

<p>Caroline: Here we go. Okay so today is the 24th of November 2018, we are here in the USM Glickman Library in Portland. My name is Caroline Wheeler, C-a-r-o-l-i-n-e W-h-e-e-l-e-r.</p>	<p>Date Location: USM Glickman Library</p>
<p>Marwa: My name is Marwa Ibrahim, that's M-a-r-w-a I-b-r-a-h-i-m.</p>	
<p>Ellen: My name is Ellen McKenzie, E-l-l-e-n M-c-K-e-n-z-i-e.</p>	
<p>Caroline: Thank you, um, just to remind you, you can refuse to answer any question or stop the interview whenever you want, um, and I will give you a little warning when the time is about to run out. Before we dive into the questions we just wanted to ask you a couple like basic things like knowledge before we start, so we wanted to ask you how old you are?</p>	
<p>Ellen: I'm fifty-five.</p>	<p>55 years old</p>
<p>Caroline: And what your pronouns are and how you identify personally?</p>	
<p>Ellen: She.</p>	<p>She/her/hers pronouns</p>
<p>Caroline: Any other identification like do you want to say your sexual orientation or anything like that?</p>	
<p>Ellen: I...as Lesbian</p>	<p>Lesbian</p>
<p>Caroline: Okay, um, so the first question that we wanted to ask you is where and when you were born?</p>	
<p>Ellen: So I was born in Portland Maine, in 1963.</p>	<p>Born in Portland, ME 1963</p>
<p>Caroline: and did you grow up in Portland?</p>	
<p>Ellen: Yes, so I grew up um born and raised in Portland, spent most of my life in Portland except for when I went away to college, I was in Massachusetts. Other than that I've lived here um and uh yeah so.</p>	<p>Almost always lived in Maine</p>
<p>Caroline: So can you tell us about your family? What your family life was like growing up?</p>	
<p>Ellen: So, growing up, so growing up in Maine which is you know predominately white state um, (clears up throat) excuse me, I was uh fortunate because my mom had eight children and I have an identical twin sister and we're the</p>	<p>Growing up in predominantly white community Big family: 8 kids</p>

<p>youngest, so I think that the benefit for me was that I always had someone that had the same experience as you know. As a child grew up in a very loving home, um, very fortunate, feel very blessed to have the family that I have. Um, we had so grew up with my mom and my dad initially, my oldest siblings were as, we were in the school ages were away at college but a very close-knit family. Four boys and four girls and lived fortunate to own the home that we lived in on Munjoy Hill, and again as one of very few black families in the community it's really finding our support through the culture in our home and in the church community.</p>	<p>Twin sister</p> <p>Close knit family Munjoy Hill Few black families</p> <p>Church community</p>
<p>Caroline: Hmm, yeah, um, we were wondering if you had any significant childhood memories that you wanted to share.</p>	
<p>Ellen: Significant, I think that, again, I mean we were very close having a twin sister, I'd like had my best friend with me growing up so we were an athletic family so we were always outside. I mean things are really different today than they were, when I was growing up. We didn't have the technology that we have now so played outside, you know, and that's what you did, you went to school, you came home, you changed your clothes, you played outside until dinner was ready, you had, dinner was at certain time every night, we lived our house was against, the back of our home was up against a play-ground, so my mom just had to open up the porch door and yell to us and so would come in for dinner and then we would be able to stay out until it got dark. We lived on a small street which was Montgomery street, again, really different back then it was very, you know, the community, we were all neighbors, families knew each other, so, you didn't really get into trouble because if you did your mother would know before you got home, (Laughs) you know, so, um, but, still friends with that childhood friends I grew up on the street now.</p>	<p>Very close to twin sister growing up</p> <p>Childhood memories</p>
<p>Marwa: Who, who influenced you the most in your family and why?</p>	
<p>Ellen: I would say that, my oldest siblings and my mom, education was very important and I think my twin sister and I at least both looked up to our older siblings, but especially our oldest sisters and my mom and my grandmother because I think at a young age you knew that they were out there doing the best they could for the family working hard, and</p>	<p>Mother and grandmother as strong influences growing up</p>

<p>you knew what the values were and I, looking back even as a I was growing up I knew that I held a lot of the same values as my grandmother had and also that my mom still has and that's just you know the importance of family, community and just being kind to one another and respecting each other and being there.</p>	<p>Family values passed down</p>
<p>Caroline: Well, um, segwaying into the next topic, just kind of a very broad topic so we were just wondering if you could kind of tell us your coming out story, how old you were, what was it like?</p>	<p>Coming out story</p>
<p>Ellen: Sure, so, I think as a young, eeh, a young girl growing up I was aah fortunate to go to an all-girls camp, my sister and I for four years in our childhood until we were fourteen, and, I had, I've always had really close female relationships, even before I've realized anything about my sexuality and I think that, so I was always around you know women and strong women and just had close relationships, and when I was twenty seven I met a woman and I was probably just as surprised as everyone (laughs) when I started having feelings for her. And that was my first relationship and it lasted eight years and so coming out was um scary, I think that, um, when I think about it now like before I came out my twin sister was the first one that I told and it's like she knew, it wasn't a big deal, she knew it, uhh, and then because I had a large family I had a lot of people to come out to (laughs). Um, but again my family was very accepting, I remember my oldest sister who was in California, I was probably the most afraid to tell her and I remember when she came to Maine to come home for I think it was Christmas time and before I said anything, she asked me if I had something I needed to tell her.</p>	<p>All girls camp</p> <p>Close female friendships</p> <p>Stared dating woman at 27 "surprise for everyone, including me"</p> <p>Scary to come out</p> <p>Acceptance from family</p>
<p>Caroline: Wow.</p>	
<p>Ellen: and so, I was a wreck, I was so nervous but I was like you know kind of beating around, finally got to it and she just accepted me and loved and I think I knew in the back of my head that no matter what my family was going to love me and accept me and I never felt, you know, we grew up in the church and I never felt like, I've heard people like families disowning them and you know that was never a fear that I had, it was just how they accepted and I remember when I told my mom and she just hugged me you know and was like, I'll share more about my mom but that's</p>	<p>Acceptance from family</p> <p>Acceptance from church community</p>

<p>just the person that she is you know. And that's the person that my grandmother was and so very fortunate to have a loving family that is accepting</p> <p>Marwa: How did, um, the community react, did they knew right away after your family or did they know a little afterwards?</p> <p>Ellen: So, I was twenty seven and in terms of the community so when I came out so I obviously was with this woman and so our circle of friends were gay and lesbian so it wasn't like a surprise I was kind of just new to that community so it seemed natural. There was no fear or, it was just, just natural progression for me in my life. I think in terms of my family that was the scary the big part not knowing but interestingly enough after I came out then I started knowing other people that I knew in my life who were also gay, lesbian so I don't think it was a surprise but it was a comfort level that was there.</p> <p>Caroline: Yeah, did you, did you want to keep talking about your mom right now? You said you wanted to share more about her.</p> <p>Ellen: Sure, I think that you know with my mom, so my mom was born and raised in Portland, she was one of 12 children and just I know my grandmother passed in my early twenties so I knew her and loved her and saw a lot of similarities in my mom that my grandmother had and I think I have a lot of those similarities that my mom has and I think the career that I've chosen I think it reflects on how we were raised. But my mom, she was very strong, growing up was really important to her that we are all human beings, she had experienced a lot of discrimination and you know growing up in Maine, as we all had, but I think with my sister and I, we were protected by my oldest siblings, so I think I really felt it more as a I became a young adult and kind of got out of the home and you know more into society. And my mom fought really hard for civil rights and equality for everyone and so I look back now and, you know, I was just talking to her recently and it's like so, it's a disgrace what's going on in the world now and the way she feels, they fought for fifty years, you know to just have equal rights and be protected and it feels like that's all being taken away. You know, but, she came from a very strong family and our family in the city of Portland, generations of,</p>	<p>Coming out at 27</p> <p>Circle of friends were gay and lesbian</p> <p>“Natural progression” in life</p> <p>Mother's history Raised in Portland Big family: 12 kids</p> <p>Facing discrimination</p> <p>Fought for civil rights</p> <p>Disgrace of current administration</p>
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<p>so, uh, I wanted to talk about the Portland Freedom Trail and my great-great -grandfather I believe there are sixteen markers that are part of the walking trail and he has two markers</p> <p>Caroline: Wow.</p> <p>Ellen: Which is pretty astounding, he has one on Newbury street which is right in front of the Abyssinian meeting house, and then he has another one up on Munjoy Hill, which was in front of his barber shop, so that is, you know, just our family place in history and civil rights and the freedom trail and is pretty impressive. And for me I just feel blessed and know that my family sacrificed a lot to make sure that we were able to live and be happy you know without the discrimination that you know still unfortunately exists in the world.</p> <p>Marwa: So did, I'm just curious to know where through out your lifetime, were there any people that you motivated to come out or did they come out to you first?</p> <p>Ellen: I don't think I could motivate someone to come, I think that, I hope that just the way I live my life I'm not, sort of, quiet and my life and my relationships, if you know me then you know my family, you know, I'm not, but, I'm a social worker, and I think that you know being a social worker and even before coming out it's like you know you looking at just basic human needs of others and making sure that you know we all have what we need to survive in this world and I think that probable the only time that I was not afraid but probably more reserved about who I was, was I resettled refugees in the city for ten years and there were some countries that we resettled from that you know there's a, they would kill, they could kill someone in their country because of their sexuality, being homosexual, so I think at that time of my life I was probably a little more reserved and just private and I think you know I'm private anyway but definitely I paid attention to that</p> <p>Caroline: Yeah, make sense.</p> <p>Marwa: So going back to your first partner that you used to be with for eight years, how did your partner shape who you are, how did she help you explore your sexuality more and just becoming one with yourself?</p>	<p>Portland Freedom Trail Great-great-grandfather Markets on Freedom Trail</p> <p>Newbury Street</p> <p>Munjoy Hill: Barber Shop</p> <p>Family's role in civil rights</p> <p>Social Worker</p> <p>Sometimes reserved about coming out to clients Resettling refugees</p> <p>Countries where homosexuality is illegal</p> <p>First relationship</p>
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<p>Ellen: so I'm not sure I'd give her a lot of credit (laughs) with shaping who I was in terms of you know my sexuality being comfortable with who I am, that's just part of my history of growing up and you know being an African American woman, there was a lot I had to learn and accept with society I think that's what I would shape that, I think where I would give her credit is that she was very comfortable with who she was, you know and I think I admired that and so that's probably what I would say about that, you know, I think that first relationship I mean I thought it was beautiful and I was very happy unfortunately you know, it takes two to make a relationship work and there was some decisions made on her part that you know caused us to break up but in saying that I think you learn from every relationship , I have always said I hope that she's happy and I'm still close with her family but I'm very blessed how things turned out, I'm very grateful with the relationship I have now.</p>	<p>Growing up black</p> <p>Broke up</p>
<p>Caroline: So, going back to what you just said about how you think that being an African American woman was kind of did you say more shaping of your identity</p>	
<p>Ellen: yeah, yes</p>	
<p>Caroline: Do you think that your race impacted the way that you came to terms with your sexual orientation or that your different identities impact one another and how you live your life?</p>	
<p>Ellen: I think that probably when I came out I thought that was just one more thing that I had to deal with in my life that other people didn't have to, like the majority, the white community, most of my friends, being African American, being a woman, now being gay, (laughs) so its just one more you know one more thing I had to take into consideration at how people looked at me and felt about me. I think that I am pretty again, pretty quiet but I pay attention to people and so I'm strong in the belief that people should have the right to feel however they chose to feel but we cannot be cruel to one another and so I am not out there you know its like I have a family and I have children and I'm very proud of that and I'm proud of who I am and how I've kind of made my way in this world, not to say there have been challenges but that I think that family has given me a lot of strength so whenever I have a lot of conflict or</p>	<p>Intersectionality of sexual orientation, race and gender</p> <p>Kindness</p> <p>Strength in the face of</p>

<p>ignorance I just go back to family, my spouse, my mom, my siblings to talk to and know that how I feel is right.</p>	<p>conflict</p>
<p>Caroline: Can you tell us..</p>	
<p>Ellen: Does that make sense?</p>	
<p>Caroline: yeah, can you tell us more about your family now, your spouse and your children and how you all</p>	
<p>Ellen: sure</p>	
<p>Caroline: came to be?</p>	
<p>Ellen: Yeah, sure so here we sit at the University of Southern Maine today, and it's actually where I met my wife.</p>	<p>Met wife at USM</p>
<p>Caroline: oh (laughs)</p>	
<p>Ellen: yeah, so, we were doing it, we were on a committee, it was the first committee that the students of color put in, at that, we put on, it was the students of color committee where we, where we had initially met. So we're on this committee together and at the time I knew that from a friend of mine who said if you're interested in that person don't be because she's married with children and so I was like that's fine we can be friends. But as I got to know her I realized that they were married but separate so we started hanging out, we're on this committee together and then within that year there was a separation and we got together and so I knew that you know as a single person and that the world is a lot different than raising children but I always had people around me growing up and at home there was, our home was the place were kids went so my mom wanted us home and your friends get over to your home because she knew where we were so I was always used to a lot of people so I had a lot of people comfort and people around me so it was not a big deal when I fell for someone who four children. And they were young and so we met and then a couple years later we ended up as a couple and then so it's been almost eighteen years and we married five years ago. And we got married because it was became legal to marry in 2012 and we got married in 2013 so I've been again very blessed that you know our families accepted each other and not to say that every single person, you know, she grew up in a Pentecostal church and you know obviously there were</p>	<p>Committee for students of color</p> <p>Wife was married to man at the time</p> <p>Wife had 4 children from previous marriage</p> <p>Been together for 18 years</p> <p>Married in 2013</p> <p>Acceptance from both families</p> <p>Pentecostal church</p>

<p>people that questioned was there were uncomfortable but I look back now and it's just a journey that we had taken together but really grateful that our families have come as one, I have a very large family, she has a very large family, and we're one big family, and so that's our story. Very, very, very grateful. So she also works at the university now and so I think about our life together and what's important and it's family and Puerto Rico was very important, she's Puerto Rican, and so Puerto Rico has been a really important place for us and the kids as they were growing up, yeah so.</p> <p>Marwa: Did you go to Puerto Rico?</p> <p>Ellen: Yes, so when the boys were young we would go to Puerto Rico every year to see family so it's been a really important place for us and not just her family but again you know when our oldest graduated from college her family and my family there was like forty five of us that went to Puerto Rico to celebrate with all our family that was there. So it's really been really a blessing for us and the Portland community. For eleven or twelve years we had big barbeque where we'd have like a hundred and eighty people that would attend and that's around the fourth of July. And it's probably one of the most diverse populations in the community and the last few years we had to back off just financially its expensive to throw a party like that with graduations and kids in college but we're definitely going to be starting that up again next year but it's just the sense of that party giving people the sense of not just we are but the people we surround ourselves with who they are.</p> <p>Marwa: How did her family react to you when they first met you?</p> <p>Ellen: So her family is in terms of my race or in terms of my sexuality?</p> <p>Marwa: Both.</p> <p>Ellen: In terms of my race, again her family is diverse so there's they, you know, Puerto Rican, Caucasian and just lots of mixed beautiful family and I think the way they reacted to me I think probably surprised, shocked maybe, that this is the path that she, she was on, in meeting me, I think that my personality probably gave people comfort, if</p>	<p>Both have big families</p> <p>Wife works at USM</p> <p>Puerto Rico</p> <p>Visiting Puerto Rico every year</p> <p>Puerto Rican community celebration in Portland Every July</p> <p>Wife's family's reaction to Ellen (race and sexuality)</p> <p>Family is composed of many different races- accepting of all</p>
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<p>that makes sense?</p> <p>Caroline: Yeah.</p> <p>Ellen: So they got to know me and I think they like me, so that made things a little easier.</p> <p>Marwa: Was it challenging for you to make them feel comfortable, like it's okay you can like approach me and talk to me and ask me, in terms of being their daughter's partner?</p> <p>Ellen: So</p> <p>Marwa: Or was it effortlessly done?</p> <p>Ellen: I would say it was more family in general, I think unfortunately shortly after we were together her mom passed away and we didn't really find out until after her mom passed that she knew we were in a relationship, so her mother's sister said that she loved me and knew that her daughter was happy, so that was a comfort and her dad who is in Puerto Rico I think there was a language barrier, so he just you know he would just call me Mackenzie and we just had a nice relationship, it was just, it was fun, my family the Mackenzies would travel to Puerto Rico a couple of times as well , so it wasn't just her family, her extended family now and we just had fun and I think that he just loved his children and their life.</p> <p>Caroline: we noticed on the sheet that you gave us that you noted Jamaica as a really important place in your life</p> <p>Ellen: yes, so, important as, I've only been there once, but my grandparents were Jamaican and so it was, it's always been on my dad's side, so my dad had one sister and she was born in Jamaica and I had known a couple of relatives on his side that were Jamaican so it was really important just family in general and where we began and so the Jamaican side is important because it's who I am so I've traveled there once, I've known relatives from Jamaica, my dad was proud that his parents were Jamaican so it was, it's nice, it's nice to know your history and to be able to visit and feel like you belong.</p> <p>Marwa: so, going back to your wife's children, how was it when you first met them or got to really build a bond with them, was it hard for you, or was it, did they, did you</p>	<p>Easy to get to know Ellen and feel comfortable</p> <p>Mother-in-law passed away Was happy about their relationship</p> <p>Language barrier with father-in-law</p> <p>Jamaica</p> <p>Been once Grandparents were Jamaican</p> <p>Getting to know your own history</p> <p>Getting to know the children</p>
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<p>connect with them right off the bat or did it take time?</p> <p>Ellen: so I think for sure it took time, they were very young, they youngest are twins, at the time they were six, twelve, and thirteen I think when I met them, so they were young, and I think when I look back I think should I have slowed things down a little bit, but when you're in love and you want to spend time with the person you care about, it just happens, I think the boys and I we connected on an athletic level, I'm very athletic , I played basketball my whole life, they're athletic, we had sports in common, I think that's what connected us, was athletics for sure</p> <p>Caroline: are they the older or the younger ones?</p> <p>Ellen: the twins are the younger ones but all four of them I think we connected through sports, not to say I mean they , had gone through a divorce with their parents who they love very much and I think all children want, I come form a divorce household and you want your parents to be together and that's I think what kids want, they want their parents to be together, I think that took time to the realization that they weren't going to get back together and this is our life now, I think that if you ask my spouse, things she may have a different perspective because she birthed the boys and raised them for a long time before I came into the picture but I think that I've been, it's been a blessing to have them in my life, unfortunately we lost one child to suicide and that was really hard, but I think that we have a strong family and I have no doubt that they love me and I certain that they know that I love them and so, you know I'm not their mom , I'm their co parent and I've always, I believe you know, if you're an adult in the household then you have to discipline and show children what's right and what's wrong I think that it's different for some households but I think that that's who I am and I think that they respected that and I tried to, there's always a balance when you have a blended family but you know they have lots of adults who care about them, they have two step moms and you know a mom and a dad and grandparents and lots of aunts and uncles who love them and wants what's best for them</p> <p>Marwa: so, I'm really sorry to hear about the suicide,</p> <p>Ellen: thank you</p> <p>Marwa: it must've been really hard for you and your wife, at</p>	<p>Kids were young when they met- 6, 12, 13</p> <p>Quick connection</p> <p>Connected on athletic level Plays basketball</p> <p>Twins</p> <p>Kids experience with parents divorcing</p> <p>Lost one son to suicide Strong family</p> <p>"Co-parent" vs "mom"</p> <p>Blended family</p>
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<p>that time would you say it effected your relationship with your wife and if so in what way and did it bring you closer together as one family, you being with the children and another question did the suicide draw the other children away from you did you confide in you?</p>	
<p>Ellen: so I think I have the question, in terms of our relationship I think it probably brought us closer, you know the death of a child was nobody wants to experience that and I was you know had co parented him for five years, it's different giving birth and raising him for eighteen but I think that I definitely brought the family closer, but survivors, we are all survivors of suicide, there are a lot of challenges, and there were a lot of questions, the boys were young, the twins were thirteen when their brother died, their older brother was in college, and I think that, so there were a lot of questions, and so we had to do a lot of family work, we had to statistically speaking, survivors of suicide are more apt to attempt themselves so we had to come into the realization that our eyes had to be wide open, I think probably the biggest struggle for me was I've always tried to separate my profession from my personal life, so I'm a clinician so I should know the signs and I should, so in terms of that I think you know I, there was not blame but some guilt, but I think that I hope that it made us all stronger, and if any of the boys feel like you know they need to talk about it, they know we're there, their mom and I, I'm sure their dad and their step mom, and you know I think one of the things that I know makes us a strong family is that after the suicide we had some family counseling and it was not just their mom and I but their mom and I, their dad, his wife and, you know, we came together as a family because what was most important for us is that the boys were healthy and we're going to be able to live with the fact that they've had a brother that died but become strong and know that you know if they had feelings that you know were difficult that they could come to any adult in their life and talk to them about it and make sure that they got you know the services that they needed to overcome that.</p>	<p>Loss of son brought family closer together</p> <p>Challenges of being survivors of suicide</p> <p>Family work to heal</p> <p>Feeling like a bad social worker because of missed signs Guilt</p> <p>Coming together with dad and step-mom Family counseling</p>
<p>Caroline: thank you for sharing that with us</p>	
<p>Ellen: yeah, and I think you know on the topic of suicide and LGBTQ, it's last year my godson died of suicide and her was transgender and he was fourteen years old, I think</p>	<p>Suicide of transgender godson</p>

<p>as an individual as a social worker and as an individual it's really important to me that the way I live my life is an example that we shouldn't discriminate against anyone, we're all humans and you know when you think about the social work profession it's to enhance human being and to help basic human needs of all people and all people means all people, you know, and so it's been, so we had that tragedy in 2007 and then we had again last year and its like you know it's just question like when is it going to stop you know because you know my godson Finn was in a very supportive household and loving community and still you know felt that you know the pain was too difficult you know so I think that you know as survivors you know we've met lots of other survivors and one of the things that I've taken on since my stepson died was to do the suicide prevention training for my school district that I work in and prior to that just in the community and it's been healing and I know that it saves lives so I think that you know I just feel like I've had a lot of blessings and as devastating as that is I know that you know we have to look at you know life now and being positive and hopefully you know helping others</p>	<p>Connection between loss and social work profession- against discrimination</p> <p>Trans suicide in an accepting and supportive family/community</p> <p>Suicide prevention training Healing from pain</p> <p>Looking at life positively</p>
<p>Marwa: so, in terms of internally and personally, what helps you and motivates you to or better to say keeps you like you fall and then you go back p again what makes you go back up again what is that, do you think the strength is, the power that pulls you up again to keep going and keep going even stronger than before you fell?</p>	
<p>Ellen: so, I'm sorry, so what's the question</p>	
<p>Marwa: so, what motivates you to stay positive even after a hard fall</p>	
<p>Ellen: so I think what motivates me is that we have one life and I chose to be happy and so if circumstances happen where you know I'm not happy then my personality changes and I don't feel like I'm being true to myself so I will for example when my stepson died, I always felt it's not like you know I mean I've been a social worker for along time and I've felt like I had the family support so I never really felt the need to see a therapist until after that death and so that probably brought me down to the deepest that I'd been and so through counseling I was able to kind of find myself again and I think that you know in doing therapy in my job also, I want to teach, at this stage in my life, teach children</p>	<p>Choosing to be happy</p> <p>Therapy</p>

<p>that they're good you know even if sometimes their behaviors are not showing that but they're good and they matter and they're loved, and so to built that into them so they hopefully become strong and empowered.</p> <p>Caroline: so, do you currently work in like an elementary school?</p> <p>Ellen: I work in elementary school, forth and fifth graders.</p> <p>Marwa: so, what advice would you give to your young self, yourself before coming out</p> <p>Ellen: hoooh (laughs, the pauses) what advice would I give myself to be true to yourself to be honest even if it's going to be painful to be honest and be true to yourself I think a lot of people for whatever reasons they have, can't be true to themselves, or it takes a long time or they have families that they make it feel impossible to them to be true to themselves, and that saddens me because I think that we're a, we're all born , we all should be able to live our true selves no matter what that looks like and should not be judged by someone else because they think that you know, it's wrong,</p> <p>marwa: so back to your coming out story so, before coming out, I wasn't sure, so when you met your first partner did it just naturally come with your feelings of your partner or was there someone in your community that came out and made you question yourself, like am I living my life the way I want to or the way I feel to or did it just naturally occur to you</p> <p>Ellen: yes so, I think it was more natural, I kind of wish there was someone there that kind of helped me through the coming out processes but I think it was again I had very a very close relationship, my best friend of over thirty years now, so I was young when we became friends but I knew it was just a deep friendship there wasn't anything intimate but it was a very deep friendship that continues today so I knew when I met my first partners that there was something a little deeper, so I think that it wasn't easy because I think I kept a lot to myself and tried to figure it out by myself which I don't think I would recommend if you have someone to talk to but that's how it was, it way my story, it was kind of a process that happened intimately with myself</p>	<p>Working with children to support them and empower them</p> <p>Current work: elementary school</p> <p>Staying true to yourself</p> <p>Naturally coming to terms with sexuality alone</p> <p>Difference between friendship and romantic relationship</p> <p>Wishing for someone to talk to about sexuality</p>
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<p>finding and realizing that this relationship is different</p> <p>Marwa: at the time when you were coming out did you feel like the social media and the portrayal of the LGBTQ community at the time did it touch you in any way or the community you were living in, did they have a certain outlook on the LGBTQ community based on the portrayal of the media at that time?</p> <p>Ellen: if they had it I didn't hear it, you know, if, I paid attention because it was my life, but people in my circle I really don't know what they were thinking but I just know that when I did come out I was s accepted so for me I think that's probably a good coming out story you know that my family accept me and embraced me and if they felt any negative way I didn't feel it.</p> <p>Caroline: just thinking back to the form that you filled out before doing the interview I'm just thinking of some other things that you noted that you would be interested in talking about and gender identity was one of them, I was just wondering if you had anything else to share about that</p> <p>Ellen: not really, I mean, I identify as a African American woman who happened to fall in love with another female and you I know in a lot of readings I've read or a lot of stereotypes in terms o people who think they know about gay and lesbian community in terms of gender male female as someone who is more dominate, you know these roles you know id don't really look at my life like that you know I'm fortunate to be in a relationship where we're both strong women who happened to love each other, raising strong beautiful young men that are all grown now, still living at home two of them but I feel like you know the two of us and their dad, and their step mom have done an incredible job at raising the boys and I think that shows as how they are as individuals</p> <p>Marwa: was there a time in your life where you felt you were being discriminated again, solely based on your sexuality?</p> <p>Ellen: I would think more based on my race more than my sexuality</p> <p>Marwa: wow that's interesting</p>	<p>LGBTQ portrayal in the media when coming out</p> <p>Accepted when she came out</p> <p>Gender Identity</p> <p>Disregard of gender roles in lesbian relationship</p> <p>Discrimination based on race more than sexuality</p>
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<p>Ellen: because living in Maine, people would say racism doesn't exist, you know, but it does exist and unfortunately we have a president now that it really bringing out the worst in people that were silent, so I think that you it's true that I may not say it out loud but I feel it, you know, you know from I mean I live in Maine so there's lots of times where I'm the only minority in the room you know, because I'm married to a person of color it's a little different, because I have a twin sister that you know my extra circular actives like basketball and now we all bowl, there's someone that looks like me always present but it's certainly has not always been easy growing up and I think I've probably would harbor a lot of that you know sad feeling inside and just I was always aware I'm always still today I can sense and I'm aware and I know when somebody is looking at me and they're thinking that differently because of the color of my skin and you know my jobs, I'm not saying my current job and I'm saying in my career even colleagues I can, you know there's been times when I've been treated different or I'm in the room and I'm the expert in the room but I'm overlooked so it happens, it's not an imagination but I've learned to you know I don't accept it but this is where I'm at and you pick your battles, sometimes I'll address it and sometime I won't, it really depends on the person</p>	<p>Racism in Maine</p> <p>Experiences with racism</p> <p>Learning to pick your battles</p>
<p>Marwa: so for you personally, how do you define racism?</p> <p>Ellen: hooh, you know, that's a big question, that's a load of a question there, now I think that it's just if you look at the world that we live in today and you... listen to the President and all his negative, you know, spewing hatred, there it is in a nutshell. You know, and when I look at my nieces and nephews, you know, and I think- not too long ago we had a person of color sitting in the White House and there was dignity and respect and acceptance and whether you liked him or not, you know that he was kind and it's not what we have now. And I think that, you know, its just hate and it's sad. You know? But I sit back and I know, or I pray, that things will change, and, you know, it's like it exists. And it exists in a lot of places. And hopefully that, you know, we'll come out on a better side.</p>	<p>Personal definition of racism</p> <p>Current president</p> <p>Trump vs. Obama</p>
<p>Marwa: Yeah. So, um, did your children ever, at school, face, like um, kind of discrimination because of their mothers, either race or sexuality? And if so, what advice did</p>	

<p>you give them?</p> <p>Ellen: So I, I am sure that it's happened. I think that kids wanna protect- boys want to protect their moms. I think girls want to protect their moms but in this instance I think that... if it happened we weren't aware of it. But I'm sure it happened because they were athletic, they're around other guys. Um, one of the things we do, is- we're photographers as well, so we photograph, um, a local football team, so we've been doing that for several years and the language I hear on the sidelines- so I know it happens. And I think that is probably, um, because we are a family that- we're open to, you know, they know what racism and discrimination is and looks like, um, and- if it happened, which, you know, if you're in athletics and I would be surprised if it didn't, but it's not something they came home to and shared, you know?</p> <p>Caroline: Um, so we do have around ten to fifteen minutes left, um, so I was just wondering if there's anything else that you really wanted to talk about or touch on?</p> <p>Ellen: I think... I think for me, it's um, my family. I think that I've been, again, I have been blessed with an incredible, strong, loving family that accepts everyone, um, and... the history of my family, you can find in the book <i>More Than Petticoats</i>, it's remarkable Maine women by Kate Kennedy. It features my grandmother, so my maternal grandmother- my mother's mom, and um, Florence Williams, and so to, it really gives, if you are trying to understand who I am as a person, it gives you a sense, a good sense of how she raised her family and how she was as an individual. And I think that, like I said earlier, I can see a lot of those influences in my mom, and I see a lot of myself in my mom. And also, um, a lot of our family is, um, also featured in <i>Maine's Visible Black History</i>, um, book, and McKenzies and the Eastman's, and so, um, just that journey. Um, my grandfather went to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and so there's a richness that our family has. Um, you know, and in reading- so preparing for this interview I was reading <i>More Than Petticoats</i>, and my grandmother's had twelve children, and her oldest is Dot- Dorothy. And she is 105 now.</p> <p>Caroline: Wow.</p>	<p>Children's experiences with discrimination- race or sexual orientation of parents Was never told about it</p> <p>Racism in athletics</p> <p>Working as athletic photographer</p> <p>History of Family</p> <p><i>More Than Petticoats</i> book Grandmother</p> <p><i>Maine's Black Visible History</i> book Grandfather</p>
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Ellen: And she's one of three that are still living. So my mom is alive and she just turned 89, and she has a sister that's 99 and 105. So there's longevity in our family, which is really amazing, and, um, I just- I pray that, you know, my nieces and nephews will live, and I know they have I've seen it, but through the example of their grandmother, who has been a matriarch to the family and in the state of Maine, but mostly in the city of Portland, and just, you know, fighting for equal rights and protections. She worked tirelessly her whole life to make change, and change happened, and I hope that one administration doesn't ruin all of those years and decades of work, um, that my mom and the NAACP and people that fought really hard for civil rights and equal rights, um that everyone deserves to be able to live the way they choose to live. And love who they love. And, and be happy. So my hope is that, you know, when I pass, you know, my nieces and the boys and whoever is left can say that, you know, yeah, that it's important to live the way you choose to live and to do the best, because I think everyone wants to just, you know, be happy, and whatever time we have on Earth, to just be happy and live the best to our potential.

Caroline. Yeah. Um, and did you have any new thoughts or insights onto your life during this conversation that we've had?

Ellen: Thoughts. I think just again, you know I know I've repeated it but I think that for me, uh, family has been huge. Again, my twin sister, you know, and my other six sibling who I love, um, and am very grateful for how we were raised and how we were brought up, in a community that, you know, it wasn't always easy. I look at, you know, Portland High School's been instrumental in my life and, you know, my grandmother who graduated, well she didn't graduate from Portland High School, but all her children graduated, you know, from Portland High School. And their children, and their children, and I look at just, you know, I graduated in 1982, and if you look in my yearbook and you see what the class looked like, as compared to what the class looks like now, on the diversity. I think back, that would have been awesome! Haha, you know? But, very grateful for my childhood. Not that it was always easy but, um, grateful nonetheless. But, um, looking at the society now in Portland and the community, and how much richer it is

Longevity of family

Grandmother's role in family, city and state

Fighting for civil rights

NAACP

Portland high school demographics- 1980s vs. now
More diversity

because of the diversity.

Caroline: Mm. Yeah. Thank you so much-

Ellen: You're welcome.

Caroline: for sharing your story with us.

Ellen: You're welcome.

Caroline: Um, we can send you an electronic copy of the audio, um, once we have it all set and we can send you a transcribed copy of it too if you are interested in that.

Ellen: Okay, sounds good.

Caroline: Thank you again.

Ellen: Thank you.