Morgan: My name is Morgan Lindenschmidt, M-O-R-G-A-N L-I-N-D-E-N-S-C-H-M-I-D-T, and it is April 14th, 2022. I am interviewing Linda Nelson.

Linda: Hi, I'm Linda Nelson. L-I-N-D-A N-E-L-S-O-N.

Morgan: Thank you, Linda. Alright, I was thinking we could get started maybe early on and kind of try to move linearly. If we want to start out by talking about your coming out process and how old you were when you did.

Linda: Great, sure. I came out to myself when I was 14, which was in 1975. It was not quite the same environment for coming out that it is now. It was not anywhere near as welcoming. There was not anywhere near as many visible queer people in the world but I recognized in myself that I was a lesbian, at that point. I came out to my parents when I was 17 so sometime later after I had gone to college and came home. Coming out was an interesting process. To come out to yourself and in that environment in the 1970s in the US. I'm not exactly sure–what I often say is that my mother took me when I was 12, this was before we could go see movies on our own, before we could stream movies, to see this movie called "The Way We Were." It featured Barbara Streisand and Robert Redford. It was a famous movie back then. A very old-fashioned kind of movie now. There was this love-making scene and I realized that I wanted to be Robert Redford with Barbara Streisand. All the rest of my classmates were totally like "Robert Redford," who was one of the most handsome actor of the timeframe. That was my initial lightbulb but after that I was really lucky. We're sitting here in a library and I was huge reader. A big fan of the public library. I took it upon myself to go and look at the card catalog under "L" for "lesbian." I found this wonderful book which I still recommend. It's by Jill Johnston, called "Lesbian Nation." I stole it from the library. I didn't–I actually checked it out and I never

returned it. It lived under my chair in my room. She was a writer at the Village Voice. I went on to work with the Village Voice. It was very formational for me, that book.

Morgan: I'd love to talk more about that book but before we get to that though, I wanted to ask you: did you feel safe coming out and telling people? Did you feel safe in how they would react?

Linda: No. I was an athlete and we already had an older classmate who I was friends with who had gotten caught with her girlfriend underneath the bleachers. She was one of my teammates. That had been a huge hysterical thing. We were all very aware of that. Aware of what that would mean. I did date somebody in high school. I dated a girl in high school starting when I was 15. Her mother did find some letters between us and we were forbidden to see each other. It was not a safe environment by any means. I never felt physically unsafe but in terms of possibly losing the sports that I loved or the friends that I had or my family, it felt very unsafe.

Morgan: How did you define your sexuality at the time? Would you have said queer or lesbian?

Linda: It's a good question. I've always said queer and I always loved queer but I'm not sure that's historically accurate. As I said, I went to the library and looked under "L" for "lesbian." I definitely think in the beginning I knew myself as a lesbian. I understood that quickly when I went to college in '79 as queer. Definitely defined that way.

Morgan: In your background notes that I was reading, you mentioned the lesbian bar The Evergreen in Hartford, CT. Is that where you grew up–in CT?

Linda: I did grow up in CT, going to Stonington High School. Ironic because I started the Stonington Opera House up here and live in Stonington. It is in Southeast CT. It's the town most on the border to Rhode Island. My older friend, she had gotten caught before I got caught, went on to the University of CT. Now we know the UConnn Women's basketball team as an icon. They win all the time. They've been champions for years. Back then, it was not that way.

Because I was two years younger than this friend of mine, she went off to college and I would go up to UConn to visit the whole basketball team and go up to Hartford. The school was 15 or 20 minutes from Hartford. That's where UConn is. We'd all traipse into the city together.

Morgan: The Evergreen was…

Linda: The Evergreen was one of the places we went.

Morgan: Was that the first bar you went to?

Linda: Totally the first one. This was in the day where the drinking age was only 18 but I was only 15. We all had fake IDs and stuff to get in. Must have looked like babies. I can't even imagine how we got in there but we did and it was a very important place for me. I got to be who I was. I was very young at that point. It was great to be in the bars. I loved the bar scene.

Morgan: Was that one of the first spaces where you felt safe and where you felt like yourself fully?

Linda: Totally. There was just a great culture. It was the 70s. It was disco. It was dancing. We could all just be who we were without worrying about getting caught. We could flirt with each other. We could make out with each other. Especially for me. I'm still a butch lesbian. I've always been a butch lesbian, which is why I consider myself queer. Being trans wasn't an option then and even though it is an option today, I very much like being a butch lesbian and owning that. Being a queer woman and owning my womaness but just queering it, as opposed to feeling like I gotta be a binary. I was always a little butch. I got confused for a boy a lot growing up. I still do when I have my hair this short. My voice is low and I have a stocky presence. I get called "sir" all the time.

Morgan: Sounds like from early on you weren't able to be straight-passing so you were put into–

Linda: Yeah.

Morgan: You grew up in CT. I noticed you talked a bit about Bowdoin College in Brunswick. Did you end up going to college there?

Linda: That's where I ended up going tos school. It's what brought me to ME. Its ultimately what brought me back because I lived in New York City for 16 years after graduating from Bowdoin and I really wanted to give back to ME. I felt like I got a great education here. It was a real privilege. I felt like I owed the state something so I alway wanted to come back and do something for the state.

Morgan: Did you find community–I noticed you talked about Gay-Straight Alliance. Do you want to talk a little bit about your involvement and finding a community and support system at Bowdoin?

Linda: Yeah, I got there in 1979. It's important to note that women had only been on campus since 1971. We just celebrated the 50th anniversary of women at Bowdoin. I was cochair of the host committee for that because of my experience, particularly of being a woman there was different than the other women there who were the forerunners there. Bowdoin, I don't know how much you know about it but it's a very privileged place. I'm definitely a working class girl from the bars. I'm a softball dyke from the bars. Bowdoin had been an all-male school. Because I was working-class, I had no idea really how to choose a college and no support from my family. I mean, they wanted me to go to college so they were supportive of my going to college but they weren't able to say, "well, consider Smith or Wellesley or somewhere where there's all women." Nobody was doing that. I ended up going to Bowdoin because my–there were many teachers in CT that had moved down from ME because the pay for teachers was so bad here. I had a lot of teachers from ME in CT. One of them was my high school history teacher, whose sister worked at the Bowdoin Library. He was like, "Bowdoin is going to the perfect place for you." He said,

“go up and see it.” So I packed my parents and my girlfriend and I and drove up to Brunswick. It used to seem like it took 7 hours but it could not have possible because it doesn’t take 7 hours today so it couldn’t have taken 7 hours then. It felt like a long drive. My girlfriend and I were actually cuddled up under a blanket in the back of the car, in the backseat. I fell in love with the campus when I got there. It was everything I thought of college but what did I know? I knew I didn’t want to go to UConn. I had experienced the University of CT and it was too big for me. I’m too small to be a division one athlete. I had applied early admission and I never applied anywhere else. There I was in a very, very patriarchal, masculine environment that was very misogynistic, very racist and I was my young queer self. Luckily, in my very first year, I met another working-class woman and she became one of my roommates and best friends. She and I saved each other’s lives. We hooked up with the Bowdoin Women’s Association first and we did see ourselves as feminists, first and foremost. That was where our political orientation was. Then after the women’s association, we were part of the founding of the Gay-Straight Alliance. It was important for us to have a place to be together. In fact, several of us founded what we called the Women’s Resource Center, which is now the Center for Sexuality, Women, and Gender. It’s an actual building and we lived there my sophomore year. Really created a safe-space for ourselves. It was not a safe environment. Underwent a lot of harassment.

Morgan: I can only imagine. I actually live in Brunswick and have actually walked past that building many times.

Linda: 24 College Street.

Morgan: So you were a founder of both the Women’s Resource Center and the Gay-Straight Alliance?

Linda: Yeah, I was a less active founder of the GSA. I was very actively a founder of the Women's Resource Center. I was one of the founders of the GSA in its very first years at the end of the late 70s.

Morgan: You said you started it mainly to create a safe space and sense of support system, and that you were aware of a feeling of misogyny and homophobia on the–

Linda: Totally. Let's see now, women had only been there for 8 years and the fraternity system at Bowdoin was ferocious and very dangerous and toxic for women and for gay people. Women got raped a lot. Gay men were routinely harassed. We were followed. They tried to burn the Women's Center down at one point. We had threatening phone calls for a whole year. We had people, other friends of ours, move in with us because we were all feeling like we needed to live together to protect ourselves. The friend I'm staying with here in Portland, she always says "I can't believe you'd come back and do anything at this college." It was pretty fucking horrible when I was there. Socially and culturally. I got a great education and I recognize that. It has made me into a person who believes I can do what I need to do in the world so I give it credit for that. That's where my loyalty comes from but culturally and socially it was hideous.

Morgan: It sounds like you felt more unsafe at Bowdoin, as both a woman and a lesbian, than you did growing up. Would you say that's right?

Linda: Well, I became more active and more out. As you get older, you recognize danger in a different way. Again, as a butch lesbian, I carry a kind of maleness in the world. That's kind of like balls-to-the-wall. I'm going to do what I'm going to do. I've been like that for whatever reason since I've been a kid. I really didn't recognize the danger I don't think before I got to college. It was only, well, experiencing, being around women who were being raped and sexually harassed, being harassed. That's where I really recognized that.

Morgan: Would you describe it as a political awakening, connecting your life to politics?

Linda: Oh my gosh, yes. I know I shouldn't be nodding because that can't be recorded. I totally had a political awakening at college. I was a working-class dyke. I was a jock. I played semi-pro softball in CT and pretty much everyone I played with was a woman but they were very closeted. If you look at women's sports today–I don't want to stereotype but if you look at the long hair and the makeup, all the accouterments, what basketball players in particular go through. That's still all masking. Those women don't look like that when they're not on the court, trust me. I used to hang out with them. The level of disdain for strong women in our society is still pretty fierce. I was just thinking about this today, how we don't often call it enough by its name anymore. We don't say, "hey, patriarchy still exists and its part of our intersectional oppressions." We need to call it out. I just look at some of these young athletes–you saw what the women soccer players went through with pay. Women still make 77 cents on the dollar. It's still out there. I actually just experienced it very recently, in terms of how a board of directors treated me and different types of disdain that would not be shown to a man.

Morgan: You brought up being working-class. At least Bowdoin now has the stereotype of being the wealthier, privileged college. Was it then and did you become aware that you were working-class when you went to Bowdoin or did you go in knowing?

Linda: Bowdoin has always been an elite school. Hawthorne and Longfellow went there. Presidents have gone there. It's always been the home of the dominant culture: white, cis, male, elite. That is Bowdoin through-and-through. It's about as blue blood as you get. Again, I just want to be clear for the recording, I can be critical of it and still support the institution. They've done a great job diversifying. It's much different there now for women and for queer people. That was then, this is now. I'm proud of the work they've done and I'm proud of the education I

got there. But, no, I grew up on a campground. Literally. Both my parents only had a high school educations, high school degrees. It was very clear back then. In Stonington–I'm not sure if you've seen the movie Mystic Pizza, it's from the 80s. It's totally worth watching. It's shot in Mystic, CT, where I grew up and it captures it pretty quickly. Stonington used to be a Portugese fishing community back in the day when I was growing up there. There were those of us who were the landscapers, the campground attendants, the maids, the whatever. The rich people would come from Boston and NY because we were midway, right between them in the summer. We knew what we were. I was too young. It was kind of like being a woman and going to this school. I didn't know enough how to make sense of any of that, my different choices. Would I have been more comfortable at Southern CT Community College? Yeah, I probably would have been. But would I have achieved everything I've done today because of the great connections and great stuff I did at Bowdoin? I don't know. That's the beauty of one of those institutions. It takes it seriously and gives you a lot of opportunity, if you can survive it.

Morgan: Especially you being so early on. I'm still blown away at what you had said earlier about 1971 being the first that they let women go so you were still in those early years–not to even mention the working-class and being a lesbian. Just being a woman in the first place.

Linda: When I look back, I think to myself, "what the hell was I thinking?" Obviously, I didn't know what to think. I was too young and I didn't know enough about the world. Like I said, it wasn't like my parents had gone to college or any of my relatives. I wasn't thinking like that.

Morgan: So you talk about having a political awakening while in college. Immediately after graduation, did you also continue that involvement in politics and political activism?

Linda: I did. I have to credit my peers at Bowdoin. Certainly, the late-70s were a time of political awakening. It was still the hippy years. They had just pulled out of Vietnam in '75. I grew up in

the Watergate years. One of the first things I remember watching on TV was Nixon being impeached. There was a political atmosphere. Feminism was very, very strong in the 70s. As was the queer movement. It was, what, ‘68 or ‘69 that Stonewall happened. People look at the history of the queer movement and second wave feminism, its the 70s. So in ‘79, when I got the Bowdoin, radical feminism was super, super strong. I wholly recognized something. I was brought up as a social justice Catholic. I still am a practicing Catholic. I’m like a Dorothy Day Catholic. People who know who Dorothy Day is. I believe in helping, always, those with the least amount of us. The analysis that feminism brought to my intellectual growth was: this was a way to look at the world and see the oppressed, oppressors. To understand the hierarchies and the domination. Racism, we were intersectional before that word existed. We recognized that Black people, people of color, women, gay people, that we were all suffering under the same system. The big umbrella of it is capitalism. There were some great books out at the time that fed that. There was great music. I have actually never gone back on that. It has been a study trajectory for me of political growth, activism from that point. I’ve never stopped. I’ve never gone back. I took a semester off, I went to Wesleyan down in CT. They had a very strong feminist house, as well as an ethno-musicology department. I was a musician too. I worked on a feminist newspaper there. I just found copies the other day. We had a feminist paper and an anti-capitalist paper we put out at Bowdoin called “To the Root.” I found copies of that the other day in my archives. I was wondering what to do with them. I was thinking I should send you copies.

Morgan: Absolutely.

Linda: I’m pretty sure Bowdoin has it in the archives because of the Women’s Center. I’ve always been a writer and a journalist. Kind of like a muckraker. Make this stuff visible and let’s change the world. Make it better. So after I took some time off and went back and graduated

from Bowdoin with this whole cornucopia of credit from a variety of places. I was a dropout and then a hippy. I got something from the University of ME in Augusta. I got an English credit. I got some credits at Wesleyan. I got some credits at UMass Amherst. I moved to Northampton, MA because I wanted to work for this radical feminist journal called "Trivia." That was very intentional, like "I'm a writer, I'm a radical feminist lesbian, I'm queer, I'm going to do this work." That journal is filled with this very queer, feminist ideology and critique of the dominant culture. I'm proud of all that work.

Morgan: How would you describe what you mean when you say radical feminism and why do you think it attracted you early on?

Linda: That's a great question. I was thinking about it when I was using the term. It's almost jargony, right? What does that mean? To me what it meant at the time, and I still hold on to this–I know today we're seeing all the oppressions and they do intersect. But we do see that racism in this culture is very primary. I'm not sure that patriarchy is equally primary. That the opression of men over women is at the root of a lot of our dominant culture. To me, they sit side by side and they share the same greed of capitalism. The same desire to acquire wealth. But it is an understanding of the world in which men have created a hierarchy of power over women. What feminism is a theory of liberation. It used to be, back when I came out, "women's lib." Wasn't just feminism. It was women's liberation because in the '70s women were recognizing that they wanted to be free from marriage, free from having kids, wanted to be free to make as much money as men. That's how different the world is now. A lot of that we don't question. I'm guessing some of that you don't even question and I'm so glad of that. That means that 40 years of work has resulted in something. We have changed the world so that young women coming after us don't have to deal with some of those same issues, in the same way. That's what

feminism meant to me. Radical feminism–I was a radical lesbian seperatist feminist for several years and I still have leanings that way, honestly. Like, “come on, guys, pay the fuck attention.” Excuse my language.

Morgan: You’re fine.

Linda: I’m a saucy girl. In creating a Women’s Center, it was for women to have a separate space. That was a really important thing. It was like, “you know what, you guys have the fraternities, you have the whole campus, we have no space here, we have no space to be who we are authentically without you interrupting us, talking over us, criticizing us, harassing us.” Whatever. It was intense. That was the intent of the Women’s Center. Part of my radical lesbian seperatism was because I didn’t want to live in this patriarchical context. You guys can do whatever you want but I’m going to make my own world.

Morgan: That’s how you were first introduced to feminism through being a lesbian and Jill Johnston, who was a seperatist lesbian. In case people don’t know, talk about what separatist feminism is.

Linda: It’s really the rejection of men and all things male, which is a little hard for a butch lesbian. When the fur started to fly, when people got angry or hurt, they would say, “you’re being like a man.” So we have to recognize that there are qualities and behaviors that are oppressive and that we can all do them, including myself. I can carry some of that forward. I ended up working in corporate NY at Village Voice. I learned some of the worst techniques for how to dominate and get what I wanted and be a leader in some ways. Radical lesbian seperatism was really like, “we don’t need men, we don’t want them, we’re not going to live with them. We’re creating our own world with our own values and those are matriarchal values. Those prioritize women. They prioritize women and we don’t want any part of this dominant culture.” Nowadays

there's a lot of critique of the dominant culture, particularly in anti-racist movements but we were like, "the dominant culture is [illegible] to us." It's a big piece of capitalism and a big piece of patriarchy and racism.

Morgan: Sounds like you pieced together a lot of different credits to graduate. You graduate, what happens next? You talk about going to work at Village Voice, which is corporate NY, but then I have a couple other places like Women Against Nukes, Women's Pentagon Action. What happened next after graduation?

Linda: I got involved with the Women Anti-War Movement in college. I had a friend, Lori Freedman, and her lover named Susan, last name I'm not going to remember. They created a handbook for women against nukes. It's a great booklet. We were recognizing the intersectionality of the oppressions. We saw that the environmental issues and man's impact on the environment, particularly through war but also through nuclear power, was another completely damaging, murderous thing. We were anti-war, anti-nuke. We demonstrated to shut down AVA in Wiscasset, demonstrated to shut Seabrook down in NH. It was after I moved to MA that I did Women's Pentagon Action, which was for women to encircle the Pentagon to make a statement that this is not our world. You've created a world that is poisonous and toxic and deathly. We believe in something different.

Morgan: That was right after finishing college, starting that?

Linda: I had taken time off. I was the class of '83. I didn't walk until '83 but in '84, I arrived to Northampton and began to work for Trivia as an intern. Ultimately became coeditor and editor in the late 80s, early 90s. I also worked for the daily New Hampshire News Ed, so I was furthering my journalism career. But I stayed involved with radical lesbian seperatism because Trivia was that. I went there to work. Trivia was based in the same time where Adrienne Rich lived and

Audre Lorde and Mary Daly. A lot of the big names of radical feminism and lesbianism where people we published, people I met, knew, and worked with over those years. And was influenced by and mentored by. They made who I was becoming and who I still am becoming.

Morgan: I definitely recognized a couple of those names. You mentioned Mary Daly and Audre Lorde. Did you meet both of those people? What was that like? Can you tell me about either of them?

Linda: I lived in Northampton for a couple of years, until '85 and then I moved to NY. In NY, not only did I work for the Village Voice–which became corporate but honestly the Village Voice was the most radical paper in the country for a long time. It was a great place to grow up because all the queer artists were there and all the queer people were there. That's where Jill Johnston wrote for. Allen Ginsberg wrote for that paper. It was an incredible place for me to land. I was so lucky. I was also pursuing my own writing and I got involved in the women's poetry scene in the Village. That's how I met Audre, Adrienne Rich, Jewelle Gomez who's an African-American poet and novelist and mentor. An incredible mentor, friend, and lover of mine. I was lucky. I was on the young end. I met Dorothy Allison. I was friends with Dorothy Allison in those days. I was in the right place at the right time.

Morgan: You moved to NY in the 80s, is that right?

Linda: '85.

Morgan: How did you get the Village Voice job? You were a journalist, right? That's what you were doing?

Linda: Yeah but I actually didn't get hired there as a journalist. My girlfriend at the time was a photographer and we always dreamed of living in NY as artists. In '85, NY was not as expensive and beautiful as it is now. It was trashy and awful and we loved it. We could afford to live there.

We moved into this slum that we restored ourselves. That slum is now called Williamsburg today and there are huge high-price condos there. It was full of junkies and prostitutes. It was great. Totally great. Loved it. The other thing is we were sexual radicals. We believed that sex was a good thing so we slept with a lot of people. So did our gay male friends. Then we went through the holocaust that was AIDs, which was just really hitting in ‘85. Between ‘85 and ‘95, by working at the Village Voice and being associated, we were just going to funerals all the time. I still can’t talk about it without crying. It was a pretty awful thing.

Morgan: I can’t imagine. You’re talking about finding empowerment through sex radicalism and then of course the time–

Linda: A lot of people my age didn’t get to experience the sexual freedom in the bars because I came out so young, so I’m right at the cusp. I’m the youngest one in my group. All the women I named are all older than I was. My gay male friends, the ones that are my age, didn’t experience the kind of freedom in the bars that I did. If I had waited until I was 21, AIDs was already happening in ‘83 or ‘82. It was just starting then. It was by virtue of my coming out so young and being in the bars so young that I got to experience that freedom. AIDs didn’t really hit the lesbian community in the same way. I mean it did and we took safe sex precautions. I was tested several times. It was not where it was hitting. We still believed in sexual freedom. We still slept with everybody. I still believe in the positivity of sex and sexuality. I still ascribe to that. It’s interesting watching was is still not normative in our culture and those beliefs are still radical.

Morgan: I’ve heard of sex positivity. It’s a little more talked about. Do you think that sex positivity is still radical or have you felt a big shift from the 80s to now?

Linda: Well, AIDs forced some shift and that began to circle back around with ATV. The medications that kept AIDs at bay. Men began to be more open with their sexuality but there was

definitely a shut down of the sexual world with AIDs. We all felt it. It shut down the culture because what we all had been doing in the bars was no longer safe. Safe sex was safe sex. I think things did get more conservative for a while. I don't think we live in a sex positive culture. I think it's way better than when I grew up and way better than the 80s and the Reagan years but we live under these Republican administrations. Look what's happening with abortion. Look what's happening with trans people. No, we don't live in a sex positive culture. We live in an oppressive culture still that doesn't want queer people to be queer or say the word "gay" in the state of Florida. Doesn't want kids to be introduced to anything other than heterosexual sex and believes that the Bible dictates all that. We have a lot of conservatism around sex.

Morgan: You were 21 in 1982, right?

Linda: Yeah.

Morgan: You went through those young adult years right in the middle of HIV and a lot of cultural changes. Did you work at the Village Voice throughout the 80s and 90s?

Linda: I worked for the Village Voice for 13 years, from '85 to '98. I was there the whole time. It put me right at the center of NY queer culture, downtown culture, the arts scene. I was a downtown NY artist. I read on this poetry circuit. I just found this old flier the other day. We didn't have computers. We didn't have laptops. I found this mimeographed flier for a reading we did. We didn't have these things–no cellphones. Culturally–I know I sound like an old person. I don't feel like an old person but so much has changed. It's pretty remarkable. Along with that material change, has come some good, progressive changes for people. I never thought I'd see gay marriage in my life. I'm still not a huge marriage fan but I believe in social justice. So many rights are tied to marriage. I believe that everyone should have the right to equitable

opportunities to have the same rights as everyone else. It was a different world, for sure. The world of the Village Voice was a great place to be.

Morgan: Could you have even imagined gay marriage being legal when you went to Bowdoin or even younger than that when you went to CT? Was that even something you had imagined would happen?

Linda: No. I think it was in 1987. KD Lang was on the cover of New York Magazine. KD Lang is a queer, lesbian singer and all of a sudden she was on the cover of New York Magazine. She had become a pop hit. We were all like, “oh my god.” The level of visibility. Stuff like that kept happening. It felt really slow, I have to say, and change still does feel really slow to me. I reeled off that whole list of things that still haven't changed for women, right? But it does happen. It is very incremental. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said “the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice.” I’m like, “why is the arc so big and wide?” We have more of a steep arc. I can’t remember your original question so I think I’m off base.

Morgan: No, just talking about gay marriage and visibility. Is that something that has definitely changed? At least from my perspective, it seems like it has changed.

Linda: Yes.

Morgan: Since the 1980s and earlier than that?

Linda: Oh my god. Again, forgive me for sounding like an old person. I can’t believe it when I turn on the TV and see advertising that’s got gay couples in it. Or TV shows where being gay is totally normative. This is the outcome of all that work we did. If we hadn’t been pushing those boundaries, making ourselves visible, and taking those risks, we wouldn’t be here today. It was 1984 that Charlie Howard, who was a young gay man, that got thrown off the bridge and murdered in Bangor. It was the year that I basically left ME and moved to Northampton. As with

racism, the threat of lynching–it's terrorism. The threat of violence is terrorism. Women have been terrorized through domestic violence and rape. People of color have been terrorized and gay people have been terrorized. To confront that and increase visibility so that we can have these normative images of gay couples, gay lives, gay families. Gay people can adopt children in some states. Not in every state, I just want to say. In ME, we're pretty lucky. We live in a pretty progressive place. At the end of a progressive region: New England. On the border of a progressive country: Canada. I just traveled in AZ and SC. It's really different there. If you were interviewing a gay person of my age from down there, they might have a very different story to tell about how they feel today. But, yeah, I actually worked for gay marriage twice here in the state in the 2000s. We did get it passed and then it was overturned through a citizen's–what do we call them? I hate them. Citizen's initiative. So then we had to go back out and I actually went door to door in this very poor community in Ellsworth, which is downeast where I live. I was scared. I was, god, how old was I? I was 40-something and I was in this pretty poor neighborhood with dogs and guys in pickup trucks. People I lived with and I felt comfortable around them. Except I was knocking on their doors and asking them to vote for gay marriage. I realized I was putting myself at risk again.

Morgan: Were you getting negative responses when you were going door-to-door? Was it mainly positive? How were the responses?

Linda: I would say it was, "meh." People didn't really see their connection to it. Especially because it was a poorer neighborhood so there were people really focused on their own survival. As a practicing Catholic, the bishop here totally came out against it and used the pulpits to lobby against it. Sent videos to the local parishes against gay marriage and I actually protested in my church. Anytime they did that from the pulpit, I stood up and walked out very loudly and very

obviously. I was stand outside with my back to it. I wrote letters to all my fellow congregation members. Asked them to support gay marriage and said how wrong it was for the bishop to be doing this because Christianity is about love. Jesus was about love. Jesus was murdered for love and for humanity. I don't see my Christianity at odds with being a queer person. I see it being in sync with it. The people that are homophobic and racist and misogynist are the ones that are out of sync with Christianity in my view.

Morgan: Was it hard to have leaders in your faith being discriminatory towards a group your part of? Was that painful for your or did you just always know that it was wrong and that you were going to fight against it?

Linda: I stopped going to church when I was 14 because I came out and was like, "this is a fucking male institution and I'm not doing it anymore." Then what happened in my late 30s after being disassociated from the faith for 20-something years, I just really missed the liturgy. I've always loved being around people who are different from me. I've never wanted to be around people who are the same as me so I started going to church again for the community of it. But I recognized through conversations with my mother, who raised me Catholic and was a very strict Catholic–I mean, she even read some of the work I did in Trivia that was anti-religion, anti-church, and was like, "oh, I get what you're saying. The church is a man-made institution. My faith is in the raspberry patch." I was like, "love you, mom. True for me too." I've been able to separate and criticize the church hierarchy as an institution, and keep my faith and my love for the liturgy I was raised with.

Morgan: Talk about the "raspberry patch." What does she mean by that? Is that something you feel like also resonates with you?

Linda: Totally. It was one of the best things she ever said. I was living in a Brooklyn neighborhood. In the 90s, she would take the train from CT on Mother's Day every year and come to visit me. That was the closest we ever were. I was pretty alienated from my family throughout the 80s. It was just too homophobic. I regret that now because I lost a lot of years with my parents. My parents were older parents. I'm adopted. They were in their late 30s when they adopted me so I lost some valuable years with them when they were in their 60s and 70s while they were still healthy. She began coming on the train for this once a year thing. I would tell her what I was doing and I introduced her to–I was totally out with her at that point–introduced her to a lot of stuff. We were walking past a Catholic church on 6th Avenue in Brooklyn. I asked her if she was still going to church. It was after we had a lot of conversations about church and I tried explaining my own alienation from it. She said, "no, I really see what you've been saying. They used to tell us that eating meat on Friday was a sin. Not wearing a hat in church was a sin. Then all that changed. These were men's rules. These are the rules of the institutions. But I still have faith in God. I feel closest to him when I'm in my raspberry patch." We had a little raspberry patch out in our backyard. Basically she meant her garden. When you're in the natural world, we are closest to God. That is where God lives the most clearly.
Morgan: You were alienated from both your family and faith during the 80s. I'm trying to do the math–was it mid-90s when you started going back to the Catholic church?
Linda: Yeah, a little bit in my last years in NY. It was very much when I moved up here to ME and Deer Isle. I live on this island. I was really missing my parents. My dad died in 2002. I just wanted a connection to who I was raised to be. I also wanted to know people in a different way in my community. I really valued the heterogeneity in the community. Yes, it's all white and it's very varying in class, religion, different things. I was working on starting this nonprofit, The

Opera House Arts, and opening this theater. We were seeing people that like the arts and who shared our progressive values. I found that by going to the Catholic church, none of those people came to the Opera House so I got to know a whole different group of people. I'm a real community development person at heart. Where I was doing a lot of community development work was just in the queer community as a radical lesbian seperatist with women. I've really morphed that into the community where I live. That's when I started to go back and practice more.

Morgan: When you went back to the church in your 30s, were you nervous at all about having this butch identity? Did you go in thinking you would get resistance or pushback, or did you think you would be accepted when you went back?

Linda: I would have been in my 40s already and by that time I was like, "I am who I am." To quote a bad Harvey Firestein quote. Nothing scares me anymore. I lived in NY in a slum. I used to have to walk around with my keys through my fingers because I was a short, blonde woman in a completely different kind of environment. I had to have my wits about me all the time. I recognized that the streets were dangerous. I learned to believe in myself and that I could survive. Luckily I haven't been murdered yet.

Morgan: We're glad for that.

Linda: I want to say, it's there for the grace of God or for the grace of whatever. People like Charlie Howard. People have been murdered. I've worked for a domestic violence shelter for a while. A good friend of mine who is 64 just died who was sexually trafficked when she was 12. Bad shit happens to people. I've been one of the lucky ones. I give thanks for that all the time. I try to make a safer world for other people.

Morgan: Sounds like you've lived so much of your life under this threat of–you mentioned some sexual violence at Bowdoin and gay bashing. Then in NY with your key between your fingers. Is this a constant throughout your life? Having the threat of violence and being attacked mainly by men?

Linda: Yeah. That's probably right. I don't think about it that concretely. Because of the work I've done and the people I've known. Dorothy Allison, good friend of mine, her novel "Bastard Out of Carolina" is about her sexual abuse. I know more women who have been sexually abused then not quite honestly. The statistics are that 25% of all women have been sexually abused. I'm hoping that you're asking that question because you don't feel that. I'm hoping we've gotten the world to a place where young women don't feel like they're living under that threat of violence all the time. I think that I have felt like that for most of my life. I've worked to change it as much as I can.

Morgan: I have to ask about Dorothy Allison. Did you meet Dorothy Allison in NY?

Linda: Yeah, she was part of my writing world.

Morgan: So many greats.

Linda: I know. I edited Gloria Anzaldua, who is the author of "Borderlands." That's one of the most important books to me. She is a Mexican-American author. If you don't know her, I totally recommend that book. I got to edit and work with a lot of great people. I worked with Dorothy a little bit. I edited Jewelle Gomez' "The Gilda Stories," which won a LAMBDA literary award for best literature. They're actually making a TV show of it right now, so that's pretty cool. I've had a charmed, magical, lesbian experience in my life. When I tell the story like this, I'm like, "am I making this up or did that really happen?" I don't want to sound at all like I'm bragging because I'm not. I'm really not. I've been lucky with who I've gotten to know.

Morgan: After NY, you moved back to ME. There was another gay bar you had mentioned but this one in Portland. It was called "The One-Way."

Linda: That was when I was in college.

Morgan: Back in college? Okay. So you discovered it in college. I had a question about gay bars. Many have closed in recent years.

Linda: Totally.

Morgan: Do you think that has had an impact on the lesbian/gay community?

Linda: It's had an impact on me. I really miss them. I was a major bar person in NY. I played softball again when we moved to NY. All those writers I'd mentioned, we'd hangout in the bars, we'd makeout in the bars, we'd have sex in the bathroom. We'd have sex on the subway. We would dance. We could do that because we were in these gay spaces, queer spaces. Women's bars. A lot of them women-only queer spaces. A couple gay men would hangout. I totally miss that environment. I don't think younger people do as much. I think the world is more open and people feel more comfortable in mixed environments. It's because I'm older and my experience–I don't feel the same in a straight bar, in a mixed bar, as I did in a queer bar. I loved, loved the gay bars. I miss them.

Morgan: Do you think younger generations, both women and queer people, take for granted some of the rights we have and underestimate how much older generations put work in to make our lives so much safer now?

Linda: Yes, but I think you should. That's what we wanted for you guys. You should take that for granted. You should take safety for granted. You should take equality for granted. You should take that the doors are open for you–that's the way the world should be. It's the way it always should have been. I always appreciate it when younger people want to know about the past. I was

a history major myself. Understanding the past helps to inform how we are in the present. More young people might be activists if they understood how activism it actually took to create this. When you don't understand that it didn't just happen, it's not like the world just evolved to this point. There was very intentional, specific, political, persistent action that made this happen and we still need to do that for climate change, racism. We still need to be working on these issues and working collectively the way we did. That's what I worry about the most with young people. I fear that we don't have the same sense of collective politics–that we can actually change things. I've been doing it through art for the last 20 years and leading conversations. Sometimes I think we need to be back in the streets. The way the Republicans are proceeding with voting rights. I'm thinking about going down to a state that has been restricting voting rights, restricting abortion and seeing what I can do as an activist to help in those areas. There's still a lot we need to change. Still a lot we can change. I'd love to see more young people radicalized feeling like they have the capacity and the right and the fury and the passion to do that. To stand up to the man.

Morgan: It might be hard to say but do you think that young people are less political than when you were younger? It sounds like it was such a politically charged time with everyone talking about politics. Do you think people are talking about politics less now?

Linda: There's a couple of big things, right? The anti-racism, working for BIPOC stuff especially since George Floyd's murder two years ago. I think that movement has been super important. There's been a lot of young people of color that have been working in that movement. I'm less clear that the intersectionality of issues is as strong as it was. We can't let Greta Thunberg be the only young person talking about climate change. I know we're all worried about it and I'm not trying to criticize at all. There's less of a sense of collectivity. We've been divided. The

demonstrations we were able to have, even the act up demonstrations in the AIDs era in the late 80s, early 90s, you don't see those happening anymore. There's been some shit that's gone down that we should–I'm worried about the voting rights thing. Seriously worried about climate change. We don't have the move on different political activisms. It could be that they're just not speaking my language and they are speaking to young people. There are young people that are really involved but it seems like more digital involvement. More electronic involvement, less community-based action. I'm a community-based action person.

Morgan: That's an interesting distinction between digital activism and actually getting in the streets and connecting with community members. That was the only type of protesting happening.

Linda: Yeah.

Morgan: After you left NY and came back to ME, what was the decision like? You said you wanted to give back to ME. Was that why you moved back in the 90s?

Linda: I lived in NY for a total of 16 years. I was at the Voice for 13 of those. In 1998, I moved back here because it was a seduction. I had met a new woman in '97, who was getting her PhD in Performance Studies at NYU. We had met in a writing group. She was going to move back West. She had three kids and she was from CO. She was going to get her degree and go back West. I fell in love with her and I didn't want her to go back West because I didn't want to go West. I was like, "let's go on vacation to ME, it's the prettiest place I know. I want to show you the most beautiful place I know." So I rented this place back in the day, when I was here in college during the early 80s, I had rented a house by a lesbian, feminist musician named Kate Gardner. She's since died of a heart attack. She was a wonderful flute player. She played with Alice Dobson, another lesbian seperatist singer. Anyway, she had a house in Stonington. She and her girlfriend

ran it. It was called “Seno’s Home.” We used to have lesbian bed-and-breakfasts in those days. That was a lesbian bed and breakfast. They smoked weed on the porch and only women stayed there. It was beautiful. Looks out at the whole harbor in Stonington. Right from above the Opera House, which is what I ended up doing for the last 20 years. I took my new love up–I rented a house. I was the chief information officer at the Voice at that time. I could afford to rent a vacation home for a couple weeks. She fell in love with the place. It was the most successful seduction I ever made. She is still, I don’t like the term wife, she is still my partner. She is the person I live with. We’ve been together for 25 years. Very successful seduction. We also saw this old opera house that was decaying and falling down to the ground on that trip. I had just left the Voice and was starting as chief executive officer for a consulting firm. I was in a transitory space. We saw this opera house. We had some friends that had grown up around there and had told us to look at it. We came back and were like, “so, do you want to do the opera house?” They were like, “what, are you crazy?” It was falling down and raccoon-infested. It had been abandoned for eight years on this island with 3,000 people. It was this crazy idea and we did it. We’ve been living up there ever since then.

Morgan: You’re still doing the Opera House now?

Linda: I’m not. I did it for 17 years. I’m a serial entrepreneur. I wanted the next generation to take over. In 2015, I left there to work for the Maine Arts Commission as the Assistant Director and then I was the Deputy Director here at the Portland Ovations because I wanted to work in the city again with diverse populations. Then last year I quit it all because I was like, “I don’t want to do this anymore.” I’ve been writing a book. I got my CNA license and I’m doing all this other stuff. We’ve lived in the same house for over 20 years. We’re part of that community. It’s been a great thing.

Morgan: Writing has been a constant through all of this for you?

Linda: Writing and editing. Took it into filmmaking at the Opera House. We had a public digital media studio. I transferred some of my writing skills into producing films and telling stories through film and theater. Basically I would say I'm a storyteller and I have a lot of different mediums.

Morgan: Thank you so much for sharing so much of your life and also career. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Linda: Well, I feel bad because I thought you guys were looking for more Portland-centric. When I talked to Wendy and we did a walking tour here of Portland-centric history and obviously I don't have a lot of that. The One-Way I do want to say was a fantastic bar and we used to come down to Brunswick because it was close enough, you can come down. Portland, there was nothing going on. Part of what happened in the 70s was that there was terrible recession and inflation. All of our cities and towns got blown out. They were empty and vacant. Not the vibrant places they are today. The One-Way, I used to think it was down on Commercial St. When we took that walking tour, it seems like it may have been up the next street on Middle St. I just remember it being so dark. We would go in and the gay men would be doing poppers and dancing. We'd all be there dancing. It was great to be young there.

Morgan: Was that the only lesbian or gay bar that you were aware of? In Portland, at least?

Linda: It was the only one that I was aware of. We at one point ventured into Augusta to what we heard was a gay bar there. Turned out to be a biker bar. Full of guys. Maybe they were gay, I don't know but it was very tricky. They used to have gay dances up in Belfast at the Unitarian Church. We would drive all the way up there. We just got used to driving around a lot because there was nothing in Brunswick, that's for sure, and not very much here in Portland.

Morgan: Thank you for telling me about the One-Way. I noticed it in your notes. It's interesting to hear about how in different decades there are different bars open. A couple other people who have been interviewed, there had been some more open in the 80s. That might have already been once you moved.

Linda: I would have been coming down here in the '79, '81. From the history walking tour that I took from Wendy, I think it might have only been open for a short amount of time but it was in a space that became other things. I can't remember the names of all the things it became. It was right around the corner from where the Nickelodeon is now. At least according to this tour. I didn't quite remember it there but that was a long time ago so I don't know. There were gay bars. I had been to Blackstones in the day. The Flask. A few years ago, I was seeing somebody else too because we're sex positive people and was at The Flask dancing and having a good time. We used to say that the bars were really central to gay culture because they were joyful. You could dance. It was about dancing and bodies. That real physicality. Being in community together. Yeah, it was around alcohol and there were drugs so there was some not good shit going on but for a lot of us they were pretty important.

Morgan: It's making me curious where those spaces are for joy in the queer community. Seems a little lacking in some ways.

Linda: EQ ME is starting a community center. My friend Chris O'Connor is working for them. Have you interviewed Dale McCormick?

Morgan: I'm not sure. I'll have to check. It doesn't ring a bell but that doesn't necessarily mean we haven't.

Linda: Check it out. She's older than I am. She's in her 70s. She was instrumental in starting Equality ME. The one thing we did have in Brunswick was Dale because she started a women's

house building program called Cornerstones and she used to have lavender tea dances in Brunswick. She’s a good source. That was in the early 80s.

Morgan: I have that name down. I’ll pass it on to Wendy.

Linda: I’m sure Wendy knows her. She became a state senator and head of ME State Housing for a while.

Morgan: Alright. Well, thank you so much! Anything else to say? Last words?

Linda: No, thank you for your interest in the old history. I’m glad if my stories can help delight and inform anybody. That’s the main thing about stories, right?