause I don't want to die, and no one not know me. You know what I mean? Especially not Danielle.

[10]

Is she grown?

Yes she's grown. She lives in Virginia. And I have a granddaughter. I'll show you some pictures; they're nice. [She goes to retrieve photographs and forgets she is attached to the microphone. She is very excited about showing them to me. Comes back with a big smile, after 30 seconds]. This is Danielle. This is my granddaughter. This is when she graduated from high school. She's real different.

[11]

She's really something.

She's ultra femme. She's ultra femme, real different. I talk to her everyday. She's one of my best friends. And I think Danielle knows me. Okay? And Danielle has courage. There was this thing that Amelia Earhardt said, "that courage is the price that life extracts [exacts] for granting peace." And sometimes I lack courage. And I think um [explosive sound], and that's my battle, I guess. You know that courage you know, to be who you want to be. I settled. I think I feel like I settled.

[12]

There's no arguing with what you feel.

Yeah. I do. You know, I can't be that, um...so I work.

[13]

What's is the biggest fear you have about what would happen if someone found out you were gay and you didn't want them to know?

I think I still think I have this thing about going to hell. Um...[pause] somehow I'm less than they are.

[14]

What was your religious background?

Well, my father he didn't go to church. My grandmother [pause] was a Baptist [spoken almost reverently]. Um...she was real heavy into God. My grandmother died when I was ten. See when my grandmother...maybe I was nine. Once my grandmother died, that's when my mother left. And my grandmother would always come to my rescue. My father was afraid of my grandmother. You know, she would come and she was a protector. Okay? And now me and God... [explosive sound], Dr. Marks says God does for me he makes me, he makes things easy for me.

[15]

Do you participate in gay community activities like the gay parade?

I go. I go. You know, like it's separate in my case, I used to go to clubs a lot. There were times, you know, during my first separation from Franklin I went to the clubs a lot. Just lately, the last 2 or 3 years, um...[pause] I'm tired. Um...and I don't know um...I don't go to places to meet the women that I think I would be attracted to. Um...and like the women...I like intelligent women. Um...um...and then my girlfriends, like that I went to school with, and I work with...[explosive sound] um...Debra's married now, she lives in Charlotte. Carol just moved up here from Atlanta. She's never been married. But

*um...she's into men. She wants to always go out and do this man thing. And then Stephanie... Carol just took, she's the marketing director of Prince William County Transportation. Now Stephanie Marsh, she's um...a doctor over at Sibley. And um, now she carries...she never took her husband's name. Her husband lives in Cleveland. She lives here. And these women like me, but it's nothing we've ever talked about...I just don't talk about it. And there's a degree of satisfaction just being with another woman.*

[16]

Do you think not talking about it has something to do with being in the African-American community?  
*Uh-huh [yes]. It's not socially acceptable even today [laughing]. You know, it's like, pardon me you know I do this thing for National Council of Negro Women. I spoke at...I just finished this thing with BT [Black Television]...about... well it's called "The Naked Truth." And part of...I was just a consultant. Part of the thing they were going to air about was down-low men. And there are down-low women. You know, I'm gay, but I don't tell it. I don't go sleep with men! But I don't tell it. And it's like even...like I said there is this whole thing, and when I have to speak about down-low men, you know it's a hard thing you know. It's **so** hard. Like I don't know **what** they would think, you know. When I was younger, there was...I think I had more courage about that. When I lived I the city. I'm from New York, but I went to undergrad and graduate school here. And I had a history, and people knew me from **not gay**, or whatever, you know. And it was always assumed especially that I would get married to somebody, and have a child, you do...you know, um. And you know, I think as a child, you know, I'd watch *Leave It To Beaver*. I'd watch *TV Land*, *Leave It To Beaver*, and *The Brady Bunch*. We would have that particular type of value. And in one part of my brain I still think maybe that's the way it's supposed to be. But there's this thing about um...men irritate me.*

[17]

Do you attribute that irritation to your father?

*Right. Cause I don't um, [breath] I work hard to be good at what I do, and solve the competition. Um...like, okay, like with my sister, like the mechanical things around the house, you know, go under the sink, so you can get the...we just had the kitchen redone and we have new plumbing in there, okay? So but she couldn't get the water to turn off last night, and there was this scream [laughing]. So this guy comes, and it was ok, the valve is under here, but it's my house. I'll get under the sink and mess with it. And it's like this thing...you know, it's like he's supposed to do this, because he's here. But it's not your house, "Please have a seat." [Laugh] And the guy for the furnace, you know, he was explaining to me how to bleed it. Here's here and he's asking "Could you [ ]" "It's not your place to ask questions, excuse yourself." And it becomes that way, you know...adversarial. And it's not that I mean to be adversarial, but it's like I'm real [explosive breath].*

[18]

Are you more that way with men than women?

*Yes.*

[19]

That makes sense to me. Is it hard for you to live in the straight world and be gay?

*Patrick [man she works with] is a womanizer. He sleeps with Cheryl [woman she works with]. [laugh] And that's a real crazy...She lets it be known because she...he's married. You know...he has a wife that's overdone. They have matching Cadillac's, [I laugh and she starts to giggle], O.K. Cheryl's underpaid, you know, you know, he lives further out, big house. But she lets it be known that she has a piece of Patrick. I'm brighter than Patrick. So it's like, this...we have a different level of respect, okay. But like, see I have um...this woman comes in and does some typing, Gloria, a Hispanic girl, very pretty, ok. Um...and he doesn't care if they're HIV positive or not, cause Gloria, like my sister Renee, she's one of our clients. And she needed some work. So I said, okay. So she'll come in and she'll do you know. And Patrick is trying to sleep with Gloria, but Gloria is a New York, Spanish Harlem, New York...tough. You know what I mean...she's going to get paid; she's going to get paid for it. But Cheryl is not getting paid [laugh]. It's true. But um...so that's what it is. So Patrick and I demand...have...and because he is a womanizer, and to a degree, Patrick doesn't care how it happens. I do the work. I'm satisfied with doing the work, and that's ok with him. Cause to a degree with him, he's still getting over, so. He's still getting over.*

[20]

I'm going to go a little further into your abuse. What age did it begin?

*It began before my mother left. But most then it would just be just grabbing my ass, you know. I was 6 to 8.*

[21]

Did he touch your siblings?

*My sister would fight him back. And when he tried it with Renee, she told my aunt, his sister. And they moved Renee into the house with them. But um I look like my mother. My sister looks like my father. And um it was always ok...they called me Serena [mother's name] when I was growing up. You could call me fat ass and it was ok. He didn't particularly care for my brother Michael much. But um...my father was a machinist. My brother Michael is a comptroller for Bank of America. He was in their London office, now he's in their New York office. They're like worlds apart. My mother had a master's degree and my father had a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education. My father was a mulatto. My grandfather was white. My father was very fair: green eyes, wavy hair. My mother was from Barbados, very dark. When they came here to America, her aim was to get anything that was white as possible. But he wanted something as dark as possible. I'm the brownest. Um...the Mason's don't like brown people. So again, it would be ok. My sister resembles them more. Um...it's like this self-loathing. It's like you always wanted to be something that you're not. You know...if I could look like them, look like a Mason. It's all in my head. So like I said...so when they moved...this is after my mother had died [she meant to say grandmother]...all the four of us lived together with him. And him and my mother would fight violently. He was always threatened. My mother she went to Hunter College, and he was always threatened by that. Now he made a good salary, he worked for Hertz Rent a car. And he was a body and fender man. And he made ok money, you know. We had a house, you know. But his existence...[breath] his ideals and things and you know, what she'd like and what he'd like, you know. His ideal would be to have five cars parked in the garage or along the thing where he could work at. And she didn't like that. And they couldn't communicate. That I learned from them. They were attracted by color, or by looks. They liked the way each of them looked. But there was nothing to hold that. And uh...he would beat her. He would beat her. And when my grandmother died, and she left, he would get me up at like six o'clock in the morning, I would get to have coffee with him before he left, and he would tell me horrible things about her. You know, and your mother wouldn't do this, and your mother wouldn't do that. You know, and I'm your daddy and maybe you can do some of the things I wanted your mother to do, should have done for me. You know, um you know. And he would show me...it first started out...he would show me his penis. Um, "Your mother didn't like that," you know...lot's of men, you know. And he would say this thing about that if there was white spots, calcium spots on your nails, and he said they could tell you about the number of boyfriends you have had. And you see how faithful he was because he didn't have any. But look at your mother's hands; she has dozens [breath]. And um I would sleep with him at night. And most of it, you know he would masturbate and like to come in my face.*

[22]

Did he ever penetrate you?

*I don't know [explosive breath]. I know he would lay against me. Um...and, he would drink. Like he got paid every other week, and he would get drunk. And his male friends...I remember one of them trying to touch me and my brother Michael...five of them, like it was an ok thing to do. But my father never said anything. As I got older...and once, I came on my period when I was 15, then um...the sexual things would stop. They stopped then, once I came on my period. We still had a husband and wife relationship.*

[23]

Meaning?

*We slept together. I would cook for him. I would go to the supermarket with him. And I would discuss the bills. We would discuss what, you know, we'd get for my brothers and sister, or whatever. You know if they needed clothes or something, then he would give me the money, then I would go get it, or him and I would go get it. But the sexual stuff, he would rub my head...and hair, but um the sexual stuff would stop. It stopped about 15. It just moved into...we were like older married people, I guess.*

[24]

Do you feel as though you were in a privileged position?

*Um...no [long pause]. Because he would beat me. Holidays, birthdays, um...over simple things. Like one day it was oatmeal. I didn't like oatmeal. It was slimy to me. And he just pushed my head into the bowl of oatmeal. Um...what I think what I inherited from my father is fear. Remember I spoke about courage? Because speaking out is more or less courage. I was afraid. If you'd say something, he would slap you. You know. We'd be riding around in the car and I'd say something, he'd put you out in New Rochelle. How do you get to White Plains? You walk.*

[25]

He held his power over you.

*He would talk about my mother. But you were different. And I thought I...because he would talk to me. And he wouldn't talk to my brothers and sister. He liked my brother Mark, my younger brother, but Mark's not his child. But...and I think he knew, like you know, Mark wasn't his child. We would always hear from him about that. Then it wasn't until my mother's funeral Mark's father shows up. Um...and my father shows up. Cause then, my mother lived in Long Island; then my father lived in Mt. Vernon. And he came to my mother's funeral. But there was something about him taking care of Mark. I think at some level, he loved my mother and I think he was thinking he was taking care of her child. And he was nicer to Mark than he was to the rest of us. He really never beat Mark. But he would do...he would take a broomstick, you know, right here [pointing to her head], it finally cleared up. He split my skull with a crowbar and he didn't...he didn't have to be drunk. He was just mean. He was just a mean man. You know, my sister, when I was in the kitchen and he was beating me, and Renee was hiding, and she hit him from behind. [Laughing] But she would fight him. I just crawled up in a fetal position, and just let him beat me. If he'd do it, just do it.*

[26]

You talked about the way you survived the abuse, through your obsessive-compulsive behavior, and you are still surviving it through working hard, doing your best. Was there ever a time you relied on drugs or alcohol as a way to cope with your situation?

*Yes. Um. Franklin introduced me to cocaine. I used to smoke some reefer, but none of that was a problem. Franklin sold cocaine. And that whole thing that he offered. I like cocaine. Cocaine became a problem. Um...[explosive sound]. It was substance abuse. Then, I think one of the, I guess, benefits of substance abuse, nothing else matters, you really don't need. Ok uh, you don't eat, but you don't need. I have an emptiness in my life. Um...if I smoke coke, I don't worry about it. Um...it's...work does a lot for me, my sister does a lot for me. We built this house, and it's done a lot for me. But I have a need. If I smoke coke, I don't have that need. It doesn't...it supercedes the need for another person. You can honestly live alone. When I was a child I used to sit in my closet. We had an armoire, and I would go and sit in there, and turn off the light. I would sit there in the dark, and the clothes and the objects in the closet...I would talk to them. They became my friends. Cocaine became that armoire. You know. You have it - you really don't need. And that's the part...like that I haven't really got, like how do you get past that hole. Right, there is a hole. And the courage, and that's what Dr. Marks talks about, like doing things. Like go here Olivia, go here. Like taking those steps. Going past your front door. You know go do this. To change while there's this hole here, to take those steps, some days I don't have that. With cocaine, I don't need to. I can live very isolated. And you don't need anything [pause] at all.*

[27]

Is it almost as if the hole disappears?

*Yes. You don't feel. You don't feel. And you can be ok. Ok. There's no secret because I'm not heterosexual, I'm not homosexual, I'm not any sexual.*

[28]

In a way it kind of erases you.

*[She replies enthusiastically and quickly] Yeah! It's...you know that's true. It gets you by.*

[29]

What would you do today if someone tried to abuse you?

*Well now I don't let a man get that close to me. There's always that thing about getting close. There's something about my demeanor that says we have a boundary. Like with me and Patrick, you know, he wouldn't say...we never discussed my sexual preference. You know, I think some things are known without discussion. It's nobody's business, but...there is a way of carrying yourself that no one would ask. And it becomes a thing that is not up for discussion.*

[30]

Do you talk about your abuse with anyone but your therapist?

*I talk about it with Renee. Abuse, I think in the black community, is more of an accepted issue than homosexuality. I think there's...I do think abuse is acceptable.*

[31]

How so?

*Wife beating, children beating, it's common.*

[32]

Did you ever relate your sexual abuse to your sexual orientation?

*To a degree...um...like when you asked, had my father ever penetrated me...um...I went with a girl once, she liked toys. I really don't want you sticking anything up in me. We can make love, seven different ways, without that. Um...I don't...one of the things...one of the ways...I think I like women because you don't...making love is different. You can hold a woman. I really uh...don't like penetration. Um...and this particular woman, there was something about making love to her which was similar to a man. And I just didn't like it. You know. I really don't like that. Uh...to that degree.*

[33]

Some gay women who were abused have a thought that if they weren't abused, maybe they wouldn't be gay. Did that ever occur to you?

*Maybe, but I'm [explosive sound]. But looking at my character, I don't think so. I have a friend Jeffrey, and he's an idiot. But he really perceives in his mind, that you haven't been fucked right. And he would make statements that um that you know...that a woman hasn't had it. He would say, "that's a real pretty woman, why is she gay?" Like he could see an ugly woman being gay. Like all lesbians are ugly, or fat [laughing]. He's really...he thinks this way. And that's not so. And I never had to discuss it. You know, he would know one. "Do you know what a lesbian looks like?" Yeah, he would know one. He would know a lesbian. He would know an HIV person. He wouldn't eat at an HIV person's house if they cooked. You know, he's an idiot.*

[34]

[I just burst into laughter]. I can't tell. Even if you sleep with someone, you still don't know.

*That's the same thing when they talk about this down low. Sleeping with someone...I learned that from my father...it becomes operational. You can go through the motions if necessary. I've had male lovers. I can go through the motions. And it doesn't mean anything. "Did you come?" "Sure!" [Laughing]. You know if that's what you want to believe. "Sure." "Was it good for you?" "No, really [laughing].*

[35]

I think we've covered everything. I want to make sure everything is cool with you, because I don't want to leave you in a funk.

*No, I'm okay.*

[36]

I want to thank you for allowing me to interview you, I wish you all the luck, and I was very happy to meet you. You are a very nice person.

Sheree

[1]

*It was easy to get here wasn't it? And you found the door without much problem.*

[2]

Absolutely, your directions were perfect. I'll give you a microphone and I'll take one. So you've read the informed consent [she nods yes]. And you know you can stop the interview at any time.

*Yes. It's interesting yesterday I was feeling uh a lot of anxiety, a lot. And I couldn't, I could not figure out what it was coming from, and like...and...and then all of a sudden it hit me. What am I doing tomorrow morning? Yeah. [deep laugh] But uh, yeah, so it was going off without me even like being aware of what was happening.*

[3]

The first set of questions is about internalized homophobia. I would like you to talk about when did the possibility first occur to you that you were attracted to women and wanted to become involved with another woman.

*Well I know when I was six, my girlfriend and I had a lot of sex play, and my mother was alarmed and wouldn't let me see her anymore when she found out. When I was twelve, I knew that I liked looking at my girlfriends undress, more than I should, and I felt guilty. Um when I was around nineteen, twenty, um I realized that I had sexual feelings for women that I wanted to act on and um I had a string of romances. But the sex wasn't very hot, and I was disappointed. [Laughing] I thought it would be hotter. Um I didn't really fall in love with a woman until I was about thirty, and then I felt madly in love. And I've been with women since.*

[4]

I heard you say that you felt guilt at first.

*Right. Right. But um actually part of my coming out was also um, I was also very much involved with the new Women's Liberation Movement at that time, and the leaders in that were lesbians, and out lesbians, and I admired them intensely. So for me being lesbian was a positive thing to be. I never had, uh I don't think I've ever had negative feelings except um, when I told my mom, when I was about twenty, that um you know I was with a woman at the time, she um said she was going to throw up, it made her sick. And then I felt bad. Because somehow I thought she would not have that negative reaction. I felt bad that she felt bad, you know. Um [pause], actually, um I feel like I've always had a consistent pride [voice goes up] in being a lesbian [voice goes up]. It hasn't been an issue. But I've had to deal with some um pretty intense external factors like um I did have a son when I was 25. And I um gave temporary custody to his father [voice up] while I went to school and took advantage of a scholarship. And when I tried to get him back, I couldn't because I was a lesbian. So I lost my son, [pause] custody of him, which was very painful. And at that time, in the eighties you just couldn't get your kids back, the way you can now.*

[5]

How old is he now?

*He's 27; he's getting married in June. Oh yes, we're very close.*

[6]

Did you have to wait until he reached majority until you could have a relationship?

*No. I still got to see him on weekends. But I didn't have any control over the quality of his life, and I just saw a lot of things happening that broke my heart and there was nothing I could do about it. At the time, I was partnered with a [laughing] Methodist minister, and she had to be incredibly closeted, because she would have been you know thrown out, so that complicated everything. Plus it would have cost a minimum of \$10,000 for custody battle [up inflection], the battle [up inflection]. And the lawyer told me I would probably lose unless I got out of the relationship I was in. And 10,000 was just like, I mean that's like saying a million dollars. I mean that was out of reach for us.*

[7]

So rather than dealing with internalized homophobia, you were dealing with a lot of homophobia.

*Right. Right.*

[8]

You spoke about this, but was there a specific time when you felt it necessary to stay in the closet?  
*Just that thing with the minister really. I've always been very out. And right now, I'm so out that it's not even an issue anymore. It's like, I don't even think about how people might respond. I don't even think about that. It's not a factor anymore.*

[9]

Do you participate in gay related community activities?  
*By working here um, actually, I run a smoking cessation program for LGBT folk. I'm sort of like the administrator of that...that program um because um we have such a higher smoking rate. It..It's...the average I think is about 25, 30% in the general population, in the Bronx. About 59% of Bronx lesbians smoke, according to our research.*

[10]

To what do you attribute this?  
*Homophobia, internalized and external, I mean definitely, yeah; plus racism, poverty, and sexism for the women on top of it. And 25% are moms, so you've got them taking care of kids too. Anyhow. I came here, um, activities. So almost everything I do right now that is LGBT related is part of my work. I go to the pride...to the gay expos, I'm out there all the time as a lesbian, yeah.*

[11]

I'd like you talk about your abuse history.  
*Um, yeah, I...I...I tend to minimize like most folks do [laughing]. It wasn't that much, but it was it was really profound. When I was little, my sister and I were both sexually abused, molested by my grandfather. But that doesn't leave...all I remember with that was being angry with my sister because she told my mother and everyone was so upset. So I remember being very angry with my little sister. But we are talking about five years old, I mean very, very young. And I remember you know my grandfather going into my underwear and fooling around, you know. So that...but um...that I just cut...that didn't affect me as much as my dad. And with my dad um, he made me very, very uncomfortable. He was alw...he was a very narcissistic kind of man. I mean in terms of like classic DSM-IV [laughing] narcissist. Um, you know, we didn't exist for him as real people. And he um...he would like find ways to come into the bathroom, when I was using the toilet or you know in the tub. Um he was, you know, always looking at my breasts. You know, just made me **very** uncomfortable. I couldn't use the word breasts for like five years because he had used it. Do you know what I mean? And just made it dirty; he just made it awful. Uh...and um...so what happened it was a single incident, but um I had come out of the bath and I had a towel around me, and he stopped me in the hallway and he said, "I want to make sure you're clean." And I said, "I took a bath, I'm clean." I was 12, 11 or 12, somewhere around there. And he said let me check, and he took the towel off and basically ran his hands all over my body [very low voice]. Um...and I was just like totally mortified and ashamed, **totally** mortified and ashamed [very deep breath]. And it still like gives me total creeps and chills. At that point, as far as I was concerned, he wasn't my dad. You know, its like and I began to really hate him. I didn't care much for him before that either. He was pretty sadistic and uh, um, you know beat us also a lot. You know, lots of difficulties along with the emotional degrading, and then ultimately, you know this was like um...out of everything, this was worse than the emotional and physical, this was like really bad. Um...but I can tell you more about the sex later but um. Well one of the hardest [laughing] things for me is um that...um...my sexual fantasies always come back there. No matter what, they always come back to that point and I hate it. I hate it. It can be the fantasy of a man doing that to another girl, of me doing it to a girl, you know, which is [] because I would never actually act on the sexual feelings, but they're very powerful. And anytime I'm having sex, if I want to orgasm, **that's** where I have to go back to. And I just...after a while, I said, you know what, that's the way I...I am. That's what I fantasize. That's what makes me hot. It makes me really angry...at him, but that's what makes me hot. [ ]so I learned to accept it, and go with it finally. Do you know what I mean? Absolutely. Okay. And um...I didn't tell anybody about it, because I think I just couldn't believe it. You know, I kept trying to figure out...I remember saying to myself for years, "Oh, he was just trying to see if I was clean." "Dads do that, you know." Then um [pause] when I was about 25 I went to a workshop*

that a woman did on sexual abuse, and the memories just flooded back. It was like right there. You know, I remembered it. I remember saying to a friend, well my dad, at least, you know, he never raped me or anything but he did touch me. And then it was just as if it had happened yesterday. I mean it was like I remembered the whole thing very clearly. Um and not much later than that, about five years later, I was taking a course in domestic violence, I think it was [ ] domestic violence course in undergrad, I was about 30. And they had a speaker come in from the Task Force for Child Protection. And as she was talking, I suddenly realized that I had been abused on all these levels. Uh...and it was really hard to believe. You know like, I could connect that...one of the first things that happened, and I was incredibly angry at my mom, because she'd never protected me [up inflection], and I love her dearly, I still do now, but she made her choices very clearly. You know to stay with him instead of protecting me. Also I had very difficult teenage years, and I was also very sexually active, which [pause] everybody says is part of abuse stuff that you become sexually promiscuous, but I always enjoyed my sex [big laugh]. I always enjoyed it, in a way that I never felt like I was [pause] um...behaving disrespectfully towards myself. It never felt like acting out. It felt like something I really wanted to do [laughing], and enjoy, you know, and it was kind of like despite what people were saying about you know sex and girls and all that. So when I was um...shortly after that, when I was about 30, I went to therapy to...to...to talk about it and deal with it, and um...I just got...I got very depressed, **very** depressed. Had a really hard time, and I finally told my sister. And my sister got very angry with me. She's a year and a half younger than me. She said, "There's no way that happened. Dad would never do that." And I'm like, "Look, it happened." And she said, you're just crazy. You're making this up." And I'm like "Jayne, why would I make this up?" Why would I come out in the middle...why would I do that. And I was trying to get support from her, from another person in the family, and also, we had both been victims of abuse from my grandfather, right, so I thought she'd understand. What she did instead is she called my mother, and my mother called me hysterical and called me every name in the book. And just, you know, your **father** would never, ever do that. You have a sick twisted **mind**, and just really... And about a year later, I tried to kill myself [the words quickly tumbled out, followed with a laugh]. I was like, I just got, uh so depressed. I cut myself off from my family um because I felt like [pause] not only did they not believe me, but they were supporting him. **Oh** the first thing that happened [upward inflection] after that phone call with my mom, I thought sure my father was going to come and kill me. I turned off all the lights and I hid in this closet. I...I was like 32, 33 years old. And I just sat there and hid until my partner came home. And she said, "He's not coming," and I said, "He's going...he's going to **kill** me." And I...it was just like I was a little kid again. You know, I felt like I had no [pause], you know, no safe place. So um my parents and I didn't talk for about five years altogether and...and...uh my family and I, we were just totally separated for about five years. Based on that and um...then I started missing them. I've brought it up a couple of times since with my sister [upward inflection], and she still, like she can't handle it but she's not um nasty anymore. She just...she just will say, "It doesn't make sense, dad's not like that." And I said, "He's like that." I'm the only person like who...well that's not true, my sister does too. My dad's like a petty tyrant. He's a little bastard. He's like 74 now, and he's just as weird now as he was [laughing], just as, I shouldn't even laugh, he's just an awful man. And um there was a lot...a lot of hitting, punching, kicking, um belt spanking to point where I was in extreme agony. Um...um...and...and also totally unpredictable. It had nothing to do with my behavior, it just whenever he...you know...I knew he felt pleasure in it. I knew that. I knew he enjoyed doing it, and that was also very upsetting to me. And my mom would just disappear. You know [nearly whispering] she just wasn't there. And um, yeah, so that's a lot, right?

[12]

Yes, that's a lot.

Yeah, but of all the things that happened to me, um, you know that one day when my dad touched me like that was the worst part of my childhood. And that was it, and of course, I couldn't...I never wanted to be with him alone afterwards. Nev...I mean I did everything I could to never be alone in the house with him. And I don't think we ever had a moment alone since. There's even today, when I'll be sitting in my mom's house, I don't even call it my parent's house, it's my mom's house. When I'm sitting in my mom's house [laughing], and my dad is there, it's like I'll get up and leave the room. Cause I have like, there's no way I

want to even engage with him as a person, you know. And I'm the only person who sees it that way. And for a long time, I accepted the family's verdict, that I was the crazy lady. But I'm not. It took me a long time.

[13]

Was your father related to the grandfather who abused you and your sister?

No, no, he was my mother's father-in-laws. My mother's stepfather was the abuser. Right. Right. Right. My father's parents both died when I was very young. One, when I was one years old, and my grandmother when I was about 10 years old. So yeah.

[14]

So there is a history of abuse.

Yeah! Yeah and you know, I...my...I recognize that emotionally I'm not the most stable person in the world. But I also know, like I know myself very well, I know I have limitations, I never...I suffer from anxiety, um and I understand why [laughing], you know I would feel anxious. And I feel like considering everything that has happened to me, I've done amazingly well, to get as far as I have. Every once in a while it feels like its all going to crumble under my feet, but I've made it so far so good. And I feel like I'm really [pause] it's really amazing I've gotten as far as I have.

[15]

You had a lot to handle and it sounds like you didn't have much support. Who did you turn to for support?

My partner. And she was both an MSW and a minister and she was very highly skilled. In fact, I think she was kind of on a rescue mission and [laugh] and I needed to be rescued so...our relationship, for a long time, was um her taking care of me.

[16]

Did she give you skills so that you could do that for yourself?

Um...actually, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. She ah...she...she would say things that left an impact on me like um...like once I had broken a window and uh my dad had beaten me over that, and she said to me she said, "Honey your so much more valuable than that window." And that was like, "I was?" "I am?" "I'm more valuable th...", " and it's like you know stuff...little things like that she would say that made me realize my own worth.

[17]

So she helped.

She helped. But, I'm not sure it was...we're still friends too. I don't see her that often, maybe once a year or something. But um, yeah she's very supportive.

[18]

Was there any else you could turn to?

I was seeing a therapist at that time to deal with this. And unfortunately things went terribly wrong there. Um, I um, the therapist was good, but...but I was referred to a psychiatrist for anti-depressant medication and the guy gave me an MAO inhibitor, Nardil, and put me on the highest possible dose, and I had a manic episode, um where I was...I was actually psychotic [laughing] for about a month [upward inflection]. And I had to be hospitalized again. So um he wasn't monitoring me well. As soon as I got off the Nardil I was fine again. But uh I just completely lost faith in myself because you know it took a while to figure out that it wasn't me and that it wasn't normal state. That it was you know the medication that pushed me to a manic phase and I hadn't had it before or since, so...yeah.

[19]

I imagine that's what you do. Your first reaction since childhood was "I'm the one."

Absolutely. It's still. It's always hard for me to imagine that other people [laughing] have responsibility. I always go to myself first, **always**. But I have learned over time that it doesn't have to always be me, and I have some very supportive friends that I can reality check with. But my experience is whenever I get really angry, and really upset with somebody that I pay. And I'm still afraid to be angry with people even though it happens quite a bit [laughing]. One of my issues, one where I need to grow in is um accepting that my anger can be justified. And um, it can be expressed appropriately, in ways that it doesn't alienate

*other people from me. Because I can be very good at alienating people when I get really pissed. Yeah [laughing].*

[20]

Did you engage in self-injury, like cutting?

*I still do. Um...it's not cutting but it's I think it's called tricotomania or something like that.*

[21]

Yes, trichotillomania – hair pulling?

*Hair pulling, scab picking - And it's obsessive-compulsive. I mean it's like I can't control it. And my doctors give me increasing medication to deal with anxiety; I do deep breathing; my sister said "Try an ice cube on the skin to, you know stimulate instead of scratching." But that's um like my deep secret. Yeah, I...I...I cut myself a lot because it **feels** so good. Yeah, it's like a pain that feels good, and um it's...that's actually been since I was 15 and I've never stopped. And it's never changed. That's embarrassing for me.*

[22]

Thank you for sharing that. I know it must have been difficult for you to share that with me. You spoke about anger, but can you experience other emotions with more ease?

*You know, um...no...no. Sometimes I feel like I'm almost like two people [hearty laughter]. Well, it's like there's one part of me that is very warm, and kind, and compassionate, and caring. Um...and, there is another part of me that feels like an actor behind a façade that, and I feel like really I have no feelings, and really bottom line, I don't care. And um...you know sometimes it worries me, like maybe I'm a bit of a sociopath or something. And it's...it's like, and you know somehow I think that my mother and my father's personalities, they're both here [pointing to herself]. I've never done anything you know terribly wrong or immoral, nothing that I couldn't live with. You know, I mean real wrong. But I've always wondered if I'm capable of it. Which...I just worry about that part of me that's really shut down, it's shut down. Um...um...and...and with that is distrust, a little paranoia, I have to really catch myself when I start thinking that there's more than one person who's working against me [deep laugh]. My god, it's like "No, people have their own lives to live." See I've got this on a cognitive level. It's the emotional level that's really hard. Um [long pause] and um, the other thing, maybe you're going to decide I'm too wack-o to be in the study [gales of laughter]. The other thing is that I've really enjoyed acting as a dominatrix, and giving pain, especially to men. Making them suffer. And I get incredible arousal out of it. Incredible. But no um...no real feelings. Do you hear what I'm saying? And that's like maybe one way that I've coped. I haven't played much lately but I used to quite a bit.*

[23]

Is it sexual?

*I won't have sex with men.*

[24]

So how do you dominate them?

*I put them into a state of submission and powerlessness and I give them pain.*

[25]

I understand you don't have sex with them, but is it sexual?

*It's erotically charged.*

[26]

So they know they are participating, that is, it's not just domination of men that are around you from day to day, like coworkers.

*No. It's totally consensual. That is very separate. It's like a separate box in my life. I just, it was like I just realized one day that um I really enjoyed...I mean guess why [laughing], it's not a hard stretch...I really enjoyed literally having men underneath me begging. And the weirdest thing was that afterwards they adore me you know. And I get all this incredibly positive stuff from them, and I was just being a cruel bitch, I really am. And it's a safe place to play all this stuff out. I like it.*

[27]

It sounds as though you know yourself very well and, I'm summarizing, so correct me if I'm wrong. You know yourself. You said you have two parts – this side and that side. But what you haven't yet done is to integrate them into one self. Would you like to do that?

*I think it's safer to keep that part separate. I have to be really careful. I work with all guys here. I have to be really careful how I speak to them, especially you know, not to call them boy, and especially because they're all men of color. So, and like I, no I have to really put a box there. The part that warmest, and actually that I feel best about is being a grandmother and a mom. I also have two stepchildren from a relationship with their biological mom, who I adore utterly. They're the apples of my eye. And the children and the grandchildren, I just like, yes, there's feelings there and they certainly are very positive and wonderful. You know and I feel that's the part of me that's most nurturing. And there's this other part of me that...that...just yeah, I don't know what the potential is there sometimes.*

[28]

And it scares you?

*Yeah, there's an amorality there. It's...it's my dad. You know, like a part...maybe I inherited some of his narcissism or sadistic stuff. But yeah when I'm in that other space [motions boxes with her hands on the desk]...look I've got it like this [notices her unconscious movements and laughs heartily]. The uh, yeah, when I'm being really, really sadistic, yeah, I mean the words that come out of my mouth and they're often my father's words. Yeah, but it gives me satisfaction. I also dominate women, which I enjoy um. It's much more erotic, much more erotic and much more sexual.*

[29]

Because you can participate.

*Yes, yes, exactly. Yes...yes. But I'm always the top. Never the bottom. Never the bottom.*

[30]

Are you with someone now?

*No [whispered]. I have a uh...a leftover houseboy, I call him. When I was doing domination, there was a boy that used to come around for...uh to see me and I sort of adopted him [upward inflection]. It's not a sexual relationship. It's more of a mother-son kind of thing. He's 20 years younger than me. And he has some psychiatric disabilities where he can't function on his own. And I found him literally in the street. He can't take care of himself. So I take care of him. And I would say that our relationship is um [pause] close. Um...but more of a care taking role. And he drives me crazy, and he's like...but he also helps me as I'm getting older and fatter. I'm having more trouble getting around and lifting things and all that so he picks that up for me. Yeah, so he has been living in my apartment. Yeah.*

[31]

I'm going back on the abuse. When your father abused you, what were the messages that you heard?

*When I was younger, when I was younger, it was along...I was a nobody, and I shouldn't have even been born, and I was nothing but a problem to him. Um and I was...everything about me was wrong, everything about me was wrong. And that there was no way to please him, and that it was all my fault. I was bad. I was bad. Yeah. As I got older, he started calling me a slut, and started using sexual language as well. Um...when I was about 15, 16 uh he started talking about having me uh...uh...basically he thought my behavior justified uh...uh...getting in the legal system, having me put away, which was absurd, I mean I skipped school a couple of times. You know, it's like really outrageous. And then I left home at 16, 17. I don't remember exactly when, I just left as soon as I could get out.*

[32]

He never said anything nice to you after he hurt you?

*No, [whispered] no, no, no. One time when I was...I don't know how old I was...16, 17, 18 maybe. He sat...I remember sitting in the living room with him. And he said uh, "You know why I'm doing this, right?" I don't even remember what it was. "Why am I doing this," he said. I said, "I don't know." "Why am I doing this?" "I don't know." And he kept asking me over and over again. "You know why?" And I said, "Because you love me." Because I thought that was the answer he was looking for [upward inflection]. But he seemed surprised. It wasn't what he was thinking [small laugh]. Do you know what I'm*

saying? And the conversation just like ended. And I just felt really dirty [upward inflection] because I knew he didn't love me and it was...it was like a violation to have pulled that out of me. I was really upset about that. Um...so that's the closest he came to saying something positive. He uh...he uh...even uh...you know I was a welfare mom for a little while. I had such a hard time. And I managed to get a scholarship to...to Vassar College and graduate cum laude, not a word, nothing, nothing. As far as he's concerned, I'm still like stupid, and nobody. And that's the way I am, I'm always going to be in his eyes, to the point where he conceives me as a person. I don't really think he does. I don't think he's ever realized that he has a wife and three kids.

[33]

So you are not alone in his category of non-person.

No. No. It's all of us. I just got, I was in...[deep breath], I was the, what do they call it, the Identified Patient type person, the crazy lady [laughter]. Nobody else got that one.

[34]

Did you ever do drugs or alcohol?

Um...I took...I mean it was the sixties. I just did a lot of what people were doing then. You know, [in a whisper] a lot of marijuana, mescaline, and acid and that kind of stuff. And in my early twenties I went through a period of doing some drinking at bars. And that's pretty much it. [Nearly shouting] **Oh smoking**, oh my God, two, three packs for twenty years! I was a huge smoker.

[35]

Is that the reason for your job?

Well, the job was here. The job was here. This would not be the job...I would ...I would much rather do something around sexuality and gender more specifically than tobacco. Tobacco doesn't excite me. It just doesn't excite me. But I do the job.

[36]

Where you ever anorexic or bulimic?

Bullimic. Yeah. And I'd say sometimes I'm still bulimic without purging. I think that's how I've gained so much weight. I...It's an incredible thing. I was about this fat when I quit smoking and I lost very slowly over time, over a 100 pounds, by exercising and eating right, and over a period of years. And I got down to what I thought was a very nice, attractive weight for me. It was still high for most people, but for me it was great. And I was taking full pride in my appearance, and felt very attractive, really good and uh... And uh I just started getting really lazy here and there, and the next thing I knew, I was gaining weight, and the next thing I knew I was back to where I was. And I'm like "Oh my god." And I'm always thinking about, you know, "How can I motivate myself to make that commitment again to my health, because it was so good. It was fun. It was a good thing. But um...yeah, I think I rely on food for comfort. And uh that's my...that's uh, yeah.

[37]

How old are you?

Fifty-one. I'll be fifty-two in uh a couple of weeks.

[38]

What do you do to help you reduce your stress?

Uh...let's see. What do I do? One is picking. Um...actually, um sex was major activity until a couple of years ago. Um...major. Yeah [laughing]. I enjoyed my sex big time. I think the anxiety medication started taking...took away a lot of my libido. And you know I knew that could happen [upward inflection]. And I...and at the time I was saying, "I love sex so much." It's like always been such a positive part of my life. Um...and I was afraid of...of losing it, but you know, now that it's gone, I'm not missing it. You know what I mean? But it seems like it's so unfair that you have to make that trade. Yeah sex, yeah, I love sex and um uh scratching.

[39]

Any other things?

Yeah, deep breathing. Deep breathing. And you know, up until like about 2-3 years ago also, um, um the exercise was really good. But I stopped doing them. I don't exercise any more but it was a stress

*reduction tool. But the deep breathing is...is like automatic now. When I get into any kind of situation where I'm anticipating pain or you know, any negative stuff, I start with the deep breathing. And that helps.*

[40]

Do you write?

*I play solitaire on the computer.*

[41]

SOMEONE ENTERED THE ROOM. *Hi. It's all right Coby you can come in. Do you need anything? Do you need the room? I'll be finished here in about half an hour.*

HE LEFT.

[42]

You were saying.

*Solitaire. Yeah. Yeah. It's funny, my sister and I both picked up solitaire as our...as a stress reliever. You know. It's meaningless. You know, it's just doesn't...[trails off]*

[43]

It's a game where you don't need to be with any body else.

*I do feel very independent, except for needing some physical help once in a while. I do feel like, you know, obviously I still have some issues to work out. But overall, I do feel complete alone. And I don't feel...I very rarely feel lonely. I'm not seeking partners. I tend to be polyamorous anyway. I prefer more than one person in my life when I can.*

[44]

Have you every thought why that is?

*Yeah. But I haven't come to any conclusion [laughter]. It feels like natural to me [upward inflection]. It feels like I'm forced into being monogamous with people, because they have a lot of f...fear and jealousy and all that. And um...so like if I get lonesome then I usually need to be monogamous with them, but I always want to... Why? I don't know, I guess people would say that it's a fear...*

[45]

I'm more interested in what you say.

*I just feel like it's my natural state [deep laughter]. Yeah...and I have to...I mean sometimes I have to force myself to make connections with other people. I have...I have very good friends and good family. My, my sister's good family, you know. My sons and I are close and...um but I have to force myself to call them or visit them. Because I know it'll end up being something I don't want it to be, but it's not when I initiate. I just like being alone a lot.*

[46]

What about spirituality and religion?

*Um...I'm a you know, Buddhist [deep laughter]. Meaning that I don't take it terribly seriously. But I do find that the, the truths and the path of Buddhism um have meaning in my life. And really, my religion, my spirituality is about compassion [upward inflection] and sometimes that's very real for me, and sometimes it's not at all.*

[47]

What is your parent's religion?

*They're atheists. They were um die-hard atheists, like political atheists. [ ] It's funny cause now my mom's the head of her small church in her town [upward inflection] um and she doesn't believe and nobody knows that. It's just that's all there is to do in the town is the church, so she got involved and got pushed up to a leadership position [gales of laughter]. She's still an atheist, which is crazy. I don't know. I don't know how she does these things [laughing].*

[48]

So you were from a small town?

*Uh, no. Actually they were, and they went back there when they retired. I'm from Poughkeepsie.*

[49]

You left home at 15 and then...

*Yeah, I moved in with my boyfriend at the time. His parents were very uh I didn't realize what a good deal I had. They were communists. They were like really like cool political people [laughing], and they like just basically said don't get pregnant, you know. But, they were ok.*

[50]

Why did you get pregnant?

*Um I actually I got very tired around 25 of trying to live a different kind lifestyle, 23, 24. And I decided to try it the traditional way and so the first man that would marry me I married, and then I got pregnant. Almost immediately after, I had a baby and then I realized that I was bored out of my mind [laughing]. It was like, I have to admit I went into the whole marriage thing not intending to. I don't even think I intended to follow through, you know.*

[51]

Did you go into the marriage as a totally committed lesbian?

*No I wasn't totally committed lesbian until I was 30, when I really fell in love with a woman. Before that I was playing around. I had my first lesbian experiences around 19, 20, as an adult. But um there are even sometimes when I identify as a lesbian and still have some attraction for men, you know. But um just during those couple of years. And even then, I thought of myself as bi. My identity changed over time.*

[52]

Research shows that sexual identity is fluid.

*Right, right. Yeah, yeah.*

[53]

As you look back on your coming out and your abuse, what perspectives have you gained with regard to both of those experiences?

*I know that, and partly because I was a scholar of sexuality and gender myself for a time [upward inflection] um I know that we tend to reconstruct our lives you know through the present. Um and make, try to make sense of who we are now, and by saying oh I didn't realize then that that's what that meant. You know that kind of thing. What I've done is, although I identify openly as a lesbian, and my, my, my uh primary attraction is certainly about women, sexually and emotionally [upward inflection], um I also have kind of uh thrown away the identity [pause] issue. I mean well I usually just say to people I'm just queer. I'm just queer as you can be. You know, I'm just very, very queer. [Laughing] I just say I am very queer. But I'm comfortable with lesbian. Is that an answer to your question?*

[54]

Partially. What about the abuse piece?

*I just think that at different times in my life I've tried to find an identity by going back and you know, focusing on different things in my history up to that point. I mean there was a point when I thought I was straight, when I was a teenager. Then I was sure I was a lesbian for those years, when I got married I was bi – I fell in love with a woman and oh my god, I'm really a lesbian, you know. Then what am I doing topping men, you know? What is that about? And that, I can't fit that in.*

[55]

Did you ever think that if you weren't abused your sexuality would be different?

*There's no way to know that. I have no idea.*

[56]

Have you thought about it?

*I thought about it, yeah. I thought about it a lot, especially because a lot of people who are into the power exchange scene like to look at their childhood as the root. But what I learned over time was that no matter what side a person was on, they have the same stories. Or different stories, you know, they weren't positively correlated. So what I came to believe and what I believe now is that there's really no accounting for desire. Enjoy it. That's where I am. It's like um the desire is neither good nor bad. It exists and there's no point in analyzing it. In fact, people used to bore me when they started to analyze their sexuality. It's like I don't want to hear it. Does this make you what? Does it make you...then enjoy it.*

[57]

Before you arrived at that conclusion, how did you perceive your sexuality?

*Well I often thought that I, well you know, because I had a relatively positive relationship with my mother who was warm, and it was really difficult to live with my father who was a bastard, you know but it was natural for me to feel safer with women and to form those relationships with women. But it doesn't really explain the sexual element, you know, to me anyway. It doesn't for me um and uh at this point, I'm really not sure it's important. I really don't know. I really don't know. And I decided to stop analyzing it quite some time ago and I don't think about it.*

[58]

Is anything you would like to add being gay, or being abused?

*One of the things that I think is special about me or different, I see most women think about sexuality in terms of expressions of love and intimacy, and a spiritual and um have difficulty separating out the sensation, the physical...physicality of it and the emotional part of it, and also feel that those feelings have to be legitimized by feelings of love and tenderness, and all that shit. And that's something that I separate out, for better or worse, a long time ago, and I know when it's about sex, and I know when it's about love. And I feel like I've claimed a sexual subjectivity [upward inflection] and autonomy and that what I ch...how I've chosen to do sexually has to be for me. It's nothing I can **do** for someone else, nothing I can **give** to someone else. Um and there's a part of me feels very good about that and there's another part of me that wonders since there are so few women who feel that way you know, is there something wrong with me that I can do that. But most of the time I feel like "No this is okay, this is good." As I'm getting older, especially being fat again, um I you know, I'm very much aware that I'm not a hot chick anymore, you know, I'm no hot babe right?. And that um [pause] [shaky voice] cause it's hard, it's hard getting old as a woman on many levels, and on of them is the sexual aspect. Um and it seems so ironic, because at this point, I have the capacity to probably enjoy my sexuality more than ever. But um there are fewer opportunities.*

[59]

That's a thought I can identify with. [She laughs very heartily]

*One other thing I want to say is that, I understand...I understand how adult men would you know have the desire toward younger girls or children, young boys too, I can understand why they have that desire, because sometimes I have that desire. But to act on it is the most horrible thing you can do to a person. And...and it's like I wish there was somehow that the men could like, the people who would do these kids, I mean their own kids especially, if they could just **realize** the effect that it has you know, that is **has** on...on the kid. It's like how...it's almost like a rapist who kills his victim, and for like what, an hour for a sense of control, or pleasure, or whatever it is he gets out of it, he destroys a whole life. It's like it's the same thing on a, you know, another level. You know, it's like whatever my father got out of it, you know, he did some really major damage. You know what I'm saying? And what did he get out of it. You know ultimately what...what, you know, I don't know. One thing I'm happy about is my father is now an old lonely man and in a lot of pain and nobody respects him anymore. And I've always had this fantasy of waiting till to be old enough to kick down the stairs in his wheel chair [regales with laughter]. And he's there so it's enough, no not really, but it's nice. It's his punishment. I mean he brought it on himself. He's isolated himself, no friends, no love, you know.*

[60]

But he's still with your mom.

*That woman, uh she was well socialized in the 30s and 40s and she's not going to leave him. And he's the...she is the best thing that ever happened to him and I don't even think he's knows it. She's a wonderful woman. Yeah, I love that woman. Ok.*

[61]

I really thank you.

*You're welcome. Covered everything?*

[62]

Your education.

*And I did 8 years of grad school but I never got the doctorate. I never finished. It was in Sociology, Sexuality and Gender. I got the education, I was teaching at the college level – Women's Studies,*

*Sexuality. Yeah, I got a lot out of it. No piece of paper, but...but incredible knowledge and experience. I'm very happy I went and I don't regret leaving. Okay?*

Thank you so much.

Marina

*I hate the sound of my own voice.*

Are you comfortable, do you need anything, any water?

*No. I'll let you know if I do.*

[1]

O.K. The first set of questions is about experiencing the effects of internalized homophobia and homoprejudice. As we go along please feel free to add anything. These questions are to get the juices flowing, so you can go where you want to go. Can you describe what it was like, or your feelings the first time it occurred to you that you were sexually attracted to another woman?

*Oh Jeez. How old was I? I must have been [deep breath] what was it, at fourteen? And it just scared the hell out of me. And having grown up in complete denial of what was going on, I had an editor in my head, and I just said, "NOPE, I didn't think that." Then pushed it out of my head. But uh then when I'd sit around with my friends and we'd start talking about who the boys that they thought were cute, and I was just very, very, quiet [emphasis], and I just couldn't relate. So you know, it was always in the back of my mind and at the same time, it was always something I would push away. I would say no, no, no, I don't think that.*

[2]

What was your first sexual encounter? Or how did you start exploring more fully, at what age?

*Oh jeez. Uh, around 18, 19. Even though I was still in denial, "I'm not a lesbian, I just...I just slept with my friends. You know, it happens." [Closed mouth laugh]. Granted, I've never even touched a boy, but you know, "I'm straight." I just wanted to be [pause] normal, whatever that means. And I wanted, you know, I was used to playing the part of the good daughter, and you know, doing what I had to do, and I wasn't going to step out of that. So it wasn't until I was 22, that I really said, "You know I'm a lesbian." This is...at this point [laugh] I may as well come out and admit it. And you know, by then, I was familiar with the resources and the community. So it wasn't so scary. I remember the first time I came down...oh jeez, was I in Columbia at that point? Yes. I was in Columbia at that point and I came down to the village, I had a counselor at the center who was wonderful. And I was just terrified being completely acculturated to the Upper West Side, music school, Columbia University. And then be in this entirely different neighborho...WORLD, where the streets don't make sense and, you know, people are...well when you first come here and you're in culture shock, you think WEIRD. And thinking, "Oh my God, this is going to be a large part of my world now. And this is really scary." And it was like speaking a foreign language for a while. After a while you figure out where you are going and I think that helps. Just knowing the layout of the streets.*

[3]

I think I understand. Whenever I go somewhere new, I like to have a picture of where I am in space.

*Yes. Just to know the lay of the land a little bit. And when you wander up Greenwich Avenue, and suddenly you're in this maze, I mean emotionally, that was exactly how I felt [laughter].*

[4]

That's a great metaphor.

*Yeah, yeah.*

[5]

You described your feelings as at first scary, then less scary. Has it decreased more over the years?

*Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I grew up on Long Island, so it was very difficult for me. I mean I heard homophobic slurs at least 25 or 30 times a day. And you know, I got called dyke, lezzy, more than once, cause I wouldn't date. And you know, let's face it I'm pretty, so I'd get asked out and, "No." So after a while I*

*got better [closed mouth laugh]. I got fairly gay bashed a few times. And I was...I was in complete denial. And then I had to learn how to fight. Just uh survive at that point. I was very depressed. Um, I was the quiet kid in the back of the classroom who never did any work. Smart, but just never did any work. And the teachers would always say, "Well if only you would just apply yourself." I was like you know if I felt physically safe, maybe I could do that. So it was a very unsympathetic environment.*

[6]

Do you remember any specific time, during high school or after, where you remember not wanting to reveal anything?

*Well, what I was going to say is when I was 18, I started, or 17, I started coming into the city for music prep every Saturday. And that was such a relief to me. I went from being a Long Islander, to a New Yorker. And suddenly, everything was really safe. So by the time I was 19, even if I wasn't ready to say I'm a lesbian yet, I was comfortable with...with it, and comfortable with the idea of experimenting. And I'd never been a terribly visual oriented type of person. So, no, I never was uh stowing a picture or anything like that.*

[7]

I see. What about coming out to your family? What was that like?

*Um. Well at first my mother was a deer in the headlights. "Oh" [disingenuous tone]. I was 22 when I finally came out. I met someone and it was just time. I think I was...I can't say exactly when I came out to myself, but somewhere along the line, there was this gradual easing into not so much a definition, but a shorthand label, and getting comfortable with that. Um...with my mother, after I reassured her that she would still have grandchildren, she was pretty much ok. So, "I'll still be a grandma, ok." You know she just went on her...went about her business after that. And it was hard for her for the first year. It was some adjustment, and she said, "You know, this isn't what I pictured for you." And it just takes some getting used to. And there were times where she was upset. And you know, mostly I said look you have to deal with this. I have my own stuff to deal with [deep breath] and...*

[8]

Do you have siblings?

*No. I have a half brother and a half sister by my father's second marriage. I'm from his third. Um, when I came out to him, I've always had a very uncomfortable and awkward relationship with him. He always went out of his way to make me more aware of his sex life than I would want to be. Um, he would use me as an excuse to see various women. So sometimes he would say, "So if woman A asks you how your sleepover was last night, say it was fine. Because I was with woman B, and I don't want woman A to know that." So I was implicitly involved in this. Um, you know, I would hear him having sex on the nights when I slept over, with some random person [low voice]. And so having had a really weird relationship, I just said, "You should know, I'm a lesbian." And he said, "Well, I kind of figured." And...*

[9]

Nothing affirming?

*Hmm [closed mouth laugh]. No, no. He always had this thing about being a progressive parent. Um...he had way too much pornography lying around the house, which was...I mean, you want to talk about pictures and stuff, I've always shied away from that cause of having such early negative experiences with it. I had access to an open liquor cabinet from the time I was 11, on. I was practically an alcoholic by the time I was 12. And for some reason, I've always had the good sense to stay away from something like that, once I found myself getting hooked.*

[10]

So at that point it was mostly alcohol?

*I would say I was fairly dependent on it at that point to get through the day.*

[11]

Were you aware of how the alcohol affected your feelings?

*Uh, how do I explain? I didn't feel like I had to worry about being different and keeping up a façade. And I could just put on some loud music and drink and you know, be comfortable for an hour, before I had to*

*go home to my mother and my stepfather. So I didn't drink heavily, but it was just enough to take the edge off.*

[12]

When you said, "feeling different," you meant...

*I was not attracted to boys. I felt there was something horribly, disgustingly wrong with me. And I had to hide it, and, you know, between the two of those, it wasn't such a great combination.*

[13]

And drugs?

*I remember coming across my father's marijuana when maybe I was 11 or 12. And I just felt so disappointed. I don't know why. I should have expected it. I mean, I guess you should also expect an 11 or 12 year old to go through your closets. I mean they're going to go through your things. That's a normal developmental thing. And every mental health professional I've spoken to has said that [angry]. Don't tell my father that though. Um, and I was just really upset by that, and one of the few things that helped me get by was reading, and my head, and my mind. So I [deep breath] I always shied away from that. I never felt like I could entirely trust it, whereas alcohol was something that was around. My mother's family is Italian, so I was around wine a lot. My father, to his credit, I think exposed me to alcohol from an early age, in a positive way. "Do you know how to taste wine? Here have a sip of this. This is how you taste it. This is what you taste for." From the time I was 11, and I would always have, if we were at a meal, a sip of his drink or something. And it was undemonized. So it wasn't something verboten. In a sense, so it was very easy for me to walk away from later.*

[14]

You said you had access to an open liquor cabinet, and he never noticed the levels dropping?

*Yeah. He didn't care [laughing]. His advice was just take it easy, ok?*

[15]

How are you now with coming out with coworkers or fellow students, or friends?

*I am just out. And um, you know I think of it as, I didn't come out of one closet to go into another, and selectively sit in closets. It's rather cramped. So I'm fortunate to live in NY, which is an accepting place, and, you know the only people who are stigmatized in NY are the people who have an issue with it. So I feel very lucky with where I live, and the kind of life I have. And no, I'm out. I uh, I'm not working at this point. I'm in a behavioral therapy program dealing with some of the ramifications of the abuse. I've never been able to function on a [] level. Something I'm just starting to get angry about. But, what was I saying. I didn't come out immediately. I noticed every male psychiatrist I've always had has said, "What's your sexual orientation?" I've always said, how is that relevant to my treatment? Just on principle I will not answer the question. Over the course of you know, the first few weeks, you know, I'll come out. And when I get comfortable, it'll be of my choosing, at my moment, and with who I want and when I want.*

[16]

That sounds like a very clear boundary.

*Absolutely. I don't see how that's the least bit relevant to treatment.*

[17]

Before you came out to your mom, what was your biggest fear of what might happen?

*[Deep breath] Oh, which one? Well, I didn't think she would, but of course the fear in the back of your mind was well is she going to disown me? Is she going to be one of those parents that just can't accept this at all? And my cousin's gay, so I really wasn't terrified of that, and you know so, so at least I knew someone who is gay, so that definitely helps. Of course, gay men, they're a world unto themselves. So I never felt quite comfortable, I never really had role models per se. But, that wasn't a terrible fear. I was afraid she would look at me differently. I was afraid she would think of me as a deviant. That was a big fear. Um, I was kind of afraid about those times I'd had friends sleep over, you know, when I was 19 or 20, and [laugh with closed mouth]. You know, and after a while she said, "So all those sleepovers?" Yeah [laughter], hey wait a second.*

[18]

So that was your biggest fear?

*Yeah. Yeah. I feel like I'm not really consistent in what I'm telling you. That things...I think things were gradual and hazy, and I'd kind of go back and forth.*

[19]

How do you participate in the gay and lesbian community?

*I don't...I've found it hard lately, because I've been so depressed. I only remembered who hurt me when I was 23. And I went through a process of having really intense flashbacks, and just an awful, awful time of it. I withdrew from school. I had too much time on my hands in retrospect, but...in a way I needed to just...wade through shit. And um...I was in the hospital from...for about two weeks, in August of 2002. Um...I was just feeling really suicidal and hopeless, and that was when I...in the beginning of August I found a really good trauma specialist. And, you know, if not for her, I don't think I'd be here. I didn't trust anybody, but I trusted that she could...that I could trust her and she would be able to help me get to some place better. Cause she said she could. I didn't believe it, but I believed she believed it [upward inflection].*

[20]

That's important.

*But in terms of participation, Columbia has a very active community, which is really nice. I mean it's got to be the most accepting place on earth. Um... and it's also nice because it was one of the few places where I could flirt with a butch looking woman and she would get it, "Oh, your queer, you're not a straight chick flirting with me." I was so incredibly frustrated; I don't know what I have to do, tattoo it across my forehead [angrily] or something? Um...so that was really nice. And you know I was very involved with my studies. I had some friends, some of whom were lesbians. I did have a few lovers, and it was just...it wasn't the main thing on the agenda at that point, cause schoolwork was so paramount, but it was certainly part of it. And it really profited me to be in that kind of atmosphere.*

[21]

You were very comfortable.

*Oh yeah. Oh yeah.*

[22]

You're so articulate, it's a pleasure to listen to you speak.

*Why thank you.*

[23]

Can you describe how you view yourself as a lesbian woman living in a hetero world?

*Um...sometimes I feel like a fish swimming against the current. I feel very frustrated with some of the people I know who are rather religious and say, "Well, I hate the sin and not the sinner." And it's like, well you know what? Go jump in a lake. Um...I feel incredibly frustrated that I'm automatically perceived as heterosexual. That I find incredibly frustrating, and you know, I'm not much of a drinker, but I will go to the bars, just to be out, and to be some place I'm comfortable. I mean that's, in this community that's always been...half of it is I mean...the community. So I resent that. I resent the way men will aggressively flirt with me and try to get my attention, and the pedestal they put me on, and their utter stupidity and docility. Um...they really bug me. I have one close male friend that I like and respect as a person. I'd love to have more, but 90% of them turn out to be not worth my respect.*

[24]

And you're friends with him because he...

*He doesn't look at my...my breasts. He is happily married, has a very functional relationship with his wife. Has a new daughter who he's absolutely thrilled with. You know, it wasn't that **she** was pregnant it was **they** were pregnant. And granted she was more pregnant than he, but he was still very much a part of it. And the pictures at the hospital, it was so amazing to see them, because they were the first hospital pictures that I've seen that the father was glowing **as** much as the mother. And he's a wonderful dad. And you know, he [almost whispers] he understands that I'm a person [close mouthed laugh]. Yeah.*

[25]

Now we're going to go into the section of child abuse.

*Oh that little thing [sarcastically].*

[26]

Yes.

*Small details [sarcastically].*

[27]

If you could tell the story the way you want to. Talk about the history, how old you were, how you were related to him. Try to include your feelings, but we can get back to that.

*O.K. I've gone through this so many times and have had so much good therapy that it's not as horrible any more to talk about. Um my mother's one of those women who feels she needs a man to be complete, or at least felt that way for a long time. In fact, it wasn't until I told her about what happened that she was really able to evaluate that. Um she...I would describe her as being a very naïve person for most of her life, very Pollyanna-ish, very easily manipulated. I think that's what attracted my stepfather to her, as well as me, my being in the picture. At first he was just very nice. Um and then as it got closer and closer to him moving in he got too nice. And I didn't know how, but I knew something wasn't quite right. This is almost...it was too intense. Um and then after he moved in, which was the summer before I started first grade, I mean things started going downhill from there. Um [pause] I mean he's ex-military so...I mean part of his whole thing was to fuck with my mind. And that was deeply important to him, for obvious reasons. So I didn't quite believe the bad things he was saying about me when he first moved in but you know, by a few years later...sure. Um*

[28]

Bad things?

*Yeah, I sucked my thumb, I was like five and a half, and he would say, "Well don't touch me, you're covered in germs." Um you just things to make me feel really gross and disgusting and things along those...those lines. Like it was, I don't know quite what the word is, um horrible should I happen to take a spoonful of peanut butter out of the peanut butter jar. You know this is...[high screechy voice] "Now it's filled with your germs and I can't eat that." And very possessive of food. You know, I kind of ate at his behest. Um [25 second pause, followed by an explosive exhale] still and all, I was still blamed for...I mean he really laid into me. Um I don't remember exactly when it started. August before I started first grade, I know that. Um he was very violent from the beginning, he was very cunning, very good at covering his tracks, he was good at hitting me in spots where he knew it wouldn't leave marks: he knew how to cut off my hair without leaving marks. I mean he was a smart son of a bitch. He always made sure to do the laundry. It was one of his things. [Pause and explosive exhale] I remember him showing me the combat knife that he saved from his army service. I mean the thing must have been about the size of my head. And that was before he started hurting me. I mean he was showing me that and his medals, and I felt kind of special that he was showing me these things. And um this is probably the hardest thing to remember-- I was reading *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson. Are you familiar with it? Um it's a very funny book. It's about the Appalachian Trail but there were two women who were found one morning in their tent with their hands bound, their throats slit from ear to ear. And when I read that I started shaking and I got this strange buzzing sensation throughout my entire body, and for about ten minutes I could barely breath. And soon after that, that's when I remembered him raping me at knifepoint. I thought I was going to die. And I wanted to. I wanted it to be over. [Deep breath and long pause]. And I never remembered what happened in the morning when I woke up. I was just completely numb from the waist down. I theoretically should not have been able to walk. I had this horrible secret though, and I had to go on with my life, and my life depended on it, as far as I knew. So I just went through school completely numb, completely dissociated. They thought I had a learning disability, whereas the year before I was considered to be exceptionally bright. I could not complete any work, I could not learn to hold a pencil, I could not run in any conceivable, in any recognizable way. I mean I was just out of my body 99% of the time. And the school, the teachers were not perceptive or sympathetic to that in the least. I mean, they thought I was lazy, or absent minded, or stupid or something. And you know, when a child had issues, the way to deal with them was to yell at them, at her. So I just got yelled at a lot [laugh]. And I was just*

*deeply uncomfortable, and I did not have friends at school, obviously. I was extremely quiet. You know, I always liked to be by myself. And it was actually, strangely enough, a relief to come home, because at least I...I didn't remember what happened at night. I used to get the hell fucked out of me. Why would I be relieved to come home to that [angrily]? I had no idea what I was coming home to. Complete traumatic amnesia. No clue. I mean I just paid as little attention to my body as possible. You know, and I have several different memories of him. I remember waking with him on top of me. I remember waking up with his tongue down my throat. Somewhere about that, I remember waking up with his prick in my mouth and not being able to breath, and asphyxiating on him, almost to the point of suffocation, almost to the point where I was going to pass out. I remember vomiting immediately after that [breath]. I remember this incredible weight on top of me, and being totally helpless to do anything about it. To this day if I'm in, you know, reclined position and I'm uncomfortable about something, I will instinctively put my...**pin** my hands above my head, without even realizing it. For some reason, whenever I get in the shower, my left hand **pins** itself into the small of my **back**. I don't claim to know...I don't remember why. I don't need to. But I still have these little physical reminders. I remember being in the shower and not feeling a damn thing, and washing blood off my legs, and not...and it...I wouldn't stop bleeding. Just this really vague snippet of memory. And it felt like it wouldn't come off, and even after I'd stopped bleeding, I was still scrubbing, and I felt like I couldn't get it **off** [pause and breath]. And I felt just horribly **filthy**. I would always take the longest showers. I would get in trouble for staying in the shower for half hour [choking] half hour. I'd get in there and I'd just **stand** under the water and try to get clean and get out of my head at the same time. I was extremely afraid to be out of my mother's sight. I remember anybody coming up behind me would scare the hell out of me. I remember having to bend over to pick anything up for any reason was terrifying. I remember him **forcing** me over and just raping me from behind, **and I cannot do a thing about it** [very angrily]. [Deep breath] Well needless to say, I don't have sex in any of those rear positions. We just don't go there. I mean the few times we have, I've just had these awful flashbacks and flipped. Um [long pause]. What was I saying before that?*

[29]

Who did you first tell about your abuse?

*My therapist. And she specializes in gay and lesbian issues. So immediately what she said to me was, "You know I hear all this stuff is coming up," and she didn't understand the process of memory, or the process of how a child survives these things. So she was...she wanted to be supportive but didn't know how in the beginning. Like, like well "How could you forget this?" Or "How could you have gone to school like that?" Or, "Are you sure he raped you at knife point?" I mean you don't want to believe it, and if you're not trained in this area, you don't get it. Fortunately she understood she was not qualified to help me with this. And although I was really hurt in the beginning, um, she said, "I can't work with you with this, you need to find someone who deals with this kind of stuff. And she referred...she didn't have anyone to refer me to. So I found someone who said she was a trauma specialist, but she wasn't very apt. Didn't want to deal with anything. And then I found Jeanie, and she was really helpful. Who is the first person I told? My therapist was the first person I told, and my friends in school. They were incredibly supportive...deeply, deeply supportive.*

[30]

Did you eventually tell your mom?

*I didn't want to tell her in the beginning. I was furious with her and didn't want to have any kind of contact with her in any way. Um...never had a good relationship.*

[31]

Can you talk about it?

*I was always angry with her. I was absolutely furious with her when she'd do something absentminded or naïve. I never quite understood **why** I would just fly into a rage if she did something stupid. You have to understand, my mother is someone who a week ago was doing a presentation for work. She's an educated woman; She's an MSW. And she said, "Why can't I find," I forget which word it was, "in this dictionary?" She was looking and looking and looking. And I go into the room, and I'm looking at it, and I said, "Mom, you're looking in my French-English dictionary. That's why you can't **find** it. And you*

know just completely over her head. And I've learned to laugh at these things, but I was utterly furious with her. So she's not, not always the sharpest knife in the drawer. So I didn't want to tell her. I did write her a letter though as I wasn't intending to send her. And she went away on vacation. And I was having an awful time. I was incredibly dissociated. I was having affect storms, and these intense bouts of self-hatred. Um...I was having these body memories, and heaves, and um all sorts of things, and [pause] and... You know for some reason, dissociated as a kid—I...this I have trouble understanding myself—I didn't know what a desert was, but I found myself just kind of absentmindedly wandering around one.

[32]

Emotionally?

No, physically. My body was where it was. The rest of me float...floated out of it and would wind up in odd places. What I would think was, like the Mohave Desert, Painted Desert, beautiful, beautiful painted rocks, and sage and stuff. I somehow, I don't know, I wound up there. I also met a dead...my grandfather who died before I was born. And he prevented me from dying in a sense. They talk about a tunnel with a light. Well guess what, it's there. He [pause] stopped me, and he picked me up, and put me on his lap, and I understand this is him. He was a contractor. He had his shirtsleeves and he loved his – these are things I learned as I got older – loved his fedoras [closed mouth laugh]. Always had really nice hats and he had a hat on and he picked me up, and put me on his lap and said “Little one, it's not your time. You have a lot to do.” And he **held** me until it was over. But um of course these are things that we can't logically explain in a scientific manner and yet there they are. But at that point in time, I wound up, although not in the same intense way that I was as a kid, but in that same desert. And how comfortable that was for me, and comforting. But I was really not there. I...it actually kind of turned it into a short story.

[33]

Did you do any past life work or regression therapy?

No. I feel like I spend so much time out of my body and out of this life, that I'm reluctant to do that. I want to try to get here. I mean that's been the struggle. Um, jeez. So at that point, I was really distraught, I was out of my body, I was watching *Thelma and Louise* over and over again which maybe was not the best movie for me but it was really soothing. Um. I don't know if you're familiar with *Tori Amos*, but she's kept me alive more than once. In fact the cover she did of *Rattlesnakes* turned into the short story. Um so I wrote my mother this letter, and d...digressions are good...are ok...right? Okay [laughing]. And the things I said in it were first of all, this is what happened: Your ex-husband raped me. And I don't remember exactly what happened, but I remember he wasn't nice about it and I remember he was violent. This is what I need from you. First change your last name to something, **anything** else. Second, I don't ever want to see you cry about this or be upset about it. I have my own stuff to deal with. I can't handle your shit. Third, don't bring this up, unless I bring it up. I don't want to discuss it, and I'll discuss it on my own terms. So she came back from vacation and said “Marina, what is going on?” And I said to her, all right. Here's this letter, but don't read it until I'm out of the house. And I went to a friend's. And actually had a very good time that night. I stayed out till three in the morning. But I needed...I w...she...I didn't want to see her in any upset kind of space. I didn't want to feel responsible for hurting her, upsetting her. And after that we started to really bond in away that we never could before. I mean she thought about the ways that he manipulated and abused **her**, although no where near what happened to me [swallow hard]. And we started to really enjoy each other's company, and to really be friends. Although the past week or so that hasn't been, but there are always bumps in the road. For the first time I'm **angry** about what happened to me. This is brand new for me. I'm angry with the situation, and I'm angry with her for not doing a better job of being a parent. And she's upset with me for saying that now. She used to say, “Well aren't you mad at me?” And I said, “Yeah, I guess I am but I'm not at that place yet.” Now that I'm there, she doesn't want to hear it. So I don't know what she wants [closed mouth laugh]. I'm entitled to be angry. I mean it went completely over her head.

[34]

In what ways did he abuse your mother?

He was mentally controlling of her. Apparently he wasn't terribly interested in her. I mean they never had a close or a warm relationship. I mean his goal was to get to me.

[35]

That's a common goal of pedophiles.

*Yeah, sickeningly so. Um well I say about men, I'm not fond of the whole death camp thing, but I think the concentration model really has some things to say for itself [large closemouthed laugh]. If we could just put them all somewhere [open mouthed laugh].*

[36]

I have different thoughts about what to do with people like that.

*So do I. I'm rather humane, I guess [laugh].*

[37]

I have some specific thought about what to do with pedophiles.

*Oh for them specifically. I was referring to all men in general. For those I would have other things. I don't believe in hell, but I hope there's one for him. If I could...if I was sure I could get away with it, I swear I'd kill the son of a bitch, in a heartbeat.*

[38]

What was it like when you all together at the dinner table?

*[Deep breath] see that was another one of his controlling things. My mother was totally out to lunch. He had this thing about table manners. This is another way that he made me feel awful. [Sternly] "Chew with your mouth closed," "Use your knife and fork this way." He could chew gum, but nobody could chew gum around him, cause he couldn't stand the sound of it. Um so it was this constant [pause] derision over...I mean one should not expect a 7year old child to, you know have perfect, regal table manners. And that was just a constant struggle throughout my childhood. And you know the amount of food was always a big thing for him. After he started abusing me, **I ballooned**. I absolutely need...those were physical layers of protection that I needed. Padding. So I was a chubby kid and he was not happy with that. So he was always trying to control what I ate.*

[39]

Were you bulimic or anorexic?

*Uh, uh [no]. I had this wonderful grandmother, who's with us still. The bane of her existence as a mother when she had sm...two small girls, was that they didn't want to eat. And she wanted to make you know a hot lunch and a hot dinner, and then I came along. And I always loved to eat, so she could feed me. And I always had this real pleasure and real joy in eating and cooking with her and you know food was always something I could have a positive relationship with her, through her, rather. So in the back of my mind I understood this was a control thing, but this guy was just a weirdo [laugh]. Cause other people weren't like that. And my mother used to make excuses for him. Enabling. "Well, Fred just doesn't like that, you have to be careful about that [whispering]."*

[40]

Let's walk on eggshells.

*Yes.*

[41]

Did you ever self-injure by cutting or...?

*Um I was very subtle about it. Every year in school I would start off a straight-A student and by February, be failing. I would just sabotage over and over and over again. And I didn't even want to do it by the time I was getting to high school or even middle school. My mother worked in a hospital; I really like the environment; I was really drawn towards medicine. I wanted to go in that direction and I just kept sabotaging. Of course the environment didn't help. I pleaded with my mother, in middle school, to put me in a different school. Cause I was so tortured there it was you know, just awful. I could expect to be physically abused on a regular basis, um to be called all sorts of names. I mean I was just never sure what going to happen when. I mean beginning 7<sup>th</sup> grade, it must have been September, this boy just came up to me and yanked my pants down. Nothing was ever done about it. And it was just, I mean this is just what I lived with. I couldn't go through that again now.*

[42]

And you think they focused on you because...?

*I was a safe target because I was quiet, I was bookish, I was awkward, very introverted, what they would call, weird [closed mouth laugh]. I mean I just wanted to be left alone. I mean I was always **very, very** grown up. I mean I had to grow up fast. You know, we were in Home Economics in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and the teacher said, “So what do we have for breakfast?” Everybody’s mentioning what they had for breakfast. And I’m like, “Oh well I have a cup of black coffee and a piece of toast.” And the Home Ec teacher’s like, “What?” “Black coffee and a piece of toast.” It’s like look I don’t have time for this shit, ok? I mean I was always really, really grown up and you know the things people my own age were doing seemed so stupid in light of what...of my life.*

[43]

He was a military man whose life pivoted around control.

*Uh huh [yes]. He came from a Prussian family, too, which is not to disparage all Prussians, or Germans, but in that house alles muss perfekt sein. I say it in German because it has more of a meaning in German – [sternly] “Everything must be perfect.” Alles muss perfekt sein. Um I mean that was the attitude I grew up with. So I found lots of little ways to be self-destructive and rebel. Usually I’m very quite self-sabotaging.*

[44]

Could you name the ways?

*Well there was school, I allowed myself to be very heavy. I would steal food out of the fridge, especially if he wanted it, just to piss him off. I mean, I’d get the shit kicked out of me for it but what did I care. Um after a while, it just became mental torture. I don’t know I think I may have just outgrown his age preference or around the time he married my mother, he stopped sexually assaulting me.*

[45]

So he was living with you...?

*For two years, or two and a half, three years. At which time, he was raping me a few times a week. And I don’t know if he wanted to turn over a new leaf, or just outgrew, I just outgrew his tastes, and he was particularly comfortable there. I mean that slowly tapered off. But when I got out of the hospital, for some reason, I guess it was just so much more real to me that, and that was when I started with parasuicidal behaviors, cutting. Of course I always banged my head into the wall on various occasions. I remember in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade just being so utterly frustrated at myself. I couldn’t hold the pencil right. I had these muscle spasms in my arm. And they couldn’t do anything at that point. I couldn’t think straight. And the teacher was an absolute horror the way she laid into me. And I was just frustrated one day and I started slamming myself in the head with the palm of my hand [motions how she used to do it]. Which is exactly how he hit me. He liked to hit me in body areas that wouldn’t bruise. Above the hairline, the cheekbone, forehead, these places. He was not going to leave marks. And I must have sat there for about 4, 5 minutes slamming myself in the head. The teacher just looked at me like I was from another planet. I mean no concept that, “Hey there’s something wrong with that.”*

[46]

That it’s an underlying symptom.

*Uh huh [yes]. Oh yeah. I remember in the Courage to Heal, which I am so thoroughly familiar with it’s ridiculous, um talking about disclosing as a child. And the fact of the matter is, **I did!** Just nobody knew how to listen. I had hallucinations, in my room, as a small child, between like 6 and 7. I mean I’d see creatures walking around my room. And all these awful things, and I’d tell my mother and she’d say, “It’s just your imagination, go back to bed.” I mean these things were like right in front of me. And I lived in the basement, which had wood paneled walls so it had all this [pause, and snapped her fingers] uh sap tone to it. And I mean you could...all the patterns that could pull themselves out of these things were phenomenal, um phenomenally awful anyway. So it was like there was no place I could turn [laugh] to try and go to sleep. I was terrified of the dark.*

[47]

So you did engage in some cutting to hurt yourself.

*Later on, yeah.*

[48]

How long did that last? Do you still do it?

*I haven't done it in several...several months. I wouldn't say never again, but I haven't done it in quite some time.*

[49]

How do you feel when you cut yourself?

*Relieved, deeply relieved. I grew up with this whole idea that I was this awful little girl um who had to be punished. And you know I still feel like that, but nobody's there to hurt me anymore. So I crave that...that release that comes with someone finally cracking me outside the head. It's like ok, at least it's here now, and it'll be over and then at least I'll be safe for the night. So it...it was just that anticipation. It was intolerable.*

[50]

Between your mother and your stepfather, your whole family experience, what were the messages that you were living by and growing by?

[Laughing] *Um that I could not and should not trust my own senses: That they were not accurate. That I did not have feelings: That they didn't exist: That I was not worthy of care taking or love or kind treatment: Um that I was horribly, horribly deficient and would always be so. Um that the only thing I was good for was sex [laugh]. The list just goes on and on. That I was stupid: that I'd never amount to anything [begins to tear up].*

[51]

What are some of the things you do today to relieve your stress.

[Whispers under her breath] *What do I do to relieve stress, [out loud] an excellent question. This is what I'm learning how to do in this program. My friend Adrian, I didn't want to do this program. It's so frustrating to be 26 and hear, well you know, you need at least a year of behavioral therapy in order to be able to be just functional. And he said, you have the perfect coping skills for a combat situation. Unfort...well fortunately 98% of life is mundane, and you have no coping skills for mundane life. This is what you need to learn. So I am in the process of learning how to cope with normal stress in healthy ways, as opposed to dissociating or cutting, or slamming my head into the wall [deep breath] and it's difficult.*

[52]

I heard you say you that you wrote a story. Is that one of the ways you cope?

*I wish I had more to write. That was the only story I've been able to find though.*

[53]

And your music?

*I had to stop playing when I was um 21. I damaged my teeth, cause I didn't listen to my body. I was a clarinetist. And I destroyed the nerves in my two front teeth on a mouthpiece that I shouldn't have been playing on. So that ended my career. And you know what? I was relieved. I didn't have much of a life before that. You know social life in music school was, "What are you doing tonight?" "Oh, I'm practicing, what about you?" "Yeah, me too." "Oh alright, see you tomorrow." I mean 4 and 5 hours a day. It wasn't a life. I liked mu...I liked that life because I didn't have to be a person, I didn't have to be judged for who I was. All that mattered was how well I played. If you talk to orchestral musicians and ask them, "What are you?" They won't say I'm a man; I'm a woman: I'm a person. "I'm a flutist, or I'm a violinist." **That is their whole identity.** Yeah, so it was a very comfortable way to subsume myself and get lost.*

[54]

And listening to music? You talked about Tori Amos.

*Oh yeah, yeah. I never really listened to the music I played. It was kind of like shop music and comforting music. It was quite funny. I'd come home from high school, at 15 or 16, take off my combat boots, put on Indigo Girls and say, "Gee, where do I fit in the world?" [Laughing] I know I'm not a lesbian, can't be.*

[55]

How do you think your abuse experience affected your relationship with people?

*Romantic relationships?*

[56]

Whatever.

*Well I don't have relationships with men, period. As far as I'm concerned, they do not exist.*

[57]

Do you think that's the result of the abuse?

*Partially that, and partially just the way they behave. I mean I will give them a chance, but so few of them live up to the most basic expectations.*

[58]

And you mentioned romantic love.

*I've always pushed people who were interested in me away. I've been afraid to open up and to be vulnerable. Um to date I've only had one serious relationship. Um I've always had a difficult time being comfortable being sexual. Um, I've not been able to **have** really good relationships, [pause] or even terribly satisfying relationships. I'm incredibly insecure. I need a lot of reassurance[laugh]; I don't know if that's ever going to change, but that can push some people away.*

[59]

We're moving toward the end of the interview. You're in therapy now. What are some of the things you're looking to change in order to feel more comfortable?

*Oh a bunch of things. I'm still trying to get out of the depression that I've lived my whole life with. I never thought...expected to live to be ten years old. I was shocked when I turned ten. [Low voice] it was like wow, I'm old. I didn't expect to be there. Um, [whispering] I forget where I was going with that. Oh, oh, yeah. Basically it's always been what I do in my free time is I will put music on and lie on my bed. I mean for years, that's been all I...just about my only aspiration in life. I really had to kick myself to to get...to do anything else. Um, and it's only recently that I realized you know that's not necessarily healthy or not the way the majority of people feel. I would...I still have trouble with a lot of basic tasks. I tend to miss appointments. I tend to pay my bills late. I tend to have difficulty [laugh] finishing tasks. I tend to have difficulty doing some basic tasks. Those are all primary [laugh]. And I'm furious that I have to deal with these things. I remember the sense of buoyancy I had before this, and the way I was able to just do things. I had energy; I didn't want to lay down all the time. And I can't imagine ever getting that back. Um I'd like that. I'd like very much to finish school and to have a career. I'd like to be financially independent at some point. I very much want to move out of the city. I would like to get married, which as of today I can legally do.*

[60]

It's great!

*Isn't it great? I'm so excited about that today. Uh, what else? I wanted to get my MSW. I think I'd either...I think I might like to work with other survivors. I'd also be interested in working at a college setting. Cause I love that atmosphere, and I really like working with teenagers.*

[61]

One final thing, I'd like you to think about. And that is have you ever made any cognitive or emotional connection between your abuse and your lesbianism.

*As in causative?*

[62]

Have you ever thought about that?

*Yeah, I thought about that. And I refuse to believe that who I am is a product of my experience. I am who I am. This is how I was born. If sexual abuse created lesbians, the human race would have died out a very long time ago. So I refuse to even listen to that kind of hypothesis. I think its junk. Well, people ask me that question, and I give them the same answer, that there would be no straight women. I mean I know some lesbians who aren't survivors, well how do you explain them then.*

[63]

Do you think that your abuse had an effect on the timing in terms of when or how you came out?

*You know I thought that was implied, not being able to trust my own impressions. I would have been out very much sooner, probably 14 or 15, because...because I understood I was attracted to women. And I*

*understood there were other women in the world like that. So it was a matter of not being able to trust what my body was telling me. [Whispering] Of course, it's a common theme.*

[64]

Thank you very much for your time and for sharing all this with me.

*Well, I feel like if something positive can come out of my life experiences, it's not a complete waste. There's some kind of meaning in that suffering.*

### Kitt

[1]

When you first thought you might be sexually attracted to women and when you wanted to become involved do you remember anything specific?

*Um, well, I did like I had some crushes on teachers at school, both, you know, women. But I think when I was in college is when I, you know, sort of last year of high school, first year of college, um, I started, I was sort of attracted to some...uh I made some close friendships with some people at girl scout camp, who were all women and we sort of stayed friends and within that circle.*

[2]

And was that short relationship sexual?

*No it wasn't sexual. But it was very intense, you know uh, hugging, kissing. You know a couple of occasions we would all end up sleeping bag. Were you aware of those feelings? Yes.*

[3]

When was the first time you were aware that you wanted to be with women? Describe the feelings around that if you can, and what happened.

*Well I was about [pause] was about 19 at the time, I had graduated from high school. And I went to a college for a year and then I... a residential college, and I couldn't afford to stay there so I ended up going to community college. It was around that time period that I went to a reunion of the summer before I was a camp counselor. And there was quite a group of people that particular summer there was a large group of CITs, which are counselors in training, young women, about seventeen or eighteen years old who want to be counselors. And there was like 24 of them, which is really big for our Girl Scout area. Like I was in a group of three when I was in camp. There was also some other counselors and sort of the group of us many of the CITs and some of the other counselors we just became very good friends. And we decided in December of the following year that we would have a reunion at the camp. So everybody came up there and uh...I was corresponding with some people, back and forth, but uh...when I came up to reunion, we all st...they have a big dining hall and unless you go up to camp in the summer, that's really the only place that's kind of warm enough to sleep. So you go up there and build a fire and what not, and everybody just goes into their sleeping bags. During that reunion, I developed a friendship with one of the CITs who actually we were...sort of friends at camp but I wouldn't say she was the closest friend I had made that summer. So it was kind of interesting that we ended up sleeping next to each other. And then at some point...during the weekend I...you know...one of the nights we some how ended up holding hands and then snuggling...and sort of...and she became my first lover.*

[4]

Over that time period, can you describe the thoughts you had about your sexuality. For instance, did you worry about it all?

*A little bit. Ah...ah...at some point when I was in high school for some reason, I might have been at, around the time I had...I had a crush on a gym teacher at one point, and an English teacher at one point, sort of between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. And then I actually had a crush on my CIT director. Um, um, I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. But anyway, uh, somewhere in around that time I got curious, I sort of thought well, what is this happening, so I did actually get some books [laugh] out of the library, but unfortunately at that time, most of the things you could get were like these scary psychology books and you'd see these pictures of people getting shock treatments. And so I sort of tried to you know say, "Nah, this is just like a little phase thing I'm going through. This is like it's natural for teenagers to do these things. And so I thought*

*well, you know, I just, sort of, you know, shoved things aside. I um I never really had any boyfr...I ended up dating one guy for a little bit at the end, who was actually very interested in a friend of mine and she never was interested in him. And it was like for lack of anything else, we sort of got together at one point [laugh]. You know, but and again, I think part of it was related sort of to see, you know, to see whether [low voice] I should have, sort of a forcing of this other kind of relationship thinking that's the way it should be. And he was a...I think he was a very nice and shy...shy young man like me, and we talked a lot. So it was more for the companionship as much as anything else.*

[5]

You spoke about pushing it aside. Can you remember anything specific that you consciously did to hide your true feelings about your sexuality?

*When I first went to college, I had a roommate who I didn't really realize until well into the semester, was having a relationship with a woman back home where she lived. Because she sort of told all these stories about men she had also been with [laugh] so it was kind of a...a But eventually, you know, as we went on, she sort of told me some things. And, as a matter of fact, she left school and went home to be with this person for a while. She ended up coming back and then leaving again at the end of the semester. So, but before I got to know her, I you know, did sort of spend some time like...you know, **not** [loud] you know, just like sort of being careful about what I said and what not. And there was a gay student's organization on campus, and I was sort of interested in that, so I would conceal the fact that I would go to these meetings [laugh].*

[6]

And she never went to those meetings?

*No, she didn't. Like I said, she ended up going home. I guess to be with this person or something and then I guess her parents wanted her to come back.*

[6]

What did you feel when you were skirting the issue with other people?

*I think part of it was I was still in this thing of well I'm not sure yet. So...and the other thing was it was it was just a very taboo thing at that point. And I grew up in a small town and I was even going to college in a similar sized town, and it was just like, it wouldn't occur to me to like go somewhere and seek out a counselor or a therapist or something like that, so I just sort of tried to struggle with it myself, and I even had to even..um...even while I was in that year in college when I went home on the weekend I was still sort of seeing this guy. You know, so I was thinking that might be the way to go [laugh]. But...it was...I enjoyed the companionship but the other piece just wasn't near as exciting as you know as when I spent time with other friends.*

[8]

Before you came out to your family, what was your biggest fear about coming out?

*Well, I...I was worried because I was living at home at that point, so I was worried that I would get kicked out. Actually, I didn't come out to my family. My mother found out by going into my room and stealing my diary. The person that I was dating at the time, we were sort of its spending weekends in each others' house like once a month or something like that. You know, not like every weekend. She lived about a half a mile away. When she came over. We would spend a lot of time in my room, and yeah, we would be in their laughing. My Mother was not home every weekend. She mainly lived in Rockville with her current husband, and just came home to where we were on weekends and not every weekend. So a lot times I would try to plan these things around when I thought she wasn't going to be there [laugh]. But somehow, she...what...my girlfriend's name was Robin and so she and I were doing this thing called a hundred page letter. Basically, what it was that each one of us had a composition book and we would...while we were apart we would write in it. And then when we got together, we would switch and then you know, there were two, you know, and we would read, and write in the other one. And so we were like always switching these books back and forth. Well, I think my mother found my, I think it was mine that she found, I forget which ever it was, unbeknownst to me. And then the next time that Robin came up to stay with me, my mother showed up sort of unexpectedly for the weekend, and so we were in my room*

*sitting on my bed, just talking and laughing, I think listening to music. And my mother...my room had a wooden door which originally had these two sort of glass, like frosted glass panels. Well, my mother had a very bad temper, I can't remember when it was, one of the panels got broken out. And I don't know which...like..I can't remember whether she busted it or it was actually busted from slamming, but something happened. So we...I had put some contact paper...some what I thought was nice looking co...I don't know remember what kind of contact paper over both sides so it looked the same. But sort...so there was not an empty pane. Well, while we were sitting on the bed doing this, my mother had a scissors or knife or something and was cutting a hole into the contact paper. And I guess she saw us. At that point we weren't doing anything that was inappropriate, but uh...I guess since she had read that and everything, you know, she knew what was going on. And so she started yelling and blah, blah, blah, so we ran out of the house. And uh, my girlfriend had, her family had like two or three cars at this point and her mother would let her use her car to come and visit me. She was a senior in high school, and I was like, we were like a year apart. And um...so she had, we had this old Volkswagen that was really her mother's. Her mother was a nurse and used it to commute to work. And so, we just got in the car and took off. And we didn't know what to do. And I had a close friend from camp...um...who was quite a bit older, a few years older than I, but she was my CIT director. She lived in Pennsylvania at the time. And we just got in the car and drove to Pennsylvania. [breathy laugh] So I really didn't come out, unfortunately, you know. And my of course biggest fear was realized because....Oh and my mother called the girl scout office and told them, so I couldn't get a job at camp anymore [long breathy sigh]. You know, somebody said she blamed them for making me gay or whatever.*

[9]

Have you reconciled with your mom?

*Well my mom passed away quite some time ago. But at the end we did. What happened was...my mother had a series of mental illnesses. She had several nervous breakdowns and um...near the end she had uh...a couple of years before she passed away she had a breakdown and went into a hospital, a residential situation. And um, while she was being treated for...by a psychiatrist I guess, or a therapist...told her...he actually called and talked to me...and at that point I was actually had gotten involved with my CIT director. Robin and I had sort of spli...its kind of a weird thing that happened. Where I came down to visit my CIT director and her partner, somehow...this is the weirdest thing that ever happened in my life...but we just got attracted to each others' part...so we switched partners basically [exhaled laugh] is what happened and I still can't explain it [laugh]. Um anyway, so um so I was with my CIT director. That was my partner then when all this was going on.*

[10]

How old were you then?

*Um...twenty, mid-to late-twenties. Well, let's see. What happened was, after that fiasco, eventually I stayed home for a while and then Robin went to college. She had gone to [] College in West Virginia. And so for a while I was hitchhiking up to visit her. Then what happened was the one weekend that we picked for her to come down and visit me in my house, my mother shows up who isn't supposed to show up. So **again** we were on the road [laugh]. This time we had no...we hitchhiked to a place and called friend of ours who lived in the eastern shore of Maryland and she came and picked us up. And we lived with her for mmm...about three to six months, and then couldn't find a job, so we ended up going to Pennsylvania and living with another friend, and then we did get jobs and get our apartment. We were in Pennsylvania when my ex...my CIT director called us and invited us down here for an event that she was having. And then that's how this other convoluted thing happened. But you know, I am sort of running off [laugh] So by that time it was um, my mother had her breakdown while was already, I had already been with a...well, the four of us were sharing a house together. The four of us, my ex, my new and current. And that's when my mother had the breakdown, so that was you know probably my late twenties, by the time we reconciled.*

[11]

What were your feelings about your mother being sick, did you think you caused it?

*No she had other illnesses when I was a child, so. It was usually caused by...she was married three times and it was usually caused by some martial situation as far as I could tell. It wasn't because of me. She wasn't accepting of me. So that piece so maybe she thought that on top of that, my thing...*

[12]

I wasn't asking about what she felt. I was just wondering if at that time, that's the way you felt.

*No, I didn't, but she may have. I loved my mother, but we had a very uneven relationship and so we were never...there was only certain times when we were close. Like in the summer, you know, at a certain age, we used to go camping. She would take me and my friends out for milk shakes or something. And I can think of these little things but then over the long haul, she had a terrible temper, she would come in and break up my stuff and yell at me. She was always...every time she saw me she was always correcting me about something. You know, I could never live up. So there was that piece of it. You know, so I guess I didn't feel guilty [exhaled laugh on the word] because I wasn't that close to her. She talked to her therapist. And her therapist talked to me, and at that time, I was in a happy, healthy relationship. So he went back and told her that you know, there is nothing wrong with me, that **you** need an attitude change [laugh] basically. So I think that meant a lot to her coming from a professional because she had been dealing with these professionals for a while and I think she had come to respect them. So she next time when I had come to visit her, she sort of accepted it. And before she died, she told my partner at the time to take care of me.*

[13]

So that got pretty well resolved for you. I am interested in what it was like coming out to your peers, but it seems that by the time you were coming out most of your peers were....

*Well actually it's a really strange story. I didn't come out to my peers or my coworkers or anybody until my relationship with my CIT director, which was eleven years long, ended. I mean we were very closeted. I mean the only people that we, that knew, were some other gay people and most of them didn't live in our State. I mean her mother knew, but I mean, I mean, we had no gay friends, we did no gay stuff.*

[14]

Eleven years. So you finally started coming out...

*When she left me for a man, I was just...and at that point in my life I was still a very shy, um...self conscious, uh...pers...I mean I was very, sort of...she was older than me, and was the more dominant one. She made more money, you know, and so I was very sort of backward person, and I was, you know, not really expecting it. And...and it just...I thought my life was over. I was very depressed. I had worked at...at that point probably at least about nine years at the job I was in at that time, I worked for a university. And I made friends...I made some pretty good friends there. And at that point, I guess I didn't have any gay people friends, but those were the only people I could think of to turn to. So I ended up...you know, and I said I know people are going to know that something was wrong because I am a mess. So I ended up, I came out to my boss and a few people at work, but.*

[15]

What was that like?

*Uh, it was very hard. But everybody was...I was lucky. Everybody was really great, really supportive.*

[16]

During the eleven years you were closeted, did you think that you would live that way the rest of your life? Or did it ever bother you?

*I can't say that people didn't suspect. I'm sure that some people had an idea.*

[17]

But for your own self, you were perfectly content.

*Yeah, because we were in our own little world, you know, you know.*

[18]

And then it was shattered when she left you for a man. I don't know what would have been worse, a man or woman.

*Yeah, and you would think that it shouldn't make any difference, and you know, maybe...I know some lesbians who think its worse with another woman, but I mean because its someone who you are directly*

*competing with like. Actually what happened was she was a rather heavy-set person and she decided to have the stapling surgery. And she lost a lot of weight, and she met this man. After she had her surgery, she was in a support group and then the man had the same surgery and she met, you know they went... People from that group visited people who had surgery in the hospital and that's where they met. She met him through that group, so. It was one of these things, like you know, so you lose weight and then you find somebody else [laughing].*

[19]

You were closeted for eleven years and all of a sudden you were...it's almost like cracking an egg where everything is inside one minute, and the next it's all pouring out. From that point on, how did you start connecting with the gay community?

*I looked...there's a gay newspaper called the Washington Blade...and the first thing I did was look in there for...and this is while I was still living...I lived at my ex's two or three weeks before I moved out and got my apartment. But even while I was still there...I mean for a while, or a couple of days, all I did was cry. And then I still crying, I mean I was still depressed for six months or more after that. But, um..I... [to herself] How did I start connecting with the gay community? I mean you sort of...first of all I started to think...it makes you think, you think well maybe I'm not supposed to be gay. I did have that little second thought there for...but...then I said well uh...you know. Then I looked in the Washington Blade, and first thing I did, I looked for like a support group. And I did find a lesbian support group in Rockville, in a church somewhere. So I did go there for a little while and that was kind of good but I didn't really connect too much with those folks. What eventually happened after I moved out and was in an apartment by myself, I...the other thing I started doing was sort of this spirituality thing. Well where am I. Because when I was with Laura, my CIT director, I converted to Catholicism. Actually, all my girlfriends that I had dated were Catholic, so I figured maybe it was in the stars. But I had always been fascinated you know, with the Catholic Church. And when...when I was a Girl Scout I used to...the Catholic girls would go into town for mass and at back at camp we would have our own ecumenical service for everybody else in camp. But all you'd have to do is raise your hand, and most of my friends were usually Catholic. So I always used to go to Mass with them. So I guess it kind of naturally occurred that way. So I felt I needed some kind of spiritual experience so I looked in the paper and...and...for what kind of like gay churches there were. And actually I went to MCC first, which is the Metropolitan Community Church. I like the experience, it's kind of a combination between Christian and Protestant that they do Eucharist every week, but there is a lot of Protestant angles to it and similar prayer, so it's kind of an interesting. And it's a pretty big church membership-wise and they had two services. I enjoyed it but somehow I just didn't feel, you know, right. So I was looking to see well what else could I do? And the other thing that just sort of popped in my mind was that well, you know, I felt like she took my life away...er, you know it just sort of popped into my mind and I said wait a minute I'm still Catholic and she can't take that away from me. So I started Catholic services for gay and lesbian people so I said I'll just go there. And um...and I went there and uh...they were mostly men, but they were very welcoming. And I think the first time I was there the fire alarm went off during mass and they said oh don't worry about it, it happens, but they said this doesn't happen every week. I started becoming friends with the men and eventually I became friends with the women. But it's a little hard, women...women are very hard sometimes to make friends with...it's just sort of a weird culture. There's this thing of, especially single women, I never experienced this, but I've been told many times by other single women that they're afraid of another...other lesbians sometimes because they're afraid they're going to hit on them and I guess they're not interested or, I don't, I don't know, I guess, I guess they don't know how to deal with it, you know, so there's that aspect of it. But in the meanwhile, a lot of friends hang out with the guys and I went from there...in addition to that I got involved in, there was a group called the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard. And what that was is a, it's a...how would you say, it's a call in place where if you have questions either you need somebody to meet or coming out and you need somebody to talk to. It's like a peer counseling thing **and** an information thing, if you're new in town and you just want some places you can go like bars or whatever, we can answer those questions. So you just sign in for some training and*

*then once a month you go and answer, or twice a month, depending on how many people are needed. I did that for a while, but then I mostly started getting more and more involved with the Church.*

[20]

So you were very involved in the community. There's a gay and lesbian parade here, isn't there?

*Yes, I would often go.*

[21]

What is it like for you to be living in a hetero world? What are some things that you notice or that strike you?

*Um...the only way you really, I mean you notice things, little pieces here and there, like advertising and you fill out forms and the only choices are single or married, but I think the most that I've ever realized that, and it's may sound silly, is that Rosie and I have been to the lesbian women's music festival a couple of times and the Women's Music Festival is sort of what I call a utopia world because they just sort think of everything, people pitch in. There is and like there is something for every need that a person would have while they're there. They provide for counseling, AA, they make sure that the people, the older people and the people who are handicapped can get from one event to the other, and it's just like sort of you're in this little, almost, lesbian utopia. But when you come back to the real world, that's when you sort of, get this sort of culture shock that, you know. And the only other time I felt that was um when the last march on Washington, when DC was sort of taken over by [laugh] gay people, if you will. And I remember the Saturday, Friday night before the march, we had gone downtown to um...a gay bookstore to get a gay newspaper to see where all the events were. And as we were driving through there, it was just packed. Dupont Circle was just packed with all these gay people. And we had just moved into our new apartment, so we decided that we just had to come back. And so we ran back in our car and got on the subway, and came back. And as we were coming up the subway to Dupont Circle, all these gay people, and as you come up all these people were just cheering, and so it was like you were in a gay world, you know [laughing]. And coming back from the march, on the subway, was full of all these gay people and one person on the subway was making these, you know, like remarks about these two lesbians, to this man who was standing there, like "How can they do that?" "Why don't you love this nice man, why don't you introduce her to this nice man here?" And we were like [makes a face with breathy sounds] So it was sort of like we were outnumbering. So eventually he had to get off [laugh] at the next station. Instead of being in the other situation where you would be in the minority and people can make bad jokes about you, and you can't really, you know, say anything. But you notice it in little things that when. I've come to the point where, I guess after I had a...some period...I think it was basically when I met Rosie, I think I decided at that point that I was just going to out to out, and that was it, and there was no going back. And so I became totally out, at work and everywhere. And so it gets me, but every once in a while there's that little glitch. Like I got a new job and it was like...you got to do it all over again. And there's always that little possibility that somebody's going to come and give you grief about it so...Like lately there's all this stuff going on about the gay marriage thing and um. Rosie's uncle is giving me a motor scooter. He has one, he bought a new one and I was up visiting...we were up visiting Christmas time, and he let me try out his other one. Cause I have an old mo-ped that's, I've decided it's...I really want to do some commuting with it, but it's not really enough powerful to do what I want. So I tried out the motor scooter, and I liked it, and I did some research. I was just going to come back here and sell this and buy something like that. But I realized that the one he had was... they don't really make them like that anymore. And so if he would sell me that one, but I asked him and he said he was going to give it to me. So I was doing research on how to transfer the title. So I found out that had...it...well it's a mute point because it's titled in Indiana. But had it been titled in Maryland, he could have given it...if Rosie and I were married, he could have given it to me and the taxes would be waved. But because we weren't married, he would have had to like put in her name and the tax...because your immediate family, and...and...wife,...and uh...uh...what am I saying...um your um your spouse, in the spouses of this family could also be given, her parents could give me a car, but I would have to pay taxes on it because we're not legally recognized. So that, I was just thinking, there's things like that you get discriminated against.*

[22]

Now we're going to talk about your abuse history, when it started, your relationship to your abuser, how long it lasted, things like that.

*Um...when I volunteered to do this, of course I knew I that I had experienced that, but I had forgotten that it was actually [laugh] two. But um, the first one was um...with a friend. My mother was an only child. She had a brother who died when she was...well he died when he was eighteen. I never knew him. She had no bothers or sisters. Her cousins were her age, but I would call them aunt and uncle, even though they weren't my aunt and uncle. And there was also some friends of the family, but there was a man and a woman who... My grandfather was a real estate developer and although he lived in Washington, DC, he would buy land around Front Royal, Virginia and that area. And he subdivided it into lots and sell them to people. And there was one couple, who bought one of these lots from my grandfather, Jane and Joe Simpson, and sometimes, when my grandfather was selling lots, we would go and hang out. So when they, when this couple bought the lot, they befriended my mother. And you know, they sort of became family friends. And so they bought the lot. And the plan was, they were going to build a house there and retire, which they did. But the first thing they did was built this garage, and they were sort of living in the garage, while they were building the house. But they only did it on the weekends, because they weren't retired yet. So, and, but, I called them aunt and uncle, even though they weren't. So um...the first incident happened when Uncle Joe and...Aunt Jane didn't come up all the time. He came up to work on the house on Friday, or whatever. I think he was either retired or semi-retired, so that he had more time to work on it, and I think she was still working full time or something. He would come in and get me. Sometimes we would do something fun and then we would end up back there.*

[23]

Do you remember the first time? How old were you?

*I think it was in Junior High School, about 10 or 12.*

[24]

So it was around puberty?

*Yes. The first time that I can remember, and I'm not sure this is the first time. But it's like I have this connection with it because it was my birthday. And I wanted a bike. It was a boy's bike. Which my parents did not want me to have a boy's bike. I don't think they had enough money to buy that particular bicycle anyway. But, I wanted a bicycle, and I wanted a boy's bicycle. And they weren't going to get me a boy's bicycle, period, even if it was a cheap boy's...or a used boy's bicycle, you know. And, and also where I grew up, the thing with bicycles was that they were being stolen right and left, so I was also needing another bike. So I had my eye on...in the Western Auto Store, they had, you know the banana bike. It had a banana seat and it was candy apple red, with this seat that had these sparklies in it. And it was a five speed with a stick shift. That's the bike I wanted. Well, my aunt and uncle bought me that bike. And after that, it was on that day, was also he started you know, just...um...sort of...sort of touching me, and um...stuff like that. And eventually, um...it was...you know, just have me masturbate him. It lasted until I was in college. When I was sixteen, seventeen. I didn't have the occasion to see him. After a point, when I got older, and I felt really bad about it, and I couldn't, you know, I felt, I was torn because [inaudible]. I remember at one point, I was going to try and avoid him and the families just sort of drifted apart naturally, anyway, so...*

[25]

The feeling of being torn, was that because he was really nice to you....

*And he paid attention to me. And I was an only child. I didn't have a lot of friends. I was very self-conscious. People, you know, I was ridiculed in school, all the time, I was ugly, I was stupid, and on, on, on. He was nice to me. He paid attention to me. He talked to me. So I felt this was something I had to do in exchange. And then when I got old enough to realize that this is not right for me to be doing...*

[26]

When did you realize that?

*I think it was somewhere around maybe 14 or 15, 16. I remember consciously trying to sort of avoid him, to cut it off some way, but my way was to sort of avoid being alone with him [laugh]. Cause I wasn't...I was...I wasn't the kind of person that, and I still have a problem today. You know, I still have to work on*

*this, saying no to people, I just, you know. And I mean I was never physically hurt or anything like that. And, you know, it was sort of repulsive, but it wasn't that bad. So I just thought it was something I had to do, sort as a favor.*

[27]

So the sex itself never made you feel good, it was the emotional rewards of it?

*Right. We would also get treats and things.*

[28]

That's typical behavior for a child sex abuser. Did ever say not to tell anyone?

*Yes. Don't tell anyone, especially Aunt Jane.*

[29]

The message you got was "what we're doing is fine, just don't tell."

*Yeah, the thing is when you're younger, they make it like a game.*

[30]

For them, since they're okay with it, they have to make you feel okay with it. What happened with the second one, the one you nearly forgot about?

*The reason why in my head I discount it is because I was like, it started when I think I was like seventeen, and it went on for a year, year and a half. So I sort of don't, I feel like I was old enough that I should have just never let it happen, you know, somehow scream my head off or something. It was my mother's [deep exhale of breath] third husband. And the same thing, it sort of started with the attention, the buying stuff, and then all of a sudden, I find myself in this situation and I didn't know how to get out of it. So I just went along with it. I knew my mother would never believe me if I told her. So again, it ended up being sort of...*

[31]

What did he do to you, sexually?

*Um, well he started out by you know, touching me, and everything. And then he'd want me to touch him. He wanted me to do oral sex, but I just didn't do that. It was in my senior year of high school. That last one, that last one was I know I remember consciously it was during my first year at college. I think there was like one weekend where I came home.*

[32]

At the same time this was happening, you were also trying to figure out your own sexuality. Did you ever make comparisons?

*Um...It was kind of strange, because sometimes I would think, "well since I'm participating in this, so then on the other had you realize that well I can never say I every enjoyed any of it, but I guess I was at the age where I was old enough to think that there was something different because if I was in the right development, maybe I would be enjoying it. You know I mean or it should be more, you know so I'm thinking well you know maybe that does mean I'm tracked [gesticulating] this other way, there was this [laugh] back and forth thing. And I think maybe that's some reason why I didn't cut things off sooner because I was struggling with that. And that's the hardest one to talk about because I was older now, and that's why I blame myself.*

[33]

Let's go back to your family. You said you didn't get much from them, and your mother was three times married. Go into a little more detail about how you communicated, what the dynamics were.

*Well, um...I'll just go over the whole thing because it is kind of weird situation, and I think that will bring it out. I was adopted. I was about fifteen months old when I was adopted. I was told by, I was told this story, I was told by a family friend who happened to be the friend who abused me, I was told by him that my first father, my adopted father was actually my biological father. I've never looked this up so I don't know if it's true or not, but it can be. My mother couldn't have children. She had a stillborn. And then basically, she couldn't have children. So I was adopted for whatever reason. I was born in Fredricksburg, and also another thing that I was told is that I have a half brother somewhere. I was born in the back of a station wagon. And when I was adopted family, mother and her first husband my family lived in Alexandria, Virginia on ---Drive. And I was there until I was seven. We there in a house and I went to*

*kindergarten and first grade, and my grandmother, my mother's mother at that time we lived in an apartment in DC...uh...Washington DC. She had separated from my grandfather. My grandfather was married three times. But I didn't know anybody except my grandmother [ ]. So my grandmother was living in an apartment Washington DC. We lived in a house. We had a maid. And uh...[pause] I don't remember a lot of stuff. Well, I was an only child. I lived by myself, and I so spent a lot of time in my room and stuff. I just remember always being like very lonely, and I didn't have a lot of friends. There were some kids in the neighborhood. But, like I have birthday pictures, but there are only one or two kids there. But the other thing that I remember is my mother and father fighting pretty much. And a couple of times and it being physical. I remember my father [ ] my mother. I don't remember a lot. I remember some good times and um...so...you know pretty normal stuff other than that. And then...My father was a real estate developer. And...um...he traveled a lot, you know, went away a lot, and be gone, you know, a week or two at a time. And I had just started second grade, well a week or two into it, he went on a business trip, he was always on a business trip. I was out in the driveway, when he was pulling out, and he said love you, so I'll see you Friday, or something about Friday. Well, when Friday came, they repossessed the house, and half the furniture. And...uh...my grandfather, the one who was developing stuff in Front Royal, he um...found a house for us to rent in Front Royal, out in the country. So, we lived there, and my grandmother lived with us. So, I mean my mother and me. And, we lived there for about a year. And um...then my grandfather helped my mother make a down payment, to buy a house in town. And while we were at the house, by the way, my father showed up, somehow showed up and stole the only car we that had [laugh]. Well not stole, I don't know, whatever. Either that or it was repossessed, one or the other. So, we lived in town. My mother worked for one time she worked for a furniture store, one time she went back to business school on the weekends. Somewhere, after that happened, in that time, she had...she had a nervous breakdown, and spent some time in a mental section of a regular hospital. It wasn't like a special mental hospital. And then...um...at some point, at a party, she met my second father, who was actually a cousin of my first father. They had the same last name. He was in the Navy. Oh, I'm sorry, she met him actually when we lived in the country, that year. Cause he lived in town, and they were dating at that point. And he went to in the Philippines, and that was his last tour and then he was getting out. So he came back when he got out, they got married, and he got a job in the Navy Yard in Washington, DC. He would come home weekends. It was that kind of thing. Um...you know...um...and I don't remember like how long like that sort of went on. In my mind it was a couple of years maybe. I remember once I ...the only memory I really have... see he was a nice guy, he never bothered me. I mean I really got on with him well. I don't have a lot of memories other than one time I did have to go track him down in a USO Club to get money to buy a Christmas tree. He was working as a civilian for the Navy and doing some work. He was in computer-communications and they had something for him to do in California. So he went out to California to do this work. And I guess he was supposed to be there for a couple of months, I was never clear on that. Well, he would call us, every week or so, and then finally it happened that he didn't call for a while. So my mother called there, and a woman answered and I think she asked for my dad, cause he did adopt me, and she said he wasn't there, so I think my mom said well who are you and the lady said well I'm Mrs. Shelley. Well, so we finally find out that he married this woman, and he was a bigamist. The story is this woman told him she was pregnant by him and so he married [laugh] her. So there was a divorce, needless to say, and another mental breakdown. That one was the one where [in a singsong voice] she took some pills, drank a lot of alcohol, the rescue squad came, she put on all her jewelry, and the rescue squad came and got her. Then when she comes back, so, in between these times...she was a night...first of all she was a night person. So, she would sleep, I mean she...well she...she...when she had a job, of course it was a day job, so she would go to it. But on the weekends, or other times, or when she didn't have a job, she would sleep during the day and stay up and or go out all night, or stay up, you know, so there was that kind of a mis-connection. I mean, we never had lot of...I was basically raised by my grandmother. And there wasn't a lot of like family dinners, and all those kinds of things. And, you know, my mother would sort of appear, or...or...I mean she was home most of the time, but I mean, we sort of didn't intersect that often, but if we did, then it was often sort of blowing in, having a rage and, you know, breaking something of mine, or you know. There was this one incident where she made me mad*

*and I threw a bowl of soup at her, and you know, but...um...those kinds of...and then yelling and screaming. Like my grandmother and mother would yell and scream at each other between the two rows of the houses.*

[34]

Did she drink?

*Not that I know of. She may have had like some pill problems. You know, something that was prescribed that she was probably abusing. She socially drank, but she was not like a real alcoholic.*

[35]

But she was in good enough shape to meet her third husband.

*Right. Probably not long after she came out of the hospital the last time. I'm not sure how they met. He owned a wood yard in Potomac. We had a house in Potomac, but not like Potomac where the big houses are, but the address was in Potomac. And he also owned this...but then he also had this piece of land that basically what he would do is buy firewood, like trees and trunks and cut it up, and deliver it as firewood. Or people could come and load up their trunks. So...and then also he did...in the non-firewood season he, they would do other things like repair fences. He had his own little business. And after they got together, basically they would stay here during the week and come home on the weekends. And I lived with my grandmother. And this was like during the last two years they were together.*

[36]

Talk about your pregnancy.

*I wasn't sure where it would fit in. I almost brought it up awhile back. I almost brought it up, as that was again sort of the result with my experimentation stage.*

[37]

With?

*With the guy from high school. Even though he doesn't admit it. But I'm sure.*

[38]

But it wasn't your stepfather.

*No, no, It was I'm almost sure, no not almost sure, very sure it was the guy from high school that I...I...I was...for a little while when I went away to college for a year, while I was living in the dormitory, I mean we were like twenty minutes from home. So I used to come...go home on the weekends frequently. And we would go out.*

[39]

It was more than companionship. It was an intimate companionship.

*Yeah, It was almost similar to the other relationships in that sort of I wanted the companionship, but I figured I had to put up with the other part as a result of the just, I don't know.*

[40]

And at that time you didn't think about protection? No. Did anyone ever talk to you about sex?

*I mean, not really. I mean other than in the Girl Scouts we saw that film that's sponsored by Kotex. And that's how, and that's basically the sexual education, and they gave us this little book. And I had a best friend who was a year younger than me, who knew more. So when I had this book, we would hide and look at this book. So, no there wasn't a lot of things. But the town we lived in, it almost felt as if it was 5 or 10 years behind everybody else's.*

[41]

And abortion was out of the question? What did your mother say when you presented her with the situation?

*She sort of had this jump in and deal with it attitude. I didn't tell anybody until, I didn't show a lot until I probably was I would say 6 or 7 months pregnant. There was a discussion of keeping the baby or adopting the baby. I made a decision on my own to not do it [abortion]. Part of it, I don't think I could have done it anyway, but the other half of it is you would have to tell somebody to get help which I didn't feel comfortable with either, so.*

[42]

So at that time had your stepfather still abusing you, or was it finished?

*It was...actually they were both sort of both, back to b...it was right about the same time. It could have been even simultaneously almost. I basically think I had finished with him before I ended up being pregnant. I think I was finished with him like in that summer and like this happened in the fall. So it was pretty close together.*

[43]

Did your stepfather do or say anything to you when you stopped?

*Part of the thing was, the good thing too was that I was away at school. We didn't have much interaction either. So that was the thing.*

[44]

Because it still would have been hard for you to say no?

*Yeah.*

[45]

Did he mind? Did he say anything?

*No, you know it was funny. There was never a lot of conversation between us to begin with. I mean, we could sometimes sit. Our house, in Front Royal, was two levels, and at one point my step father made the second level into a separate house, where they...he made one room that we had into a kitchen. So there was actually a kitchen up there and a kitchen down there [gesturing]. And then there was two bedrooms. There was only one bath, so everybody had to share the same bathroom. But, uh...so their piece was almost a separate little piece. And we would, you know, I would go up...go up there and sit in the kitchen and listen to music, and sort of just hang out at the table and not really talk, but just be there. You know, I mean, we talked some, but not like you know, yada yada non-stop, you know. And we would usually have, you know a glass of wine, or something, some kind of alcohol. We wouldn't get drunk or anything, but we would have a couple of, some things to drink, and just mellow out*

[46]

Did you drink a lot of alcohol in your past?

*Not much. There was one period, I wasn't living there, it was much later, and I was out of work and I had a little, I felt like I was a little...I didn't have a job, and I was...like we were living out in the middle of nowhere. And I was depressed. And I sort of went on this little binge, but it sort of...it wasn't...I mean it was like a couple of weeks, it took care of itself. Well, I don't know, I mean it wasn't everyday, it was like...you know, I don't know how to explain it.*

[47]

But it kept you from feeling what you didn't want to feel.

*Uh, hunh [nodding yes]. Well it was, for a short time my grandmother also lived with us.*

[48]

*You said that your mother wouldn't have believed you about your step-dad, or even about Joe. Probably not.*

[49]

Who was the first person you told?

*Probably [a very long pause of thinking] Robin, or it...I may have not mentioned it till Laura.*

[50]

So you never really told your mother?

*I think I eventually told my mother, but it was much later, like near the end.*

[51]

At the time when you were little, there was no grown-up you could talk to.

*And, you know, I probably could have told my grandmother. But, she was like...she doted on me, and she was the sweetest person. **But**, I always felt that she was from a different generation. I mean, I would have done the world for her, I mean we were very close, but I never felt like I could talk to her about anything. And it was like, you know, I never talked to her about what was going on between me and Robin. She sort of intuited it. Just sort of said... not so much that she didn't approve of it, she didn't care what you'd do because what you do is nobody's business.*

[52]

So she wasn't judging you.

*No, she was worried about the consequences.*

[53]

You said that when you were in school, everyone was razzing you. Did you like school? Did you do well in school?

*Not until I was a sss...not until I...I did ok but I only did well in school when I was a senior in high school. I was, I got...I don't know, I can't say like this person called me this, but somewhere in my head, I got that I'm not smart, I mean I have a low IQ or something, you know, just so I never even tried to work hard. What happened was my um... Lauren, who I was with for eleven years, she...I had...um...the summer in my 11<sup>th</sup> ...it was the summer when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, before I went to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she was my CIT director. And I, you know, she was the first woman, other than my grandmother who like paid any attention or showed interest in me and I mean, we just had these long [drawn out vowel] talks.*

*And...and...you know it was the summer and I just, I felt compelled to like you know, sort of throw myself into things, and...and thought I was capable of doing things. And I got really good grades. I always got C's and B's but I mean I got A's.*

[54]

Well, it makes sense that you weren't able to focus in school. You were dealing with a lot of stuff in your family.

*Well, I was just, I also, I think lazy, and I thought, I got a C, I deserved it. I mean, I think it sort of made me lazy and accept the mediocre. I was just like you know, like so taken with her, and it was almost like hero worship, and I just wanted to impress her, so I was just trying to do my best.*

[55]

So you're saying that you were doing this more for her in a way?

*Yeah, yeah. And of course she was very encouraging. Cause we were calling, after we split up after the summer, we were calling each other. Before that, between the people picking on me, and me not thinking I was very smart, school was pretty much of a struggle.*

[56]

Why do you think they picked on you?

*I guess I was always an awkward, backward person. People said I was ugly. I mean, you know, I wore glasses since about 4<sup>th</sup> grade so that was a reason to pick on people. I didn't have shabby clothes, but I probably didn't have a lot of designer things, so maybe that was a thing, you know. When I was younger, my grandmother used to make my clothes and some of them were quite nice. That was when I was really young. Like I never really **had** a hygiene problem. But people would just like...my last name was Shelley and they used to call me Smelly Shelley. You know, I wasn't smelly, they just called me, you know. Or the other great one was, I had a nickname, my first father, when I was, when they brought me home from the they said hospital, but probably the adoption center, or wherever it was they brought me home from. They stopped at a store, and my father wanted to buy me something, but my mother did not want me to have a pacifier. So he came out with this little rubber kitten. Squeaky. So **he** started calling me kitten, which got shortened to Kitt. So that was my nickname up until I just sort of got rid of it myself. So...K.I.T.T. [spelled out] So, I was never Charlotte. I became Charlotte when I came up here and I couldn't stand it. My mother insisted on...they didn't call me Charlotte, they called me Charlotte Elizabeth, my family called me Charlotte Elizabeth. Hardly anybody ever called me Charlotte. It was mostly Kitt. So, and so as I developed and got into high school, it became Big Tit Kitt. So I went from Smelly Shelley to Big Tit Kitt.*

[57]

That must have been so terribly difficult for you. What did you do to make yourself feel better?

*Basically...I wasn't good in sports. When I was like in intermediate, junior high school age, I spent a lot of time by myself reading and stuff. When I got older, like the last couple of years before my 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>. maybe even a little bit before, I sort of lived my life with my best friends. And both of them...one was a year older than me, and one was a year younger than me. And, at different times both of them were either one...one was infatuated with someone who was not interested in her, and the guy I ended up dating, like I said, that was one thing. Then, the other friend I had, sort of...sort of two*

*boyfriends sort of shuffling back and forth, but you know her parents were a little more... stricter. So I was always was involved in creative ways of making sure that she could spend time with her boyfriend, by going along, or you know, or sort of facilitating. Again it satisfied my need to, you know, be nice, help people, then maybe people would like, you know, do something to make people like me if because I was **dying** for someone to like me.*

[58]

What did your peers say when you told them you were pregnant?

*It happened when I was in college, once, at that point I had dropped out. So I didn't really have any peers at that point. The last couple of months of that, I basically stayed with my mother, and stepparents here. And then the baby was born and she went up for adoption.*

[59]

What do you do now to reduce your stress?

*Yeah, I'm learning to play a musical instrument. Actually [laughing], I'm trying to reduce my stress because I find myself being nervous trying to learn how to play, but...uh. Hopefully, I hope that's going to be a stress reducer. Writing, reading, I like to read. Getting involved in my spiritual life. I have to admit the job I have now is not that stressful, I love my job. I feel like in many ways I don't have a lot of stress like I used to. But we've had a lot of things happen in our personal life that have been stressful, so things...the tree falling on our house, and we were in a little car accident. I've had several eye surgeries over the last couple of years. And so it's more of the personal life that has been stressful. You know, and you struggle...you know, Rosie's struggle with her job, and she's just now sort of, you know her previous job getting to the point where she can say...look back and not internalize it, and say that's not all about me. You know, you know because she had these two jobs, and she ended up having to leave them; she felt like there was something wrong with **her**. She's just actually now getting through that and it's really cool because we're sort of now in good places together. I think the last couple of weeks those are the ones that are the best. There was a time, I mean, I...we've been together eleven years now, and I...I just...I don't know where the time...It's actually official, that Rosie's been waiting for...we have been together longer than I was with **what's** her name. And we have now reached my hallmarks. But it's scary for me, you know, when it was creeping up on you, because, when I was with my previous partner, we had a house, we were together, we had a car, we had been working on these jobs for a while [singsong voice], and the whole thing. And in one day, it all went out. And somehow, that same thing was little scary. It was like...the breakup, I don't want to go through that again.*

[60]

You were eleven years with her, and eleven with Rosie. So this is an anniversary for you. You told me that abuse was taking place around the time you were searching for your own sexual identity. Looking back on that, what do you think about that, putting those two things together?

*I think it was almost like I was struggling to let go of childhood [said very slowly, and the ending raised like a question]. Er, maybe that's not the right word, and so it was, reaching back at the same time as trying to go forward. Because there was this other piece I forgot to mention. And that when I said that um, we were talking about my first experience with Robin, which I...I did not intentionally forget this...but, it actually was **not** with Robin [laugh], it was...um...it was with Lauren and what happened was I was in college and was in the fall, and we had this break weekend or something. And we were still...still close friends. I was still very much enamored, I guess because she was a lot older than I was, so I was...so I was like... Yet...we at that point, it was more...we called it big sister/little sister relationship. And then there was actually a young woman, a little younger than me that also they had the same relationship, although, [sigh], and this is probably...looking back on it, I realize it probably wasn't...it was probably problematic, even though **they** never did anything sexual, but there was an attraction between the two, it sort went beyond friends. I think that had things been different, they might have acted on it, but...but then again that would have been not a great idea because she was underage at the time. So that's the relationships, at least that's how we termed it at that point. So I was calling and writing a lot. So I had this break weekend, and so...I think I asked her, and either she invited me or I said, "can we get together?" basically was the thing. "And when you're in college, if you want to go somewhere, or*

*whatever, you know, they have this ride board. So I found somebody that was going up there and I got a ride with them to a certain point and then she picked me up from there. We spent the weekend together and basically, she made a pass at me, and, you know, it was an encounter just for that weekend. And then that was sort of the first...first one. That was when I think I really realized that, you know...*

[61]

That was when you said to yourself, "I'm gay"?

*Yes. But of course...unfortunately at that point, I was already pregnant. But I don't even know if I knew. But I'm sure it was almost...it was very close together.*

[62]

What was it like having sex with a man, being pregnant, and then realizing you're gay? What went through your head?

*Other than the fact that I thought it was...well stupid [laugh] that I allowed myself to get pregnant. That went through my head. Uh, I still...once I realized that...this is where my attractions lie, it was still very much not a thing...especially where we were living, a thing that you know...you could do it still was a little troubling how...how was I going to what would I be a celibate person or was I gonna ...sort of...where do you meet other people, you know, how do you...*

[63]

Were you frightened or confused?

*Yeah. Even when I was starting to acknowledge that I think this is where I was...where... what my nature was, I was still always terrified that somebody would find out. Would I get arrested or sent away, you know. It was more the legal thing, you know. Not...I wasn't as...It wasn't more like the stigma or making fun of, I mean, I guess...No one would have wanted that, but I was more afraid of being arrested.*

[64]

Of course today, you wouldn't be which shows the change in public attitudes.

*It was very real to people who were afraid of it. That's for sure. I mean when you think of it, more than likely, the police aren't going to come into your home for no reason. But you know, sometimes, [long pause, big sigh] like different situations, I mean, where [long pause, big sigh] the only time you could get together with someone was in a certain place and you so you sort of had to take advantage of it. Like when Robin and I one time, we had somehow saved up some money or got some money and we were spending the weekend together near her college, but we had rented a hotel room. And the following morning, you know, even though we hung the sign out, the maid still sort of opened the door. I mean we weren't doing anything at that point, but it would scare the shit out of us. Because you just never knew when...we were always afraid like a roommate might come in or something. And one time, um...that's why we sort of started going to **my** house and other places, because my college roommate...even though she would go home for the weekend, and we would stay in the dorm room. One time we were there, somebody slipped us this note under the door. It was some kind of a vague...**thing** that they knew what we were doing, or something like that. Yeah, I can't even remember what they said, but it was enough to scare us into finding someplace else.*

[65]

Describe your general thoughts about how you might see your lesbianism and your sexual abuse.

*Well...[pause] I think its [deep breath and pause] its natural, or at first, at least, it seems natural for one to wonder if your having bad experiences with men at that young age, that you would be turned off by that, and you don't really...and that's what sort of causes you to go off so far in the other direction. That may be true for somebo...some people. But, not...I personally I don't think that's not where I'm at. I've had some great male friends, and I mean, and it's like a whole experience. I mean it's not like...you can't like divorce the sexual part from the being that one person is. And it's just...as strongly as some people are attracted to people of the opposite sex. There is something that's like, you can do this, and you can function, and its ok [sing song]; but this is like **wow**. It's just like there's a connection, there's a...it's beyond just the sexual part of it [lesbian relationships]. Being connected with a woman, is not simply...Recently I went to a talk by an ex-gay person, who was saying that homosexuality is caused by a relationship in your family that's gone awry, usually with your moth...like if you didn't have a good*

*relationship with your mother, so now your seeking a like relationship with another woman. Well, in my case, I didn't have a good relationship with my mother, but I don't believe that's why I'm gay [laugh], and I don't believe that, you know, these abuse things are that...I think it's my natural orientation. Other people who are straight, and had terrible relationships with their mother, but they're still straight. Or their mother, or their father or whoever, I mean, sometimes I understand that there may be some people that that experience, where they had this abuse, and I can certainly see why you would not want to have anything else to do with men: Or, if they were abused by women, women. But, in my experience, that, I don't feel like it's the reason that...that...I think it's nature more than...it's not like I...I don't feel like I'm trying to escape something. I just feel like I was born...and it's natural, something that's inside of me, not a like an escape. I think for some people, that may be what happened. But It bothers me that people think that everybody, there's something wrong that something happened and that is the cause of this.*

[66]

Did your abuse affect the way you felt about your sexual identity? Put differently, do you think that if you weren't abused, you might have seen the world differently?

*I think that I wouldn't have developed such a strong...I think, this may not be the answer to your question but, um...I wouldn't continue to try to do everything to please somebody. I think it made that worse. I'm not sure I answered the question.*

[67]

I heard an answer to the question.

*But I wouldn't be surprised if that's how my mother justified everything. In the end, I mean several months or so before she died. That was particularly hard. Because the second one was her husband and I really was the daughter. But what happened was, the reason she had a...the ending of her story was that...she found out that my last stepfather was...like this is semantics, but, I never really considered him my father. I...It's kind of funny, I...had this abusive relationship with him, but I also feel like I never really liked him, it's kind of weird...I know, I can't explain it... so I was pushing that piece of it away, at least the father piece of it. I never felt like that was our relationship. But anyway, she found out that, I think he was seeing other people and that's what caused...she actually came to this area to stay with my grandfather to pursue a divorce and that's when she had a breakdown, and went into a mental hospital. And then into that, she became physically ill, and was transferred into a...she had some more problems before she passed.*

[68]

Is there something that you would like to add, or mention before we end the interview? Thank you very much for participating. You were very open and frank, and I appreciate your effort.

### Tess

[1]

The first set of questions is about experiencing internalized homophobia. When was the first time that it occurred to you that you had sexual preferences for women?

*Um I became aware of them, I think in my early 20s. Um which would be about 20 years ago. Um and it was...um actually in high school I had, I...and also in grammar school I would form these...these alliances with other girls and um it never...I never sexualized it. I considered myself pretty asexual. Um and I guess you know I always had the attractions or had the attractions that you know I was like always definitely more drawn to...to girls. I guess for more...and that...that was acceptable as companions you know. And definitely the sexual stuff took off when actually older women would approach me. And um and I was like fascinated by their...like attracted to their energy, et cetera, so um and that was like actually, "Oh, wow" and that became real when I when I like I think when I was a sophomore or junior in college. But I also had uh...like when I was under six, or something and my family moved I would, I had like this...a sexual relationship with another girl. Um, and I never really looked at that, you know, but um...um but what I remember is that we would like mess around in the bathroom and she...and that I would...I would lie on the floor and she would lay on top of me. And it was like this thing that we did every afternoon or something. And then I think my little brother like busted us. And like actually climbed*

*up a ladder and looked into the bathroom window. You know, and, so it was like this whole thing. I don't...I don't know if I got in serious trouble about that, it was like, or I don't even remember like if an adult was aware of it but it was like blackmail, kind of thing. And...and...and it wasn't a big deal. I mean It was, I didn't...I don't know like for me it wasn't a big deal, it was like yeah, so what. Um but I like we didn't hang out after that, and um the next thing I remember about like her, she was a next...she was my next door neighbor, was that her mom was like there was this like a lot of sounds from the house next door like knocking, et cetera, so. Her mom had been...was in this abusive relationship and had come to our house to get some help um, and I remember, she was really beat up, you know like beat up in face and stuff. And I remember this girl Clarissa had a lot, **a lot of anger** behind it, a lot of anger, you know. And we never hung out or talked after that so I don't know what happened to her, you know. So it's like that's sort of like this whole mystery kind of thing.*

[2]

Do you remember a specific instance when you were attracted to women and said to yourself, "I never thought about this."

*Um I told my mother, I think when I was in grammar school or junior high that I didn't want to have children. And she was like, "Are you a lesbian?" [Laughing] like that was her response. I didn't want to spawn so I had to be a lesbian. And I was like wow, that's an interesting word. It sort of resonated for me. I wasn't really clear what the word was. So [heart out loud laugh] and like wow, that's an interesting word. And you know, something resonated for me. I wasn't even clear, like how I would know what the word was, or whatever. But it was like that was definitely a resonance at that point. Um and I never, and at that point I never like did anything about it, but there were girls that I would talk to everyday. Like this one really intense...*

[3]

She put an idea in your head, that hadn't been there before. When you were 20 what was your first experience like.

*I was like, I had taken off from school, I'd taken a sabbatical from school. And um I moved away and I came back home...went back home for a tiny sabbatical and I was hanging with these **gay** guys, you know like in theater, artists, et cetera, like doing that whole thing. And so they were very open about their attraction to these men. And every night it would be like, they would go to these bars and every day and try to pick up guys, and all that stuff. So it was around that. Um and the woman scene there was, you know, like sort of circular...circular to, I mean like it was like really hidden to me. And so I mean like with my first experience it was like WOW. I mean this woman was really com..., I mean was just like really out there and just like who she was, and you know real, you real apparent that she liked women. And I liked her energy and I liked talking to her, she was a complete flirt, you know. So it was like that was...for me it didn't really cross over, because it was...I didn't have a political or feminist platform. And eventually I started doing the reading about, like in terms of...I got grounded as a feminist and from that developed more of a lesbian...sort of a lesbian, I guess mind frame, mindset? Like, not...I'm struggling for a term.*

[4]

Paradigm?

*Ok, yeah, paradigm. Um and what became really important for me was to have it as fluid as I needed to be. You know, yeah, I mean like so much of the literature at that point, women's literature was...was so like didn't include, incorporate my color. You know my...that was like all of this...then I got to like some of those writers, and then it was like okay. A felt very isolated you know still. I mean it was either the party scene, you know the bar scene, or the artist scene and with you know a number of women that I could interact with but it was like I...I...I never felt really satisfied with the intellectual or the...the like I didn't feel, I felt, I always felt like things were always a compartmentalization, either race, um education, or interest in terms of academia or philosophies, et cetera. So um or I was straight so you know I've always felt like needed to cross lines.*

[5]

You bring up some interesting ideas. First of all, the gay scene is different in the artist's crowd, bohemian and different with women of color, and different with feminists. You described yourself as asexual at one point. So that means you never dated men?

*Oh, I did. I did. And that was like. I mean I remember it was something I worked through. When I was 17 and I was hanging--living with one of my friends. You know like, we were musicians and so we would get carte blanche to go and you know like go to hotels and hear jazz bands and stuff play. I mean I grew up in New Orleans, so it's got that whole--there was this accessibility like very early on and at that point the drinking age was 18 so and it was just like I was a musician I played, I mean I played the guitar at the time. I was playing the band scene and it was like I could do all this exploration and stuff. I had a lot more freedom you in the arts scene, etc. What I found was, what I **did** was like my friend and I both got hooked up with these 2 guys who were hanging out at the same hotel, you know. And we were there to listen to music. And like both of these guys were talking to us, and you know, you know it was like this role, and it was very unsatisfying like emotionally unsatisfying, you know I had this sense of like I need to get this over with. So I got, you know, like I like had sex with this guy who I wasn't particularly attracted to and you know it was like so disrespectful and dishonoring of my sexual being, my sexual nature. It was just like wow. You know I had to look, I was looking at that like that as a traumatic thing, that was like a choice that I made just to like **get-this-over-with**. Like that kind of...that kind of concept you know. And it was like some initiation or something. I don't know, it was really bizarre, like I just wanted it over. I didn't want to have that mystery or whatever. You know it wasn't sacred or sacrament, or you know it was really fucked up and weird.*

[6]

Yes. I understand that you grew up hearing what the natural order of life was supposed to be, and never had the permission to explore your own natural order. Can think of any time that you—after you came out to yourself and some friends—did you ever feel the need to closet yourself, or hide things from people? *I always felt like there was...I was always hiding. In you know I mean, in some form or fashion. I remember like the first time I made love to a woman, and it was like that. It was like all this energy it was just like this really wonderful, intense experience. I think the next day or in the next few days, I was going back to school and I was just high. And my friends were like, "Can you **shut that** off? [really laughing hard]" "Can you turn it off, my God?." It was really funny. Um and you know it was like I would put myself in these situations where I just wasn't...I didn't thrive. I hated...I was going to school in Boston and I just hated it. It was like a spirit sucker. You know it was just like this place that...really intense. You know, and so it was like...like towards or after finals, around finals, it's like I would start dimming, you know like this whole...I would have these patterns like ok I would be like, I would like go home to New Orleans and like have all these wonderful, magical experiences and then I would go back to school and be absolutely miserable. Um and you know I mean its like I didn't really pursue trying to chase people, or chase women or men for that matter. It was like I just sort of had sexual relationships with men and fell into friendships that were very intense and very like not asexual, not sexual but I would have like eventually I would have the sex with men. Or be or put myself in situations that you know were didn't really honor my...what my, like honor that, like these people I didn't I was not finding people I was attracted to. You know but it was just like I would sort of fall into like these making out situations or whatever, these sexual situations, and it was just like huh [voiced exhale] you know sort of like letting it, like not responsible at all. Not honoring that stuff at all. That's I mean I didn't...in retrospect that's what I guess, like that my behavior was um was really disrespectful to my um spirit, you know, to who...to who I...I was drawn to. Then on the people I **was** attracted to, they were unattainable to me. Like I was...I didn't...I didn't...from myself...to myself **I didn't out myself** as being attracted to them. Um you know it was like, I tried to stick with the safe kind of platonic sharing kinds of things because I guess I mean I think from the memory I was afraid that if I told them I was sexually attracted to them they would be they would run off, like I wouldn't have the emotional attachment to them or wouldn't have the emotional connection with them, which to me was more important I guess or most important.*

[7]

I understand that kind of behavior. You went to where you could feel safe.

*Yes. Yes. In fact the people who I was, I mean the even people who were coming forward, I'm still reluctant to...I'm reluctant to uh—not chase her—but I'm not aggressive—those are not the correct words but I'm still really reluctant, even now in terms of saying “I'm really attracted to you, let's work this out, let's you know, I'd like to get to know you.” You know, I'm just learning those things now. Like ok wait before you get physically into someone, you know. Just like respect and get to know someone and build up the trust, for myself. You know, not so much because of somebody else's expectations or whatever people say, but and I'm just learning this stuff.*

[8]

You sound cautious.

*Yes, yes.*

[9]

Before you came out, what were you most afraid would happen, when you did come out?

*Ridicule. Not being taken seriously. And I guess also being ostracized from I guess my family.*

[10]

What did actually happen?

*Um, I did it really late, and I was um involved with this like, it was my second five-year relationship [laughing]. I was in my mid-30s maybe. Early thirties, yeah early thirties I think and um my mom um...by that time my father had a series of strokes and he was pretty much out of the picture. I mean the emotional picture. And my mother...my mother's reaction was, “At least you won't get pregnant.” And I'm just like, “Ma, I have to work at getting pregnant, but I can still get pregnant.” You know hello, you know, so it was like, that was like kind of it. Like it wasn't a big deal to her, whereas, I had all this energy behind it and like all these sort of expectations, and it's like she totally...I mean I guess it wasn't a surprise to her, because one of my exes had mentioned...had said “Oh she know.” This is what she said to me, she said to take care of you. You know, this woman was coming up to live with me in Boston, you know like we were going up there together. And...and um she's like, she knows, why don't you just come out you know and so I guess she already had enough time to like go through her freak-out or whatever she did, by herself. Or it didn't matter to her.*

[11]

Is your family still in New Orleans?

*Yeah.*

[12]

You sound so not New Orleans.

*[Gales of laughter] As another New Orleanean said, come down sometime.*

[13]

What about coming out to your friends?

*Um, yes it's like there's some who know, because...because I spend more time with them or because, I'm very cautious in just like developing the trust. And I try to get...I sort of task and try to get a feel for where they are, where they're at. Um with you know, like, with they, what their concepts are about homosexuality or whatever. And um you know if their pretty liberal and open it's like ok I'll open up and let them know. Um, but on the other hand, it's like being from the south, it's like don't ask don't tell. I mean like that's just like a southern kind of mentality, man. I mean again like looking retrospectively, that's like so not honoring, you know, or being...or being authentic actually which is I'm totally seeing **that** being the problem but for a long time I've lived with...like it's either one or...it's...I can sort of hide like that. So and I mean it's in like thinking about it is a lot of internalized homophobia. You know this is like a total survival mechanism. You it's like not about, **I'm here, I'm queer, fuck you motherfuckers!** It's all about like hide and be safe, you know. You know I mean there's such a level of violence that um especially in New Orleans, you hear about people getting shot and killed, beat up for whatever reasons. And this is like that whole level, that whole thing of being in fear. It's very palpable to me even now.*

[14]

I also understand Southern politeness can be scary, because you don't know what's under that politeness.

*And then too, like to get to witness the violence and like when somebody finally blows their top, you know to witness that. My family, my father was very abusive to kids to children, you know. So that was like something that physical and sexual abuse were just like rampant and the fact you know like at maybe 4-5 seeing my friend's mother beat up, beaten up, you know and my parents kind of attitude of like, I think they kind of cordoned us off, cordoned my brother and I off, you know cause we were really young and witnessing that. But you know so I'm not hearing how you know and not just like that whole mystery of like...like a man can do this to a woman and what happens to this man, and then he's back, and all of that, all that interplay.*

[15]

And the messages that our cultures send are internalized by every one of us. Do you remember, or could you describe any positive or negative emotions you felt when you came out? For example you seemed surprise at your mother's reaction when you told her.

*It wasn't like some heavy Christian trip, you know because she was a Southern Baptist or she is a Southern Baptist and so it was like she was a lot more liberal than I expected her to be. However, **her** parents are Southern Baptists, you know, no smoking, no drinking, no cursing. I mean like on the farm. You know, like that kind of thing. You know so like even there's a level of protection and hide and they constantly do it. Even to him, my grandfather. I guess at the time to my grandmother when she was alive, as well.*

[16]

And you also grew up a Southern Baptist?

*Right, right, and I went to Catholic Schools [laughing heartily] so it was like heavy ritual the Catholicism and then because it was like Mass and all this, the constant ceremonies and things. And then it was like on Sundays it would be like Sunday school, and like the Southern Baptist, like the preaching, the three-hour you know, three-hour sermons and stuff.*

[17]

I wonder about how the messages you got from the churches affected you?

*You know what was cool though like the Pastor that we had...I had when I was I think up to about high school, cause he passed away, was **gay**. Cause I never heard homophobia, I wasn't conscious about hearing homophobia you know and it was like known that this preacher was gay, and he was cool. It was like my family...it was like the whole church really liked him, and loved him, you know, and apparently he did a lot of good work. And I mean it wasn't a conscious thing. And then there were the guys in church...the guys in the choir who you know were very...could be very effeminate. And you know and it was just like they were great singers and that was it you know. And then of course when AIDS hit, um like its like I'd gone back a number of years ago and I just found out that like these guys had died. And you know the sense of mourning around that. But it was like the lesbians though, like the lesbians though in the church were sort of...I want to say were pariahs almost. There's one who is considered to be a lesbian, you know, there was this woman and actually I remember there was this woman who had held my hand, like I must have been, I was under 18 I think and she held my hand, it was just like a little bit too, like what the hell are you doing you know. And I found out later that, I think my father made some comment that she was a lesbian, or that she...that she was lesbian or something. You know, that's how they said it, "She was a lesbian." Um and that was and it was just like something to stay away from or like I needed or wanted to be careful around her because I wasn't clear about what that, you know how that would impact me. And I was a real asshole. I remember college and like, early college like and some of these women were coming out, some of my friends were coming out and I was just like, "**Ooh**, what's that about," you know [laughing] and had this intense attraction to this one woman who was amazing, just really like beautiful and you know just like split. I didn't even know what it was like to be sexually attracted to someone you know. And It was like later on wow, I was like really into her, and then didn't like...didn't do anything about it.*

[18]

I heard you say that the Church accepted gay men much more readily than they did gay women.

*Yes. Oh yeah, most definitely. I mean the guys seemed to be a lot more open and much more out, I mean I could tell what was going on.*

[19]

What was that about?

*I don't know. I mean I think with...actually I don't know. It's like maybe it's a black thing. Um you know it's like the whole thought of strong black women. I mean when I came out to my brother, and it was early on, um he said something about, "Well that's why you're not connected to me." As in I wasn't falling into the patriarchal pattern. Like I challenged him you know and or not challenged him, I threatened him is a more appropriate way to think about it. Because I identified as a lesbian, I threatened some kind of male order that he needed for his own stability or something. It was like I lived in relation to who he was. So that's what I mean that's what my family was...is about...was about. I mean the stuff that's going on with my family now, um that's out, that's become apparent, it's like that's it's very much about the male order being maintained.*

[20]

Can you tell me about some of the stuff that you do in the gay and lesbian community?

*Um, let's see. I will support...I live in a in a queer arts collective. Um and I moved in there this past November because I couldn't afford rent, my rent, I couldn't pay, you know. I lost my job. The company I was working for shut down. I moved here from L.A. and the company moved me here and they shut down you know like after a couple of years. Actually it was good because you know, it was like I hated it. I hated like that whole thing. However I've been...I've been having trouble with consistent employment and being able to support myself adequately. So um I moved in there, and it's like being around people of color, mostly people of color, and people who identify as artists, and sort of outsiders, politically, you know more of an anarchist. And also kind of crazy [laughing] like it's ok to scream at you know 2:00 in the morning you know, to walk in and be excited, and all of that stuff, so. Um then this, the collective has a lot of a number of events, like other organizations will come in to rehearse and use the space because it's a huge loft space. But like so a lot of visual artists live there. And then we'll do exhibitions and have parties and things like that. Also like I'll go to, I belong to a like social group that like does different things with each other, usually like women of color, lesbians of color, women of probably my age and older. Um sometimes it becomes, very sporadically, and I will support performances or talent shows or things like that, and like social groups, and groups looking to like activist groups as well. I think that is pretty much it. I mean it's like trying to maintain like an opening to know what's going on but I'm not like part of the fabric necessarily. Or like I'm not necessarily, intimately part of the day-to-day running of those things with the exception of living in the collective. You know, sort of you know because I have my own agenda in terms of doing the creative stuff and needing a lot of space and time around that stuff.*

[21]

I heard you say you're totally out with everything, but I also heard you say that you're not out in certain areas and that you're really cautious.

*I mean even with, I'm also not out necessarily professionally, with sometimes as a musician and sometimes especially as um doing like AV tech work, audio visual tech work, where I'm loading trucks and often times I'm the only woman you know. And just like really needing to be like ok asexual you know what I mean [laughing]. It's just like it's 3:00 in the morning and we have all this work to do, and I'm around with a group of men, some I know, some I don't know so it's just like ok let's be real. There's that whole thing so I'm not...musically sometimes I'm out and sometimes I'm not out. You know it's funny, I've met these women musicians and I later found out they were gay and didn't, and like we didn't make that like, "Oh, by the way you know sis, I'm queer." It's just like it's not, it's just like yeah I'm a player.*

[22]

Do you write lyrics?

*Yes, sometimes.*

[23]

Are you out in your lyrics?

*Yeah, I am actually, but right now, and I think this has a lot to do with my um with being a survivor and the abuse stuff, is I've tended to be support--like bassist-- so that doesn't mean I'm not performing my own stuff or I haven't performed my stuff. And I'm working on recording it's there's also a level of you know like Joan Armatrading without pronouns. I understand those, it's just like all this intensity and yes it's like a painting and you fill in the blanks.*

[24]

Talk about your abuse.

*What I remember was, what happened is, I got triggered. My sister described my niece-- my father [said father instead of brother] assaulting my niece, or molesting my niece. And um actually molesting was that whole under...inappropriate, completely inappropriate behavior and she witnessed it and so when she told me about it--years after she witnessed it. I was, at that point doing morning pages--you know the Julie Cameron book, The Artists Way --it's like you roll out of bed and you start writing--three pages. And you know that like that was obviously on my head, and I recognized, "Oh, my God, that same thing happened to me." It was like this whole mystery was like uncovered. Because my mother was not about, um like whether or not she saw it or perceived it, I see now that she would block it, you know. So now my reality, my emotional spaces, my emotional states weren't validated, you know so it's like I still...I'm still going through that whole thing of like sort of the disappearing. Um and so I remember, my body remembers. I'll have these body remembrances and occasionally I've gotten some...some flashbacks. My feeling is that um my family moved to New Orleans when I was, when we were, when I was 6. My brother was 5. And during the time, my theory is that when my mom had a miscarriage, that's when something happened. And I, this is like in therapy that's not something I'm like really...really dealing with yet. Um it's not, because it's like I have such, it's like at the survival stuff I'm dealing with [laughing], I mean survivor...survival on a material...a material-emotional level right? And so my feeling is like something happened there and I know that my father was in, I mean it's like the body also remembers a lot of the physical abuse. Like we got hit **a lot**. Um and a lot of it was about the squelching...about squelching the spirit. A lot of it was like the whole discipline thing. A lot of it was sanctioned because you know it's like black family. You know it's like there's this **joke**, you know people turned it into a joke, you get your ass kicked, you get a spanking, I mean it's just like and that's supposed to be good rearing. It shows love and all those other stuff. I have a lot of frustration and rage about it cause it's like I mean I recognize now it as being so unnecessary. It was like absolutely lazy. And it just totally got into my parents' sick you know my mother allowed this abuse to happen and sanctioned it, you know. It was just like she would sic my father on us if she, we were out of control with her, or challenged her. I mean, **yeah**, it's like, it's kind of extreme you know because she's such a nice lady, nice southern woman [said in a sarcastic southern drawl], so refined, you know. But you know it was just like madness. He was out of control and he also did things to hide. Like he wouldn't...he would hide his level of his abuse from her. And we were sort of keeping it secret along with him. I think he had, I would call him probably a sexual addict...a sex addict at this point. Because he had other relationships outside of the marriage, had other children outside of the marriage that he kept secret and my mother allowed this, it was sanctioned. He was not accountable in his marriage; also in career stuff he didn't give a sense of accountability. Um, yeah, you know it was just like all of it...it was like he was running from so much. It was like real, real, real oppressive. One of the things that has come up, in my last therapy session, was um that my brother and I were not allowed to overshadow him. Cause children weren't allowed to overshadow him. It was like so consciously he was doing this stuff to undermine us, our sense of, I don't know, just like a confidence or whatever. I wasn't supposed to, I'm not allowed, I wasn't allowed to over...overwhelm my brother, even though I'm was the oldest. You like I mean to overshadow him was unacceptable, in the family culture.*

[25]

So again that dominant-male cultural theme comes through, that says that women and children are not allowed to actualize their inner beings.

*Yes, only to a limited extent. What I'm remembering now is my mom, um my mother's father, like we had gone to family reunions every summer, every year. And my grandfather eats first. I mean like there are these kids, these babies, you know these women, **and my grandfather eats first** [said in an incredulous*

tone]. *It was like, wow, [laughing hard] says the blessing, and he eats first. I realized it when I was there five or six years ago. It like wow, there's something really fucked up with that. And recognizing when my father died, he did not go to the funeral. You know like and he called my mom and said he couldn't leave his farm. And there was no reason I mean you know that was bullshit. Like that's the kind of parenting she had, you know.*

[26]

Was their abuse in her household?

*She doesn't disclose it. And its like she's on lockdown dude. She is so on lockdown about her stuff, you know. And that's how all of this madness could perpetuate. So a lot of my abuse history is centered or is triggered by the disclosure of my sister, and her niece, actually my niece's disclosure. And she said that my brother the one who's a year younger than me, raped her when she was like 4 or 5 maybe. And my sister, she was...my niece was living with my parents and um my brother lived with them as well, lived in the house, and he raped her three times. She remembers he threatened her like if she said anything it would get worse. He actually started hitting her and so when the sexual abuse began, she would tell people Carl is hitting me and then um like if there was and there like Carl are you hitting Arie? And there was this bullshit, and Carl would deny it and that would be it, the end of the story. And this child went unprotected in the house and he was following the same path as my father.*

[27]

What have you been able to remember?

*During support group stuff, there have been memories that have come up that I've shared. And also like the need for silence, like because at one point one of the things he did was this [puts her finger to her lips and gestures as if she slits her throat] and like I understood what that meant, you know.*

[28]

Could you describe the first time you talked about your sexual abuse?

*For a while it was morning pages only um and eventually I sat with it for a long time. And I there's a...my best friend lives here and you know it took me a while for me to talk to her about it. And so she's like, "Are you going to tell me? Are you going to tell me what's going on?" [laughing] "Are you going to tell me?" I'm like, 'Dude, you know [laughing] like she was completely devastated. I remember I was working too at the time, and it was such a weight. So I eventually told her. I had gone back to New Orleans I think in 2000...for Christmas for the holidays for ten days, is that 2002 or something like that. And um and I was you know like in the throes of it, the throes of like the weight of it, not so much even the memories, cause the visual stuff, I don't remember dreams generally. And I was telling a friend of mine, "I'm going through some deep shit." And she you know we were walking in the Quarter, it was late at night and she said, "You know in high school, you exhibited the symptoms of someone who had been sexually abused. I'm like GASP. So I talked to her about it and while we were walking I remember having tunnel vision, literally. Um so we started, so she was saying that I could um...I said I couldn't afford therapy. At that point I lost my job; my company had shut down. I was just barely getting like...unemployment was just barely covering my expenses and um so she said, what's important is for you to work on it, just commit to writing about it for an hour a week. And I had already been doing morning pages and I was, "Ok, I can do that." And she said you can send them to me. She studied, had been working on a Master's in Psychology and it was part of her interest. So I said...so we did that. I sent the pages to her. She kind of walked me through or talked me through the process, or wrote me through the rage. And like I processed a lot of the stuff. And like, and then she did the thing what she did for a while, apparently she went through a period of time where she couldn't read, she was like over stimulated, so she let her husband and he would read my stuff to her. And she told me about that. And I was just like, that's it I can't. You know, it was a breach of trust. I mean they both knew, I mean like I knew he knew. I knew that he'd been abused sexually, and we shared like a lot of it, shared information, but I was sending it to her. And so she's got this codependency stuff with her family. Like she's been surprised when I won't talk in front of her kids about my internal life. You know, it's like it really shocks her. Cause its everything about them was all out in the open, but I was not raised like that, I didn't like that, you know what I'm saying it's just not cool. She's never really gotten that and I explained it to her in a way that's like My boundary is I talk*

to you, I may talk to others, but I'm talking to you. I probably need to have that like, don't expect me to talk in front of your kids. I'll talk in front of your husband you know while I'm there. I haven't known him since high school and I'm not completely comfortable with him, you I think he's a racist. "You're both Republicans, I don't trust you, you know?" It was a real bizarre experience, and after that I was committed to writing once a week. Then she'd been suggesting to checkout support groups. So I looked into the 12-step, Survivors of Incest Anonymous. And I found they met at the center and I started going there, from like January of...February of 2003 and like really consistently and with that I started meeting um other survivors and like it took a while to get the intimacy with talking to other survivors and um even talking out. You know the first meeting I started sharing, and it was just like this absolutely terrifying experience with these strangers. Now I mean I see the benefit of having done that and also seeing how people have shifted and changed by working their programs and stuff. There is one woman I'm thinking of that has made...she was like really tight and now there is such an openness to her like joking and teasing and that would have been unfathomable before. It was all about the boundaries and all of that. Getting the information about boundaries and about being able to share openly. And also what's been really helpful is like after the meetings and going out to dinner and talking about the experiences and still being respectful with boundaries, you know may I comment about what you said. But you know like having that and the freedom to do that back and forth and not in the confines of the group. So that's been a real help. That's been happening the past six months or so.

[29]

Can you go into more detail about the interactions between members of your family?

Um I haven't really looked at it it's like...but consciously its not a relationship I want to emulate, in my life um because my father gave the appearance of being a good provider, you know he had status, it's like he had a good job, he had his own company, it's like he was a lawyer, he had a lot of prestige, he was **brilliant**, he had a great mind. He could argue with all kinds of people, he could also be charming and this was outside, you know outside the family home. And my mother was like...again gave that appearance of being this beautiful, refined woman, caring, who cared about her children but there was this stuff, there was this miserly quality, there was something like in the sense, she didn't have enough, she never had enough. It was something my sister pointed out, my father would give my mother money for us, for the kids and my mother wouldn't she would take it for her uses like to go shopping or wherever, or stuff like that...like this **weird** stuff going on. My father played provider, he supposed to be the provider, but yet on the other hand he didn't like...towards the end of his life he was trying to make sure she had nothing. Like he wiped out life insurance policies, and did all this stuff to take away their resources, the resources that he supposedly built up. What I...what I mean and maybe I need a lot of this stuff because I'm working on my...my attitudes about work and jobs, etc. I've been looking at the models of that, and what I'm remembering, I don't necessarily remember like a lot of affection. I remember walking into my parents'...like in their room while they were making love. I don't want to say fucking [laughing] but...I remember that my father didn't seem to be accountable in the relationship. He would regale my mother with stories about his clients who were stupid, who were low-lives, who were you know all this you know people I wouldn't want to be around. I had no interest in...in continuing...I had no interest in being a lawyer, let me just say that, you know because people were stupid, you got to see the worst in human beings. You know the worst of humanity, but that was where his head was at, like everybody was stupid. My mother was stupid you know like because like in his frustration, like in his own childishness or whatever, he always had these assessments about everything. Like my teachers were stupid, you know like all this intense frustration.

[30]

It sounds like he wanted to control things.

Yeah. I mean like denigrating everybody else. And my mother um like just sort of taking it, you know like.

[31]

So you see her as passive?

*Very, very much so and also as though, I guess the word now is enabling, but also powering or just fueling that. Like She did not make him accountable, like she's not made my brother accountable for his actions—to her, you know.*

[32]

Do you talk to your brother?

*No, no. No I talked to him like when my sister, like when my niece disclosed. I talked to him once and he came back with this threat about disclosing family secrets. And I was just like, who gives a fuck. You have done, you know, its like you've done something atrocious to this child, and its like, "I didn't do it." And I'm just like, "I don't believe you." [Laughing] And I've never...I've not talked to him since. However, and this is where the...the whole thing is my mother still talks to him and in fact talks to him in front of my niece as if everything were ok. Um and I've never...my sister has a twin bother um and I've, you know, its like I talk to him sporadically, I mean really sporadically. I was in Atlanta recently for the first since [] been there so it's been like 5 years. You know it's like there's been a whole disconnect in the family. Um and his wife told me they were going to visit my brother, the other brother, you know I think this weekend or, yeah...sometime in May. And I was just like...I didn't even know what to say. And so I grappled with how am I...how am I you know and then in fact its like becoming more obvious to me, I mean like to cut the family, like cut the people who were sticking or were not taking sides and just to cut them off. You I can't it's just become this amazing conflict with me. You know like ok this is my problem, "Mom the reason I haven't been sending you gifts, etc. is not only due to that I am not working, solely. MOM, this is un...this is untenable, this is an unacceptable situation and I don't want to deal with you. You know it has been going on for years for me now. And the same thing with my brother, its like you know, I really have a problem that you are...that you have a solid relationship with Carl and you have not encouraged him to...you've not counseled him to turn himself in and make it right with this family. So you know its like, and to me that's what my mother did with my father. It's like he had these...I mean I found out, he told, my father told me that I had a half sister in DC. It was kind of a crisis situation. And he wanted me to give her some of the money that he'd sent. You know and so I'm like, "Give to...to **who**, you want me--**what**? You know that was my attitude, which I of course I've never said. And so he explained, you know, can you keep something confidential? So he enforced...he enlisted me in his stuff. And I kept the secret you know until um...until years later when an investigator called and said that the car that this woman owned had been in an accident, and it was in my father's name and he was just trying to get to the bottom of it and...and I guess he was trying to chase down who was accountable for this car. And my mom was like in total denial. You know, like would not acknowledge that this guy said it was his daughter's car. And she told me this and I was just like "MOM, [laughing] and she was like, "NO." And like I'm not having that. You know, this is madness. So um that's when I disclosed...he was already dead. No actually he was very sick, he was in a nursing home and she confronted him then and he disclosed the other kids that he had to her.*

[33]

How many siblings do you have?

*Well the ones I know? Well the ones I grew up with, two brothers and a sister. And then there's um two sisters through one woman, and I think one brother through another woman.*

[34]

You don't have contact with them?

*The two sisters no, um although they like the oldest girl was um around him, you know like was around his office. She worked in his office and was in DC at the same time that my sister was. And then the brother, the other brother, the other half brother was um was paralyzed. My sister, my immediate sister um but you know like took me to meet him. Um he was shot, and there was another brother that was shot and killed. And my father like did...dealt with all this stuff by himself. You know, it was just like control ok. I guess...I mean I saw it as sickness but I guess it is this whole thing is like control.*

[35]

What kind of a student were you?

[Breaks up laughing] *I was interested in what I was interested in. Um and I mean ok like the growing up years, I did what I had to basically get by. And I didn't do the passion stuff. And I wasn't...so it was not about doing...like even figuring out what my passion was and following up on it. The only constant in my life has been music. You like being a musician. And I, and you know in the past few years **that's** become my commitment. You know so ok, so before I was working in like silly administrative kind of jobs for...like as a manager in like advertising, outsourcing and blah, blah. I mean really things that like had nothing to do with my real interest. Um and I think it was the same thing with school. I mean like I studied philosophy and psychology and that's just like yeah that was cute for, it was stuff that I was interested in but it like ok Hegel, who cares, you know Kant, who cares and who was that behavioral guy? [Skinner?] Yeah, I hated him. So it was just like ok, you know lost interest and I didn't finish.*

[36]

Where were you?

*I was at B.U. [Boston University] Big behavioral place, you know? But philosophy, the philosophy department was cool. Um I was a real...not a very good student with stuff I wasn't interested in. Um and also had trouble with like finishing. I got a lot of incompletes. Um when I was in LA I studied music formally and I had to stop because I had to get back to work. But I was a pretty decent student with that, you know. Yeah I mean I got really good...I did really well.*

[37]

Did you do any drugs or alcohol by yourself or with your friends?

*I did a lot of alcohol um and that was sort of like de rigueur acceptable stuff to do. I also smoked a lot. Well I remember starting to drink when I was with my uncle, my mother and some friends of theirs, of my uncle's, that had come to town to visit. And Courvoisier man, you know, with my **uncle** and my **mom** watching and it was cool. You know I had a mint julep at 15 or 16, in a bar on Bourbon Street with these folks, you know. And so it was like no big deal. And I know in my family, like my mom like we had a little alcohol around and sometimes they'd throw parties or whatever, like early on. And then at, and it was I mean you know like I never really considered it a problem or anything intense. I remember drinking in college in the dorm room with another friend and you know it was like I wasn't even playing with the ID stuff. I got an ID saying I was 21 and that was it [laughing]. Because the drinking age in Boston was 21 and it was like NO, I'm not having that. So it was like um and I would drink, a friend of mine and I would drink um, and I don't remember getting ridiculously drunk, it was just like I liked the taste and it was kind of a comforting kind of thing. And I know that when I moved here, one of my closest friends I mean it was like throwing martinis back, you know a lot of them. So a couple of years ago, I guess in 2002, it was like I cleaned up. You know, lost a bunch of weight, worked out, like and was really like sculpting the body, and cleaned up the diet. And you and it was like I couldn't drink anymore, like a glass of red wine and woo, I'm done girl. [laughing] I some friends come into town the past few days...the past week or so, it's been um...I drink socially kind of thing, but I'm very conscious about it ok. And you know like I never really considered alcohol as a problem as such. But you know there were really bad nights where I was falling asleep in clubs and you know.*

[38]

What about drugs?

*I was smoking. I stopped smoking. I think I started smoking when I was like 17 and I stopped about a year ago. I'm not a big pothead. That really doesn't do it for me. I'm more like caffeine. Don't like coke, you know, just feels you know real uncomfortable.*

[39]

Were you ever bulimic or anorexic?

*I was 288 pound before when I was in LA you know and when I started working out I slowly...I was slowly losing that. I considered it imbalanced eating. I just like food, but there are certain foods that I find triggering. I mean I've become more sensitive to that, especially with reading about bodybuilding and stuff. Um and also doing the recovery circuit, you know like people talking about sugar, wheat, you know and like how that can trigger you. And so I go through that still about like ok I'm eating sugar these days. Or ok here goes the butter. Here goes the refined stuff, so consciousness about that. And you know*

*in some ways it sounds really obsessive, you know where regular people are. But I recognize, but recognizing caffeine, nicotine, those are all like...also foods, certain kinds of foods as being that are completely sanctioned but the empty calories and all of that stuff that like that has an impact, that has impacted a lot of my moods, et cetera.*

[40]

So you're very mindful know of what you put in your body?

*I'm mindful of it, but it doesn't mean I'm like you know I'm kind of hard on myself...not hard on myself. But it's just like I have to...I'm having to pull back again now like I think, that's it, like depending on what the stresses are, you know. And especially with traveling, like sometimes during the road managing thing or traveling around it's been like ok here we go with the grits again.*

[41]

What are some of the ways you reduce your stress now?

*I try to meditate, reading certain things too. Um and also trying to face it, you like looking at how I'm say reenacting or repeating how I felt in my family's house which was incredibly like terror you know like all the time, you know and releasing a lot of that stuff. And I'm reading this one book that talks about like how being victimized has become social currency, um and looking at ways that I'm holding on to things like that as a safety and not moving, say necessarily moving forward. Um and I think a lot of it, and also like writing or journaling or doing morning pages or, and also talking with people. I think therapy is also helpful.*

[42]

Do you use your music to reduce stress?

*Um I have such a high level of expectation with my musicianship that, it can be, you know if I **don't** play an instrument, then you know like I lose something. And you know music definitely helps, but I'm on this thing that I need to record, like compositions or like there's a pressure to it, and just like you know like people are like lets get together and jam and it's just like--you know [laughing], I have work to do, you don't understand. It's like that. So there's kind of a pressure, a need, let's hire a band so let me just mess around. And also I'm trying to make a living.*

[43]

In going through your healing process, is there anything else about your abuse that you think affected you?

*I think um I mean something I look at and like I've this woman that we've met 10 months ago or 9 months ago and at the time I was doing I was following the 12-step programs and not becoming involved in a new sexual relationship, and so and she went back to and so we've been continually talking and one of the things and of all the problems of coming out and working through all this stuff and making her aware and also being an artist, that's the element we share. Like in the past 2 weeks I have this intense experience of like really interacting with something on a really romantic in a romantic way, we laid the groundwork in terms of learning about each other and getting to know each other. And the first time I took the time took, my time to become with somebody else. And um what surprises me was like how the sense of so much more safe it feels being in women only spaces or lesbian bars or lesbians... lesbian spaces. Like we've been hanging out with friends like other lesbians in queer spaces, I mean there's a certain it feels so much more secure. Um and how bizarre and how it feels to walk down the street holding someone's hand, you know another woman's hand. The subway, all of that stuff and it's like she's into that and its not something that its not something I would initiate. I would be like I would just HIDE. So that's something that's like WOW, to look at that. To me that's like, yeah I mean how important touch is and then to like not do that because of fear.*

[44]

Do you think going through abuse healing has effected how you perceive your lesbianism?

*It's making me more aware now [laughing]. I...cause I never labeled it and I hadn't labeled it and how identified...male identified I can be. You know like how are the men going to like this, or relate to this or not relate to this. You know what I mean there's that concern too. If somebody and it's only from an assaultive point of view, whether be it verbal or physical. You know cause in some of these*

*neighborhoods, maybe not on the West Side here it'd be fine, it'd be no big deal, but you know like Bed Stuy or Harlem you know I mean just like.*

[45]

So that cultural piece of male dominance comes back in.

*And also I mean I know that with one of my exes, um and like ok I hadn't introduced this woman, like a five year relationship and you know my immediate family knew who she was to me, but not the extended family outside of that, or like the friends at family function. Looking back on that now, it's just like what is that? You know it's just like that is so disrespectful and dishonoring to the relationship. I recognize that now but at the time it was like I was sort of like not shaking the boat. I mean so many people in my family, I mean especially my extended family have like this fucked up attitude, like this fucked up homophobia, you know. And my just like sort of playing into that because I didn't want to offend them or subconsciously, or whatever, you know. And so I think that it's not so much, there's the sexuality, the physical intimacy with someone else privately and then the physical intimacy outside of that say in public spaces, and then there's the physical intimacy say in the I guess the familial sphere or the personal sphere that is not necessarily queer. I mean I have a much more queer community spaces are so much more key and important to me now than they were before, because that's the...that's where it's sanctioned. That's where my relationship is sanctioned in that space, but not necessarily with my family. Not formally, I mean not that they would ever say anything. But um my nephew had commented about like cause my niece has come out to him and um he had commented that he liked how I was **with** my partner, like I wasn't like he couldn't tell I was with her, it wasn't in front of his face. And so my reaction to that was damn, next time I will have to make-out in front of him. [Laughing hard]. Cause it's like NO, you know, NO I'm not, that's just not right.*

[46]

So on some emotional level, are you connecting the feelings of fear you have of males to what happened when you were little with your dad?

*You know what's funny is the only male that's assaulted me like that has been my father. Um and I mean for a child that's the paradigm. And I was just remembering, while you were talking, I've seen women react to like one of my other lovers was in town and we were having a meal in Harlem and you know and how this woman looked at us. You know, cause it was just like we were feeding each other, you know a very affectionate woman [laughing] I mean in public, just like and how that made me feel, of just like of not wanting to be despised like that or not wanting to be looked at like that. I mean I was very clear about that, however, here's somebody I'm sharing a meal with. Most of the time people have been really cool, and that's been ok. But just to get hit with that. I don't even know...disdain isn't the word, but... .*

[47]

Perhaps it threatens their cultural ideas of role gender.

*I hadn't looked at it like that. I mean intellectually I know that, and actually when I was walking the streets with my lover, holding her hand, wherever we were I know from how it feels with her its like we are being revolutionaries, you know that's how it felt with her. We're being warriors. But its like we're just lovers damn it, but then there's that whole component of like no there's something that's about tearing apart the order. And when I've seen, especially baby dykes, like on the train, and being very affectionate with each other, I tend to get really protective and make sure everything's cool. And just like that whole thing of being real supportive, like yeah that's really cool, isn't that beautiful, love is really beautiful. So there is something about I mean I do have a lot of fear about it and it might be originally from the grand patriarch.*

[48]

But it's not something you were ever conscious about?

*Yeah, but it makes sense that it would be, I mean where else would you come up with that, I mean where else in my experience would I ever come up with that? My brother and I fought. We reenacted, we did a lot of reenactment, it was like really ugly. And at one point I made a decision never to do that with him again, because it was not some one I wanted to be. But I never had a sense of being in fear like that with him. I mean even when he said it doesn't feel like you're connected to me it was more like, I wasn't*

*threatened in the same way. It was more like there was some kind of sympathy in his suffering that I felt. It was something like a misplaced. I don't know what that is. I'm not clear what that is.*

[49]

Do you think he was abused by your father?

*Oh yeah, he was. A lot later than I was, cause I left. Like in his early twenties he was still being abused. Not sexually, not from my dad, but physically. There were these bouts of bats and all kinds of things. I think the last time my father assaulted me my brother protected me and had to leave the house cause my father was going kick his ass.*

[50]

Is there anything you want to add?

*Um yes I mean like the sexual I don't think I like really covered the sexual abuse piece all that well with this because so much of where I am at right now with my processes like with the physical and the emotional stuff. The woman I was talking about before, my friend I was doing the email counseling with was, she would blow me away because she had this vision of me like working through this sexual abuse stuff, and imagined me hooking up with a man. And the reason I'm a lesbian is because I was sexually abused.*

[51]

Did you ever think that?

*Well why has my sexuality got to be in relation to a man. It's like that overarching patriarchy. You know and it's a belittling thing I think, again, like what you were talking about before, the need to control. And that's something, like people have asked me, do I think I'm a lesbian because of sexual abuse.*

[52]

And you answer?

*It's like I...I can't even answer. My answer has been I don't know enough, I can't answer that, maybe, maybe not and then I try to talk about attraction and the Hite report and how it's a gradient. And that whole thing, I think that with women, with lesbians especially, there's such a disappearing of, and I'm just becoming aware of it, there's such a disappearing of experience and validity. You know gay men can be, like I mean like the stereotype is the queenish, effeminate kind of thing, and not necessarily like there's such a difference in power. And what seems to be like sanctioned societally and not sanctioned. And with women although there's this like intensity and there's like the comfort of being in women only spaces and having that respect and feeling really safe and secure and like all of a sudden you can walk around—you know, I was at a woman's festival and you can walk around topless and it's no big deal. And people can walk around completely nude and it's no big deal. You know like it's that sense of freedom. And how you always have to hide. It's going to be hot here in the summer and we're going to be stuck with wearing tee shirts. You know because some men might attack us. You know, all of that stuff you know. I think for me the whole think of um somebody defining, trying to define why I have a visceral attraction to another human being--male or female--is fucked up. And that makes a lot of sense.*

You've put that sentiment really well. Thanks for your time, and your openness.

Laura

[1]

I am not looking for specific answers and you know that you can stop any time you want to. I'd like you to talk about the time when you knew you might be sexually attracted to other women.

*I pretty much knew by the time I was in high school that I didn't want to be with guys. It just didn't feel right. I tried to push it away. I didn't want to act like it. All my friends were straight. I had one that I thought was gay so I sheered away from it. I really didn't become involved with any other women until I was...in my second year in college. So I wasn't ...I was about nineteen years old when I first became involved with a woman.*

[2]

But you remember having same-sex feelings in high school.

*Yeah, ninth grade is the earliest I can remember.*

[3]

Did it affect your school work?

*No, not at all. I was an all honor student. I didn't goof off in school, I didn't go to too many parties, I went straight by the books, athletics, that's pretty much all I did.*

[4]

Think about a very specific time when you were nineteen and felt attracted to somebody. Describe your experience and how you felt.

*I was real scared at first. She was my first girl friend. She lived in Michigan, and we had met on the computer, of all places to meet. I met...I was with...I was in a relationship at the same time with a. man out in New York and it just, it wasn't going right. He was very pushy, very shovey, and always trying to do things that were just not acceptable. And I started looking elsewhere and I always had these feelings, but I never acted on them. And I was on a website in a chatroom, talking with other women who had been in a similar situation. And the women that I eventually got involved with, she...we began talking about the losses that had happened in her life and stuff that had happened in mine and we just kind of clicked from there. And we had a relationship for about a year and a half. And it quickly fell apart [laugh] after I moved there. We were togeth....I lived in Michigan for a year while we were together, and a half a year while we were apart, and I think that half a year apart was much easier then living there with...in the same vicinity.*

[5]

So what brought you together was...?.

*Bad experiences and losses. Her boyfriend at the time committed suicide and I had been abused. So it was like, between that and that it kind of drew us together and we were helping each other through some stuff. It like drew us to each other, and we were helping each other through some stuff. It was hard in the end but that's what initially got us together. She was engaged to this person and he couldn't deal with it any more so he ended his life. Cause they had...what had happened was he had actually had a long case of depression and he couldn't...he just couldn't deal with it and no one knew until it was too late. He had actually killed himself while he was on the phone with her so that like it permanently scarred her in the worst of ways.*

[6]

What was your loss?

*I never felt normal after it had happened. I always felt like I was different. [She was talking about her sexual abuse]. I just...everything I thought I was going to be ...[pause] it's just kind of ..it felt like it changed everything. I threw myself into it, and then after it had happened. I'd always been into sports but after it happened I like totally went into it full out and it kind of worked out some of the anxiousness that I had. I went out for all the sports and I threw myself into my schoolwork. I didn't spend that much time with my friends. I was more by myself and a lot of the times I would hang out with my father. I didn't get along too good with mom. That was bad more times than not. Eventually my brother and sister were born, and then I just kinda locked myself in my room and I wouldn't come out, I didn't socialize. I wore black all the time. It was hard growing up. And my parents didn't accept what happened. Till this day they really don't believe that anything happened because it took me so long to tell them about what had happened. It's like the unforbidden thing, we don't talk about it at home, we don't mention it, no one in the family knows about it. Except for my parents. So no one talks about it. My current girlfriend knows everything that happened. You know, she knows it bothers me still. There are things that, there are little signs that she sees and that she tries to help me through. But there's not too much you can do.*

[7]

How old were you at the time of the abuse?

*I was young, I was young. I was seven when it first started and I was 13 when it finished.*

[8]

Tell me more.

*It was a next-door neighbor. We had just moved out from Queens and I got to know this guy very well. He was thirteen and I was seven, so there was about six years between us. We used to....I used to go out, it started out very slow. Go out, I would go out on paper routes with him, drop the newspapers. He used to ride his bike; I used to take my scooter. We used to hang out at a friends house down the block, with a couple of kids, on the corner; we used to play ball in the street and then it slowly turned into more and more.*

[9]

Can you go into more detail?

*First it was hanging out and then it was coming into his bedroom, and laying on the bed with him. He didn't touch me at first, probably a couple of months after that. We used to go to the garage and work on the bicycles, changing tires and pumping up the air and stuff. He grazed me one day and it just felt awkward and the next day the same thing happened. And the next day he grazed me again on my rear. And then one day his hand was sliding in my shorts and then it just took off from there. By the time I was 13, I had had sex with him. He had physically forced me to be with him while his friends watched.*

[10]

Did the sexual activity gradually increase between the ages of 7 and 13?

*It increased. More and more stuff was being done, longer periods of time. I felt like we it became But, I did see him until he eventually moved to Florida.*

[11]

Would it have continued if he didn't move away?

*Yeah. We were still hanging out and it was like, my parents said, what a nice kid. You know, to a certain extent, I didn't really know anything was wrong until I got older.*

[12]

When did you finally tell someone?

*I told Joan [therapist] when I was about 15 years old. I didn't tell my parents until I was about 16, because we were working on it just individually. Joan told me that it was okay, that it wasn't my fault. That I didn't ask for it to happen, it's something that just happened, that the person who did it was a very sick person. Everybody still loves me. It doesn't change who you are. And then we eventually...we called my parents and we told them and no one showed me any support or concern. They just said it happened. Like what do want me to do about it now...it's three years later, what do you want me to do about it now. And then in the car on the way home that night, it was very quiet, and nobody said a word to me and they just let me be. The next day was school. So.*

[13]

What were you feeling?

*I was real hurt. I didn't know how to deal with it. And I was doing stuff that I probably shouldn't have been doing, but I was doing it.*

[14]

What things?

*I drank. I cut things.*

[15]

Like yourself?

*Yeah, I cut myself a couple of times. I would starve myself for some time. I would eat and throw up. I used to do damage to the house. Take a knife and cut um...furniture up. I know when I was really angry and I started really lashing out, I took a match and threw it in front of the refrigerator. After it was put out, but I threw a match and so it could have caused potential damage. But luckily it didn't. And I played a lot of sports in high school, and all through elementary school, I played a lot of sports. I was in a lot of academic clubs. I didn't want to go home by myself. I always had a baby sitter until I was probably about 14 years old. I didn't start coming home by myself until I was almost 15. They gave me a key when I was in I think, eighth grade, so that I could go home by myself. But several times I didn't spend it by myself, I*

would go to a sitters house. I was with a group of kids, we all got lunch; we all got picked up by our parents, later on in the afternoon.

[16]

Talk more about the ride home after you told your parents.

*They just left me alone, didn't say a word. My sister, I think at that time, was in the car. And my brother might have been in the car. I'm trying to think if he was around at the time at that point. I think he was a baby and he was in the car. How old are you now? I am 24, my sister's 14, and my brother is 8. So it's quite a big age difference. He was probably a couple of months old, maybe a year at most. Cause I graduated high school in '96, when I was 17, and he was only born a short time before that.*

[17]

While you were being abused, your mother became pregnant.

*Yeah, she had my sister and later on my brother.*

[18]

Do you remember any thoughts you had about your abuse with respect to your siblings?

*I didn't really think about it too much, because by the time that my sister came around the guy was gone so I thought that she was safe. But then again, I couldn't stand my sister either. She came into my life and I had been the only child for over 10 years, so I wasn't exactly keen on her to begin with. But I knew that she was safe and no one would harm her because she was too little. She was only a couple of months old when I think the guy moved. It's somewhere in that time frame.*

[19]

Can you tell me your idea of boundaries, with respect to other people?

*I can tell you that I have a very small group of friends. I don't trust very many people. I trust a lot of people based on recommendations or how I see that they are with other people. It took me a long time to get into a relationship. I didn't have my first relationship until I was till I was almost 17. There are very few people I would hang around with or who I'm friendly with. It showed in high school. I mean I was in the athletic and the sport clique, which was almost one section of the school, and I didn't talk to three-quarters of the class. I had my eight friends that I talked to and I stayed with, all the way up from elementary school. The same eight people. To this day I talk to at least two of them still. Now it's different because college stopped the closeness but now there's only three left. So.*

[20]

What were the boundaries like in your family?

*Me and my mom had a very strained relationship. We barely talk. Me and my girlfriend, we live in our house, in the basement. And my mother doesn't approve of her. She doesn't approve of my life, and of the lifestyle. The gay lifestyle? Yeah, I think that's pretty much what's getting her, at this point. She uh, she's has uh a mental illness. And she's not all there to begin with. So she basically disapproves of everybody else and so... So she's not the greatest person. I'm pretty close to my dad now. Even though he wasn't there for me when I needed him, we've gotten past all that, and now, of course, we both work together. So I'm with him pretty much night and day. And I still go out to the stores with him like I did when I was little. So...we're...we're pretty close. Um.*

[21]

You still don't talk about your abuse?

*We talk about everything else but that. He asks me how my relationships are going...and he wants...I mean just for instance, he took Donna [girlfriend] to the dentist, cause I didn't feel like going. So he took her for me. She doesn't drive so...things like that. My sister knows about my lifestyle. She understands it pretty much for what it is, and we get along so-so. You know, she's at the difficult teenage age, so no one gets along good with teenagers [laugh]. But we're pretty...but we're ok. And I get along pretty good with my brother. He's Mr. Athletic. He likes to run around and act like an idiot, and I go out and I do it with him. But I took care of him when he was a baby. That was like my responsibility. I would help take care of him...change his diapers, feed him. So I helped out big-time with that. We're very close, me and my brother. But he doesn't know anything...he doesn't know nothing [about her lifestyle]. He just thinks*

*Donna's a cool person and she goes with us. He doesn't understand anything But he goes out with her, and plays in the street with her.*

[22]

What about your relationships with your friends?

*Well, my friends don't know about what happened...when I was younger. Only one does. And she's been my best friend for years. So she's was kinda like...when I wasn't at home I was at her house. So she knows pretty much everything about me growing up. I don't tell them too much stuff. I don't tell any of my friends more than they need to know. I tell them what they need to know, that I'm happy and healthy, and that's all they need to know. We'll go out, we'll just laugh it up, we'll drink when we go out, have a good time, just talk about what we did today; how the weekend's gonna be...that's pretty much it. We don't talk about anything else.*

[23]

They don't talk to you about their stuff?

*Not really. None of them, as far as I know, had any major problems. The only one that had something happen was um my friend had knee surgery. She eventually developed cancer in the knee, which they just cleared up a few months ago. That was the only life-altering experience that she ever had. She was the only other one. Everyone else was, you know...came from decent backgrounds, and...none of them have problems. A lot them...they work garbage jobs now. But, none of them graduated college. But, um they're making do with what they have. I think that was the story from my whole graduating class. None of them seemed to have graduated college [laughing].*

[24]

Did you ever wonder why that might be?

*Yeah. Well, my whole class is weird. When I was last out to dinner with my friends, we found out that three quarters of our high school was gay, from our graduating class. Or they're bisexual. That was three-quarters of my class. That was over, let's see, there were about 1400 kids that graduated that year, and at least three-quarters of them are all and it was like the unspoken word, but we never said anything in high school. And we actually when we were talking...when were at the dinner...I was at the dinner with 5 of my friends from high school, and we had just finally all said, you know this is my lifestyle. You know, and I had my girlfriend with me and my friend had his boyfriend with him and that's when really finally knew who was what, and no one had ever said anything in school. Everyone was so afraid. They just all wanted to do the right thing. So it was the like same people all had the same boyfriends and girlfriends in the group. So my best friend--her boyfriend was in the group; and my boyfriend was in the group. There were eight of us.*

[25]

So there was this very large group of kids who had similar thoughts, but what kept you from talking about it? [A very long silence] Do you think it was fear?

*I...I know. I didn't, I just didn't...wasn't comfortable saying that. I could I agree with that. Even changing in the locker rooms was difficult. Because you know if you find someone attractive on the baseball squad, you don't want to go up to her and say "Hey, good game" and then do the wrong thing. So I used to like bring my uniform to school, change in the bathroom to avoid any physical look or contact with any other person. Change in there, and then dart out on to the field. That was how it was in high school. And then we had um...after your game you should go into the locker and change, I used to just bring my stuff home and change when I got home. And shower at home. I wouldn't even go into the locker room. That's the way it was all the way through high school, each gym class I would change in the bathroom.*

[26]

Did you have any idea that other people felt the same way as you did?

*Not in my classes. They all seemed like they were all very straight people. And that none of them would change. There was one couple that thought they were gonna be engaged, and the [ ] high school really believed it. And it turns out the guy in the couple is the fruitiest of all people. He killed himself in [ ] somewhere. I'm not sure. But that's actually the way it went. You never know.*

[27]

Can you remember any specific things you did to hide your lesbianism?

*I did a lot of stuff to hide it. I used to walk around the school with my boyfriend, hand in hand. We used to stand at the locker and kiss, come over in the morning and ride the bus together. We were inseparable. Turns out we were just best friends. You know, there was nothing there. You know and we were always together hand in hand. That's how it was in high school. Well at least for that last year of high school. The previous years I didn't date. I was into my own thing, which was work and school. By the time I got to be a senior, I didn't have very much work left, because I had already taken all my requirements. I should have graduated as a Junior, because I had taken all of my requirements and fulfilled them already, but I stayed in school and graduated with my class. And I just took boring classes and b.s. classes just to get my way all the way through. And survive that last year of high school.*

[28]

You just described how hard you worked. You had a lot of responsibilities in the house, and you still made the good grades and played on the teams.

*And I still do it. Just yesterday I was working half the day on stuff that I brought home from my job [Saturday] to take care of at home. So when I go in Monday morning I can just work straight through with my father. I used to unload trucks. I used to work in retail; I used to unload trucks. And I used to just work really hard at it. Just constantly doing it. Never, I was never late. I very rarely missed a day...of work. That's how my ethics were.*

[29]

What event stands out for you the most when you came out to your family?

*You know, when I first came out, I didn't tell my father first. He was the last to know. I told my mother first. And my mother went around and saying that "Oh, whatever you choose to do, we're going to support you," and "You'll be fine, and no one is going to disown you." But that was the first thing they did. They pushed...everyone pushed me aside. I was purely responsible for stuff on my own. When I told my father, he didn't know how to deal with it. So his way of not dealing with it is not talking to you. And not going to places with you, and not doing things, and that's exactly what all of them did. My aunts didn't find out until I was in Michigan. So did my uncles. That's when they found out. Everyone just really pushed you away. That was my worst fear, and it came true. And then eventually when I was in Michigan, we worked out this stuff, I would call home, they would act tough and I would go [say], you know - "Things are going really good or really bad," you know depending upon the mood. We were able to eventually get through that.*

[30]

Is that generally how thing in your household go, really bad or really good?

*Yeah, generally that's how, yeah, that's how everything goes-it's either really good or really bad. It's never been in between yet. Right now things are pretty good. But, or, it could be really bad once I get to work, depending on how the morning goes and how many people call. I work at an insurance office. No one had anybody to talk to on the weekends, so people are really buried with claims. It never really looks up and it never really looks all the way down.*

[31]

How did you come out to your friends?

*I didn't. I didn't come out till, to any of my high school friends until just recently. That's when I found out that all of them were gay too so it didn't make a difference. Everyone was just really happy, hunky-dory. Everybody was accepting. My college friends that I hang out with, only one knows. That's my best friend. She knows. She...she's cool with it. She got married; she has two kids. And um...I would like to say that I'm married, but I won't, you know. We go over, we go over to each other's houses for dinner, we make dinner together. And my girlfriend and her husband, they sit and watch the sports game, and the two of us will go cook dinner. They'll tend to the kids. So it worked out pretty good. A lot of my college friends I don't even talk to that much anymore because I just don't have time. I really don't have time.*

[32]

What coming out experience affected you the most?

*When I was finally able to get it off my chest. Because I held it in for over five years, that this is the way I was. Till I was out with my best friend, and getting off my chest what has been going on with me. That was the best.*

[33]

You held in your secret for five years.

*I knew when I was in ninth grade. And it got more and more clear when I went through high school. Then when I got to college, I fully well knew it. I was like, totally aware of what I wanted, and what I didn't want. We had groups in college that we could go to. So I used to go there. In college I was attracted to a teacher. That like fully brought it out. That was when...when I really, that was the like the absolute point. And like I kind of knew, it but then in college it solidified it.*

[34]

Do you get involved in any activities in the gay community?

*Not really. I...My work....My place of business doesn't really have it where I can. I work in insurance so there's not so much you can really go. I mean, but everybody in the office knows that I am. They see the pictures on my desk, of me and my girlfriend, they see pictures of us...hanging up on a little board that I have in my office. Everyone knows. But it's not something I can go around and you know, brag about or get involved with. And at home, it's like the weekend is devoted to quiet time. And I don't have time during the week. I work too many hours during the week. It's kind of like weekends quiet at home I don't get into all that activist stuff.*

[35]

Have you ever gone to a gay pride parade?

*I...I went to one individually out in Michigan. But that was it. I don't know what my girlfriend, you know, I know recently we haven't done anything. But she used to go to things. But her family stopped [ ] too, but her family lives down in South America, so.*

[36]

Have you met them?

*No, I didn't meet them, but they know I exist. I talked to them. They're a little sketchy too. But they live down in South America, so not a problem. It's out of sight, it's out of mind. Pretty clear.*

[37]

Describe how you feel about being a lesbian woman in a heterosexual world.

*It doesn't bother me too much. Pretty much I get along really well with everybody. So it doesn't...doesn't a place for me. You know, it's...I don't flaunt it, um...at work; I don't flaunt it at home. I'm very reserved in what I do. I don't sit down and hug my girlfriend in front of the kids.*

[38]

Would you like to?

*Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. I don't...I won't do it because I still consider them little kids. You know, I think if they were like fifteen or sixteen, I might, but I'm very reserved. I don't want to flaunt that. I don't think it should be flaunted, even in a heterosexual relationship it should be flaunted in front of children. They don't need to see that. I'm very reserved with all that kind of stuff. I don't flaunt it in front of anybody. In the park, when we're.... Like we went to Connecticut recently, and my father rented a van, and my parents sat up front, two kids were in the middle, and me and my girlfriend were in the back. And the most we did was hold hands for the entire road trip. But they see that. That's about the only thing they ever see. Anything else is behind closed doors, or shades drawn, or keeping real quiet.*

[39]

And you're fine with that?

*Yeah. I don't need anything, uh, I don't need other people knowing all of my business is how I look at it. Just the people that it really matters to, they're the ones that have to know. Everyone else I don't care about them.*

[40]

When your parents didn't acknowledge your abuse, what message did that send you?

*I think that by not acknowledging it, I thought it was all my fault...in the beginning. I thought that I had done something wrong. And so despite everyone telling me it wasn't my fault, I really believed it was my fault, because I didn't have enough courage to speak up when it was happening. So I really did feel it was my fault. And that's pretty how much I felt. And that's really when I began locking myself in my room, and not talking to anybody, and keeping very quiet. I didn't want to tell anybody what was going on with my life, because then they'd figure everything was my fault. So I kept it real quiet. There are days sometimes at home I feel that way too. I feel I might get blamed for something, they'll say, "Oh, it's your fault."*

[41]

It sounds as if you felt very responsible for how things went in your house.

*Joan used to call me Cinderella. That's exactly what she used to call me. Cause I used to cook, I used to clean, the laundry, helped take care of the children, maintained my studies, I did my after school activities. I was never late; I was always on time. And that's how she...that's what she, said I had the Cinderella syndrome.*

[42]

With all the responsibilities that you had, it makes sense that you feel so responsible.

*And meanwhile now, my brother and sister have no responsibilities. They have nothing to do. I mean my sister is responsible for cleaning the kitchen, when she decides to do it. Sometimes her room looks like a disaster. My room never got that bad. When I was 7 or eight, before I could control it. But when I was a teenager, my room was never dirty. They could walk in there at any time, find the bed neat, stuff was all dusted; my room was immaculate. Nowadays their room looks like a bomb hit it, clothes everywhere, clothes hanging from the lights, and that's how they are.*

[43]

And you feel....?

*I'm really pissed about that, because I had to maintain everything. And if I didn't maintain it, my butt was grounded for two weeks. So if I ever did anything wrong, I was in trouble for it. That was it. I came home one day late from being out with friend, and I was grounded for 2 ½ weeks. I had no bicycle privileges. They said "Nope it's revoked." Then when I hit eighteen, I saw that they couldn't really stop me, I just said "Oh, whatever." I think when I was eighteen I had outside responsibilities; I was working, I was going to school, I think they felt because I was paying my own tuition, that was a good thing to have less responsibilities. If I didn't...If I paid the bill, and my education suffered, it would be their fault. So they actually let me cut back on the things I was doing. I would just be responsible for cleaning my room, and doing my laundry, that was about it. And that's pretty much what I would do if I was away in college. So everything got cut down. Now I don't do anything. I just clean up my apartment in the basement, I cook my own dinners, me and my girlfriend alternate doing the laundry. We just maintain a very working relationship that way. Because she is unemployed right now, so, she'll do most of the work before I get home, or on the weekend I'll help her with everything else.*

[44]

I heard you say, "I don't do anything," and then you just described all these things that you still do.

*It feels like this is what you have to do. It's not because I have to because my mother told me to do it. It's because I know I have to do these things; or else I know I won't have any clean laundry come Monday morning when I have to go to work. Or I know that at midnight I'll probably be starving, if I didn't eat at seven. These are normal things now. It's not because someone is telling me, it's because I know I have to do them. But it doesn't feel like anything to me. And while it's true, that she does most of the work right now. I know I get too tired when I get home to do it. By the time I get home from work, it's between 5:30 and 6:00, on a good night. Most times I stay late, to catch up or do other things. I [ ] to stay at home, but we don't have any children.*

[45]

I'd like to talk more about what you called "acting out." I see it as what you needed to do to survive.

*Problematic issues with food. That was a big one for a while. I had lost so much weight that it was disgusting. You can see it in my graduation pictures. I'd always been heavy, not extremely, but it would*

*show in my face. And I would just go through, they would make dinner, or I would make dinner, it was on the plate. I would run into my room, throw it in the garbage can, come out a half hour later with an empty plate. Put in the sink and knock off to bed. That was it. That I used to do. Always kept myself isolated. I always kept people pretty far away. I'm pretty much the same way. I tell people what they need to know, and when they need to know it. Not too many people know things. Now I only drink socially. I don't drink at all unless it's socially. And it's normally not to the point where I get drunk, and start falling over.*

[46]

But it used to be otherwise?

*I used to...my parents have a bar down in the basement, and there was all sorts of liquor. So when no one was around, I would fill up a sports water bottle and put like vodka, or something like it. And keep the bottle around. No one ever knew I was drunk because I could tolerate the liquor so well. So, that didn't last too long. That was short.*

[47]

Looking back, why did you drink?

*I thought it would really take my mind off of it. And I knew that it really didn't. And I've seen other people in my family who are alcoholic and I saw what it did to them. So I quickly stopped that one. I did....I did what people learn in my family. I don't understand. I did what everybody doesn't learn in my family. Everyone else is...like my aunts, and stuff, they're open and they're happy, and they're always hugging and kissing. And I was the one that was always on the outside. I didn't want no part of being hugged or kissed. I was just "Leave me alone." I used to...I mean, you used to be able to tell when I used to go to a family function. I used to sit over here, and my whole other family was on the other side of the room. That's how isolated I was, from other people.*

[48]

Did you do any drugs?

*I just did just the normal teenage stuff. Like? Marijuana, E, tried it once, to see what it was like and then quickly discovered it wasn't for me, and then dropped it. But that was like the normal teenage stuff. That was the bad part of being a teenager. Cause everybody in high school was doing it. You tried it. I didn't like any of it so I stopped it. I just worked really hard in school. Still do it now. I don't go to school now, but hopefully I will be soon, go back to school. Joan still tells me I should go be a doctor, but I finally got that out of my head. I won't do it. I tried, and my grandmother died, so I didn't want to do it anymore. That actually turned it all the way around. I saw her die, so that just killed it. I didn't want to be a doctor anymore. Now I'm going back to school for insurance. So that profession is right now. Going back to school, but make the money now. Right now I'm making middle money. Then I'll be making big money once I get my degree in insurance. And in business I can actually go for [ ] where the good money's going to be...eventually. I used to get real mad. I used to smack my sister up, push her. Not to the point where I really hurt her, but you could see that I was really pissed at something. And a lot of the time she would just say the wrong thing at the wrong time. That would like set it off and I'd get the hell out of my face, I would curse and swear. Push her, smack her, and then used to get in trouble for slapping her. So "Fine, I'm leaving the house, walk out the door." Once or twice, they couldn't find me. Cause I had all sorts of spots to go to. So they could never find me. But I'd come back and unlock the door and go to sleep.*

[49]

What spots did you go to?

*We had...I had a friend right around the corner, and she had an upstairs. My parents had rooms downstairs. So they'd come over and she would be downstairs, and I would be upstairs, either in her spare bedroom, or wherever. I had friends that they didn't know about them, right around the corner that were in high school. They owned a chain of stores. I'd go in the store they though it was least likely to be in. So they couldn't really go looking at the 7-11 or the auto parts shop.*

[50]

Why you did you want to hide?

*I wanted to get away as far as I could from everybody. I went to the garden center and hang out over there because I hadn't gone there so why would I go there now? I hadn't gone to the middle school for years, so why would I be back over there when I was in high school and I could really go far away cause the high school and I could really be far away. It was like was two and a half miles away from the house and the middle school wasn't like...not even half a mile. I would go into little card shops and hang out over there and look at the magazines go there now. I never went to spots where they really thought I would go. Did they try and look for you? No, uh..a couple of times. They never found me. I would climb a tree. I would hang out and wait at the top of the tree and they would never find me there up there. I didn't want to be around anybody.*

[51]

Talk more about your self injuries.

*It didn't last very long. I used to take a knife and just kind of dig it into my arm. But I never cut really bad to make any bruises or scars. Where did you get the idea? I used to think about it. 'Cause I knew suicide you could kill yourself or mess yourself up, unless you did it a certain way. And I didn't want to kill myself. I was angry. I wanted to get all the anger out, and the aggression out. I was running a knife up and down my arm one day, and it hurt. And I began to do it a little harder and it still didn't hurt and I pushed it in until it started bleeding. Every day I would do the same thing over and over again. Until you could feel? Until I could feel it, I couldn't stop. Till this day I can still do it and I won't feel it until it's too late. Even when they draw blood I don't even know they did it. Do you still do it? I haven't done it for four or five years. I'm pretty happy now. I have a partner for life. We're pretty compatible. We get along very good. A few times we want to kill each other. Now I'm pretty happy.*

[52]

Did you ever keep a journal?

*I hated writing. I never do that. And when I did do it that's when they found out I had issues, so I quickly stopped. I had written a letter to a boyfriend and we had written back and forth numerous times. I was fourteen. We wrote back and forth. We never did anything, we just wrote back and forth. And uh, my sister saw it in my draw, it was in my draw and she pulled it out and she brought it to my parents. She didn't know what it was. She thought it was a piece of paper that she could screw up on me, and my parents read the letter and they both freaked out. And they made a counseling appointment. Ever since then I didn't write. I only wrote if had to for school. I don't do a journal. I never have, I never will. I only write down things that I absolutely have to - when is my next doctor appointment, and stuff like that. I did sports until I couldn't do them no more. I eventually killed my knee doing all those sports, and all I can do is ride a bike. That's about it. I just pushed and worked. That was where I was. I was at work more than I was at home. I used to work when people were on vacation. I was like the first one to say "I'll work the extra hours, I'll come in, I'll work all day." There was one time I worked from seven in the morning till ten o'clock at night. And then I went to bed. I got my hour for lunch, I got my hour for dinner and went home. And your parents brought you to counseling because of that letter. Was that the first time you saw Joan? Yeah. I was either 13 or 14. And the letter, I think only came up in like two sessions and that was it. And that was when all the other stuff came out. It was like I'm doing everything in the house and they didn't feel I was doing enough in the house. Things like that. And my father was very strict and if things were not done properly, you heard about it. I remember one day there was one dish that came out of the dishwasher, and I was supposed to clean it and that's it. I was whipped and totally grounded. He was really strict that way. He will punish you. Now he's not so strict anymore. He is the one that carries the heavy stick in the house. He's the one you don't want to screw with. Cause he will punish you. My mother doesn't care about anything. You can do what ever you want. She doesn't care. Was it always that way? Well, she used to be worse. When I was little, she used to literally go through my laundry. Go do this, go do that. She's still that way in a certain respect but then again she can't take care of herself anymore. She needs to be reminded, you know, to take her medicine. That's not something that I should have to remind her to do. You're 48 years old; you should be able to remember to take your own medicine. I'm 23, I remember to take mine. My sister is the one that needs to be reminded to take her medication, but she's the one that reminds my mom.*

[53]

What medication are you on?

*Right now I go to the doctor. I am on a depovera shot to control my menstrual cycle. Cause it's very bad. I get this shot once a month. I go the doctor. Then I see my regular doctor; I've gone through all my tests. There are a couple of things he needs to see. I had heart disease when I was very young and I had surgery - they fixed that. There are other minor things, I get colds, normal stuff. I went to the eye doctor, my eyes are fine. I only wear glasses for reading. Nothing to detrimental there. My whole family wears glasses a problem so [ ]. And then when I went to the psychologist there was a whole slew of problems that came up that they're working on.*

[54]

Your father was very strict. Did you ever get beaten?

*Nothing that was gonna kill me. Nothing that really kills...hurts real bad. He's actually now [ ], I tell him now I'm 23 and I can drive myself. But he still takes me to the doctor once a month. He takes me to the gynecologist and he'll sit in the waiting room, and he'll come in. And he does the same for my mom. He takes me for my shot once a month. It's his way of making sure I would go. He thinks I'm a computer person who knows everything. Then when we leave the office he's like "I think you should do this and that and that would be it.*

[55]

It must have been hard having a mother who was ill.

*Yeah. It's worse now. I think it's much worse now. I was only really happy a few years ago after she got her medication straightened out when she . It's horrible. She accuses people of doing things, and she's the one doing them. She goes on the internet and has a cyber chat with people that...and having phone sex with people that... "Oh, I'm only having fun." And then she accuses everyone else of doing it. Like her whole life is there. How is that for you? It's hard. That's what I'm going to Joan now for. Cause I can't get deal with my mother. And I make enough money so that me a Donna can really live on our own. But financially, my father I know he can't do it. would have a big time problem., I know he can't do it.. It would be real hard if I left. But She says "You don't have to be there," I know I don't have to be, but I know my father would have big problems if I left. It would be really hard if I left. And it killed him the first time I left. So if I left it would really be hard.*

[56]

SPACE ON THE TAPE RAN OUT, AND THE PARTICIPANT NOTICED. THE DIGITAL RECORDER CAPTURED THE CONVERSATION AS WE PAUSED AND I TURNED OVER THE TAPE. THIS IS THE CONVERSATION THAT ENSUED BEFORE WE CONTINUED.

Thank you for noticing.

*I just glanced over. I always watch the clock. I always watch the clock. I always get in trouble when I go to Joan's office. She'd be talking and I'm like time's up. So I always got into trouble.*

[57]

Talk about how your attitude changed towards your own homosexuality.

*I became a lot more accepting of it. In the beginning, I was denying it all over the place. I was thinking this is not what a person should...should be. It's wrong for another woman to kiss another woman or for a guy to kiss another guy. It thought that was very wrong. That's the way I grew up. It's the way mom and dad taught you. And that's the way the church said to be. So I really believed it was wrong. But I kept having these feelings and these problems. I know for the longest time I didn't even tell Joan that I had these problems. I didn't really tell her till..... I think I was twenty when I told her that finally. I eventually got more accepting of it. I actually flaunted it a little bit. Somewhat in my parent's face, that this is what I'm gonna be and you can't stop me. [ ] That's how it was.*

[58]

How have your perceptions of your abuse changed over time?

*I know now that it isn't my fault. I know it's not my fault anymore. I still think about it occasionally. There will be something that will trigger it. Normally there's not so much that triggers it. The only thing that really triggers it is rain. That's when it is uh the worst. There was like one day that it really bothered*

*me and that day really sticks out in my mind. It was thundering and lightening and [ ] it was the worst day in my life. And that...that always sticks in my head. But I really think that you know the abuse really made me not want to be with a guy. It was just so painful, and hurt so bad, I didn't want to be touched by another guy. Until I was touched by another woman. And that when...that's when...you know...and that's when it felt great, not bad or dirty, it's...that's when it felt right.*

[59]

Do you sometimes think, "If I wasn't abused I wouldn't be gay?"

*Yeah, I used to think that. For a long, long time. Now I'm coming to understand that you know, I chose, I'm choosing to be this way. I could be with a guy and I would probably be very unhappy, and live my life the way, you know, everyone thinks it should be. It doesn't have to be that way. I'm living the life I want to live right now. You know, if I change my mind in ten years and want to go be with someone else, I have that choice. But I know [ ]*

[60]

I'm not quite clear. I'm hearing two things. If I wasn't abused, I wouldn't be gay, but.....

*I really feel that if I wasn't abused I probably would have been with a guy, ...for...ever. But because I was, I think that changed my view on it and made me open to the possibility of being...with another woman. That opened it up. Now its like, I want to be with another woman. It's not the abuse, but I want to be with another woman. I kind of went through an evolution process. I thought it was this and now really it's because I really want to. Not because I was abused.*

[61]

Is there anything you would like to add?

*We touched on pretty much all of it. I worry about my brother and sister. Are they going to grow up the same way? In which way? Are they going to be gay, or are they going to be straight? So you're worried that they will be gay? I think I'm more concerned about my brother than I am my sister. My sister is very boy crazy. I was never boy crazy. My sister is very boy crazy. I think she's more likely to get in trouble first and she would have problems. My brother, he's like I see it in him. He says he likes girls. He's too little to like girls. He likes to play with the boys. But he's very...every time I see a gay man, it resembles my brother in some way. I really feel that my brother could be. I'm not so sure he would be, but I worry about him. I know it's harder for a gay man than it is a gay woman. For the guys it's a little harder. So I worry more about him maybe being...gay more than my sister. But you never know. They don't know why you are that way; if it's how you live, or if it's in your blood. You know, I was the first one in my family so I pretty much assume that it's not because of heredity. It's more how you live. You just don't pop up and become gay especially if it's heredity. Everyone else has been married for 20 some odd years. I really don't think it's in your genes if your gonna be gay. I really think it's how you live your life, what you choose. But you really worry about your brother. I am very worried about my brother. Cause I just see the way he is, he's very, very wimpy. Boys tend to be this tough...he's very wimpy he's very...he's into all the things that I feel he shouldn't. He plays with dolls. It really doesn't mean anything. But I just think that...you know. My sister is very into makeup. I was very into sports, I was very much a tomboy when I was little, and I still am. I am the first to admit it. I will never change..uh.. I will never wear a skirt or a dress unless it's for work or if I have to. I would rather go out and romp in the mud then anything else. Then go to a fancy meeting or anything. I would rather look very casual and very laid back.*

[62]

AT THIS POINT THE PARTICIPANT READ THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND PROCEEDED TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

[63]

*23 years old*

*I completed high school.*

*I was number 13 out of 1400 kids.*

*I went to college for 2 years.*

*Really long two years. I never finished. I went to Suffolk.*

*But when I eventually left, I had a 3.98 grade point average.*

*I was in all honors classes. In high school I had calculus, and environmental studies and physics when I was in like 10th and 11th grade, so which is why I was able to graduate as a junior. Eventually I just changed it to senior year to graduate.*

*I worked at camp when I was younger. When I was 16 years old I was at camp eventually till I was about eighteen.*

[64]

Was it a good experience for you?

*Yeah it was fun. I did all sorts of stuff. I got paid garbage money. But I had a good job at the camp. I didn't have to baby sit the kids. I was an arts and crafts supervisor so I got to see a whole load of kids for 30 minutes the counselors who were all older than me and were responsible for the kids. Alls I had to do was conduct them and tell them what they had to do and the counselors were responsible. So that was pretty good job. I worked at JC Penny's for 4 years. I was going to be business manager um...till I got fired...cause of cutbacks and layoffs. I was going into manager. They were getting ready to offer it to me, I was just about to take it and then "Oh we gotta fire you." Last one hired, first one fired. But I worked there for over 4 years. I was employee of the month. And now I work in an insurance company, out in Hicksville. I am working with my father. And I handle one side of the business completely on my own. And I finally gotten the system, so there isn't that much work any more. Still enough to keep busy though, - 40 plus hours a week. I get into work about 8:30 in the morning and I leave...I can leave at 4:30 but I leave closer to 5:30 unless I...I usually work about 35 hours a week and in the summertime we only work 33. So I still work 40 hours and I get paid overtime. It's a good job. I make very good money doing it. And I got [ ] just for working at my father's office and helping him and they actually offered me a job. Which was pretty cool.*

[65]

*I don't really practice my religion but I'm a Roman Catholic. No one practices their religion in the family. I never even made my confirmation. My sister and brother haven't made their communion. The only thing we have in common is that we were all baptized. That's about it. I am a European mutt. I have Irish, English, Norwegian, all that in my background. Irish is more dominant and German is the more dominant part, which is why everyone in my family is an alcoholic. Because of the German or the Irish? The combination.*

[66]

So everybody in your family is an alcoholic?

*Well everyone drinks a little too much. I think everyone's an alcoholic. There is only so much alcohol you should consume and they all surpass it. If you give them a case of beer, everything will be polished off in an hour. My grandfather is a recovering alcoholic. He's the only one who actually admitted it and gone to the meetings. He hasn't had a sip of anything in years. My father doesn't like to but when he's upset he'll drink. So when his mother died, he sat there and he drank...with everybody else who was drinking because everybody was upset.*

[67]

*My mom is 49. My dad is 50. My sister is 14 and my brother is 8. I'm 24. My parents had me when they were 21 and 22. And Christy and Andy didn't come along until they were 35. So there is this big space, big gap.*

[68]

*Right now I'm in a completely married relationship. I am wearing a wedding band and an engagement ring. We've been together a little over a year, about a year and three months now. We have no children. I can't get pregnant and she refuses to get pregnant. So we will have no children unless we adopt, at this point. That was unfortunate when my dad took me to the doctor he said that I can't get pregnant. We have a nice working relationship. I come home, we cook dinner together, we do laundry together. Either she'll wash and I'll fold, or vice versa. We alternate making the bed. So, it's a nice working relationship. It was harder in the beginning, because she lived in Jamaica, Queens and I lived in Brentwood. We would see each was only like... I worked at Penny's at the time when we started dating, so it was easier cause I could arrange one day off and we could stay out all hours of the night and then I would have to go to*

*work the next morning. So that was rough. It was tough in the beginning. And then eventually we started uh moving very quickly in the relationship. We'd see each other....we met in a bookstore. We have a very quiet relationship. We go out, we walk to the movies, come back, go out to dinner.*

[69]

How did you ask your parents if she could move in?

*She was having problems with the family she was living with, that's her cousin who she was living with and having big problems. They were being really obnoxious. They were asking her for like four or five hundred dollars rent a month, and she shared a room with...with one kid. So she was like screw it. And I said well I can't go out on my own cause at the time I was working at Penny's. And I couldn't afford to live on my own, working on Penny's salary. So I said well can she come here. And then my fa... um...At the time I asked, my mother had left the house for a couple of days. She was missing in action. Don't know where she went, why she left. She left, and my father was taking up the financial responsibility of the house. I was working so he would get all my salary if worse came to worst, and he said yes, she could come in. And for a time being it was me, Donna, and my sister all shared one bedroom. And me and Donna slept in a twin bed and my sister had a twin bed. And we shared this...this...room probably no bigger than the one we're in now. Just from the bar to here [gesturing to approximate the size of the bedroom]. To show you how big the room was. We shared that room. And we shared that room for about four months, till my mother got really upset. She thought that we shouldn't be doing it, that we shouldn't be sharing that room together. Even though we were not doing anything in front of the children, she felt that we should not be sharing a room. So they put my brother in the room with my sister, and they moved me and Donna into the..the smaller room, about half not even half, about a quarter of the size of this room. And we were in there...for quite a few months. And now we're in the basement. Donna did all the renovations in the basement. She laid the floor down, she hung the shelves. She did everything, she painted. And alls I had to do was buy the furniture. So..that's pretty much where we stand right now. It's pretty good right now.*

[70]

How is your sexual relationship?

*Uuuuum.....Pretty good. Are you satisfied? I am most of the times. I had the shot which is really weird, so it kind of interferes with it, as of recently. I feel like I'm going through menopause all the time - I'm hot, cold, I don't want it, then I do want it. So..but in the beginning it was fine. Before I started taking the shot. I've only had the shot once. But before a month ago it was really..it was fine. Now I feel somewhat tired, which is normal. More or less, more times on the weekend then during the week, because during the week I'm exhausted. My honey is cooking dinner, the last thing you want to do is...especially when you've been doing for two hours doing what you have to do. We do that on the weekends. But we're very affectionate. We sit and we lay on the couch together, we watch movies, we hold hands all day. That's pretty much how it is. Unless we're out in public, then we just walk side by side. And on the train, we don't hold hands. We just sit next to each other and we talk the whole way. There's nothing I can't tell her, which is nice.*

[71]

I want to thank you for participating in the research, and if you have any questions, or if you want to call me please do so.

Phia

[1]

Thank you for participating in the study.

*Are you getting enough people? I was trying to get \_\_\_\_\_. She does some landscaping for us. She has a background that's very similar to mine, but she's a lifelong lesbian. And I called her yesterday and I said to her if you'd be interested I'll see if Nancy is interested. She said let me think about it. I think I'm the only person she's ever talked to about it. Because I talk to her about my mother and she just said I can't, so I didn't push it. I don't think she's talked to anybody about it. I know she's been to therapy but I don't know if she's talked about that. And I was kind of hoping she would say yes because I thought may be it would be helpful for her. But she didn't.*

[2]

That was very nice of you to think about that.

*My therapist I think I told you about her, she's has a website, lavendervisions.com and she helps women who have come out later in life. And I told her about it yesterday that I was doing this and um, and um so I don't know she might be able to recommend someone to you.*

[3]

You told me you came out later in life, and the first set of questions is about coming out, internalized homophobia, prejudice. I was wondering, since you came out when you were 47 did you experience any of that?

*Are we on? Are we recording?*

[4]

Yes.

*Oh, ok. Ok so what's the question?*

[5]

You said you came out when you were 47, and why do you think it took you so long to come out?

*Well it wasn't an intellectual decision. You know and um I had feelings all my life on and on, or off and on about women and about every ten years I'd develop a serious crush, you know. But at the time that I met my **guy** when I was 35, I really wanted to meet a man. I mean I have always I feel like I'm not the kind of person who knew they were a lesbian all their lives and had to repress it or anything but I'd get waves of feelings about it, attractions, and not really do anything about it. And then you know I had strong feelings of wanting to meet a guy. I always liked men and I was always sexually, I enjoyed my sexual contact with men. Um and I met Arthur and I fell in love and it wasn't even an issue. But you know um it started coming up about seven years ago but we've been together for fourteen years. And I guess five years ago or so I developed a crush on a woman I was performing with--on stage. And she was a lesbian. And I really had a...it really was profoundly strong for me and I ended up telling her and she chose to not pursue anything, but probably because of my situation. Just, you have to redirect me if I go off.*

[6]

You're allowed to go off in other directions.

*Um and then I knew it was really strong, because when she decided not to...to pursue it, she was very upset because I couldn't just be a friend. She wanted a girlfriend, she wanted a friend and I wanted to have my first lesbian experience and she, probably because I was with Arthur, she never said that, but um she couldn't do it and I had a very, very, very bad reaction. And I really plummeted and um I have some history of self-injury and um and I did that and um so I decided it was time to tell Arthur. And I didn't tell him who because I was still in this particular show, and um I went to a diner with him and I told him and I was crying and I said that I love you but I have these other feelings and he just looked at me and he said, "I've always know that." And I had no idea you know that he always knew that and so we just decided to take it a day at a time. And see, and we talked about having a more open relationship. Um we're also Pagan and that's we're pretty open-minded that way, although we've always been monogamous, um [breath] and honest you know about our relationship, and promised that if we were attracted to someone else we would...we would say. So just having that off my shoulders was enough for several years I didn't do anything about it, I continued to get help and talk about the issue and um. But um nothing happened until I met, nothing happened until I met the woman that I first got involved with and then all hell broke loose for me. It was just very clear for me that once I kissed...there was a friend who actually came to see me in a show this other woman was also again with me--this was the second time I was performing with her—and a woman friend came out, a Pagan from...from Indiana to see the show, I hadn't seen her in years and I always had a crush on her—and I told her and we got you know involved, and she was straight and was involved with a man and um we kind of fell in love with each other and then she just shut down, and shut it off and that was that was the second time I kind of went off the deep end with things because I knew it was very serious you know for me and she really broke my heart. And so I decided that was coming out for me, at 47, I was with her and for three months and we*

*kind of went back and forth with it, the relationship. And then she just cut it off and I had a really rough time about it and um. Well I was just, I was in a lot of pain, and Arthur knew what was going on and um I was still not sure I wanted to...until that...I didn't realized what kissing a woman would do, in terms of turning my world upside down. I had never even had an experience as a girl. And once that happened, having a sexual experience with her, I just...everything in my body knew that that's where I wanted to be. And I fell completely head over heels in love with her and she got really scared and basically and um...so that's when I got help seeing a lesbian therapist who helps women who come out later in life. And for two years it's been wonderful, it's been horrible cause you know I've been dealing with my life here with Arthur, as I know it, and he's really been my first family that has been meaningful and happy. SO, you know I feel like I found myself, but I fight off the possibility of losing this [gestures at the kitchen and house]. So we're trying to do it our own way and not um separate at least at this point and he's dating women, and I'm dating women [laugh], and it's actually we're much happier and you know that's it.*

[7]

*Am I right, is the scary part not seeing yourself in the situation with Arthur, rather than being a lesbian? Oh yeah. There's no um there's no homophobia for me, I actually...which may be a problem for you [laugh], um I actually used to pray to be a lesbian [laughing]. I mean I was so enamored of like, even in the 70s and the 80s, I would just always, when I would see two women together, I would just...my eye would go there, or a lesbian book store or anything...women's music which I'm completely addicted to...I had this thing. And you know nothing ever seemed to hit me over the head hard enough to say you know why do you think that is? And you know and I...I loved it and I longed for it, but I also loved...loved men, at least up until recently and um and it's just like it all came...it all came flooding out. Once I had an experience it was like everything got released. And I wasn't afraid because I work in the theater and nobody cares who you sleep with, it's very liberal. And all my friends are like my family and community, they're totally accepting and they just want Arthur and I to be happy and be ok. And my family I have nothing to do with except one nephew. Um so my parents are both dead, my father just died. And um but I don't communicate with them so its not an issue coming out to them, so I don't have all that to deal with in my work, or home or...and I have a partner who's completely supportive of the situation.*

[8]

*You sound very lucky...*

*Oh, oh yeah, I don't know if I would still be here otherwise cause there are just too many other things in me that were...to fight...you know emotionally, more than anything. Not people being against my being a lesbian, but and really until recently I've always had the feeling that it was happening to somebody right next to me. Like it's been a really interesting 2 years, like I know it, I go to women's events, I've had a couple of relationships you know I...I'm happy with it, but I never quite felt integrated. Like it only recently feels like it's happening to me. Like I could let it in. You know before it felt like it's happening to this person right next to me over here. And you can't intellectualize yourself into it...it just suddenly all of a sudden it feels like it's me and not some other part of me.*

[9]

*You mentioned women's events, how do you participate in the lesbian community?*

*Well I...I took the year off this last year. I did my first play in New York and I decided when I got home, I really kind of crashed um because I hadn't had any time really to process really well what was going on and um I was kind of...the relationship was ending, that I was in. Everything just, I really kind of had a little break down, I think, whatever that is. And I decided to take the next year off and um not do any plays, and not...just be myself. And I could do that so um I travel once a month to some woman's event or another, festivals, music festivals, or a pride event, or something related. Once a month I would go away, and it's been great. And it's been year now and I'm still [laughing] I haven't gone back to work yet. But you know I've really needed it. And just gone to therapy and just done things I want to do. And I have to fight depression, I'm on anti-depressants and, you know even with medication, which has helped me a lot, I...it's just something that I feel like I'm probably always going to have to battle.*

[10]

*At what age did your depression start?*

*Um when I was 23 I had a...I ended up in a hospital, I was in graduate school in acting and um that was a really horrible experience that um they had put me on those old medications and I didn't want to be on them and I...I wasn't really functioning and I...I you know ended up running away from the hospital to avoid ending up in a state hospital and uh and then I you know kind of recovered and got my life back over about six years and um and then I was fine and the depression ended up really lasting with me started about 5 years ago when I had really dealt with a lot of anxiety and terror and fear in therapy, you know a lot of trauma in my life, and I...I really had good help. I've been very lucky all along. And it was like when a lot of that had lifted, what was left was depression. You know I used to be kind of really, really hyper and...and it was just such a kick...kick in the ass, I was doing all this work and all of a sudden I found myself like seriously depressed and I wouldn't take medication...I wouldn't take medication and my doctor kept saying you really, you're going, you're going to really be glad you did. And it was when all the new drugs were out, the Prozac family stuff and. Then finally I hit bottom and said I ok and it was really great. And so I have been on different ones cause they stop working and there's problems with some women with them that they kind of poop out and so I've switched around on different meds, but I definitely can feel how it's, it's very chemical for me. You know I really need...I need some help, um.*

[11]

Sometimes people work hard trying to avoid their feelings and when they finally start therapy all of a sudden they report feeling worse than they felt before because they are beginning to experience those feelings.

*Yeah, and for me a lot of those things were high anxiety things, like so the adrenalin you know and the theater thing is adrenalin--constantly up and down, you're up--you're in a show, you're down, you know and I think for years that kept me and sports as a kid I think those things kept me...kept the depression at bay.*

[12]

It's interesting that you are an actor—actors take roles—and when you were talking about how it was happening to the person next to you—that connection popped into my head.

*I hadn't thought of that but it's true.*

[13]

So you really felt very little homoprejudice that many lesbians report when especially when they first begin to come out. Do you remember a time when you felt you had to hide your feelings about your sexual preference?

*Well the thing that I always felt shame about and had to hide which may be related um since I was a little girl I remember this, was wanting women to hold me because I had such a horrendous mother and no contact that was positive that way that I really up until currently I'm still working on that you know, of just being held and um all that longing, and I really had to deal with that in therapy and fortunately have had 2 good you know, therapists who are not afraid of that and don't have rules about don't touch the patient. You know so um and have handled it really well, and so that I can see it's getting better gradually. And also when that happened, once I had a few years of that kind of nurturing and treatment, it was after that that I came out. You know so it was almost as if when I had those needs met then I could find out who I was, you know. And I...so but I still in therapy feel like some shame when I want to reach out and hug my therapist. If I'm in a really a rough spot and I want her to hold me or whatever, it's...it's still that feeling that they don't want to, or you know I'm ashamed of it or there's something wrong with it. But I have that feeling since I was a little girl. So. And maybe that's like maybe akin to being ashamed that you're gay or afraid that you want contact with a woman, I don't know. It never felt sexual to me you know, until recently.*

[14]

So you never really had any fears about coming out to anybody.

*No, I kind of announced it to the world people, everybody jokes about you know, I go up to people who say, "Are you gay," just because I was looking for people to talk to. You know just people I sort of knew, but no, I would just say, "Are you gay?" And I actually [laughing] ended up talking to this one woman,*

*because she seemed like really nice and I hardly knew her, but she was gay and she ended up meeting me for coffee to just talk to me about coming out.*

[15]

That sounds like a meaningful experience. What did you talk about?

*Well, she apparently, she was bisexual which surprised me and she told me that she she's happily in a relationship with a woman now, and it was just early on. And I was just telling her about my confusion and my worrying about Arthur and what do I do and because he was my family and um...um that kind of thing. And I was real confused about who I was. I thought that I was probably a lesbian, but it was just so overwhelming.*

[16]

So you were confused about your sexual identity at one point.

*I guess when it first started, it didn't feel like confusion but all I wanted to do was be with a woman, but it felt confusing as far as my lifestyle. Like you know, this is home, with this man and my best friend and that was confusing. And you know, as I looked back, it was clear, you know, I was not enjoying sex for a while. And when this started it was just kind of a gradual shifting into not being sexual and sort of trying it and then having some really upsetting experiences for me, and you know my whole body would freeze up. It was clear it was all transitioning.*

[17]

Did you feel asexual?

*I did feel kind of asexual and I'm a very sexual person. And the meds kind of temper it a little bit. I'm not on the ones that are like, when I was on Zoloft, there was no sexual ...but I'm on Lexapro now and that's better. I not quite myself, but at least I can experience orgasm and sexual feelings and um I thought it was that until I was with a woman and then [laughing] I realized it wasn't that. I just had no desire, you know, for heterosexual sex. And it was a kind of a process to kind of you know, not often we talked about it and got through it. I'm probably saying more than you'd ever want to know.*

[18]

Quite the contrary.

*I'm not shy.*

[19]

I'm so happy you're not shy. I knew you weren't shy, because I'm here [laughter]. When you were coming out, and in that process, did you ever feel negative emotions about your same sex feelings? You labeled confusion, but I'm asking again; did you ever feel frightened about coming out or exploring your sexuality?

*Well, the odd thing that really struck me was suddenly realizing like I remember I went out to dinner with my first girlfriend, after the woman I came out with and she was from Indiana, and she...they were both from Indiana which was really strange, no connection but um um she had some work in Philadelphia and she was here and her colleagues wanted to take her out to dinner and she invited me along and I suddenly was sitting in the chair and these people were talking to me and it reminded me of **me** being in a chair with you know lesbian friends like being totally accepting but like you know they're different and it was suddenly me being different you know and it was like—**what--this is really weird** they're talking to me with just a little patronizing quality in their voice. You know isn't that nice, Holly has a new girlfriend, you know. And I just felt god I'm the one. And then because I had done a lot of work with children, theater, outreach and stuff and I used to hear on the news people have like weird ideas that homosexuals are pedophiles and wouldn't get hired to teach and I suddenly felt like oh my god, I'm a really great teacher with kids, people love my work, kids love me, and I could actually be discriminated against and that was the one thing that blew my mind. That I would be judged based on who I wanted to be sexual with in my adult life. And I thought, a lot of those parents when I was straight teaching those, their kids in after school programs, they would probably, you know they're Catholic, they would probably pull their kids right out and I thought how devastating that would be to me. And now I really understand what that's like for people. I mean I can imagine now really to be discriminated against when you're fantastic at what you do. It has nothing to do with, any more that I would sleep with little boys if was teach...if I'm*

*heterosexual. It's just so bizarre. That was the one thing that made me go, WOW, I don't know if I'm up for that, because I'm really out there about being out, because I tell everybody, everybody, except my nephew, no he doesn't know yet.*

[20]

How old is he?

*He's thirty-something and he's married and has a kid.*

[21]

And you haven't told him because

*Well it's not time yet really. We don't have a lot of contact and he just connected with me a few years ago after years of you know me not having any contact with any of my nieces or him. And he met Arthur and he kind of considers us his **normal** family you know and because his mother has followed the footsteps of my mother; my sister has followed the footsteps of my mother being a miserable alcoholic, and abusive and he reached out to me for help and it was such an amazing experience, and you know email I see him once a year, I go out to visit him. I know we'll tell him eventually but we'll tell him when I'm ready and when I'm clear and um he really like Arthur and it's like now he has to deal with you know he's kind of conservative and like now he's already had a hard enough time with the fact that I celebrate solstice [laughing] he said oh not you too. And it's like I'm this crazy aunt, you know, who he thinks is normal. And then when I tell him I'm a lesbian he going to probably lose his mind for a little while. But I know, I think he'll be ok ultimately. But he's the only one I haven't come out to. I am afraid of that and he just had a little baby girl you know and I haven't met her yet and so you know I guess if there's fear, it's there. But it's also still pretty new for me, so when I'm ready I know it'll be the right time, and his wife is pretty liberal so hopefully she'll help.*

[22]

Can you describe what it's like to be a lesbian woman in the hetero world?

*For me well I'm just so newly out, I'm just trying on my lesbian shoes and I'm having fun with it. I love it. And like I said all the places where I am in the world don't care. If my family was still alive, you know I would dread telling them, but I wouldn't tell them anyway because I don't have any involvement with them. But um well in the neighborhood we haven't come out, just because we're still living together here and it's even though it's \_\_\_\_ and so it's supposedly liberal area, this is the conservative branch over here you know. With money and we're kind of the freaks of the neighborhood already. And I think some of the nicer, the people we like see my bumper stickers, they're probably figuring something's going on you know, they think you know those crazy pagans. Um I don't feel like I want to share, so to me sharing and coming out is for people that you care about. So in my work, or with my friends, that's where I'm out or I'm...so but here oh if the closer neighbors were to come out and ask me, I would tell them.*

[23]

What attracted you to paganism?

*Well I always thought I was an atheist, but I always felt had spirituality. And um I was doing theater with this really cool older couple who have a company called the \_\_\_\_\_ and they are wican, pagan. And I ended up getting hired by them to do a couple of shows and we hit it off really well, and I got into it through them and they said you may find you are a pagan and just don't realize it which is exactly what happened. You know, that I live by nature and cycles of nature and you know honor the female energy and we all are, you know there's not some divine savior outside of ourselves but it's all the same energy, Buddhist in a way, and um but no dude to worship, you know no dude with a big belly.*

[24]

[She was playing with the cord of the microphone all the time she was talking] The reason I asked you was because I was interested in your parent's ethnic and religious background. I think we may be shifting now to the background of your family.

*Well, they were um devout alcoholics basically. There was no spirituality you know and um there was just misery and um and money and um but we went to Sunday school we had to go to Sunday school and it was Episcopalian. The neighborhood was very Catholic. My high school the whole area was pretty Catholic. I grew up in a suburb \_\_\_\_ on Long Island. Uch, I hate Long Island. I couldn't get away fast*

*enough. And so yeah, so I grew up in \_\_\_\_\_, very sterile, but we went to Sunday school and they told me all I had to do was to make it to confirmation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the day I was confirmed, I was out of there. That was it. I never bought any of it. I went because I had to. And um that's it. So*

[25]

And their ethnic background, do you think that might have contributed to their alcoholism?

*Well yeah, they ran with the waspy country club, that was it. They were all a bunch of drunks for the most part. But you know covered up and with class and until you get behind closed doors.*

[26]

What happened behind those closed door?

*What happened [laughing]? Not what happened in the country club, you know.*

[27]

Can you talk about what happened?

*[Deep breath]. Well my mother drank from 11 in the morning on, gin. And I never knew that was odd. I just knew that she had a couple of personalities and I knew which time of day to stay away, and which time of day to poke my head out. You know, I remember I was the youngest of three girls and we all had different fathers and...but my father basically raised all of us, or didn't raise all of us. He was mostly gone, traveling. This is going to get really good, because I just found out that he was in the CIA my whole life. He died in November and he was a spy. So he was gone, most of the time, traveling and I started to kind of figure it out a few years ago. My therapist kind of figured it out. She said, "Do you think your father was a spy?" And you know I think...I think I was...I think I knew on some level but so he wasn't around a lot and my mother was just like a, you know, Mommy Dearest. Horrible, miserable, and she would get very violent and my sisters were a lot older than me and you know, they were beaten, and there was just a lot of trauma in the house around. She just took her misery out on them basically, and I was young enough that I kind of kept my head down and um you know, so it you know I remember my older sister getting beaten for staying out on a date, or my mother found her making out with a boy in the living at 2 in morning and I just remember huge battles and screaming, and you know. I think she would just slam my sisters across the face over and over. She did it to me once, till I saw stars and that was the last time. But uh...um you know she was just pretty horrible so she would be playing golf and socializing with her friends, and when my father was home, he would just drink until he kind of passed out. You know he was always quiet, just did his paper work and drank and they watched the news and went to bed. But it was a horror.*

[28]

Was it better when your father was home?

*No, not really. No. He would just sort of leave the room when she was screaming and yelling. I mean remember her and I looked at him and I said would you please help me and he would shake his head and walk out of the room. I think my sisters got the brunt of it and by the time they left home, I was bigger, you know physically. She couldn't really physically abuse me. She used to cut all my hair off you know, take my hair and twist it. Well, in the summer you used to have your hair cut, and I think other times as well, and she just didn't want me to have long hair and she used to say I wasn't feminine I wasn't pretty and I would always never be able to wear feminine clothes. And She made me wear tailored clothes and man-kind of things. And You know I felt really embarrassed about that, and I didn't want my hair cut and I would be crying and she would just you know grab my pony tail and twist it and drag me into the bathroom and cut it off while I was crying in front of the mirror. And I'd be crying and she'd tell me to be quiet, that I had to have my hair cut and she made me look like a boy which confused me. She actually was really unattractive and scary looking kind of like an unattractive male. And she and my father did not have much of a sexual relationship. I used to hear about that all the time. They would fight, I would hear them fighting in the kitchen. You know my mother would be screaming at him for being impotent [laughing] which was really awful. She was just a ball buster, you know, literally.*

[29]

You told me she used to give you enemas.

*I had stomach aches, but they probably weren't arbitrary you know there was an indication and maybe in those days that's what they did but um I just remember being completely humiliated through the process. She would leave the...she was big on leaving the doors open everywhere, you know like there was no sense of privacy or...for me. You know and you know I...we would go to clothes stores to try clothes on and she would leave the dressing room door open, and I would cry for her to please close it and people couldn't see, and she would say it doesn't matter, nobody cares. But anyway, just remember being on my father's bed and she'd make me get on my hands and knees and she would give me an enema and it would really, really hurt. And I would be crying and then my sisters were on the stairs, on the landing looking down into the bedroom laughing and she didn't stop that.*

[30]

Did they get enemas?

*I don't know, I don't think so. And I would be crying and she would make me stay there and she would leave and I couldn't move until she came back, and I was in agony. And I...I felt so ashamed and embarrassed. I don't know how many times it happened. And it felt you know like...it felt like...felt like rape. You know and it all started coming up a couple of years ago in therapy a couple of years ago and there were other incidences with her. You know I started, my hands started breaking out...like my hands were covered [] like blisters that would itch. And when it all started to come out my hands were covered with the stuff like for a couple of years. Then it finally calmed down as I dealing with it. I have a lot of confusion as to whether that was sexual abuse or what. But all the things she did like that, had to do with my sexualized areas.*

[31]

It sounds like those things can be very confusing especially for a child. It's true that you aren't aware of what motivated her, but what I am hearing you say is that's how it feels to you. You relate to her actions as a sexual violation against you. [Silence] Did it affect your schoolwork? What kind of student were you?

*Um I was a good student. I was a lonely student because I was really fat when I was a little girl, and I was teased unmercifully, tortured at school. So I had a great dual life [sarcastically], you know at home, and then at school where kids tormented me until about 6<sup>th</sup>...5<sup>th</sup> grade. And then I became like the most popular girl on the block. It sounds a bit schizophrenic. When I hit puberty I lost a lot of weight and I became athletic, go figure. I was clueless as to what was going on I didn't understand, but I rode with it because it was you know a lot nicer than...*

[32]

Were you sexual?

*Yes, very sexual, early. Um I loved the boys, I loved, I didn't lose my virginity till what's now considered pretty late, I was 19. But I was sexual, you know, everything but intercourse, not oral sex but you know making out with boys and fondling, from about 13 on. And I got my period when I was 11 and so every opportunity to be behind a bush with a boy, I was there [laughing].*

[33]

So a lot of different boys.

*Um well, probably not a lot, it may be in my mind. But I'd always find a boyfriend, you know. Like in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade to kiss with or whatever, and at parties and things, and in high school. I mean I never got the popular boys, I always got the nice boys, but I never liked them very much. Cause they liked me. So um but I was very sexual, so yeah. And then I went to college and I had um I had in my junior year, was it my junior year, my junior year in college, I became very promiscuous. And I slept with everybody, any body who would sleep with me.*

[34]

All men?

*Oh yeah, all boys. Well, I felt sexual, I wanted to have sex, they were usually my friends. They were all in theater. They were all straight at that point. And you know so I would just start sleep with them, have sex with them. It felt good.*

[35]

It felt good.

*It felt good and probably...I probably wasn't, I don't know, it was physical for me...it was mechanical.*

[36]

So the orgasm part felt good.

*Yeah. I liked the whole thing you know, and I probably would have liked to find a boyfriend but it was probably really hard for me to find someone I wanted to be with.*

[37]

When did you begin to think about your mother's behavior as abuse? It sounds as though you still wonder whether it was or not.

*Well there were a couple of other things that my mother did. Well there are kind of these memories that stick out. One was being checked for vaginal infection. And I think I was all of like 11 and that I remember probably I told her I was itchy and so she had me lay on my father's bed—**again my father's bed**—and um she put her hand up in me, her fingers, and a flashlight and I just I still remember laying there. I was frozen and I wanted to scream and I was mortified. And I didn't know there was anything wrong with it. I still need to be convinced that that's not appropriate behavior. I mean I can tell myself that she should have taken me to the doctor, that's how you make sure, you know. If you want to check your child, you don't do it yourself. And it just felt horrible to me. And um when I first had my period, I was...the first day...I was in the den where my father was doing paper work. And he wasn't facing me and my fath...my mother was watching TV and she said, well, let me see your pad, so in the den with my father doing paper work, she didn't want to get up, she's drinking, watching TV, she made me take my pants off, my underpants to look at my pad to see how heavily I was bleeding. You know things like that. And I don't know, they just all started piling up in therapy and um you know I started to feel like I was...I started having symptoms of being sexually abused, I guess, I mean I have post-traumatic stress syndrome from the trauma and the violence and stuff. So you know in the past 10 years, as it started coming up, I got extra help. You know I went to WAR [Women Organized Against Rape]. I went to one of their groups. I went to Incest Survivors Anonymous, which I'll never go back to, and but every body pretty much when I would say my story would say, yeah, if that's, if you felt you were abused sexually, you were.*

[38]

Both your feelings and your descriptions sound like sexual abuse.

*But I mean it wasn't like she was having sex with me. It wasn't quite overt like I mean I'm still not 100% convinced, but I want to be.*

[39]

Before you started therapy, did you talk to anyone about the abuse?

*I talked about it in therapy. You know before that I didn't know there was anything wrong. I didn't know my mother was an alcoholic until I left home at 19. A neighbor said I know your mother is alcoholic [whispering], and she was an alcoholic too, it's interesting. She was a neighbor of my mother's in Vermont, they had a winter place and I said, "She is?" And another really weird thing, was that whenever I would get close to a woman friend of my mother's or a counselor or someone, my mother would accuse them of being lesbian. I was like "What?" Yeah she was jealous that I sought out support that she couldn't give me. Or maybe **she** was a lesbian, I mean, I don't know.*

[40]

Often people need a third eye to help focus. There didn't seem to be much communicating between your mom and your dad. What about you and your dad?

*He didn't talk. He just was a...he was a typical spy profile apparently. He was perfect for it. Well, I started to realize that I was the mirror in the family and like I got that in therapy too that they hated me because all I had to do was look at them and they knew I saw right through them. And I was the one who stood up and called...told my mother she had a drinking problem. She did not have a drinking problem you know. She had no problems. And she used to threaten to hit me as an adult you know, older, in my*

*20s and then walk out of the room. So I was...I kind of left and I was blamed as the black sheep who left the family. And you know I left to survive, and it took me years.*

[41]

And your sisters stayed?

*Yeah, they still live in the same town and raise kids and have um abusive husbands, and divorced and one of them tried to molest me, when I was 19 and um since molested an au pair and is divorced. My sister's divorced from that one. The kids are a mess, except for the nephew, they're all either bulimic you know, drug, alcohol or just emotionally so fucked up. It's really sad. Cause my sisters are both alcoholics now.*

[42]

Were you ever bulimic?

*Um I never was. I bordered on anorexia when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I would starve myself. But I never...never...it stopped. But oddly enough in the last few years, I started behaving like that. It was just like I wanted to try it. And I would eat and then make myself sick after, I haven't even told my therapist [whispering] this. And in fact lately I've been thinking of telling her. And it's not an issue. It's like I was playing with it. I don't know why but I'm not doing that. I haven't done it for a while. It was very sporadic. I don't know what it was. I'm not sure what it was. But um...I really went through a thing when my mother died 11 years ago. Um she didn't tell me she was going to die, and she made everybody promise not to tell me, in my family. And then when she was dead, my sister called to tell me and um I went through a really bad time at that point, and that's when I found out I had post-traumatic stress I would wander around the house at night, looking for predators, and the whole kind of soldier syndrome.*

[43]

Do you startle easily?

*Oh yeah, it's always been, I never new why. I was pacing the house all night was...I was terrified. I couldn't stay alone until very recently. When Arthur would go away, I'd have to go stay with friends, and we have a security system. I couldn't fly, I mean I you know, it was a really bad time when she...when she died. All these things got triggered.*

[44]

Did you sleep?

*No, I didn't sleep. But I was afraid. I couldn't sleep because I was afraid at night. And I used to have that as a child you know [big sigh]. It wasn't just insomnia. No I was terrified. I would lay on my mattress with the lights on, I couldn't move, I was afraid to step on the floor, because somebody was under the bed. I used to think John F. Kennedy was under there too.*

[45]

That's nice.

*No actually he was dead [laughing].*

[46]

Did your mother have any explanation for what she did?

*Yes, she did it for health reasons and I felt, there were worse moments in my life.*

[47]

When you were a teenager and you hung out, you were going behind the bushes did you do any alcohol and drugs.

*I don't think I drank, not really until um well I was actually, I didn't really feel it was being promiscuous, I think I was just a teenager messing in the bushes. I mean I wasn't having intercourse. It was more like I was just figuring it out.*

[48]

And later on?

*Oh yeah, later on I would drink and smoked pot, but I never liked pot. Oh yeah, I used to drink and the first year in college, I used to drink until I was completely drunk, and yeah.*

[49]

Why did you stop? How did you stop?

*I was really...I used to hyperventilate too, and pass out my first year in college, I went to school in Wisconsin, and I ended up in the emergency room a couple of times. There was just a lot of things going on that first year. Also somebody had died our senior year in high school. And I was almost in the car where everybody either died or was seriously hurt. So um you know I had a lot of stuff going on and dealing with my family, and...but um I seem to get, after the first year, I seemed to do better. Sophomore year things were much better. I had a boyfriend that I really liked and um so. And then but there's been times in my life, pockets where I abused alcohol, another time, pretty badly. I went and got myself evaluated by like a program, like my therapist said I think you should go get evaluated to see whether you are an alcoholic or not. It was an interview and they said I was purged...purged...perched on the precipice of disaster. I think that helped. So I've always had to watch it. But I don't...like I used to do these, just drink. I was unhappy, you know. And then it would stop. It wasn't like I needed to drink all the time or anything. And um and then it just wasn't a problem, like now I enjoy red wine, you know a glass or two of red wine. But I've never have a problem with it. Like I don't get drunk like anymore, I don't control...you know it doesn't run my life.*

[50]

What did the alcohol do to your feelings?

*Well I think when I was abusing it--it just numbed me. It would also give me permission to hurt myself. Well, I...I would drink and then I would cut myself, my wrist with a piece of glass usually or a knife, and I was just having so many feelings at the time, I was in my thirties.*

[51]

How did you feel when you cut yourself?

*Oh it was terrible. I felt terrible. I mean part of me felt relief because it was...from the pain. The emotional pain became physical pain.*

[52]

[Her husband came in so we greeted him and waited for him to go upstairs.]

*Yeah it was, I remember I would like the physical pain better than the emotional pain.*

[53]

So you understood that it was a tradeoff?

*Yeah it was like I just couldn't stand it anymore in here [pointing to her stomach].*

[54]

Would you consider yourself in school, an underachiever or an overachiever?

*I went to private school from 9<sup>th</sup> grade and I really excelled, I really did well. And then high school I went to...I wanted to, I don't know why...but I could have gone away, I don't know why I didn't. But I decided to stay at home a go to public school [laughing]. I really have no idea why I did that. I don't know why I didn't want to get out of the house. Things weren't horrible at that point, but they became horrible. And I was really, it was a small public school, it was a good public school. So you know, I really did well. I always did well in school.*

[55]

Today, what do you do to relieve stress?

*Um, I go to Curves and work out. I really like that. And I you know, I'm a gardener, I love to garden. And I hike in the woods when it's not too hot. When I'm working, um I come home and that's when I probably, that's when I like...I mean I like to have a glass of wine. It's really...I definitely use it as a drug. I mean not really in a bad way, but it just helps to have a glass of wine to deal with stress, and I watch TV. You know I watch some programs.*

[56]

Have you always been able to do those things to relieve stress or did you have to make an effort to learn them?

*Um [pause] I think I have, you know once the depression started becoming a problem, I had to push myself to exercise you know, but I would find, like I used to play in volleyball, or I used to hike but then um you know, but then it became more like to exercise or to hike or play to tennis or. Now Curves is a*

*good brainless way to get your exercise, it's not too hard. When sports is a built-in part of your life, you didn't have to think about it, you know in school and stuff.*

[57]

What messages did get from growing up in your household, what was your environment telling you?  
*Oh man, I don't know. For me it was like just surviving [pause]. Don't piss off the matriarch [laughing]. That was the one message. Um you know we had nightmarish scenes at the table with food, that was another. Oh god, I hate that. I still can't sit still at a dinner table. And all my friends joke that I pop up and down like a jack-in-the-box, I don't can't like have a meal, I mean I do but, I guess it's pretty apparent that I'm, everybody makes fun of me, in a loving way, it's dinnertime, let's watch Phia bounce up and down at the dinner table. Um it was just was a really bad scene, my mother would cook, and she actually liked to do that, and she would make um really horrible things and make us eat them. Um meat that wasn't cooked, I'm a vegetarian, you know and she ruined meat for me. It was raw, rare and also if there were chops, she'd make us eat, it felt like fat to me until I would gag and she would make me sit there for hours and hours, and I'd be crying and throwing up and my sister would hide her food in the table...in fact, I remember her getting caught. My mother found food in her underwear draw. And she just, I don't know what she was doing to her in the other room, but you know, it sounded like torture. And um my dog helped me out. He would sit by me and I'd give him stuff.*

[58]

You've had a lot of good relationships with animals?

*Oh yeah. [She has 9 cats]. And I'm allergic to them, but... [laughs].*

[59]

How do you think that your abuse affected your relationships?

*Probably being suspicious of people. I had to work through a lot of that.*

[60]

So it's hard for you to trust?

*Oh, I'm much better now, much more trusting and risking and um, but yeah.*

[61]

Do you think it affected you specifically in the way you relate to males as opposed to females?

*I think I always got along better with boys. Probably you know. It's like I had a lot of men friends, guy friends. I would have girlfriends too, but I was more leery of women, girls, It's harder for me to find a good girlfriend.*

[62]

When you think about your sexual preference, do you think that maybe you would have come out a lot sooner if you hadn't been sexually traumatized?

*Um, its weird because in my twenties, my early twenties, after I got out of the hospital, I had a boyfriend that I didn't really didn't feel that in love with him. And I had one of those decade crushes on a woman who I was in a writer's workshop with. And I came right out one night and I wanted to, I knew I wanted to sleep with her, have sex with her. I loved her. And that was really the first time, I was 24, and I asked her, "Have you ever slept with a woman," and she said, "No, but every body thinks, everybody wants me to be a lesbian." And I and um I said I haven't either but I'd like to and...and um she you know she was totally straight, she was older than me, and we were really good friends. And so I just dropped. But I remember that night, that feeling being with her. And I don't know why, for me it didn't just happen you know like progressively. Like why then didn't I go look for another woman? I didn't. I went and looked for men. You know, and maybe it was because it was too risky or too, you know I never really thought of that before. You know that I would be rejected you know um like that. I didn't really, I remember that night thinking I can't become, I remember that night thinking I can't become gay...I can't be gay because, I can't let my family know that after being, after coming out of the hospital, they already think I'm crazy. They already hate me and it would be too hard. I remember thinking that. But I also had...but you know at that point I was I guess bisexual. I liked men and I wanted to be with men. Um and so I think I must have just shut it off and then never thought about it. I always wondered, well why didn't it progress. And it didn't until my thirties, you know until the next decade, when I had a crush on this actress. You know*

*and that was so strong that I couldn't...I thought this is not...I can't shut this down. And when she rejected me, it was the first time on years that I had cut myself again. And I cut myself here [points to an area above her right breast]. I took a knife and cut myself down my breast. I was in so much pain and I wanted to die.*

[63]

Have you ever attempted suicide?

*When I was in the hospital, I would save my medication and all I would do is think about dying. I was so miserable. I was so depressed, and so unhappy and I didn't even know what was wrong with me at that point, and just the accumulated effect of my family, finally caught up with me in graduate school. And I was in a play about a mental hospital, Marat ...de Sade. That play didn't help. And I was rehearsing and I still have a scar here, I remember in the hospital I would do these things, I would save all my meds, put them in my night table, really visible, like I was playing with it, I wasn't... Then I went around and broke all the lanterns in this hospital with my hands. Like all the glass lanterns around the property of the hospital, and I took, I didn't...wasn't even trying to hide, I just [makes a sound and gesture] smashed them all. And I'd take a piece of glass and I went into the woods, and I started--I remember it was raining--and I started to cut and I wasn't even hiding that. You know I was just and it started to bleed, but I didn't cut deep enough. I didn't know about cutting the vein at that point. And the therapy, they were so stupid. I had to put my hand in my raincoat pocket. And they never knew I was bleeding, and they never checked me there. So I messed with it. And I think cutting myself was a way of saying I have control over my pain and if I want to die I can, but I never I must have such a survivor in me because I never can never quite get to that point. And the other time it happened was with Anita, the woman that I fell in love with. And when she shut down, I...I...that was two years ago when I came out, I did this again. I was down here, he [Arthur] doesn't know this, and I took knife and just sliced myself. And I couldn't bear the emotional pain anymore. I wrote that poem and I cut myself. And then I seemed to...you know I just, I told Joanne and um she saw me several times a week and you know, till I got through it.*

[64]

Is there anything you'd like to add that you think is important?

*I don't know [laughing]. I don't know. I hope I helped you. I feel like I'm not quite the right candidate.*

[65]

Why would you think that?

*Cause like...like everything else, nothing is like--homophobia really didn't really affect me. Maybe it did. Maybe that...in my twenties that night when I thought I can't be gay because I've already just come out of a mental hospital, my family would totally, I don't know, I just couldn't deal with any more shit from them, and uh I can't be, oh yeah, **maybe I would have come out then**. I know I wanted to sleep with that woman and then it was like it all went away. The curtain totally came down. But there was desire for guys. And when it happened finally two years ago, the curtain came up and I went straight from being a bored out of my mind heterosexual, not bored but I realized I wasn't enjoying sex for a long time and I didn't know why, to I you know people would say maybe you're bisexual, and I would say no, I'm not bisexual. I don't want to have anything to do with a man, sexually. I have **no** desire for that. And once I allowed myself to experience a woman, I thought like I had come home. And for me that was like a loooong time of home you know of wanting to...wanting women to pay attention to me because I never had a mother pay attention to me, since I was a little girl. And you know I don't want to think that my sexual preference at this point is from dysfunction. You know like oh well, Phia never had a good mother so, I mean there are other women who don't have good mothers. And they're totally straight. But I you know I've been tracing the whole line, and it's so interesting to see all of the little pockets where being a woman loving women was so obviously where I was headed. And other people saw it. And you know people have said to me, lesbian friends of Arthur's actually, it would piss me off and they would say you're a lesbian Phia, and I would get so angry at them. And you know it was a few years ago and they must be laughing their asses off now. You know they're just too...they know I kill them if they said I told you so. But I feel as hard as the two years have been, and as much pain as there's been in it, when the moments of being with a loving women, those moments, and finally integrating the person next to me*

[referring to other self], *to this person, there is this sense of such relief and deep happiness that I never felt in my life. And that I know I'm in the right place, you know and I'm really I'm excited and I'm happy. I've had some upsets and some disappointments weird experiences but you know that's going to happen. But I feel like I'm home and its been such a long, you know tumultuous ride. And sometimes I think, oh I wish I had figured this out, you know and it's like you can't figure it out any sooner than you can figure it out. And I think I wasn't clear then, you know I think there were a lot of things going on for me. It happened when I was ready and when I was clear and when I knew that's what I wanted. I think.*

[66]

How does your practice of paganism help you?

*Yes that, having a spirituality, it's just been the last few years for me, and um it has really helped me a lot because there have been some of the most painful and difficult moments of my life and I just, I...I feel like I have now a sense of that I've never had before that things would be ok. That the path will lead me, you know and that there's something out there and in here that will help me through and see me through this. And so having a sense of spirit has helped me a lot. And I've gotten it all on my own, with my mentors, who moved to California [crying] it really fucked me up for a while. I'm still in touch with them and I also know, I don't know if you want another fact, I also know that apparently have a um, I just told my therapist about this, I have a apparently a guardian that other people have seen.*

[67]

A guardian angel?

[With great trepidation] *Yeah, can you take it?*

[68]

I can take it.

*Um the other really like, it's like a lot of nightmares here, but there's been a lot of happiness in my life too. The last 12 years in some ways has really been great. I kind of created this home and um*

[69]

It's beautiful, lovely soft energy, like a cat.

*Well this angel, well so I had really close friend and mentor, after I got out of the hospital, I ended up getting this job in a cultural center for kids and I left theater and I was teaching kid acting and poetry and stuff. And he was the boss and he got me into therapy. He was bit older than me and um he dropped dead suddenly, and it was the week I was going to move to Philadelphia. And he had a 2½ year old little girl. And um he dropped dead at the tenth anniversary of this place. It was called \_\_\_\_\_ it was on Long Island, in Great Neck, and maybe you've heard of it. And um kids would go there, and the kids ran the place. Staff was just basically, not a whole lot older than them, and we would help them run things. And it was his idea and it was awesome and um the tenth anniversary every Memorial weekend, which is always the time of year I have a hard time and I never can figure it out until, like I've been sick for a week and physically and I said to Joanne, I said I have the runs, I'm bleeding really heavily, I don't feel well, and then I said, "Oh fuck, it's Memorial weekend," you know every year without a doubt. So um it was the tenth anniversary, and all these kids come back who are alumni, you know and they're in college and stuff and the kids at the place put on a show, I think they were doing Grease or something that night, and all the staff worked really hard and he had asked me to cover for him that day cause he was exhausted, and I said I can't. And I really took care of myself. And I said I cannot put another foot, I'm not even coming to the show that night. And I went to the picnic and the park and he went into work that night and he dropped dead. And um he got out on stage and announced the show and went back stage and dropped dead. And the maintenance guy saw him, and the kids called for help from the audience and this rich Jewish town, Great Neck, you know, a lot of doctors, nobody came forward, and a kid ended up doing CPR on him and um I hope that didn't sound racist, cause I didn't mean it to. Cause it made me so angry, I know a lot these people and I know there are a lot of doctors in the audience. And I hate my waspy family, anybody who acts like their stereotype is like dirt to me so. Um anyway, he dropped dead and I lost my mind. I was out of my mind. And I was going to move and then I couldn't move, cause the kids were losing Ed and then they were going to lose me, and so I decided I would move but I would stay...I would commute. And then I had to stay with Maggie, and her little girl. I stayed with them once a week. I*

*came up from Philly. Anyway I couldn't move, I was like immobilized unless I was with the kids at the center and dealing with the funeral and stuff. And so a friend of mine who is a psychologist came down from Stroudsburg to stay with me and help me pack, because I was sitting in all these boxes and I couldn't do anything. And that night, I slept in an old house in Seacliff, Long Island, and went to the little part of the house and my old roommate went to the other part of the house. And there was a closet between us. There were doors in the closet so you could come through. And in the middle of the night, we were asleep, my friend and I were sleeping on the mattress on the floor and she woke up and she thought Marie came through the door. And all of a sudden this woman came into this light--this woman is a psychologist and not very spiritual and um she said Marie and all the sudden, she sat up and she knew she was awake, and she sat up and you know she was pinching herself—and the woman was in full a American Indian garb, put her hand on me on the bed and said take care of her. And then backed off. And the next day, Roseanne told me about it. And um she was so blown away by it. And then a few years ago, I had an experience where--I mean I never did this before, it wasn't a dream--I went somewhere, I went to the coast of Massachusetts or somewhere in New England. I astral planed or whatever, traveled I mean it was clearly different than a dream, and I...there was a white house, an old white house, and I walked up to the second floor, I knew exactly where I was going and there she was, sitting in a chair, by a window, and there was no, there was no speaking, there was meant to be no speaking. And I just came over and I sat in a chair right across from her, and she communicated to me telepathically, and I remember feeling all of this longing and love for her and it felt completely, I felt without her touching me or saying anything, she just filled me. And she said to me in that way, she said to me you're going to be all right, and I felt, without ever even putting my hand out to hold her or anything, I felt I felt all right, I knew I would be all right. And I got up and I left and that was it. And that she was in full American Indian garb and she looked just like the description of you know. So...And so whenever I get on an airplane or have a really intense experience, I talk to her and I call upon her to help me instead of hurting myself. You know I call her my spirit mother. I really believe she's there you know so I feel a little better knowing that. Thank you so much for sharing that and for being so open and sharing so much yourself with me.*

**[70] Waiting**

*The landing  
at the top of the stairs,  
familiar, but cold.  
She is perched  
like a little bird  
waiting  
on the dark olive rug  
freshly vacuumed, but wearing thin.*

*She holds fast to the black wrought iron bars  
of the railing that spiral cold in her hands.  
She peers through them  
down  
into their bedroom  
where she sees her mother's face propped up  
on the pillow, silent, but not calm.*

*Even in sleep the lines are deep and painful.  
The skin around her eyes and brows is tightened  
as if hard in thought  
or just hard.*

*And her mouth, those thick lips open*

*open  
waiting  
for words  
or love  
to close them.*

*The little girl shivers,  
runs her fingers down the spiral.  
Sometimes,  
even the cold  
feels good.*

**[71] No place like home**

*When I was a boy  
she shaped me by cutting  
my hair twisted  
in her hand, long, dark, straight.  
Straight off onto the bathroom floor, followed  
by the drop, drop  
of a little girl's eyes,  
first one, then the other bouncing on the floor.  
No longer able to see straight,  
she relied on  
feeling.*

*Boy's trousers,  
ugly shoes,  
the policeman's yellow raincoat and hat  
drop, dropped off  
at the bus stop  
when I was a boy in the rain  
on the way to school.  
No lace ruffled sleeves.  
No frills, no pink,  
No eyes, just as well.  
When I was a boy  
I only heard them laughing.*

**[72] Dian**

*She said no.  
So I took most of myself  
and left.  
She stole the deepest part  
of my eyes,  
and though she has her own mouth now,  
it has echoed deeply  
in my own.  
Her hands and mine  
have held a story  
some words still*

*imprinted there.  
 Her hair has unwrapped  
 itself that sweet distance  
 around us.  
 It is free.  
 I am gone.  
 But somewhere  
 in a small, dark corner  
 of that injured heart  
 lies a part of mine—  
 It will not go  
 [despite the no.]  
 And sometimes  
 late in the night  
 I have heard it  
 calling all this way  
 home  
 when the crickets sleep.*

Leonie

*Is that a digital recorder?*

Yes.

*Cool.*

I can put the interview onto my computer.

*How many minutes can it record?*

[1]

I put a SmartCard and it gives me 12 hours. You know what this interview is about. What I'm interested in is your voice, your feelings. The first set of questions is about your coming out experience. So I'd like you to talk about when did it first occur to you that you were sexually attracted to women?

*Um...I guess I had my first crush on a girl when I was 13. Um but I didn't think anything of it, because I had read that Ann Landers column. The one where she says that it doesn't mean anything [laughing]. And um and then I was about 16 and I really loved the Indigo Girls, and I realized that I was obsessed with them, and I realized it was more than just a musical love that I had crushes on both of them and then I realized that maybe I was attracted to women and then I started realizing that I was. And so I declared myself bisexual, said I was bisexual and um and then more when I was like 22 decided I was a lesbian. But then if I look back into my early childhood, I see that I, you know, who would I play doctor with...I liked the girls more than the boys [laughing]. So if I look back...but I never thought about it.*

[2]

Have you thought about why you first declared yourself a bisexual?

*Um...cause at first it was like, this is something that I want to explore and I don't know, and I need to experiment with women and see if I like it. And then, also when I was 17, there was a boy, and he became my boyfriend and I liked him and so. But we had a non-monogamous relationship and it was like, "I need to stay open to women." And I did like him, I loved him, but I don't know if I was really in love with him.*

[3]

What was your first sexual encounter like?

*Um I mean there is when like I was 4 or when I was when I was actually a teenager, or there's...*

[4]

All of the above.

*I mean, I had this girl, we would make out when we were six, and it was very sexual, I mean it was great. Like we would reenact these movie scenes and it was very sexual. So I look back on that and I say oh that's interesting. I had a boy who I played doctor with, but I didn't like it all. It's just that he had gum, and I wanted his gum, and I wasn't allowed sugar gum, and I remember I had no feeling for him, but I just liked his toys, trucks. So that was a sexual experience. But then it was like I was abused sexually, or do you want to talk about that now or...*

[5]

However you feel.

*Well we might as well talk about the whole thing and go chronologically. Um, um so I mean I had a baby sitter when I was 4 and yelled at me actually told me I was a lesbian. I mean and he was the one who started molesting me when I was, I don't know how old 4, but I think it didn't end until I was 8, because that's when I told my family about it. And so he would molest me. Um he would lie on top of me and he was trying to get...do something with my vagina, I don't know [laughing]. It was just like I was like you know not letting him there. And he was just he would be on top of me. He would baby sit and every time he came over he would do this just lay on top of me and touch me all over, and things like that. I only remember the last time, and I remember, I remember saying when I was 8, this has been going on for years, but I don't remember any of the other times, except I remember, I think the first time which is when he yelled at me and told me I was a lesbian, and locked...went into another room with my older brother. My brother was there all the time...went in a room with him and then locked me out. And I was alone and being yelled at. So I remember that. And then I don't remember anything in between but I remember remembering that there was. And it was...it was like I just hated it, and it was gross. And I remember hating him as a baby sitter and always telling my parents I don't want him to baby sit. But he was very close friends with my brother. And he was kind of young. My brother's four years older and he was just a couple of years older than my brother. And um I remember the last time because I yelled for my brother to come. Like I was screaming. And then...and my brother came and he yelled at me, he just screamed at me and told me I was lying, like right there, he just yelled. But then I told my stepmother and she believed me and then it was horrible because um they...my dad got like the mother who had been the housekeeper, they used to live with us, and um she came and then she denied the whole thing and yelled at me and told me I was trying to kill him because he had this rare disease and that and I was eight years old, and I had to demonstrate what he had done with my doll, which to me was like the worst thing ever. And there was a police officer there too. Not that they were filing anything, but just that he was a friend of my dad's. And she just yelled at me, and she had been my housekeeper too. So everyone but my...my parents believed me. Um and but then when I was about...ok so then...then I...I mean I started...I don't know what order things happened in but my dad started becoming very like inappropriate sexually with me when I was I don't know eleven or twelve, or something. He started um there was hardly ever any inappropriate touch although there was a little bit. It was more comments, things he would say about my body, and the ways he would tell me about his sex life and things like that, so that started. I became sexually active right around that time, very quickly. And I had like I mean I was making out with boys when I was twelve. I mean I was really into boys. I was very boy crazy. And I started I had a boyfriend when I was 13 and I started having sex when I was 13. That relationship was actually very positive though I mean it was enjoyable, I mean and um yeah, I mean there was a lot of...*

[6]

What did your parents think of your sexual relationship with this boy?

*They never talked to me about it. But it's funny because I told my mom when I was 16 or 17 and she said oh I knew. She never said anything to me about it. That's very strange. Oh, my brother too started he would come into my room and lay on top of me and he would have a hard on when I was I don't know how old like 11 or something like that. So I was getting it everywhere [laughing].*

[7]

It almost sounds as if you were free game for everyone.

*Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. It was just sort of like there were no boundaries in my family so yeah.*

[8]

Do you think that the sitter abused him?

*Oh I don't think so. No, I think...I think...unless my brother blocked it out, he would have said something like later to me about it. No, no I don't think so. I think my brother got his behavior, he mirrored it from my dad. He learned it from my dad, he you know. And I think there was so much craziness in our childhood cause we also had this stepfather who used to beat us up physically. So I think there was just so much abuse. We were both experiencing that. I think my brother he was like lonely and didn't know how to have boundaries, you know. Yeah [laugh]. Yeah.*

[9]

Talk more about the physical abuse.

*Sure, yeah, when I was 6 years old, my mom had a boyfriend and he lived with us for a year and he beat her a lot um I only remember listening and hearing it once. And I kind of don't have an awareness of it, but she told me that he did I remember he beat me once, only once. He actually threw me across the floor and I had bruises all over my back. It was really intense, I'm not sure, I don't know whether he beat my brother or not. But I think he did beat him a lot and there are like discrepancies of memories of my family, people who can remember that.*

[10]

How long did that go on?

*They broke up. She left him But I mean there were other strange things that happened like my brother stole something when he was 12 and all my parents got together, they were divorced when I was 5, they all went in a room and whipped him with a belt as punishment. And he wanted to kill himself right afterward. These things went on that was like still to this day my mom says, that wasn't abuse, that was just punishment [laugh].*

[11]

Again the boundaries

*Yeah, and my mom has a very harsh edge. She would slap me across the face and so it's like what is that, I don't know, but it's pretty mean to do, pretty harsh, yeah.*

[12]

Were you abused in other relationships?

*No um I mean my boyfriend when I was 13 was great. The only thing was he was a drug addict [laugh]. But like I was doing a lot of drugs too. But he was very sweet and um then I stopped doing drugs when I was about 15 and I went to therapy.*

[13]

How did you get into therapy?

*Um and, my mom started going to therapy and about 2 years before that she got breast cancer and realized that she was a mess. And decided to go to therapy and then she asked me if I wanted to go and I desperately, secretly wanted to go for years. Yeah, I mean I started doing pot when I was 12 and getting drunk. And I was really wild, I got suspended from school lighting fires in my desk, some wild stuff, I was pretty wild.*

[14]

Did you self-injure, or were you bulimic or anorexic?

*No I never did that? A little obsessed a little bit about my weight [laughing]. So I have, so I didn't actually have sex with a boy until a lot later. And I had a boyfriend, but when I had a boyfriend I was 16 and I was going to therapy and we just we didn't go that far and um and that was when I was 16 and I didn't until I was 17 and I was sexual with him, but then I went to college and you know I was dating girls too, but I've never had an abusive relationship that I've chosen. I had a girlfriend, I was sort of her girlfriend for a few months but she was really like not treating me well. Well she left me.*

[15]

Lucky you.

*Yeah, I guess I hopefully would have figured it out.*

[16]

Tell me now about your first sexual encounter with a woman.

*That was in College and well, besides my girlfriend when I was six [laughing] um um um a woman, yeah we just it was actually with a bunch of friends and we were all playing spin the bottle and we were kissing each other, and a little bit drunk and it was fun and I ended up making out with this one friend of mine and it was a lot of fun.*

[17]

When did you first have sex with a woman?

*I was 20 years old and she was older, she was 27 and um you know, it was nice [laughing]. I...I it was sort of a one night stand I guess. I met her, I knew her through friends of mine, saw met her in a bar and then went home with her. I guess I wanted more from her, but she didn't want more.*

[18]

What I'm hearing is that it was a natural process for you following a path of exploring your sexuality, seeing what you like, and then...

*In terms of becoming a lesbian?*

[19]

In terms of finding your identity, including sexual preferences, or what excites you.

*Yeah sure, sometimes I'm like if I think about it I'm turned on by S&M, I tried it with my boyfriend, a little bit, a tiny bit of it, and he didn't like it. And then ever since then I don't like it. I don't like to read about it. It just reminds me about being abused. I don't quite understand it. Sometimes I understand it as a fantasy, but then to even actually do it...like it would be very confusing and it would bring up all these feelings.*

[20]

Do you remember a time that you didn't want to disclose to people your sexual identity or keep your sexual preference hidden from anybody?

*As a lesbian? All the time. I teach in the public schools and um yeah. I don't feel like I can come out there. I'm a contract worker so I don't have steady work and I'm very easily fireable. And it's happened before, and it can happen like that. And I'm an outsider in their environment. I just go once a week for a certain amount of weeks. And um people can be very suspicious of outsiders, plus my hair is red and spiky so [laugh]. I teach music and that's different and scary for a lot of teachers to do the arts and play art games. So I um I really wish I could come out there, but I can't. I don't feel like I can.*

[21]

What was it like for you when you first came out to your family?

*My dad was very supportive because he came out as gay a couple of years after that. And he apparently had been a practicing bisexual the whole time I was alive, and had been cheating on all the women he was with. My mom said she guessed it and um said that um it's not what she wished, but she supports me and loves and it doesn't matter and now she's gotten over it and so it's cool.*

[22]

Did you have any trouble in coming out to friends?

*Well I've had trouble in terms of I think I experienced a lot of harassment being a lesbian like um well one instance is that I was in a theater company and I was the only lesbian there, in the company, I mean I was the first lesbian they'd ever met and um you know there was just two guys in particular who couldn't let it up and had to make a lot of comments. And one guy who actually harassed me continually. And um would touch me, touch my breasts back stage and would just make really inappropriate comments and just one day just freaked out and yelled at me, which is very abusive. And I really think it had something to do with being a lesbian. It's not something you can pinpoint, and like prove. But I think the fact that I'm a lesbian made them want to target me and I just feel that happens all the time. Like I get harassed all the time so, um I...you know I just think...you know its' just weird, men relate to you differently, they just...just...either they think you're another guy and they can just crack these things about women in front of you, you know. Or they're trying to get you in bed because they think that you know a lot of men are very weird around you. They're threatened so I feel that that's harassment. I just I just think I mean subtle things, like this one teaching job I did, I went and did a great job and I mean the parents, everyone loved*

*me there and it was a perfect placement. There were no problems and in the end they wouldn't rehire and my supervisor kept asking why and, "Nothing specific, they said well she's weird." And can you specific, no, there's something weird about her. Well I think that's because I'm gay and have spiky hair and I feel different. I mean what does that mean? I mean there was nothing specific. I yet they have the power to hire me and there is nothing I can do because I'm a contract worker. And that kind of thing really happens all the time. Schools can be very conservative places.*

[23]

Tell me about some of the activities you're involved with in the community.

*Well, I'm a performer so I mainly perform to gay people [laugh]. That's my niche audience. So I travel across the country performing to gays to lesbians, gay people. So that's my main involvement. I can't think of anything else I do.*

[24]

In traveling around the country and going to all those small towns, are there differences in the way you feel about how people treat you, as a lesbian woman?

*Yeah, yeah cause sometimes I book a show, and it's not, I'm trying to focus on gay venues, but sometimes you really need to fill a date, and just take what you can get. And you realize you're playing a sports bar. I've been kicked out of sports bars in the middle of my set. The owner told me to leave because my lyrics have swear words in them and um we talk about 9/11, we talk about abuse, we talk about other things and I've been literally kicked out. In one place, there was a wedding party and I was too dark even though I have a lot of humor in my material, a lot of silliness um and another place they just kicked me out. I don't know why. So I've had that. I've had I don't know, I mean, I guess it's on the edge of safety. It's sort of on the edge.*

[25]

Where are you from?

*I'm from Canada, so I went to Concordia University in Montreal. And I grew up in Toronto.*

[26]

Can you describe how you see your day-to-day life as a lesbian woman living in a predominantly straight world?

*Sure. Um I don't know I mean there are a few ways of looking at it. Um well this is harassment again [laughing] I mean just walking down the street again, in this neighborhood especially, people calling out and commenting on my hair and things like that. You know, I get that daily. Um Other than that, I don't know, I mean there's wonderful things about it too. I do feel like I have a community, and as a musician that's a great thing to have a community to support my music, a poor community, but [laugh]. I think it's also a neat place to be. I mean I think it's sort of the time of the gay people. There's sort of a revolution happening. So I think that's exciting in some ways its chic...in some ways its chic and some ways your still getting harassed. I mean it's like kind of like it's cool to be black, black people are cool, wow do jazz and hip-hop, but they're still oppressed. You what I mean, both of that, but at the same time its fun to feel cool [laughing], and feel like you have a voice that's being listened to right now. And I think especially lesbians are writers right now. There are so many lesbian writers and I think there's basically a lesbian cannon exploding of writers. I mean cause you go to any lesbian open mike and there are brilliant writers there. And I think there's a whole thing going on that I don't think people know about, or recognize because you don't normally recognize minorities.*

[27]

But as you say, the chic aspect shows how it has mainstreamed.

*Yeah, I hope so, like black jazz, like jazz did, but I really feel like there's a renaissance of lesbian writers right now. So I hope it will carry over. So I think it's exciting to be part of that. It gives you a purpose [laugh].*

[28]

Talk a bit about how your family communicated, what were the dynamics between your mom and stepdad, for example, or you and your brother.

*How did everybody communicate? Well they divorced when I was five, and lived in 2 homes and I switched back and forth for ten years. They actually, I mean, my mom and my dad communicated a lot about keeping the same rules things like that, with each other. My brother and I...I think were more each other's family because we were together going back and forth so we grew up together, more than we grew up with either our mom or dad. So we understood each other more than anyone else in the world. So we, well we went through many different phases, like hating each other, but mostly we were very intimate. And um we could talk about many things, but unfortunately it became too intimate. Right. So um I don't see him or my dad anymore, so there's no communication there for me.*

[29]

Is that painful for you?

*Um, they're still inappropriate, so it's a matter of safety. My brother touched me on my thigh, touch and he doesn't have good boundaries. He's been a pothead since he's 17 and he's 33 now so it's like he's not developed psychologically. He hasn't grown out of it. So I have no, I don't see them at all. My mom and I have an interesting relationship. It's very complicated [laughing]. Cause she's still denies a lot of things. But yet, she's a therapist and she a very open kind of person, so in some ways we talk about everything and in some ways I hold back a lot from her. And in some ways...and there's certain topics we decided not to talk about, except every few years have a big upsetting conversation about it. So um as a kid growing up, I don't know, so that's how it is. So in some ways we are remarkably close, the things I say to my mom people would think wow, and in some ways I hold back a lot, to protect myself from her denial and judging. Like she says that um you know I have to take responsibility for my role in what my brother did to me and that um you know it wasn't abuse and things like that so [laughing].*

[30]

What is your religious and ethnic background?

*Um my mom was her she comes from Pennsylvania Dutch country. And so actually its' Mennonite, German, um a couple of generations back, they were Amish. And now they're fundamental Christian, and my mom married my Dad who is Jewish from Chicago, Jewish, very suburban, Midwestern, American Jew.*

[31]

And your step-dad?

*Well he's not there. Oh now I have a new step-dad, not the old one who beat us, he left. But I do have step dad now, he's Finnish from Canada, half Finnish--half Scottish. And my dad's German background, German Jewish, but no one was in the Holocaust that I know of.*

[32]

Do you think that cultural German-Jewish piece of being compulsive had any part?

*My mom is German too, the Mennonite, its all German, I mean she's totally anal, a totally compulsive cleaner, like that, and with my dad it's more that he has a short temp...fuse. Not so much that he's obsessive, but that he is totally controlling. He has a problem with anger, yelling, he never hit us, I mean except for spankings. But yelled, he had a temper. Apparently a lot of the world thinks spanking is abusive, but...I'd rather not do that to my kids.*

[33]

Are there things that you told yourself about your abuse, like it's my fault, or not my fault?

*Yeah, I still struggle with that all the time, especially with my mom telling me that it's my fault [laughing]. That I have responsibility, however she would word it, with her, you know, it makes...it makes me feel that I'm exaggerating it and what happened really wasn't abusive, and I mean cause that's what my mom would tell me.*

[34]

And that makes you...

*It makes me get obsessed with images of me hurting myself, I've never done it, and I don't think I ever will, but I get completely obsessed like a broken record or a movie of slitting my wrists. And that's why I stopped seeing my brother because just being with him made me completely overwhelmed with feelings of*

wanting to hurt myself, because his boundaries are still not good. And so I couldn't take it. And then to have the whole denial part in it just made me feel like I was crazy, so I might as well hurt myself.

[35]

When you spoke to your therapist, you talked about your abuse?

Yeah.

[36]

Did you talk about other things?

Yeah, I was in a relationship with a woman for um two years, I just broke up like a month and a half ago and so I just spent a lot of time dealing with, when I was in the relationship I spent a lot of time processing things that were happening in the relationship. And um you know we talk about the teaching world that I'm in because it's completely stressful, we talk about my music career, um we talk about everything, but I mean you know, I mean I get a lot of um I don't know, like yeah, but abuse is part of all of it. Abuse weaves into everything so it's kind of like

[37]

So you get a lot of affirmation from her that...

I get a huge amount from her [tears begin to well up and she starts to cry]. It's just I'm talking about everything all at once to a stranger.

[38]

Do you want some water? [indicates that she does not]

Yeah, um yeah I get a huge amount [of affirmation] because um now I'm getting it from my mom and she's my only family and it's really hard.

[39]

What were you like as a school child?

I was really good. I got good grades, ultra, except for as an experiment when I was doing drugs, I decided to get bad grades as an experiment [laughing] yeah, just in one class I decided to not do well, and I got a D, and I thought that was fun, and then I started doing well again.

[40]

So the experiment worked?

Yeah [laughing]. But no I always got good grades. I just talked a lot. I got into trouble in terms of behavior but yet I charmed all my teachers so they liked me but struggled with me.

[41]

What do you do to reduce your stress?

I don't know [laughing]. I guess like after a show I perform, I'll hang out with the people afterwards, socialize. I'll call up some friends on the phone.

[42]

Is your music helpful to relieve stress?

Oh yeah, performing, when I'm on stage it's a pick-me-up, I can ride for days after a good show, feeling really happy. Yeah.

[43]

And what about writing lyrics?

No, it's very stressful [laughing]. Yeah, but oh that's not true actually something I do to relieve stress like if I'm totally freaking out I will just make up a song really quickly like, I mean never finish the songs that I make up really quickly, finishing songs is really stressful, it's labor intensive. But I will just quickly express myself in like eight bars and then I feel completely better. Like if I can't sleep, and I'm about...like if I'm crawling the walls or I'm going to scream or hurt myself I'll just I'll write about it and I'll play the piano and I'll create and express myself and then I will be completely mellow afterwards.

[44]

That's a gift for you.

Yeah, it's a gift for me. I think it's the only way, I think it's how I survived everything, because I'm in the arts my entire life. My mom plays piano and sings beautifully. No one is professional in my family but she's an amaze...all the women in my family are great musicians, beautiful singers, play piano and guitar

*and um and actually my grandfather was a visual artist on my dad's side. Not professionally, but he was good.*

[45]

Looking back, do you think that your abuse affected the way you relate to people?

*Um, yeah I guess so. Um one of them is that I really like I'm very careful about who I let into my life. I'm very careful. And I would much rather have no one than have people who are going to put me down in any way, even though it's very subtle. So I'm very sensitive and I really can't stand, I can't tolerate, like anybody mistreating me for a second, and I don't want them in my life. So I have like a very, I'm very sensitive. And um so that's one thing. I don't know, I think it's also a gift, in that I can identify abusers or creepy people very quickly like in a minute [laughing] no but pretty quickly. Um yeah, I um um I don't know I mean I'm struggling a lot with I kind of feel like, I mean my mom tells me that I don't relate to people well. That I expect too much of them, but then my therapist says that um that my mom expects too little from people and [laugh], but I don't know, I get, maybe sometimes I lose my temper with people like if they're mistreating me. It's not that I will be mean to them, but I will tell them exactly how I feel. I'll say what I, like I'll say you're doing this and maybe sometimes I'm not supposed to do that, I'm not sure, I'm trying to figure that out now. Well like I mean if I'm at a school and the teachers are being completely inappropriate, like I'm teaching and they are um undermining me in front of the students, and I probably should just ignore them, I'll kind of like let them have it. Like I'll just say you shouldn't be doing this right now, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I really you know get really upset about it, and probably if...probably because I just get really upset if I'm being attacked in any way. It's like hard for me to handle and it's probably related to my abuse, I'm sure. But then I don't know. I'm trying to figure out what I'm supposed to do. Maybe it's ok to yell at them [laugh] maybe it's appropriate, I don't know, but I think it might get me in trouble with, like at work like with my supervisor. Like I have no fear of authority like I just but that's something separate that my parents... My dad's kind of cocky that way and I just have no fear of them, no matter who it is, if I feel they're doing something wrong to me I will tell it and express it and it then I think that makes them not want to hire me [laugh]. I have a hard time like, and I just feel like I don't know, I'm not sure it seems like most people in this society put up with a lot of stuff, and um I can't do that and I feel like it gets me into trouble, with getting hired and stuff [laughing]. You know, and I'm not sure if I'm supposed to just deal with it differently or what, I don't know, but then that's the line. When do I want to work somewhere or do I have to put up with it. I don't know.*

[46]

So that's something you want to figure out.

*But ultimately I don't want to be teaching anyways. In the music world you can totally be moody, so it doesn't matter [laughing] so you can totally do that. I mean artists are like that [laughing]. So I want to be just an artist. In the educational world, I don't fit it, so, but I'm a great art teacher.*

[47]

Do you feel most comfortable among lesbians?

*Yeah. I really...like when guys touch me it really freaks me out and I don't know how to deal with it. My friends say you should say something to them, but I mean it just feels like it's so awkward, and I just like um every time a man touches me, I just really freak out. And I just don't trust and I'm just like in order for me to have a good friend that's a guy we would have to actually have to have a relationship and he would have to like know to sort of like probably ask permission before he touches me you know. But most of society doesn't work that way. So I find it very um very, very stressful actually. To be with men because I just feel like they touch me or sometimes ask me questions. Like if they're straight like, "What's it like to be lesbian?" or things like that. And I just I don't know I just it's hard.*

[48]

So you feel most comfortable with women?

*With women, yeah; and most relaxed, and at ease, and most myself with women. And straight women I'm very comfortable with, as long as they're comfortable with me being a lesbian. Except, except sometimes I feel like they can flirt and [laugh] and it's confusing. And whereas a lesbian who is your friend, if your just friends who knows how to have boundaries, maybe, although still it gets confusing at times, but you*

*know it's very confusing. It depends, some straight women sometimes don't know. They just want to treat you like another straight woman but it's confusing when they're taking their shirt off in front of you and like [laughing] ok don't do that to me its really confusing. I know you're straight so I keep telling myself that, but my eyes see your naked breasts and I don't want to see that because it's just like I thought we were supposed to be, it's hard. You know what I mean? [laughing] But at the same time it can be hard to be friends with lesbians because you're **both** lesbians and so you kind of think is this person interested in me? You kind of think is this person interested in me and sexually can run into any relationship. Straight guys too. So I guess it's like that everywhere. But I'm most comfortable around women. That's not true. Sometimes I really enjoy hanging out with guys. For like one night [laughing]. It's totally different and sometimes its fun to be the only lesbian in a group of guys or like straight people, women too. Sometimes I find that refreshing.*

[49]

Do you ever make any connections either emotional or cognitive about between your abuse and your sexual orientation?

*I don't know, I mean, the only thing that happened, well when I first came out, I struggled for a lot of years and I thought am I just gay because I was abused by men, you know and I just struggled with that for a long time and I feel like that's sort of something I struggled around. I struggled with that and I kind of wanted to be queer but I thought is this just because I was abused by men. So it felt like really difficult for me to feel at peace with it. Because I thought...then my friends stop worrying about. So I just stopped one day, and I realized that there's a lot of straight girls that I know who have been abused by men and um yeah.*

[50]

But at one point it crossed your mind, and then you dealt with it and put it to rest.

*Oh yeah, yeah. I struggled with it for a couple of years. Really I kind of always thought...though about it and felt real bad.*

[51]

Did you ever think that if maybe you weren't a lesbian, you wouldn't have been molested?

*I think that's true with my dad and my brother.*

[52]

Is that what they think?

*Yeah and with that guy in the theater company.*

[53]

If one makes a connection between abuse and sexuality, can one then make the connection between sexuality and abuse? I am a lesbian, therefore I was abused.

*Right, and I don't know, that guy who called me a lesbian, maybe he picked up on something, but at the same time he probably [] straight, I'm sure.*

[54]

Is there anything that you might want to add or talk about?

*Well I was just thinking, you didn't ask about how it plays into my life like with my sexual partners because it's really big like um it's just really intense because um I was just in a relationship for along time and it was just, I mean I just needed to talk about it a lot and sometimes stop having sex because I was feeling threatened and that it was just um it took a long time to build up trust with her. And yeah I just think that's important.*

[55]

That's an important piece for you.

*Yeah, yeah, cause I don't feel like I can just have a one night stand with someone. I mean I could if I wanted to but I feel like I would be shutting down a part of me that needs to trust somebody first and um and it's just a big, it feels like an issue like when I'm dating people, I think like who's big enough to like be able to process this with me. Because if I'm going to be sexual with them, there needs to be an open dialogue.*

[56]

I think that's a good way to look at things.

[She begins crying] *I'm crying right now [laughing]. I'm talking about relationships and I probably won't date again. I just like going out there and dating again is so hard...who's big enough [laughing at herself], who can I trust, who has their shit together and... [drying her tears] and then its just a very new, new break-up. I'll find someone, that is like I need to find someone who's open as well who can handle it, some people are uncomfortable being vulnerable.*

[57]

Was your partner also sexually abused?

*Yeah, I think all my friends were um I don't know about...I don't know about the boyfriend when I was 16, or the boyfriend when I was 13 we didn't talk about it, but when I was 17, he had been sexually abused and that's a big reason why we had such a great relationship. Because, we had both have this, so we could have a dialogue. I don't know about that one who neglected me, you know but she obviously had many issues, I 'm sure she was abused. Her mom was an alcoholic so she had her own issues. But um my past girlfriend had you know, she had been abused. But in different ways and kind of had that thing where she felt she liked it. But I don't know I kind of...I'm kind of suspicious about that because I think maybe she liked some things about it but still it wasn't right. It still must have taught her some bad things too. Um and she was abused in other ways, molested when she was young. And her stepfather sexually abused her sister too. She lives with it, but she doesn't deal with it that's the problem. She sort of does half the time denies it.*

[58]

Can you think of anything else you would like to add?

*No just about how it's like every day in that in relationships it comes up a lot. Oh just I was talking about especially in a relationship it comes up a lot and its just hard to know in terms of how it comes up in your other relationships, its really hard to know when it's something coming up from your past, or whether because of your past you are particularly smart about something you know what I mean, whether you're right on about something or let it slide, or they're I mean its just like very hard to know because in the end you just are who you are so...*

[59]

How old are you?

*I'm turning 28 in a couple of weeks.*

[60]

Thank you very much for your time and good luck with your upcoming tour.

*You're welcome. I hope that it helps lots of people. A study like this is important like answering questions yes or no like asking some one did you ever hurt yourself, and I would say no, but then they wouldn't know I am a obsessive about it. Right and that would go undocumented and that's I think interesting. Right and human's are so much more complicated.*

Certainly for a researcher that is important because we deal with individual who are very different from one another, even though they may have certain things in common.

Thank you again for being so frank and expressing yourself so openly.

**[61] Merry Go Round Up and Down**

*Little lace girl*

*Never stop to let the dirty men*

*Touch you where you don't want*

*Stay on the Merry Go*

*Round and Round and Round and*

*Round and Round and Round*

*Listen to my voice*

*it'll soothe your fear*

*Can I ride on a horse  
that goes up and down*

*On the Merry-Go-Up  
and Down and Up and  
Down and Up and Down*

*Yes the shadows came in  
and the ceiling came down  
like a body pressing down  
Oh my baby baby  
Round and Down, Whirl and Twirl,  
Whiz and Squiz, Round and Down*

*I wish I could go back  
I wish I could stop that  
Give him a good kick  
and run away*

*Listen to my voice  
it'll soothe your hurt  
Can I ride on a horse  
that goes up and down*

*Yes the stem was broken  
But it's healed so well  
with the sun shining down  
and the roots so firm*

*I'm thanking the sun  
and I'm thanking the earth  
and I'm riding on a horse  
that goes up and down  
On the Merry Go Up  
and Down and Up and  
Down and Up and Down*

**[62] *Ballad of Chicken Shower***

*Water pounds with fury  
Heat rises thick and warm  
Washed my hair 2 or 3 times- can't keep track  
'Cause steam can't soothe this inner storm*

*You lie on bed blue soft  
Thoughts in sweet fantasy  
Comfy grey sweatshirt caresses your skin  
You breathe in time and wait for me*

*I'm a wrinkled chicken  
O.K. this is my cue*

*Cannot bring myself out of this shower  
I'm a nervous wreck think'n 'bout you*

*Finally, by dawn's light  
Hands find hands; lips brush cheek  
A soft drunken blur of sweet caresses  
This is the love that we all seek*

*Morning brings fuzzy light  
Orange juice & champagne  
We giggle as we fumble into clothes,  
Float out the door and to the train*

*Strangers brush by in blurs  
It's time to part my dear  
I lean in, in a daze, to kiss you deep  
Your face contorts in desperate fear*

*"Not here! Not in public!"  
Your mouth twists with disgust  
"This kind of love's for the bedroom only,  
Besides it's only childish lust."*

*But I would kiss you anywhere  
the street, the bus  
or in Times Square*

*I'd hold you tight  
in naked light  
I'd never hide  
I'd shout with pride*

*This is who I am  
you are who I love  
Any snicker or stare  
We can rise above*

*But your smile has soured  
your brow is tight and creased  
your chin turns hard, my senses jarred  
your eyes reveal our love's deceased.*

**[63] How can I sleep**

*How can I sleep  
With war raging in my bones?  
Images crawl and creep,  
My bed is full of sticks and stones.  
Mangled, twisted, gnawed,  
Muscles clenched and clawed.  
Screaming bleeding scratched,*

*My wrists my limbs detached.*

*I remember war.  
A child of 6 can learn to fear.  
Bruises down my back,  
You learn to curse your falling tear.  
He whacked me 'cross the room.  
He taught me terror and doom.  
He'd come in my bed at night  
And murder my innocent light.*

*And now I lie awake,  
Knowing I'm not safe once more.  
Afraid this time I'll break,  
My nerves can't take another war.  
Hollow black rimmed eyes,  
Waiting for nuclear skies.  
Sores that will not heal,  
Movement slow surreal.*

*When will I weep?  
My eyes are burning buzzing dry.  
Horror woven deep,  
My heart a manic lullaby.  
My breath is shallow fast,  
Threatening collapse.  
Twisting in my sheets,  
My heart still mockingly beats.*

### Harriet

I arrived at the appointment and Harriet's social worker was there. I left for about an hour and returned. At that point, I was unable to get one of my recorders working and so my apologies were mixed with some conversation about that and other things.

[1]

How often does your caseworker come?

*We had to come up with a plan, and um mostly just make sure that everything is coordinated. I see a therapist and a psychiatrist um if you know if I have any problems.*

[2]

Are you on medication?

*Depacote and...*

[3]

Does it work for you?

*Oh it helps a lot. Well I took um...I took antidepressants for ten years and they were **wrong**. You know they were the wrong things for me to be taking. And then once I started taking...I tried lithium but it wasn't so great and um...but the Depacote is good.*

[4]

You have bipolar disorder?

*Yeah. And um now I have to see a...I might have some kind of hormonal stuff going on too.*

[5]

The first set of questions is about coming out. I would like you to talk about when the possibility first occurred to you that you might have same-sex attractions.

*I think I first, maybe about 14, um I think younger than that, maybe ten or so but I didn't really formulate it as sexual, because I always had female well friends, so. It was...it was somewhere around there.*

[6]

When did you first start dating or having sex with women?

*Well actually, I...I..hmm [pause] when I was in my early twenties, I had, I had a roommate when I was um nineteen, but who was actually...actually heterosexual. Um I had a couple of crushes on women when I was nineteen or 20, and I went out with a women when I was about 23 who claimed she was bisexual, and slept with her. And then when I was 25 I had uh started a lesbian relationship.*

[7]

Can you recall any feelings you had about that experience?

*Mostly um curiosity um I wanted to know what it felt like, cause I had dated men and um and I...I had one significant sexual relationship with a man, but I didn't, it was more sort of succumbing to pressure. And I think by the time I started a lesbian relationship, the woman I was attracted to was definitely you know, overtly lesbian. She, she approached me and um I sort of looked the part. I was very frustrated by this time. I was just like I was waiting too long, and so I actually just wanted to know what it was like.*

[8]

And what was it like for you?

*It was very pleasant [laughing out loud]. [pause] Um she paid a lot of attention to me and um that was something that was different from...from former relationships. Where I sort of...they were non-monogamous, or I was...I had a relationship with a man who...who was going out with other women. New Year's Eve would roll around and I would find out he had a date with someone else and that sort of thing. And you know, she paid a lot of attention to me and um it was actually quite a while before actually we had sex. I mean I know when I initially met I mean her we kissed but then um it was like about 6 months before I slept with her.*

[9]

Why was that?

*Um actually, we were physically, geographically separated, was one thing and um [pause] it would have been sort of [pause] I'm trying to think when...[pause] a lot of, I think a lot of it was that was setting, time and place where it would be comfortable because there was um a child involved. Family...liker her...when we met...basically what happened was when we met we were going to immediately move in together, and then it...it didn't turn out that way. I moved to another place. Um she...she had her child reenter her life. Um and then she had to...then she settled down. Um I don't know, there was issues about privacy, um...*

[10]

Did she want to keep her lesbianism away from her child?

*I don't know if it was her child so much as the rest of her family.*

[11]

So she was closeted.

*In a very awkward kind of way, because she had been, yeah, I think she was in and out a lot because her family is um...is Irish and her mother is a very devout Catholic, and believes that...is...was trying to set her up with a man all the time. And I think it was like she had experienced a lot of rejection from her family. Um so in a way she was closeted, in way, and then on the other hand, she had been living a very out lifestyle, away from her family, you know, within a community.*

[12]

At the time, were you out?

*Um [pause] I had been trying to come out. Um I had told my brother when I was 20 that I had these feelings and several of my friends were not surprised, um you know, long time childhood friends. My brother told me not to tell my parents.*

[13]

How did that make you feel?

*On one hand I felt angry about it, on the other hand, coming from my brother, I was not surprised. Um he's very, almost protective of my parents. I mean, you know, he's told me that I've done terrible things to my parents, you know by the way I've...I've...I've lived my life you know. So um, I think I took it as **he** didn't want to deal with it. And there was always this sort of overhanging feeling of "Oh God, what's she doing now?" You know, maybe this is something that'll pass. So I always took as what was going on outside of me. Um but it was invalidating, you know, it...it...it made me feel like, oh well, maybe I am just being you know silly or something. But I think it also increased my frustration level because I had...I had been conscious of the feelings for a long time, but then things happened in my life like we moved several times when I was in junior high and high school age and um...and I changed schools a lot. And even when I got to university age I changed schools a lot. And it just became like socially [pause] very, very difficult. Like I wanted to sort of get on this path of being normal, being 14 and growing up and it just seemed like I kept having these things coming in the way. And then I think that's what made me sort of succumb more to...to the role of being normal. You know, it was kind of a way of fitting in, because that's what you were supposed to do. [Inhale] so I was actually at a...at a very bad point in my life, a very low point in my life when I met my first girlfriend. And by that point, there was almost this thing in me that said, oh what the hell, what do I have to lose? [Laughter]*

[14]

You just wanted to get on that path and hadn't been able to. I'd like you to talk a about your family, as you were growing up. What was it like in your family, the interactions between family members?  
*Well, I did have a nuclear family. My um my parent...my...my parents actually emigrated from England in 1967. Um and brought my brother and sister with them and um, my father was a...trained as a chemist, he worked as an engineer, um so he made a good living. My mother worked...she started working part time when I was about 9. Um...she worked in a...as a...as a costumer at a theater which, children's theater, which she really didn't get paid very much for... it was almost volunteer, she sort of got a stipend. Well, she got me involved in that. And she also worked as a florist and eventually became a designer over the years.*

[15]

And you had siblings.

*I had one brother and one sister who were...my brother is 8 years older than me and my sister was 6 years older than me.*

[16]

What kind of relationships did you have with them?

*Well it was like...it was almost like having another set of parents. I got a lot of baby-sitting. I was very definitely the baby. My brother has always been kind of detached in a way. Um I don't know how you'd say this, extremely independent, he stayed to himself a lot. My sister and I were extremely close, emotionally. I...I...I felt pretty protective of my sister, um my brother and I you know, sometimes played around, but his whole sort of philosophy of life was just ignore it, don't worry [laughing].*

[17]

Ignore...?

*Well, there were...there was a period of time my parents had [breath] had tension when like I was ten to about the time I was about 15 that they sort of played with being divorced. Especially, I remember when I was 13 my mother told me she was definitely going to, and that she wasn't even going to try to get custody of me. That she sort of assumed that he was going to get it. Um and I was extremely upset, I told my bother and sister about it, and my brother's reaction was basically to ignore her. Um...I guess he thought you know she'd never go through with it or she was being dramatic. I guess he saw it maybe from his older point of view. I...In this...I guess in a sense what I always did was, I was very good at school. And I just worked on that. I guess I figured that was the way out. But I also um...I kind of felt I needed to take care of my mother, emotionally. I did a lot of counseling type behaviors with her, you know. She went through a shopping period [laughing] she was a big shopper. When I was in junior high school, we used*

*to go shopping three times a week, like after school. So it was, um I...I...you know I spent a lot of time with her, doing things with her. And then with my dad also...my dad's very quiet, he's um very reserved. He doesn't really discuss anything very much, um politics, religion, his feelings. Um and he would go away on...on business. And um it was usually me that I spent a lot of time like kind of being her friend type of thing. Well, my sister and she actually were very close. My mom is extremely perfectionistic, and somehow, [pause] she...like my sister became the same way. She became like the ultimate perfectionistic like student. Straight As, everything, all the activities, she was just like the golden child, you know.*

[18]

She was the golden child and you were...

*I was almost like um I think I was...just did everything on my own, my own way. I was like... I was always like very, people could tell me things, my parents would tell me things, you know do things this way, do things that way, but I always had to process it through myself. So until I came up with that conclusion or something else I wouldn't do it that way.*

[19]

What kind of town did you grow up in?

*I grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina, in a suburban area. Um it was a neighborhood. I grew up in a house. And then the times when we moved it was, we moved to New Jersey and actually my parents live in Cherry Hill now which is a pretty sum...affluent, suburban area and um we moved to Dallas and it was the same thing, like a lot of these big houses, big modern-type houses.*

[20]

What was it like going to all those new schools?

*[Breath] I didn't like it all. Um Actually I did pretty well when we moved to New Jersey, because the school I went to turned out to be a highly academic geared school. Its like I [laugh] the initial interview when they interviewing me for what classes I would take was quite something because I had to **prove** to them that I didn't need to be put in remedial classes.*

[21]

Why did they assume that?

*Because, the man came out and said because I had gone to school and been raised in the south. And I was so...[raising her voice] **I was so angry** with him, I was just like, oh no [laughing] you're not going to you know, I said I went to a very good high school and...and you have the wrong attitude, really. And um I had a lot people say very funny things to me like you know, "Why don't you have an accent?" I was like, well, um I actually didn't grow up in Georgia, so I might not be speaking the way you think [laughing] and um my parents are English and um I **do** have an accent, it's just not the one you're expecting [laughing]. And certain...certain things were weird like um I was sure everyone was so much smaller, everyone was so much shorter. There were a lot of Jewish people, which I wasn't used to. Um people were very into what ethnicity they came from. Which was new for me because when I was growing up I mean we had a lot of friends in my family who were English, but that was unusual to sort of have an ethnic community, when I went to school you were either black or you were white. That's what it was.*

[22]

How did the kids treat you?

*I made...made friends. I was nervous. Um I didn't make it with the popular crowd. Um I was fortunate in that a girl in my grade lived like three doors down from where I moved into and she came over the day I moved in. And she was Canadian originally [laugh]. And she got me through. Cause this was another thing...I had to walk to school, which was new for me because I always...we always had bussing when I was growing up. And every morning she'd come pounding on the door and get me out the door on time and march me through the snow. I had to buy snow boots, which was new. And it like you know, by the end of the year I was pretty much adjusted.*

[23]

Did you stay in New Jersey after that?

*No, we went back to North Carolina. I was 16 and um that was the bad part. Having to switch back and forth. Cause I couldn't decide what I wanted or who I wanted to be and now what...what I liked anymore,*

*what influenced me anymore. Actually when we moved back to NC, my parents offered...they took me to a private school in Charlotte and um offered for me to go to school there. And I turned them down because I wanted to go to the same high school that my brother and sister had gone to. You know, I don't know, in the long run it might have been better for me to have gone to a private school, but who knows.*

[24]

Since we're talking about your family, perhaps we'll stay on that subject. Talk about the circumstances of your abuse, what took place, who the perpetrator was, things of that nature.

*Well um the sexual abuse was something that I suspected for along time but I only had just remembered it to know for sure that it happened um this past January. Um and what I know for sure is that it...that it was my father. Um and I know it occurred when I was six, um because I remembered that specifically. Um and I am fairly certain that it happened for a good period of time around that age, um you know 5-7 or something like that. Um actually, I was first hospitalized for depression when I was 20. I actually dropped out of school um to...and as soon as I dropped out, and what happened was I went to the EAP at my father's company, and they sent me to a psychiatrist who immediately sent me to hospital. Who said, she's in really bad shape, you know. And was like she's going to need long-term, intensive help. So it all happened really quickly. Um I was...I was in school and I had been suffering from depression um for years, and it wasn't like a secret. I mean I had been going to see a counselor, and um what happened was actually happened that, I don't know what triggered it but I started having these really intense nightmares and um it wasn't about sexual abuse. It was actually about...it was only that...actually though that I...the problems that I was having initially was that I thought I was seeing ghosts. And I called my mother from school and I said, you know, I've got to come home. And she said...well actually they had just moved houses, can you hold on for a couple of weeks, I'll be there, we'll sort it out. Well, I said no, I can't hold on. Um so I came home and actually when I went into hospital, and the psychiatrist called her, she's got to be in the hospital, my mother was furious with me. Um so but and I knew then before I came home, there is, I said there's...to myself, I've got to know, there's something here I've got to know. And I'm not going to be able to change whatever is, but I...I need to know what it is. [Exhale] But the thing is that I was in, you know, I went through the mental health system for 10 years, and they...I brought it...**I have brought it up.** And it's the sort of thing that they don't, it's almost like they don't want to talk about, or they...they don't want to believe you. Or they think that you know I was told so many times well just cause you're saying this you know, it's happening to you now, it doesn't necessarily mean **this** happened in the past. Um and I...I had a...I had a actual...I was in a program that was run by the State of New Jersey, um it was a team of - there was a psychiatrist and a clinical social worker and case managers and nurses. And it was known especially that...I said you know, this happened. And I never...I still don't know whether they think it actually happened, and...and then sometimes I think there were psychiatrists who thought that it had happened, but they didn't want to tell me about it [voice inflects upward]. Like um I was hospitalized, and I actually went, I mean I've been diagnosed with everything, except for schizophrenia, that I mean not everything, but I've been diagnosed with a lot things. And I um...I went and...to the psychiatrist and I said are you...are you thinking that I have multiple personality disorder? She said yeah. And I'm like ok. And she said is that all you want to know? **Yeah**, I wanted to know what you're diagnosing me as. And...and you...then it's always like well, they like, they like to diagnose certain things at certain times. There like...there's like...like at that particular time, it was like ninety...the nineties. There's like fashionable diagnoses, or something like that. [Exhale] so...because I, but what I...I also lived in a residential program. Because what...what kept happening was I would go home, and my parents would say we can't deal with this, you have to go live somewhere else. You have to...so they put me in a residential program or I would go in hospital, which I did regularly [laugh], um and the local hospital, and my mother would come to hospital and she would say to the social worker, she can't come home you have to find somewhere else for her to be. And they would say, well there's really not anything, I mean there's not. I was like in one group home that I actually ran away from. I just, you know I mean there's just not a lot of stuff out there. And um so I had...I was living in this...this residential program, and I had a roommate. My roommate was going to the Psychoanalytic Institute in Philly when it was opened, who was going through full blown treatment, for full blown multiple personality disorder. And*

*apparently been though all this, I mean and was having...I know all this stuff. She would come home and she would change personalities and the whole thing and um I mean, and like when I was leaving school, I guess this was when the whole like trend of that was starting because I saw a show on television about it. And I saw it and I was like oh my God. You know it just...just really disturbed me. And um and I called and said I have to talk to you about this, will you talk to me about this. What's wrong with me? I don't I just...just...*

[25]

Were you thinking this diagnosis was really off?

*I don't...I didn't know, um all I knew was I was just depressed, when I was in the hospital, I would sort of...I was in this unit where everyone was psychotic anyway, so who knew what was going on. Um, and time was kind of meaningless in that kind of environment. So I...I'm just surprised at how people are not direct about childhood abuse. And even when I was in the hospital, this last time, and I was saying I'm having these very specific memories, and I went in the hospital and I said, you know, I'm really not sure if I'm making this up. I mean, I actually said, I don't know if I'm making this up, but it seems real. And I don't want to say something that's not true, even though I've made allegations in the past. I even accused my father of it directly. Um...the counselors are all like "you don't have to talk about it, you **don't...you don't** have to talk about it if you don't feel comfortable. You don't have to talk about it. They're being sensitive and they're being nice. But...and they're...but its...and then I...I got to the point where I...I see an individual therapist who I have and I like and have a good relationships towards. And then I got to the point where that's all we have to talk about anymore. And...and she's like well you don't have to talk about it until you're ready. It...it...it's still...it just seems like it's still like it's the big taboo. So...and telling **you** what happened, that's...that's all I can really tell you. I have memories where I know it definitely happened. And it's a very weird thing to think about because, for me the image of my father, is that he's a very respectable man. And he's not a sleazy guy, he's not...he doesn't even seem to be the kind of person who would victimize anyone, he's usually a sympathetic person, when someone's ill or tra...or you know people who are going through tragic circumstances, he very sympathetic. The only thing I can relate to with him is that is was like a power thing. A power thing and...and...and maybe a sex thing like with my mother [upward inflection] maybe. My mother's kind of, when I was growing up she was kind of tight, you know what I'm saying, like tense. So...and I can kind of understand from her perspective...situation...like they emigrated, she didn't...like maybe there was part of her that said you know I should go back to England, I mean she, you know go back to England. I should do something about what's going on. Cause I really feel that she knew what was going on. And it was like she should, but she...it was almost as if she didn't have the support. Or she seemed that she was the kind of person who would be very, very ashamed. You know and I really know, like her growing up, her whole history I know really well. And like that she...she grew up in a family of seven kids and she was like major baby sitter for all her younger siblings, and she had an alcoholic father, and a mother who was sort of trying to do her best you know and just this sort of thing like, there's this huge amount of shame attached to it. Where its like we should have done better. You know, I should have gone back, but what was there to go back to? And there's this whole thing that everybody wanted to totally, totally, totally bury.*

[26]

But what you haven't buried are your symptoms. And they tell it all.

*Yeah. What triggered it, the whole thing with me really, is that my sister committed suicide. And here was a person who even my therapist I had said, "I can't believe she committed suicide." I mean here was a...a girl who was supposedly had...had it all on the ball. Had it all going for her. You know she had a prestigious degree from a university. She'd done very well in everything she had tried. She was pretty, she was...all this going on for her. Never mind she had a drug problem.*

[27]

Nobody knew?

*Oh, yeah, everybody knew. Because she outed it...she outed it. And she...she was classic, she was classic in her...but it was I don't know, it was another thing like she's in college [sounds in awe]. Well she's in college. But she was the one sitting there saying I'm an alcoholic, I have a drug problem, I'm in trouble.*

[28]

How did your parents respond?

*Sent her to a clinical social worker. And asked the clinical social worker, "Should we put her in rehab?" He said, "That's up to you." It never happened and you know she ended up dying. And I said, I think part of me then said there's something here that's really not right. I guess it says it to everybody. I mean, but I guess a lot of people, you know you hear of young people dying all the time and it doesn't make sense to anybody, so they don't try to make sense of it. But to me, I knew there was something, it really, it really, to me I said, I really there's something about it I know that, there's something behind it.*

[29]

How old was she?

*She was 22.*

[30]

And you were?

*16. But she had just come out of university. And I was just actually starting you know my junior year of high school. My brother was out and gone [laughing]. He was always...he left when I was ten. And when she died actually he was living in an apartment and he We were in Charlotte. He left when I was ten, went to NC State. He graduated when I was 15 and um he had a job and an apartment in Charlotte.*

[31]

You mentioned alcohol. Did your parents drink?

*They drank socially, parties, dinner. There wasn't...my mother's family and I'd say my mother were are more on the alcoholic side of things. Um...I wouldn't say like my father had a substance...*

[32]

Did you ever have a problem with alcohol?

*I drank um you know like I...well after Stephanie died I started drinking pretty heavily. Um and that continued up until [deep breath] um a couple...a couple of years I did that, I did that for maybe like three years. And I also smoked pot and um then um when I got a little more serious about college, declared a major and all that, I cut down. But I did experiment with um PCP and um mescaline.*

[33]

What did they do for you?

*It was not a good thing. It was um [pause] it just was kind of a detaching kind of um thing. But I...[breath] It was almost more it was almost more of a social...I actually had a lot of people... [laughing] it was weird...a lot of people thought that I was a person who did a lot of LSD which I didn't ever. And...but I don't know what it was about me, maybe the way I dressed, or I had really long hair, or my...my personality or something. And it was almost just like a social...this social thing again.*

[34]

At school?

*Yeah. Like I guess some people...some people's groups are really heavily into certain kinds of things and a lot of the people I knew occasionally you know did that kind of hallucinogenic things.*

[35]

What was your sister's drug of choice?

*[deep breath] She...this is really lovely [sarcastically]. They...someone who is a drug counselor actually told me this term. There's a term called a garbage head. It basically means that the person does anything and everything, and it's whatever they can get their hands on. So from what I understand, the biggest thing was alcohol, um cocaine was around at the time. Um she said she abused a lot of um like over the counter pharmaceuticals. Um I got the feeling that when I was around her she was sneaking off and like taking pills, so I really don't know that she had a specific drug.*

[36]

Did she self-injure herself?

*No. No. She made one attempt where she...she did some gashes at her wrists, but she was not a person who...who cut herself regularly.*

[37]

Do you ever do that?

*Yeah. I um...actually after she died I um had a couple of incidents where I burned myself.*

[38]

Just around that time?

*Yeah, just around that time. Sometimes I've had times when I've had urges to cut myself. Um I've had times, extremely stressful times when I've like taken knives out and like...almost like brandished them [using her hands and raising her voice in a dramatic way but laughing] like **oh look what I'm going to do** sort of thing. You know, but um I've nev...not really done that.*

[39]

*So the first time you actually told any body about your sexual abuse, you felt you weren't being validated. No. These were psychiatrists and social workers. Right. The first time I was...it was at the hospital in Summit, I was probably about hmmm...twenty-five. And all they had to say was, "That's a very powerful accusation." And I said, and...that you know, my dad had not denied it. [laugh] He had not said, "I didn't do it," but he said, "You can't say that." So he kind of...kind of denied it you know. He said, I remember exactly what he said. He said, "You can say a lot of things about me, but you can't say that I molested you." Like he said it like that's a really horrible, disgusting thing to say.*

[40]

When confronted, perpetrators sometimes don't directly deny their crime, but they skirt around it saying things like, "Do you really believe that?" or "Do you think that about me?"

*There was a lot of that, sort of twisted around things that were said in very significant times that didn't make a lot of sense.*

[41]

What about emotional abuse?

*Well, my mother wasn't always very nice [laugh]. Um...emotional abuse came more in...in...I don't know if that counts, if it's emotional, just...just like sort of the confusion, the not being very clear. No ever said to me like you know, well that's not true either. I mean I got called a few names sometimes, at home you know. But at school, when I was growing up, I was a kid...I got teased a lot, you know. I didn't have a lot of problems with like dyke or you know people yelling at me like that. A couple of times -- I lived with a partner and this guy like yelled FREAK at me across the parking lot and it's like ok, but I mean [deep breath]. But I didn't...these kids on the school bus used to call me mars [upward inflection] because I would like space out like if I was intimidated, and I developed...like I actually had to have my mom take me to school because I developed stomach problems. Like I was the kid, that if you were a bully, I was an **aha-bully-her--**kind of kid.*

[42]

You had a bulls-eye on your back.

*Yeah [breaking into laughter].*

[43]

How did you sleep?

*Um I slept walked. Um I used to be, well I still am, well if you were every in one of those family situations, like away on vacation, and you had to share a bed, like no one ever wanted to sleep with me because you'd get beat up. Cause I rolled around and thrashed around so much, and I used to fall off bunk beds regularly I never wanted the top bunk. I slept walked off of a bunk bed one time. Apparently sometimes you still don't want to sleep with me cause you'll get kicked or something. I dream a lot, you know. I slept a lot. My bedtime used to be 7:30 up until I was 7. I sucked my thumb until I was 7. I actually used, I remember when I was in first grade, I used to have to take a change of underwear cause I would sometimes wet my pants. I can sleep. I always have been able to sleep anywhere, anytime. I've always been a really like, I guess heavy sleeper. And um you they used to, my family used to take me on camping trips like from the time I was an infant and it was like no problem. I always slept.*

[44]

Do you take care of your health?

*Yeah. I'm you know...I'm very conscious about taking care of stuff.*

[45]

Were you ever bulimic or anorexic?

*No, actually I'm...I'm more...you can see I'm pretty overweight. Um when I started therapy when I was hospitalized, when I was 20, I was 140 pounds. When I started therapy at all--I started counseling therapy when I was 16, I was like 130 pounds. I...I...I'm...I can't get through a day without sugar. I almost I think I replaced alcohol with sugar you know...so...I always liked sugar though, sugar and chocolate and you know. I don't like alcohol anymore. It doesn't make me feel good and I feel depressed the next day.*

[46]

Let's go back to coming out. When you told your parents and family--what was that like?

*[Very long pause] Um [long pause] well my parents...I told...or they had to face it when I got in a relationship, my first relationship...um [pause] I don't remember actually **telling** them, like coming out and saying, "Hi you know, I'm a lesbian." Um though I think I did, I actually I think, yeah, before that, I did tell my mom I had feelings. Was there somebody I really liked? [Pause-thinking] Yeah, actually there was this girl that I really liked and I told my mom that I loved her, and my mom said, "Yeah, but she doesn't love you the same way. No, which was true. Because I'm pretty sure that girl was straight.*

[47]

So your mother seems to have just accepted what you told her without a problem.

*Yeah. She was tricky about it. She worked--in her working life--she worked with a lot of gay men. So it wasn't a big deal to her, but then on the other hand it was a...I think it was different because I was female. And...and also [vocalized breath] my brother is married and he...he has 2 children. My mom said to me one time, "Well I figured that's all I'm going to get--for grandchildren." And there's this part of her that want, I mean it's almost like because my sister died and my sister was straight, I think she just wanted somebody, some girl, some daughter, to have the big white wedding, and the husband and the babies and the whole nine yards, and I can't do that. You know I don't want to do that really. And they...they, but then they also I think they have like they don't know what to think. They don't know what to view it as. I mean it's almost just like do what ever you want to do Harriet. They don't have a...they don't realize that I could have a big white wedding. Or they don't realized what it means. There's no format for them to put it in. So they don't...I mean if had been 16 and gone out with girls, and taken a girl to the prom, I think they would have been completely fine. They really wouldn't care what gender...as long as I was doing something they could understand. But they um...I think, I honestly think they always knew that I was gay. But it was another thing where it was let's just sort of not pay attention to this or sweep it under the rug or we'll just see how it goes. Because I think I was just I...they had no way of knowing for sure [laugh]. I was a kid I mean what was I going to say [laughing]. That's just the way, I mean when I was growing up...I mean when I grew up, North Carolina was pretty traditional, you know boys and girls, you went on the traditional dates and it was all very laid out like that and there wasn't [pause] it was all just assumed, this whole life was assumed for you. But it was...I think...I think maybe the only thing my parents knew was that I never fit into that mold. I never fit into anybody's mold.*

[48]

Do you think it was scary for them, especially your mom?

*Yeah. My mom was...was...was a very good teacher. I actually, you know she paid a lot, **a lot** of attention to after school activities and all that sort of stuff. Did a lot of community involvement. And [breath] I guess the thing was like well she's really **smart** so I guess she'll be ok. And you know and she...we'd all, she said, and I was pretty self-reliant and I pretty much just did things my own way, so that's just...they just...I always...they just got this thing where they just sort of sat back and watched and that's the way it was with me. Which, in a way, I didn't get as much guidance as I wanted but um but so my mom she's made all kinds of comments. She's been all over the map with it. "It's not normal," she's said that, "It's not normal," um "Gay people aren't normal." My favorite one was, "We don't care if you sleep with her or not" [rising inflection—breaking into a huge laugh]. That was my favorite one. It was like, "Sleep with her if you want to, we don't care, but we're not going to pay attention to it either, cause we don't want to..." [Laughing hysterically] I mean it was...that was like really weird comment. Um. Also I dated, or*

*went out with people who...like the other thing was they really wanted me to date somebody who was you know, you know, class, professional—you know I had major relationship with a woman who was in recovery from serious drugs. And I used to tell them things about it that probably scared them half to death. Um...[silence]*

[49]

Did you want to see their reactions?

*Yeah. They...and they actually liked her. But then they always...they like everybody so.*

[50]

So would you say they were warm, hospitable people?

*Yeah, but they'd talk about you behind your back. They talk about **everybody** behind their back, you know my brother, they talk about him, they talk about my sister, they probably confide about me with my brother. I know they do. Goodness knows what they say. From like things that my brother has said to me, "Oh you've done such terrible things to mom and dad," and I want to know is that coming from you or is that coming from mom.*

[51]

Are you active in the gay community?

*Um, I've been to Asbury Park to the gay pride thing. I've been to the, what was the one, they had another gay... Coming Out Day they had at the P&C arts center. Um I've...you know, I've gone...down in Philadelphia, there's a certain area that it's like bars. And I've been to Sisters, The Cartwheel. I've run the gamut, you know. The website, Bucks County web site I looked up. So like I'll go out and do stuff, but on the other hand I don't like, I don't do it a lot. Financially and um, I actually, I'd say of people that I socialize with that its probably like about 50/50 split. But I really don't know a lot of gay men. Um I used to go to a support group in Philadelphia for people with depression and bipolar disorder that was all gay, um but actually what happened was, the majority of the people there were gay men or transgendered and for me I felt, and it was almost like, for me I felt like an old throw back 70s lesbian you know, I was just not hip enough or something [laugh] and then they I had an argument with the group leader and I just stopped going. So but that's the thing that really like even, around here there's not a lot. Primarily, any...anything, for some reason, the...the men are a lot more networked. They have the bars, the clubs. There's one bar in Philly, Sisters, but I don't drink, but I like to dance. Um but the...but the one in New Hope is um all...all men. They have like one night a month that's women. Um and when I lived like 30 minutes from New York, I never went to New York by myself or really with people.*

[52]

Financially, how do you get by?

*Disability, yeah, yeah. My situation right now is um I'm working, I'm brushing up on my computer skills to go back to work in the fall. I have worked full time, um not a lot, but I have. My goal really is to work full-time and I also, when I can, really want to go back to school. I've had a lot of part-time retail jobs in my life and I'm...I don't want to do that anymore. You know and, I had got this place, which is the first time I've lived alone without a roommate, or girlfriend, or anything. I've been here like seven months and it's really great.*

[53]

I just noticed your bicycle.

*[Laughing], yeah, my bike, I tried to ride and it was not really good, I fell off [laughing]. It was not like riding a bike, I fell off. I have to try it again.*

[54]

Describe what it feels like being a lesbian in a heterosexual world.

*[Breath and silence] Well I...I worked, my last job I worked at a school for kids who were severely disabled. And I wa...[silence]. At first, I didn't let anybody know that I was gay, cause I felt like I was protecting myself. Um...and then when I did let people know, I felt like I got a lot of backlash. On one hand I think there were people who really didn't approve of people being gay. And then on the other hand, there were people who didn't approve of people being gay who wouldn't let you know ahead...right off from the beginning, because there were quite a few lesbians who worked there, especially in*

managerial positions, um. Around here in the area that I live in, it's pretty closeted. Um, I don't worry about it too much. Um I go out with my friend and she...we look, we look just pretty lesbian I think, [laughing] I don't know. Like she's sort soft-butuh looking and I'm kind of femme looking, and sometimes we go out and feel like people are making comments, or they're making indirect comments, or they're looking at you. Um or there's like, sometimes it feels like...it's possible to get kind of paranoid, um to feel like there's an underlying... Like I had a problem with my neighbor and the apartment manager really gave me a hard time about it. And I kind of felt, it was part of me kind of felt like you don't like me because you know I'm a lesbian you know [breath]. But then on the other hand, there seems to be a pretty visible lesbian population in Bucks County, so I think a lot of people are getting used to it and they just accept it. You know, um most of the straight people I'm close to it's because they--like I know that they accept lesbians. Like **I know** that they have that attitude. Then there are people I have to deal with like in like ok, like doctors, mental health and whatever. And I just let them know, I don't worry about it, and most people I've found, in professional capacities like that, they're fine, they don't give me a hard time. Sometimes they don't...I almost feel like I...they don't...they don't get it, you know. But they don't give me a hard time either. Like my therapist, like ok I don't even know how many lesbians she's treated in her life. Um, um so it seems like it's...it's mostly neutral. I don't get a lot of hostility. The only hostility you get is like the real macho Pennsylvania dudes, like the truck driving kind of red-neck kind of guys. But it almost seems its more towards women and what they don't want to see, what the problem is that they don't want to see is a woman who's loud, is assertive, isn't going to bow to a guy. That's more the attitude around here you're going to see. It's not really towards homosexuals, per se. But just I think...I feel like there are men who want to boss women around. The majority of gay men are that I know, or come across or in Philadelphia, there seems to be a very definite like population split. Or you're just ignored as a...as a population, you're just ignored. We get called girls a lot. That I think is just hysterical. Because we'll go out and it's like, "Hi girls, how're you doing?" And like here we are, like, I'm 33 and it's like it's not like we're teenagers. What would it be like if I was out with a guy. Would it be, would they say, "Oh high girls?"

[55]

In the first part of this interview where you talked about your first lover you said she *claimed* to be a bisexual. Why did you use the word *claimed*?

Well, I just, I met her at a day program. She was real young. She was like 21. I guess when I started coming out I said I was bisexual. I was purportedly bisexual from about 20 to 25. So I didn't know what she was doing [laughing]. Was she in transition, was she being fashionable, was she truly bisexual? I don't know.

[56]

Has the notion ever occurred to you that if you weren't abused as a child, you would have come out sooner?

Yeah. That scared me a lot in treatment, that there would be a lot of confusion between my orientation and um the abuse.

[57]

What do you mean exactly?

Well, I was afraid I would be told...there are all kinds of things people can say. You know, you're gay because you had...my...my...my mother told me this one too. **Now I remember when I came out** to my mother. She told me it was because I was bitter about men. That was her first reaction. And the only way I could make her come around was by saying, "Look, I could be killed for this," "People will take my job," and bring out these really extreme things to make her like sympathetic [laughing]. So I think it might have been less scary and I would have maybe felt less influenced by the power of men.

[58]

Your comment about the confusion between the sexual abuse and your sexual orientation was interesting. You said it frightened you.

Yeah. But then on the other hand I felt, maybe I survived **because** of being a lesbian. All I know is, it definitely should have been easier to come out. And I don't know like what the...really what the

connection is. I attribute it to moving [coming out late], but then again, I...my...part of the reason we moved was cause my father had a...like a nervous break down, and um had...and stopped working for like 6 months and that was part of the deal to start working again—was moving. But then when I got sick he started telling me basically that he was having paranoid delusions. He thought people at work were talking about him, saying things about him. About that they didn't like him. In a sense, they were out to get him, stuff like that.

[59]

How old were you?

Um I was 14. And it was right around...actually it was right around, I was 14 and my sister was 20. When my sister was 20, she reported having been raped when she was 18. She called my mother. He had the breakdown...actually I was 13, and then we had to move and then right when we were going to move, she called my mother and said the guy who took her to the prom had raped her. And this supposedly was the basis for her depression. So I don't know...but supposedly the thing that triggered my dad's breakdown was something going wrong at work. Um so I think it would have been a lot easier for me to come out if um things in my family had not been so confusing. It would have been like safer, you know, to just be who I was and not feel like I have to like fight everything off or worry...worry about how I'd be perceived.

[60]

What are your goals in therapy?

[Silence]. You know what? Honestly, sometimes I feel like I'm done [laughing]. I guess the...the therapeutic goals that I have written down with my therapist is more one of them is to talk about the childhood abuse, and then the other ones are more life, like career, job, um economics, um almost like, I feel like I'm on the other end of the spectrum of...of...of leaving the mental health system. I had **no** idea when I started, what the whole, I mean how. I had no idea how time consuming, I had no idea what...what it was about, or how involved...or that I would get involved in a **system**. You know, I thought I was going to go to therapy...

[61]

How many times were you hospitalized?

Sixteen. I was hospitalized sixteen times for depression and suicidal ideation, and one time for an attempt. I feel like I'm on the...I'm leaving now, you know. I'm going back to life, as most people know it. It's been hard to explain you know for a long time. It's been a lot of little-bit-jobs, it's been a lot of hanging to somewhere to live, losing a lot of friends, you know, a lot of friends going on with **their** lives.

[62]

How do you relieve stress?

I belong to the Y down the road. I like to go swimming a lot. Um, I'm...well I really like the internet. I just went through, I got very addicted to something on the internet...so that's...I go out um to...I go out to the park walking, I like that sort of thing a lot.

[63]

Is there anything you'd like to add about any of this?

Well, I just...when I saw that you were doing this research, I know there's not a lot of research on it, and I really hope that it would be something that would get out there, that a lot of therapists would read. Because there are a lot of therapists who don't know very much about, about lesbians and homosexuality and most therapists I've met I don't feel like its that they have anything against it, or they're judging, but they just don't, they just don't have any idea. Or they don't have any education, and you don't want to go to a therapist and have to educate them, or I would hope that people wouldn't have to spend a lot of time in therapy and that's time wasted.

Thank you very much for your participation.

O.K.

## Jasmine

[1]

[Her cat was clawing] *Izzy...Izzy...he not supposed to do that. He's trying to get our attention. Izzy Izzy [screaming] he's just trying to get our attention. And this will take approximately? An hour and a half.*

[2]

*Ok. I hope I initialed it. I didn't initial it here, sorry. I need my glasses to read.*

[3]

*I heard that starts happening. It's starting to happen to me a little, little bit. I just turned 40 so I'm not really so young.*

[4]

The first set of questions I'm going to ask you talk about internalized homophobia or homophobia. I would you to talk about when you first thought you were sexually attracted to women and what that was like. (She turned off her cellular phone which took time and made a lot of noise).

*Just turning this off.*

[5]

All right. [So I ask again] Talk about the first time when you thought you were sexually attracted to women. Talk about a specific instance.

*Mmm... Well, there's a difference. Like when I first became attracted to women, I think...I think I was aware very young, but...*

[6]

You can talk about both times.

*Ok. And that...that was probably in grade school. Um but I think you know I...I totally repressed it. I think you know I was attracted on some sexual level, but I...I just felt closer to women and um the way I was with men was just always um performing for them [up inflection]. Or I was um you know trying to seduce men, at a very early age. But um I think that the, you know, the deeper feeling I **felt** was with women, um at a very early age. But then you know I totally, totally repressed it where I sort of went you know, against the mark and I started like **not liking** women at all, and being friends with men, like befriending men more. Um and then when I was like I got out of college and stuff, my roommate and I moved in together in uh back to Queens and um. So I was about 21 that I started acknowledging my bisexual feelings. But I didn't you know, I didn't really act on them until like a year later. And then it was basically just experimenting with women.*

[7]

What were some of the feelings that you started to acknowledge?

*Well it was I think first initial attraction that I was attracted to women and women's bodies. Um and then you know when I started acting on it and sort of dating women, and I say sort of because I didn't really commit to it, I was just going to clubs and bars and picking up women and just being promiscuous. Um So it wasn't until I started like dating I don't...I don't mmm I can't really say I...I started dating women until my I was in my mid to late 30s. So in my early 20s I was just acting out, but that's what I did with men too. I just acted out with sex, and it really had to do with the incest. Um so I wasn't really acknowledging the deeper feelings, I was just lusting.*

[8]

And you didn't have any thoughts about your sexual orientation?

*Oh yes. It was very confusing for me. Because I...I...I did feel like I liked women more than men, but I also felt um that I wasn't being accepted by the lesbian community. And that oh wait a minute and I, the only mentors I have or know of lesbians, were these you know butch kind of gym teachers that I had and I was always very feminine looking so the community per se like rejected me and said, "Oh you know, your just going to like sort of abandon us, and you're not really gay." So I was not trusting my heart feelings then. And I was just feeling that it's probably just a phase. But I knew inside too that I wanted to delve*

*deeper in it. But I was in and out of the closet for years, for years and years and years it seems like, you know, my twenties and my thirties.*

**[9]**

What were some of the things you did to hide your feelings from yourself?

*Well first of all, you know after I sort of came out to myself, as a bisexual when I was 22, um well what I did--well events happened to me. First, like I got hit by a car and a lot of stuff. I was going through turmoil in my life. But throughout that time I started dancing. And I was stripping, dancing topless, and you know almost as if I was trying to talk it out of myself and that you know I'm able to interact with men, but only as a seductress. And only in a power-control thing, where I am on a stage, they cannot get near me, and I am seducing them. But I was also was out during those times too. And like I was sort of seeing this girl, I remember, and she came to see me dance or she used to come see me dance, um but I was so confused, I was really confused. And I didn't know about my incest until 1991. So I was doing a whole slew of you know, just whole years of promiscuity and acting out. But when I was dancing, I was not dating. I was not having sex at all. It sort of was a release to dance and that was my sex. That's also...but I was definitely because I love dance, and I've always loved dance, but when I look back at it now, I still...that is my way to be intimate with men. And now, I'm in a dilemma now in therapy because I do want to conjugate [congregate? sic] with men. I do want to have healthy relationships with men. I like men a lot. And I feel like that they fill a void in me. Cause I didn't really have a father growing up. He was alcoholic, he was not around, so I want to make amends with you know my...with men. But I still, just this past Tuesday, I went into scores and asked if they need a dancer. I still feel like that's my only way to relate so [sigh].*

**[10]**

When did you come out to your family and friends?

*My first experience coming out, when I was you know 22, my roommate and I moved back from college. It was a traumatic experience because we were very, very close. But we weren't lovers and I was you know screwing around with every guy in college. And she was screwing around as well. But then we moved back to Rego Park and um I find this out—I come out to myself about it--and I put an ad in the Voice and um you know I get all these responses from bisexual girls and blah, blah, blah, and my roommate found these responses. And uh we weren't getting along then and it was, our relationship was too incestuous our relationship, it was too close and I was trying to break free of her. And she found these letters and she threw all over the room and moved out on me, and said that I had betrayed her by not telling her that I was bisexual, and of course she ended up being gay. So it was traumatic because you know I...I didn't tell her, and she was my best friend. I wanted...I didn't want to tell her. I wanted it to remain a secret. Um and then she abandoned me you know and then she left me. So it was really hard and um you and then I got in my car accident, and I was like laid up for years basically. So I did a lot of healing um and...and you know did all the spiritual stuff, all the workshops, and ACOA work, um and then did this workshop in Hawaii, no not in Hawaii, it was after Hawaii. And um...and that's when I found out that I'm an incest survivor. We did like left hand writing, and it just came out. I just found out that my brother was doing something to me in the woods, there was a piece of wood that he put on me, but he wasn't the real perpetrator, my father was. So I had body memories, and I couldn't get out of bed for a year, from it. So you know...I lost track.*

**[11]**

We were talking about telling other people about coming out.

*Oh. Yeah so during that time and stuff when I was recuperating and healing and all that stuff, I was integrating more of the bisexuality to myself. I wasn't really dating or anything. I was doing a lot of spiritual work. So I came out as a bisexual like at these retreats um but I was still feeling like that...that man is there for me. There is going to be a man for me that's going to you know just take me off on his horse.*

**[12]**

When did you tell your family?

*Um [pause] I guess when I was when I had my first girlfriend that I had a relationship with. I might have told my mom in my mid-thirties, even before I started dating her, that I was bisexual. And that I...I could be lesbian...um and my mother was like whatever makes you happy. You know, If...if...if you know a woman comes along and you fall in love with her, and she falls in love with you, fine. So she was very cool about it. My mom always had gay friends and she was very cool. I wasn't really scared about that. And now it's the same thing, but of course she still says you know, and I still say even though I you know, basically have been only with women for a very long, you know like ten years, no maybe seven years, that I still think a man's going to come. Like sort of knock on my door and just be there for me, you know. And I know it has something to do with thinking my father is coming back for me. So I really need to like you know I have a therapist but she not an incest...you know we don't get into the deep incest stuff, I think I really need to do that.*

**[13]**

And you have how many siblings?

*I have a brother and a sister and then I have a half-sister in Atlanta.*

**[14]**

Did you come out to them?

*Well my half-sister is bi as well. She's bi so I came out to her first, my half-sister, like when I was in my late twenties. And we went to Fire Island together. But she wasn't close enough to my mom yet, my mom had put her up for adoption and she found my mom and we ended up like totally clicking and becoming like best friends almost. So she was the first one I told and that was in my late twenties actually. Um and what was the question?*

**[15]**

Are you out to your brother and sister?

*Oh well my brother said you know like, "What the fuck happened? You were always so into guys." He was defensive about it and doesn't understand it. And doesn't really **want** to understand it. But I sort of you know give him what he wants too, and you know and so I tell him you know that I'm not sure I'm not really gay, and maybe if I found the right guy. I still am in denial about it. I still have homophobia. You know. And my sister, I give her the same spiel too. My sister's cool she's like, "Jasmine, whatever makes you happy." My mother and sister, all the women in my life have always...were never ashamed to say I hate men. Even though they're with men. But they I was constantly conditioned with that.*

**[16]**

Your father passed away?

*Right, and he was my perpetrator.*

**[17]**

When you disclosed your sexuality, did you ever experience any negative feedback?

*Yeah, I mean on and off a lot, till this day. The pizza guy down the street who I know since I'm 16, you know the other day he came out and goes, I think it's disgusting, you know women being with women. And he knows I am. So um that really hurt me cause I you know consider him a friend. I mean I know him for along time, you know. So I get it here and there, and it's like oh, no, do you think it's because you got raped. Because I'm also a rape survivor, and that's probably the reason. And your probably really not gay, which is goes on in my head, and the reason I'm gay is cause I got raped. And my father raped me, and my brother used to emotionally abuse me, blah, blah, blah. So I'm still not grounded in it at 40.*

**[18]**

So you still have those questions.

*I still have those questions all the time. There's still that dilemma and confusion, yeah. I go back and forth. One day I'm gay, and another day I'm doubting it but it goes hand in hand with the incest.*

**[19]**

It shows a lot of insight on your part to recognize that.

*Right, but it's stressful, I don't feel like I need, like I...I feel like I should you know, know who I am, especially at my age. And I have done so much soul searching and I've been to many workshops, you*

*know, I've I'm basically a you know counselor without the degrees on some level. But I've done so much work. I really haven't...and I still don't know. It's still a journey.*

[20]

Do you participate in any gay related activities?

*Oh yeah, yeah. Most of my friends are gay, so I am out in the community. You know I have been out in the community since I'm about twenty-seven. I was actively involved in like the ACOA groups and gay pride and when Marianne Williamson had a center here we used to have healing workshops and stuff and that was...I had to do a lot with HIV stuff, but I was marching with them all the time. So I have been out, but inside what goes on is that...and also living here I'm outside of the city and I still can play it straight. But I'm in the city everyday, and then when I'm in the city I'm myself, and myself is I don't know I guess I...I...I still don't want to label myself as lesbian. And I don't want to label myself as bi either. I don't want to label myself. I just want to be me and follow my heart, and my heart knows exactly what it needs. I just hate the labels cause then it's like labeling yourself, well I'm an incest survivor, and I'm a victim, and I just hate labels so...but it confuses me. I want to...I want to be just gay you know. I want to just be straight. You know I want to be bi.*

[21]

It's almost as if labels are safe. You can be in a package, tie it up and it's really neat.

*Yeah, maybe that's it. I've been thinking it's safer not to label myself maybe. But maybe that's not true. Maybe I just want to put myself in a box so I belong somewhere.*

[22]

Putting oneself in a box makes very distinct boundaries. Could you describe how you view yourself as a lesbian living in a hetero world on a daily basis?

*Um...yeah I think I like...I...I...I don't test myself, I might challenge myself daily by...by you know walking out, when I am outside, when I walk outside you know to be this like sort of stronger woman that doesn't need a man type of thing. But I think that's like my warrior's nature. And that I've always been like this warrior and thinking of myself as one. So but I think it goes hand in hand with the gay woman pride. Um but I really you know like I...I...I'm a very loving person so I...I...I don't try you know to think of myself as just gay, but I try to like communicate and converse with...with everybody. But this neighborhood is like, there are some gays around here, gay people and I befriended this gay guy in the building but uh I think...I think it ...you know it's safer here and it makes me be able to hide more. Whereas, if I lived in the city I think I would be challenged more to be out more, as a gay woman, maybe, maybe not. But here I know that I can still sort of not have to be out as much.*

[23]

We're going to move on to the questions around the abuse. I'd like you to talk about the history as much as you can remember. Talk about the perpetrator and when it began and ended and what that was like for. *Well I found out in 1991, so that was only thirteen years ago. But I've been in a hellish kind of life for 13 years, trying to figure out and trying to like put the pieces together. So what I have found and pretty much...pretty much believe in, not a hundred percent believe in, but pretty much believe in, that it happened when I was about 3 or 4. And we had a place Upstate in the summertime, in Monticello. And that there was very good chance that my father you know was the perpetrator. You know, he basically like fondled me, and touched me. And I don't remember much of him, but you know what I do remember was I had this love for him, that I continue to have until this day, which is just so deep. You know, it's such a deep love. Um I remember being very, very close to him at a very young age and screaming and crying when he went to work. Um and I just have, like I basically, how I found out about it is it's all body memories. And I was doing a lot of spitting; constantly I'd go to incest rooms for like a few years. I went to the rooms and I would just spit. So it could have been happening when it was pre-verbal. And I'm not sure, but this is what I was feeling when I was in bed, with these body memories and couldn't get out of bed. I...I was helpless. I was, you know, like a baby. So I'm thinking that it could have happened then too, but I'm not sure about it. With these body memories, I would also smell vodka, and my father drank. So I would smell, have the sense of that smell. And that he was coming into the room in the nighttime, in my*

*crib and touching me. So those were...those were...it didn't happen when I was, I say three like three, but it could have been before three.*

[24]

The summer place resonates.

*That resonates a lot, and the woods. You know my sister confirmed to me that you know he took me out every day--to those woods, and that I was HIS daughter. I was my daddy's favorite and um that basically, my mother like put us together like, you know that's his daughter, I have enough with my daughter and son, my other daughter and son you know, fine. So she and she confirmed to me that she once caught him in the bathroom at the sink cleaning me or something um and that she screamed and said, "What the fuck are you doing?" something like that, but then she denied it and said, "Oh I don't know what I was thinking." But also she goes back and forth, saying "He could have done it...he couldn't have done it," "He loved you too much." Um and that was the thing too, I hear a lot too, was that he adored me so much he would never do that to me.*

[25]

What were some of the symptoms you displayed?

*[She laughs and laughs] The symptoms. Not being able to hold down a job. Since I was stripping which has been twenty years, no a very long time. I'm on disability, still. Which is about 5-6 years I'm on that. Um I cannot function, basically. Basically, I can't hold down a job, um basically during the day, I'm so dissociated I can't get out of the house. Dissociation's been a big thing for a long, long time. I mean I'm a trillion times better than I was say 5 years ago. Ten years ago I was waking up at 5 in the afternoon, and up all night and I couldn't sleep. And I would stay awake at night and walk the streets, walk you know walk, go on the subways, ride the subways, in the middle of the night. Basically, I was...I was living here with my step-uncle who is also named Marvin, my father's name. And it was a very incestuous um relationship, but he was diabetic and I was basic...and he was also um you know nebbishy kind of guy, diabetic, very sick. He ended up dying. I found him dead here one day and uh it's just like so many...you know I know it sounds like I'm running, I'm jumping all over the place, but um yeah my first few years here I didn't have to pay rent so I was...I was sleeping all day and so...so dissociated at night and...and...and feeling like I was living in hell you know. So now I only have my incest days, where all the days are like total hell. I call them my incest days, when I feel a memory or something. But thank god maybe they come once a month. Whereas ten years ago its every single day, every single day. And I couldn't go into therapy even I was so out of it. And I didn't feel at all like I was in my body. But I also worked on a lot of like past life issues and stuff, and so I felt like I was walking in a dream sort of, that I was here, but I wasn't here. So I worked through a lot of past life stuff, but [laugh] for ten years I wasn't here and I don't know what happened to my thirties. So it's very, you know I go through so much depression, because I had gone to so much therapy it's like I'm 40 years old and I really don't have a career, and I really don't have anything that I thought I would have by my age and I identify with like a 28 year old now, because that's where I sort of am in my life. I don't know what happened to my thirties. It's like I slept. It's like I was sleeping. You know and I cry about it always in therapy and um because I wasn't here, and where was I you know and so its really hard to integrate all that. So now I feel like um I'm healthy enough where I can begin a career, I can...I can start doing the dreams I just forgot about, during this whole incest recovery, you know. Which was basically a death, a death for me.*

[26]

Why did you call the relationship with your uncle incestuous?

*Well it was my stepfather's brother, and it was incestuous because um I don't know, cause I projected that maybe I could have a good daddy. You know he did let me stay here for nothing, he wasn't blood; he didn't have to. Um it was incestuous maybe um well cause I tried to take care of him in my own way, but nothing sexual ever happened.*

[27]

So it was the feeling you had, did you feel like you were a "couple"?

*Yeah, well I describe most of my relationships as incestuous, [laugh] cause they are, a lot of them are. Well because usually, you know especially with you know my...my relationships with women have been*

*very enmeshed. So maybe I use the incest word too you know easily, but... maybe enmeshed is better with Marvin.*

**[28]**

There is the notion of blurred boundaries associated with both words.

*Well incest to me is you know where there's abuse and enmeshment necessarily is not abuse. For me enmeshment is I think more emotional um incest [giggle].*

**[29]**

For those ten years, how did you cope?

*I was in lala land. I had a lot of um...that's when I learned basically about the energy work I do, I was channeling like information. I am able to read energy and go beyond this dimension so to speak. So I was like in...I...I...to compensate and to sort of make myself feel better, I feel like I was sort of doing training for my psychic work and stuff. The coping, I was you know, I felt so, you know I was so not here, and yet I felt so like there was an energy around me constantly that was just love. I don't know how it...how I survived it, when I look back, but I was so disoriented um and I was able to sort of do a lot of mediating and I think that saved my life you know to meditate and channel on this love energy that I constantly felt and which actually gave me my story and information about everything. You know not only, with the incest, but also what was happening you know in my house when I was a child. And you know, stuff with my mom, stuff with my um stepfather and you know all the other issues that went on in my childhood. So I was you know lucky because Marvin didn't bother me, he didn't make rules for me, so I was able you know cope with a lot of you know eating and starving, also that's what I did a lot too. I was able to you know meditate for hours after I woke up, without eating, and that was used for meditating, that was used to sort of center myself. Cause I knew that I wasn't here. You know, I was here, but I wasn't here. The eating just made me feel so much worse when I would eat. It would ground me here, and I would feel, oh my god I'm in hell. It was horrible, I just want to write about it one day, but I don't have words for it. It was just blackness. So the eating was just when it was late enough and quiet enough that's when I was able to eat, and I was alone. My friend lives here now, but I used to...this is where I used to live [points to a corner of the living room]. And this was my little corner...so but I did a lot of you know, healing in this room, and I did a lot of you know channeling and stuff so basically, what saved me was my ability to learn about energy and I was doing Reiki then and learning Reiki, and any kind of healing work. I was reading a lot and doing a lot of healing work.*

**[30]**

You used the phrase "it saved me" three times. What do you think would have happened if you weren't saved?

*Um...[silence] well I think, I think the only way I feel like I self-sabotaged was when I moved here and in my twenties after I was stripping doing that kind of world, I started writing and I wrote a play, and I worked on it for four years, day and night, from like 25, or 24 to 28. And uh when I moved here, I burned it. So my therapist said that was like a suicide. And there were 72 songs, and it was all about my resurrection and that was supposed to be my career and my passion and my dream and what I wanted for myself you know, when I was child and, to be a successful playwright. And it came to me, it came through me, I mean it just came through me and I threw it out. And I threw all my writing out. And I kept on saying you know all I need is the minimal stuff and I will turn into this phoenix from letting go all of my all my old stuff and I really, you know, I felt like I had this Jesus Christ thing, like I was Christ, and I was...you know which I still feel like, we are all of us god. But I really felt the grandiosity of you know, well I will be the savior of the world.*

**[31]**

Would you describe it as hallucinations?

*Well it felt like hallucinations a lot. Uh huh. But at the same time I felt like there was communication too. And also I felt my father's spirit pushing me **always** to acknowledge the incest. Like my father committed suicide and that's when the incest memories came, after he died. And um it was almost like I you know, that's also when I started channeling, communicating, being able to communicate and I really felt like his spirit was saying it happened, it happened, and you know I will help you from this side to get through it*

*you know. A few weeks ago, I saw Capturing the Friedmans, I recommend it if you didn't see it but I was just sitting here like stunned and tears for hours, hours. And its like how can I say I'm not an incest survivor, when I cry at these things and I don't know why I'm crying. And I just cry and cry until my heart breaks. But I think that it's that loyalty to my father. I still have so much loyalty to him like he, you know, he...he's my husband on some level. And much more so there-now then when he was here.*

**[32]**

Was he abusive in any other way?

*Um I just remember him always protecting me. My brother used to totally tease me, and micher [annoy] me when I was little, and my father just going after him, so and yelling at him, screaming. When he started drinking, he got abusive you know, physically to my mom, but she got out early enough that you know I didn't see a lot of it. But basically I feel like my father was a very genteel kind of soul, and um very smart, very, very smart and couldn't channel it anywhere, and my mother married him on the rebound and didn't really love him and all that...all so much stuff that goes beyond the incest, per se, that happened, you know, the alcohol changed him and I think a lot of whatever happened to me happened because of the alcohol and not because he wanted to hurt me. You know, so like I know, I know enough about him, the little time I spent with him and what I remember was that he was not bad, and he was not really evil, it wasn't intentional. It wasn't you know...he fucked up [she began to take deep breaths].*

**[33]**

Do you feel all right?

*Yeah, I just need to breath.*

**[34]**

You spoke before about being revictimized. You said you were raped.

*I was 15 and I was doing heavy duty drugs and uh you know, I turned from drama student, honor student, child actress/model when I was a little girl, Uh you know, perfectionistic you know, anorexic, bulimic type [laugh] in Junior High. And then I got into high school and went to the extreme opposite. I started taking drugs, Quaaludes, Tuinol, angel dust you know everything, the whole gamut except for heroine. And coke, I really didn't like. Um but I got in you know with the wrong crowd, I guess the crowd was like my family [she was implying reenactment] and uh I started going to clubs and I...I was so desperately looking for love you know and a boyfriend, per se and that I went to these clubs and started taking Quaaludes. I hung out at Yellowstone and hanging out with all the older people and um got heavily into Quaaludes and uh basically got um was given Mickey's and in my drink or something. I never drank alcohol, but I...whatever seltzer I drank...um these you know eight guys took me out of the club, from Brooklyn they got me out of this club and they took me into Bedford Stuyvesant and till this day again, I don't know what happened to me, but they left me in an alley way and it was, actually I was 16 because I had all my sweet sixteen jewelry on and everything was stolen. So they robbed. They took me out of the club knowing that they were going to rob me, obviously. And I was in a one-piece spandex outfit and when I woke up, it was just the top was down, so I don't know if they raped me or not. But I was I in this alley way, and I didn't know where I was, and I was in a stupor from all the drugs, and uh disconnected from my body and I started walking down this block and I was oh my god, where am I, this is not the city, this is not my neighborhood. I did not know where I was and I ended up being in Bedford Stuyvesant, they took me into Bedford Stuy and I walked to the corner and it was all black people and they looked at me and like they were laughing and I was like, "I need to get a cab," and I said I was just raped. Um but I also said that because I wanted help, so they said, "Girl, you ain't gonna get no cab comin' in here in this neighborhood." So I stuck my finger out, and an older black man picked me up in a station wagon, and I was oh my God grandfather type. And I started crying hysterically, and saying, "I just got raped, please help me get back into the city, and I got taken out of club and I need to get back," and he goes "Oh dear, get in the car," and this and that, and you know he took me to a parking lot and locked the doors and took a knife to my throat and told me if you know, I don't you know do what he says, he was going to kill me. So he raped me. He sexually, he...he per...he fucked me, vaginally. In the car, and what had happened was the cops stopped us before we went anywhere and uh I was crying and they said, "Are you ok hon?" and I said I was just raped, and this and that, and the man told the cops I'm going to take her*

*back into the city, and they said are you ok with this, and I was just in shock, and I was ok. I thought he was a nice old man. But he was drunk. He was drunk as well. And um I was scared of him but he was so drunk that I knew that he wasn't going to hurt me. And he raped me. Like he did put like glass to me and he said you better just say...do what I say and at the same time I said ok I just got to do what he says, and I was just like, I did it. And it happened real quick, and I got him to drive me into the city, to the club I was at. [Breath and laugh] and I was actually dating the owner of this club so I went into the club, I was in shock you know. This whole thing is like one big dream. And I ran into the club and you know screaming, crying, "Oh my god, I just got raped!" All the bouncers just, I told the guy to stay in the car, that I was going to come out cause he was saying you know you're gonna date me and this and that. He was trying to befriend me after this and I was playing along and saying you know, "Oh yeah, definitely, I want you to meet my brother. You know, he works at this club and just wait here for 5 minutes, I'll be right back." So all the bouncers got him and they took him out of the car and they beat him up badly and the cops came and stuff but I never prosecuted. My mother said they're going to make you look like the whore and that you caused this and blah, blah, blah, and that was the end of my life. You know, after that night, I dropped out of high school. I ended up taking my equivalency and going to college, but that really was the ending of my life. So like 12 years later is when I found out well actually like 14 years later I found out about the incest and how everything connected, cause he was an older man. I always thought of the station wagon as the family man and you know drunk, like my dad, and it was just like there's too many things that connected, that make this not real. My dad was very, very sick with Parkinson's sick for years and years and years, but he committed suicide, you know. I think there's a lot, like guilt on him or something. I'm not saying it was because of me but I feel that part of it was. Um I just don't understand why I wasn't aware of it you know until after he died.*

**[35]**

Very traumatic experiences can be blocked from memory.

*But this definitely happened. So because it's more concrete, whereas the body memories its like you know. I don't know. And then therapists also say well that maybe there's fantasy that this would have happened, there's a special relationship, you know, I've heard therapists say that to me.*

**[36]**

Do you realize that this second incidence of rape was also sexual abuse? When you were abused you were a child, no matter how hot you looked and how sexy you looked, it was still child abuse.

*Yeah, I don't think of it as child abuse. Because...[silence]*

**[37]**

Well maybe because you remember it so well.

*I don't think of it as child sexual abuse because I was trying to be older and I didn't think I was a child at that age, you know, I did not look like a child.*

**[38]**

You said your mother told you not to say anything about the rape.

*Well, my mother when I told her I got raped, she started screaming like a maniac for like an hour, just screaming. Cause, "Oh my god, my daughter got raped. Oh my god it's happening to me." You know, that kind of thing.*

**[39]**

As though it had happened to her.

*Right, right, well that was a lot of stuff with my mom that I'm still working through.*

**[40]**

Do you mean that what happened to you--happened to her, what you did affected her.

*Right, right.*

**[41]**

Talk a bit about how your family interacted with one another. What were the patterns?

*My mom is a prescription drug addict and was basically put on fiorinal and started getting addicted to fiorinal and took ups and down, and so it was a very crazy childhood. My mom was high a lot. My sister took drugs. My brother dealt drugs. So patterns? It was just fully dysfunctional, you know, till this day, I*

*don't know how I survived it but I think, because I was able to go into fantasy a lot and dissociate and be in my own little world, that that's what allowed me to survive. I also had really good friends when I was little, and I would stay a lot at their house. Um but connections between people, communication between people, healthy communication, there was none.*

**[42]**

I wasn't necessarily asking about healthy communication so much as how they interacted with one another.

*Oh it was very um stressful, and lots of anger, lots of rage, you know. My mother was from an alcoholic family, her father, I think she was abused by a border that they had in the house, that she never uh talked about, but came out you know to me later on. Um yeah, my mom was very troubled and uh never went into therapy, just continued to take drugs until this day to get through it. So she never took responsibility for her healing or her life. So I feel like wow, even though this is a small, little world that I live in, it's still better than her world, but that's you know, I want a lot more than what I have now, you know, not base my stuff on her.*

**[43]**

What is her family's ethnic and religious background?

*Jewish. My father's family is Russian Jews. Then my mom, um her mother and father were her mother was German Jew and my grandfather was a Hungarian Jew, so Eastern European. We weren't religious.*

**[44]**

When you hung out with your friends, you mainly just did drugs.

*Well this is when I turned 15. Before 15 I was really a good kid, A student, Drama Club, B Club and kept myself out of the house by being so involved in school. Yeah, when I became 15-16 I just started hanging out with my friends and taking drugs. And living a promiscuous life style. Like I mean, I don't know how many men I was with from the age of 16 to 18. And then like the rest of my life has been sort of celibate, like all or nothing type of thing. In my 20s maybe, yeah, just in my late teens is when I had maybe like I went to be with like 30 guys or something in those 2 years. I just kept having sex. And my sister dealt into prostitution as well, so we think something probably happened to her as well, but she hasn't owned it. She owned it a little bit cause my father made comments to her when he was older like oh you're so beautiful, you look just like your mother, oh I had a dream about you. So she now like totally believes that he did something to me when I was younger. She said she didn't see anything but she doesn't put it past him.*

**[45]**

How old were you when he committed suicide?

*Um, I guess it was in...I think it was in '91, that same year that I found out. Um...so it's 13 years ago, I was 27.*

**[46]**

And he hadn't been in the house for a long while.

*Oh yeah, they divorced when I was 8. So my stepfather basically came into my life when I was like 15, when all this happened, that year [yawning]. And um yes so my father really wasn't in my life. I can count on one hand how many times he took me out. And I would come...I would go to his house and I would try to save him, cause he was alcoholic and "Why don't you go to AA groups?" You know I was 11 years old and I already knew what Al-Anon was and stuff. So I...he really wasn't in my life at all. You know, that's why I don't understand how it happened. He didn't try to be closer to me, or something when I got older. It was just like, you don't exist, you know. That's how it was, you know. When I think back at it, you know I remember my last Thanksgiving that I remember him, my sister had him at her house. I was stripping then, I was about 22, and how, you know I walked in. I was like in some kind of leather stripper outfit, and here I am a baby, 22-23 you know just you know, god knows how I must have looked you know and yet you know I was really this baby inside and how like he stood in a corner, sat in a corner the whole time and didn't like hardly even said hello to me. It was just like I always sensed there was something a little too weird. Like I never did anything to him, why would he treat me like this? And my sister said um, you know, well he's you know he's sick, he has Parkinson's really bad, and you know, he's like this to*

*everyone, which he sort of was. I mean he really you know when he didn't...after all those years of not drinking and stuff he sort of became very reclusive and...do you think he remembered doing that?*

[47]

Well the research on perpetrators who abuse when they are in drunken states suggests that when confronted, they usually say, "It wasn't me, it was the alcohol." "I would never do such a thing if I didn't drink."

*Uh, huh, uh huh. I also did a lot of therapeutic dance that helped me a lot.*

[48]

What do you do now?

*I do Gabrielle Roth's work, they have classes in the city a couple of times a week and basically she has 5 levels of dance to get to your inner most core. A lot of drumming, a lot of deep ritual kind of work. So I know I have to keep very physical because I always have that rage, so it's very important for me to get it out physically.*

[49]

It's good that you're aware of what you need. You said before that you wondered if you weren't abused you might not be gay. Did you ever twist that idea around and think well if I wasn't abused, that perhaps you would have come out sooner?

*I don't know if I have [laugh]. The thing is that I don't believe I would be gay, probably. Well I have this fantasy, if I had a good daddy, I wouldn't be.*

[50]

So there it is.

*But I have to think about it also, if I think about it you know, more deeply and then think about how I did feel attraction um you know at a very early age and stuff and appreciate women's bodies so much, I don't think that has to do with my father but I think I've connected it so inside that...that I...I...almost blame him for it. Like something's wrong with being gay, again that homophobia and he did it to me.*

[51]

Is there anything you'd like to add to this conversation?

*Um yeah just that it's I'm...I'm still till this day not confused about the incest so much, but more about not owning my sexuality or sexual ness, you know, even. And how you know how hard it is for me to stay present in sex, how I've either been celibate or promiscuous, there hasn't been any in between. You know my long term relationship um which ended about a year ago and I'm just about ok I can date again, I have so many problems with me, first of all it...there's so much it could be a topic for another hour, me still being, wanting to seduce, being the aggressor on some level and then feeling like I'm getting abused during sex, so that not being healed for me and wondering if it will ever be healed for me. Not being able to have sex without a joint. You know without smoking or feeling comfortable with it and that it's two extremes; that I am the whore, or I am the nun. So you know the incest and the gayness being totally black and white for me. And maybe that is why perhaps I'm bi because you know there is that black and white there. There is that middle ground. And so being thinking and being whether I'm in reality or fantasy in my life. Am I fantasizing still about that white knight in shining armor coming, whether it be a man or a woman, but is that a fantasy for me still, am I still 3 years old? You know, have I not emotionally grown still, you know like I have grown on many levels emotionally, but I still feel the time of my incest, I'm still there, inside, and that I...I think that I'll always be there and can I can beyond it I still question? Because I still do things um and my therapist says I just don't want to grow up. But of course, I feel like I do because I am...I've always dreamed of having a career [laugh] and of being loving my career, that's so important to me. So I don't know about me not wanting to, I think it's more of like can I? And still uh, you know I still go through days of baby talk all day and regressing and wanting to stay curled up, and you know talk. I will go into that baby talk and talk to Izzy like I'm 3 years old. So I'm still really you know disjointed in a lot of different years that I've worked on integrating for myself, but I don't have a helpful therapy. I think I've integrated on an adult level, but 3-4-5-6-7-8 year old is still, they're still in me and they're still acting out inside, so.*

**[52]**

Thank you for being so open, and letting me hear your story. How do you feel?

*Like I need some water. I'd like to ask you if you know of someplace I can go to, in the city, because I feel like incest is my core issue.*