

Interview – Debra Guy

Interviewee: Debra Guy

Interviewer: Cecelia Parks

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START OF RECORDING

Cecelia Parks (CP): Okay, this is Cecelia Parks. I'm here with Debra Guy. It is September 1st, 2022. We are in Clemons Library at the University of Virginia, and we're going to started. So Debra, before we jump into like the meat of the questions, can you tell me what words you use to refer to yourself? Like do you call yourself “queer” or “gay” or “lesbian” or--what do you use?

Debra Guy (DG): Oh, I use all--all kinds of stuff. Gender-queer, queer, dyke? Sometimes I use “dyke,” I do. Nonbinary. Those are kind of the big ones. They kind of encompass most--most of everything. A “dude,” sometimes I refer to myself as a dude. [Laughs] I identify as a dude.

CP: Okay, so that was the words you use for yourself. And then what do you-- what words do you use to refer to a community of people like you? Like do you say, “the gay community,” “the LGBTQ community--”

DG: I say “queer.” I say “queer” to sort of encompass [claps hands] pretty much everybody.

CP: Okay. Great. And your pronouns are “she” and “they.”

DG: They are.

CP: Okay, great. So can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

DG: Sure. I grew up in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Southeast, in a city called Chesapeake, Virginia, which is a very large city, but it has sort of little sub-groups within its actual city-ness. So yeah, the part of Chesapeake that I grew up in was more adjacent to Suffolk and Portsmouth and Norfolk, so there was sort of a bougie part that's south of Chesapeake and I was in the less bougie part. [Laughs]

CP: Got it. So how did you get to Charlottesville? How did you end up here?

DG: This completes my Virginia tour. I went to college up in Fairfax, Virginia. My family originally is from Roanoke and Richmond. And when I was in Fairfax, the Falls Church area, my wife took a job at the University of Virginia, which brought us here in 2008.

CP: Okay. So that was 2008. Tell me about some of your first experiences as a queer person, whether that was here, whether that was DC-George Mason-Fairfax, whether that was in Chesapeake.

DG: Sure. Yeah. One of my first experiences as a queer person--I didn't really "come out" until I got to college. So that would have been fall of 1995. And I kind of stalked the GSA group--the Gay Student Association, I think it was what it was called then. And I knew that they were meeting and I think I went to their table once, like at the tabling fair, as like a small young thing. And then I knew where they--where they were meeting, and so I would just sort of like--kind of like do a circle around where their meeting room was, and then I would run back to my dorm room. So that was sort of my first experience at George Mason, and I ended up having a relationship with another

person about my age that same kind of school year. And that really helped sort of like you know, comfort-in-numbers sort of things. So that was the first person that I went to like a gay bar with. [Laughs] Which was very exciting when you're eighteen and you go to your first gay bar.

Back in Chesapeake, I would go home for the summers and the winters and I had a very small sort of gay community there that were my friends. And I wasn't very out in Chesapeake, because it's a little more religious and super conservative and there's a military element down there as well. There's a lot of Chick-Fil-As and Walmarts. Just putting that out there. It's just that kind of--that kind of group, that kind of vibe. And so it wasn't like walking around with like my queerness everywhere every time I was down there. But one of my first instances though--I will back up a little bit--of--I did--I was--I came out to like two people before I graduated high school.

And I do remember going with one of them quite frequently to the Barnes & Noble in Virginia Beach, which had a very small gay book section. And my gay friend and I--who is a cis man, a Black cis man. He was gay, and I was gay, and we weren't involved in the same people that we liked, but we were the only gay people I think we knew, and so we were besties, right? And so we would drive to the Barnes & Noble and hang out in the GLBTA like book area. And we would thumb through the same books every week and spent a lot of time there. So yeah, that was my very first sort of dabbling in the world of the gay community.

And then--yeah. And then, finally, I think when I was--when I was in a relationship and kind of found that community in--not that you have to be in a relationship to find a community, but that's just how it happened with me. It was a lot

easier to sort of infiltrate some of the folks that I had been observing and sort of the groups that had been sort of getting together and then yeah--ended up going to you know, Pride events and youth Pride events, and that was great.

CP: So did you ever end up going to one of those GSA meetings at George Mason?

DG: No. [Laughs] No.

CP: You're--[incomprehensible]

DG: I did not.

CP: Yeah, fair enough. So how did you meet your wife Meridith?

DG: I met my wife in 1998 and she--she came to a show that I was playing at George Mason. And this is funny. If you know my wife, she's a little introverted, and I wouldn't really say she's the sort of person that would just get on a bus and go see a person perform somewhere like through the Metro and through a bus. But she did. I think she was in--she was in DC for training to go overseas as a foreign service officer with the State Department. So she was sort of in this language training class. And I think she was also trying to sort of make the most of her time in DC. So she was involved in lots of different things and going out and really kind of exploring that whole area. And she ended up at a show of mine. And we became friends. And I mean, she would probably tell this story differently. I fell in love with her, and then she went away for like four years. And then we finally started dating when she got back from being overseas for like four or five years. [Laughs] The long game. It's the long game.

CP: [Laughs] Yup, that makes sense. So you met Meridith. Did you all--were you all married before you moved to Charlottesville? Obviously not legally.

DG: Yes. Obviously not legally. And if you ask me the year we got married legally I don't know if I'll remember. [Laughs] Because I mean I think of it, but it's like our anniversary in my brain is 2005, which would be March 2005, which is when we sort of eloped and had rings and vows and went to the beach and had a honeymoon and cake and flowers and all that stuff. So, yeah.

CP: Got it. So you and Meridith moved as a couple to Charlottesville in 2008.

DG: We did. Mm-hmm.

CP: So what was that move like, moving from DC to Charlottesville, which is...a different thing.

DG: It is a different thing. You know, it was funny, we kind of did it in stages, because she started here in either June or July 2008. And I didn't get a job and move down here until I think it was September of 2008. The economy was really weird around then. Like everything was kind of--it wasn't like the housing, but everything like jobs was becoming more sparse by the end of 2008. I don't remember why; there's probably a good reason. All I know is that it was really hard to find a job. And so our first--the first hurdle that we had was in the DC area, if--if I wanted to get a different job doing something that was in my field, you had a lot of options. You had the private sector, you had the public sector, you had universities and all kinds of educational institutions. And Charlottesville just did--was not as--as generous with its options as far as job prospects go.

So she moved down here and so I gave my notice at my job, which at the time was American University in DC, and sort of put them on like, "I'm going to go but I'm not going yet." And I moved in with some friends until I got a job down here. And so yeah, the move as a--so we sort of dabbled in Charlottesville first, right? [Laughs] Like

she--she lived here with like a couple cats and a futon and a fork for like three months, you know? And then I came down with the dog and more furniture and then we finally, you know, discovered what grocery store we would start to go to and what pharmacy we would use and those sort of things where you really sort of cement yourself into the community.

CP: So how did you meet other queer people in Charlottesville when you moved here?

DG: Oh, wow. It was really hard. I think that some of the first queer folks we met were folks who also worked at the library. So I also work at the library. And this is the only job I've had in Charlottesville and we--it just so happened, like the stars aligned as I was hunting for a job in between interviewing at the *C-Ville Weekly* and some other place at UVA, that they were looking for someone to manage the auditorium reservations at the--one of the libraries here. And I was like, "That's like my whole--that's like my job. That's what I do. That's what I've been doing forever." That was really great. So, and the library's a great place. It's big, big group of people, big diverse group of people and we came here out, you know? And so we never were in the closet. We were very out when we got here. And so she--I think there was a handful of folks who reached out to her.

Queer folks in the library and then--yeah, I mean we don't--we don't have a ton of Charlottesville queer friends. We have some that are acquaintances but as you get to be a certain age or you're living a certain lifestyle--like we have a daughter--and you know, like there's like the gays who have dogs, right? And the--[laughs]--I'm generalizing. You know, like there's the gays who have dogs, and there's the gays who like to hike, and the gays who like to go to sporting events, right? And we just never fit into any of those like

“gay pods” of people. Like we were just homebody gay people who were just like living at our house and eventually we had a baby and that was great, but--yeah. We didn't have a built-in kind of structured set of people we could identify with and be like, “We're the hiking gays! We love to hike!” You know, that wasn't us. It would have made it a lot easier, though. [Laughs]

CP: So would that--did you feel like that was a difference between DC and Charlottesville? Like did you feel like you had like a community of queer folks in DC that you would like do things with or hang out with and then you sort of lost that when you moved to Charlottesville?

DG: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I think a lot of the folks that were our queer friends in the DC area were friends of mine from college or just sort of people who had stayed in the area or friends of Meridith's, and so yeah, there was a bit of a community up there that we--we really enjoyed hanging out with and yeah, never totally made that pod of people here. And still--still really haven't. We have a very--much smaller pod.

CP: So were there places that you would go in DC? Like were you going to gay bars in DC? Was that something you did frequently? Or what kinds of things were you all doing in DC?

DG: We were not going to gay bars. [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs]

DG: Oh my god. I mean, I think at some point I did go to gay bars, but we didn't go to gay bars together.

CP: Fair enough.

DG: No, we typically went to dinner with other queer friends. Dinners--or like

game nights, like you know, come over, play board games, play cards, let's--you know, drink and do very domestic-y sorts of hanging out things. We did go to Pride, you know, Pride happened every June, and we'd go to Pride. Which is a whole different probably paper. You know, like [derisive snort] anyway. So yeah, the--yeah, we didn't do a lot of gay stuff. You know, for lack of a better term. A lot of queer stuff.

CP: Yeah, fair--I mean that's totally fair. So, did--when you moved--so when you moved here there would have been probably two gay bars here: Escafe and 216, it would have been at that point in time.

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: Did you all ever check those out? Was that something you were interested in at that point in time?

DG: No. No, I eventually ended up playing some music at Escafe, but not in--I think maybe once in like relation to a Pride event. Like it was me and another songwriter, queer-identified songwriter. But no, no we were like queer--on the down-low. Like, I don't think it's like that we were anti-social as much as it was that the folks that we would sort of hang out with that had kids the age of our kid or had similar interests that we did, you know, being here, that also were--like we're friends with other folks that have dogs, right, for instance. But they were also in like a completely different age bracket altogether, like different life stage is a better way of putting it. And so like we could talk about dogs. But that's like the long and short of it. Like that's where it stopped. Like there was not a whole lot more to have chitchat about. But I think that's just the consequence of moving someplace that's got such a smaller pool of--of people.

CP: Yeah. That totally makes sense.

DG: Yeah.

CP: So you mentioned you have a daughter.

DG: We do. Mm-hmm.

CP: Yeah. Can you tell me about the experience of having a child as a queer person? I know you were the one who carried Ruby.

DG: I was the birther!

CP: But yeah, so what was that like as a queer person and as a couple before marriage equality?

DG: Oh my god. So weird. So weird. [Laughs] So I identify as “butch.” That's one thing I think I left out. I identify very much as “butch.” Butch is an identity. I think it's more than just how you present, it's a little bit of swagger, it's a little bit of attitude, a little bit of chivalry in my opinion. There's also a term that I like that's called “masculine of center,” which is something that I really enjoy. And so I was not--if you're looking at both of us on paper and in a picture, I was not the obvious choice as to who would, in the traditional roles of what appearance-wise someone who would be carrying a child would look like.

But we were here for only a couple of years when we--or maybe only one when we were like, “Oh my God, let's have a baby.” You know, because like this place was a little addictive, Charlottesville. Like it's just like you don't want to leave. Like you--even with all of its flaws, and I'm sure some people want to leave, and those folks leave, and then sometimes they come back. Right? 'Cause it's got this like sort of quality that makes you want to be here. And even the stuff that you complain about is funny. You know? It's like--it's funny in a quirky, small-town-y way. Nazis aside, you know what I mean, like--

if you're thinking about just like the quirkiness of a college town.

And so we were like, "Let's have a kid." And at the time, I don't remember how old I was, I was probably 32, so I was--Meridith is four years older than I am, and so we were kind of doing the math as far as like fertility goes, and I was laughing about how my sister's had three children and I don't think has ever tried to get pregnant, and I'm just like, "I think like my people are fertile." You know, I'm just saying. I'm like, "I--I would just put my money on fertile people on my side of the family." And I think Meridith was like--I think she was--not totally interested at that moment in carrying. And I said, "You know, well, I'll take one for the team, it's nine months? Ten months? Let's do it." You know? And I had been a musician in DC and came down here and kind of stopped for a while. So it was kind of a natural place where we were looking for kind of a different direction to put our energy and efforts.

So yeah, we--we went to a fertility clinic and we met with those folks, who were very nice and very much like, "Okay. Go get some sperm." You know what I mean? Like they were like, "This is great."

CP: And so what year was this?

DG: This was 2009. So yeah, they were adorable. And like very supportive, no judgment, like, "Oh, so you want to have a baby? Cool, great. Let's run these tests to make sure that like I don't know, you have all the right plumbing and then go get some sperm. I don't care where you get it from. Like, here's some suggestions, go forth." You know? And, "Here's how to track your cycle, and here's how to figure out when you're ovulating." And it was like super--not easy, but it was a little trippy. It was like, "Okay. Sure."

And so we you know--I don't know how much of this you want to know, but I'll tell you anyway--we picked a donor who looked a lot like my wife. Which was the goal. So we had a donor database to choose from. All the sperm in the world, right? So you're looking at all--and it's like, I don't even know what it looks like now that we've got like technological advances. But in 2009, you could get pretty specific about the height, weight, the physical features, the emotional kind of temperature of the person and what their likes were and dislikes and favorite foods and all kinds of stuff. And so we pored over many many many many nice people--I assume they were nice--and we found a donor who had a lot of the physical qualities of Meridith and a lot of sort of the emotional qualities of the both of us combined, so we went forward with that nice person and got pregnant on the second try. Just super absolutely fortunate in a way that we didn't need to go to like IVF and you know, we just did sort of intra-uterine insemination and I was pregnant.

And then, it was weird. That's when it got weird. Not in a bad way. But it got weird because then like, as--in regards to like my identity. Like the clothes I had to wear got really weird and the things that I couldn't do as a person like--I like to pick up the big bags of dog food. You know? And I mow the lawn and I shovel the sidewalk--actually, Meridith shovels the sidewalk. She would point me out. She'd be like, "I actually shovel the sidewalk." Like snow. You know like I do these manual, sweaty things and this--I was immediately plunged into "don't pick up a milk carton" land. You know? And it was like, "What do you mean, don't pick up--" you know?

And so the limitations there started early, and then I'm not a particularly svelte or thin person, and so then it became this game of "fat or pregnant?" Right? Like I was

gaining weight, and sort of shifting weight-wise, and then I was trying to avoid maternity clothes so I would just buy like really large men's clothes. Neither of which were flattering, you know? But at some point--and I think when you're just carrying a baby, when you're going to the doctor and you're getting checkups all the time, you just lose a part of you that cares about that. Right? And so yeah, at some point, you've been poked and prodded and you feel this sort of second job you're doing as a human that you're like, "Okay. I'm going to go and I'm going to buy some--" Can I swear? [CP nods]--"Some fucking periwinkle shirts." You know, this is what they got. You know, I'm going to buy some periwinkle shirts and some stupid-ass pants and I'm just going to suffer through this moment. Because this is not permanent. This is temporary. I can do it.

You know, and this was after you know, morning sickness and you know, cravings, and you know, coming into work every day and getting a cup of ice and just eating buckets of ice because pregnancy is really weird. And yeah--and then the, you know, the--the you know, having--should we go to the birth part? Like having a baby. Like, there was the pregnancy, which was super trippy, and then there was the having the baby part, which was also super trippy. And we had--our daughter was born in June of 2010 and on a legit dark and stormy night. Knocked out the power at the hospital, which I thought I'd done.

CP: That was the derecho, right?

DG: This was--this was close. It was the--the microburst. So the--there was a derecho I think it was the next year. Very similar though. Big old storm comes through, middle of June, knocks out everything and I was--I had labored for like thirty hours at that point. I was very tired. I ended up having a C-section, they delivered her, she was

beautiful and great and perfect.

And--and then sort of the post-partum-ness of all that, which is you know weird on a whole different way; you know, I remember my first trip to you know Target without a baby was weird, because I was like, "Wow, I'm like--I'm not married because I didn't have my wedding band on, and I'm--don't have a baby any more on me or in me," and so it just became this like invisible you know visible moment.

As a queer couple, before Ruby was born, we had to put lots of stuff in place for like advance medical directives, because we weren't married, right? And so wills and power of attorney, all that stuff, and we couldn't find anyone in Charlottesville--this is probably our first and only real like hard queer moment in Charlottesville. We reached out to a local lawyer, a queer lawyer, to ask for help drafting these documents. And that lawyer said, "You don't--don't have the baby in Virginia." You know, they were like, "You should drive to DC and have your baby, because then you can both be on the birth certificate. This place is, you know, not friendly."

And that's not what we wanted to hear, right? Like, it was like, "I don't want to go to DC and have a baby." But we knew people that were doing it. People that were--it wasn't that unheard of at the time for people to go up and like a month before their due date and just like I don't know, hang out at a friend's house so they could go have their birth in, you know, Georgetown or something. But that was not in our cards. So we thought we would just put the legal provisions in place here. So we were trying to find somebody in Virginia to draw up some--some queer documents, for lack of a better term. [Laughs] Some queer like, you know, worst-case-scenario documents, and couldn't find anybody.

So we ended up going to Maryland, about a month before my due date. And Maryland's far, and it's a long way to drive when you're very very pregnant. And so we drove up there I think once or twice to sign the documents and then they had--what do they call them? Witnesses, right, for all that stuff. And then there was some videotaping because my family--I love them, but my family was not the biggest cheerleaders of our relationship and I think it's--I think wills and advance medical directives and that sort of thing might be less mandatory--feeling if you've got warm fuzzy relationships with all of your family. You know? And you can feel like they would respect your wishes and respect what you wanted, but my family would've just been super baby snatchers. You know, they would have just super baby snatched. And we did not want that at all. Which was part of going through so many hoops and making a video--a legit videotape explaining to my family from dead-me, because I'm dead, and I'm--so I'm telling them on this videotape about how they cannot have my baby.

So that was weird and hard, but also like uber-necessary. It felt really necessary in 2009. Or 2010, at this point. So when we--yeah, when we went to the hospital to have the baby, like we brought a like--it felt like a suitcase of paperwork with us. It was like the go bag and the legal documents. It was like a little bit of each. And yeah, so that was the first like sort of weird queer moment in Charlottesville, which was--yeah, like, "Don't have your baby here." And that was weird and gross and I didn't like that. But fuck that person, basically. My take on that. It's like, "Okay, great. Fuck you. Like, still gonna do what I'm gonna do. Thanks, though. Noted, right? Noted."

But then yeah, and then we--and that, I really thought that like having a kid would like bounce us into some sort of like queer playdates or something, but it didn't. And

maybe because of our age or just our nature, there are some folks who did have kids but they were older, and had older kids, which is not that big of a deal once you get into old--like older, older kids but when there's like a one-year-old versus a seven-year-old it's a little weird. So yeah, so we mostly became friends with like straight couples who had kids. [Laughs] Like the age of our child because it--you know, that was more in common--you had more of that in common. Queerness doesn't come up a ton when you're parenting. But yeah, like it'd be nice to talk to another queer mom, dad, or something about [laughs] something, but at the same time you're just like, "Oh my God, what swaddler are you using? Oh my God, what school are you going to?" You know, like these are things that queerness has nothing on. [Laughs]

CP: So, that's all super interesting. I'm curious, sort of to follow up on a couple of things.

DG: Yes.

CP: So you mentioned that the whole like experience of being pregnant was a little weird for you as a butch person.

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: Did you experience any weirdness with like your gynecologist or whatever, like going through that as like a butch person or as a person in a relationship with another woman? Like, was that part--like was the weirdness coming from there?

DG: You know, not so much. There was one--so we had sort of a like OB-GYN practice and we had all these different obstetricians who were like sort of on call if you went into labor. There was one guy who I swear was like stuck in the 1970s. Like called us both like "gals," which is the weirdest word ever. Like, "Hi, it's good to see you gals!"

It was like, “Who are--what? Okay.” You know, and so we only had one guy that we were like, “Oh my God, please not have that guy be, you know, the doctor who's on call when we go into labor.” But no, they were--they were--they were pretty--they were pretty resp--they were respectful. I don't think there was any weirdness.

There--I don't remember, and I'd have to ask Meridith, but I--like, I do know that like when we went in--for the C-section itself, maybe there was a question mark around like why she was wanting to be in the room maybe? Like, there's a lot of moving parts, right? There's like 900 doctors, it seems. And I think that might have been the only time where--or I'm sure there was at least once or twice she was advocating for me in the birthing room, you know, that maybe it might not have got as much weight as if it was coming from a husband or like a mom, like a grandma or something like that.

CP: Got it. I also wanted to follow up a little bit on the legal stuff that you talked about.

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: So you talked about--you had wills, advance medical directives, can you just talk a little bit more explicitly about why--like what those documents did and why it was so important for you to have that? Again, we're thinking about like--Ruby was born in 2010, right?

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: Yeah, so we're thinking about 2010, you all weren't married. You couldn't be married at that point in time. So talk a little bit more about what you had and then why that was so important.

DG: Sure. So--and I will--I forget the difference between an advance medical

directive and power of attorney. I'm sure there's like--there's like medical power of attorney and maybe like a financial power of attorney. Basically, if we were to go into labor and I were to be incapacitated. So there's two--there's two scenarios. One's I'm almost--you know, I'm--I'm ill and I need someone to make decisions on my behalf. One is, I'm gonna die, but I'm not dead yet. One is, I'm dead. I just died. Like something happened along the way here. And the baby is still alive. Like that is--that was the point of all of that. Like I mean I think we all care. We all care like what happens to me if I'm, you know, incapacitated. But we care more so what happens to the baby.

So yeah, that was the main reason was if I--under Virginia law, the--you know, Meredith and I were roommates at the time. You know, we had absolutely no legal connection to each other as--you know, other than maybe being on the same car insurance. But there was no legal connection so the government looks at your next of kin, which in that instance would have been my mom, or it would have been my sister. And those were people at the time that I did not want making decisions about my health and well-being, making decisions about my financial well-being, and making decisions about what happened to me if I died. And most of all, to make decisions about where my baby went if I had, you know, if I was in--you know, a vegetative state, or if I was, you know, had died all the way, you know. It would have--you know, what happens to the baby?

And so yeah, with Virginia law, the baby goes to my mom, and boy howdy, I did not want that to happen. And so that was--that was the bulk of it. It was just the absolute bulk of it. And I think that--like I said, maybe there would have been less pressure if I had a different relationship with my family. I hear some people enjoy their families. I hear that's a thing. And I think some families respect the opinions...but I know also that

grief makes people crazy, a little bit, like grief can trigger people into making some really crazy decisions, and so I just wanted to take all that decision making as much as humanly possible out of the system. And the lawyer, you know, bless his beautiful little heart, was like, "This still isn't...completely foolproof." You know, he was like, "This is the best we can do, here in 2010, you know? But it could go to a Virginia court and they could overturn it, and this is what's going to happen." So. That was the long and short of that.

And then one fun side-note that I forgot to mention is when we got ready to leave the hospital I think--so they put her name, right? Her name is Ruby Reed. She's delightful. So they put her name on the little thing that has her birthday and how much she weighs and all that stuff on her little like thing they put the baby in. And then, maybe like the second day--at some point in time, somebody comes around to get the information you want on the birth certificate. Right? And it's this lady. I don't know where she's from. I don't know who she works for. It's just this random person, you know? And she goes in, she comes in, and she--we had fully planned on naming her with my last name. And then we joked that we were going to hyphenate her last name with my last name and my wife's last name. And she said with the straightest face, "Dude, you can name her Mickey Mouse if you want to. Like, it doesn't--it doesn't matter at all. If you want to hyphenate her name, you can."

This is the first that this had occurred to us. [Laughs] And so this was like some sort of backup system to you know, like the--like, you know, Ruby's twelve now. So--I'm not sure there's a day that goes by that we don't like slightly high-five each other for like being like, "Oh, yeah." You know, because she really operates out in the world in a way now that you don't know--you can't just make the connection to who the biological mom

is, right? And whose last name she has, because there's both of our last names, and so they--we just wanted to confuse the shit out of everybody who might try to you know, puff up and try to assert their authority in some way to say Meridith couldn't pick her up from school or couldn't sign a permission slip or--you know what I mean?

Like, these things that traditionally are for the legal parent or guardian, we tried to slip a little bit by the folks that were in charge of our child, you know? Because--and then, you know, we've gotten so good at it that there's probably a good amount of people who just have no idea or who assume Ruby is Meridith's biological daughter because they look alike. So yeah. That was intentional. [Laughs] We intentionally like picked a short donor. Like he was short--because I'm like, "I don't want to have a basketball player." [CP laughs] You know like we're both like five-six, like I can't have like a six-foot-five son, you know what I mean? If you're looking at the scenarios that could fall, you know, we're like we just want like a short one. Can we get a short one, right? And--and so yeah, it was part of--it was all part of the plan. [Laughs]

CP: It did work. Ruby does look like Meridith.

DG: Yeah!

CP: So that's incredible.

DG: [Laughs]

CP: So, that happened in 2010.

DG: Yep.

CP: And then one thing that I've seen is that you and Meridith were pretty public around sort of the fight for marriage equality in Virginia and in Charlottesville in particular.

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: Can you talk a little bit about what that looked like for you all and why you decided to sort of be public in that way?

DG: You know, we--we were asked to be public about it, and we just didn't say no. At that time, I think Ruby might have been two or three, and we went to a rally, a marriage equality downtown I think. And someone picked a--someone took a picture of her and her little pink hat and her little zip-up coat, and it said, "Let my mamas marry!" She had this like little cute sign, right? And so she became like this like unintentional poster child for, you know, marriage equality. And Charlottesville's only so big. And the--it's not to say that there are not gay people that are not out gay people, but probably because of honestly like where we worked and how we looked, people were like, "These look like some gays that maybe you wouldn't hate just looking at them." You know what I mean?

Like I don't know what the vibe was, but like these are people who don't mind talking to the media. And this was print media and video media. And they are you know, have reasonably articulate things to say, and they don't mind. You know. They don't mind having people take their picture and put it on the front page of the paper. And it seemed like something that we could do, you know? And I remember saying like, "There are other gays in Charlottesville." You know, like there are others. There are many many many many others, you should--do you want to us to like get you in touch with them, you know? And they just--I think they did one or two stories on us and then sort of wanted to--to sort of follow us down the path as laws changed, as our kid got a little bit older, as--yeah, things just sort of evolved, they kind of wanted to you know, "Where are they

now?" You know, "One year later. Still not married." You know, like what--what that kind of looked like.

So yeah, we were--we were vocal, you know, it was not the sort of thing where we called up the news stations and were like, "We have things to say!" As much as it was they--I don't know. I think they just saw our delightful faces and wanted to talk to us about gayness and we were like, "Sure." You know, "Sure. Anything to raise awareness." I think at that point, it wasn't even like awareness but--I had a coworker who was like Republican, Marine dude. Nice guy. And I am pretty sure that I was the first like queer person he had known and known well. And he at some point was like, "Man, I don't--I don't know if I can vote this way any more. Because like, you guys aren't like sick fucks at all." You know what I mean?

Like, that's my words and not his, but that was the sentiment, was like he had grown up thinking we're all on parades. We're all on like floats and all the banners and Meridith and I were just--just trying to live our lives as people working and being consumers in the community and having a kid and I think that part of our--our outness and our activism was to put a face to like, "Your everyday person could be gay." You know, like, "Could be having some struggles that you don't know about." Or could be wanting to get married to someone and can't and--yeah, not, I mean no dig on the people that are on floats. Power to them. But, yeah. I think that was part of our interest in getting in front of people was just sort of showing people that we're just normal community members, normal in quotey-fingers. Like we're just like anybody else. Yeah.

CP: So I think this ties into you know what we were talking about earlier about all the documents and everything with the suitcase that you had to carry around.

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: But you know, you said that you know--you consider your marriage anniversary to be 2005.

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: And that's when you like sort of had the big wedding and all of that. So why--so can you sort of talk about why it was so important for you all to advocate for marriage equality and sort of have that legal sort of official-ness.

DG: Yeah, I mean I think that it was a little bit of--you know, like getting wills and power of attorneys and all that stuff drawn up is expensive. You know, like it costs a lot of money and it cost time and energy and effort that could have easily been avoided with just getting married. You know what I mean? And so, I think there was a level of--not like, "Wouldn't it be nice?" But like you know, "Why should we, as a community, as just people trying to get married, have to go through these, you know, steps."

We even went through like the second parent adoption, you know, business. And it was--which I don't think we could do until we were married. I don't think we could do second parent adoption until we were officially married. So yeah, it was a little bit of that. It was a we've put these protections in place but we were always in being legally married but were prepared for honestly, in Virginia, for it to never happen. You know, like I've lived here all my life and there was a moment where it's like, "I don't see this being a thing that's ever going to happen." And so yeah, it was something we would always advocate for. But yeah, it was a super cool second marriage. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah so can you talk about the--the second marriage. I think it was in 2014, right?

DG: I think so, that makes sense. That makes sense. I know, like I said I don't remember the years. It was really funny. It was the day--I think it was October 6? I think that's right.

CP: That's close--yeah.

DG: That's close.

CP: It's October.

DG: It's October. My birthday's on the fourth. And I remember that we had gone away for the weekend and our daughter had stayed with her grandparents, Meridith's parents. So our house--this all is going to make sense in a minute. So our house was kind of a wreck when we left, and we went to a cabin and had a lovely like birthday weekend, and then we came back that Sunday night and took Ruby to school or to preschool Monday morning. And that August we had a little bit of a...like a false start that August. Like it almost happened, right? And then it didn't. But like it almost--but then it didn't. And so we were--

CP: So, sorry, just to sort of fill in--so what happened was it--like it--when there was an appeal--there was a court case that had been like, "Okay, you can get married." And then there was--it got--there was a stay on that, right, while it was going to the Supreme Court. Right?

DG: Right. Right. Right. So there was something where we got really excited and then we got less excited, right? And so--so we had it in the back of our heads. We were paying attention. We weren't like completely oblivious. But we're paying attention. But we came back from our sort of weekend away and Monday was a normal day. And then it was--God, I don't know, like nine in the morning, and I want to say Meridith's sister who

lives in Arizona but is a lawyer started like blowing up everybody's phones here on the East Coast to kind of let us know like, "Holy shit. Like, y'all can get married today." You know, it was--so it was like a flurry. And so we had to like call out of work and like we were literally at Cohn's on the Corner getting like sandwiches for lunch. [Laughs] You know like we had meetings and so it was like, "Oh, let's go grab lunch and then put it in the fridge and we'll..."

But then it was like, "Oh, you know, we gotta go get married. We gotta go get married. Right now!" Right, and so we told everybody. And my sister and my niece and my two nieces and my nephew all lived in Chesapeake still, Portsmouth-Chesapeake area. My mom passed away a few years before that, and so she wasn't around, but my--my family got in the van and drove to Charlottesville. And we had to wait until the afternoon for Ruby to be at the ceremony because she had naptime. [Laughs] And it's very precious, naptime. Don't screw with naptime. And we went home and we cleaned the house, because we were like, "People are going to want to come over."

You know, because we're going to--we didn't know how it was going to happen, but at the same time, I wouldn't have had it happen any other way. It was a very magical sort of thing. Our friends in DC, our best friends, drove down. And you know, everyone just rallied. And we went down to the courthouse and we signed whatever the papers were. And we kind of decided what time we were going to get married. We did it outside, and the sheriff was there, and he's the guy who married us. Which is awesome, because he had a gun. I was like, "That's awesome." [Laughs] Right? Like every--I think everybody should be married by somebody who has a gun, I'm just saying. It's very powerful. If you've been denied marriage for so long, definitely have a gun-person if

you're getting married. [Laughs] Which is how I felt at the time.

And I had some friends in town that were musicians and they showed up, and my friend Corey--I mean, everyone just rallied. And just--literally showed up and we had the--the ceremony like out on the steps. It was afternoon. And I think that's the--I think we went home and got dressed earlier, and then we like bolted home to tidy because everyone dispersed to go get a cake. Someone got a cake. Someone took Ruby. Someone got champagne. Someone got a cheese platter. And then they all stormed the house like an hour later, and we had a party at my house with like champagne and you know, nice, you know, Waterford crystal champagne flutes that we had gotten for our first wedding, right?

So it was like this really special special experience where it just--it, you know I think we used our same wedding bands from before. But you know, it was the first time--it was also really interesting time like gender-wise, because like I dress up in a tie, right? Like, that's my formal attire. And so I had my blue jeans on and a white shirt and a tie, and Meredith had a lovely--a lovely dress on I think? And someone from work I think had just gotten married so they had a veil? So someone rushed down to the courthouse with a veil and maybe some flowers? I mean, like--like I've never seen a community just like freaking rally around one event. And it was just the most like special whirlwind day that was--that just started out as a like a normal Monday, right?

And there was a photographer who took like pictures and a couple really cute pictures of Ruby like looking up at us because she's little and you know, she's--yeah. So it was crazy. It was crazy. But it felt really good. You know, to kind of just like--like I said, I don't know if I thought it would ever happen. [Laughs] Super surprising and you know,

almost like you might--you might try to take this away from me but I don't think you can now, you know? No backsies. That's how I felt about that marriage. It's the no backsies marriage. [Laughs]

CP: Yup.

DG: [Laughs]

CP: So were you--so was Meridith able to adopt Ruby after you all got married?

DG: She was! Mm-hmm. So we have--Ruby's birth certificate now has both of our names on it, just "parent"--I think it just says "parent". But yeah, so even on paper we're confusing people. You know. It's just the--the lot of it. So yeah, she's--she's just as much hers as she is mine, and it definitely makes it really--like I'm pretty sure Meridith fills out permission slips as often as she can. You know, just because she can and she's just like, "Uh-huh!" You know, like signing her name all like, "That's right. I'm the legal guardian."

CP: And so has there been any weirdness about having you know Ruby with two moms at her school or at any point in time? Like through that or...all the experiences that Ruby has to have with sort of outside systems?

DG: Yeah. I'm trying to think...I don't think she's had any negative experiences. Sometimes that's what she leads with, like when she was littler? Like she'd be like, "My name is Ruby. I like drawing. I have two moms." You know, and it would be like, "Darling, like you...[laughs] that's a lot--that's a lot for the first interaction on the playground." You know? But she just--you know, she--I think she knew it was something that made her unique, just like anything, she shared it with people. And it's like "And I like to ride horses. And I like to do this. And these are things that about me that I'm trying

to tell you that maybe we'll find a common thing about. I'm six, I'm seven, I'm eight, I don't know any better." You know, like this is just what we're talking about. "What's your favorite color? Mine too." Right? And so I think it was like, "I have two moms." And I don't think she ever got like, "Me too!" It's one--one day it's going to happen and it's going to be amazing. But yeah, she was pretty--yeah, we were--and we were both relatively you know, active in like the--not like the parent groups but we're you know, we weren't like walking around closeted, so it was pretty obvious. [Laughs]

CP: And Ruby doesn't go to public school, right?

DG: No, she goes to a Montessori school. She goes to a private Montessori school. Which is less a dig about public school and more just because she's a quirky, quirky kid and it's a learning style that is extraordinarily suited to her--her--yeah, how she likes to learn and just sort of the little person that she is. So.

CP: Yeah. So shifting gears a little bit, you mentioned music a couple times. I know from just you know sort of existing in Charlottesville that I see your band [laughs] and your--your name sort of everywhere. So you're pretty well known and busy in the area. Can you just talk to me a little bit about your music and--yeah.

DG: Sure! I think it was--it was probably in like about--so when we first moved here, I did a little bit of music back in DC but I didn't do a lot in Charlottesville, and I think that's because I thought I was sort of a washed-up mom who couldn't do music any more. Like I had sold myself a little short too early. And--and in 2012, my mom passed away, and so I wrote a lot of songs about like, you know, this very like sad, sad sort of grief album, and so I started to play out a little bit more just as like a solo singer-songwriter, which is something I'd done in DC and something I'd started doing in college,

so just very familiar sort of singer-songwriter wheelhouse.

And I connected with a man in town named Drew, who is a very good friend of mine now, and he--I initially just connected with him so that we could record some stuff, and he was like, "You should really go like play out." And I was like, "I really kind of don't want to." You know, because that--at that point, I was just very much in homebody mode. You know? And he was instrumental in getting me out of my comfort zone, out of the house. And so yeah, so I did sort of like a solo singer-songwriter thing for a while. I made a first like initial little folk band called Help Me, Helen, with a couple of different folks, and then I accidentally started this band that I'm in now called 7th Grade Girl Fight, which is hilarious.

But I started it based on the name itself. Kind of like the first kind of thing that I did, and I think this was 2017, I think? I was just writing a bunch of like what to me at the time were kind of like ridiculous like pop songs on my electric guitar and then I shared it with some friends and accidentally kind of made it into a whole band, and it's just kept going! It just won't die. And I don't want it to die, because it's amazing and it's hilarious and it's so much fun. We've had some lineup changes but yeah, it means that I do the occasional radio spot, either as like a promotional thing or I'll go do radio interviews. We played Fridays After Five a couple years ago and--yeah, so there's been a little bit of notoriety, which is fun.

It was funny, one of the reasons that I--when I started doing music in 2015 that I made it a band name and I named it something that wasn't my name is because if you googled my name and Charlottesville, you just got marriage equality. You got a lot of marriage equality. And I was like, "People are going to be really confused." [Laughs]

They're going to be like, "Who's this person playing music? I really thought they were an activist." And so I'm trying to like take the pressure off of my name being the weight that carries both the marriage equality sign as well as trying to be a musician. But that's seemed to have petered out at this point. So, that's--I'm good with that. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah, I can say from experience that it is a little more balanced when you google it. It's a little more balanced.

DG: Excellent. Whew. It was totally the whole point. [Laughs]

CP: So shifting to a couple of sort of, I don't know, bigger questions.

DG: Sure.

CP: So you obviously work at UVA. You're a staff person. You and Meridith moved here because of the university. So in your experience as somebody who works at UVA, as somebody who has--you know, you're out doing things in the community, to some extent, you know, how do you see UVA staff and faculty sort of interacting with the rest of Charlottesville, especially like, I don't know, do you see like queer faculty and staff like only talking to each other and not talking to queer folks outside of the university system? Yeah. I'm curious anything you've noticed about how UVA interacts with the rest of Charlottesville. [Laughs]

DG: I don't--I don't know if I know so much about how the queer UVA interacts with the non-queers--

CP: Yeah.

DG: As much as I--you know, I know that UVA is--is such a touchpoint for like--like the initial getting-to-know-you bits with folks. And so like there's a good portion of like Ruby's friends, her parents work at UVA--you know, their friends' parents here. And

so, they're in the community, if only because they're in departments. They're faculty, they're staff, they're in the medical center, they're doctors, they're radiologists. There's such a huge group of--of parents and musicians. You know, even like--you know. There's a lot of musicians that work at UVA in the Music Department, and are also sort of in the community doing music stuff as well.

So yeah, I think that that's where I see the most like community overlap, is this-- there's something externally pulling them away from UVA, if it's an activity or if it's, you know, I can't tell you how many times I meet a musician and they'll be like, "Oh yeah, I work at UVA." You know? And they're like, in IT. Or they're in like whatever. And it's just not--it's not unusual at all, which is really cool. And the same thing happens with like the public school teachers. There are a lot of the public school teachers, and those folks are also--I feel like those are the people that if I ask you where you work, which I don't any more.

It's funny, like coming from DC, that was such a big thing, like how you got to know people was like, "Where do you work? What do you do?" I learned that that should not be the first question in Charlottesville because I got a very, very strange array of answers and people were like, "Why are you asking me what my job is?" Right? And I was like, "I'm going to stop asking you what your job is." And ask you instead, "Where do you live?" Where do you live is pretty easy. DC is like, "Where do you work and what's your commute like?" You know, like those are the first two things. And Charlottesville's a little bit more like, "Where do you live?" [Laughs] And you can get to like, "What do you do?" But "Where do you live? Do you have kids? Do you have a dog?" Less work-focused.

But yeah, I--as far as the queers go, I don't know. I mean I feel like a bad work queer. You know, like in some way like I don't--you know, like I got invited--and it's not because I'm not necessarily anti-social but it's--you know, I don't--there's so many facets of my life that sometimes--not saying the queer gets overlooked, but sometimes it's not frontal lobe interest material, you know, if someone's like, "Do you want to go to queer game night or do you want to go to rock climbing and bouldering with my kid's friends?" Like, rock climbing and bouldering, one hundred percent. You know, like and it's a little bit priority, it's a little bit more just like comfort in where we're at. I'm not saying that in six years when Ruby's left the house or whatever that that might shift again, but like yeah, like right now it's definitely a work--for me--work, music, parenting zone. Like that's sort of the--and then managing all the animals that we own. But that's a different question altogether.

CP: Yeah, that makes sense. Another kind of big question--

DG: Mm-hmm.

CP: Is so you were obviously here in 2017, with the Unite the Right rally. When we think about--you know, after that, race relations, such a huge sort of topic. It really looms large over Charlottesville. So I'm curious about your experience. Like, how you see black and white queer people in particular in Charlottesville relating to each other.

DG: Yeah. I mean, it's hard, because I think that--you know, I wouldn't necessarily say that the the two marginalized groups have a ton in common. But they're still marginalized groups. They're still a--even being a woman, being a--an assigned female at birth person, a person who has a period, you know what I mean? There's some--there's some commonalities that we can all kind of agree that like, "I see you. Like, I see

you.” It's like the butch nod. Right, there's the butch nod. You see another butch in the grocery store, you don't know each other, you're just like, “Hey, what's up, butch.” You know, it's like, “You're just getting your empanadas and just going about your day,” but there's a recognition there. With being like--I'm very--I don't know if I'm very queer-presenting [laughs] I might consider myself very queer-presenting; like I'm not--I don't typically read “straight,” if I do, something's gone terribly wrong, I think, just in my own ideas [laughs] so there's definitely a--for me personally, there's a vulnerability in just existing in the world as I appear, you know, and that's in regards to restrooms and in regards to just you know, getting ma'am-ed at the Food Lion, you know?

But I do find that like--again, like personally like my history was growing up in sort of a lower-income part of Chesapeake. Not lower-income but a part of Chesapeake that was not all-white. You know, it was--it was--my mom was a high school--high school biology teacher and it was--we grew up more poor than--more being aware of being poor than being aware that we were white, you know? And so--and if you were in the poor sector, you know, every--people who are poor are all shapes and sizes and colors. [Laughs]

But we all recognize that we're all poor, right? Like, so it's this--it's a little like the queerness of it. It's like oh, you know, a recognition of like I see you, you're struggling, I'm struggling, you know, we're here struggling, you know. And that could be because, you know, you're Black and I'm white or you're poor and I'm poor. And I think that that transits a little bit to Charlottesville in--in that way that the--and the queer people of Charlottesville tend to be pretty activist-y. You know, they tend to be--not like outspoken, but there is--they show up, you know, like if there's rallies or GoFundMes or

Twitter retweets, you know, even if it's like really low-stakes, like they tend to not just sort of hide in the woodwork. That was a very long answer to your big question.

CP: Yeah, so--yeah, so we'll sort of spiral back to that.

DG: Yeah, yeah.

CP: Have you gone to any of the like Cville Pride festivals there or things that Cville Pride puts on?

DG: I have. I've gone to the--the--I think I've gone to every Pride festival they've had. I'm not bragging, I just think that I have. I want to say I've played or performed at most of them if not all of them. They started out in what used to be Lee Park, and they were very small. And then they grew and moved over to the Pavilion and they adjusted for COVID and I think they're just having like a street fair this year. But yeah, yeah definitely--definitely have gone to my fair share of Cville Pride activities.

CP: So what have those--can you sort of describe what those are like? Like what kinds of things are happening, like--

DG: Like do you want like brutal honesty?

CP: Yeah.

DG: Okay. They're very straight. For gay pride events-- [Laughs]

CP: That is what every--literally every person has said, so.

DG: Yeah, I mean I grew up going to Pride where it was like--it was like this opportunity. Again, super honest, like it was this opportunity to like buy your Pride rings, because there was no internet, right? So you could buy your Pride rings or you could buy stuff that you--from a store maybe you wouldn't want to go into for lack of a better explanation, or it was where you could hold your hands with your girlfriend or your

boyfriend and you could kiss them and you weren't afraid of running into anybody that you worked with or was sort of in the community at large that would then know--you know, like even if you weren't out, it was still--even if you were out, it was still like, "Oh, well, my straight coworkers aren't going to be here." You know? And that's no dig to the straight coworkers. But they are *all* at Charlottesville Pride.

And so that--it takes a little bit of the Pride part of it out in a way that is--you know, it just becomes another fun festival, which is great! I love a fun festival! Who doesn't like a bounce house and funnel cake? Like, great. But it doesn't feel like a Pride festival. It feels like an opportunity for people who are left of center, who are welcoming and--you know, I think that it's--it's huge value comes with the youth that show up and are not treated like freak shows, you know? And the tabling that has--you know, the churches. You know, if you're like shopping for a church to be a gay at, that's totally where you're going to go and do it.

If you're just looking to go and like hold your--you know, hold the hand of your partner and like sneak in a public smooch, like you're probably going to get observed by several straight people that you know, and that takes a little bit of the fun out of it. It's not even fun, it just takes a little bit of like the meaning--meaningfulness out of Pride. And it's--it sounds like old, gay, and jaded, but there's a vibe that's like, "Man," like you just--it's also where you used to go to find the other gay people? You know, because you don't walk around with like a gay shirt on. I mean you can, but like not everyone is like walking around with their gay paraphernalia just like shouting to the rooftops about how--how gay they are. You know, like Corey reads a little queer but she loves going out with me because I make her a little more queer, right? Like, so we become like QUEERS.

Like QUEERS ON THE TOWN, right?

And same thing with Meridith. Meridith reads a little bit more straight, but with me, you know, we still get the whole like, you know, “Together or separate checks?” And it's like, “Fuck you,” right? So that happens. But at least it's--the odds are better. The odds are better if you go to a gay pride event and you can be like, “Wow! I didn't know so-and-so was gay!” And you can be like, “Cool!” And now it's just like, “Oh wow. Those people are cool with gay!” Right? There's like--that's like the long and short of it, it's like--and then, it's, you know.

But it feels--it feels a little dirty to say that out loud because I don't want to like straight-bash, you know? Because like the reason that some laws are passed and things get done is because like the allies show up, and you know, there are--there's bi erasure, you know what I mean? Like, there's stealth trans folks. I mean like, the world is bigger. The Pride world is bigger and more complex--not than it was in 1995 but than it is allowed to be these days. Like in 1995, it would have been a little bit more invisible, and nowadays things are a little bit more on the surface, which is really great.

But it takes sort of the--the traditional Pride people, like the old-school Pride people. It's hard--it's a hard adjustment because you do want to hold the hand of somebody and--Meridith and I are terrible hand-holders; we don't hold hands a lot anyway, but there's a moment where it's just like, “Man.” Like we'll go to a--we'll go to an amusement park and we'll see like the younger, you know, gays holding hands and we're always like [intake of breath], you know, we always tear up and we're just like, “This is so--we're so happy to see this!” You know? And that's--that's great. And I think it's a sign of progress to a place where you don't need to have these umbrella events

where you have to be...this is the only place you can hold hands. But at the same time, it's a lot of straight people. And rainbows. Straight people and rainbows.

CP: Yeah.

DG: [Laughs]

CP: So if that--if Cville Pride--sort of to spiral back to what we were talking about earlier like--

DG: Yeah.

CP: Do you see like a mix of like different races there? Is Charlottesville Pride predominantly white, like what's that kind of experience?

DG: Hmmm. You know, I think like--I think it is predominantly white. In thinking about the Prides of the past. It's not--rather, it's not as diverse as it could and should be. You know like I think that there--yeah. I think that the opportunity to do programming and events and stuff for a wider audience--wider, not whiter, wider--audience is there, but it also like requires someone to--to do that shit, you know? And sometimes there's nobody to do that shit, and so it doesn't get done. And so it's not for a lack of desire or recognition that there's a need as much as it's just like there's no one kind of stepping up and being like, "I'll take that on!" Because it's--you know, it's not fraught, necessarily, it just is complicated. And programming any large event I think is complicated. So, it's--yeah. I think--yeah.

CP: Yeah. So do you think--so you sort of mentioned feeling at Pride like it's not so much a like a space just for queer people anymore; there's a lot of straight people there. Do you feel like a space like that's missing, like a place that's just for queer people or you know predominantly queer people, where you can go and sort of feel that like...I

don't know, you can hold your partner's hand, you know?

DG: Yeah.

CP: Do you feel like that's something that Charlottesville is missing at this point in time.

DG: Yeah, hundred percent. Yeah. It's funny, so we went to a--a soccer game. A DC women's soccer game in DC over the summer? Back in the spring? At some point in time we went. And it was gayer than anything I have been to in a long time. Like, this was like--it was like, "This is like Pride. This is what I want Pride to be." You know? Because it was just gays. Everywhere. And I'm sure there were some straight people and that's fine. You know, they're allowed to be there.

But like it was just really cool, and I feel like it is--sometimes Charlottesville can feel like the folks--the allies, I'll call them the allies, I feel like they--they don't want to be excluded, right? And it's hard to be like, "This isn't for you, though." And it's hard to explain to them why it's not for them. And it's--because I think that Charlottesville's such a--it tries to be such an inclusive place. And the people who are allies really want it to be inclusive. Like they want fair and equal housing. They want bike lanes. You know, like they are passionate about you know inclusivity.

And so to have a group be like, "Actually, you guys aren't invited to this one," you know, I think it hurts their feelings a little bit. Like, "You're going to have a picnic without me?" Like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah we are. We are going to talk about super gay stuff over here." You know what I mean? It's--yeah, I think it's definitely missing but I think that Charlottesville's just catty enough that it would--it would be hard to pull off in a way that didn't come off as like elitist to some group, you know? It would be like, "This group

is only meeting--you know, they've only publicized through Facebook and we all know that there's a certain income level that involves being on Facebook." You know, like that--just that--it's a rabbit hole of problems. [Laughs]

You know, that could arise, and I think that regardless of popular belief, gays like to be as drama free. You know, we don't like to have a ton of drama, and I think that it's--we don't want to be exclusive. We also kind of do. But we also...like don't know who we're excluding, because there are people that are not out, you know? And so it's a hard--it's hard to know to invite, you know, 1995 Debra to the GSA meeting because 1995 Debra's not telling anybody, you know? And so I might feel excluded but at the same time like I haven't done anything to voice my--my desire to be included. So. In short, yes.

CP: Yeah. [Laughs]

DG: [Laughs]

CP: Yeah, absolutely. We've talked a little bit about this, but do you feel like you're part of a queer community here in Charlottesville?

DG: I do! I do. I think it's a--it's a--it's not a big warm fuzzy, you know, link arms and sway kind of a community but I think that if...you know, if--if you were like, "Hey, direct me to some gay people," like I'd be able to give you a--you know, a good pool of people who identify and are out and who are people that if I had a gay crisis--I don't know what a gay crisis might be, but if I had a gay crisis and I needed a gay person, that I could find several. [Laughs] You never know.

CP: Yup, I mean that's--that's all you need, right?

DG: [Laughs] That's the name of my next band: Gay Crisis. It'd be like so right where it should be.

CP: [Laughs] What do you think people don't know about queer life in Charlottesville, but should?

DG: Hmmm...I would say that there are--I mean, a recognition that there are a lot of stealth queers, you know? Like more--there are more queer people than people know. Like, you work with queer people. You are--you know, queer people come to your restaurants, queer people shop at your grocery stores, you know? We're not all out in the newspapers. I worked a table one time at Cville Pride, and it was for an organization that's in Oakland that I volunteered with for a while called Butch Voices, which is sort masculine-of-center kind of organization. Not singers, contrary to popular belief.

But I was at this table and these two folks came over and they were kind of like lesbian-identifying in their--in their presentation and they were talking about how they lived at Lake Monticello, and they don't do any gay things ever, you know? But like it was like this is like the gayest thing that they had done in like twenty years, right? And it was like, "These people are everywhere. They're--they are elderly people living together. They are everywhere." And so I think that part of wanting people to know about Charlottesville is just to not make those sort of blanket assumptions about everybody that they meet. And about either how they present or you know, what language or pronouns that they use, like just--you know, there's--there's more gay people than I think that people recognize are here. But there's just a good portion of us who are--not necessarily not out but just aren't out there you know picketing and going to all the Pride events.

CP: Yeah.

DG: I think it's because we're tired, though. [Laughs]

CP: That's reasonable. Can you talk a little more about Butch Voices?

DG: Sure! So Butch Voices was a--is a group--I don't know if it's still active. They were active--they were pretty active when I went out to Oakland. They are a nonprofit and they were created by--just--and maintained by people who identify as butch. And it's--that's sort of where the “masculine-of-center” term came about. And they would put on a conference every two or three years? Two or three years. Where they'd get everybody together and they'd have--yeah, sessions about like butch hair and being butch and pregnant and butches loving butches, you know? Like all kinds of--and you know, they'd have plenary speakers and...intersectionality lunches, you know? Like--like all kinds of really cool things.

And I kind of opted-out of the committee work probably like five years ago? Just when work got a little crazy and parenting got a little crazy. Their annual conference used to be kind of right around when school started here, like the same--like it was like August, and it was just too much for me to like go out and do all that stuff. But it was really cool. It was--they were going through a bit of a transition--no pun intended--because they were trying to figure out how to include a lot of the stealth--”stealth”--trans folks. Like folks who were really, really male-presenting and--but wanted to be in this butch space.

And so there was some complications sort of associated with, you know, presenting like you know like me or presenting like me but with like you know, more angular body and a beard, you know? And a deep voice and a dude name, right? So, there's how to appeal to kind of both sets of folks and then make everybody feel comfortable, and there was a little bit of--not a fallout necessarily, but just a hard time trying to figure out how to move forward with--you know, there's lots of articles about

like the dying butch community, you know? And I think that they--that really resonated with--with that group. And it was--yeah, I don't know if they're still around doing their stuff, but they were really cool.

CP: Yeah.

DG: Yeah.

CP: Why were you in Oakland?

DG: That--the--it was really funny, I was one of the handful of people from the East Coast, because the--the nonprofit's based in Portland, Seattle, Bay Area? Yeah, and so that's--so Oakland was where they have their conference every two or three years. They--yeah. So...

CP: All right!

DG: Good times. [Laughs]

CP: Sounds like it. We're about wrapping up. Is there anything else you'd like to share for the historical record that you haven't yet?

DG: Man. You know, I--only to touch a little bit back on like--like being a queer person in a band, you know?

CP: Yeah.

DG: Like, so I think that's the only thing that is like--it's still got sort of a hazy question mark around it, right? Like there's lots of festivals. There's a lot of festivals you can apply to go play as a band. And I don't feel like I can put in for the women festivals, like the women's music festivals, right? There's tons of women's music festivals. There's so many! So many. And I feel like it would be disingenuous to try to represent there. Just as personally, as me. Like I don't want to represent a woman fronting a band, right?

CP: Yeah, and so is that because of how you personally identify or because there are people who aren't women in your band, like--

DG: No, just my personal identification.

CP: Yeah.

DG: Yeah. I mean it's the--it's the same reason why I bristle when people "ma'am" me. You know, it's the same--it's the same thing. Or call Meridith and I "ladies" when we sit down somewhere. It makes me just vomit a little bit. And it's like, "Come on now," you know? So there's--it's that. It's--I think you kind of have to own--like I'm happy to talk about like AFAB [assigned female at birth] stuff, like my band will tell you all about how I love to educate them on the horrors of peri-menopause, you know? Like I'm just like, "We're in the van for five hours, who wants to learn about night sweats?" You know?

CP: [Laughs]

DG: They hate me, I think, a little bit, but I'm like, "You need to know this." You know, like, "You just need--I have to suffer through your jokes here, let's do it." Right? Because I think there's a difference between AFAB and a woman, right? So like there's some similar struggles but at the same time, you know, I don't--I don't think I could just go and be wanting to be all girl-power with--like I would support--I would go to a women's music festival, but I don't think I would want to--yeah. To sort of be that person.

One of the reasons I had top surgery is because I...I found that it was--some of my sort of gender dysphoria was--was surrounded and rooted in presenting like--even though said I identify like a dyke, like just like a--just a dyke. And I hated how I looked in polo shirts, right? I hated how I looked in short-sleeved button up shirts and I took me a while

to realize that it was my chest that was the problem. And it's a lot, lot better. But--so that's the other sort of element to the women's music festival. Like I don't really fit in with those sorts of like big dyke energy bands, who are like all female bands.

But at the same time, if I go compete with all the dudes at the dude festivals, it's hard. There's so many. There's so many men, Cecelia. [claps hands] There's so many. There's many many of them and they're all in bands. And they're all in bands that are terrible. They're not all terrible, but they're--it's a huge, huge competition, right? And just the--so, I think that that's where I don't necessarily feel slighted, but I feel a little like, you know, sort of like there's a thing that goes around the internet which is like, "Female-fronted is not a genre." Right? Like, female-fronted is not a genre. Like queer-fronted is not, trans-fronted is not. But at the same time, like how do you find those acts? Like how do you find--like it's not a genre, no, because that's sort of, you know, making it like different, you know? Because you shouldn't want to go like, "I just want to find trans people who are singing." Right? But at the same time, like a part of me's like, "I kind of do, though." You know? I kind of do want to find those people who are really in the middle and...

So yeah, that's I think one of my biggest struggles and I don't necessarily know how to--how to cope with it or how to you know, take--I mean it's one of those things where you know, you get in sort of divisive conversations about you know, trans in sports and doing this or doing that or you know--it's like it's a part of my identity where I recognize, "Okay, maybe this is just [claps hands] how it is." You know? Maybe I don't get an accommodation, you know what I mean? Like maybe I don't--I don't get a free pass to--to go to either or. Maybe this is just--this is just a bummer. You know? It's just a

bummer that I don't want to go to this group, I don't want to go to this group, or this group is too--you know, huge of people trying to--trying to get someone's attention with their music. But yeah, so that's--that's the only sort of strange aside in regards to sort of gender.

CP: Yeah. That's so interesting. I never--I never thought about it that way but I--especially hearing about some of like the politics around the women's music festivals in the last couple of years, I can see how that would be...challenging.

DG: Mm-hmm. Yeah, and you--you know, and I think that--and honestly, like I feel like a trans woman has got a bigger seat at the table than I do at a women's music festival, you know? And...yeah. It's weird.

CP: Yeah.

DG: It's weird. But again, one of those things where it's like, "Oh. That might just be unfortunate." [Sighs]

CP: Yeah.

DG: Like we--you know, we can't make everything--it's not necessarily like, "Life's not fair," but it's like there's only so much, I think, we could do without saying, "Yeah, we're going to make you know trans and queer a genre." Like there's like queer music stations and you know, people who like support queer artists and that's one thing but there's no like--I think it--I think it goes back to like queers don't like to exclude people, you know what I mean? Like I think--I think it's very similar to like having like an all-UVA Library queer picnic. It's because we'd be like, "Well damn, but there's some people who probably want to come to this, you know? And I'm pretty sure they'd be a little bit mad that they weren't invited because they're super allies!"

CP: We had this conversation at the--when we were making the Inclusive Excellence plan.

DG: Really? Yeah--oh yeah! Yes!

CP: We were trying to think about like, "Well how do we do focus groups for queer people," and then thinking about like, "Okay, but like straight people are going to want to come." [Laughs]

DG: Yeah, they're going to want to come! Right!

CP: So how do we accommodate that?

DG: And so instead we're just like, "Never mind," you know? We're just like, "It's fine. It's fine. It's fine." You know, but is it? Like, is it? Like maybe we do need to get together. Like maybe we do need to--

CP: Yeah. Well, we settled on--we said one was straight people inc--allies and queer people and one was just queer people.

DG: That's true. That's true.

CP: I think that was the end of that story.

DG: That's because it's like [shrugs] I don't know. It's complicated. I think that we're just sensitive. We're a sensitive group. [Laughs] We don't want to offend people.

CP: Oh, for better or for worse.

DG: For better or for worse.

CP: Anything else you want to share?

DG: I think that's it. I talk a lot. [Laughs]

CP: Well, I really--I really do appreciate it, Debra, thank you so much for doing this today.

DG: Sweet. Awesome. Of course, any time.

END OF RECORDING