

Gretchen Muehle: Okay. So today is November 20th. Uh, we were at Donna's house. It is about 12:15[pm]. Um, my name is Gretchen, G-R-E-T-C-H-E-N M-U-E-H-L-E.

Brooke Hall: I'm Brooke Hall, B-R-O-O-K-E H-A-L-L.

Gretchen: And if you could spell out your name and give us your preferred pronouns and your age.

Donna Ekart: Sure. Um, I'm Donna Ekart D-O-N-N-A E-K-A-R-T. My pronouns are she and her and I am 53 years old.

Gretchen: Amazing, perfect. So before we begin, we want to ask you a few basic questions about yourself. What words would you use to describe yourself? So for example, lesbian, gay, queer, so on and so forth, whatever you would prefer.

Donna: Okay. Um, I usually go with queer. It's the one that makes me feel the most comfortable, um, and just feels more generally true. Um, if people press on that, like "what kind of queer?", um, I'll go with bisexual usually.

Gretchen: And how would you like us to refer to the community? Would you like it to be the queer community or the LGBTQ community?

Donna: I love queer community.

Gretchen: Beautiful. Awesome. So diving into it, um, where did you grow up?

Donna: I grew up in Manhattan, Kansas, so pretty much the dead middle of the Midwest. It couldn't be more in the middle. Like literally the center of the United States is like 75 miles from where I grew up. So, uh, right, very much in the middle.

Gretchen: And could you tell us about your family growing up, and your household dynamics?

Donna: Um, sure. Um, I grew up with both my parents in the house. They're still married today. Um, and I have one sister who's three years younger. Um, so it was mostly us, but, uh, in town I have a very large extended family. So I feel like I'm from a big family. I feel like my dynamics are big family dynamics because I had 20 ish cousins on each side of the family. So 40 total that were, you know, within a 10 year range of my age, you know, one way or the other. So, uh, I feel like I have a much larger family than the nuclear family actually comes from.

Gretchen: As an adult now, do you still have a strong relationship with your close knit family?

Donna: I do. Um, I, it's been hard during the pandemic to be away from them for as much, cause I just don't want to travel. Things are worse there and I don't want to go there and bring something back that isn't already here and, uh, you know, my parents are older, so I don't want to put them at risk by staying at their house. So it, it's been tough, but, uh, yeah, we still maintain a real close relationship. Both my parents and my sister.

Brooke: So is everybody in your family still in Kansas?

Donna: Pretty much. I have a few cousins spread out around the country, um, who were in my generation, but the vast majority of my aunts and uncles who are still alive are all there in Kansas.

Brooke: And another thing we also forgot to say this in the beginning, you are allowed to decline any questions or decline to answer any question. You can stop the interview at any time, too. Um, and I know that Manhattan, Kansas was one of your specifics that you wanted to talk about. Is there anything specific about Kansas that you want to mention?

Donna: Um, Kansas in some ways like Maine, um, it's, uh, got little pockets that are more progressive, um, surrounded by a lot of rural area that is a lot less progressive. Um, so I grew up in a pocket, uh, Manhattan's a college town and there's also a, uh, a military base right outside of town. And those two things sort of combined to make the town more diverse than it would be otherwise. Um, and, uh, and just, uh, more able to handle change, I would say. A lot of the little rural communities in Kansas, you know, everybody who lives there, it goes way back to their great, great grandparents just like here. Um, and so it's a, it's, it's a harder thing for them to, to deal with difference or deal with things changing. But, um, but I do, um, I get a lot here. I get a lot of, "oh, it must be such a relief to you to be someplace more progressive." And honestly, Portland is, the East coast in general, is more liberal than the Midwest. That's just a truth, but I don't actually feel it's incredibly different, like in such a like, "oh, I was so repressed and now I can just be myself kind of way." And I think, um, when people hear Kansas or think about the Midwest, mostly, they've never been there. And mostly they have sort of a very preconceived notion of what it's like and just like any place, it varies a lot more than, than people think.

Brooke: Right.

Gretchen: Well with that, I kind of do want to talk a little bit more about Portland, Maine, if you don't mind.

Donna: Sure.

Gretchen: So when, how old were you when you moved to Portland?

Donna: We moved here in 2013, so I would have been, oh my gosh, now you're making me do math. Um—

Gretchen: Rough estimate.

Donna: That's eight years ago. So I would've been about 45. It would have been my mid forties. That's a safe—

Gretchen: And what made you want to move to Portland?

Donna: Uh, I, uh, had never heard of Portland Maine in my life. My wife grew up here. And I met her when she was in the military. She was stationed at the base that I mentioned, uh, right outside of town. And we met through mutual friends and, uh, when she got out of the military, uh, she had always promised her mother that she would move back here, um, when she got done. So, uh, she was coming back and I came with her.

Gretchen: Did you find it easy to connect to the queer community base here? Is there anything specific about it here that kind of drew you in?

Donna: We did get fairly involved with like pride stuff and, uh, we literally lived around the corner from Blackstone's, so it, that was easy. It was like an easy place to just be like, “oh, let's just go have a drink or see who's there or whatever.” And so I think that was probably my initial contact. Um, I think it's probably fair to say I struggled making any connections here. Uh, what I've settled on is that New England is a friendly place where the east coast is a friendly place, but it is so different than Midwest friendly that I don't recognize it a lot when people are doing it. So they're being friendly, but I think they're being like standoffish or cold. And so I spent the most of the first year here saying that no one here liked me, which is not true. Uh, but just, it took me a while to recognize what sort of interpersonal dynamics are like here and how people aren't quite as, um, it's not outgoing. It's sort of effusive like Midwesterners sort of over connect when it's not really warranted and people here more wait until they feel the connection to do the things that I recognize as friendly. So it's almost— you both work in the service industry, it's almost service friendly. It's almost that, like it's genuine, but it's also not based in anything. So, and when I look for that here, I don't find that necessarily. So I'm gonna turn this off because it's starting to go.

Brooke: That's a nice fireplace.

Donna: Oh yeah, we love it. It keeps the house so warm.

Gretchen: Um, so what do you like the best about Portland?

Donna: Oh man. Um, there is a lot to do here. Um, if you are living in Portland and bored, it is your own fault because there's always something and it's not just the big things or the things that everybody's like, "oh, it's restaurants and breweries", which it is, but there's also just a lot of interesting, small things going on all the time. Like any night of the week, you can find good live music somewhere. There's a lot of cool theater. There's just so much to do. And it's beautiful. Like just beautiful. Um, so I, I love those things about it. Um, and I think the lots of things to do makes it easy to meet a lot of different kinds of people. Um, you know, people who are like you or people who are not like you, or, you know, whatever. It's just a really, um, I think it's a really good dynamic that way.

Brooke: Are there things in Portland that you find challenging? I mean, we could, we could add, um, like compared to Kansas.

Donna: Um, well, for me personally, I grew up in a place where almost anybody, Manhattan's a little tiny bit smaller in Portland, but not much. Um, but almost anybody I ran into knew a family member. Like I would say my last name, which is very common there and people will be like, "oh, are you related to this person or that person?" And I didn't realize what a luxury that was, uh, until I moved here when, uh, literally nobody has ever even heard my last name, much less met any of my relatives. And so it's a real, that's a real different thing for me, but that's like a, that's not an Portland thing, that's a personal thing. And probably a lot of people feel that exactly how I feel about home, about Portland.

Gretchen: So alright, you, mentioned in your pre-interview that you wanted to talk about, um, coming out late in life and the process of coming out. Um, when did you first begin to kind of question your sexuality and or gender and or identity?

Donna: Sure. Um, I would say. Uh, just sort of at a base level when I was a teenager. Um, that's when I first started to realize that, um, I had fairly intense feelings for a lot of my friends, um, for a long time. So when I was a teenager, it was the eighties, which I'm sure sounds really scary, but, um, and then it was, it was not at all common for anyone, especially in high school to be gay or to say they were gay. Um, I had friends who were gay, but it was not a thing that anybody talked about outside of our small circle. Um, and certainly nothing that anybody ever in everybody had, uh, a girlfriend as a cover, you know, or, you know, whatever, there wasn't any, there wasn't anybody being out anywhere. Um, and so it wasn't really any conversation or anybody to talk to about how I felt about anything and for a long time, I honestly thought that that's just what female friendships were like. It took me, um, into well into my twenties to realize that there were lots of women who did not feel like that about their friends. Um, and I know that

probably sounds crazy today, but, um, it, so I would say that I realized then that I had these feelings, but I didn't realize that I could put a name to them. Um, the first time I dated a woman, I was in my forties. So, uh, there just were not examples of anybody, uh, like I didn't know any queer adults at all, um, until graduate school. So it was, you know, and so that would have been mid nineties. Um, it just, I didn't really have any examples. And then. Uh, a friend of a person who had been friends with my mom, her whole life. And so I grew up with her kids and, um, everything, uh, divorced her husband and moved in with a woman. And I was like, "oh, that's how it happens. You do all the stuff. And then, and then you get to go do the thing that you wanted to do in the first place." That was honestly my, and I would have been, I mean, it would have been close to 30 when that happened. And that was really, it was like, "oh, okay. So unless you're like really out there, this is how it works." You, you get married, you have kids, you have a whole life. And then when that's starting to kind of wrap up, that's when you get to go do this other thing, like, it was really, that was the example I had and it seemed genius. And, uh, I, uh, yeah, I just didn't really have anybody to look at to say, "oh, this is how it is." And even once I was old enough to realize, "oh, well, it's fine. And my family would not be mad and no one would actually care," there just wasn't community there to even connect to. Um, the first one, when I dated, I met at work and what made her think it was going to work out to ask me out, I'll, I'll never know, but I am so grateful to her because it was literally sort of like a, "oh, I guess so" like, and then I was like, "oh, this is, uh, this is what I should have been doing, uh, all along or at least, you know, at some points along the way." Um, I don't want to say that I, that, that relationships I had with men were fake. They were very genuine, but, um, I, I feel like if I'd known earlier, I probably would have made some different choices. So,

Brooke: So you mentioned, um, having friends as, when you were a teenager that were gay, but nobody was out. Did you, were you able to talk to anybody as a teenager about it? Like friend group wise or —

Donna: No, the friends I had in high school were, uh, guys. And so it, that just seemed like, "oh, okay. They get to do that." But there, I didn't, I literally like, I have people now that I knew in high school who have ended up being lesbians, but we did not have any conversation about that. It was just a thing that boys did, I guess.

Gretchen: Who was the first person he came out to? If you remember.

Donna: Gosh, um. I'm trying to think of the first person I told. I guess it would have been a friend because I told my friend Hannah, that Teresa had asked me out. And so I guess, and she was like, "oh, I didn't, I didn't know you dated women." And I was like, "I didn't know I did either."

Brooke: That was when you were 40, right?

Donna: Yeah. So that was quite a, and it wasn't long after that, that, uh, I told my family, um, partly because we started dating in the fall and it just seemed like, you know, like holidays come up and you're like, "well, I'm gonna, I'm gonna bring somebody to Thanksgiving and it's a woman." So, but my family is, um, almost ridiculously chill about almost everything. So short of me saying, I'm, "I'm bringing an ax murderer home." I don't really know that they would have changed their faces at all. Um, you know, it just, it was fine. Um, and, uh, I, I always feel like, um, like I snuck in through some backdoor of queerness because I never had a struggle, like a, you know, a thing like my grandparents weren't mad, nobody was mad. So I was just really fortunate in that way. And it was just fine.

Brooke: That's crazy. I feel like you don't see that often.

Donna: No, and especially not where I'm from, but, um, you know, yeah.

Gretchen: So how did coming out late, later in life, impact kind of your ability to, um, like form relationships with other people in the community? Like, was it hard, like a more difficult dating pool? Was it, what was that dynamic like?

Donna: It was, I, um, when the, the woman who asked me out first when she was she and I dated for almost a year, and then we broke up and I pretty much was like, "well, that was a thing that happened," but I didn't honestly expect it to happen again. Like, it just seemed like, oh, there's just this weird little blip that I had. And, and, you know, because there isn't a lot of queer community there. And what is there, was younger than me, a lot. Like by that time being out and in college was a lot more normal, well, a lot more accepted. And, uh, and so the queer community that existed in Manhattan at that time, would've been wildly inappropriate for me to date. Um, so, uh, yeah, it just, it just seemed like, well that I don't know any other 40 year old lesbians. And so, you know, that, that was just a thing, but that was not the case. Um, and even to this day, sometimes I struggle with, um, "am I queer enough?" Because a lot of people my age have harrowing stories of what their teenage and college years were like, and I don't have that. And I feel like if they hear that I came out when I was fully an adult and already independent and have my own life and my family was all fine with it and nobody's mad. I probably don't sound very queer to them if their queerness is sort of wrapped up in that struggle. And so, um, now that I'm married and it's obvious, like, I don't think anybody questions it, but I do have people who are then surprised to hear later that this hasn't been my whole life, but just a very, uh, late development in it. So, yeah.

Brooke: And that definitely connects to, um, uh, feminine visibility that you want to talk about. But just before we go to that section, um, did you lose any friends?

Donna: Um, I did. Um, I was, um, pretty, uh, active. This feels so weird to say now. Um, also funny that you're complete strangers and some of these stories are things I haven't said out loud to people I know really well, so this is really interesting cause I'm kind of picking some of it apart. Um, I was really active in church, uh, at, uh, when all this sort of started happening. I sang in the choir. I was involved in, uh, it was Catholic church, so there was a program for people wanting to join the church. Um, and so I was involved in that education program. Um, I, I mean, obviously I was there every weekend to sing in the choir in church, but I was probably there two nights a week just to do random things. Um, so, uh, that was sort of my primary social and creative outlet was, was through those, those programs. And, um, there were definitely people there who it was not okay. Um, I found that, uh, mostly the people that I wanted to keep as friends, like the people that it meant the most to me, um, stayed. I didn't lose anybody that was like heartbreaking to lose. But I, you know, there is a chunk of people, I guess I really only like, feel it now via like random social media. Someone will be like, here's a picture of all of us back in the day. And I see it because they tagged, you know, five or six people that I know who are also in the photo and then there's me. And I, you know, like I know they know how to find me, but they're just like, we're just going to pretend she doesn't exist or we can't remember this girl's name. And, um, I was like, well, okay, well we were friends for a decade. So, you know, it's, you know who I am. Um, so that's a little weird and I feel like it's harsh, but I also, um, I understand that they're not bad people. I liked them in the first place. They are still the person that I liked. I wish they could see that I'm still the person that they liked too. Um, but you know, a lot of it's just born out of how they were raised and where they grew up and what their social circle is like, where this just wouldn't be acceptable or, you know, whatever. So, um, I did lose people, but nothing incredibly painful. I lost church altogether at some point that just became impossible to navigate like the wanting to be there. And the feeling that I was not wanted, even though no one, like literally said that to me, you know, it's the church, so it's obvious. Um, and so I lost that. I think that's probably the hardest loss I suffered, but, um, yeah.

Gretchen: Um, yeah, you mentioned, um, with religion and church and all of that, um, and how other people kind of, reacted. How did being queer, like in your internalized sense of religion kind of affect you in your coming out process and how you identified yourself in the long run?

Donna: Um, it helped me realize how much of, what you see a religion is things that humans have built and, um, that they've constructed out of their own like, um, desires and weaknesses and fears. And that it's perfectly possible to be a spiritual or religious person without having a, a building church connection. Um, and I would've said that was completely untrue before that. Um, because I know that I feel the same. I feel the same about everything except the institutional structure. And so, uh, that part of it just must not be necessary and must be a thing that isn't as important as people make it out to be, which makes it easier to be like, oh, because before I was like, it's really best to be Catholic like it's okay for something else, but it's really best to be

Catholic. And now that, that is completely gone away because I realized that those things don't actually hold the weight that I thought they held.

Brooke: So just, I feel like it will be easy to just go to our religion section. So, uh, when you, so you would consider yourself to have a religious identity?

Donna: Yeah. I, um, I still call myself Catholic. They would not call me Catholic, partly because I don't go. But, um, that's the faith tradition that I know and understand and, um, have a connection to, and it feels like it'd be really random to be like, oh, okay, well now I'm a Methodist or Presbyterian or something, you know, like, or, or to just sort of be generically Christian because that, that doesn't resonate with me at all. Like a lot of it is about the sort of extra that the Catholic church is. The part of the thing that appeals to me is like, oh, there's all these saints, there's all this stuff to do and there's just things all the time. Um, it keeps my brain busy and I, I liked that a lot. And so, um, yeah, I don't, I still call myself Catholic for what that's worth.

Brooke: So religion, um, I'm assuming played a big role in your life growing up. Was it a family thing? Is that how it began?

Donna: My father's family was Catholic and my mother's family did not go to church at all. And so when we, when my sister and I were real little, my dad took us to church. Um, uh, but my mom never went, she became Catholic to marry him, but just cause you've had to then, um, and we were baptized Catholic and then we went to church with them for awhile. And then they got upset at the church about birth control and he stopped going. So, uh, uh, that would have been before, like really, um, before things like birth control pills and things like that. The church didn't talk that much about birth control because it just wasn't a thing. And so then when it became this thing that you just go to the store and buy, then they started talking about it. And so that's when my parents were like, we're not having any more kids, but we're not bad people. So they stopped going. But my father's whole family was still Catholic. So still all of the sort of major events of my childhood were all church based. So, weddings and funerals and baptisms and confirmations and just social-ness. And then I came back to it as an adult, which confused the heck out of my mom, but it just felt like, um, I dunno, it felt real comfortable.

Brooke: Did it, would you say that it hindered or helped you realize your identity or, or both?

Gretchen: Or neither?

Brooke: Or neither yeah.



Donna: I'm going to go with hindered, but not because of the reasons that seem obvious there. Um, but more because of the, it, it gave me enough of a sense of "I have a life and stuff going on and it's important" that I didn't feel, uh, completely pressing need to, uh, form a family of my own or, or do things like that, that might've come more to the forefront and like, sort of forced me to like look at some issues in my life. Um, uh, the Catholic church has always relied on people who aren't married with children for a lot of things like the priests aren't married, nuns aren't married. And so they make a big deal out of, uh, the fact that it's a holy calling to be single and to be of service to the church community. And I bought every word of that and, um, and really let it shape a lot of my identities. So then I sort of, it let me, back-burner like relationships that were personal and just for me, um, in a way that probably wasn't the best thing, but, um, I probably would have dealt with a lot of things sooner if I hadn't had that, like notion in my head of who I was being.

Gretchen: You mentioned kind of putting on the back burner a lot of your relationships. How did that kind of, you know, affect your, um, like internally how you felt about yourself?

Donna: Um, I'm, I'm a good avoider of heavy feelings. I realized when I moved here, uh, how much of my life was stitched together, pieces of other people's lives, these things that I did with my sister and my niece and nephew, these things that I did with the cousins and stuff. And it was, it was all parts of everybody's lives. I didn't have anything to hold on to that was just me. And when we moved here, I was like, "oh, this, this is actually me now." Like, it took a long time to get to that point of saying, "oh, this is"--- I've already forgotten what the actual question was. So I think I had a point that I'm not going to get to now. Um, but yeah, so this was my first sort of experience as adult of having a life that I completely shaped up my own and was not sort of bounded by, "oh, I need to do these things for these family members or with these people that I've known forever." And so it was a real interesting experience that probably, um, a lot of people have, uh, earlier in life. Um, when I moved here, I think I started having a life that a lot of people will have when they're in their mid twenties, just like, "oh, uh, there is, you know, we're adults, we have a house and jobs and money and we can just go do things." And it was really, um, that was like a big deal, like a really big deal that I think a lot of people come to a lot earlier than I did.

Brooke: So when you mentioned things, like when you're looking back and you're like, well, probably, um, in terms of religion, [...] like you would have realized your identity sooner if it hadn't been for church, are there any regrets or wishes connected to that or are you glad with the way that it unfolded?

Donna: Um, I am not unhappy about anything in my life that is like historical. Sometimes I look at, uh, uh, like a group of queer teens at pride and I think, "dang it, like, that would have been awesome." And it just wasn't a thing that existed in my world at all. And so I have this sort of,

uh, the dogs are in their kennels upstairs. I have this sort of generic life regret, but it's not about anything specific, like, not like, "oh, if I'd only said these words to this person, my whole life would have gone a different way," but just like, "oh, if this had existed there, I would have done that," but it didn't exist. So yeah.

Brooke: I feel like we should shift to a feminine visibility. What does it mean to you to be a queer fem?

Donna: Um, it's hard. I, uh, all of my girlfriends have been, um, more androgynous or masculine presenting and so is my wife. And, um, I thought for a while that I, um, that people recognize me as queer. When I started dating women, I thought, oh, well, they'll see me now. Um, and then I realized later that, that, like, I only get recognized when I'm with a partner and otherwise, like, literally nothing, even to the extent of, "I am boldly and outrightly hitting on you as hard as I possibly can," does not get recognized as me being queer. Um, maybe it gets recognized as, "oh, this is some straight woman out on a, like a, oh, I'm just going to try this thing." Uh, but I, you know, this is what I look like, and this does not read as queer to anybody. Um, for a while I had a really short, very queer haircut and that helped, but it also was not me every day I was in the mirror. I was like, you just don't look like yourself. Like I just don't, I don't look like that. And so, um, it may have helped other people see me, but it didn't help me see myself. And it wasn't really very true to who I am, which is the whole point. So, um, so yeah, so I went back to looking like I look and really I'm, I'm pretty much only recognized when I'm with my wife. Otherwise it just doesn't happen. Even when I'm doing things that are like should be, should make me visibly queer, like volunteering with a queer organization or whatever. I get a lot of like, "it's so nice to have allies like you," and that's hard because then you're arguing with somebody like, like, well, "no, I'm not, I'm a member of the community. Like, um, you know," and then that enters the whole thing where it's like, I just have to, I think this is why like queer, because if I go with bisexual and I looked like this, I don't know- I, it's hard for some people to take it seriously or to think that it's something I actually mean rather than just something I'm saying so that I sound more interesting. Um, so yeah, it's, um, it's a real, it's a real thing. And I think sometimes even when I run into other women who present in a more feminine way, they read as queer to me. And so I still think there's something else that I'm not doing that I'm supposed to be doing, but maybe it's just that I recognize them because they seem like me. But because it, it is not terribly hard to tell I think, but, um, people seem to struggle with it like otherwise. So yeah.

Brooke: Do you feel, um, like you feel more invisible to everybody in general, like that nobody can recognize you as queer or is it more the queer communities? Is that the bigger issue?

Donna: I think it's only an issue for me as far as the queer community, but I would say pretty much, no one recognizes me. When people think "I'm thinking of a gay person," they think of very feminine, gay men and they think of very Butch women and they do not consider that there

might be something not that. And, you know, and that holds up even in like examples of that you get in movies and TV and things like that. A lot of times it's only been very recent that, you know, you get genuine portrayals that aren't coded so strongly that you just can't miss it. So, yeah.

Gretchen: Do you think that because of people's lack of awareness, your identity and like the invisibility you feel— has that like shaped your like drive to participate in activism, participate in like community organization and other stuff like that?

Donna: Um, it does. I, we, my wife and I both been very involved with Equality Maine and, um, I think that that's part of it that I can go there and declare myself queer and it's, it all works out. And then I can assume that most people who are doing their activities are probably also queer and then it just all is fine. So it does, I think, push me to do some things, um, both volunteer wise and activism wise. Um, it also pushes me to construct sentences really strangely so that I can say my wife at some point to just any random person who thinks they know me. Um, I do some other volunteer things in the community and I find myself like, not even totally consciously, but making up an excuse to tell a story that requires me to say my wife so that I don't have to be like, “Hey, I'm queer.” Um, I can just let them pick it up from the sentence and go on. And so I think that it's helpful being married. I don't even know what I would do if I wasn't like, I dunno how I would let people in. I had to wear a banner or something like a hat. Um, but even that sometimes. Like I have a jacket, a jean jacket with some patches on it that are all queer themed. Doesn't help anybody see me.

Gretchen: So, when did you get involved with, um, Equality Maine just to back track a little bit?

Donna: Um, probably 2015. Yeah, 2015. Um, we both started out just doing random volunteer stuff. She made a lot of phone calls. I did a lot of like administrative help. Um, and then she joined the board in 2015 and, uh, I continued volunteering to sort of, uh, I, for awhile, it was a lot of time like pre-pandemic. I had two days a week where I would just show up in the afternoon and whatever needed to be done, I would do those things. So that [?] mailing or, or finding supplies for a, an event or, you know, just whatever kind of thing. So I did spend, um, you know, probably 10 or 12 hours a week just with them. Um, that all kind of went away with, uh, with the pandemic where they weren't coming in the office so there wasn't really anything to do with, but, but prior to that, yeah, it was a lot of, it was a lot of time. I really, um, it's an easy place to put energy because they do so many things. They do social things and they do, uh, legislative, like activism things where they get laws changed. And so whatever mood you're in that day, there's probably something that they have going on that you can get involved with.

Gretchen: Do you feel like they, um, more so acknowledge you as queer? Do you think that that was a space where you felt like more accepted as yourself and more recognized as a queer femme or?

Donna: Yes, definitely. And I think that's partly because they do so much work with young people, so they are used to a very different set of queer people than probably most of the people there, their own age, like the age of the staff or the board. Um, and so I think they're just more accustomed to being ready to accept anybody who says anything about themselves as having a valid identity. And so it's a good, it's a good space.

Brooke: So, so your social media profile features you doing weightlifting. Seems super intriguing. Can you just talk about what that means to you as a woman, a queer?

Donna: Oh man I fucking love it so much, sorry, I'm swearing on your recording. Um, uh, yeah, that is something I started doing a little over three years ago. Um, prior to that, uh, I played sports as a kid in the way that like, they take you to play sports and you, you you're on a soccer team because your mom said you were not because you like chose it or love it or anything. Um, and I was, uh, massively uncoordinated and I hated it. I hated every minute of gym class and everything like that. So I literally never found, um, a physical endeavor as an adult that I felt competent at. And, uh, I actually started weight lifting, um, I had a cancer diagnosis at 2016. And as part of like trying to reclaim a connection to my own body, because for a while, you just kind of have to be like, "oh, it belongs to the doctors and the radiologist and everybody else, they're going to do the things they have to do to make you better." And of course, you're going to do it because you want to be better. And so, uh, it was, I sort of gave up control of my own person to other people. And that was part of my trying to claim it. And I started going to the place I go, but specifically, because they had social media, it was the only social media I'd ever seen from a gym where people looked like me. I was like, "oh, well that girl's not like completely ripped and you know, doing 80 pushups." And like the people they feature in their ads are literally people who go to the gym and therefore they look like normal human beings. And they're not even picking like the prettiest, most muscly people. Like, they're just, "Hey, you, you want to be in a thing?" and, you know, so it it's, I really adore them for that. Um, for me, uh, it is a whole other, it's an interesting thing because honestly being strong and being muscular, or physical and in sort of a weight lifting kind of requires a little like aggressive to it. Like there's not a lot of gentleness there. And so it is sort of a, like, it pushes any woman who does it towards a more masculine energy. There's just no way you can do it any other way. So it's funny because it sort of pushes me away from this feminine queerness that I'm trying to exude, but I find that it, it is helpful because they're working so hard to make everybody see that you can be this and still be whatever you are, um, masculine, feminine, somewhere in between. It just doesn't, you know? And so that's been, I think really good for me to, to get to do and to, to find a path, um, I, I really have gotten a lot of value, like personally out of it because it's—If you're going to do it and do it

at all, you're going to fail over and over again, because they're just going to come a point where you're not strong enough to pick that up. And it's taught me a lot about seeing failure as part of a process to being something else, um, instead of a thing to be afraid of or a thing to make you quit, you know, like, um, and so now I don't feel like failure in my everyday life, even small ones, you know, feel like a big deal. They're just like, oh, well I had to mess this up to learn, you know, the ways in which I need to be better at the ways in which I need to try differently or, you know, whatever it is. So, yeah, it's been a great, a really great thing for me.

Brooke: And do you have friends in the gym community?

Donna: Yes. Um, I would say some of my best friends in Portland right now, are people, are women specifically that I've met at the gym. Um, when I first started, it was before the pandemic and they were doing, um, group lifting classes. And so it was like five or six people in a class. Um, the classes were gendered, which I argued with them about a lot and to their credit, they heard me on that, but also had some they're like, well, we don't know how to like, account for the differences we see in people's bodies and in another way. And they did have a couple women, uh, both of whom were really tall, who they allowed in the men's classes. So funny. Um, but they were just really big women, so they could really pick up a lot of weight. And, and what they always said is if a guy comes in and he's sized, like the women will put him, but I guess tiny men don't show up at weight lifting gyms probably, it seems like not a thing. So, um, so it just never happened. But, um, anyway, uh, so I was in a class with five or six other women. Once you get on the schedule, you kind of see the same people. And honestly, I bonded so hard to those women and in just a way, and I don't think that I would've made it through the pandemic without that, that very specific friendship, because, you know, first the gym had shut down all together. And so we weren't getting together three times a week to work out kind of intensely. And then when it came back, they were doing, you had to, you could only do one on one just to sort of minimize your risk and make it easier for them to do contact tracing and the whole deal. And, and so that we stopped seeing each other in person, but worked really hard to hold each other up. Um, you know, virtually basically, texts. And we did all those, you know, zoom happy hour things that everybody did in the beginning of the pandemic. And then we started doing workouts together via zoom and, uh, that was the only thing that kept me sane in the beginning, because it was both like a emotional connection and a physical release. And that, that was absolutely necessary when like it's still awful now, but it doesn't feel as awful because we've figured out ways to navigate the awfulness. Um, but in the beginning it just seemed like, well, are we all just like, by June, everyone's just going to be dead, you know, like who knows. And so it was real helpful to have those friendships. And I felt like, because we were so accustomed to see each other so frequently, we maintained that. Whereas other people that I might've been closer friends to socially, social relationships really suffered. And so without a structure, I think those were a harder to maintain or harder to find a way for it to work. Um, but we, we kept that up and still to

this day, um, are a really tight knit group of people. So I think that's, um, been just as valuable as the literal weightlifting itself to keeping me well.

Brooke: So do any of those friends, um, are any, are they part of the queer community at all?

Donna: Um, no. No, not one of them, which is weird. Uh, there are two coaches at the gym who are queer, but, uh, uh, nobody was in my classes regularly. It was queer.

Brooke: So it's interesting that you connect to this group so much without it being like a queer community event type of thing. Yeah. But that's good though. I think it's good.

Donna: I mean, I'll be honest. I, I spend a lot of time wishing they were all queer. It would make so many things so much better. I wouldn't have to hang out with their husbands all the time and you know, like it was just like, oh, and some of them talk about things that I just, I just want to be like, look, "if you would just date women that would go away, like that problem in your life would just disappear. It would be so much simpler." And they were like, "oh yeah, but I like men." And I'm like, well, yeah, I guess, yes, that is valid. So, um, uh, yeah, but still it would be, you know, then that would sort of bring everything together in one spot for me. But, um, but it's okay. Uh, it, it works out.

Gretchen: Did you feel like you had to, um, like you mentioned earlier around a lot of people, um, you feel like, like you feel invisible as a queer—Did they more like recognize your identity more? So is that what, like kind of built that emotional connection with them? Or did you have, "oh, my wife."

Donna: I have to be, oh my wife all the time, but they seemed, um, okay. So a lot of straight people, when they hear that you're queer, what they want to do is be like, "I am cool with that. And it is a cool thing. It is good to be gay. It is good!" You know, that never happened there. And almost immediately upon like, once we'd all been in classes together long enough, or I'd been in classes, they'd been in classes for a while together when I started. And so once they were like, "oh, okay, she's fine. Like, everything's fine here, she can take a joke," When there ever was anything, um, in the gym to do that involved balls, the jokes were instantaneous. "Donna's not going to pick up Donna doesn't do balls." And that made me love them so much because they didn't feel like they had to be like very careful and very affirming. They were just, "we're going to give you the same shit we give everybody and your shit happens to be, you don't do that. So that's the shit we're going to give you." And it just made me feel, um, completely welcome in a way that's sort of the "I'm being affirming" does not do that sometimes. Cause yeah.

Gretchen: Just shifting gears a little bit, um, just to kind of stay on track with timing and everything. So you mentioned in your pre-interview, you wanted to discuss marriage equality

and we, we know you're married. Um, what is like, the history of marriage equality kind of mean for you as a queer family?

Donna: Sure. Um, I think, uh, the equality issue was partly, uh, what helped me recognize and accept and myself that I was queer. Because there was no reason for a random change like that in society to mean so much to me, if it wasn't actually me. Um, and those first few states that were like, "yeah, anybody could get married." I mean, it, it was heartrending for me. And I would just like read every story I could find about it and look at all the pictures of the people getting married and I would cry and I would be so happy for everyone. And it's just like, I, and then, then that started to sort of be like, wait a minute. Like, like if I'd been in therapy at the time, my therapist would have been like, "why do you think this is so meaningful to you?" You know? Um, and I examine that on my own. And I was like, "oh, it's, it's meaningful to me. Not, not because I have friends who have struggled to, you know, legalize their relationships or anything like that. But because it is personal, it's personal." Like it, it gives me a path forward to a life that I think that I wanted, um, without having to do a thing that also feels slightly like a compromise. Um, and so it meant everything to me. Um, my wife is a dentist and, uh, that gives us, uh, some financial freedom that is not, uh everybody's. But what it does is it lets me not work. I don't work. So I, I stay home with the dogs and I take care of the house and I do all their other stuff so that we can have a really nice life in the evenings and weekends. Um, I forgot a little bit, I'm stupidly happy, doing stuff at home and cooking and keeping it nice and, you know, whatever. I, uh, always knew I wanted that, but always felt I had to reject it because I didn't want to like give in to like society and the patriarchy and all the things. Um, and as soon as I realized I can have those things and still be married and not feel the, all the weight of it, because she's a woman too. It was just like a freaking dream come true. And I think that's why that early thing meant so much to me because it was like, oh, it would, then I would get the life that I always kind of envisioned, like my mom stayed home because back then it was possible for anybody to, you know, just have one person working. And, uh, and so that's like the model of what family looked like in my head. And I just couldn't figure out a way to create that. Like, I, I had meaningful relationships with men, very meaningful and long-term and marching towards marriage and always found a place where I was like, I'm out, I'm out because I just can't. Because I just couldn't make the picture work because it felt like I was going to have to give up something, either give up the life that I thought I wanted or give up the person inside of me who didn't want to just at even appear to be like, just subject to some dude's whims. So, um, yeah, marriage was enormous for me and it still is when we got married, uh, we got married in 2014, it was legal here. So we got married at the courthouse and then we went to Kansas where all my family is. Um, Flo's family is very small. So we took her, her mom and sister with us and that was it. Um, and we had a big ceremony and dress and the whole deal. Um, there, where, it was not legal to be married, but we didn't need the ceremony to impose any legalness on it. Um, and then, uh, and then when it, when everything started to fall, like chunks of things. So we got married in Kansas. It was, or when we had our wedding, it was not legal. Soon after that, one of the first like district

court rulings that swiped in a whole bunch of states in a scoop, scooped in Kansas. And, um, and suddenly we would've been able to get married there, but we, you know, we were already done. It's all done. Um, so it was legal there. I was like "this is so cool now we're now, we're still married when we go back to Kansas to visit my family." And then it was like [?], like was so fast that everything just fell and it was so overwhelming and still there's the, the day the Supreme court ruling came down, um, is like the queerest day ever on Facebook, I guess, just like it was ridiculous. And still when like Facebook will present you with like, here's your memories of this day. Um, like, like everything, like my phone exploded, everything exploded. Every single person was like, you're married here now. Like it was the neatest feeling to suddenly go from just only being married, depending on where we were standing to being married everywhere, which is a thing that people take for granted. And then it just seems ridiculous. Like, so I'm married here, but if I take 10 steps to the right and enter another state, I'm not, I'm not married. Like that's ridiculous. That's ridiculous! So, um, that was just, uh, the best day, just the best and still the best day. And then when things got really crappy for a while, and it looked like maybe some of that wouldn't hold up, it was just a constant thing of like, I don't want to go back to a thing where yet, like we are, we are so safe in Maine, um, you know, they mentioned get married through, even with all sorts of objection and it's going to stay forever, but it's much better when you're just married everywhere, where everyone has to recognize that your relationship is just as legitimate as theirs is. So, yeah.

Gretchen: Do you remember—It's kind of a very specific question so if you don't remember, it's really okay—like where you were, when the U.S. did that huge sweep and they passed, queer rights for marriage equality? Do you remember the exact moment?

Donna: Yeah, I do. I do. Uh, cause there was like three days in a row where the, the, the decision could have come down. And so the first day when it didn't come that day and it was like, okay, well it'll come tomorrow, it'll come the day after that. And so that was literally the first thing I did when, I'd get up, I would turn on the news and I would wait for them to see it. That would scour the internet because there were like, you know, there's the people like outside, literally outside of the Supreme court building just waiting to hear the decision and runners who are gonna come out and like, if you've ever seen the footage it's hilarious, because people come out of that building and it's so obvious what the decision was because they're so happy and it's, um, it's just like the coolest thing to me. So yeah, I was literally in my living room and, um, and, uh, uh, yeah, I had the TV on and I was watching it and happened to have a laptop on my lap and everything just went nuts. Like all the social media went nuts. My phone is ringing and texts and stuff and the TV. And I just, I just sat there in it. Like I just soaked myself in it. Um, as hard as I could for as long as I could. Cause it was just like, it's never going be like, like this, this is right here. This is the wedding day. This is the feeling that everybody else gets to have. There's no terms on it. There's no conditions on it. This is what it feels like. I, the only thing I'm sad about is that my wife was already at work. So I was home alone with dogs. Um, but you know, we had a



great party, me and the dogs. Um, I also remember exactly where I was when I heard that the, um, when they took down the defense of marriage act, which was actually just, um, two years, three years prior, but literally on the same day, like it was the same, it's like June 24th or something. So I think of that as like, this is queer day because, um, uh, I, my wife and I were dating at the time we weren't married yet. Um, and she was in the military and she was, they'd already gotten rid of, by that time, got rid of, don't ask, don't tell so she could be out, but they did have weird rules, like she could be out and that was fine. But when she was in uniform, she wasn't allowed to like hold my hand or do anything. And we used to meet for lunch and she of course, would be in uniform because she was coming from work. And, uh, we wouldn't, we met for lunch on that day and she kissed me in the parking lot of a Burger King, like probably the least romantic thing ever. But I remember it strongly because she got out of her car and uniform and it was just like, we're, it's, it's done. Like it's done because if, if that's the case, they can't, they can't make these rules anymore because obviously they don't impose those rules on straight people who are in the army. They get to hold hands with their wives or, you know, it's all fine. So, um, so yeah, so I got a kiss at a Burger King parking lot, um, by a person in a military uniform, probably the most romantic moment.

Gretchen: So kind of looking forward, obviously, uh, marriage equality, is such an astronomical milestone for the queer community. What other, like human and civil rights are of particular concern for you today? Especially with the queer community, like what, what more needs to be done?

Donna: Oh, trans rights. We really have to work so much harder, even, even within our own queer community to, to be, um, accepting and recognizing that, that trans people's lives and decisions are, and identities are valid. We just, um, I feel like marriage got a lot of focus for awhile and other things kind of got pushed to the side. And I think, um, it's I feel like, oh, well, they so clearly were made to like, wait their turn. And so now it's, it's time. It's time for us to be all out, like let's work on this. Let's make sure that there aren't any schools anywhere that are telling kids, they can't go to the bathroom or play sports or whatever because of their identity. And let's work on better representation in the media. And let's work on all the things that we worked on to get people to a point where they could be like, "oh, okay, it's fine for you to be married." Um, I, a lot of people that I care about and respect in the queer community talk about, um, that it's more important to change hearts and minds than it is to change the laws because the change of laws comes after the change of hearts and minds. So rather than trying to get in there right away and like secure legal protections, um, one thing that's also really important to do is to make individual connections with individual people, um, and, and help them feel like this is not something that's scary or different or something that wouldn't be okay in their own lives. And so, um, I think that's a really important thing to do. Um, because I, I feel like it just kind of, a lot of people are like, "oh, we can get married now. It's, it's done." Like, we're like everybody else, but I don't even know if being like everybody else is the best goal. In fact, I think that's probably not,

um, it's, it's probably best to maintain queer identities and to think of that as something, um, special or unique. And we need to really make sure that that is something that is also good for transfer, because I think that for whatever reasons that is more of a, it freaks people out a little bit more than, than just being queer because they can kind of translate like "Oh, okay. So you feel about that person like, I feel about my husband," but they cannot translate: "you feel like you were this whole other thing." Um, and so it's, it's a lot harder and I think it's going to take some more work. So we really need to put a lot more effort into it, both inside and outside the community.

Gretchen: It's like there was a big disconnect in translating, um, the queer community and trans rights and how they feel and how they, you know, kind of navigate life versus, and I think that really important too.

Donna: And they're, there's so many prejudices inside the queer community. Like I've heard people who are very active and very like, you know, "gay rights let's go." Um, you know, basically imply that if someone who is a trans woman marries a trans man, then those people are no longer queer. So they're accepting of the identity. They, they're saying, "oh, well you are a woman. And he is a man, that makes you straight," but it doesn't, it doesn't, it you're still queer. Like there's still a lot of corners going on there. And there's a lot of like reasons that in sort of straight people, heteronormative society at a trans couple, even if they were a man and a woman who would not fit in or be accepted or not afforded the same rights. So I think that, um, I think that's something that we really have to work on in ourselves as well.

Gretchen: You said a really beautiful quote earlier. I think it was, um, we need to change the hearts and minds before we change our laws. Um, it kinda sounds like, do you think that that also applies to within the community itself?

Donna: Oh definitely. Yeah, definitely. Um, I, uh, okay. So the, the bar Blackstone's is the only queer thing left in Portland. And for a long time, like when we lived around the corner from it, when we went in, we were the only women in there. There were, it was all white men, probably like one group that was in their twenties and one group that was like fifties and up. And, um, and it was a very, it was a very male space and whatever, and they didn't mind that we were there, but like, you know, whatever, and that space has radically transformed itself into something that's more accepting of, of people, of all queer identities rather than just certain queer identities. Um, and technically of course it was always okay on paper for someone trans to go in there, for people to hang out there if they weren't cis-gendered white dudes, but it wasn't okay. And now it is okay. So what happened is they changed hearts and minds. They got rid of a few people who were problematic and, um, now that it's, the space feels completely different when you're in it. But on paper, it's the same as it always was, which is "we're for the for the gay community." Um,

but now it actually is, or it's trying really hard to be. I think they still have some struggles because their patrons have struggles, but you know.

Gretchen: This is a bit off topic. I've just, my brain is just thinking, you know. Um, do you think that it'd be more important for us to create more spaces for the queer community themselves? Or do you think that it's more important for us to kind of assimilate and become more accepting as a culture as a whole assimilate everyone together as opposed to kind of like separating us off?

Donna: Right. I would've told you, I think even as recently as maybe five or six years ago, that, that the assimilation was a good thing, but that was the thing that worked. Um, but I have found, um, so much, uh, comfort and security in spaces that I know are exclusively queer that I can't deny that that is a really valuable thing. Um, it just, it gives you a little room just to breathe and not have to worry so much about "is somebody going to react badly to the fact that I'm gay?" Like, uh, you don't have to worry about that. And so that is quite a relief. Um, you know, like we, we go out to places in Portland and we, um, don't hesitate to be physically affectionate, uh, anywhere we go. Um, I kind of, I dare somebody to have a problem with that. Um, uh, but, uh, but it is nice to be somewhere where you're absolutely certain that nothing is going to be a problem. And so that is, that is really good. Um, and it doesn't even have to be like spaces, like I think for so long queer culture was centered in like bars and clubs. And that that's not a healthy environment for everybody. Um, and it certainly doesn't provide you a ton of options if you would like to experience queer community at one o'clock in the afternoon, it didn't exist. So, um, I think it's nice that there's, you know, maybe it gets less focused on that. Um, like I think of like Queers of greater Portland and the work that Kyle does with that, and he's put together some camping trips and, um, nature walks and some other things where you can go and everybody there is going to be queer, but it's not like so much of a, I don't know, party situation or a hookup situation. It's just a chance for you to feel community and be able to relax. And that's, I think really valuable.

Brooke: Just to go back to religion really quick. Um, is there anybody in the queer community that you've met or are friends with that also has a similar religious background, like consider themselves Catholic or no?

Donna: Um, yes.

[DELETED PART OF AUDIO PER NARRATOR'S REQUEST]

Gretchen: Do you think that they [churches] will eventually recognize marriage equality and recognize basic human and civil rights for the queer community? Or do you think that's like, uh, as our society progresses, do you think that they'll just kind of lag behind always?

Donna: I think the problem there is that the Catholic church is a worldwide church. Even if a big chunk of the majority of the, the church hierarchy here in the United States would want to do that to make a worldwide change in some countries where it's still literally illegal, where you could still literally be put to death, it's just not going to happen. Um, I don't think it's going to happen in my lifetime. Um, I'd be astonished if it happened in your lifetimes, to be honest and it's sad, but I think there might come a point where there's more sort of like, um, tolerance of— so the Catholic church isn't going to marry anybody, but maybe they'll start to just recognize that the marriages are valid, even if they didn't, cause they'll do that. Like if you were Baptist and you got married and then you became Catholics, they would still consider your marriage valid. You wouldn't have to have another wedding. So I think it might, that might creep in, um, and there's already a lot of like, uh, like there's several organizations that, um, promote being queer and being Catholic and staying in the church. Um, and to the extent that you can go to like masses led by certain groups that, uh, where, you know, probably everybody in the church is queer or at least queer accepting, um, priests have come out as queer. Like it, I think it, I think at least in the United States, things are, are slightly better, but it's still very much like a localized phenomenon. So depending on where you live and where the church is, you know, it's probably very different.

Gretchen: So, now before we kind of wrap up, um, is there anything that we didn't ask you that, you want to talk about before we finish? Anything at all?

Donna: I feel like we covered a lot of stuff.

Gretchen: Can be as random as you, you know, about your wife and your dogs.

Donna: Yeah. It's interesting. Cause she's, um, she's visibly queer. I think most people would clock her as clear without the slightest hesitation, but like, uh, at work, um, with her coworkers, I mean, I've met them that's all fine. But like with her patients, she, um, she tells stories about her home life, but she always says spouse. Um, and I don't know whether that's a doctor thing that happens, but I, I find that really interesting. Um, there are definitely like sort of professional differences in what's okay to say and do. Um, whereas like, uh, you know, people in other professions are equally, like whatever educated or wouldn't even hesitate, but like, she seems to feel like she has to kind of keep some stuff, not under wraps because if they asked her, she wouldn't, she wouldn't pretend she was married to a guy, but, um, and she definitely has people who come to her because they've seen her photo on the website and they're like, “yeah, I'm going to go get myself a queer dentist.” Um, so, you know, that's, that's, uh, you know, one thing, but, uh, but just in sort of the general people that come in, because she likes to tell stories about home because it makes, cause nobody's relaxed as a dentist. So she tells stories about dogs or a hike we went on or whatever people tend to relax because they see her as like a nice person rather than an evil person. Um, but, uh, uh, but yeah, she always says spouse. And so it's really, um, that's really

interesting to me that that's still a thing. And I wonder like how many other things are like that, but you only know that if you're married to that person, you know—

Brooke: That is a big difference too, because you're, you know, you're finding every excuse to say “my wife, my wife!”

Donna: Right. We're basically opposite in that way yeah.

Brooke: Does that—you can tell me if I'm prying obviously, but does that cause any tension in terms of—

Donna: Um, I think the first time I realized she did that, it, it felt hurtful. Um, just cause it like, it activates like whatever, like insecurities or anxieties you have, like, “does she not think I'm good enough?” Like, but then you're like, “well, she would say that about any. It doesn't matter who she's married, she could be married to the best person ever, and she would still say that.” So it doesn't have any to do with me. And this is about work. And I realized that, you know, especially where her background is, she joined the army, they, they put her in, um, officer's candidate school asked her what she wanted to do. She said she wanted to be a dentist. They're like, great, go to dental school. And then we'll, we'll do that. We'll cover that. And then you'll come back and you'll be a dentist. So the deal is basically however long they pay for thing, you have to give them at least that number of years. Um, so her, and at the time that she was in the army, she couldn't be out and queer. And so, but she needs to stay in the army because she doesn't want to suddenly be stuck with, “oh, well, here's what we paid for you for dental school, pay us that now” that's not going to work, for anybody. So, um, you know, it was important for her, survival to, to keep things, you know, very like buttoned up. And so I think it's probably a habit that she got into that. If she joined the army, after don't ask, don't tell was repealed, then maybe it would have been a very different situation for, but now it's just sort of what she thinks of his professional habit. So, yeah.

Gretchen: Is there any message you would like to leave for future generations or the queer community, um, who might listen to this interview?

Donna: Um, I think it's important to realize that a lot of what society says about queer people we take in and hold inside of ourselves, even when we don't realize it. And so we need to treat at least within the community ourselves with so much kindness and generosity, because you just don't know how many of those messages people are still holding onto or who they absorbed them. Like maybe they just absorbed them from the news, but maybe they absorbed them from their parents and, or their siblings. And that's really, um, a wound that is very hard to heal. And so I just feel like we all have to be so much gentler with each other than we sometimes are.

Gretchen & Brooke: That's beautiful. Well, thank you honestly, for letting us talk to you and sharing your story and everything. We are going to send you a link to the recordings as soon as we get them downloaded on our laptop and stuff. But thank you!