

Interview – Claire Kaplan

Interviewee: Claire Kaplan

Interviewer: Cecelia Parks

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Location: Cecelia's house, Charlottesville, VA

Length: 1:10:58

START OF RECORDING

Cecelia Parks (CP): Okay, so we're going to go ahead and get started. It is...Thursday, October 13th, 2022. This is Cecelia Parks. I'm here with Claire Kaplan. And we're going to go ahead and get started. [Recording switches to iPhone recording] So, first of all, what words do you use to refer to yourself? Like do you say you're a lesbian, do you say you're queer? What do you say?

Claire Kaplan (CK): I generally say "lesbian."

CP: Okay.

CK: With bisexual tendencies [laughs]. But yeah, lesbian. I've never--I mean, I'm comfortable with the term "queer," but I don't generally use it. It's--you know, if I was younger, probably I would [laughs] and--and it's...as one of those old--and I'm not an old *old* feminist--but you know, an older feminist, I think that, you know, when I hear young women refer to themselves in various ways, I think, "I don't ever--working with college students--I almost never hear anyone refer to themselves as lesbian anymore."

CP: Yeah, that's true.

CK: It's just so fascinating to me. Like what happened to that? Anyway, it's just a

question. [Laughs]

CP: So, when you--so that's what you--you know, you call yourself a lesbian mostly, what do you use to refer to like a group of people? Like do you say, "the gay community," "the lesbian community," "the LGBTQ community?"

CK: I'll say either "LGBTQ" or "queer."

CP: Okay.

CK: I don't--"gay" isn't enough for me.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. And then what are your pronouns?

CK: She/her.

CP: Great. So can you tell me about where you grew up?

CK: Sure. Born and raised in Long Beach, California, which is now a gay mecca, which is--to this day, and it has been for many many years, but I'm like--I still can't believe it. [Clears throat] Anyway, when I was young and grew up in Long Beach, it was still suffering from its origins, which was largely populated by Midwesterners who came there because some doctor promoted it as a "healing place" for older people. So every year in this one park in town, they would have an Iowa Picnic. I mean like, hundreds of people would go.

So this is the town I grew up in. Very white, very [unintelligible], I'm sure very racist, though I, you know, was too young to know that. In my high school class—well, my high school had over 4,000 students. All the high schools had that many students. So my class was 1,200, and I think maybe there were two Black kids in the whole school. Latinx, I don't know, because--I don't even think we thought about that then, but there were plenty of them around. Anyway, so, that's--and also being Jewish, that was...there

was a very active Jewish community and we were Reformed so we were pretty liberal. My--my grandparents were socialists, so we were all sort of in that lefty spectrum. Yeah.

But LGBTQ stuff, of course, wasn't--well, I should say, I didn't hear anything about it. And I didn't even think about it, honestly. Growing up, we had a family friend who was sexually abusive, and so that was sort of the predominant thing in my life. And I actually--when I started thinking about my sexuality, I remember thinking...I was sort of more--I thought about--I didn't know--I thought I was heterosexual. But I--I wasn't--I figured, "I don't want to do anything until I...take care of this other problem I have. To make sure I'm making sure I'm making choices because I'm attracted to women, not because I hate men." Right? So, to me, that was really important. But that was in my twenties.

But I just have had a middle class-y family, and Dad was a dentist and Mom didn't work when we were kids, and she got a job when we were in middle school and...she was a writer and editor and artist and my dad made her quit, you know. So when she was, you know, earlier in their marriage, so...yeah, it was that kind of family.
[Clears throat]

CP: Yeah, so you talked a little bit about it, but can you tell me a little bit more about your first experiences as a lesbian?

CK: Well...I had dear friends who were lesbian before I came out as a lesbian. And so that was really my first experience, I think, because I was so close to them and I was starting to think about it and going to therapy and figuring it out, and I was actively heterosexual. And...they were sort of encouraging me to just sort of, you know, explore [coughs] and I was always at events at their houses and half their friends or more were,

you know, lesbian or they were departmental friends so they were grad students at UCLA. So anyway, my first--I would be drawn to people but nothing ever happened, and I really never even dated, but I--my first relationship--typical lesbian here, you're attracted to someone and you end up getting involved before, you know, anything happens, right?

And so she was someone I met through these friends and she was--she was the video editor I mentioned to you earlier. She was a video editor and film editor and we met at a film screening, a lefty film screening, of a movie called *Seeing Red* that some friends had made. And...and then we ended up going out, and then we were in a relationship! [Laughs] So typical, with a lesbian second date and a U-Haul--that's sort of--that's sort of what it was. Anyway, yeah. Well, no, actually she and I were dating for a while, when I lived in Santa Monica and she lived in Venice, we were very close to each other, and then I had to move because my house--the house I lived in was sold, and so I moved in with her. No, that's not how it worked. I had to go home first. How did we move in together? I don't think I remember, to be honest with you. The sequence of events now is very confusing. But somehow we ended up living together.

CP: And this was in...? My California geography is like nonexistent. So this was in...?

CK: So this is near LA area.

CP: Okay.

CK: And--and Santa Monica is directly west of LA city proper. You may have heard "People's Republic of Santa Monica" I don't know, but it's a very lefty town. And--rent controlled from way back. And just south of Santa Monica is Venice Beach. And

that's where she lived.

CP: Got it. So, you were--you were living with her in Santa Monica, in Venice Beach, and then how did you end up in Charlottesville then?

CK: Well, I mean, we were together for like nine months and we broke up.

CP: Right. Yeah.

CK: Actually, yeah, I did move directly in with her after Santa Monica. And then, other living arrangements--I was working--by the time...I don't even know where I was working at that point...Somehow, mixed in with all that--I--my memory sometimes is weird, but anyway, for a while I was working at Warner Brothers, which was in the Valley. I don't think--I don't know if I was working there when I was with her, but then I ended up working at the LA Commission on Assaults Against Women, which is now known as Peace Over Violence. [CK adds: I was working at the USC Film School (Peter Stark Motion Picture Producing Program) when I first got involved with Eve (my first gf). When I worked at WB I think we had already broken up. From W.Bros I then went to work at LACAAW.] And...so I was working there, and--what was your question again? [Laughs] I've lost track.

CP: How did you--no, totally fine--how did you get to Charlottesville?

CK: Oh I--how did I get here? Right, right, right.

CP: Yeah.

CK: So, while I was working there, I started a relationship with my present--my wife now. So we--we got involved. She was part of a group of Deaf women who went through training as self-defense instructors and volunteers. We weren't involved at that point, but we did eventually start seeing each other. And she got a job in central

California. In Fresno, which is a really forgettable place. Anyway, and so she moved to Fresno and I started looking for a job there. Didn't find one. But I eventually left my position in LA and moved in with her and got temp jobs.

So we were there for--I don't know how long we were there. But not a super long time [CK adds: Probably about 9 months], but it was...kind of a weird situation. And she was not really happy in her job so she started looking. She had initially, before she got involved with me, was looking to come back here to the East Coast. She's from here, she's from New York, she wanted to work--really wanted to work at her alma mater, which is Gallaudet. And that didn't work out, but she found a job in Richmond working for the Deaf agency, for the state agency, and I got a job in DC. So that's how we ended up here on the East Coast.

My job [in DC] lasted about nine months and then I--because it was a nonprofit--I arrived with the Gulf War. And it turns out they had not nearly as much money as they thought they had and it was like I got there and no one warned me. You know, I'd moved across the country and they hardly had any money in the bank and it was not funded well. And we made it--made it last about nine months. This was a national sexual assault organization. I said, "This ain't happening," you know. So we had to shut it down and I got a job near where we lived, which was in Fredericksburg. Because it's halfway between Richmond and DC, but of course my commute was three hours and hers was one hour, right? [Laughs] If I had known, right? So anyway, so I worked for a TV station for awhile, using my screenwriting skills, et cetera, working as a TV reporter for this little teeny cable news station. And then...terrible pay. And Lisa didn't care where we lived, as long as she could get to work, so I ended up finding--you know, I started looking for a

job, and this one popped up in the newspaper, because that's when you advertised in papers. The one that I got at UVA. So that's how I ended up in Charlottesville.

CP: Yeah, that makes sense. That's quite the odyssey there. So what was--so how did you meet other LGBTQ people when you moved to Fredericksburg or to Charlottesville, this area, you know, moving across the country?

CK: Fredericksburg is funny. Because we--when we were looking for a place to live, we just went straight to Fredericksburg, got a room in a hotel, and then we started looking. And there was this place available and really cute, in a little--in Stafford, which is very cute, you know, and it was one of these little, really old, old like probably 1800s places near the--near the river. The Rappahannock. And we just took one look at her and she took look one at us--you know, it was like, the first person we meet, right? [Drops hand on leg] And she turned out to be--and I called her later the "Perle Mesta of Lesbians in Fredericksburg," who's like this famous sort of party woman in New York or something. Anyway. So--but we didn't reconnect with her for quite some time.

Once I had my other job and we'd found a place to live and everything else, you know I sort of started finding--finding the community in the Fredericksburg area. And also did some freelance writing and there were stores on--what was it, Princess Anne Street or something? And you know, all the gay owners of the decoration places [laughs], and you know, just finding it all, you know. That's where I met Gaye Adgebalola, from Saffire, and you know, we all would get together and [drops hand on leg] periodically, we'd all just get together and hang out or whatever. So that's really--that's how I met the community, which was pretty substantial, you know, as one finds. As far as the men goes, I don't know, but it was all women that I, you know, connected with.

Then, when I came [clears throat] came here, actually it was a gay man who told me that Charlottesville is a great place to come to. And [clears throat] because of my position at the Women's Center, and because there was stuff on my resume that clearly identified me as, you know, part of the community, I made connections very quickly with folks in the faculty and staff at UVA. And I did meet some community people over time, but mostly they were UVA-connected.

And I was part of the group that founded the faculty and staff group at UVA, and that was ninety--hmm. Well, I started in 1991 and it was not long after that, that we founded the organization [UVA Pride]. And that was the organization until the--now they're called affinity groups? I'm not sure what, but there's--faculty, staff groups, the groups that exist now is not the same group that we founded that, the first one. And [clears throat] this one came out of the Diversity Office. So the second one came out of the Diversity Office. It's one of the many committees of the Diversity Office.

CP: Right, I think it's just called like the UVA LGBT Committee or something like that.

CK: Something like that, right. We were UVA Pride.

CP: So was that like an official university-sponsored group or was this just something that you--

CK: No.

CP: Yeah, so tell me about how that got started. I am super curious about this.

CK: Well, I think it was mostly Charlotte Patterson and Bernard Mays. And then, oh, a few other folks. [Sighs] Who was my--I mean, for one year, I was the co-chair with Nick Edsall, who was--I don't even know if he's still alive. But he retired, moved back to

Vermont where he's from. And so there were different pairs. There were different co-s each year. So Charlotte and Bernard were the first. And the rest of us sort of joined in. I think it was mostly faculty. There were a few--few staff. A couple of librarians, of course, but a couple of other folks. And then--and we just--we just formed ourselves. It was after John Casteen, the president, signed an order including sexual orientation in the nondiscrimination policy.

CP: Right, which I think was like '91, maybe? Yeah.

CK: Yeah. Nine--early '91, I think it was before I got there, but nobody would do anything until that happened, because a lot of people were scared. I didn't give a shit, but you know--because I was out. But--and of course, tenured faculty, it didn't matter, right? But for those who were untenured, it was an issue. So that's--and we would meet once a month in Peabody Hall--in a room that doesn't exist any more. It was on the first floor, and there was this big room--it was just a meeting room that anybody could use, with a big round table. We would sit around it and meet.

And...I remember when we voted to become official, you know, like, "We are this group and we vote for it." When we were walking from there--this might be in the video, I don't know--but when we were walking from there, it was always after work--from there back to--I think we went to like--somewhere for a drink. Probably the Virginian or something, I don't know where we went. And--there weren't as many options as there are now. And the older men--even tenured faculty--were--you--you'd just--they were just walking a foot off the ground. It was just the cutest thing I ever saw. They were so transported with joy, you know, that it was so liberating for them. And it was the sweetest thing. It was so sweet. I mean, somebody like Bernard, he didn't care either, right? And

he'd been through so much; he'd done so many things, he was beyond that. You know, those of us who were women were like, "Yeah, guys, this is what empowerment feels like, you know? You don't even know." [CP laughs]

And it was just like--it was like the '87 March on Washington that I attended...actually, I have something I want to give the Special Collections from that. But they--we had a meeting afterwards--this is still--I was still in LA. And we were sitting around, the people who went, and there were some younger men who were getting involved--ACT UP started then. And they were all talking about doing the sit-in at the Supreme Court. And I hadn't gone to that, because I'd done other things. Anyway, they were talking about, "Yes, the--the lesbians taught us how to do civil disobedience!" This was [laughs] this was like, I'm just sitting there going, "I can't believe this." But when we--would you come and step for us? No fucking way! If we had to do a pro-choice thing, or whatever, you wouldn't be there, right?

So, you know, it was--they were very cute, but it was so one-sided, you know? They all relied on the lesbians to teach them about civil disobedience, and how to protest, and how to do all--because these are all white guys. White, privileged guys who mostly worked in the film industry and had no clue. So...anyway. That was just, you know. So this kind of had that feeling, right? They had lived in the closet all their lives. Some of them, you know, close to retirement. And so it wouldn't have had an impact on their careers, but it's just the feeling of it was really exciting. And that was cool to see.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. So, how public was this group? Was it something that like--you like would put--I was about to say on the website, that's not what was going to happen, but you know, would you say like, "UVA Pride group's meeting at this time;

anybody can come"?

CK: Yeah.

CP: Okay.

CK: Yeah, we--you know, we were open about it, and several of us, you know, were out, and those who were not out--

CP: Got it.

CK: Just, we didn't have their names, you know. We protected people's identities. Bernard wanted everybody to be out. I mean, I was okay with that, but we had to respect people's status. And actually, we did have a website eventually. Wendy Repass created the website, and had all--we kept our notes on there, our, you know, when we went through the whole marriage inequality crap, and you know, all that stuff it was on the website. I don't know if it's still there. It probably is in the--actually, I think it all got transferred over to the current group. But Wendy, you know, created and managed that website for quite some time, and I was involved with that too for a while. So...

CP: So what were you all trying to do? Was it mostly a social thing--I mean, you mentioned working on like inequality, like the sort of marriage inequality stuff, so what kinds of things were you all doing, like what were the goals of the group?

CK: Honestly, I can't remember. I know we--we had bylaws, we had all that stuff.

CP: Right.

CK: But mostly, actually, it was somewhat social, just to provide a place for people to connect. And we got funding support from the College, the then-dean of the College, gave us some money. Probably Bernard asked him to do it. But we would have these amazing holiday parties at Bernard's--he lived in Pavilion VIII in the basement, so

we had these huge events, and he--he probably paid for a lot of it. But great spreads, and you know, everybody went, and we had allies come too. You know, it was just occasional. And then something in the beginning of the year for, you know, and we'd try to get the word out, but it wasn't as easy as it is now. So, we would just try to spread the word in some way or another that this thing was happening. And--and provide support, you know, for folks.

And then, you know, advocacy work. Trying to--I mean we went through a whole thing where we were just trying to get [drops hand on leg]...gym membership for partners. And that was crazy, trying to get that done. And--because it was a grad student who asked for that. And it took a while. And then, they figured out a way to do it. And then--but everything had to happen under the radar of, as John Casteen would call it, "the alumni in Richmond." [CP laughs] Which meant the General Assembly.

CP: So that's where the pushback was coming from. It wasn't like--clearly the president of the university was on board.

CK: He was fine. Yeah.

CP: And then--

CK: The administration was on board.

CP: Okay.

CK: It was...it was the general counsel who was saying, "We can't do these things because the way Virginia operates, because of the Dillon Rule." And what happened to...was it Virginia Tech or William and Mary?

CP: You mentioned William and Mary in your video interview. They tried to do something.

CK: Yeah, I think it was William and Mary, where they passed--they basically made the benefits available to faculty and staff and the General Assembly slammed down on them. So...and there were particular legislators who made it very difficult [CK adds: It was Virgil Goode who was the ringleader of the blowback. He later had to resign due to a sexual harassment charge against him.]. So--and it was--it was--did I mention my meeting with John Casteen in my video? I don't remember.

CP: I think so.

CK: Yeah, yeah, where he called me in. So anyway--

CP: Can you--

CK: Want me to repeat it?

CP: Yeah, yeah yeah. It was a great story.

CK: Well, this is--this is when that sort of that stuff was going on, and the--the marriage amendment hadn't happened yet. So that came later. But it was Vance. I can't remember his first name. A really awful guy. From the Lynchburg area, I believe. Anyway, he--Vance Wilkins, that was his name. Vance Wilkins. He put something into the budget amendment that said that any Virginia state college or university that offered any benefits or recognition of any relationship with fact of marriage, for anyone other than a man and a woman, would lose their state funding. And...I get a call at like 4:30pm on a--probably a Friday or something, I don't remember what day--no, it was a day, you know, a weekday, and it said, "John Casteen wants to see you." And I thought, "Why me?" And I wasn't the co-chair of the--or anything! I was just, you know. But I guess he just thought of me as having more influence than I did.

Anyway, so I went running down the street, because I was on the Corner, so it

was easy to run [drops hand on leg] up to Madison Hall. And he said, "Let me show you this." And he pulls his--turns his computer around and he shows me this--this bill, right? [Clears throat] And he explained to me that budgets are sunset bills so they only last two years, so whatever was attached it would only last that long, right? He said, "You need to call your people." And I remember thinking--and he said I should call this one person who was a former member of the Board of Visitors. I'm thinking, "How do I do that?" You know?

Anyway--anyway, I'm thinking, "Who are my people? The gays? The Jews? Who do I call? I don't know who my people are!" Right? You know, so I have to call my people, none of whom have any power. Anyway, so I said, "Okay," you know. Anyway, so I said, "I will." Well, what ended up happening was--I mean I made calls to people I knew but...you couldn't do anything. But it got stripped out of the budget anyway so it never made it, because I'm sure people thought, "This was crazy and you can't do this." So, anyway, that was one of the weirder--weirder moments [drops hand on leg]. Yeah, John always liked me. [CP laughs] I don't know what that was, but anyway. So...yeah. That was one of those moments. But then, of course, a year or two later, maybe a little more, came the Marshall Amendment. And the anti-marriage amendment.

CP: Right, that was the--

CK: Which is still on the books.

CP: Right. Yeah. So how did the university respond to that? Was there anything that they could do?

CK: Very--pushback. Pushback, you know. Didn't--yeah, there was definitely pushback from the university, but it wasn't as strong as we wished it would have been,

but it's like again, you know, there's this scary--people are just scared, you know, it's a state university, there's...it's the Dillon Rule, which is unique to Virginia, and there's all these things that were pretty unique, and so people did what they could. But you know, it passed the General Assembly and then you have to have an election between the two years and it passed again, and so it became part of our constitution. And of course, now it's held in abeyance because of the Supreme Court, but that could change.

CP: Yup. [Laughs] It could. So that was all happening sort of through the committee that you--you know you were sort of on.

CK: Yeah, we were doing that stuff, yeah.

CP: And then was there other stuff happening informally, like sort of what was it like to be LGBTQ outside of the context of the committee?

CK: Well, I mean I was out.

CP: Yeah.

CK: And so I, you know, I just--and I had a partner and--you know, it wasn't like I was a single person looking for love or anything. Like where do you find people or whatever. So I know it was hard for a lot of people to find partners...because the community is small. A lot of people went to a bar downtown to meet people or, you know, to at least socialize, and I never even went there. It doesn't exist anymore, but...the women had always had their own sort of thing where they would do sort of social things or movie nights or things like that, even before I got here. But it was a small group of lesbians, I think that probably Charlotte Patterson could talk about that. Who else might be around? I'm trying to think. I mean, she was pretty well-known and she was out, of course, because of her research and what she was doing in the psych department, so

people would connect that way. I didn't really go to many of those things, just because I had a life of my own and I just, you know, just didn't. But I think if I had been single, I would have, you know. Though I did some social things.

And there was a Pride march that a grad student organized in the '90s. And it--it had had happened for a couple of years. I don't remember; you would have to--Michael Bennett, he was the organizer. He met his partner here and they ended up moving to New York. I just saw him a year ago. He came down here for something. Anyway, he remembered more than I did. He...yeah. He was--and there was another guy who was really active who was a grad student. Doug--what was his name? Not Doug Meyer. He's in WGS. What was Doug's last name? I'm trying to remember? And he--he was like one of those great troublemakers. You know, he would confront people like crazy. He was in History. But I don't remember...

CP: So what were those Pride marches like? Like did they get a lot of attendance? Was there people, I don't know, being mad about it? Like what--what happened?

CK: No--no reaction, really. It was, you know--the one I remember we met in front of the women's center, we marched up Main Street, I don't remember where we landed. And it was--it was, I don't know, forty, fifty people maybe. And...yeah, there were, you know, cute--having been to Christopher Street West marches in West Hollywood [both laugh] it was--it was, yeah, it was pretty fun.

CP: Yeah. Slightly different scale.

CK: Oh yeah, definitely that. And--and there weren't many of them and--and I think about the Pride events now, it's so much bigger, you know. So--which is cool, you know.

CP: So I think in the interview that you did, you mentioned a couple of times that people left the university.

CK: Yeah, oh yeah.

CP: Because--so, where--did you get the sense--like what was your sense of why they were leaving?

CK: Well, often there are professional reasons. But they often left because they would start looking because there was nothing here for them. And I'm thinking specifically of one friend of mine who was a counselor at CAPS [Counseling and Psychological Services]. And [clears throat] he was single and he just had--you know, he couldn't even go out to the normal social places to meet because so many students were there and he might run into a client, so he couldn't even--he had that kind of situation [drops hand on leg].

And I--I had a friend, my friend, I was real active in the Democratic Socialists of America, I was [on] the National Political Committee then, and the--the headquarters were in New York. And my friend would go up to New York pretty often; I think he's originally from there, and I said, "You know, you should meet my friend Michael, who was the DSA [executive] director." So--so they did. And they met and...they never have been apart since then. They're still together. They live in San Francisco [drops hand on leg] you know. They have a kid. I mean, it's like...that was--there's a Yiddish word "shidduch," which is like make a marriage--it's what the yenta does, makes marriages. Anyway, I think that's the best, most successful shidduch I ever made. [CP laughs] And--yeah. But so he left, and I was just like, "My friend is leaving!" You know, he was someone I really--and he was really sort of an anchor for me. [Sighs] But--yeah, it was

usually--there's nothing here for me, so I'm going to look for a job somewhere else.

CP: Right. And did you get a sense that that was because, you know, Charlottesville is a pretty small town?

CK: Yeah.

CP: Combined--and then--or, you know, are they feeling just like, I don't know, like there was...I don't know, some kind of pressure for them not to be out.

CK: I think it was all those things.

CP: Yeah. Yeah.

CK: But, you know, it depended on what their positions were, what they were doing. I mean...I think probably the experience for people who were from here and who grew up here...you just sort of make do and you stay, you know. I'm just thinking of people, especially Black folks, who probably didn't want to leave their communities. But still, a lot did, you know, or they'd go to Richmond, you know, where there was a larger community for them. But folks--I mean, grad students obviously move on, right? So they would anyway. But they would definitely look for places that had more of a community for them.

CP: Yeah. So what made you stay?

CK: Well, I loved my job, I loved where I worked... I should have left. [Laugh] I should have left. In retrospect, I shouldn't've hung on so long. Especially when the new director came, I should--but I--I was looking for work, but by then I was older, and it was like nobody wanted to hire me. But it was--if I had--and there was a period where I was looking for jobs elsewhere, but I also didn't want to disrupt, you know, my daughter's life too much. So there were those things. I think it would have been better if we had left

anyway. But--inertia, too, I don't know. But I went through period where I would be looking for work and nothing--you know, I'd get job interviews, I'd go someplace, I'd actually be a finalist and I wouldn't get the job, so.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense.

CK: Mm-hmm.

CP: So, obviously, I mean, on that sort of like--UVA has a really big presence in the Charlottesville area.

CK: Yeah. Yeah.

CP: So in your experience, how do you see like LGBTQ folks, maybe faculty or staff at UVA, interacting with the rest of the Charlottesville community? Like do you see an overlap? Do you see a divide? Like, how do you see that sort of happening?

CK: Hmmm. Hmm. Well, I mean the folks that I know, I mean a lot of them are involved in other stuff in the community, so--often deeply involved in other stuff. But I think it's--I don't know that the LGBTQ issue is the cause of divide. I think it's really more about where do you work, what you're doing, and...yeah, that's what I'm thinking. I mean so many people at UVA, especially--I think so many people at UVA are involved in other stuff in the community, and sometimes doing active work, or whatever their work is, or whatever their research is, they are doing work in the community.

I'm thinking of people who are in the community who are out and they're--they're doing a lot of social justice work, you know. So I think the presence is pretty well seen. And--and Charlottesville's a little blue blob in the middle of, you know. I think that it's--it's a fairly friendly place. I think people who feel more complexity are going to be people who aren't white or people who--who are LGBTQ or--oh...what am I thinking? Or single.

I think that's an issue, you know. It's hard to find someone.

CP: Yeah, I mean that was one other things I was thinking about, like how have you seen--in particular queer people--LGBTQ people of different races interacting with each other? Do you see that happening? Do you feel like there's a divide? Like how do you...

CK: I do think there's some interaction. But I know that like, you know, Cville Pride is--is actively trying to, you know, change that, but it's still--it's hard. Latinx and Black communities are actually socially very conservative, so that's a challenge. I think that...even if you have--even if there are definitely common interests and common concerns--I think it's less of an issue, but it's still for some it's a--it's a barrier. And, you know, Cville Pride is largely--it's mostly white, though not completely. So I think amongst students it's different, where the queer community among students is a little more diverse. You see that some. Yeah.

CP: I actually--I'm glad you mentioned the students that I wanted to ask you about, which was before there was sort of this faculty and staff organization that you all created, obviously there was the Gay Student Union that had been around for a long time.

CK: Mm-hmm. Right.

CP: And continues to exist. So, did you see like any involvement with like faculty and staff getting involved with those kinds of things, or townies--people--for lack of a better term--

CK: Not townies so much.

CP: Yeah.

CK: No, but--but definitely faculty and staff. And the other piece of that is that,

because we--a lot of the students rely on faculty and staff for a lot of in-UVA things-- issues, things to deal with. [Drops hand on leg] I mean, I was one of those people, but-- though a lot of students didn't know I was a lesbian and I would talk--when I would be doing my work as a survivor advocate and there was a queer, lesbian, or gay student in front of me by whatever--I would try to--I wouldn't say it, but I would try to imply something or I would make a reference that would make it clear that was the case, and they were always surprised because I don't know what they thought I was supposed to be--you know, what I looked like, I don't know. Anyway, they just thought I was a nice white woman, you know. [Both laugh] Anyway, I mean, do I pull out my socialist credentials, I don't know.

So, I mean, among faculty and staff it was well-known to them, but I think that they knew--the students knew, especially folks who were doing work somehow in studies or whatever, that was really important to students. But also, I'm involved--I'm involved with the--what's now QVA, the Serpentine Society, because I got my PhD at UVA, and so I'm involved in the alumni group, and that's where there were connections with students. Because they really helped get the Q Center started and--though there were many people within UVA who were involved with that process as well, including me. And...and funding scholarships [drops hand on leg] and whatnot.

CP: Mmmm.

CK: So, the Serpentine Society until this year. Now it's QVA. So they, you know, fund Alumni Fund scholarships. So there's a pretty strong connection that way. And through the Alumni Association. So there's that connection too. And UVA faculty are often recognized by that organization too. So there's--it's sort of there are little overlaps

here and there.

CP: Yeah, that makes sense. Do you know, or have a ballpark sense of how long Serpentine Society has been around?

CK: Oh, I should know, because I've been around since it started. Matt Paco was one of the founders.

CP: So it was significantly--so like the GSU's like in 1972 or something like that.

CK: No, no no no no.

CP: It's older--it's after that.

CK: Yeah. Serpentine started in I would say...late '90s, early 2000s. But it would be easy enough to find out. Just go to the Alumni Association.

CP: Yeah. [Laughs]

CK: You can find it.

CP: Right. Yeah, that totally makes sense. Okay--I mean, that's still been around for a good bit of time.

CK: Yeah, I mean it's--it's interesting. I mean, of course the people who are providing these scholarships are all, you know, older white men because they were the students at the time. And...so. Yeah. And there was also...they give out awards every year to alumni and to allies. So that's something that you could see. Find some stuff out of that.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. So, I don't know, we're going to shift gears a little bit. But is there anything else that you wanted--I don't know, that you think is important to--for people to know about sort of the LGBTQ community at UVA? From your experience?

CK: Well, I know that when I first got to UVA, I was--I didn't discuss the fact that

I was a lesbian at all. I didn't really mention Lisa as a partner for a while. And I had forgotten, really, that anybody who'd seen my--my CV would know. [Laughs] But I forgot about that part! There was a woman who was an associate dean of students named [name removed]? There was a group of women at UVA on the faculty or in administration who were, I'm sure, lesbians. But who were so closeted that they had that kind of look to them. I don't know how else to describe it. And there was a faculty member, a couple of faculty members in the School of Education who were lesbians. And one was kind of out and one was not. But--and they were--and--and [name removed] was also part of that group. And I had lunch with her. She was not someone I really understood very well or trusted very well, but she--we were having lunch and she said, "Tell me about your--your partner." And I thought, "Oh, fuck. How did she know that I had partner?" [Laughs] And then I realized, "Wait a minute. that doesn't--of course she would."

Anyway, so--but I didn't--I didn't get that she was--she was just like someone who like never had a partner, at least apparently. You know, it--that older group of women who just dedicated their lives to their students, right? That's what they did. And I mean, she may have had a relationship. I don't know. But I'm sure she was a closeted lesbian. And--and the the couple of other women at the Ed School, a little less closeted, one not so much, but...significant people on the faculty there. So it's...God, I'm just--I have a thing with names. It's like--I call it name dyslexia, I can never remember names [drops hand on leg] when I need to. But there were--there were folks like that scattered around the university.

CP: Yeah.

CK: Yes.

CP: Heard--yeah. Sorry, go ahead.

CK: Yeah, there's a named John Herring who was actually the director of Newcomb Hall, and there is a scholarship in his name, but he was [drops hand on leg] he was--he was outed or came out--this is long before I was there.

CP: Mm-hmm.

CK: He was long retired, actually...after--by the time I got to UVA. And, I mean, he had a horrible experience around those issues. He was--he, you know, he had power, but he also was treated poorly, and there were things that happened that he never forgot. I mean, he's passed since then, but he had some...bad experiences. And--and I know that Bob Elkins, who was the first out RA also had...the president of the university tried to fire him. So, his story is fairly well known, you know, that's something you could check out.

CP: Right.

CK: And, actually it was the BSA that came out--that literally stood up for him, which was so interesting.

CP: Was he a Black student?

CK: Uh-uh.

CP: Oh, that's so interesting.

CK: Yeah.

CP: All right. Was this before--I mean I can look it up--

CK: It was in the '70s. Late '70s.

CP: Okay. Okay. So GSU is around, but fighting. Yeah.

CK: Yeah. Bob and I are friends, so, he was just here last week for the QVA

annual thing.

CP: Yeah.

CK: [Sighs] So, I mean, I think that the student organizations--there was sort of mutual support around certain issues, that was just one example. When a student who was running for student council president, a Black woman, was assaulted outside of her--was it her or her boyfriend's Lawn room? I'm trying to remember. It must have been her boyfriend's Lawn room....there was this huge uproar and it was assumed that it was racist. I don't think they ever caught the person who attacked her. I mean, it was a physical attack. The whole issue around gender and race and the queer community really came out for her.

And Bob, who at that time had recently won this major lawsuit because of discrimination took pretty much all the money he had won in that lawsuit and he gave it to the students to do stuff with, because of what happened to Daisy. And...yeah, so he--that's how I met him, because I had never heard of him until that all happened and he sort of [drops hand on leg] showed up out of nowhere [laughs] and it turned out he was living in my hometown of Long Beach [CP laughs], so it was just so interesting. So there's--so we've been friends ever since. But--so there's been this sort of overlapping, you know, like alumni to student to faculty/staff, you know, people--in this community, everybody connects somehow, you know for mutual support.

CP: Yeah. That's amazing. Yeah.

CK: And I think that that's probably also true for say, Black students, you know, other minoritized students.

CP: Yeah, that makes sense. So shifting gears a little bit, you mentioned your

daughter.

CK: Yeah.

CP: And she's adopted, correct?

CK: Right.

CP: Yeah, so can you talk a little bit about the experience of adopting her?

CK: [Pause] Well here's what I'll say. [Sighs] I actually tried to get pregnant [drops hand on leg]. That didn't happen. So...we ended up looking. And I have always been open to the idea of adoption. We ended up adopting internationally because at the time, it didn't seem that domestic adoption, at least in Virginia, was all that accessible.

CP: And around what time period was this? You don't have to give the specific year, but--

CK: '90s. Yeah, yeah.

CP: Yeah.

CK: Early '90s. And...early to mid. So I said, "Let's just, you know, let's do--let's adopt internationally." And so we were thinking about where do we want to adopt from? And we figured we'd go to the motherland, which was Russia. So we adopted her. We had to hide that we were a couple. Though the social worker working with us--and it was a Richmond-based agency [drops hand on leg] knew, but she said, you know, "Don't mention it." And in fact, the interesting thing is that she--she was working with a gay couple also, and she went with one of the men as the fiancée. [Laughs] She faked it. And they took pictures together and everything, and then she went with him to Russia to get the baby. Anyway, she was very cool. Because in Russia it is against the law to be gay, so there was no way you could adopt. And this was during the horrible, you know, economic

collapse in the Soviet Union, which was no longer, and it was just--you know, kids were being left on the street, it was a really bad scene. That's not quite what happened with my daughter as we learned later, but...yeah. It has been interesting, let's leave it at that.

CP: Fair enough.

CK: She's an adult now, but not functioning very well, so.

CP: Got it. I understand. I understand.

CK: Yeah.

CP: So moving on a little bit, I'm really curious about your work with DSA [Democratic Socialists of America]. How did you get involved in that? What kinds of things did you do?

CK: [Laughs] Okay. Well, I'm a founding member. [Laughs]

CP: Okay.

CK: I was involved with an organization called the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

CP: Okay, and this was--when? Like, time period?

CK: In the '70s and '80s.

CP: Okay. A while ago.

CK: And--and that, I got involved--God, I don't know, it was a family thing, because my--my cousin, one of my cousins who I'm really close to, his father was a founding member of DSOC. My grandfather was a socialist. And papa probably would have been a member if he'd been alive, but he wasn't. Anyway, so I got involved in DSOC because--

CP: And DSOC is, just to be clear, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

CK: --Organizing Committee, that's right. Yeah, and I got involved when I was already in LA but it turned out that my advisor--undergraduate advisor at UC-Davis, where I went to school as an undergraduate--I think I knew--I already knew about DSOC, actually, when I was up there, and she was very familiar with it. It was a total coincidence, because she wasn't even an advisor in my area, you know, an undergraduate advisor you just get whoever you get. I think it's alphabetical. Anyway, Michael Harrington, if you've ever read any of his books, *The Other America* or any of these books, he was the founding--the founder of DSOC, with a few folks. And my uncle was also a founder. And [clears throat] Michael was...he--Johnson--LBJ hired him to run the War on Poverty, you know, so he was--that's who he was. And *The Other America* was the book he had written about that.

Anyway, so there was DSOC. And it turned out that my advisor--undergraduate advisor--was having an affair with Michael Harrington! [Both laugh] This was how--I didn't know this until I moved back to LA. I thought, "Oh, you're kidding me!" You know, this is just hilarious. Anyway, so there was that. But then...DSOC and there's another national organization called the New American Movement, which was more left, New Age-y kind of--not New Age, but it was just more left, and very feminist. So it was socialist-feminist identified. DSOC came out of the labor movement, so it was a little more traditional socialist, to the frustration of many of us. Anyway, so the two organizations were so close in members--some people were members of both organizations, but so close politically that it took a few years, but there were--historically unusual, most left organizations splinter; this was a merger.

So the two organizations merged. Some people left over it [drops hand on leg] but

eventually a lot of them came back, but eventually it became DSA. So that happened in the '70s. Maybe early '80s. And [clears throat] and actually most of the friends I have from DSA in LA or elsewhere really came from NAM. Just, you know, because they were more feminist. But anyway, so...I mean, I was an active member in LA. When I moved out here, I eventually ran for and became a member of the National Political Committee, so I would be taking the train up to New York [drops hand on leg] and, you know, there would be people like Barbara Ehrenreich and, well, Michael. Michael passed away before I moved out here. But other folks. And my cousin Harold Meyerson, who--he's still a VP I think, but he was a--he was an editor at *American Prospect Magazine* and he was a columnist for the *Post* for a while, so now he's in DC, but he was actually in LA (when I moved out here). We grew up together. We are really close. So anyway...[sighs] so I was--yeah, I've been--I have not been actively involved since I adopted Sammy. My involvement really dropped. I just couldn't do it. And--so I'm just on like email lists and stuff like that, you know. That's about the extent of it. And I started a DSA chapter in Charlottesville.

CP: Mm-hmm.

CK: And several faculty members who are--most of whom are not at UVA any more, and a couple of other people, grad students and undergraduates, were members, but then it sort of faded out. So the DSA that exists now started up during the presidential election when Bernie was running [drops hand on leg].

CP: Right. I was going to say, we have a pretty active chapter now.

CK: Yes, very active. And so they--that's when that started up. And the interesting thing is that Bernie was never a member of DSA [laughs]. I don't [think] he's a member

of DSA! I don't know if he ever joined. But he just, you know, he identifies as a Democratic Socialist, but he came out of...SPUSA, the Socialist Party of the USA, but he left SP and he--and we never could figure out why he wouldn't join DSA, but he didn't. Anyway, he recruited thousands of young people to the organization! [Both laugh] And they had no idea that he wasn't a member. I don't--you know, I don't know if he--you know, he might be. Who knows?

But the interesting thing is that the--I remember once at a convention and Harold said to me--this is before Bernie ran, because I haven't been to a convention in a long time. And he said, "You know, DSA has a very high nerd factor." And it still does but it's a different kind of nerd factor. I mean, we have people like--there was a guy who came from the Philadelphia chapter who was so anti-religion that--I mean like he was almost like--he was the kind of person that you almost would not want to like socialize with. I mean there were just some really, you know, socially very awkward people.

So anyway, but we had a lot of cool people too, like Barbara, people like that, but I remember being in a hotel--Barbara's hotel room with a bunch of other women bitching and moaning about how the men were controlling everything and having to like strategize how we were going to just take over everything, and that was when Michael was still the chair, right, so it was like--and we would just confront him, and he would go, "Okay, okay, yeah. Okay, you know, yeah you can do it." So, you know, it was--and Barbara just passed away like a month ago. Anyway...actually, I think Ann Lane might have been a member. She was chair of Women's Studies for a while. Anywho...yeah. Bernie recruited a lot of young people, and young people of color.

CP: Mm-hmm.

CK: So there would be--I have a friend who's still very active, and active in the NPC, and she would sometimes contact me going, "Claire...this is driving me crazy." I mean because--because there was this sort of--a much stronger adherence to sort of political correctness that--

CP: Mmmmm.

CK: That--or a kind of political correctness that...almost emerged, you know, the whole idea of political correctness was almost an inside joke for a long time. And then it turned into something real. So it's like, too bad. But I mean, I understand it, but at the same time it's...Chris tried to explain what was going on with the organization, and there was a lot of stuff happening. A lot of conflicts between the older generations and the younger, and the directions, and--things we had already been through in the organization, and now the new people would bring--and then having to go through it all over again with the younger members. And I said, "You know, I'm so glad I'm not active any more." [Both laugh] I really am. And at one point I was asked to sign something as a founding member, just saying, "This is what we were doing--this is what we were doing--" Like kind of affirming the things that we were trying to do and accomplish.

So, back in the earlier days, we had committees. And there was the Feminist Committee, or Socialist-Feminist Committee I should say, and then there was LGBTQ Committee. And I was chair of that, for a while. We had a--we had a monthly--like a little journal that we published. Shoot, you might want that. I don't know--I think I got rid of some stuff. But I do save things, so...if there's anything you want, I might be able to find it. Because we've been trying to purge stuff at home [CP laughs] so I have like twenty boxes of stuff for shredding. Anyway...yeah, that was--and so I have to say that DSA was

very instrumental in my development as a lesbian, but a socialist lesbian. Socialist-feminist lesbian. And my understanding of kind of the world, really happened in that organization, because I was really involved for many years.

CP: So what kinds of--so you said you were involved in the National Political Committee, you were in this LGBT committee, what did you--what were you actually trying to accomplish? Like what was the work that you all were doing?

CK: Ahhhh. Very funny. Good question. [CP laughs] I don't fucking remember. Anyway, we had a lot of meetings.

CP: Yeah. [Both laugh] Yeah, I mean I guess like in a really broad sense. Like were you all interested in electoral politics at all--

CK: Yes.

CP: Were you all interested in--

CK; Very active in electoral politics.

CP: Okay.

CK: In fact, that's mostly how DSA did its work. I mean we would do--

CP: Like trying to elect socialists.

CK: Solidarity work, yeah.

CP: Yeah.

CK: And I was really active. And in LA I was really active, for example, in solidarity work with folks from El Salvador--

CP: Got it.

CK: And anti-oppression work. [Signs] We had a--we were part of a group that had a contingent of people marching in the Pride parade, and this was when--when you

talk about socialism and queer stuff, of course they didn't use the term "queer" at the time, but it was like everybody brought up Cuba, which at the time was very oppressive to queer folks. Very oppressive. So what they did was all the lefty groups that wanted to march in the Pride parade to express solidarity, they lumped us all together--they weren't going to let us do it, but they let us march under the auspices of one group, which was--I think it was CSPES--Committee in Support of the People of El Salvador. So we marched with CSPES all together, but we brought our own banners, right? So--and I remember when we were marching up the street, and we had a DSA banner. I was marching with my two friends who helped me come out, right, marching up the street in our--

CP: And this is in--this is Christopher Street West?

CK: West Hollywood, yeah. West Hollywood. In our comfortable shoes, right?

CP: Yeah.

CK: And right behind us was this adorable...I don't know if she was trans or just a cross-dresser or what she was, you know--clearly gender non-conforming in like--in a little sort of short waitress dress and heels like, you know, up to the sky. Trotting behind us. And--must have been like twenty. You know, very young. Anyway, so I turned around and I said, "Look, if you're going to march behind us, you gotta help us carry the sign." She went, "Okay!" So she came up and we marched up the street, and walked, and it was like a mile? I don't know. I said, "How do you walk in those things?" I said, "Women fought for--we have fought so hard not to wear those shoes, and you're wearing those shoes." You know, we were in our Birkenstocks. Anyway, it was just hilarious. She was so cute. Anyway. I digressed. So the--yeah, we were really--I mean, electoral stuff, pushing candidates for positions--

CP: Mm-hmm.

CK: And the thing is, we were so identified with the Democratic Party, and as Michael would say, we work on the left of the possible, which was basically working in the Democratic Party. Because it's quite clear that a third party won't work in this country. It's just the way our Constitution is set up. You really can't, because of how our elections are, you just can't get the--if we didn't have certain restrictions, you could have multiple parties. But it just isn't going to happen. So we found--we felt that the only way we could get any electoral work done was to work through the Democratic Party.

And so--and we would occasionally have people who were DSA members who were in Congress, or certainly--definitely local elections. I mean, at one point, I think...where's Syracuse? Ithaca. The entire city council of Ithaca was all DSA members. [Both laugh] But, you know, and I think maybe Santa Cruz, little places like that, but Ron Dellums, who was a Congressman from Oakland, he was a member. I mean we've had--we have members now, of course, like you know, AOC. But there was always at least one person who was a DSA member who was in Congress for a long time. So. Yeah, and that's sort of where we did our work.

CP: Yeah. Did--did you have any--did you ever have any issues sort of lingering from the--the '50s of, you know, not wanting to be called a "socialist" because--I don't know, the whole Lavender Scare?

CK: Because of McCarthy?

CP: McCarthyism, like did you have any sort of repercussions from that or were you mostly beyond that at this point?

CK: There were some--a little bit of leftover stuff. And the reason for that was

some of our founding members were people who had actually been impacted by that. And--not so much Mike Harrington, but one important member who came out of NAM was Dorothy Healey. And Dorothy, who was in LA, was a member of the Communist Party. And was--and quit when Kruschev said, "This is what's really been going on, what Stalin did," and that's when she quit. I don't even know if she quit right then, but she quit pretty--about then. And...she--Congress passed a law against her. Her. [Laughs] One person. So--so, you know, she had to go underground for a bit. We had a couple of other members who were underground for quite some time.

CP: Wow.

CK: And...so they, you know, they--they felt it. Those were people who had actually been members of the CP. And a couple of people had been Socialists, and then you know, I lived in LA, and the people who had been blacklisted--there were a lot of people who got blacklisted. And so there were a lot of people who were--paid the price of that. In fact, where I worked in LA, I worked at USC Film School, and there was one very respected teacher who named names. And there were people on the faculty who refused to speak to him. So you know, this is--and this was in the '70s, you know.

CP: Yeah, there's some time in between there.

CK: And the '80s. Yeah.

CP: Yeah.

CK: Yeah, it's...Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Wow.

CK: Yeah, it was...so my--my ex, who's the film editor, actually did a documentary about Dorothy, but she also did one about the blacklist. A couple of--

Michael, who was the writer, I can't remember his name. And then she got involved with his daughter [laughs]. So she had a way to do that. She tended to do that kind of thing. [CP laughs] Anyway, yeah. What was his name? It would be easy enough to find. He was part of the Hollywood Ten.

CP: Got it.

CK: So, yeah.

CP: Yeah [laughs]. So, shifting back to Charlottesville a little bit, do you feel like you're part of an LGBTQ community here in Charlottesville?

CK: Good question...Yeah, I am, but I'm not like--I'm kind of on the periphery.

CP: Do you see that there's--do you feel like there's a central LGBT--like one LGBTQ community in Charlottesville?

CK: Mm-mm. No. I don't. I think if you're active in Cville Pride, you've got that group, and then if you're active in--I was part of the UVA community, right? I mean, I did stuff with Cville Pride too, but it was really UVA. So it's that town-gown thing, really.

CP: Yeah.

CK: If you think about it. Yeah. I mean--I mean the people, some of the founders of Cville Pride were UVA people, so there's--you know, there's a big overlap, I would say. A big overlap. But there is--there's some difference.

CP: Yeah.

CK: But, yeah. I would say--I was definitely--not any more, because of retiring, but I was very, very involved in the UVA LGBTQ community. And I'm still involved with QVA.

CP: Right.

CK: I'm on the scholarship committee, that kind of thing, so.

CP: Right. That makes sense. Have you been to any of the Cville Pride Festivals?

CK: Yeah, all of them--most of them. I didn't go this year, though.

CP: What are those like? Can you describe those?

CK: Have you been to any?

CP: No, I haven't.

CK: Oh no, because you got here after--

CP: And I was gone for this year's.

CK: Well, yeah, and I didn't--I don't know how the one this year was. First of all , it was in IX [Art Park], which was the first time it's been there. But before then it was in the Pavilion, and really cool. I mean, a bash, really. Tons of stuff. Tons of stuff, and lots of people would go. I--I loved it. It was considered one of the best Pride festivals in Virginia, you know, some people said it was better than Richmond's, but I don't know. Obviously not as big as DC or something. But it was--really cool. And a lot of community organizations. Faith groups, all kinds of groups were there. UVA had a strong presence. Yeah, the faculty-staff group has a table, the students have a table, I mean my synagogue has a table. Yeah. It was--it was fun. And hopefully--I mean, maybe I'll make it next year, I don't know. We'll see.

CP: Yeah. I'm hoping also.

CK: Yeah.

CP: This hasn't actually--this has sort of come up, but we haven't really talked about it. Is there anything that you would say about, you know, how--I don't know, you

feel as like a Jewish person in Charlottesville?

CK: Yeah. Yeah. [CP laughs] Here's the interesting thing. For years, I would tell people--I felt more oppressed as a Jewish person than as a lesbian. [CK adds: I totally forgot to tell you about our queer Havurah! That's a group of Jewish folks who gather to observe holidays or services. We met once/month for Shabbat dinner. All of the folks (except for me) have moved on—including two faculty members who got offers at UNC Greensboro. They may still be there. Grad students left, of course. It lasted for a couple of years.]

CP: Mm-hmm.

CK: Because...[sighs] I think there was more acknowledgement of my relationship in the Jewish community than there was acknowledgement of the fact that I was not Christian in the LGBTQ community. There was sort of an assumption that everybody's--that nobody's not Christian, you know. And--and that's changed some, but--and I would say that that probably was colored by the fact that you can't go anywhere without people wishing you "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Easter," and that has nothing to do with queer community; that's...where we are, right? So I mean, when I first moved here, it's like, "What's your church?" [CP laughs] Right?

And I--one time, when Sammy was really little, we went to get her a guinea pig, and there was a farm east of us, between us and Richmond, and it was a family farm and each kid--they were all homeschooled, and they all raised some animal for pets. So one person raised rabbits, and one person raised guinea pigs, and you could go get your pets. And they made the cages and everything, it was really cool. Well, you know. There was a reason the kids were being homeschooled. Now, I know people who homeschool who are

like totally lefty, cool people, but when I got there I realized quickly that I was like entering a, you know, a little cult. Anyway, but the kids were so sweet.

And so the little girl who raised the guinea pigs asked me what was my church. I said--and her older sister, who was probably a teenager--I said, "Well, actually I don't go to a church, I have a synagogue--I go to a synagogue." And she said, "Oh, what's that?" I said, "I'm Jewish." She said, "Oh!" I said, "Yeah, we believe that Jesus wasn't the son of God." [Both laugh] "That he was Jewish." And her sister's eyes got really big, she said, "I'll explain more to you later." Because she knew what I was talking about. So anyway. [CP laughs] I just--that's all I said, you know. I love doing that kind of thing. [CP laughs] Anyway. But they took really good care of the animals, and so there was all that stuff. So anyway. Yeah...

CP: But you have a--there's--there's more than one synagogue in town?

CK: No, there's only one.

CP: There's just one. Okay, yeah.

CK: There's Hillel, which is--which is a student support organization.

CP: Okay, yeah, right. Got it.

CK: It's national, and there's the Hillel. That's affiliated with UVA. And often I would just go to services at Hillel and stuff because it's sometimes more comfortable for me. But when Sammy, you know, was growing up and I would send her to religious school at temple, which she hated, as it turned out, it was a mistake, but anyway...and I got involved at the synagogue. And I still am kind of tangentially involved with that. So--and I have a lot of friends who are members, so. And not too many LGBTQ folks who are members but there's a couple, and there's--in fact, the rabbi, before he became the

rabbi at the temple, before he was even affiliated with CBI, he was down in Lynchburg or something. He converted three of my friends to Judaism, all lesbians, so, you know, the fact that he's there is not [drops hand on leg] [both laugh] it's probably okay, right?

CP: Yeah, fair enough. Well we're getting close to wrapping up.

CK: Okay.

CP: What do you think people should know about being queer, being a lesbian in Charlottesville that they might not know?

CK: Well, I would say you can't assume because Charlottesville is in a southern place that it's an unfriendly place. Because I think it is pretty friendly. I'm sure there are unfriendly people. I just--haven't had many encounters. It is kind of a live and let live--in a way that's kind of a southern thing, but it's certainly true [drops hand on leg] like in my neighborhood, you know, that kind of thing. No one's given me any problems.

But I would say that you do have to work a little harder to find your people, so to speak. To quote John Casteen. To find your people and find your community, and you know within the LGBTQ community, there are communities, so finding--I mean if you're a person of faith, I think it's less difficult, because there's certainly churches here that are so clearly, you know, or even Unitarian, which I--people say, "Oh, a lot of Jewish people go there." No. When I go there, it feels very Christian to me, but that's just me. That--there are definitely places of faith where you can find your people, you know. But outside of that, it's a challenge. So you really have--if you're not affiliated with UVA, I can imagine it being a little difficult to find where to go. So I would think Cville Pride, if you can find it, right, would be it. Pretty much. There's no community center, there's no bar anymore. All the bars have gone. Or restaurants that are--I mean, there's Marie Bette, but

that's not a place to hang out, so. [Clears throat] Yeah.

CP: Yeah. That and the Pie Chest, also not--

CK: And the Pie Chest, right. [Laughs]

CP: Not a place to hang out.

CK: Both tiny, you know, can't have a meeting there.

CP: Yeah.

CK: So yeah.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. All right, is there anything else you'd like to share for the historical record that you haven't yet?

CK: Not that I can think of. Oh yeah, there's also Moose's.

CP: That's true. That's true. I have been to Moose's.

CK: Yeah.

CP: Yeah. [Laughs] Me and every police officer in the Charlottesville-Albemarle area.

CK: Oh, I know. [Both laugh] Yeah, all the old customers have continued, so that's pretty interesting.

CP: Okay, well thank you so much for doing this.

CK: Sure!

CP: I really appreciate it.

CK: You're welcome. You're welcome, my pleasure.

END OF RECORDING