

Interview – Nancy Kechner

Interviewee: Nancy Kechner

Interviewer: Cecelia Parks

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**START OF RECORDING**

Cecelia Parks (CP): All right. Well, this is Cecelia Parks. I am here with Nancy Kechner. It is...what's today's date? The 18th?

Nancy Kechner (NK): The 17th.

CP: The 17th. [Laughs] Today's the 17th of October, 2022, and we're going to get started. So what words do you use to refer to yourself? Like do you say you're a lesbian, do you say “gay”, what do you say?

NK: Probably say “gay” more than “lesbian.”

CP: Fair enough. Do you--when you're referring to like a group of people, do you say like “the gay community,” “the LGBTQ community,” “the queer community,” or something else?

NK: I probably evolved to using “LGBTQ.”

CP: Yeah.

NK: You know, in the past I would've probably just used “gay community.”

CP: Yeah, that makes sense.

NK: Or sometimes “queer community.”

CP: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And then what pronouns do you use?

NK: She/hers. The traditional female things.

CP: Okay, cool. So tell me about where you grew up.

NK: I grew up in Staten Island, New York, which is one of the boroughs of the city. Very white. Very semi-rural at that point. Very conservative. Everyone was either Irish, Italian, German, Polish, you know, in my elementary school there was literally one Black family, and it was a public school.

CP: Yeah, so how did you end up in Charlottesville? So you grew up in Staten Island; how did you get here?

NK: Okay. So...I got bussed in to a different intermediate school, which was primarily in a Black neighborhood. Of course, we didn't mix. You know, they had clusters, and you know, you only--you know, you only had band or gym with anyone of color. But we had an amazing math teacher. Mr. Rayden. Steven Rayden. And I think he's still alive. But this guy was just amazing. So in New York, you have Regents Exams, so the first year of sixth grade math, we did--we learned how to fill out IRS forms. [CP laughs] And we studied the theory of special relativity. And then in the seventh grade math, we took Algebra I, so we--then we took our ninth grade Algebra I exam. And then in eighth grade, we took Advanced Algebra and Trigonometry--and Trig, which was the eleventh grade Regent. And then he said, "You know, if you really really really like math, you should apply to Stuyvesant." And I was like, "Okay."

So a bunch of us decided to apply to Stuyvesant. So I was thirteen, and my parents were fairly racist and not at all embracing diversity in any way, shape, or form, so I got into Stuyvesant and I went to Stuyvesant. So I left my house at six in the morning;

took a bus, and then a ferry boat, and then a subway, and then I went to a high school that was completely mixed with people from all five boroughs. At that point, the school was 65% Jewish. Now it's 65% Asian, so it--it was interesting. I had never met a person of a divorced parent, you know. It was--I had Indian friends in Jackson Heights and it just changed my life.

So--and that also got me out of my house. So then, usually I did something after school, either sing or I swam, and so I would take like the 6:30 ferry home, get home around eight, you know, eat my dinner, go study, you know, wash, rinse, recycle. So it was--it just opened my eyes to the whole world. And then my oldest bestest friend, Annie Newgarten, had gone to Virginia. And another friend of mine was like, "Let's go visit!" I went to Brooklyn. Because it was--literally I paid fifty dollars for my first year of college. So I was at Brooklyn College and it wasn't a good fit. We are talking about disco age, and I am not disco material. [CP laughs] So we came down to visit Annie, and I was like, "Wow! This is a nice place. I'll apply." And I transferred in my second year and that was it.

CP: And so what year was that?

NK: I came here in 1980.

CP: Okay. Okay. And then you finished undergrad in Charlottesville, and then you ended up in Philly at some point, right?

NK: Right, I graduated from here with a degree in kinesiology and then I stayed here. I worked for--well, I actually went to grad school for a year in biomedical engineering. Which I then discovered that I only liked the physiology, so I dropped out. And then I got a job with Pediatrics. So I worked for Pediatrics for three years, and then I

realized that I had missed cooking, because I cooked all the way through my undergrad, and then I started cooking and I was trained to be a pastry chef, and then I moved to Philadelphia. When I moved to Philly, that was in '88. I moved there to play rugby, so-- but of course the month before I moved there, I tore my ACL. So then I played seven years with no ACL. I'm a dumbass. [Both laugh] Now I have a--I have a knee replacement. You know, that's what happens when you--yeah, yeah, yeah. So, yeah.

And then the moment I got to Philly, all I wanted to do was get back here, because I have no family. You know, my friends are still here. So I was tearing up the road down here for--you know, everyone's birthday, you know, just to get away all the time. And I was just like, "I want to get back to Charlottesville."

So after I got my--I also discovered that I missed science. So I decided to go get a PhD in physiology. And I was more interested in exercise physiology. Like I was doing triathlons then and playing rugby and running and lifting, but I realized that if I went to a medical school, they paid you. Whereas if you went to an education school, which is where exercise phys usually resides, you pay them. So it was sort of an economic decision, and I would spend seven long years in graduate school.

And then I did a postdoc here. A friend of mine who was a nurse, a nurse anesthetist, asked George Rich, who was the department chair, if he needed a postdoc, and he did, and--because I'm a systems physiologist, I've never pipetted anything. So--but I can do surgery on anything. So I worked doing an isolated perfused kidney prep for two years. And then I started working for Behavioral Medicine as a project coordinator. And then UVA paid for me to go get a master's in instructional technology. Just because of the good resources we have here. And then I was hired by ITS [Information Technology

Services], by Tim Tolson, and that was in 2005, and here I am. Then one day I was given to the library.

CP: Yep. We're happy to have you.

NK: I'm happy to be here. [CP laughs] Because I actually lived in a library. One year I worked in Wilson, and then they moved me into the Scholars Lab, so I was always with the library, really. It was just a formality and giving up an FTE.

CP: Right. So to backtrack--backtracking a little bit, what were some of your first experiences as a gay person?

NK: [Coughs] I--when I was a senior in high school, I started dating this woman. Who was also a student. So that was my first sort of exposure, and then I was kind of like, "This--this--this isn't the way I wanted to live my life," you know? I mean--

CP: In what sense?

NK: I didn't want to be gay.

CP: Okay.

NK: Yeah, I mean--you know, at that point, like you couldn't like hold hands with your significant other.

CP: Because this would have been in like the late '70s, early '80s?

NK: Like '78-'79.

CP: Okay.

NK: Yeah. So after that, hit the skids...I was at Brooklyn. And I was like the consummate New Yorker. I had an apartment. I worked at a restaurant across from Lincoln Center. I knew every--like which door to get on on the subway or which stairwell to go, I mean, I was seamless. So I didn't--I didn't see anybody my first year of college. I

just worked an awful lot. And, you know, I had a 4.0 because all I did was work and study.

So...then I came down here--well actually, that summer I had a--a really really really close friend and we had sort of fallen in arrears. And I ran into her one day and you know, we just started talking again and then we started seeing each other, and then she went off to Binghamton, and then she was like, "I'm not like that." And that was that. And I was like, "Okay." But I came down here and you know, never occurred to me that I was still gay. Playing rugby, it was a very mixed team. There were some--some gay girls, some straight girls, you know. Sexuality at that point wasn't an issue with rugby. And I was hanging out with a guy named Alan a lot, but it seemed that Alan--everybody who came out dated Alan for a little while. There was like four of us. And we all came out. So, that was it.

CP: Okay. What do you mean when you said that like "sexuality wasn't an issue in rugby the way it is now"? As in like--

NK: It's actually not so much now, but at one point in--you know, in the beginning it was like girlfriends of guys who played, and they were like, "Oh, that looks like fun; I want to play."

CP: Okay.

NK: And then it became like "softball." You know what I'm saying?

CP: Uh-huh.

NK: Yeah. [Both laugh] So you know, you'd go play rugby and then you'd go out to the bar.

CP: Yeah.

NK: You know, and drink with the other team or, you know, so.

CP: So there was a point in rugby's history where it wasn't as like acceptable to be gay on the team? Or...

NK: Well, it wasn't talked about.

CP: Okay. Oh, okay.

NK. Yeah, like we knew that Sydney and Thea were together. Didn't--you know, my roommate for three years--or two years--was Charlotte, who was straight.

CP: Yeah.

NK: You know. And she's a married lady. Math teacher. I mean...In fact I have literally one gay friend from high school, and he lives in New Orleans. Like all of my friends are straight and all mommies, and you know. Except for Annie, who never had children. But she just published a book on mediums.

CP: Cool.

NK: [Laughs] Random [both laugh].

CP: So was rugby the main way that you met other gay folks when you came to Charlottesville after you sort of realized that that was...I don't know, who you were?

NK: Yeah. I suppose. No--well, there was--the Gay Student Union periodically would have dances. It was the same sort of thing where if you met one person, then you would meet more people. Like there was a woman who's actually sort of famous, Michelle Benecke. She--you can look her up, but she was a softball player. And then there were--she introduced me to some of her friends, and we never dated or anything but, you know, then I met MK, who ended up being my first *relationship* relationship. And she's still my best friend. But--then from MK, I guess it was mostly through rugby.

Just because it's a time suck, you know. Even when I was an undergrad, I mean I took like twenty-one hours because in kinesio, you have to take sports skills. And then I cooked probably twenty-four hours a week, because my parents were of the "We'll pay your tuition"--which was like \$1,000 a year at that time—"and we'll pay your housing, but if you want to go out and have fun, you better get a job." So that's how I got into cooking.

CP: And were you cooking at Muldowney's, the gay bar, at that point in time, or did that come later?

NK: No. My first cooking job was at Curly's Garage, which was--is now Red Crab. And I was a prep cook there, and then I became a line cook. And then I--where did I go from there? Then I cooked the rest of my time at Dutch Pantry, which is where Best Buy is.

CP: Okay. Okay. And then so how--so you did cook at Muldowney's eventually?

NK: Mm-hmm.

CP: Okay, so what was--what was that like? What was Muldowney's like?

NK: Well, the original Muldowney's was tiny. And dark. It was like going into a cave. It was maybe--I don't know--fifteen feet wide, forty feet long? It had a wood-burning stove in the front. It was on Second Street, you know where Waterbird [Spirits] is? So it was across the street from there. Like the back of Rev[olutionary] Soup. So, it was a strange little location. And, you know, I started delivering sandwiches for Joani [Schatzman], you know, because she had free delivery, and making sandwiches. Like, her food was quite excellent. I still make her chili; it's like a Chicago-style chili with like some cloves in it. Her smoked turkeys were great. She smoked them in like a washing

machine in Biscuit Run or something.

Yeah, so it was a pretty strong community then, and she did not want men in that bar. She was of the man-hating lesbian club, back in the day. You know, I mean she had--she'd lived a life. I mean, she's probably only, what, twelve years older than I am, but she was not afraid of anything, so. And then, after that place--like she'd have entertainment, like if you look it up--too, Kate Clinton, who was actually a very famous lesbian comedian, performed there. Literally she was probably this [gestures] far away from me.

But the next Muldowney's was where Paffles [Iron Paffles & Coffee] is, so. And it was built by a guy named Ed Ragland. And Ed was a raging alcoholic. And so--I'm sure Joani paid him in some money, but I think she paid him mostly in beer. And I remember watching him one day, and he was--he was holding his head up on the bar like this after consuming many a beer, and his hand went away and his face went smack--and he just slept through it. Yeah, so, it went up very slowly. But it finally went up! And it was--it was--it was also sort of a cave. But it had a glass--it was glass in the front, so. And then there was a bar like tucked in the corner. You walked in and the bar was like here [gestures] and then you'd go back there and there were tables, and way in the back was a dance floor, so.

And in the beginning, it--I think she still tried to keep it women-only, but then she'd have like the straight couple that ran Mid-Dale? Mid-Vale Manor? They came in every day for happy hour Miller Lites. And then...she started hosting punk. Punk nights. And we had the punks in, and they were lovely. The music was--I am not a punk person, but you know, they were great, they tipped well, you know, they drank a lot of beer, so it's actually--it's detailed in the history of punk in Charlottesville, that book. Eventually,

she had to start letting guys in, because women just don't drink enough to support a bar. And, you know, then the drag queens came. About then, I probably peaced out. Just--I had other jobs, so I don't know. And I actually went back because I quit one job, and I was like, "Oh, I need a job." So Joani took me back. And I made sandwiches and made falafel, and the food was good. It was cheap, and it was free delivery.

CP: Yeah, what more do you need? Did you go to Muldowney's or any of the other gay bars as like a patron? Or was--

NK: Oh yeah.

CP: Okay.

NK: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Before I started working there, people were raving about the chili. And I was actually like crazy running that time. In fact, I wasn't drinking at that time at all. And they were like, "Oh, come on to Muldowney's, we'll get some chili for lunch." And it was the best chili I'd ever had. You know, so, you know, if you wanted to go out, a couple of us, we'd go down there and just hang out, have a beer or two, chitchat.

CP: Yeah, makes sense.

NK: I don't I was ever an actual patron in the new Muldowney's, though. Because I worked there, and I mean...it--it--it could suck the life force out of you.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. What were the Gay Student Union dances at UVA like?

NK: Very festive. They were--I think in Newcomb somewhere. The community came too.

CP: So it wasn't just UVA students and folks; it was all kinds of folks.

NK: Yeah, like anyone could come. It was--it was of course mostly guys. But--yeah, there wasn't a whole lot of town-gown dating. It was very--

CP: Interesting.

NK: It was sort of different. You know, just because--if you were a student, you--you had certain aspiration, and you know, you just didn't run into people except if it was there or at Muldowney's, so.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. So would--you would go to Muldowney's, you played rugby with, you know, with other gay folks, were there other places that you would go to hang out?

NK: There was a restaurant, which is now Siren, that was Random Row. I think I ate five dinners a night--or a week there. I mean, you could get a burger and fries for \$5, and it was really good. And it closed like right after I moved back here in '97.

CP: Mmmm.

NK: But then it became Shebeen, and now it's Siren. But I--I mostly just went there with other gay friends. They didn't give a shit, you know, so.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. I'm curious, actually, to circle back a little bit about the rugby piece of it. When you said you moved to Philly to play rugby, was that in like a professional league, semi-pro, what did that look like?

NK: Down--down here we had--our team was--USA Rugby then tightened it up a whole lot afterwards. It was a community and school team.

CP: Got it.

NK: But they--they were playing club rugby up there, you know, which is--now there's a thing called the Women's Premier League, but you didn't--they were playing the

highest level of rugby that you could, so.

CP: Okay. That makes--and how did you find out about that team? Like, why did you go to Philly to play for that team, I guess?

NK: We hosted a tournament for thirty-seven years, the Virginia Women's Invitational Tournament. And I continued that on for years, and then--very few teams play spring rugby now, so we would be playing the same teams we played in our league, so it was just--it stressed the kids out to--it was a good fundraiser. I mean, we made a lot of money. Where was I going?

CP: [Laughs] How did you get to play at--

NK: Oh, to Philly!

CP: --Philly with rugby, yeah?

NK: Okay, so I lived...I forgot the name of the street, but I lived next to my boss in Pediatrics, and they had an apartment behind the house, and so I--I opened that up to the Philadelphia team, because they had, you know, contacted me or--I forget how I met them, but--so they stayed with me and we became friends and I'd go up to visit them, or I would play sevens with them in the summer, which is what you play in summer. It's the one that's--that's in the Olympics. And they were like, "Oh, you know, you should come and play for us!" And, you know, I was--you know, I felt like sort of a big fish in a little pond here, and I was like, "Yeah. Okay." And I wanted to get back to a big city, you know. And Philly was very livable, you know. I had a--what put me over the edge was my friend Fran, Fran Johnston, who owns a company that is amazing. She was actually--like she has a PhD in like group dynamics. But--I mean, she's awesome. She took me to this restaurant called Judy's, which was gay-owned and operated. The notion to me--it

was on Third and Bainbridge--I was like, "This--this is a thing?"

CP: This is in Philly, right?

NK: Yeah.

CP: Okay, yeah.

NK: And I was like, "Whoa!" You know, "Okay! Okay." And so I was like, "Okay. This is like--okay, it's okay to be gay here." And I ended up working at Judy's, actually, years later, when I was in graduate school. Because I could only work weekends, and that's what everyone wants, you know. It was great. It was owned by a woman named Eileen Plato. And all--everybody in the kitchen was female and all the waiters were gay men. And they were catty. So, I mean--and the food was amazing. Like, I have a Wordpress site with some of the recipes from Judy's because I still cook them, so. But it was--it was a whole lot of fun, so.

And like people always think that women in a kitchen are going to be dysfunctional, but it was perfect. You know, we had like two main chefs. I did prep, and then I would work at the salad station, which was a lot of fun. It was in--it was in the dining room, and...you know, like there was no posturing. You know, if you had to say something, you just said it. Like, "I think you have too much salt in this." You know? Instead of like, "Well..." You know, it was just--you just said what you had to say, and in fact the two main chefs had been girlfriends and had a bloody breakup. But they still managed to get food out and work together. Even though the one constantly harassed the other one about her new girlfriend, so. But, you know.

CP: [Laughs] So...let's see. How did you end up coaching the UVA Women's Rugby team?

NK: I had a friend, Chris Crosiano, who I had known from rugby. And she was coaching the team. And so I told her--I guess email had come into a thing then, and I was like, you know, "Hey! You know, I'm moving back down to Charlottesville." She was like, "Do you want to take over the team? I'm just--" She was--she was a cop, and she was also with some woman and she was running--it was a coffee joint. It's where the Fitzroy is now. And then the woman also got a franchise of The Jewish Mother. So I worked at The Jewish Mother too on Sundays. I've--I've cooked Sunday brunch like my entire existence, it seems. But I--I love cooking eggs. I don't really like eating eggs, but I love cooking them. And I'm a very good short-order cook. It's just so--I'm really good at compartmentalizing, so, I mean, if I wanted to go back to the Blue Moon today, they would take me back, but it was sucking the life force out of me.

Like my--it would get so hot in the kitchen that like my pinkie would travel across like--just in cramps that you couldn't--like I drank orange juice all day and it was--you sweat so much in the summer. Like your socks would get wet, so. But I had started cooking there in 1998 when Mark Khan owned it. And so I cooked there for a couple years, then I took that off. And actually, I was renting from Joani--a house with a bunch of other undergrads because I needed to save money. So I lived with one of my players, Laurie Peverill, which--we lived with her for two years. At that point, I had gotten with my partner, whom I met through rugby. She played for Norfolk and I was coaching the Women's Select side, which was like the all-star team.

CP: For...? The all-star team for Virginia?

NK: For the state of Virginia.

CP: Okay, okay. Yeah.

NK: Yeah. So, she played for Norfolk, and we just hit it off. And we're--we're still together. We're strangely compatible. And she's also my assistant coach, so. I met her while I was living in that house with Laurie Peverill. And then my partner's best friend Annie--Laurie Peverill was an interesting kid because she was--the first nickname they gave me for her was "Jesus Laurie." She was extremely Christian. She was also fighting being gay, like in a big, hairy way. And I have this friend--Ernie Kidd. And Ernie went to Berea College. And Ernie and I have been friends for many many many years. I met him probably at Muldowney's. And he was very very very Christian and very gay.

So the three of us had lunch one day. And it was interesting because like Laurie would be--we just called her "Pev"--she'd be like--this is before she lived with me, too--you know, "So in Ecclesiastes 1:17, it says..." And then Ernie would say, "Well, that's one way to interpret it. Then there's this way to interpret it." So they had this like completely like "Ahhhhh" discussion and Laurie came out. She then was known as the "Lesbian Avenger." She's--and her dad, I mean she lived with us in the big house. She was actually abroad--Julie Weed was abroad. Julie Weed lived with me there, too. And then when we moved to Park Street, she moved with us. And that's when she met my partner's best friend Annie, and they started to date. But Laurie Peverill's dad, literally for the next ten years, always donated \$3,000 to the rugby team. And--because he went to Nationals with us the first time we made Nationals, which was the second year after I became coach.

CP: And when did you actually start coaching? What year was that?

NK: '97. So...we went from like seventh in the state, of seven teams, to number three in the state in the first cycle. And then in '98, we won the state for the first time, so

we went to Nationals in '99. You know, because it was--we go both seasons. And we beat the defending national champions who had just moved to Mid-Atlantic, which was Penn State, and they were in the Midwest and were driving like, you know, fourteen hours to play Iowa, you know. So they moved to the Potomac Rugby Union, and as our treat for winning the state for the first time, we had to play the defending national champions. Yee-haw. And Pete Steinberg was their coach--was their coach, and he coached the women's U-23 national team, and he had about seven starters from the U-23 national team on his team. And we beat them. And no one saw that coming. And so our reward was to go to Milwaukee for our first Nationals. And the guy who coached at Marquette was like, "Oh, can you come out in matching kit? We're going to come from the four corners for the Star--you know--the Star Spangled Banner." And I was like, "We don't match." [Both laugh] "We--you know--we don't--we just don't." And--

CP: In terms of like you didn't have the same--jerseys, or?

NK: Everybody else had like warmup pants, you know--

CP: Ohhhh.

NK: We had jerseys.

CP: Right [laughs].

NK: But like matching jackets and...I don't know. We had like \$1.50. We drive cars to games. So Pev's dad was there. He traveled with the team quite a bit. And at that point, he decided he would buy everyone on the team a jacket. So, we got our first set of matching jackets. And then he just--I would ask him every year, and he'd be like, "Sure." You know, for--for, you know, we're tax deductible, because it would go through the UVA Fund. He'd write us a check, \$3,000. And then eventually he retired, and we didn't

get that money any more, but you know. So.

CP: Is it--were you mostly playing other club teams? Or was it like a varsity sport at some places, or was it--I don't know.

NK: It is a varsity sport at some places now.

CP: Okay.

NK: At Penn State, it's kind of what's referred to as a "super club." So they're within the athletic department, but they're not NCAA varsity. But they have like trainers and they can work out inside and they can do strength training. Like we are forbidden-- we don't have a place to work out inside. We practice in the parking garage if it's raining, which is pretty glamorous. And now, there's like over thirty NCAA varsity teams. We played one this weekend: Queens. We got hammered. Well, I mean, they're all thick, they all played in high school. I started two kids that have played rugby for--one is less than a month, and one six weeks. You know, and they're great players. You know, I have forty-eight kids, I can choose, but they rose to the top, so. But it's--it's a huge difference, so. You know, full-time coaches, you know, strength and conditioning coach. Not at all like what we have. So.

CP: Yeah, so that's maybe one change that you've seen over your coaching career. Are there other changes that you've seen in sort of the sport of women's rugby, either here specifically at UVA, or [NK coughs] I know you've sort of been involved in the national level a little bit, so I don't know where we're at at that kind of level as well.

NK: Yeah, I--for four years I coached the Mid-Atlantic under-23 all-stars, which is--Eastern Penn, Potomac, and Virginia. There are seven regions. And then we would go to a select side tournament. So, I was actually just the coach of the month for some

organization, and she'd asked me a question about rugby, and it's--it's so much more professional now. Like back in the day, I remember pulling up to a tournament in DC--University of South Carolina poured off a van with a keg and [coughs] the person that I saw there, Patty Jersey, ended up being like the highest try scorer for the national team eventually, so. Go figure.

But now, I mean--I mean, they really are athletes. I mean, back in the day it was kind of like, you know, a drinking team with a rugby problem. And now, it's very--I mean, my kids have a great social life that they organize. I have no part in that. But you know--we're students of the game; we're always trying to get better. We're watching international film. We're trying new techniques that seem to be working. I mean it's--and there's more of a community of coaches now. There is a true pathway to the national team now. Before, it was kind of, you know, like little pockets. But now, it's doing well. Like right now actually, the Women's Rugby World Cup is going on in New Zealand and Australia. Oh yeah. And the US is one and one.

CP: All right. But there's not--is--there's not like a pro women's rugby league in the United States.

NK: But most of the members of the--our national team play professionally in England.

CP: Yes. That makes sense.

NK: Yeah, we have something called the Women's Premier League, the WPL, that's--everything's out of pocket.

CP: Wow.

NK: Yeah, I mean--the thing is like, you know, I guess the way they do it is East

and West, there's like Boston, New York, Atlanta, Austin--big cities, you know. But by and large, most of the players are funding this out of pocket. Plane tickets and whatnot. But, you know, rugby's a sport that, once you get into it, that it just grabs you. Or if it doesn't grab you, you just sort of morph out.

CP: Yup. That makes sense. But it seems like--you know, you said your players have their own social life, but it seems like you and your partner do a lot to try and sort of create that kind of community.

NK: Yeah, we...well, she works every Friday. But I have team dinner every Friday before home games. Like, we had a big thing of turkey chili and cornbread and I made a bread pudding. I mean, I stick as many vegetables in these kids as I possibly can [CP laughs]. You know, because they've told me, like I was doing it for a while and they were like, "You know, we really appreciate team dinner." I was like, "Really?" And they were like, "Yeah. The food is all gray at--at the food places." I was like, "But--" They were like, "The meat's gray, the vegetables are gray." I was like, "Oh." So then if I started--if I like the team, we have as many team dinners as we can, and it's a great way for them to bond. You know, then they get driven downtown, get a home-cooked meal, hang out with my dogs. You know, chew the fat with their friends, so. I mean, one of the ways to keep players.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense.

NK: Yeah, but we also have a social chair.

CP: Okay.

NK: And she organizes things like--in the--in the fall, I think they have beer and peanuts, and then in the--the spring, they have a semi-formal wine and cheese, which is

pretty cute.

CP: Yeah.

NK: That--like they like to get pretty and dress up.

CP: Yeah.

NK: You know, they're--they're just funny kids. And I actually make their cheese boards for their wine and cheese.

CP: That's very cute.

NK: I am a great cheese board artist.

CP: [Laughs] I'll believe it. Yeah, I mean I imagine with forty-eight people, like not everybody's going to get on the field, so you have to kind of like...

NK: Yeah, and I've got--we have a lot of broken kids, too.

CP: Oh, yeah.

NK: Yeah, so. I mean. It just--yeah. Contact sport. Not a collision sport.

CP: Okay. Fair enough. So switching gears a little bit. You mentioned your dogs. You have Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs. Is that right?

NK: Mm-hmm. Yep.

CP: How did you get involved with that breed? Because you're pretty--I mean, you sort of have showed dogs, like you're pretty deep into it.

NK: Well, I had pet Rottweilers from the time I lived in Philly. And when I moved down here, I had Bunny, who was my Rottweiler. And I could still run then, before the old knee replacement. And Bunny and I ran on O-Hill constantly, and Bunny was my transition dog from Philly to here, and she was my heart dog. And then one day, Bunny turned the--the corner of the table, fell down in a giant heap, screaming, and I had

some rugby kids who were staying with me because they were transitioning from being in college to their real lives. I had three kids that I still talk to almost daily. They're like thirty-something or forty-something now. They helped me get Bunny into the car and it turns out she had sheared her femur. Secondary joint. Big osteosarcoma. She was ten. That runs in Rottweilers.

So, that night I had like literally forty people on my deck drinking bourbon with me. And the next morning I got up and I said to my partner, "I will not live through this pain again." And the next day, I got up and I said, "Life is not worth living without a dog." So--and one of my teammates up in--I played in Monmouth, actually. Philly was a sort of a mixed bag of tricks. Such that I went through therapy. So, it was worth it for me to go coach Princeton, which was an hour and a half away, and then go up to Monmouth, which was another hour, for practice. So like, you know. But it was a wonderful team. Great culture.

CP: In Monmouth?

NK: Yeah.

CP: Okay.

NK: Yeah, it was a--right on the shore, had a men's team, an old men's team, a women's team, and half the women were married to the guys. Like, dad would watch the kid when mom played; mom watched the kid when dad played. They owned a bar, the Irish Rover. I mean, it was a really well-run club. So I--I--those were my people. But anyway, so then I--I said to my partner, "You know, my teammate up in Monmouth had a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, and it was really cool." Because I wanted to stick with a working breed, just because, you know, they bond strongly with you, and you know,

they're just--I had Rottweilers for sixteen years, so.

And so we started looking around. Went through the AKC. There's a breeder's referral. And Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America has a breeder's page. So we started contacting people out in Ohio, everywhere else, and finally I was--I did this application. It was for Knox Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs, which is right outside of--it's in Rixeyville, which is outside of Culpeper. So I did this eight-page application. And it had questions such as, "Have you--do you have experience with large dogs?" Yes. "If the dog ate your shoes, what would you do?" Why would I put my shoes on the dog's shelf where they could get them? You know, the floor is the dog's shelf. "Have you ever kennelled a dog?" No, I'm the rugby coach. I always have some broken kid that can stay with them. So--and then, "Would you like a male or female?" I said, "Female." "Pet or show?" And I said, "Pet."

And this woman contacted me. And she was like, "I really want you to meet this litter." And you--there's a waiting list for Swissies. Because they're pretty rare. There are more breeders now. There's like maybe thirty breeders in the country. Five are in Virginia; go figure. So we drove around and we--you know, it was like, you know, driving into deepest darkest country. And this woman comes out and she's like five-ten and she shakes my hand. She goes, "Colleen Robson. I played rugby at Tech with my first husband." She said, "You know, da da da da da." I said, "Well, you know, I--I just--I just wanted a pet female, and you said you didn't have any." She said, "I don't. They're all spoken for. But I was wondering if you would co-own the male pick with me." And I was like, "What is this co-owning?" She said, "Well, he'd be your dog. I'd show him and when it was time to breed him, I'd--I'd manage the breeding."

And I just got a good vibe off her. I mean, she's rugby people. I mean, I know there's probably a lot of crappy people in rugby, but she's just a good person. We became very good friends. In fact, I talked to her last week. And so we went down, and we met the litter. And then the mom broke into the house, because they'd put her outside. And she had a whole whelping box setup. And the mom was named Rixey, and you know, I'm like handling her puppies. And she's like, "Hi," at me. And I was like, "Okay." And I met--I met the dad, who was huge and ugly. But he was--you know, Bear, and he was a therapy dog.

And so I didn't pick my dog. It was the Harry Potter litter, so I didn't know if I was getting Harry or Sirius. And then when it was time to pick up the puppy, I was getting Sirius. So I kept his--his puppy name. I forgot--the--the theme of the litter, which is different from what their puppy names were, was rum. So Sirius was Black Seal. So, but he was just Sirius to me. So he was Knox's Black Seal. And then...Sirius's sister Luna, she kept. And then Luna was getting bred to a dog named Stevie, and I always liked Stevie, because Sirius showed against Stevie. And Stevie just had this big melon head, and I became friends with his person, Cathy Cooper, who's a big breeder in town. She's an AKC judge. She's down in Martinsville. And I actually took Luna to the breeding, you know, because I was like--I was talking about it and talking about it and I was just like, "You know, I really want one of these puppies."

And so, my partner was having a knee replacement. Rugby. But she was actually an Olympic lifter, too. She was--she's a crazy person too, so she like would play basketball on a broken ankle, you know, ride her bike off the roof. I mean, you know what I'm saying? It's very funny. And so for her--for her, as her present, I got her a puppy

[laughs]. It was the summer, and we lived in Fry Springs, and so this puppy's name was George. From like, "I would love him and hug him and call him George." And so he was Jordan Bailey's Irish Cream. Because it was the Irish litter; he was born on St. Patrick's Day. And George was phenomenal, and they bonded pretty tightly because they had the summer together. You know, and like--I was sleeping down in the living room with George in his big crate, and every morning I would, you know, take him upstairs in--in like a--the linen basket, and you know, she'd pet on him, and then she'd come down and do her thing, and then I'd go off to work and she and George would hang out. And, you know, George was great. And George is Teddy's grandfather, so.

CP: And Teddy is your current dog?

NK: My current male.

CP: Okay. Okay.

NK: And he is actually--he's sired a litter.

CP: Okay.

NK: And then I have Rex, who is a girl. She's Senaca's PurpleSaurus Rex.

CP: Okay.

NK: Hence why she's Rex. Because that litter was named after Kool-Aids.

CP: All right.

NK: Yeah. [Both laugh] I think she has a--like a brother named like Berrylicious Bentley or something up in Maryland. I would not have named a female Rex.

CP: It works. So you--so your dogs would be shown, but you didn't have anything--like you weren't doing that.

NK: Well, Colleen showed Sirius, and so he was shown in Bred By. That's a--

there's like eight categories that non-champion dogs are shown in. So she finished him in Bred By. And then when I got George, she was going to finish him in Bred By, but by then her kids were playing a million sports, so I'd, you know, sign up for a show; you know it's about \$35 a show, and like she'd go, "Oh my god, I can't make it, I have to take so-and-so to so-and-so." So I just got friends to show him. And he finished. And then someone--one of my friends who's really knowledgeable about dogs was like, "You know, he could be a Special." And I was like, "You think?" [CP laughs] and she was like, "Yeah." And she said, "You should put Jesse Sutton on him." And I was like, "Okay." And so I met Jesse at one of the shows and we looked at George and groped him and, you know, gaited him. And he was like, "Yeah, we'll--I'll Special him."

CP: And so what does that mean? What does Special mean?

NK: That means that you--when a dog is a champion, the only class it shows in is Best of Breed. So all those dogs are champions.

CP: Mm-hmm.

NK: And you can--you can owner-handle show. Like I owner-handled Teddy to his championship once my knee was better. Because you have to trot. But Jesse was really--he was known for Rottweilers and working breeds and terriers. Like his wife is big in terriers. Like they have the number one Norfolk terrier; they always have the number one Norfolk terrier, so. And I would take him to the show, or I would drop him up in Pennsylvania. I was tearing up the roads. They were in...Quakertown, which is north of Philadelphia, so I would drive myself up there, drop George off if he was going--like when we went to Paris, like George stayed with them that week and did shows in Massachusetts. And then most of the time I'd take George to Jesse and Roxanne, they

would show him, and then I would take him back to the hostel room. Because, you know, he's my pet, you know, so we could snuggle and cuddle, and the next day he would go back to the show.

He was the number one Swissie that year. He won the national Specialty; he won...the AKC championship and then the following--the next Westminster, he won his breed in Westminster. And then he was the number one stud dog. And he was just a big old great dog. You know, he did weight pull; he could pull 3,000 pounds in competition. Just a fun dog. You could play with him; you could play hide and seek with him. And he was huge; I mean, you have--he was 140 pounds. We could have put ten or fifteen more pounds on him; I like to keep them skinny, you know, but like he became my first therapy dog. So--and in fact we failed our first therapy dog test after he ruptured my sagittal ligament here because he had to go meet the neutral dog. She was blonde. Then we finally passed our Therapy Dogs International test.

So he and I started going to the hospital. Like all I really wanted to do with him is--it's called the Read Program--is have little kids read to him. I even bought like a little Minions blanket for him, and--but then someone said, "Why--you know, why don't you think about UVA Hospital?" And I was like, "Well..." And I met the woman, Kim Garofolo, who--who's also gay. She figured out I was gay almost immediately; it was kind of odd. She had just lost her partner, too. But Kim's awesome, and she was the therapy dog organizer.

So we picked a unit, and it was like three east. Three east was never excited to see the dog. It was almost like hospice care, but it's all about the nurses. Like I'd bring the dog up there, and George just had this face and this smile, and they were like, "Oh, the

dog's here." And then after people in three east, you go into the room, and it's this whole conversation. then I would go to like three west, and three west, the first time they saw George, they were like, "Oh my god! You guys gotta come see this!"

CP: What is--what is in three west? What unit is there?

NK: Three west is a medical floor.

CP: Okay.

NK: So it's not surgical; it's not cancer; it's just sick people.

CP: Got it.

NK: Diabetes, lung issues. Like every nurse was coming out. And they were like, "Oh my god! Can I take a picture with him?" You know, like it was just amazing. And they make these little trading cards--they have a professional photographer come in--Kay Taylor, who's also gay--and she, you know, takes professional portraits and gives you like thirty ones to choose from. So you could collect all these little cards from all these therapy dogs.

Well, three west was great and then my partner works in the MICU, so I would go to the MICU, which until they built the south tower, was right behind three west. So then I'd go through the MICU and I'd visit--most of the people are on precautions, but--they train you. They say like, "If there's anything of this color on the door, it's--you know, it means that they are on droplet precautions or something. Or they're immunocompromised." So you don't go into those rooms. Probably more than half of those rooms were precautioned. But I would just go through the staff and they--they would get on the floor and cuddle with him. And they were like, "Oh my god, we just lost seven patients today." Because when you're in the MICU, you're MICU sick. And so that

was great.

And then, you know, George suddenly one day fell in a heap in the yard, and I was like, "Something's not right." And he came into the house. He got into the--the lower living room, I have two living rooms in my house because it's like a house in a house-- and he never got up. So we took him to--to VETS, up by the airport, overnight, and I thought maybe he'd hurt his neck. And then they were--the next morning, they were like, "No, that's not what's going on. You need to take him to Tech." And he'd been at Tech. His repro vet was at Tech. So we took him to Tech. We dropped him off. The next morning, they call us and say, "You need to get here fast." They said, "We don't--this is not an injury. This is--this is like an autoimmune..." They said it was like Guillain-Barre or something, but they couldn't tell what it was. So it was an autoimmune paralysis. So basically his nerves were just deteriorating.

So we went, we said goodbye to him, and then Janelle Kaiser, of Seneca Swissies--I had--you know, all Swissie people know each other. And since I hang out with breeders, I know all the breeders. Because Cathy Cooper's one of my best friends; she went to Paris with me, and you know, she's good people. And so Janelle said, "Do you want Rex?" I said, "Isn't there something wrong with Rex?" And she said, "Yeah, she has shit hips." You know, because they--like--all of my dogs--all of my breeding dogs, you have to have their eyes checked by a canine ophthalmologist, you have to get their shoulders X-rayed, their hips X-rayed, and their elbows X-rayed. And then once you do--each breed has a different set of characteristics that have to be okayed, and then you get a thing called a Canine Health--a CHIC number. So...we did that....where was I going?

CP: I think you were going to tell me about Rex. And how you got her, because

she's--

NK: Oh! Yeah, so, and I was like--I was like--because her dad had won the national Specialty, before I had Sirius. So she was the pick of the litter. They kept her. And then at one year, they did preliminary X-rays on her, and--like most hip dysplasia there's something wrong with the ball, where there's something wrong--where it grinds. And the way you fix that is you take the ball off. But for her, like the ball's here and the cup is here, so that's how you would fix that anyway, but they weren't going to breed her. So they were like, "Yeah, she's been the greeter on the farm for three and a half years." And she said, "Yeah, we've interviewed thirty-two families for her, and all of them are like, 'We want to get her fixed.'" Like fix her hips. And Janelle's like, "No. She's non-symptomatic." So I was like, "I'll take Rex."

So the next weekend--it was awful because if you're used to having--like I lost Sirius at--at ten in March, March 29. And George got put down in July. So we thought we'd have George until he was ten. You know--you know all the things we could do with George, I mean, because George was so much fun. And you know, you could take him anywhere; he was a therapy dog. And then we lost both dogs. So you come home and the plants don't greet you; the plants don't greet you. It's just quiet. And I've always had dogs. I mean, not when I was a child, but you know, ever since I've been, you know in college. And so I went out to Ohio. Janelle met me halfway, and turned over Rex, and Rex was perfect.

Although city living was not like farm living; she had to adjust. She had never been on stairs. [CP laughs] Because she had ramps everywhere. And it's a farm. You know, so she had grass and ramps. And like she lived in--they have several outbuildings.

She lived with George's daughter Salty. And it was Rex, and then George's other daughter Finn. And so Salty is Teddy's mom. So then they're all temperature-controlled; they have TVs; their crates are about the size of this--it's not a crate; it's like a giant unit. And then they go out in little teams during the day. Because she has--now she has a luxury boarding kennel. So it's--it's Seneca. So if you look up Seneca Swissies, you see this boarding kennel. It's beautiful. So she had some in the boarding kennel, and she had three old girls in the house that were their house dogs.

So then Rex came, and I had been on the list to get a girl from Salty's litter, and then I just decided to get a boy. She--she gave me Rex and she gave me Teddy. And Colleen Robson gave me George, because I actually fulfilled their contract. Like they said, "Oh, you need to feed a certain type of food, you need to, you know, get these X-rays, you know, da da da da." And I was like, "Okay. I signed a contract." You know? So. And now Teddy's six and Rex is nine and a half.

CP: Okay. And are you still showing them at all?

NK: Nah.

CP: They're just...yeah.

NK: Teddy...he--he is still a very, very, very nice Swissie.

CP: Mm-hmm.

NK: But it's not worth it.

CP: Yeah.

NK: And I'm insanely busy, you know, so I feel guilty because I can't take him out as much as I want, because we have a pack. And you can't walk four dogs, you know.

CP: Because you have the two Swissies and then two little terriers.

NK: Rat terriers, yeah.

CP: Yeah. That is a lot.

NK: Who are sneaky poopers and pee-ers.

CP: Yeah.

NK: That creates its own workout. But they're fun. You know, and we had rats.

Because some--I live downtown next to a woods, so the rats got their water in the woods and then came to Nancy's house. And I finally found an amazing exterminator. In fact, I hooked Maggie up with him. But no rats anymore. But Bolo killed probably twenty-five rats. And four enormous groundhogs, and he's twenty-two pounds. He's a little killing machine. You know, he has these erect ears; he can hear anything. Like he's like a bat. But he's a lot of fun. He does agility, and he's--you can play with him too.

His little brother, his half-brother, is sort of a rescue for us. So I had--she had sold him to a--this is--my rat terrier breeder's in Baton Rouge, and she had sold the dog known as Fable to a lady in Abingdon, and what--what the lady in Abingdon wanted was she wanted Bolo, essentially. She wanted a standard with erect ears, and what she got was a mini with button ears, which is like this [demonstrates button ears]. And all she did was complain constantly to Joanna. And Joanna was like, you know, she calls, and she's like, "I know y'all aren't looking for a dog..." [Both laugh] So I was taking Teddy down for a repro appointment at Tech, so I was like, "Well, I'll take Bolo down and see if he kills him." And they--they have the same mom. Must be the sneaky pooing mom. And they got along, and so, you know, Ticket came home and then COVID hit. And so Ticket stayed, you know? And we still have Ticket. He's super cute. The kids love him. So the rugby kids took him to West Virginia to a cabin. I mean, he's super cute. All he does is sit

on you; I mean, that's his job. He's a sitting--

CP: Yeah.

NK: You know. And he wears a spiky collar because he's an idiot. It'd be like me like sort of patting you in the face and you say, "Stop it." [CP laughs] And I pat you in the face a little harder, and you're just like, "No, no, no. I am serious. Stop it." And I sort of slap you in the face again and you finally go at me with a knife.

CP: Yeah.

NK: That's Bolo.

CP: Uh-huh.

NK: Bolo's completely appropriate. Like--Ticket, who's--he's really jacked up; he's a very muscular little dog, and Bolo's very sleek. Like when Bolo--Ticket likes to like slam into him, you know, and Bolo sometimes will play with him. But then like you see Bolo going *brrmp* and Ticket's going, "Hee hee hee hee hee." [Both laugh] So, what we do is he has a--he has two collars. You know, he has a GPS collar and then he has a spiky collar that has probably saved his life six times. Because it's a terrible sound and terriers--like Swissies, I had two breeding males together at the same time, and every once in a while, George and Siri would have a dustup. But if you threw a pillow at them, it sounded terrible, but they they were like, "Oh." But terriers--uh uh uh uh. I--the way to end a fight is to pick Bolo up by his collar until he passes out. And then he'll drop Ticket. And like Ticket's missing a chunk of his shoulder; I mean, Ticket just doesn't learn [shrugs and drops hands] [CP laughs] Ticket being Ticket. So we changed his name from Fable to Ticket. He's possibly the cutest dog you've ever seen. He's got ticking all over him. He's like white and he has black ticking--

CP: Yeah.

NK: --and brown ticking and spots. He's--he's a sweet guy.

CP: Yeah. He sounds like it. It sounds like they are a really important part of your life.

NK: Yeah. Well, I don't have any family. My family is all dead.

CP: Yeah.

NK: And like Comer [NK's partner] is pretty tight with her family. They weren't very nice to me in the beginning. You know, I--I guess they weren't expecting that...

CP: Yeah.

NK: It was funny because like for her, she had dated one woman. She had--you know, she had dated guys for years and years and years and years. So after she broke up with this woman, we were--we were playing a match at Julie Weed's family's vineyard. And I saw them talking to her, because the two teams were pretty tight. And she was like, "I don't know if I want to date a woman or a guy; I don't know, we'll see." It wasn't really an issue for her. And then her team played my team at--I don't know if you know about this place. There's like a women's-only camp out [Camp Out] in Louisa. It's crazy town. [CP laughs] So they only let men in there on like a weekend, like a certain weekend, like even boys. It's like very, you know, man-hating, women-loving.

CP: Like women's land, something like that.

NK: Something like that. But it's in Louisa. Like, you get off at Ferncliff. It might be like...someone's going to know what it's called. But anyway, so we were playing her team at this place. And then she and I were just sitting around on a hay bale talking, and we just...just had a great conversation. And then we started seeing each other. And it's

been twenty-five long, painful years later.

CP: So that was like late '90s. It would have been like '90--

NK: 1998.

CP: Yeah.

NK: But I met her on her birthday, which was yesterday.

CP: Okay, yeah. Okay. All right. That's very cute. So zooming out a little bit, [NK coughs] so we've talked about this a little bit, but I mean, so UVA obviously has this huge presence in the Charlottesville area. But I'm curious how you see--today or in the past, how UVA staff and faculty who are, you know, LGBTQ or queer or whatever, interact with the rest of the Charlottesville community, whether that's LGBTQ folks who are in Charlottesville. You sort of mentioned that you didn't see a lot of dating in between, but like--in between students, but like do you see the same kind of divide in between faculty--like gay faculty and staff and gay townies? I don't know, I'm really curious.

NK: No, I think that's really changed. Like Joani, for years, dated a doctor here, who was in her residency...I--you know, I hang out with the academic type. You know, most of my friends are in healthcare. MK's an urban planner. And her partner, Jane, was the banquet chef at Farmington for twenty-nine years. So, I mean, I mostly hang out with my college friends still [coughs]. That's why I came back, so. And it's fun because we--we were playing this varsity team. And there was a million NCAA rules. And they had--I had contacted them and contacted them. One thing--I said we had an EMT on the team. They were very concerned. We had to get a trainer--and they brought their trainer, so I don't know why we had to get a trainer, because we can't get them from UVA; we have to

buy them. And actually, we bought Kendall, who's--was my physical therapist when I got my rotator cuff fixed. And all the sudden, their coach comes up to me and says, "Oh, this match might not be happening." We're on the field. And I'm like, "Why?" And she goes, "There's no AED." A defibrillator?

CP: Mm-hmm.

NK: I'm like, "Do you need one?" And she said, "Yes, my athletic director just called me and said if there's not an AED here, we have to cancel this match." I'm like, "An AED?" I'm calling Slaughter Rec, I'm calling my catering company to see if they have one.

CP: Yeah.

NK: One of my old, old, old friends--and you should look her up, I think she's been her almost this long, is Emily Peliccia.

CP: She was interviewed in the first--in the documentary project that Cville Pride was doing.

NK: Okay. So Emily's one of my old rugby friends.

CP: Yeah. I wondered if you knew her, actually. Yeah.

NK: Oh, yeah yeah. I coached the local team for a little while.

CP: Got it, yeah.

NK: But Emily was at the game. And Emily's retired from Charlottesville, but now she's doing something with Albemarle Fire. And also another friend of ours, Hannah Catherine Monroe--she's straight--she's the Virginia League. But so they were both old friends there supporting the team. And so Comer goes over to talk to Emily, and Emily calls the battalion chief [CP laughs]. So the battalion chief brings an AED [laughs]. I

mean, okay. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Yeah.

NK: We actually called the library to see if they had an AED.

CP: I know we have them in the building, but I don't know if you can leave.

NK: And the Fralin had one, but it has to stay in the building. You know, and things I said to them were, "We can have an ambulance here in three minutes. And we have a tier one trauma hospital less than a mile away." And they were like, "That won't do; NCAA rules, da da da." So. I was like, seriously? But I got so many kids hurt in that game that I'm kind of like maybe they were just like--they all played in high school. They're recruited. They were bigger. They were stronger. I'd take my team any time; we're a whole lot more fun. And our degree will be worth some money, so.

CP: Yup. Feels--yes. Fair enough. So another sort of big-picture question. In your experience, you know, race relations is obviously this thing that comes up a lot when you think about Charlottesville and Charlottesville's history, recent and further back, so. But in your experience, how do Black and white sort of LGBTQ folks in Charlottesville relate to each other? Do you see--like when you were at Muldowney's, did you see like a mixed clientele? Did you sense that they were more segregated?

NK: I don't think they were like officially segregated.

CP: Mm-hmm.

NK: You know what there was, there was a lot of Deaf people at Muldowney's.

CP: Interesting.

NK: I mean, it was a--like a group of ten Deaf, gay girls and guys. So I mean, they were lovely. It was just interesting; I was like, "That's interesting."... But yeah, so

I've had friends like [name], who played rugby. I'm pretty sure she's gay. Yeah, I mean--I just don't...there was--besides rugby, since I moved back, I mean there was Club 216, but you know, I wasn't going there, you know. Although all of my straight friends went there to dance because it was the only place to dance in town. So there was really no gay thing, and then there's the Serpentine Society, and we're all like UVA people, you know. So. I mean, when I was here, undergrad, I think three percent of the population of the students was like Black, I mean, so.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense.

NK: I never heard anyone say, "Oh my God, let's keep the Blacks out of here."

CP: Right.

NK: I mean--

CP: I mean, did you get a sense that the circles you were traveling in--so it seems like most of the circles you're kind of traveling in are mostly white? Is that like a fair characterization?

NK: Yeah. Generally. Like I'm very very very close to my assistant coach, Erica Cavanaugh, who is Black, and my student assistant here, Robin, was Black and was gay. We--we really strive for diversity on our team.

CP: Mm-hmm.

NK: Like we got pretty white bread for a while there, but now we have lots of kids of color. Yeah, what happened with rugby was, you know, we had a whole bunch of people of color. So when people would go through the Activities Fair, like I had this one kid, Summer Harris-Jones, who's playing professionally now in San Diego. They pay the sevens players. But Summer had this smile that would brighten up the room. She's

actually on one of our research posters. If you've ever seen--it's on--I can't--I have it on Slack someplace, but she just has this amazing smile. She's an amazing athlete. But you know, you go up to a table and these people look like you and they're always like, "Hey!" You know, and they're friendly.

I mean, because we're not--you know, rugby is like--you're going to do some really stupid shit when you first start playing. And you know, we would, you know, just make sure we had a wide range of people. Like at one point I could have put an all-fifteen Asian team, you know. An all-fifteen non-white team. I mean, then when COVID hit, we had a really, really strong Black contingent that you know, I came back from Ireland and I never saw those kids again. They came back when they had the two graduations. Because we have a thing that we call Fourth-Year Dinner. So it's like Trey Young, Robin Watkins, Moriah--they all came back for that graduation that wasn't.

CP: Mmm.

NK: So I made them their own special little Fourth-Year Dinner, so. Because, you know. They--they were like, "We're coming back for graduation. Would you make us Fourth-Year dinner?" You know, because it's sort of a rite of passage.

CP: Yeah.

NK: Because, you know, they get--they vote on their--the two other kids that are going to serve them. By "serve them" means come to my house and set the table. Basically, I do all the cooking. But we do some crazy stuff. Like I've made coquilles St.-Jacques as an appetizer. They usually like surf and turf. This past year they wanted Indian food. So I made a bunch of really excellent Indian food and like four different types of breads. I mean, but it's a big thing. They sit down. Like they never sit down together. We

get tables. And you know, when they have team dinner, they're sitting outside or on the couch. But it's a big thing. So, I made them that.

But you know, then we had our COVID year, which was masked non-contact wiping balls down, just to keep the team going. And Alexis and Emma, we call her "Mono," because she had mono her first week here. She had played in high school. She's an amazing, amazing player, like really tight with these kids. So they kept the team going, and they made it like the social group to be. So a lot of teams didn't come out of COVID well at all, like we're going to play JMU this Friday night, and they barely have fifteen. And they've had huge numbers.

But you know, we came out with it being this great group, albeit all Whitey McWhiterson. So then, you know, we--we talked to the Office of African American Affairs. I was a peer mentor there, back in--I was actually Erica's mentor. And you know, we just got it out because these kids had been very active in OAAA. Like Trey Young and Robin Watkins and--so they were like, "Oh yeah, all the kids that have ever come through our office and played rugby had a really good experience." So we got some--some good word of mouth and, you know, so we had like--we had Imani...I think the other kid stopped playing. I was just like, "Imani. You--" Oh, and this kid is awesome, we call her "The Country." Her name is India, India Glover. I was like, "This is going to sound racist." I said, "I need for you guys to be at the Activities Fair." I said, "Because, you know, people want to do things with people like them. And you guys are super friendly. You know, just tell them how much--you know, how great rugby is, no cuts." And by--we are looking good now, you know. And everybody gets along. Just--it's a very happy, happy group.

CP: Yeah. That's great.

NK: Very non-rug--non-UVA-looking group. You know--you know, we have a bunch of Asians, a--you know, seven or eight Black kids now. You know, but they are all silly. Because rugby is like--you know, it's like organized hazing in a way, because it's--it's--practices are hard. And you practice so you can play in the game, which is the most fun of your life. But you suffer. I mean, it's like playing soccer but then periodically getting off the ground and shoving a car ten feet. [CP laughs] Okay? And--and people hit you. You can only be hit if you have the ball, by the way. There's no blocking in rugby. So, you know, if you have the ball, chances are you're going to get hit. But we--we teach them how to take a hit. Like the first thing we teach them is how to fall, you know, because we're like, "Don't ever try to brace your fall; you're going to break your wrist." And then we have the--you know, my captain demos, you know. Starting on the knees, it's knees, hips, shoulders--just because. But, yeah, so we're--we're--we've got some good kids.

CP: Yeah. That's really exciting.

NK: Yeah, they're--and I'll--I also have a thing called the Sunday Soup Club. With sort of like my inner circle of kids. Because like if I need to move something, I'll be like, "Hey guys, I need to move a couch." You know, and they'll be like, "Okay, we'll be there in five minutes." You know, and they come, and they'll move my couch.

CP: Yeah.

NK: Or "I need someone--" like Comer will be working and I cater. I'll be like, "I'm not going to get home until ten. Comer's not getting back until 7:30; I had to leave for catering at ten; can someone let the dogs out?" You know, so--my reward for kids is I

make them soup on Sunday. Like yesterday we had a lovely winter minestrone. Ina Garten's recipe. And I made a nice savory biscotti for them too [CP laughs].

CP: That sounds amazing. I think--I think I kind of know the answer to this, but do you feel like you're part of a gay community here in Charlottesville?

NK: Oh yeah.

CP: Yeah. Is that mostly through rugby? Or?

NK: No. I hang around--like my--my friend group is like Wynne Stewart and her partner Vicky Hawse. And then Laura Coones, who's a nurse. Her partner's Kathie Hullfish. She's the one with the--if your uterus falls out, she puts it back in. MK and Jane. You know. Yeah, Emily I'll see periodically. Yeah. Like all--a bunch of--Sarah Roberts and Carol Creager. Sarah you should interview. Because she is from Charlottesville.

CP: Mmmm.

NK: So--I think she's like ser5u--she doesn't work here anymore now; she works someplace else, but I can get you her contact information.

CP: Okay.

NK: You know, so we all--I met her because she was the lifeguard when she was doing triathlons at ACAC pool, so. And a bunch of them all went up on Valentine's Day a couple of years ago and got married in DC. And then they--I guess Wynne got them the Colonnade Club for their soiree, so [CP laughs]. And I went to--Wynne got married in--Wynne has always been an OAAA mentor-type person. So she always has a bunch of kids. So the ceremony they--it was in the Chapel. They did things like jump the broom, smash the glass, for all the kids that they've ever had. And in fact, when I graduated with my master's in instructional technology, Wynne was informed that one of her children

was graduating. Because she was like my--you know, she was my emergency contact, [both laugh] you know? And so Wynne got to go have brunch at the Colonnade Club with Comer, you know, when I was walking the Lawn, so.

CP: Yeah.

NK: I mean, but...yeah. That--that is mostly my peer group.

CP: Yeah.

NK: Then of course I know people through catering and Harvest Moon is extremely diverse. They pay well.

CP: Yeah.

NK: A lot, a lot, a lot of Latinos and Latinas. Like they're--I always call the ladies that work in the kitchen, the prep cooks, the "Latina Sisters." They are amazing. You know, it's always, you're talking about, "Ola!" You know, and then like I can understand Spanish, so they'll talk to me. And most of them speak English. But they are--I've been cooking most of my life, and I was in there doing--one day doing some sort of prep. And Josefina looks up at me and she's like [facial expression] and I was like, "No?" And she goes, "No." I was like, "Well, show me how you do it." And so she--I think it was like doing something with a pepper. She did this thing, and I was like, "Well, shit. If I had known that secret I could have ruled the world." [CP laughs] You know. But yeah, lots of people of color, yeah, because they pay really really well. And, you know, the work's hard, but like my job isn't particularly hard with them, just because--the prep cooks work hard.

CP: Right. Right, and so you just go out and do sort of weekend caterings?

NK: Yeah. I do actually a lot of the Colonnade Club.

CP: Mm-hmm.

NK: So memorial services there or departmental things. Because, you know, I'm a member; I know the guys that run the joint. You know, but--so I always feed them. They like us, so.

CP: Yeah. Fair enough. What do you think people don't know about queer life or gay life in Charlottesville that you think they should?

NK: I think I told you this before, but back in the day, like *the day*, this was a huge lesbian mecca. I mean, everyone was homesteading. Like Joani could probably tell you all about this, but there was a huge bunch of like--like homesteading women. So--and it was known, you know, go to Charlottesville. So, I mean, that was--

CP: And this was--this was back in like the '80s?

NK: Early '80s, yeah.

CP: Early '80s, okay. Yeah, that tracks.

NK: Yeah. People had come out. You know, it was no longer, you know...that big a deal. Like I think being a lesbian doesn't like sort of rattle society's chains like being a gay man. Like everyone has that "maiden aunt," you know. Well [indistinct], you know, so.

CP: Yeah, and so were you--you--were you part of that or did you just kind of know that it existed, or?

NK: I knew it existed. I was--we were talking about the Peter Pan Club.

CP: Right. Yeah.

NK: I mean, there--when they had their Spring--what did they call it?

CP: And this Peter Pan group or club was just like a group of lesbians who kind

of lived in the area?

NK: Yeah, there were cops, cooks, people who worked at Kroger's. Mostly community members. But they would have--like people would come and camp. It would be like 150 lesbians. I mean, you know, it was Thawing Out. That was the event, you know. Like you'd go to that. It was just women dancing and, you know, being all gay and shit, so.

CP: Well that sounds lovely. So we're about to wrap up. Is there anything else you'd like to share for the historical record that you haven't yet?

NK: [Drums hands on lap] No, I think the Serpentine Society's doing a good job, you know, keeping people in touch with each other. You should look up Michelle Benecke. I forget what she does but it's something important and it's gay. Because she was in I think Army ROTC, so. But I--I can't think of anything that would benefit the historical record unless you can think of something.

CP: I mean, we've got through all my questions that I had for you, but I don't know everything about your life, so [laughs].

NK: It's pretty--I mean, if you Google me, you'll--science publications, rugby, library.

CP: I did. Yeah. I found some articles about your dogs also.

NK: I also did--oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Like George was featured in the "Dogs of UVA."

CP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NK: Yeah. He was a cute dog.

CP: I bet he was. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for doing this, Nancy. I really

appreciate this. It means a lot.

**END OF RECORDING**