

<p>KATIE: Alright so then, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview with us, ah, just to start I want you to say and spell your name I will do mine first. I am Katie Prior K-A-T-I-E P-R-I-O-R. DAVID: And I am David Kersey D-A-V-I-D K-E-R-S-E-Y. And you are. GIA: And I'm not going to be able to remember your spelling of your names, but my name is Gia Drew G-I-A D-R-E-W. KATIE: And then if we can say all of our pronouns. GIA: So I use she, her, and hers KATIA: She, her, and hers for me DAVID: And I use he, him, and his KATIE: And just to verbally remind you again if at any point during the interview you don't want to answer a question, or you want to take a break, or you want to pause the interview all of those options are open for you so please verbalize that, and let us know at any point. Ah, okay. DAVID: Yeah, um KATIE: Anything else you want to say before we get started. DAVID: I think that covers all of our opening moments. GIA: Okay DAVID: I just want to say again thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview with us today, and making time for us in your busy schedule. KATIE: Laughing GIA: Happy to KATIE: So to start, to start with some personal history, I want to ask what year you were born in? GIA: Oh. laughing KATIE: If you're okay with that GIA: What I've been told, KATIE: or the decade All: Laughing GIA: What I've been told based on the record, what I've heard, and uh I was born in 1967 KATIE: okay and where were you born?</p>	<p>Intro, thanks Names Katie Prior David Kersey Joking Gia Drew Pronouns Gia: She, her, hers Katie: She, her, hers David: He, him, his Consent agreement Agreement Thanks Busy schedule Personal History Age Joking Born in 1967 St. Elizabeth Hospital Boston, Mass</p>
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GIA: I was born at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts

DAVID: okay, um, and what town or city did you grow up in? Did you also grow up in Boston?

GIA: I did not, you know, it's uh, as far as I know, you know like my family history, um my parents were living at the time in Watertown, Massachusetts, um, with their five children in a tiny little apartment and my mom was pregnant with me and so they moved out and moved to the neighboring town of Newton, Massachusetts and I was born in March of 1967. So I grew up in Newton, Massachusetts and uh went to school there K-12 and my parents still live in that same, stupid, house.

DAVID: wow

KATIE: How big is it, Newton?

GIA: Newton is a city of about 90 or 100,000 people its a large suburb that abuts Boston to the west

KATIE: How was your school like growing up?[00:02:42.04]

GIA: Uh, it depends, you know, so I walked, I remember walking to kindergarten in 1972, to Cabot Elementary School which is about four blocks from my house. By the time I went to kindergarten like I said I had five older brothers and sisters already in elementary school so when I started elementary school there were six of us at the same elementary school. One in every grade but first grade. Which is pretty, whatever, I don't know it seems normal to me, because I grew up in a neighborhood with very large families, so it seemed natural to have, like, big families. But I've learned looking back, and hearing about the town I grew up in, because you don't know when you're little what towns are like unless you're moving around, this is all I knew, this was the world that was presented to me. Apparently I grew up in a very progressive, uh, city. It valued education, and all sorts of really great things. So I thought I had a really good elementary school experience. It was a big town so there were something like 20-something elementary schools, there were six different middle schools, junior highs and then two high schools plus a few private schools and catholic schools in our town. But because we had family members in the neighboring towns and in the city, we would regularly visit ancestors and family members in neighboring towns and going to Boston a lot because my

Growing up

Family History
Watertown, Massachusetts
Mother, pregnant

Newton Massachusetts

K-12 School
Joking

Population of Newton
90,000-100,000
Suburb

School, growing up
Walked to school
Kindergarten: 1972
Cabot Elementary School
Close to home (4 blocks)
Family: four brothers
Community of siblings

Community: similar
Large families

Retrospective

Progressive city
Good education

Big town
20+ elementary schools
6 middle schools
2 high schools
A few private/Catholic schools

Visiting family members in

grandparents lived in Boston, my other grandparents lived in a different town and we were constantly moving around the Boston area. There was Newton which was home, but I got to know like, all of Boston, pretty quickly, as a young person.

KATIE: When you were in elementary school and your siblings were so close to you, what did that community feel like for you, did you have many friends outside your siblings, or did you guys kinda look out for each other?

GIA: Hm, that's a really cool question, so I grew up with this giant unit of a family of nine people, my sister was born in 1969 that we were our own like, traveling road show

KATIE and DAVID: Laughing

GIA: And we have plenty of cousins who are similar ages, I think I have about 20 or 30 cousins that are the same age. So there were a lot of family events that we would visit to and our parents would definitely, and we leaned on each other for support and help and we would celebrate holidays together, so it definitely was a family thing. But I also found quite a number of friends, um, from a very young age, in my school community, that I am still friends with today, in fact I am still very close friends with people I went to kindergarten with. Yeah, there's still a handful of one or two people that I still see or talk to every year that we actually went to kindergarten with. I had a family, that was actually fun to be around, and I actually do enjoy going home and hanging out with my brothers and sisters, which is kinda weird saying that, that we actually enjoy each other, in fact I was just at a Bruins game with three of my brothers the other day, which was really fun and we just celebrated my mom's 86th birthday the other day and we got together for a family event, so our family has always kinda gotten, enjoyed each other, there have been ups and downs but we like each other, but I've always had a separate friend group, um, that was either through school or through church or through, eventually college.

KATIE: What was that friend group like?

GIA: Well, it's interesting I've always been sort of the friend to everybody and so I was part of many different cliques growing up, so because I wore many hats growing up, uh, I grew up in a very competitive athletic catholic family and so, um, it was part of sports, everyone in my family was part of

neighboring towns and Boston
Grandparents

Idea of HOME
Boston

Question about community

“Traveling road show”
Perception of family
Joking
Sister born in 1969

20-30 cousins, similar ages

Family gatherings
Holidays
Family cohesion

Lots of friends
Still close to friends from Kindergarten today

Boston Bruins Hockey
Mother's 86th birthday
Family reunion: pleasant
Always enjoyed family
Close, through ups and downs

Friend groups surrounding subgroups like church, college, school

Friend to everyone
Outgoing, friendly

sports growing up so that created another bubble of community growing up whether it was playing Pop Warner football, playing Little League baseball, or watching my brothers' hockey practices, or whatever, there was always groups of people, so there was that family and friends group that was sports friends, for sure, and then I was also very, sort of into politics, leadership, so I had sort of my school leadership friends and then I had sort of my art friends cause I was in arts and performing arts so I was in plays and musicals all the way through elementary school if not middle school and high school so I had that group of friends. laughing

KATIE: Laughing

GIA: So I was able to navigate many different groups for my entire, like, childhood. For sure.

DAVID: I think, that's really amazing that you had that sort of a community, um, and what was your first, speaking of community, what was your first introduction to the queer community?

GIA: Ooh, well that word didn't really exist, way back

DAVID: Yeah...

GIA: Way back in the seventies, or whatever. There was no such thing as a queer community...

DAVID: yeah

KATIE: Please use...

GIA: No, that's a really good, you know, I think about this, um, deeply. What was my first introduction to anything LGBTQ or sense of community. It was a very foreign thing for me specifically, because even though I had friend groups that were outside of my conservative catholic family, where there was no real conversation around anything LGBTQ, um... to speak of. Um, there were no "out" friends there were no "out" teachers, there were no role models, there was nothing on TV, there was no one in movies or portrayed any sense of community back in the seventies, um, that I saw. It was probably there, but I didn't see it. It was invisible to me, it didn't become really visible until... for community aspect? Err, um... I think there was a sense of unspoken like we're part of this, but we don't talk about in junior high. There was like three or four other kids who you kinda had an idea, that were part of the community, but it was not safe at all to even,

Cliques
Athletic, competitive
Catholic family

Sports central to family identity: Football, Little League Baseball, Hockey

Groups of people united by sports
Politics, leadership, extracurricular groups
Art friends
Theater/Performing arts

Elementary/High school friends

Navigation of different groups

Compliment
First question about queer community

Lack of discourse around LGBTQ
Seventies, lack of language

Introspection
Gia questions herself
LGBTQ foreign growing up

Conservative Catholic Family
No LGBTQ discourse
Lack of "out" friends, role models, celebrities

No community

Invisibility, alludes to

like, bring up. Um, so when I started junior high, it was junior high back then, so seven, eight, nine, in 1979 but I never, it was a big change from elementary to junior high, I was so excited but also so terrified. But I remember like, my first month of like, junior high, tryin' to get to gym class, and I had heard about some tough ninth graders, like really tough ninth graders. And, it's almost like a scene from like, a movie, or a TV show, like I ran into this guy in the hallway, like the way corner in getting to the gym, and um, I remember, he's kinda like, he kinda like intentionally pushed me into the side of the wall, he said, like, "get the fuck out of the way you fucking faggot" and pushed me into the wall. And it's really confusing, when you're like twelve years old, because I didn't think I was like, projecting anything out there to the world as being LGBTQ, and I probably wasn't, but that was just a word people still use today to insult somebody: faggot, queer, gay. So I had the very vulnerable place of like, wait, does this person, like, know something? Laughing. Like wait, this is like the first month of junior high, that I'm being like, targeted. And then he pulled my shirt up over my head, and I thought he was gonna push me down the stairs. Down these, like, totally hard cold concrete stairs, and I like, I kinda tried to fight him back, and he's a big, tough, ninth grader. And then he kinda, and I kinda like, and I then I'm, I think I mentioned my name and he said "oh yeah, you're one of them, you're one of the Drew boys," or whatever, um, is what he said, he's like "alright, I'll let'cha go." Um, he let me go! And so, I have four older brothers. And, one of them was tough, really tough. And I think he knew, once he realized who I was, that he probably shouldn't, probably shouldn't fuck with me. Because I had someone who probably would fuck with him. And so, that was the first time I felt, kinda, really weird, I felt seen, even though I probably wasn't being seen, for being LGBTQ, and I wondered how about the, the other LGBTQ folks, are we all being picked on in the hallways? And so I kinda went through junior high knowing there were other kids kind of looked at like my friends, and there was a few, and I'm actually in conversation with them today, we kinda laugh, joke about it now looking back forty some years. That some of them were out a little more out than me. I was definitely put on this armor

location and culture of family

Unspoken dynamic with other LGBTQ kids
 "You knew were part of the community"

Start junior high in 1979

Memory
 First month of junior high
 Gym class
 Rumors: dangerous older kids

Confrontation

Fight

"Faggot" insult

Feeling "outed"

Discourse of junior high (and even today) present LGBTQ related words as insults

Feeling targeted
 Violence/Threat

Fight back
 Gia said that she was a Drew child

Reputation

Older brother, tough, threatening, protective

Fear of retribution
 First time feeling "caught" or seen as LGBTQ

Common experience

to be this tough jock, but we kind of had like an unspoken, like we were part of a community. But I didn't feel a sense of like real community, not until like, it gets a little confusing. So unspoken like junior high. Kind of look at each other, but not really said anything because none of use were able to say we're out. And there were no out teachers. There was one teacher we thought was gay, and then when we transitioned to high school he transitioned to high school with us because our high schools went from 10, 11, 12 to 9, 10, 11, 12 so he became a... and then we like, "think he's gay". But even then there weren't any other out students yet really, but I got to meet other students who probably were because our population went from 800 in junior high to 2,400 in high school. So like the pool got bigger like there are probably some, right. You started to figure that out a little bit, but still no one was out so there really was no community. And then this gets a little personal, but very specific for me I was part of, deeply connected to my church in our town, and we had a new priest come into our town when I became a teenager who was really amazing at that point. Loved song and dance loved to do musicals revitalized our Catholic youth organization and that was really exciting. And so I think there was some conversation about is he gay, is he this, is he that in, community. In our family and so that was really... And I was excited for that. Whether he was gay or not gay I just assumed he was gay, but he couldn't be gay as a priest. Not and so this gets kind of confusing because over about a year or two. I was sexually assaulted by him. In this sort of weird relationship that happens a lot with young queer people unfortunately. Where you are sort of groomed by someone you admire who is a role model, and at the same time you are being seen for being LGBTQ. So that is really fucked up. When I look back at like you're being sort of validated for having queer feelings with another person, but the same time someone is actually taking advantage of you. So its, thats a hard one. Because sort of like sense of community, but in a really fucked up way. Right. And so I've talked to other people who've been down that road too who have had very similar experiences where, "yeah that was fucked up wasn't it and they're, you're being, when your first queer relationship with somebody in a sexual way is actually an invasion and so its

Connection to today
Retrospection

Lack of community
Lack of connection

No out teachers: isolation
Possible gay teacher: hope

School population

Isolation

Connection to church

New priest

Sexual assault by Priest

Queer community

Sexual assault and queer
community

Common experience: sexual
assault by older queer person

just a really horrible thing". So it took me a really, a long time to process, that, as an adult. To actually see that as what it really is versus something as acceptable.

KATIE: Thank you so much for telling us that. Yeah you're right very personal. Thank you for sharing that.

GIA: So I didn't really get a sense of community with that, but it was almost like I was becoming, got accepted for who I was for the first time, but in a really messed up way.

DAVID: Yeah.

GIA: And it wasn't till I left Newton and went to college that I started to actually feel like, "Oh maybe I can be me". And that's when I started actually connecting with other LGBT folks from a college, 300, 200 miles away. And I intentionally picked a college outside of my town, outside of Massachusetts, outside of New England, and I was the only one in my family that actually went to, left New England. This was actually, I needed to get away from everyone who knew me on a very conscious level so and in my head I was like "Yeah I actually want to go somewhere I actually can experiment and at that point can I date boys because I hadn't transitioned yet and so at that point I was presenting as a boy or as a young man, and so I started connecting with other people on campus. When I went to college and that was amazing.

DAVID: Yeah. Where did you go to college?

GIA: I went to Syracuse University. Yeah and so I started there in the fall of two thousand... of nine... two thousand yeah. Of 1985 and so this was a really unique time to be sort of emb, I don't know if it was embracing, but coming out. A little bit, quiet more quietly in that college community where this is a world where there wasn't cellphones, there wasn't the internet, and so if you wanted to meet other people who are like you, you just met them. Because I was in art school there so there tend to be a safer place to be queer was in art school, but I met some other people and I just met, for some reason my circle brought me around to other queer people even though we weren't running with rainbows we kind of had a sense, and there was one friend, was a year older than me who I knew as "Egg", and he was really into me. And like wanted to be with me, and, but there was no, we had one payphone, on our dorm floor. Talk about awkward.

Leaving home

Getting away from old friends and family

Experimentation

Coming out to friends

Syracuse University

Coming out

Technology and community

Art School

Meeting other queer people

In the closet to broad community

DAVID: Oh my gosh yeah.

GIA: So how do you reach out to someone if they want to have a conversation privately and we had one payphone at the end of the hall that was just a phone on the wall and I would get calls from my friend "Egg". Because he was a year older and he lived in a different dorm and the phone would ring and someone would answer it and they'd come down to your door and say, "Hey Gia its "Egg" on the phone he wants to talk to you again because he would constantly call me because we were. We had a relationship growing, right and so you would like go out into the hall and you'd have this conversation and it didn't occur to me until look, until I started looking back going I guess everyone just thought we were gay, but we didn't say it. And we kinda just like hung out together and then when we had private moments in our room we'd hug and maybe kiss a little or things like that. When we had a little, I was in a triple so there wasn't a lot of privacy in a dorm room as you may, if you've ever been in a dorm situation so it was little moments like that we would have little intimate moments. Like walking back to each others dorms or things like that, but we never really became an official couple. We kind of just kind of cuddled with each other and things like that and got to know each other, and he taught me about some alternative music that was totally amazing and then started meeting other people in the community, and finally first had kind of my first boyfriend I think. His name was Kai he was an international student from Thailand and he was a little older so he had his own apartment.

All: Laugh.

GIA: Look at that head nod. Please note the interviewer is head nodding. And so he invited me to have dinner at his apartment a couple times and that was really lovely because we had a lot more privacy compared to like a dorm room. And that was kind of nice to be with somebody and we got to know each other really well and he would cook for me and we would cuddle and kiss and that was really sweet. I remember he went home for Christmas break and he brought me back a nice little gift from Thailand and this was really sweet. It was kind of really sweet and gentle and was nothing really it was, but still it was still very scary to like do that out in public and so you couldn't really announce that out to the world. We didn't feel

First relationship

Queer relationships
In the closet
Technology

Egg

Connection

Coming out

Connection

Fear of being outed

Relationship

First Boyfriend

Privacy
connection
Fear of gay bashing
Fear of HIV/AIDS

safe holding hands out while crossing across campus and there was still, still, it was actually the beginning of this sort public conversation around HIV and AIDS. And I was terrified of what that would happen, what that looked like. I was very afraid of having sex with men. Because I didn't know what the reality was. It was, at that point it was a death sentence. You would, that was what we were being taught or told and that was portrayed as in the Eighties that if you had sex, if you whatever, if you were a man or whatever and had sex with a man you were gonna die. That was what was out there. There was no, wasn't a lot of education of around having safer sex and protected sex. It just was sort of this you're going to die.

KATIE: How did your community, this could be as specific as just your intimate friend group, react to both what we've been talking about your first relationships and maybe even the AIDS epidemic?

GIA: You know I think, where I was in college there wasn't. It was just so quiet. There were people who were a little bit more outspoken than I was. A lot more outspoken and were talking about it, but there was no GSA at the school there was no, there was just beginnings of up, res-, uprisings and protest. Just looking at some of the posters in here and these are all in the Nineties not even in the Eighties. And you start to see little bits of it out into the other world. In New York City there was starting to be some uprising, and in San Francisco there was starting to be some uprising and as we went through college I started to hear more about the impact and you started to see people and hear about people dying. For sure. I don't, I think, I don't know maybe we were just so afraid of talking about it we didn't talk about it. I know in my group of people whether it was me and John also known as "Egg" and Kai, or me and Tony we just kind of like didn't talk about it. We didn't know how to talk about it. We didn't have people to teach us how to talk about being queer or the language. And we kinda navigated on our own what we know and don't know. And my own fear just kept me from like acting on a whole bunch of things. At the same time I was having a few relationships with women too. More publicly, maybe a little bit more publicly, but I had already known I was bisexual since, I don't know, sixth grade. That I had these attractions for different people. It

HIV/AIDS risks

HIV/AIDS: safer sex

Student Activism

Lack of GSA (Gay Straight Alliance)

New York and San Francisco uprising

HIV/AIDS: Death
Fear of talking about
HIV/AIDS

Lack of mentors/ knowledge
on queer sex/ safer sex
Fear stopping action

Relationships with women

wasn't til probably junior year that I had my, and I remember this, my first public queer kiss. If that means anything. I don't know if that means anything to any of you, but I remember I was at a bar that we, that anyone would go to it wasn't specifically a gay bar or anything. There really wasn't a gay bar on campus. I had been seeing Kai. Kai and I had stopped seeing each other and I started seeing, I think Anthony at this point, but I forget. Me and some other friends were talking at the table having a drink and "Egg" who had been trying to get to me since freshman year. I mentioned out loud that I had been seeing somebody else, and he was like, "What?" and he jumped across the table and just mad kissed me in front of everybody in a big, which was fine. But this was the first time we had actually, I'd ever literally kissed in public. And it was probably 1987 or 1988.

KATIE: How was that moment for you?

GIA: I still remember the burn from his stubble.

All: Laughing

GIA: And that's a good memory. A very happy thing, it was sort of a feeling of yeah people are probably gonna see this, and... alright. That's just part of accepting who you are. It was... Compared to what happened back when I was a teenager with the priest, this seemed a lot more celebratory and more triumphant.

KATIE: Absolutely. So just to clarify...

GIA: Laughing

KATIE: Going back in time for a minute... Definitely forgot to ask kind of a date in which you first realized that you were gay, or kinda coming out about that. You mentioned fifth or sixth grade?

GIA: Fifth or sixth grade I started having feelings for both boys and girls. That I knew I recognized. I think by the time I was four or five, I realized I was a lot more like my sisters than my brothers, so there were totally two separate worlds. That didn't make sense in my head, but by the time I was five or six I was stealing my sister's clothes and wearing them under my boy clothes to school, really hanging out with her friend group sometimes, in addition to hanging out with boyfriends, playing football in the park while I was hanging out with my sister's friends. So that was happening from a much earlier age, in

Bisexuality

First public queer kiss

Bar: straight bar

No gay bar

New partner

jealousy

First public queer kiss

1987 or 1988

Memory: stubble

Good memory

Happy

Self acceptance

Sexual assault/Priest

Celebratory

Coming out

Fifth or sixth grade

Bisexual-fifth or sixth grade

Identifying with sisters, 4 or 5

Cross-dressing

Time spent with girls

terms of my feelings towards being bisexual, two separate complete things. Didn't quite understand what was going on. And didn't have language to talk about it. Right? And so there was a lot of confusion and a lot of shame around that about figuring that all out. And I'm going to guess, I don't think I'm going out on a limb here, that I was probably corrected at some point when I was little. Cause I don't know where the shame comes from, from being trans specifically. But I had a lot of shame and fear of people finding out that I liked being a girl or identifying like that. And I don't know where that comes from. But I have a pretty clear idea that it came from above. A parent or a family member corrected me. So there are gaps in my memory around, potentially around like "don't let me catch you wearing your sister's clothes again." And whatever. I don't have a clear memory but I have a lot of shame and fear, like "I better keep this a secret." And I don't know where it comes from. Other people I talk to who are like me who are trans in this age group have similar sense like yeah, don't know why. Maybe it's society putting subtle hints out, or not so subtle hints out into the world. That if you digress from any quote-on-quote normal aspects of gender, it's dangerous. That one I mentioned being pushed into the wall, those things kinda happen here and there, there are moments where I tested those waters growing up, and I forgot to mention this, something else happened that was really impactful senior year of high school. So we're going to go back. It was Valentines day, and by the time I became a senior I had learned it was gonna be really dangerous to be me, to be bisexual and be trans in this world. So I hid that, and put on this other armor and became this person who was super masculine and became this person who was like a jock, I became captain of my high school football team, I was leader of my church organization, captain of my track team and all that, and senior class president, sort of like built myself up. To protect me from people finding out who I really was. But I remember on Valentine's day, senior year, someone sent me a carnation, and it was really sweet. And I forget who sent it, I really wish I didn't, and they said to wear that pink carnation the rest of the school day. So this was back when I was presenting as a boy, you know, I was eighteen or seventeen years old. I was gonna wear a white

Gender differences
 Football
 Bisexual and trans, separate worlds
 Lack of language
 Confusion and shame
 Loss of memory around potential unofficial corrective therapy
 Trans shame
 Parent or family member correcting Gia
 Wearing sister's clothes
 Shame and fear
 Shared experience about shame and fear
 Digression from gender norms
 Violence in response to lack of conformity
 Senior year, valentines day
 Hiding identity
 "Armor" Presenting as man, masculine, jock
 Overachiever
 Team captain, leadership, class president
 Hiding from LGBT
 Carnation as gift

button down shirt, wear a pair of jeans and I was wearing Chuck Taylors, the uniform, basically, back in 1984, whatever. So I pinned the pink carnation to my shirt and I wondered “what could go wrong?” So I remember going to a couple early classes and no one said anything, but I was nervous. I went into art class, no big deal, but I remember going into our cafeteria. Our school was 2,400, so our cafeteria was probably like 800 people and you had to walk down this cold staircase, hundreds of people gathering to get lunch, coming down the stairs, and I could see different friend groups. My art history group over here, my jock friends over here, my party friends over here, I have like all these groups, you know. And I started coming down the stairs, and I saw my sort-of jocky friends over here, and one of my friends noticed the pink carnation and he didn’t like it. He wanted to make sure everyone in the cafeteria knew that. And he called out really loud, “what the fuck you think you’re doing, you faggot?” And people, he was loud, so a circle kinda formed around us, and he lunged at me, he grabbed at my flower and ripped it off my shirt and said “Take that off you fucking sissy.” So yeah, this is a moment in my sort-of, like... You know, he ripped it off... and so I attacked him. That’s what I was taught, and that’s how I learned how to defend myself, I need to be just, fight him back even though he was one of my best friends. And before I could really hurt him, even though I probably couldn’t really have hurt him, we were separated by like, whoever’s on duty at the cafeteria and were sent to the principal’s office, well we had headmasters back then, and we waited, I remember it was so weird, because by then Tony was just kinda laughing about it. I was still enraged and the headmaster comes in, and you know, “what happened” and we tell the story, Tony had to apologize, he was like “yeah, whatever, I’m sorry” and “Gia, you have to accept that.” ... Nope. No. But I couldn’t tell the principal/headmaster why. What that flower really meant. I remember being there, driving home with my mom, I think I got suspended... Which you know, I didn’t live far from school, but she had to come pick me up. She said “why does this keep happening?” This was not the first time that I had a big, or altercation with another student or a teacher or so. And I couldn’t tell her, what really was going on and it ate at me for

Pink carnation
 17 or 18
 “Uniform” White button down, jeans, Chuck Taylor’s 1984 Culture/Style

Classes

School population 2,400
 Cafeteria 800

Different friend groups
 Art history, Jocks, Partiers

Reaction to carnation

Insult: Faggot
 Cafeteria fight

Insult: sissy

First reaction is violence

Violence against best friend

Teacher on duty
 In trouble
 Headmaster/Principal’s office

Friend Tony: laughing
 Gia: enraged

Unable to accept apology

Having to hide reasons why she was angry from headmaster and mother

a long time, so there was a time from that time that I was in elementary school till when I was twenty-three or four, where I was a very violent, angry person. Got into fights, picked fights, hurt people, hurt myself, it wasn't until I ended up graduating from college and moving back to Boston where I was still struggling with lots of stuff, drinking a lot, and I got into a fight at a bar. I ticked off the wrong person who was a bouncer and I didn't who know he was, I was being a jackass and he wasn't gonna put up with it. So they dragged me to a back alley, him and other bouncers, and beat the life out of me, and left me in the alley. My friends were with me, came around and found me passed out, and dragged me to my house, my apartment was nearby, tried to clean me up a little and sober me up cause I was drunk and they brought me to the hospital, the same place I was born. The doctor couldn't do much, I was all just swollen and fractured and drunk, can't really do anything other than breathing come back in when the swelling's gone down and you're sober. I came back in on a Monday or something, went and saw an ear, nose and throat specialist. He had to rebreak, I had x-rays and had twenty fractures across my face and my nose from them beating and kicking me in the face. So they had to realign my face a little bit and realign and rebreak my nose a couple times and put my on novacaine, and put needles up my nose. That just sort of redirected my attention, it was a life-changing moment for me. In terms of my part of it, my violence and my drinking. I could've died and I could've killed somebody. From that point on, this is kinda separated from LGBT, but I kinda had a lot of unanswered feelings about what it meant to be queer, a lot of anger and confusion around lots of things, being assaulted by the priest, trying to find my identity by going out and also getting push-back by being beaten up and being attacked in high school, or in a bar in Boston. But I realized there that I actually had to make some changes about how much I was drinking and fighting. So that was kinda the last time I can, other than maybe my wedding night, that I really got drunk, drunk, drunk. And the last time I got in a fight, that was back in 1990.

Multiple altercations
 Unresolved anger
 Elementary school violence until age 23-24
 Violence, anger, self-harm
 Graduated college
 Boston
 Bar fight
 Bouncer
 Multiple bouncers
 Violence
 Friends found Gia
 Drinking
 St. Elizabeth Hospital
 Doctor unhelpful
 Swollen, bleeding due to fight
 ENT specialist
 Medical care
 Novacaine
 Life changing moment
 Turning point
 LGBT
 What does it mean to be queer
 Anger, confusion, trauma
 Turning point, drinking less
 Wedding night

KATIE: So how did the trajectory of your kind of, isolation and drinking and those activities, how did that track along with your progress in transitioning?

GIA: I guess it all sorta goes together, I started drinking too young, I was probably twelve or thirteen, to deal with a lot of the numbing of the feelings I was having a lot of confusion about my identities, like not being able to be myself. Or being corrected about being who I thought I was by other people. So I started stealing liquor from my parents when I was like twelve or thirteen to kinda balance it out laughing while I was going through all that. And then that incident really woke me up to other parts of my life. It didn't end, about that same time, when I was about nineteen, actually there was a moment in there I skipped something. A little moment in there when one of my college breaks I came home from Syracuse and got a job in Boston, a job at a company, a department store called Filene's, which doesn't exist anymore. It's kinda like, today we call Macy's. And it was a famous place in Downtown Boston called Filene's and there were a lot of gay people working there and so I started working there on summer breaks, winter breaks, in Downtown Boston. And that was probably actually my first connection to like, a community! Was there! It was actually being, a weight came off my shoulder where I could go into Boston and I could be a little more *me* around my coworkers, older LGBT folks, mostly gay men, and other people as an employee at this downtown department store in Boston where I could jump into the role of being a gay man, even though I wasn't a gay man it was probably the safest place I could be I could be in that place and time back in the mid-80s, so I had these moments of being connected to this community at this department store in Boston for like a month or two at a time, and I would jump back into this other world where I had to like, be on guard about it. In one of those summers I came home, things just got two complicated, a friend died, confronted with the priest who was still around, and confronting my own identity, I decided one night, to kill myself. And I forget if I was nineteen or twenty but it was one of those summers where I decided that I didn't see a future of me being me, that I was too much of a burden to my family and friends. I remember one night after, it was

1990
Isolation/Transition

Drinking at 12/13
Self-medicating
Confusion
Isolation

Stealing liquor

Turning point

College break
Job in Boston
Filene's Dept. Store

Famous downtown dept store

Working on college break
Older gay men employees
Queer community

Feeling accepted

Role of a gay man
Not quite fitting, but "close enough"
Safety
Mid 1980's

Balancing between two worlds

Complicated emotionally
Friend's death
Confrontation with priest
Decision to commit suicide
19-20
Unable to see a future as true

definitely the summer where I was still working at Filene's but I didn't think there would ever be a future so I remember going to the woods not far from my parents house, taking the belt from my parents' and making a little knot at one end and a little noose at the other end, tying it to a branch, putting it around my neck and stepping off a stump thinking that this was gonna be the end. That this was my way to get out of whatever was churning inside of me and all my unhappiness and displeasure, I just didn't want to be a burden to my family. That I decided to do that. Um... Didn't work. Laughing. I woke up at some point there, in the leaves. Very confused about what happened, that I wasn't dead. So I had to make my way back to my parents house where I had... Um, that was my first connection with death and that went on for another twenty or so years where I sort of danced with death in different ways. Thinking about it, hurting myself, trying to navigate a world, until I sorta came out, fully, completely, about ten years ago. Its a jump forward, but that did happen in there, I forgot, that was important too.

KATIE: Thank you for telling us that.

GIA: Sure!

DAVID: Yeah thank you. There's something in that that a lot of queer people can understand, to relate, those feelings, just not knowing how they can ever be okay being themselves, so thank you for sharing that.

KATIE: So I think we were back in

All: Laughing

GIA: Where were we? Sorry! I'm really good at going off on tangents.

KATIE: It's more natural if we let things just come up, but yeah just to redirect a little bit, you were discussing when you had just left college, I think.

GIA: Yeah

KATIE: So tell us about that time of your life

GIA: So I was in Boston, it was exciting and I started getting, got another boyfriend, in Boston, which is kinda cool. His name was Kevin, I think we met through Filene's probably.

Which was cool, we got to meet people through other people and started going to parties after work and finding this other community. It was the first time that we, he invited me to go

self/Burden to family

Filene's
Woods
Belt/Noose

Believing that she was about to die

Failed suicide attempt

Continuation of suicidal feelings and self hurt continued another 20yrs

Relatable moment for queer community

College years
Boston

Boyfriend Kevin: met through Filene's community

on a date date, like in public public, so that was exciting. Right? So this was probably 1990-9. And I remember one of the first dates was at a piano bar at Boylston street in Boston, it's probably still there, and I remember being like, cause it was kinda dusk it wasn't quite dark yet, like "is it safe to hold hands?" And it probably wasn't yet. Or maybe it was, I don't know. Boston's a weird city, it's a conservative city where people don't show a lot of public affection, I've noticed, now that I've been connected to that city for fifty-some years, compared to other cities where public affection is more... so I never really saw anyone holding hands really, other than really some families and stuff. But I remember he invited me out to the most well known gay club, which is still there, it's called Club Cafe, it still exists, to this day in Boston. It's changed, sort of evolved a little bit. And I remember being so nervous but it was like exciting, to go to a real gay *club* club, for the first time, and being aware that people may see me, recognize me or whatever, and I was so nervous, nervous, nervous... But he was super, super, super cute.

DAVID and KATIE: Laughing

GIA: And then we started dancing and had a few drinks and it felt like home... *Crying* Good tears.

KATIE: Happy tears!

GIA: Those are good tears.

KATIE: So community right, that's when it really like... Gia rustling with box. Oh no! You're out of tissues.

GIA: Laughing. Oh yeah! That's a really good thing I really thought of it that way, your guard can kinda be down a little. It's an amazing feeling. Yeah, it felt good. Didn't last long. Kinda ended. I had some fear about some stuff, relationships, and ended up going off to grad school... Like, bye!

KATIE: Where did you go for grad school?

GIA: I went to Savannah College of Art and Design.

DAVID: What were you studying there...

GIA: So I studied, when I graduated from Syracuse, I graduated with a BFA in Art Education so I had a dual degree in the school of visual performing arts and education, I wanted to be an art teacher, that was one of my goals. At that point things weren't great back in Massachusetts, I had a job that was, I forget what it was but there wasn't a lot of jobs for new

Parties

First queer date in public

Boylston St Piano bar

Safety

Holding hands

Boston is conservative

No PDA

Gay club

"Club Cafe" in Boston

Nervousness

First real gay club

Fear of being caught

Feeling of "home"

Crying

Community

Guard down

Fear

Grad school, left Boston

Savannah College of Art and Design

BFA in Art Education from Syracuse

Visual performing arts and education degree

out of college graduates, had a few interviews, nothing worked out so I got these other jobs. Ended up, like I wanna go to graduate school. Few rejection letters but I got into Savannah. My dad and my mom were very supportive of me pursuing that part of my career. My parents have been really good about, like, letting us pursue our own dreams. I feel really grateful for my parents for all of my brothers and sisters, I think I'm in good fortune for being sixth of seven, I think they were just happy that we were, from their aspect, found the thing we liked, and were encouraging us to pursue it. Which is rare, I've heard. So I felt very fortunate my parents said "So you wanna be an art teacher, great!" There were other teachers in my family so the fact that I wanted to pursue a career that was already part of my family was like *phew* great. And so going to grad school to study painting is what I did, and I went to get my MFA in painting in Georgia. While I was there, I got to my advisor, who was gay, Steven Meyers, so I got to have a really positive role model from the very beginning, which was really helpful, my graduate advisor, that was cool, that was just nice to have someone positive who I could look up to who was gay, but it wasn't like a *thing* thing, it was like Oh, Alright! So it became a little more regular, and normal, like normalizing that. One of my best friends was an undergrad, Michael, in architecture at the time, or, he was studying art history at the time. He was gay, and then I met Deb, and we started connecting, and we became a thing. Which was kinda cool, and so me, Deb and Michael were kinda this, we weren't a threesome or anything but we were really close with one another and supported one another. Deb came from San Francisco, Michael came from Houston and I came from Boston. It was a great triangle of folks, but by that time though, I kinda, Deb knew my bisexual past, cause we were sorta dating each other and I wanted to own up to that. And then I shared with her some of my trans identity a little bit with her, but never really shared that with Michael, in that sort of conversation. Michael was the one that was "out" in the world as an out, gay man. Whereas I started becoming more quiet about my sexuality, cause I started having this relationship with Deb, weird how that navigation goes.

KATIE: You mentioned geography a little bit,

Massachusetts-not great time

Failure to find jobs as a new grad
 Rejection letters
 Accepted into SCAD
 Support from parents

Family overall supportive

Parents were glad that all their kids found something they enjoyed
 Privilege of parental support

Teaching as a family job

Grad school to study painting
 MFA in Georgia

Steven Meyers: gay graduate advisor
 Role model

Normalization of LGBT people
 Undergrad best friend
 Michael

Deb, started dating

Three best friends

Deb: San Francisco
 Michael: Houston

Hiding from Michael, open with Deb

Michael: "out, gay man"
 Internalizing LGBT
 Identity constricted by Deb

GIA: Yeah, Georgia.
 KATIE: How did Georgia affect your community and your sense of self?
 GIA: Umm.
 KATIE: Which might be two different questions...
 GIA: I don't know, the good thing was that I was in art school, which tends to lend itself to a lot of safety around LGBTQ ideas. Savannah, Georgia itself is not like the rest of Georgia. It is a unique little bubble in what locals call the low county. Low country, I should say. There was a gay bar. Where one of the first famous trans performers was performing, Lady Chablis was featuring in the book and the movie *Goodnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, it says place in Savannah at the same time, and that was taking place while we were there. Which is kinda interesting that the book came out and the movie came out and "We were there!" So there was a sort of nightclub around queerness that was happening in Savannah which was nice to go and be somewhat part of. We would go with Michael and be supported allies and friends without becoming, I sorta retreated from my queer identity a little bit then, publicly, for some reason. I don't know why, maybe it was my alignment with Deb or something. I don't know. Walking down the street and being queer in public was really dangerous, in Savannah, Georgia. It was also a very military town. Military bases surrounding the entire place, Parris Island where the Marines would go and they would always sorta break into town, so definitely on guard about being public and queer. Maybe safe in class, or maybe at that bar itself. Or at this other alternative night, we'd go to goth night. Which I did back in undergraduate too, it's part of that subculture but also another place I didn't mention in college there was a goth night/alternative night I would go to in college it was safe to be dancing with other genders in that way, back then. So that became another, you know, there wasn't a gay bar back in Syracuse it became alternative night on Tuesday nights, I was able to go with Egg there and do alternative, dance with girls or boys it didn't matter. Same thing happened at this alternative club in Savannah you could go on goth night and be alternative night and dance to Nine Inch Nails and dance with boys and girls and whatever, it didn't matter. Cause it was an

Geography
 Georgia
 Community

Safer to be LGBTQ in art school
 Savannah a more liberal bubble
 Low Country
 Gay Bar (Club One)
 Lady Chablis "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil"
 Present during that era of the book
 Queer nightlife

Gia could participate through Michael, who was "out"
 Retraction from LGBT identity related to dating Deb

Military base in GA
 Parris Island, SC nearby
 Marines

On guard about public queerness
 Goth night in GA and College

Alternative night
 Dancing with other genders and sexes without any consequences

Egg

open, safe space. And I could be in that space and not be completely *out* out. But also be safe to be myself in Georgia. So I was there for two years, and things got complicated when we got engaged, a little bit. So we got engaged on Valentine's day of 1993. On the beach, Tybee Island, to Deb. Went well, I guess, she said "yes." It wasn't a surprise, we talked about it, like "what do we do next?" We were ending graduate school in a couple months, we already traveled to Germany together, life was good, I had met her family, she had met my family. They visited, so it was like a common bond. We both started looking for work around the country for teaching jobs. I ended up getting a job in Vermont, in [Northern? 00.47.49] Vermont is where I started my teaching career. At these really small little towns, and I got a job also in New Hampshire, so we decided to move to Vermont, to Saint Johnsbury. She came with me, it was confusing, at that point I was starting to deny my identity a little bit. I don't know what this was, I've gone back and looked at it, and now I know what it was but at that time and place I didn't know what I was doing. I was trying to like, fell in love, and wanted this to succeed. And so, the idea of me being trans was a barrier to this relationship moving forward. Where she put up clear signs where she didn't want to be in a relationship with a woman. And so I was, at that point, trying to convince myself that I wasn't trans. And that's not uncommon, for sure, so I started to convince myself that I wasn't trans and I would like, promise her, because I was in love with her. Love does so many things. So I was falling in love and we were building this relationship with each other and we started this new life together at the same time I was fighting the urge to be me. In this relationship. But I remember a side little bubble in this conversation we both went into Saint Johnsbury because we both had relationships with other people with other genders and other sexes, "let's get tested" so we went and got our first HIV test back in ninety, probably shoulda gotten the test earlier because I was having sex with other people, so it probably 1993. In the north of Vermont, it was the first time we each got an HIV test and we went to this local hospital in very rural Vermont, and as one of the interviewer knows, this part of Vermont can be dangerous being queer and it was. Its a very rural, sort of the Appalachia

Nine Inch Nails
 Safe space
 2 years in GA
 Engaged to Deb
 Valentine's day
 Tybee Island
 Travel to Germany
 Supportive families
 Job hunt
 Vermont
 New Hampshire
 Saint Johnsbury, VT
 Denying identity
 Retrospection
 Relationship was a barrier for trans identity
 Deb didn't want to be in a relationship w a woman
 Self doubt
 Power of love
 Building a relationship
 Trans identity threatened that Gia buried it
 Getting tested for HIV/AIDS
 1993
 North Vermont

of New England, it's called the Northeast Kingdom and we said, we walked in, we said we're getting married soon we wanna just have our HIV's test just to see each other's status, and they looked at us like we were contagious, like we were gonna contaminate the entire hospital. And so we were shoved into a closet for like three hours, and made to feel like freaks, until someone who had any knowledge on HIV and AIDS came to talk to us about getting a test. So it was really like, "I guess we shouldn't say that out loud here!" It like, it was gonna be a hard life to be even remotely connected to a community in this part of the state.

KATIE: You were presenting as a heterosexual couple?

GIA: Yeah, absolutely.

KATIE: So it was just that you had mentioned HIV to get this kind of treatment.

GIA: Yeah, I think in the interview process we had both mentioned having sexual relationships with other people and men and women and sorta like, "why do you wanna get a test" well I've had sex with a couple men and she had had a couple relationships with people that were using drugs so it became an idea that "yeah, we probably should get tested." To make sure, moving forward that that was a thing, that education became like, we had moved to that place with education about getting tested and knowing your status became really important back in the early 90s so to be up front with each other we started having those conversations about who we had sex with, have we used intervenous drugs before, have our partners used intervenous drugs before, and these conversations became more public. And that was probably only after college I remember when Magic Johnson came out. Probably the most famous person to come out with HIV and AIDS, well, HIV I don't know if he ever had AIDS. It was Magic Johnson, the LA Lakers, famous basketball player came out in 91, 92. And changed the landscape about how we talk about HIV and AIDS. For sure, and so that was a game changer, globally, for sure. So we talk about that, and that happened in Vermont. Anyways, we got married the next summer 1994 on a hillside in Vermont, it was very quaint. We were both kinda hippie-like, we were both atheists we can this country wedding on a hillside, with a justice of the peace and our families came and

Area is dangerous for LGBT
 Rural New England
 Northeast Kingdom

HIV Status
 Patronized and ostracized

Education
 Awareness of language
 around HIV/AIDS

Presenting as Hetero

Still got discriminatory
 treatment

Interview for test

Drug use

Education
 Broader cultural awareness

Early 90s AIDS awareness
 becoming more critical
 Intravenous Drug use

Magic Johnson
 Famous person with AIDS
 LA Lakers Basketball player
 Altered social conception of
 HIV/AIDS

Married

we had this little thing. My best man was actually a woman so it was kinda like a nontraditional wedding. One of our other friends from Savannah came down and played the violin, and Deb's grandparents came in from Texas and my family came up from Boston. It was sweet. And our careers and lives moved on in this sort-of relationship for about seventeen years. And we moved from Vermont to Southern Vermont to Connecticut to New Hampshire to Maine to Maryland, back to Maine. So a lot happened in those seventeen years, in that relationship where I was like denying my identity to my partner, my then wife, but the desire to me still was there, I could not get rid of that.

KATIE: How did your relationship with the queer community change? While you were married?

GIA: It became more distant, it became very distant. To publicly be out, now as a teacher, as a public school teacher, how do you... So I always allied myself with the community and would bring stuff into the curriculum and class as much into it that I could and if there were any questions from young people, I would be pretty honest. Like "Yeah, I kissed boys, kissed girls." But I wasn't out, as being bisexual. Until later, to my students or to other teachers. I was just sort of, definitely more quiet. But we definitely would celebrate World AIDS Day every day. We would celebrate queer artists because I was an art teacher, and it became a safe place as a teacher for my students, after a career of teaching public school for 20 years, students picked up, somethings going on with that teacher even though I wasn't out yet, it was a place to even hang out, in my classroom.

KATIE: Do you see yourself being a mirror of those other role models,

GIA: Oh!

KATIE: Like your grad school role model.

GIA: Maybe, I never thought about that. I think that's confusing. Because I had someone I thought was a role model and turned out to be a monster, and at that point I hadn't figured that out yet. It wasn't until about five years ago that I figured that all out, about my teenage stuff with the priest, I had buried that stuff so deep. I still looked at him as a role model, so maybe I did think of myself like that, maybe I did,

Summer 1994
 Quaint rural wedding
 Atheists/Justice of the peace
 Best man was a woman
 Nontraditional

Friends and family traveled in from all over the country
 Support

Seventeen year long relationship/ Moving around a lot VT, ME, NH, CT, DC

Identity
 Denial of trans identity

Queer community

Distanced from queer identity
 Public school teacher
 Curriculum
 Open for questions
 Bisexual/Not out

Quiet about queerness
 Queer artists
 Art teacher
 Safe space for students

Role model

Role model
 Priest

Retrospection

maybe I didn't. Interesting question. I do think of myself, there's a point where, separate from my life with my wife/partner, there was a point where I started feeling like a hypocrite to my students. Where so many of us were working really hard to encourage students to be themselves like, you know, stand up to peer pressure, don't go along with the crowd, you can be yourself, and here I was. Not being myself. That ate at me, for sure. And my relationship with my partner wasn't going, we became, even though we tried all these different things in our lives to find happiness, as a couple. Doing lots of things, and gaining success career-wise, our own marriage actually started to become less-happy, less-happy, less-happy. And my depression got worse again, and I became more sad and more sad. I turned to other things to avoid being with her, I would avoid coming home, and other things like that. So we went through this sort of status of trying to figure that out. Still denying who I really was, wasn't until about ten years ago until I really rocked the boat, the wheels of the bus came off on that relationship and we had to face some truths about who we were and what we need to be truly happy.

KATIE: Is it okay if we jump to that?

DAVID: Yeah!

GIA: We can jump to that. Yeah.

DAVID: Ten years ago seems really important.

GIA: About ten years ago, a little more than that, we moved back to Maine, had been in Washington D.C. for a while. That was hard, we liked it there but it was hard, moved back to Maine, was on a farm for a little while teaching, and I got another job and moved to Southern Maine. Our relationship was like, we were just spinning wheels. I really wanted to, I started acting out a little bit more to be me, and I had been acting out the whole time, in private there were times when she was comfortable with me being a woman and dressing more femme. And there were other times when she was not. So there was a mixed message she was sending, so for me, I was like I don't know what to do here. Sometimes it was okay and she would actually buy me some things, it was kinda sweet, and other times, like, she felt very jealous of that other person. And she would say that. It was her feeling that she was jealous because I wanted to spend time as Gia, and some spaces, and

Feeling hypocritical

Not following own advice
Re: self fulfillment

Relationship failing

Successful careers
Interpersonal unhappiness

Depression

Avoiding home

2010-2009
Moved back to Maine

Farm
Teaching job
Southern Maine
Relationship failing

Cross-dressing
Validation from Deb

Mixed signals from Deb

Partner's jealousy of Gia

she didn't understand that. So finally it got to a place of about ten years ago where we spent some time apart, came back together. She went on a trip to Europe and came back and her mom had a stroke so she went to California and we were like, we started the step process, we started having an open relationship. Step one was some time apart, step two was have an open relationship, see other people, sure. We came up with rules, guidelines, almost like a contract, to what that looks like to be in an open relationship and Deb was really surprised that I was okay with it, I was like yeah, it makes sense. I can't give you some things that you want, you want something else that I can't give you, let's give that a shot for a little while. Didn't solve a lot of the interpersonal stuff between us, so she went to California for about six months, to take care of her mother who had a stroke. She met someone new, I went on a 8,000-mile trip around the country to find myself. Visited with friends, it was during that process that I kinda figured out some stuff. I had already connected with the core group of trans-folks here in Portland. Through Maine TransNet so in the lead-up to this I had already connected with other trans people here in Maine through Maine TransNet and found another community. I started to get the idea that I possibly could be me, I just needed one more little push. So I went on this trip, came back, marched in Pride as Gia, openly in summer of 2009 or 10 I forget which year it was, that was historic. Public in daylight walking down Congress st and being applauded. That's fucked up when your whole life you've been pushed into lockers. Its life changing and it changed my life. So I went on this journey across the country, "I can actually do this" and I came back and Deb was like "I think we should get separated" and I was like *Absolutely!* Let's figure that out, we told our friends, we're getting separated I started telling other people in my life that I was trans and started coming out to the people around me. That this was happening, so that started happening! The wheels of the bus started coming off but coming on at the same time. Like changing from summer tires to snow tires. Transition from that as we were separating as a couple, we had been together for about twenty-years now. What does it look like to not be connected to one another? What was it like for me to now be independent? And this was the first time I had

Separation
 Europe
 Deb's mother had stroke
 California
 Step one: separation
 Step two: open relationship

 Guidelines for openness

 Reasons for open relationship

 Relationship
 failing/Interpersonal
 problems/Deb dates someone
 else
 Gia road trip across country
 to find herself

 Maine TransNet Portland

 Encouragement
 Marching in Pride as Gia for
 the first time
 Public validation

 Turning point

 Separation
 Coming out
 Telling close friends

 Joking
 Transitioning

been alone. She moved back to California for a little while. That relationship ended and she called me in like December and said can I move back. We had a house together and I said fine, "It's still your house as much as mine. We'll figure out how to live together separately." So she moved back and even though we were planning our divorce we lived under the same roof for another three years. I came out that winter at the school where I had been teaching at, as trans. Came out to my colleagues that I had been working with for ten years, came out to my students, came out to the principal. Had some really great role models. One of the most important persons was Betsy Parsons who just passed away about two months ago, a month ago here who was a role model to many here in the Portland community. She was the first out ga- Lesbian teacher in Maine, back in the nineties. I got to meet her, probably in the winter of 2009 or 08 or 09 and we talked about what it might look for me to come out as a trans teacher. We talked about what that may look like and, "hey I don't know you might be the first Gia if you do it." Coming out was scary because there was no road map. I was probably the first or second trans person to actually come out and transition on the job in the state of maine in a public school. It was scary. I remember the first day driving to the school I was teaching at where I had been for about 8 or 9 years presenting more femme like this, where I had been for 8 or 9 years presenting more like kind of a skinny bisexual, gay man. Whatever. Here I was coming more like this for the first time ever to school and I didn't tell anybody I was gonna do it. I was afraid to tell people. I also thought it's no business how I dress or how I whatever. Does anyone else have to do this? Why do. Cis het people don't have to like inform people anything why do gay or trans people have to do that so I just went to school one day with a more femme outfit and a cute scarf and a cute hat and whatever. It was another life changing day. I was supposed to be at school that morning at 7 am to supervise the cafeteria for students who got to school early. I parked in the parking lot and it was really cold it was January, I forget the date, but it was a mid-January morning. Below zero and I remember it was 7 became 7:15, 7:10 the windows had froze I could scratch the frost on the windshield. I started to doubt that I

Separation after 20 year relationship
 Independence
 Shared space
 Divorce
 Coming out at work
 Betsy Parsons role model
 First out lesbian teacher
 Making a new path
 Coming out as isolating
 Presentating more femme, feminine
 Discomfort over coming out being only for queer people
 Description of femme clothes
 Arrival to school
 January
 Very cold weather
 Paralyzed by fear

could actually do this, and then I'm like oh I guess this is it. I did like the most typical. I took a deep breath (breathes in deeply) and I opened the door and grabbed my bookbag and walked across the parking lot into the cafeteria put my bag down took my jacket off. Imagining there was a giant neon sign above my head that said, "look at the freak". Imagining that even though I was wearing something like I'm wearing today that it felt like I was wearing a prom gown. Like I was Scarlett O'Hara and I kind of peeked up and looked around the cafeteria and there were probably a hundred or so students in the cafeteria. Expecting them to be like gawking and laughing at me and they were just copying each others geometry homework or texting each other or whatever. So I walked to the doorway where there are two other teachers who were also supervising and I've been working with these two teachers for like 8 or 9 years and they noticed a big difference in the way I was dressed. You know I probably did my nails, probably did some make up or something and they kind of looked but they didn't say anything we just talked about the weather. Which was fine and then I look out to like a hallway where the other students were gathering outside waiting for the bell to ring. I saw this one student who I'd had the semester before in one of my photo classes and she definitely saw that I was different. But she was, she was a troublemaker around campus she had a huge mouth, but she was also wicked smart, as we say in Maine. But I also know she saw the difference and then she started whispering to her friends like her really tough girlfriends, and this was kinda like the mean girls but without, they were like the working class mean girls. Which is a different than, right, there is different mean girls at schools they were the working class mean girls. They started walking towards me as group. My heart started pounding and I had a flashback to high school to that time where the kid ripped the flower off my shirt. Is she gonna like yell at me in front of everybody call me a faggot, a sissy, whatever? She stopped in front of me, I couldn't go anywhere, and she kind of looked me up and down and then she smiled and she said, "I like your boots. They're cute." Then she walked away. Imagine that. That was life changing. To have a student just say something nice. It was because of that probably that I haven't looked

Taking the plunge and entering school

Feeling out of place

Fear of interacting with colleagues
Colleagues ignore change

Students reactions

Tough working class mean girl

Fear of student reactions

Student shows acceptance

Acceptance by others is life changing

back. That I just started being more myself every day. From that I just started being more myself to myself, to the people I was around, my family, my students. Yeah. That was bananas. Oh my god that was bananas so I started coming out to the school and the community as me. It was hard a year later a new principal, now I'm out full time, came back that September teaching full time as me. New principal things changed dramatically. Some of the colleagues I used to be friends with now were distant. Some of the folks I'd never even talked to were more friendly. Rumors were spread around the school. There was a parent group that was trying to get me fired. Students were picked on in my class, were kicked off, were picked off, or left my track team. Now all the sudden there was a magnifying glass on me and I could do no wrong, do no right I should say. For 19 years I had exemplary career as a teacher and now I was getting picked on for the way I dress or for what I mention in class. I guarded where I went in school, my community, there were hallways I wouldn't walk down because I was afraid of certain teachers. Rumors were spread about me as a coach being in the locker room and they were just unfounded, just really gross, sickening things that people would spread about trans people. About a year into all this my position was eliminated during a budget cut and I became unemployed and unemployable as an out trans teacher here in Maine. There was this really interesting intersection of sheer joy of being myself finally and that weight off my back. At the same time a lot of things around me were falling apart the structures I'd leaned on most family, school, marriage, were no longer really there. At that point my family was not reaching out to be on board they were just scared and didn't know what to do. They eventually came back right on board and been great, but at that point they weren't there to be my support. My school they turned their back on me. They friends I thought were my friends did not go to bat for me. Went through a divorce and we had to find our own footing. That was like amazingly terrifying, and then I, you know, in that stayed connected to MaineTransNet stayed connected to GLESN and Betty Parsons. Got involved with EqualityMaine and volunteered on the 2012 Marriage Campaign, and found

Coming out, difficult process

Rumors spread about Gia

Inability to do the right thing

Scrutinized more closely after starting to transition

Fear of colleagues and avoidance of them for safety

rumors about what Gia might be doing were spread

Unemployment
Issues of trans employment

Support structures collapsing

Family not supportive initially
Family support later

Loss of friends, gain new friends

Loss of school and community support

Stayed connected to MaineTransNet and GLESN

Volunteer on the 2012

just more and more people. Happy tears. So I was able to weather that scariness of what's next. Yeah.

DAVID: So you mentioned you started volunteering for EqualityMaine. During the marriage equality campaign and a little bit of a spoiler I guess maybe, but now you work here. What was that journey for you? Maybe your journey with EqualityMaine and the. . .

GIA: I think for me it was. I was already, I don't know if I was a board member yet, but I've been really connected to MaineTransNet and they. It was a different organization that came in and ran the marriage campaign it wasn't EqualityMaine, but they had to do that. So someone from the marriage campaign reached out to MaineTransNet for help to coordinate and organize trans folks to be part of a network and I got, volunteered, or got chosen to be that person. So i got sort of, I needed, I mean I was excited about being a part of something and so I started volunteering with the marriage campaign, and started being at the volunteer office on Forest Ave. Being a greeter welcoming people if they were a volunteer, scheduling their shifts and doing basic stuff. That turned into logistic coordinator and for the election, and being a whatever. I got really involved, got to meet a lot of people, and I think that people realized that I had some capacity in this work. I had skills that I'd been doing organizing just in a different way as a track and field coach for 20 years and I was a teacher for 20 years. I had a lot of skills that transferred over to this type of work. I rapidly was given more responsibility as a volunteer on the campaign. Campaign quickly ended in November and now what so I stayed volunteer tried to find other things. Tried to get other teaching jobs that never worked out so I stayed unemployed actually for another year. It was probably January 2014 when a new job arose that I applied for and I got hired.

KATIE: Here?

GIA: Here. It wasn't this building, but it was with this organization to do raw outreach across the state and so I'm almost approaching my sixth year here at EqualityMaine.

DAVID: That's exciting.

KATIE: That is so exciting.

GIA: Yeah.

marriage campaign

Connection to MaineTransNet

EqualityMaine

Coordinate and organize trans activists

Volunteer for marriage campaign
Greeter at campaign office

Logistic coordinator for election

Transferable skills from teaching and coaching to organizing

Given more responsibilities

Campaign end in November
Teaching job search unsuccessful

Applied for job at EqualityMaine

Got a job doing outreach across the state

DAVID: Something that we had been curious about and you had somewhat kind of answered already is what was it like before and after the marriage equality fight what was your experience? But then also what have some of your goals around social justice and those issues been and how has that changed over time?

GIA: I think the scariest thing for me thinking about taking this job once they offered it to me was learning that EqualityMaine had never hired a trans person as a staff member before. So at that year it would have been their thirty fourth, no, twenty ninth year, and they had never really hired a full time staff member who is trans. And so this would, was gonna be new for them. The movement really was driven by white gay men and lesbians. It really was in Maine. Mostly lesbians actually in the state of Maine they were the driving force, but they had never hired a trans person. An out trans person, I should say they probably hired trans people they just weren't out yet, to be a full time staff member of EqualityMaine. So when they hired me in 2014 I was the first full time [trans] staff member they had ever hired in their then 28 year history, or whatever it was back then. They hired me to do this rural outreach. And I'm like is it safe for me to be an out trans person doing rural outreach in these parts of Maine. Like am I going to feel safe in Fort Kent, or Dover-Foxcroft, or Machias, or Rumford organizing and doing work. And they're like we don't know. And we had people during the marriage campaign in these communities and that seemed to go okay, but we've never had a staff member do this, and so it was like we don't know. And so there was a lot of unknowns for me to step into this place surrounded by people who have been doing this work for years, but never really had a really prominent trans voice to be part of it. So when you talk about what social justice looked like for me. Was alright so what does that look like how do we, how do I one) survive and take care of myself in this, do the work that's required, and how do I elevate the voices of trans people across the state. And so that was kinda my, kinda where I thought about in that first year was one can I do this job it was new, two can I keep myself safe in it? I realized I could and I brought something to this role that wasn't there before. I had a pretty good facility of

Nervous or scared about job offer from EqualityMaine

First full time trans staff member in 28 year history

White gays and lesbians dominated Maines LGBT movement

First out trans full time staff member hired

Hired to do rural outreach

Anxiety around doing work while staying safe

EqualityMaine unsure of how to support the safety of trans staff member

Lack of trans voice in community

Raising up trans voices

Had valuable skills of being

being able to engage strangers, complete strangers, whether they were kids because I had been a teacher or they were adults. I was able to walk into a group of whatever, whether a group of sheriffs from Oxford County or whether it was a bunch of students at Messalonskee High School. I was able to connect with them. So I had that ability. Two was I able to raise up trans issues in the process and that has definitely been my goal for the six years now is how do I empower other trans, nonbinary, nongender conforming voices in this work? We've been hearing from, this, these other communities for generations, but how do we move more voices in more marginalized communities into the movement for sure. That has definitely been at the forefront of my work for six years here.

KATIE: Such a lovely connection that I'm seeing now, but it's like you've just always been this networker. Bringing in even what you were talking about in high school you had your little different cliques that you just could kind of jump between seamlessly, and it seems like you are doing a lot of the same work now. And you're just this approachable person. Did you ever think that this would be your life?

ALL: Laughing.

GIA: No, I never saw myself ever being an adult. Ever being queer. I mean I thought that's why I chose to kill myself. There was no future there was nothing out for me to aim for. There was no role models that were positive. The one role model that I had raped me when I was a teenager. So how can that be a role model? I mean was taught to be, that I was a monster. The movies I saw the pictures I saw about me as a kid growing up I was either a rapist, a serial killer, or a monster. If I was gonna be trans, whether I was a character in Psycho, or Silence of the Lambs, or whatever I was a monster. And so I never believed in myself ever having a future beyond 19. So the fact that I'm here at age 52 is, is sometimes really strange to be there, and that it's really wonderful to meet other people who have survived who are trans who are over 50. Especially like I have some really close friends who are trans women of color and you're rare, you're a gem because the average age of a trans women of color is about 38 years old in this country. I really cherish the moments where I get to connect with folks who are

able to talk to essentially any audience

Ability to connect with people of different backgrounds

Empowering trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming voices

Empowering marginalized voices has been focus of work

Couldn't see herself ever being an adult
Suicide attempt
Lack of positive role models

All role models where monsters, serial killers, rapists

Couldn't see a future survivors

Older trans women and trans women of color

Connecting with other trans

trans, but also have other marginalized identities and to like, I feel so like privileged, and I am privileged I grew up with a family had a house, had a place I could be myself, and while my family turned their back on me briefly they turned back to me and supported me. I lost a job for two years, but I had a little bit to sit on you know, I wasn't forced to go out and do sex work, or sell drugs, or whatever. Right, I had a cushion. I'm white. I have two college degrees. I understand perspective and I understand where I come from and I'm really focused on one yes I know how, I try to take care of myself, but I also want to do my best to make sure in my work in social justice that I'm raising up other people and other voices. And empowering other people because I can't do this work for forever. I don't wanna.

KATIE: Do you have any last question?

DAVID: I think that really about covers it, and we are coming up on the end of our time.

KATIE: I just want to ask. Tell us what you're most excited about for yourself, for EqualityMaine?

GIA: So a couple things we didn't talk about one) I had a fear of never having a relationship ever again being trans so on a personal level when you start to transition you never know, especially if you're [indistinct] will you ever have a relationship ever again. I've met many trans people who are like I'll never be lovable. It's a real feeling for sure. If I transition I may, am I always gonna just be this person who is never gonna find love again? I have found love again. I've been in love twice since. I've had two amazing relationships. I'm in a relationship now and that's hard and wonderful at the same time. So there is love after transition for sure. I want to say that! That's a good thing.

DAVID: Yay.

KATIE: Woo.

GIA: What was the other thing you asked though? Most excited about? I love our camp the work we do with young people and empowering young people across the state is life saving. To connect young people who are in families, or situations, or schools and communities where they don't feel like they can be themselves is probably the most important work I do. That excites me to work on that project every year

people

Discussion of privilege

White, two college degrees, financial stability

Raising and empowering underrepresented voices

Fear of being unlovable
Isolation

Fear of never having another relationship

Feeling unlovable

Finding love again

Relationships
Connection

LGBT Youth summer camp

Connection for isolated
LGBT young people

to make sure that happens. For sure because I didn't have that growing up.

DAVID and KATIE: Yeah.

DAVID: That is so important.

KATIE: Well thank you so much.

DAVID: Thank you so much.

KATIE: For sharing your story with us.

GIA: You're welcome. Glad we had enough tissues.

DAVID: Me too.

ALL: Laughing

GIA: Sorry if I got, you know that just, but it's real and I yeah.

I have a hard time not being real anymore.

Ability to provide connection for young LGBT people

Lack of connection

Authenticity