

<p>Lisa: Have it close to me like that</p> <p>Jesse: Yeah that works</p> <p>Molly: That works</p> <p>Jesse: Alright, so</p> <p>Lisa: I'm sorry I don't see any meters jumping, are you absolutely sure this is recording</p> <p>Molly: The red light is on</p> <p>Lisa: Okay</p> <p>Jesse: Yup</p> <p>Lisa: Okay</p> <p>Jesse: It's pretty simple [laughs] not really big technology with us</p> <p>Lisa: Yup, okay</p> <p>Jesse: Alright, awesome. So it is November 9th and we're at Glickman Library in Portland Maine. My name is Jesse Lucas, J-E-S-S-E, L-U-C-A-S.</p> <p>Molly: I'm Molly Roberts, that's M-O-L-L-Y R-O-B-E-R-T-S</p> <p>J: and if you can say and spell your name</p> <p>Lisa: I'm Elizabeth Bunker E-L-I-Z-A-B-E-T-H B-U-N-K-E-R. I go by Lisa.</p> <p>J: Perfect and then just another reminder that if you wish to stop the interview at anytime, or refuse to answer any questions that is perfectly fine this is for you to feel comfortable in. And if we could just get your age?</p> <p>L: I'm 55 years old.</p> <p>J: Perfect, and if you could just say on the record your preferred pronouns</p> <p>L: My preferred pronouns are she and Her</p> <p>J: Awesome. So our first question would be, how was your family life growing up?</p> <p>L: Okay, um, my family life growing up was pleasant. I was born in 1962 in Los Melos New Mexico. My parents were scientists, um, when I was very small about 3 years old we moved to Newport Beach, California, where my father had just become a professor of chemistry at the University of California Irvine. We lived in a brand new suburban neighbourhood and my mom was a stay at home mom. It was me and a brother a year younger than me, we had an older half sister but she wasn't in the picture much. Until I was 8 my parents were married. They were reasonably happy together and functional as a couple. I was born with a male body and was raised as a boy and, um, in retrospect looking back I definitely was a trans-girl from the very beginning. I was born that way. There are different things that happened where looking back now I can say "Yeah that was what I was trying to do or say." But, um, I didn't ever even get started trying to express my gender identity, I mean I suppose I must have tried a few times very tentatively, but this is the middle of the 1960's and there was no knowledge of gender identity being anything more than two binary points and the biological determinism was just how it was. If you were born with one set of genitals you were a boy and if you were born with the other set of genitals you were a girl and this was just a received truth. And there were very few public figures, certainly none that I had access to. There</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Age</p> <p>Pronouns</p> <p>Family life</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Siblings</p> <p>Transgirl</p> <p>Gender binary</p>
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<p>was no language. And I grew up in a family and a time where femininity was devalued. This was the sort of, the beginning of second wave feminism as it is called now. And, um, my parents were progressive people for their time, open minded and progressive people. And they both, in their own way, embraced feminism, but what their feminism was, what I learned feminism was, was women are as good as men and they can prove that and assert themselves in the world by being as much like men as they want or as possible. So women could claim masculinity if they wanted. We are as good as men we can do this if we want. But the idea of a specifically feminine form of empowerment in culture did not exist at that time, and my father in particular actively had contempt for feminine women. I grew up around sort of, you know, jokes or snarky comments or sarcasms about make-up and women who cared about clothes or hair. Such women were assumed to be stupid, were assumed to be frivolous and unreliable, and maybe not even really grown-ups, you know some sort of child-human. And I was shy, I was diffident, I was easily cowed, and I was a dutiful child, you know, I was an eager to please, overachiever, first born and I wanted to make the people around me happy by giving them what they wanted, and I think it because clear to me very early one that what my parents wanted from me was a good boy. And so, I enacted boyhood for them, and once I got started and committed to the project I tried to do the best possible job that I could because I wanted to win praise and love and you know, um. So, I really, I feel like maybe there were one or two incidents where I tried to show or say that I didn't feel like a boy, that this was not right for me. I think I was just sort of quietly and routinely shut down. I don't have a specific memory of it, but I think there must have been a scene where my mother would very occasionally sort of do "femme" when she was going out for a nice dinner with my dad. She was you know, no make-up, jeans, and simple blouses, and regular shoes most of the time, she was just, she wasn't into feminine expression. But, when they were going out for dinner, she would sit down at a makeup table and she would do lipstick and she would do earrings and I remember being fascinated by that procedure and standing by the side of her table and looking in her jewelry box that she had and just being astonished by what was in there. And I think I must have asked once "can I try that? Can I wear this? Can I put lipstick on?" and my mother was not a harsh woman, she was kind in her way, um, she was not emotionally available very much and she was very sure about her opinions; she stated her opinions as facts. So, the way I imagine that scene must have gone is tentative little trans-girl me saying "mommy can I try the lipstick?" and she just looked at me and said "no, honey, that's for girls and you're a boy." And she, being who she was, and I being who I was, that was it! There was no big trauma moment there, you know, there was no , you know, scene worthy of a Hollywood movie. It was a very simple little interchange, but what I was actually saying is "I'm a girl!" and she was saying "no you're not" and so that's how it was. And I never actually said those words, "I'm a girl" until I was in my forties. Um, other than that scenario or that sort of part of</p>	<p>Second wave feminism</p> <p>Devaluation of femininity</p> <p>Enacting boyhood</p> <p>Mother</p> <p>Retrospectively trans</p>
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<p>sort of being the gendered person that I was, I would say I had a really happy family life and childhood. Um, my parents were fascinating people, they were engaged with being parents. They did get involved, they did get divorced when I was 8 and it was a messy ugly divorce with sort of, my father particular, sort of used the children against her. You know, he sort of asked us to keep secrets, and he you know, sort of bad mouthed her in front of us and sort of tried to recruit us into this sort of idea of her as "bad". I went through a divorce decades later and was, one of the sort of, something that made that better than it could have otherwise been was trying to do it better than my parents did. But, so that was ugly and traumatizing and difficult, and we, I and my siblings entered this long stretch of time where we had two households in two different states, and the households were very different from each other. And that made it more complicated, it was also cool. My mom lived a much more quiet, sort of steady domestic life, in New Mexico still; my father, um, sort of did like an early 70's pre-AIDS wild California lifestyle. He had multiple partners, he was experimenting with like, smoking dope and going to orgies and stuff like this and he, he overshared, um, he, I knew way more about that stuff than I think any 8 or 9 or 10 year old would really healthily need to know, um, and he was, he was a self narrator. He liked to sort of create the drama of his life. and there was definitely this feel that it was a cool thing to be a bunker and he would narrate bunker-ness as this kind of cool thing this sort of exclusive club, and it was exciting but, there was also, it brought with it a certain anxiety: it's like am I really good enough to be a bunker? Do I fit it? And just by accident of birth or whatever, I looked more like my mother than my other two siblings. Comments would be made about if I said a thing or laughed a certain way or something I looked like her, looked like her brother, and so I had this secret anxiety all the time when I was growing up that I wasn't a real Bunker, that I was, didn't quite measure up. In other ways, they were fantastic parents. My mom just really committed herself to showing us the world and taking us traveling and camping and arts and crafts projects and stuff. She did a great job of just raising us. We did live mostly with her. And my dad was this, was the exciting visit parent and he also took us a traveling and he exposed us to these fascinating people that he hung out with and he treated us with respect and you know respected our intelligence and our humour, he was a very funny man, I loved his whimsical goofyness that he had, and I tried to bring that to my own parenting when I became a parent. It was good. I had a good childhood. I didn't get the chance to say who I actually was as a gendered being, but that doesn't mean I had no life. I was still alive. I think living as an unexpressed trans person, you do still have a life and in many ways it's the same life you would have had if you'd been able to say your gender truth early. All the different things we do in life, some of them are very gendered and some of them are hardly gendered at all. School is not very gendered, work is not very gendered, I mean, there are some kinds that are, but when I was just, you know, trying to learn English, or, um, playing with friends or hiking in the woods or</p>	<p>Parents Messy divorce</p> <p>Two households</p> <p>Father oversharing</p> <p>Fitting in to family</p> <p>Mother</p> <p>Father</p> <p>Living as unexpressed trans person</p>
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whatever, I can do that as a boy or a girl equally well, gender was not an important issue in those moments and I was alive, I was having a nice time. It was harder when I had to figure out gendered stuff, like how to be a boy, being a friend with other boys. And just sort of feeling on the outside of that and none of it coming naturally, and feeling like there's this complicated set of rules that I had to learn and didn't really understand and didn't really like, but that was how it was supposed to be done. And yearning towards this sort of devalued and forbidden femininity that was in the world and never really clearly being able to say that in words, but sort of feeling an ache. And then when I got older and it was time for relationships, that never worked well at all because I was faking it, I was enacting bad gender theatre, being a man in the world. And I was trying to connect up with women who were looking for a man like me, but I was doing an act for them, I wasn't actually being a man with them. And a curious wrinkle of that is I had a secret contempt, I think, for the people who ended up being attracted to this construct that I had created because they were falling for my act. And, you know, so I couldn't really respect them really because, I mean everyone was, including in a way me, but, um yeah, there was no way for actual mutually respectful loving human connection and relationship because I wasn't actually that person. But the whole enterprise was based on the assumption or the requirement that I was. So, that part was real icky.

J: You said that you came out in your 40's but looking back you were always, even at a young young age, a trans-girl. At what point did you really start admitting that to yourself, and kind of, thinking about, "I'm actually a trans-girl, I'm not a boy?"

L: Um, well I can narrate one of the things that in retrospect was a clear, a clear sign. Um, when I was 5 years old, my mother became friends with a woman in our neighbourhood who had a daughter and we were, you know, we got together a bunch of times so the moms could talk and the kids could have a play date. And this girl, and this family, was the first and only girly girl that I really got to meet when I was that young, and her name was Lisa. And she was, she was adorable, I mean she was this little cherub of a girl with rosy cheeks and the curly hair and, um, the cute frock and the little black shoes with the straps, and um, and you know sort of precious girly ways and I remember having a really intense experience when I was left to play with this child. Which, if you had asked me about it in the intervening years between sort of gender revelation and transition I would say that maybe that was my first crush? I mean something really intense happened. And maybe it was, I mean she was a really cute little girl, but I think it was more than that. I think it was a moment of intense identification, because I had never met a girl like this before. And I remember this moment of sort of, like, if it was a scene in a movie it would be a shaft of light from heaven, you know, it would be this sort of [singing] "ohhh!" angel singing thing. And, um, evidently, that was me looking at this person and saying "I'm you! Everything about you makes total sense to me and I just, if I could be you it would just be so joyous and free to be alive." And the interesting final

Dating

Gender Revelation

wrinkle of that story is when I did finally sort of start to express my gender truth and explore what that meant and figure out what to do, the first time a person asked me, "So what do you want to be called?" [gasps] "Lisa!" I didn't have to think about it, I didn't have to debate the question, I knew as soon as somebody asked me that question, I knew my name was Lisa. It came to me with a sense of joyous release and revelation. And so, evidently, I took that little girls name, put it away in a little cupboard inside of myself somewhere and carried it around for 40 years, waiting for someone to ask me the right question, and then I got to say who I was.

J: That's great.

L: The other half of the question was when did I start expressing. Well, in my mid-40's. Um, and by then I was, a couple years out of a divorce after a 16 year marriage, which resulted in two children. I have two kids in their 20's now. And so the marriage came apart not specifically because of gender, although in retrospect it's another thing that well "yeah obviously!" But, um, so post-divorce I was living in a double wide trailer in a trailer-park in Wells, Maine, because that was what I could afford after the financial fall-out of the end of a marriage. And I had my kids with me week-on, week-off. We were living in adjacent towns and I had my weeks alone, and my weeks with my kids. And, um, they were preteens at the time, they were tweens at the time, early teenagers. And in the weeks that my children were not with me, I found myself alone in a way that I hadn't been for decades. And, um, with room to think and feel and write. And I was feeling increasingly frustrated and angry and stuck and like, I was just somehow failing at something I didn't even understand that I was doing. I felt like I was failing as a man and I felt that was regards to the end of the marriage and I felt it was regards to writing, I always wanted to be a writer, ever since I was a tiny child. And at the time I thought of that as an aspect of manhood, you know, like they were somehow related in my mind. And that wasn't going well. And I wasn't finding somebody else to partner with. I just felt like I was screwing up the man thing in a really basic horrible way and I also felt like it was my only choice! I had no other choice in the world but to be a man, but I couldn't do it! I was failing, and I was frustrated and angry and desperate. And finally one night, I was writing in a journal and I started exploring this idea of femininity, and I wrote something like, "what if my inner child is a dreamy girl?" and then I wrote, and this was that, I told you the moment that someone sort of asked me my name and I finally got to say it, this was the other moment which was sort of revelatory, was I wrote the words, "I just want to be a girl." And I didn't think "I'm going to write these words" and write them, I wrote them, and it was like I was thinking them as I was writing them and realizing that it was true as I was writing them. Again, another moment of sort of, amazing release, and um, and ecstasy and terror. I mean you know, I didn't know what it meant, I had, I knew nothing about trans lives or trans identities. I confused it with sexuality, I mean, as many people still do in the world today. It's like, what does this mean, is this some sort of kind of being

Affirmed name

Gender Revelation

Writing

Feeling of failure

gay? I don't understand what's going on. So, and then that was the beginning and once I had written that and more stuff sort of working out that idea, I went and I got some gym socks and I rolled them up and I stuck them under my shirt and I made nipples out of Philbrook nuts and I looked at myself in the mirror and I thought, "Yes! This!", and you know I tried on some shoes, but you know, I had a child who was female identified at the time who had some shoes and they were too small, but I put them on and I just sort of looked at myself in the mirror and I thought, "yes! This! this really speaks to me in some way, this expresses something about me that's never been expressed." And then that was the start of the long process of educating myself and finding support. I found counseling support and I found a support group, through an organization called Maine TransNet, which I think still exists?

J: It does, yeah.

M: It sure does

L: Yeah. Is it Quinn Gorham right now who's running Maine TransNet? I don't know, anyway. Off topic. And thank goodness for those resources, for the Internet, and for, um, for the council I was able to find and especially for Maine TransNet because I came to those support groups and I got to find out that I'm not the only one, there are other people working through the same kinds of sort of curious life puzzle that I was. And I got to learn that I wasn't a freak and that I was a version of normal and that there were ways forward and I very quickly began to work out that just, you know, cross dressing in secret the weeks that my children weren't with me was not going to be enough of a solution to the new way of living that I had found myself in and that I needed to undertake gender transition and live fulltime as a female person in the world.

M: Wow

J: Yeah that is great.

M: It, I can't tell you like how great it is to be hearing this. Um, hearing your stories, you are so well spoken and, uh this is so great. [laughs]

L: Thank you!

M: I'm trying to think of where, what our next question should be because you've answered a lot of the questions we've been planning on asking you.

J: Yeah.

L: That's alright, take your time.

M: Yeah, Um.

J: I have one, if you..

M: Yeah go for it.

J: Um, who was the first person that you came out as trans to?

L: [laughs] Um, that's a great questions, um. I came out to two long distance friends. One was a college friend who had come out to me a little after we both graduated from college as gay. And he was actually living in Australia at the time and I had stayed in touch with him off and on through the years. And the other was, a friend I made through my work, I worked for many years in public and community broadcasting, and this woman had come to a station that I worked at to do some voice

Dressing up

Maine TransNet

Coming out

coaching, she was a voice coach. And she a, sort of, brash, outspoken lesbian who does standup comedy, you know this sort of really edgy wonderful human. And so she came to a station that I worked at many years ago and then later on in that industry I found myself in the position of putting on conferences I was the president of a trade organization and we put on an annual conference and I hired her to come and do her workshop for our attendees and we became friends. So I had, you know, my gay friend and my lesbian friend, both very long distance, and in the early months of that process of um, after gender revelation, they were the people that I was talking to. My friend Jared in Australia was the very first I wrote an email to and he started teaching me. He said "I actually don't know all that much about this, I'm gay, I'm not gender variant" which was how I learned that there's a difference between those things. But, you know, he just sort of offered comfort and support. And Marilyn my lesbian friend and her partner were just happy to hear from me and said "yay! That's wonderful, we're supporting you" and they were very patient as I sent them these long emails full of gushing and enthusiasm and trepidation and stuff, I was sort of riding the rollercoaster with them as witnesses. And they sent me a present which was really wonderful early on; they sent me a little makeup kit in a zippered bag with leopard print and it's just like yes! thank you, you get it! I'm playing. Part of what gender transition, revelation and transition turned out to be for me, was a kind of hyper-accelerated second adolescence. And there was definitely an early period of emotional peaks and valleys, you know, extremes and sort of, giddy child-like play and um, intense self-involvement. I became deeply narcissistic for several months because I was all wrapped up in this cool thing I was doing. And, um, they sort of helped, they were my companions during that time and my patient listeners, and my cheerleaders and occasionally would say "Honey, you're being a little extreme right there, maybe you just want to think about that before you make that move" or whatever. So they really helped me. And it was good to have somebody to just write that email to when I was bursting with all these feelings! And I could just type it all out loud and send it off and they would say "we're reading, we're paying attention, we love you." It was very important to have that support.

J: That's great. Um, did you, I just uh, what was your family's reaction when you finally came out as trans?

L:Yes. Um, both my parents had already passed away by the time I had figured all of this out. My father died when I was 14 years old, in 1977, my mother died in 1992, when I was 29. So I did not ever get to talk to either of them about this. I have many times imagined what those conversations would have been like. Both of them I think would have been challenging in different ways. My father was a pretty good feminist for his time, but he did have, you know, I and my siblings have talked about his attitudes about women and the sort of, multiple partners, sexual promiscuity thing he did in the 70's, and he definitely sort of, either belittled or sort of elevated women but didn't treat the as equals. He was a man of his time, you know, and so it would have been very

Support from friends

Second adolescence

Family

Parents' death

Hypothetical coming out

Father

<p>strange coming out to him, if he had survived long enough for me to have that conversation. I don't have as much of a sense of who he actually was, 14 is pretty young, you know to lose a parent, so I have a childlike memory of him, or a partly constructed one from talking to my siblings and other people who knew him but, I really don't know what that would have been like. My mom would have been a real challenge. As I mentioned, she was very sure of her opinions, she tended to express them as facts. And so she might have just told me that it wasn't so, you know. [laughs]. "I have something to tell you, I have discovered something new about myself. I actually have a female sense of self." "No you don't!" And I would have had to insist and that would have been a very difficult conversation because I lived for years and years and years in terror of her anger. I mean she wasn't actually demonstratively angry ever but she had this tight lipped simmery thing that she did, you know and it just, I was just afraid of. So it would have been a really difficult conversation. On the other hand, I am so sad that I don't ever get to have it, that I don't get to talk to them about it and ask them questions and you know look back over our family history together and sort of trace how it could have taken so long for me to finally say this simple thing about myself. Um, I did have siblings to come out to. So I have my brother who's a year younger, and my half sister who's six years older, we have the same father and different mothers. And at the time they both lived in the Denver, Colorado area. So about a year into my process when I was definitely, when I had sort of done the early work on my own and figured out, I'm definitely a trans person and I'm definitely transitioning, I had sort of settled on my terminology and my plan, I knew what I was doing to a fair extent, so I planned a trip to go out and visit them. And I came out to my sister when we were driving together somewhere. If you need to talk to something, somebody about something that you're not sure they're going to be comfortable it's great to catch them in a car because they can't get away from you. And I had rehearsed and thought about it, I was terribly nervous, you know, I was anxious. There was all the early coming outs there was this kind of irrational thing where I knew my family are good people and open minded and accepting and I was logically sort of rationally almost positive it was going to well but there was this just sort of deep fear of rejection and abandonment, you know, the lizard brain irrational sort of atavistic child brain was saying "they're gonna hate me!" I mean I even sort of I feared death. Coming out was like facing the fear that somehow I would be struck down for saying this thing that I had never been allowed to say. So I was terrified. We're driving in the car, there's been a long, you know, easy silence and so I finally take a breath and I say "I have something to tell you," "What?" she says, "you got a girlfriend?" "No it's more complicated than that" and then I went through my little speech: "I've learned something about myself I think my identity is basically feminine.." I went through my speech. And it ended and we drove in silence for a while. And this is actually one of my favourite moments in this whole gender saga. She said, "this is amazing" she said</p>	<p>Mother</p> <p>Siblings</p> <p>Half-sister</p> <p>Fear of coming out</p>
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<p>"if something this big can change for you this late in life maybe there's hope for me too."</p> <p>M: That just gave me shivers</p> <p>J: Yeah</p> <p>L: And she's had a difficult life, I mean we had the same father but different mothers, our father died when we were young and so her mother remarried and so she has, she had, a completely different set of parents from me. She's their only child and they were difficult people. Needy, demanding, parents. And they're both dead now but she had to take care of them all by herself for many, many years and she's had a really challenging, hard life in many ways. And she was in, at that time, she was deep in looking after them as they aged and became sort of more and more hard to recon with, and she was in a long dark tunnel just like I was. I mean, if you want analogies for how I lived all those years as an unexpressed transwoman, a tunnel is a good one, a long tunnel, or locked inside, locked kind of in an internal cell. You're still alive but you're not fully alive, you're not fully present, you're filtered, or you're barred off, or you're locked away in some way. And so, I was able to give my sister, whom I love dearly, some hope in life with my revelation and that still just makes me so happy! My brother was easier, we went out and we were shooting pool in a bar and I did my speech and he was just like almost sort of casually accepting. He's like "okay, I guess I don't really care much, but okay!" which in retrospect is a lovely reaction, it's like "okay whatever, you're still my sibling." My favourite reaction to coming out is "okay, cool, so anyway."</p> <p>M: That's very good</p> <p>L: Yeah. And that was his version of that. So that part went fine. The real challenge was my children. So two kids, the older one is now identifies as genderqueer and uses they and them for pronouns the younger one is uncomplicated a male person in a male body. And, but they were both teens at the time and early on in my looking for help process, actually one of the very first things I did was I went back to a counselor that I had seen before when I was getting divorced. And I had liked, I had appreciated and benefited from her help at the time so this was just a social worker that I found, you know, locally. And she had struck me during the divorce conversations as sort of practical and hard headed and with a low bullshit tolerance which is helpful when you're sort of squirming about something. So I went back to her again, and this is actually one of the worst moments of the whole experience. Very early in the sort of, still riding the emotional roller coaster, still very tentative about it; worried, scared, misinformed still about what this was and what it meant for my life. And she responded to my news, I told her that I was exploring feminine expression and cross dressing, she told me that, she responded with alarm and shaming. She told me that, and specifically, it was okay that I was looking into this but I had to lock away all my newfound accoutrements and toys that I had acquired and my children could never find out because it would traumatize them.</p> <p>J: Oh my god.</p>	<p>Half-sister's life</p> <p>Unexpressed transwoman</p> <p>Brother</p> <p>Casual acceptance</p> <p>Children</p> <p>Counselor</p> <p>Bad experience coming out</p>
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L: She also told me that she didn't, she admitted to me that she didn't actually know all that much about this stuff, and she offered me a referral to a colleague. And so, badly shaken by this interview, our conversation, I went home and I googled the colleague, and he had published, recently, an article the title of which was something like "Should memories of childhood trauma extracted through the therapy process be given credence? Absolutely yes." so what was offered to me in that exchange was an opportunity to engage with a narrative about my life which was, that when I was a child some awful thing was done to me. As a result of that, my "true gender", based on apparently some simple biological determinism had been perverted or twisted out of shape and I was therefore sick in some way and I had to do whatever I had to do to survive my life but I specifically couldn't tell my children because it would harm them forever. So, I didn't totally buy this but of course it shook me I mean this woman was a mental health professional. I stopped seeing her, I found somebody else. And I was doing research and I was going to my discussion groups. But all the same, it rattled me. And I was, and am, a very careful, loving parent. I want my children's lives to go as well as they possibly can with whatever help they will let me offer them. I spent a year figuring out how and when to come out to my children. And I did a lot of talking about it and a lot of writing about it and a lot of agonizing. One of the things, one of the possible ways to handle that scenario would've been to not come out to them until they were, say, much older. And I found that I couldn't wait to live. Once I figured out who I was. I've always been a practical and hard-headed human, and once I know a thing is the right path, I don't feel like I can wait around five or six years to enact that. It's like okay that's obviously the thing to do, I want to do it now. I was driven by intense dysphoria, that sense of wrongness that trans people feel in the bodies they were born in. And I couldn't wait. And I felt bad about that, I felt like I was being selfish, but on the other hand I was desperate and I was, I mean my other options were self destruction of some kind: suicide, or substances, or just sort of fleeing my life, disappearing, you know. So I figured out, I have to do this, and I was afraid that it would harm them. That it would at least, maybe not like that counselor implied that it would, but at least that it would be very difficult for them. They'd recently been through a divorce of their parents, they were teenagers themselves, and I was basically proposing to impose my own second adolescence on their adolescences. Which was, you know, that's a big ask! But I finally concluded that I had to. The thing that finally decided me to not wait, to not try to hold it together and tell them later, was, um, the issue of hypocrisy. I had always raised them this basic concept that parents try to teach their children you know "be true to yourself, be real. Figure out who you are and express that in the world." That's how we live our lives, that's how we, sort of, present ourselves and have a human life. And what finally decided me was the simple notion that if I told them that but didn't practice it, that I was, that I would be hypocritical parenting. And what's the real message of that? If I had held

Parenting

Dysphoria

Parenting ideals

off and told them later, the message would have been "Be yourself, unless it's really difficult and it's gonna inconvenience the people in your life, in that case better just suppress your real self and play by the rules because that's going to be better for everybody." That's not the parenting message I wanted to give them. And so I finally did it. And I of course agonized and rehearsed and planned. And then I finally had that conversation with them. In the short term it went really, really well, they were both immediately accepting and loving, which was just so sweet and just brought me to tears then and still does when I think about it. It got bumpy later. One of the things that I've learned is that when you share some sort of really big life-shaking news with somebody there's an immediate reaction which is mostly brain, and then there's the longer slower reaction which is sort of heart and spirit. And it was difficult news for them. I was also not being the very best parent I could have been during that span of time. I was working on this big thing of my own and had other stressors in my life. And I didn't parent them perfectly, perfect parenting doesn't ever happen. I mean it's an inherently flawed and complicated and human thing. So, you know, I did some things which I feel sad about now; displays of temper and sort of displays of neediness, you know I sort of, in my desperation for support, I sometimes turn to them for support that I ought to of been getting from an adult friend or partner or support group or something. But we got through it. And I own up to those things now. And just try to fix it and do better next time and carry on. My eldest child, as I mentioned a little while ago, now lives as a genderqueer person and uses they and them. And to me that's vindication of my choice. I showed my child that, despite the bumps in life that it may cause, that it's really important to live your authentic self and they are. And I feel like I gave them permission and support to do that. Um, my son is, we went through several years where he wasn't using my old name and pronouns but couldn't bring himself to use the new name and pronouns either. So we lived in this weird linguistic space where we somehow roughly managed to get by without those things. He's a young human who likes things to stay the same, poor kid. And so our little family of three, he's the only cisgender, heterosexual one. He's our token cishet person. He's older now, he's in his early twenties, he's in college, and he's meeting lots and lots of people, who are, lots of other people who are genderqueer and gender variant and sexuality variant, and he's gotten much easier about it. But it was only in the last year or two, this process started ten years ago, I had my gender revolution in '08, so it's been a while now. But it was only in the last year or two that sort of casually when I was visiting him at school he used a female pronoun for me introducing me to a friend, or something. And it is so him that that was not a moment, he specifically didn't want it to be a moment. He didn't want any fuss, he didn't want me to say "oh, thank you for finally saying she and her", just like, he did it, I noticed, I didn't say a word. Just, so yeah. It's all worked out well, in the end. And it's routine now with my siblings. The sister, yeah. So, I'm sad about my parents, every few months I have another day where I'm just, I'm so

Children's acceptance

Difficult news

"flawed" parenting

Genderqueer child

Family

yearning for a do-over. Can I just go back and start again, please, and say what I need to say earlier and have this other life. It's a regret that will never go away, but in the meantime I do get to live as who I am, so it's going fine.

J: Which is great, and you were working, excuse me, at WMPG at the time, is that correct?

L: Yeah, the community radio station here at USM, I was the program director for fourteen years and that's from, so, at the beginning of that fourteen years I was living as a man in the world, I was married and I had two small children. And by the end of it, I was single and female and had grown up children. So all of that change happened in that workplace. And that part, I'm happy to report, went really well. Actually, I came out at work in two stages. I started, a few months into the process, I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with my male name and pronouns. I started signing my emails and memos and so-on with the name "Dee", which is the initial of my old male name. And, um, a few people noticed and made comments, "oh, is that your new DJ name" or whatever, and that was, and I had an idea early on that I was gonna be able to just talk to a few people that I sort of liked and trusted and come out slowly but that was clearly not the case once word started to spread, people were talking. What I did was, just in the confines of the radio station, which is like this little micro-community within the much larger community of the university, I wrote a memo and I said "okay, so I figured this thing out about myself that maybe my gender is different than I've always thought and I'm figuring out what to do about it and I'm not really comfortable with my old name anymore so I'm gonna go by Dee at work and for now male pronouns are still fine and we'll see what happens." And I sent that email out to everybody at the station, it's an intensely communal space, you know, it's a volunteer-run radio station so there's a little tiny paid staff and a huge body of community volunteers from every walk of life. I got so many wonderful emails, just support and love, and it was great. So I did that for a year and by the end of that year I had figured out, I've got to go all the way on this, no half measures. And right at the time I actually legally changed my name, I wrote another memo and this one went out not just to WMPG but to the whole university community, it was a huge campus. But there's a list serve you can send messages to, so I said "okay, this is it, I'm not 'old male name' anymore, I'm Lisa and she and her for pronouns, it's official, it's legal" and I got another round of lovely emails from within the station and from within the larger community of the university, a couple hundred of them from a whole bunch of people I didn't know and had never worked with, and never would, and all of them just lovely and positive. There were, later on, some awkward moments. Some of the older volunteers, older male volunteers in particular, not exclusively but that seems to be the group who were most uncomfortable with this sort of stuff, we had some awkward encounters, some moments, I got misgendered a lot, still got

Work

University of Southern
Maine

Coming out

Community

called "sir", "mister", and there were some people who were just squirmy and uncomfortable and that is what it is, and there was an episode where somebody who worked for the facilities management part of the university came over one day because we had a broken door in our little building, the arm that makes the door close again had broken so it wasn't closing it was just hanging open. So there's three paid managers and both of the other paid managers were out of the building for the moment and this guy came around the corner to my desk looking for the manager to talk to so that he could fix our door for us and he saw me and did this massive double take, and his eyes went away, and I was still very inbetween-y with my gender presentation at that time and this guy just did not wanna talk to me. "Is Jim here?", Jim was my boss, "no, can I help you?" He was evasive, and sort of deeply uncomfortable, and that's uncomfortable for me of course although I've gotten better and better at dealing with that scenario when it comes up. That poor man, you know, he just couldn't deal with this gender-mixy person who he'd come face to face with. Eventually one of the other two managers showed up and he gratefully went off to talk to her about the broken door. So there's been a few slurs yelled at me, again, when I was more mixy in my presentation. I've had a lot of body modification done, and nobody reads me as male anymore, just out in the street or in the world. It was almost entirely positive though, at work. I was lucky to have a progressive community and workplace to come out in. I know many trans and variant people and I've heard some horror stories, I was lucky.

M: Did you have any other questions?

J: Nope

M: I was hoping that we could talk a little bit about you being an author. We hadn't talked about that yet.

L: Sure!

M: Do you want to talk about what your book is a little bit? Felix Xy?

L: Felix Yz, it's pronounced Yz, it's the characters last name. If you'll permit me, I'll answer the question in a bigger way than you've asked it, I have said that it's the case that I was female largely, a female person from the beginning. We should talk about beyond the binary, that might be a good thing to have in this conversation. So I've said I'm trans from the beginning, that's evidently true. I've also been a writer ever since I was born. I love the parallels of the two narratives because I had a kind of moment when I was like five, too, where there was a certain book that I discovered in my parents' library. They were very smart about it, they put these books that they thought I might discover and didn't say anything to us about it so we could find them on our own. So I found this book, it's called The Thirteen Clocks, by James Thurber and I read it and it

Author

absolutely just blew me away, this book. I was astonished by it, this gorgeous language and storytelling. I already loved reading aloud, you know, and was a reader, a precocious reader. And I think, in that moment, I sort of realized, the reason I'm on this planet is to someday maybe make stories for people. It's an identity thing, I really, I feel like I'm a writer like the same way I feel like I'm a largely feminine person. It's just the brain I got, you know. And similarly, to the gender thing, I struggled for years to express this aspect of my identity, and I was writing all of the time, I was writing stories and poems and plays and I was always working on some project but not having success with it, not getting published, not getting noticed. And it was all tangled up in this sort of puzzle of masculinity and the unexpressed gender part was making it more and more complicated. I struggled in the most awful way with the puzzle of how much autobiography do you put in a story. You know, it's another thing that's sort of embarrassingly, and obvious in retrospect is well of course I was struggling with that, I had this unexpressed autobiography, so how could I, you know, write about myself without bumping against these walls I had built inside myself, these forbidden no-trespassing zones that I had created or whatever. So, I struggled for a long, long time and my writing, I think was not as good as it could have been because of all of this unexpressed business and the fact that I was banging my head futilely against these things inside myself. So I don't think it's any accident that it was after I finally named and expressed my true gender in the world that I achieved success as a writer. Because my writing got better, specifically, the sort of gratuitously angry mom figure that was in every single story could finally just go away and I could actually write the stories that I always wanted to tell. And the way writing success happened goes along with success in romance, which is another amazing thing that's happened since I finally figured out and expressed my gender identity, which is, I've met my someone and we're actually engaged to be married next June.

J+M: Congratulations!

L: Thank you, I live with her now in Exeter, New Hampshire and she's a writer. She's a psychologist and she's written work-books for kids who have anxiety and OCD and other things. She's actually a bestseller in her field, I mean she's got this perennially well-selling series of books that came out ten years ago and new ones also, new projects as well. So, she had an agent and as part of getting to know each other she read this manuscript that I had created, Felix Yz, it's called, and she liked it and she offered to show it to her agent, which if you're a writer and anybody ever offers to show something to their agent for you, say yes. So, she showed it to her agent and her agent liked it and that was the beginning of publishing success and we sold the book, it's now out in the world as a published novel from Viking, and I have sold my second book also to Viking and I'm actually waiting for my editorial letter back from my editor

Gender/gender expression/gender identity

Gender identity
Romance

with responses to the complete manuscript. I have pitched my third book to my agent, so I'm in the biz! I finally got into the biz, absolutely no accident that that followed from figuring out my gender and expressing it in the world because I'm just so much more functional, I am so much more able to freely and joyously express whatever it is that I have to express, my intelligence, my creativity, my whimsy, my passion and commitment to helping people, because I don't have to push through this awful puzzle anymore just to be alive for another day in the world. Another analogy that I love for living as an unexpressed trans person is the sumo-suit, I don't know if you have ever seen this, but you can buy like a costume to be a sumo wrestler, so it's this massive, foam, rubber thing. It probably weighs about seventy pounds, and you have this enormous thing on you, and everything is difficult. Walking, talking or another-another typical... another perfect imagery would be a full suit of armor, like this massive body suit made of metal with a little grid to look through and a thing that distorts your voice. When you live as an unexpressed trans person, you're walking around in a vader suit. In armour, in a sumo costume. You're just carrying around all this extra weight and trouble and every simple thing... you have to push through all of this unexpressed confusion and trouble and difficulty just to live, just to order a sandwich or, you know, do your job today at work or whatever. Um, so, I feel so much lighter, so much freer now just to be who I am in the world, and who I get to be is a writer, and an activist, a partner of a really amazing human and a parent of interesting grown up people who are off doing their things in the world and it's amazing. It's this whole glorious, miraculous second life I get to live 'cause I claimed it.

M: Also, what a power couple!

L: We are kind of ah, yeah, the two of us together. A force to be reckoned with.

M: I love that, that's awesome. Have you checked the time, by any chance?

J: Yeah, we've got time.

M: Great! Did you have any other questions?

J: No, go ahead.

M: Um, I also wanted to talk a little bit about your activism. Would you want to talk about that? Like, your activism in Maine when you were living here?

L: Sure, I... I consider the work I did for many years a form of activism, being a program director of a community radio station. Specifically, WMPG is a hardcore old-school community station where it's a live

Gender expression

Activism

WMPG

broadcast service which is hosted twenty-four-seven by community volunteers. Um, I love that. I was so proud of that when I worked there, I still think it's amazing. And the center of my passion in that work was the training that I did where I empowered people to make radio and my training was about claiming your authentic voice, setting aside cliches of the radio biz and actually talking in your real voice and expressing what you actually think and feel about the things you care about. So there was a kind of, you know, it's like a bastion of free speech and the radical definition of democracy to sort of say this corner of the airwaves is for all of the voices that are silenced or minimized or pushed aside in mainstream media so that satisfied my need to be doing important in the world, something important and progressive for a long time. I was involved in both of the fights in Maine, with regards to legalizing same sex marriage. There was a first fight which was, let's see, how did it go... marriage had been passed by the legislature, signed by the governor, but um, opponents had put a people's veto on the ballot and we were attempting to defeat the veto. We failed, so um, marriage became illegal again in Maine. I was involved in that, that was the one of the last things I did as a male bodied person in the world. I canvassed, going door to door, talking to voters. Um, then I was also involved in the second fight that we won, in the same way, making phone calls, talking to people. Um, since sort of claiming trans identity in the world, living as an out trans woman, I have been involved in all kinds of different battles. Here in Maine there was an attempt to create a law which would have discriminated against trans people and matters of public accommodation, I went to the state legislature and to the committee considering the bill and was one of many people who was... testified against it and that... the bill did fail. I was involved, last year in New Hampshire, in an attempt to pass positive legislation adding gender identity to the list of protected classes, demographic groups in all of the different places in New Hampshire state law where demographic groups are protected in terms of accommodation, housing, employment, medical care, things like that. That bill did not pass. It was not, however, defeated. It was tabled, so we're trying again this year, and I'm involved in that effort right now in an effort to pass trans protections in the New Hampshire State House, er, state legislature this year. I'm an active volunteer with LGBTQ speakers bureau called Speak Out Boston, so I go to schools and churches and places of business and say "hello, I'm a real life trans person, you can ask me questions!", so I do that, I'm one of the organizers of the Transgender Day of Remembrance event that happens yearly in Exeter. I'm actually gonna tell you something I have told almost nobody, it's brand new. Two days ago in Virginia a transgender woman won the election for the seat in the Virginia House, she beat a thirteen-term incumbent homophobe, the man who had tried to introduce a so called bathroom bill which legislated who could use which bathrooms. Her name is Danica Roem. Danica's victory electrified me, I have been living in a kind of despair since the election last year, feeling like some paradigm shift had happened in our country and somehow decency had

Campaign activism

New Hampshire legislation

Transgender activism

Transgender Day of Remembrance

2017 Election

gotten lost and this other sort of approach to the world which is based on hatred and division somehow won and evidently not, it's a phase, it's a moment, we cycle, we go back and forth but Danica's victory gave me hope and I am seriously considering running for the New Hampshire State House in 2018, it's okay for that to be on this recording. it's not common knowledge yet, but the way the New Hampshire legislature works and the way the district that I happen to live in works, I can probably get in if I decide to do it, we're one of the little democratic strongholds. The New Hampshire House is a fascinating body, New Hampshire's not a very big state, or very populous state. The New Hampshire House has four hundred members and all four hundred of them are up for reelection every two years, so it's this real citizens legislature. There are four representatives just in our little town. So I'm having coffee next week with one of the current reps and I'm gonna find out what it would really be like, and I might be one of the very first trans women to serve in the state legislature in the whole country in a couple years, we'll see what happens.

J: That's amazing

M: That is incredibly exciting

J: Thank you for sharing

M: Thank you so much for telling us

L: Yeah, you're welcome, it's what my brain is full of right now!

J: Yeah!

L: And you know, I think there's gonna be parts of that if it happens, if I go, there's gonna be endless committee meetings and there's gonna be awkward interactions with conservative lawmakers, and you know it's not gonna be a picnic. But honestly I feel called to do it, the fact that I am now working full time as a writer gives me the freedom and the time, and I am fortunate to be in good shape sort of financially and socially. I have the time and I have the resources and I have the chops, I actually feel like the time I spent working at WMPG was excellent training for this, this massive communal effort with people from a lot of different walks of life trying to accomplish a thing together. I've learned how to work with people I disagree with and I've learned how to raise money and I learned all kinds of stuff in that work, which applies to this so we'll see what happens!

M: If I were to think of anyone who would be good at it, I'm sure it would be you. You seem like you would be great at it, you seem like you would be a great representative!

L: Thank you! And I would actually take the work seriously, okay I get to work for people again, everybody, not just the people I agree with, you know, the people in my district, so we'll see what happens. I am an introvert and my buffers get full sometimes so it would, it could be a challenge. But we'll see what happens.

M: That's great.

L: I did wanna talk more about sort of getting beyond simple binary definitions of transgender.

M: Please do!

L: Um, because I don't think of myself as a "woman" in some sort of pure, essential sense. I don't think that exists, I think the concept of man and woman is way too complicated and multifaceted, so when I do "speak out" and I'm talking to a bunch of people who never thought about this before, I say my sort of 101 explanation of who I am, I am a trans woman, which means I was born with a male body but I always had a female sense of self and I tried for a long time to change my brain to match my body and that didn't work so I changed my body to match my brain and now I'm much happier. That's the 101. The 201 is that I don't think of myself as essentially feminine, I think of myself as sort of predominantly feminine, I think, my personal theory of how gender works is the binary does exist in our culture and society, we have these ideas and we have a lot of people who have really committed to the ideas about the binary. There's men and women in the world and so we humans, with our complicated mixy brains and emotions and spirits and whatever are born into this world and we're given one of the two bodies, most of us, I mean there's people with inbetween bodies too but for the sake of argument most people are born with demonstrably male or female bodies and so here you are with this body which is one thing and this mixy brain and these two choices and I think the way gender usually happens is most people, it just sort of fits, "okay, male body, I feel like a man" wants to be a man. Okay, that's easy, be a man. But trans happens when, in my case, male body... really don't feel this whole thing at all. It's awkward it's wrong, it feels artificial and uncomfortable. "Can I just do this one thing over here?" and the world's like, "no"... "Okay fine, I'll do the male thing ". So I, it's like a mapping. There's this imposed binary from outside and most people just sort of map themselves onto one or the other. Um, but I did "man" for many, many years. I lived as a man for forty six years and I did a pretty good job of it. In lots of ways, um, I functioned as a human. I was in a family and I was in a relationship and had children and raised a family and I worked in the world and I was a productive human. I wasn't happy, I wasn't fully realized but I did okay. So I did "man" okay, it's not like I'm not..there's no particle of masculinity in me or there's no part of me that can't be mapped in some successful way onto the concept of masculinity. It's just that I think I map way

Gender/expression/binary

better onto "girl" and "woman" than I did to "boy" and "man". So, my 201 is... identity is that I'm a femme dominant genderqueer person that has chosen to live as a woman in the world. Um.. There's... I've recently come across a gender quiz on the internet and it was only thirty questions, it wasn't, you know, rigorous or scientific. It was, I thought, a really good quiz and the key point about this quiz was when you answer the thirty questions and they told you what your gender was, they didn't just say "you're masculine" or "feminine", they said "you're a mix" and it didn't necessarily have to be one hundred percent mix, so it was like the right test for my mapping concept and what this gender quiz told me was that I mapped onto masculinity about forty percent and I mapped onto femininity about seventy five percent. So I did the forty percent man thing for the first half of my life and it was okay, but forty percent that's not... nah. There's a strain there that never goes away. And now I get to do my seventy five percent thing it's like yes I'm so totally three quarters a woman and I can so do this easily and have it come so naturally and be so fun. So I wanted to get that down because I think it more accurately represents who I actually am.

Genderqueer

J: Yeah!

M: That's great and thank you for sharing that with us.

L: Sure!

M: That's awesome. Um, before we come to any closes was there anything else that you wanted to talk about, anything you wanted to add, any other topics that you wanted to talk about?

L: Hmm, um, I think it's amazing how fast gender is changing in our world right now. I think there's a huge difference just in the last ten years between when I went through this process and what people are able to learn and know and see just in their lives and in their cyber lives. Um, I am hugely encouraged by how easy people in their teens and twenties are now about this stuff. You know, that "okay, cool, so anyway" reaction is lovely to see when it happens. And it... that comes from the next generation coming up where I just see... I saw it with my own kids and the friends that they have that I knew, many of whom have queer identities of some kind now. And I'm seeing it when I interact with readers of my books that there's people who are just able to say when they're still actually like little kids or preteens or tweens, they're able to say "you know, I'm genderqueer" and the people around them are like "okay, cool, so anyway" and they just start on this path from the beginning and it's actually not that big a deal. Well, it is still a big deal because there's still plenty of people in the world who this is brand new and frightening so there's an enormous amount of public education and change that needs to happen and there is a significant subset of our country who will never be comfortable with what people are doing with

gender now and saying it's not even just... it's not a binary, it's this huge wide open field, you can be both or neither, you can play around and change over time. And there are a certain people and that's just terribly threatening and upsetting and they will never come to terms with it. So it's not ever just gonna be an easy thing, but um, I am fascinated and amazed by how quickly it's changing. And I am excited to be addressing some of this in my writing work. So, my first book, Felix Yz, is about a thirteen year old boy, who because of a science experiment gone wrong when he was a child, is fused with an alien being. And the story is his blog counting down to a risky procedure to separate them again. So it's a very fraught time in Felix's life, the procedure may kill him, if it works he's gonna lose this companion.. sort of internal companion he's had all his life, whom he's very fond. Meanwhile he's got all this teen angst in his life, he's... there's a bully at school and he's got his mom's annoying boyfriend to deal with and he's got a crush and his crush is a boy. So Felix is incidentally gay, it's definitely not the preachy point of the story. He's just, you know, he's got a crush. The crush's name is Hector, so that's one of the things he's writing about and dealing with as he counts down to this fact that he might be possibly about to die. And I love that that story got accepted by mainstream publishing and I love that it's out in the world, um, and so I feel sort of tremendously privileged and blessed to be the person that I am making stories like that and actually being able to write a real book published by a real publishing company that will be in libraries across the country and that some lonely, struggling kid with a family who doesn't understand them may someday be able to find and take comfort and strength from... If I had been able to find even just one good story in which a trans girl was a regular kid like me, that might have been all I needed to have a really different life, to speak my truth decades sooner and have a different life so now I'm trying to write that book for some other kid. My second book is called Zenobia July and it's about a fourteen year old trans girl who grew up in a family who did not accept her gender identity but she's not in that family anymore, both parents are dead, and as the story opens she has just moved to live with her cool lesbian aunties in Portland, Maine and she's going to middle school as a girl for the first time in her life and she's a cyber-hacker genius and she solves cyber crimes. And she makes a genderqueer best friend and it's just, it's hella queer and I just love that this story is gonna be in the world so that's the work I get to do now and it makes me happy that I get to write these stories.

Felix Yz

Zenobia July

J: That's awesome, that's great, it's important, too.

L: Stories are everything, seriously. They help you know that you're not alone when you can see yourself in a story that gives you such strength and comfort and stories are what change minds. When we talk about activism, the way people's minds get changed is one person at a time, one person talking to another person and finding understanding, "oh, you are a human like me". Once that moment happens it's very hard to

hold onto and unreasoning prejudice anymore, some kind of blanket condemnation of a group of people if you've met somebody and recognized them as a human. If you've started to like them a little bit or even just recognized that they're like you. I have a quick story about that. When I was canvassing for the first marriage fight in Maine, still living as a male bodied person at the time, I ended up talking to a guy on his front porch who was already on our side. So I didn't... we weren't having a conversation where I was trying to change his mind but he shared his story with me. He said when he was younger he had been strongly homophobic, he just thought gayness was wrong and evil and he had been raised that way, never questioned it, but what changed his mind was.. he got involved in hospice work and he ended up being a hospice worker for a man who was dying of AIDS in a hospital and he was present when the young man's family refused to allow the young man's partner to come to his bedside. And they had the legal right in that time and place to do that. And the gross injustice of that was what reached him. The fact that there was these two people who loved each other and one of them was dying and they couldn't be together because of the attitudes of the dying man's family. That was the human story that changed his mind. That's how it happens is recognizing the humanity of the person you have been taught to hate. And the thing that fascinates me right now as I do the activist work that I do which brings me face to face with haters and contemplating going into politics which will likewise bring me face to face, maybe not, with haters but with, you know, intolerant people very sure about their opinions and unlikely to change them. My personal challenge is to see them as human. It's hard sometimes because I do feel threatened, I still feel vulnerable face to face with someone who I know has strong opinions about my identity, it's really hard to look that in the face when somebody... and I've learned an amazing amount about prejudice and it's never right out in the open, it every once in a while is, someone yelled "faggot" at me once in a parking lot but mostly it's veiled, mostly it's a smiling face. But there's this hostility underneath, there's this sort of twisted, hidden thing and it's really hard to look that in the eye and feel safe yourself and still find a way to understand that person as a human, at least at some basic level still respect them as a human but if there's... If Person A... Person B hates back, that's it, there's no more conversation. There's no more interaction, there's no more possibility of collaboration or minds being changed or understanding of any kind so we've got to resist, I think, hating back, as hard as that is sometimes. That's another thing that's in my mind these days.

J: Yeah, that can be hard, like you said.

L: If we had this conversation one week ago I would have been way darker about all of this, but look at the election results that just happened, this incredible array of diverse people, I mean Shotokan, New Jersey has a turban wearing Sikh for a mayor now. I love that! I love that

AIDS hospice

Danica won in Virginia and there's so many others. Just... people of every race and there's seven... we... two days ago we elected seven openly transgender people to different offices across the country, I mean, schoolboards, city counsels, we're not talking Congress and House of Representatives and thing yet but that's where it starts . I mean, I know one of these people personally, I know a woman named Gerry Cannon who just got elected to the school board of the tiny town of Somersworth and won by six votes, go Gerry! That gives me such joy, I really lost hope in the last year. I thought hate had won in some way but evidently not. And here we come, we're coming back. The people who believe in diversity and inclusion and respect and love, we're coming back. And, you know, the other side is always there and it has its own internal logic and they see themselves as moral people, they have a consistently, most of them, moral way of looking at the world that makes sense to them. I've been doing some reading about liberal and conservative brains and there's increasing scientific evidence that there really are liberal brains and conservative brains just like there's increasing scientific evidence that there really are female brains and male brains that don't necessarily match the bodies that they're in and the conservative brain sees way more threat in the world than the liberal brain and the conservative brain really relies for a sense of safety and comfort on clear, simple categories and rules and traditions. There's nothing bad about any of that, that's a way to survive life as a creature of a planet so I can respect and understand that. And liberal brains are way more interested in taking care of the less fortunate among us rather than, say, you earn... you by the sweat of your brow you earn what you have in the world, which is a more conservative way of looking at how we help each other or don't. And the liberal brain is way more open to diversity and change, so, two different ways of thinking and existing as a human. They will always exist, apparently we're always gonna have liberal and conservative people so... and that's fine. Ninety five percent of the people in... of both kinds are decent, reasonable humans who are willing to admit when they're wrong about something and willing to stretch past their comfort zones and try to get to know you as a human, so for a year I kept working because I just, it's not in my nature to give up, but it was a kind of dogged refusal to give up was what kept me going for the past year. Now I have hope again, these are all just cycles and we're gonna start to swing back in the other direction now and it's looking better than it has in a long time.

M: I agree.

J: Me too. I think that's a great place to leave off, unless that you have anything else.

L: Nope!

Gerry Cannon

Political affiliation

J: Well, thank you so much for meeting us during this... even better than I thought it could have been, and I thought it was gonna be great so...

L: Thank you!

J: It was really amazing.

M: Thank you for sharing your stories, you know, giving us some insight on who you are, your past, we are just so grateful. It's been a real pleasure.

L: It's been fun! Thank you for asking me.

M: Yeah! And we hope to hear from you in the future about your plans.

J: Yeah, for sure, we have to keep an eye out.

M: I want to start a book club for the Queer Straight Alliance.

J: Yeah, that would be great!

L: Um, I have an authorial mailing list, so, I can add your... just give me your emails before we go.

M: That would be awesome.

L: So, shall I press the stop button?

J: Yes!

