

Nikki: Today is Friday, December 13, 2019, and I am conducting this interview in the portland university Southern Maine Wishcamper Building. This is Nikki Farmer, N-I-K-K-I F-A-R-M-E-R. I am a student researcher interviewing Jake Kulaw today. Hello Jake. Can you please say and spell your name.

Jake: Sure. Jake Kulaw, J-A-K-E K-U-L-A-W.

Nikki: Can you tell me how old you are, and if you prefer, the decade you were born in?

Jake: Ah, I am 56.

Nikki: What pronouns do you prefer?

Jake Kulaw: he, him.

Nikki: What words do you use to identify yourself?

Jake: Queer.

Nikki: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Jake: It was interesting haha. Um, I was the middle child. I was assigned female at birth. I had two brothers. I was not the girl my mom wanted. Very tomboyish. Dad worked 4-12, didn't see him a lot. Mom was very religious. Ummm, I did when I was about 12 approach her to tell her I was born in the wrong body, to which, she didn't take it very well. I badgered her for maybe a year, until she finally said, "God doesn't make mistakes. You are a girl. Just roll with it." Or, she probably said something more, far more harsh than that cus I think she was just frustrated cus she didn't know how to respond cus people weren't talking about that stuff in the 70s. So, but, it was pretty you know, I don't know... my childhood was kind of tumultuous, but, between the alcoholic dad and some other childhood trauma issues umm it was not fun. And so as a result of just not, between the childhood trauma and not being able to articulate to articulate or get the support I needed on gender identity, which I didn't know what that was. I just said, "I am in the wrong body." And that is just the way I felt. But, puberty was like a nightmare and that when I started picking up alcohol and drugs.

Nikki: Umm, at what age did you come to see yourself as something other than cisgender and heterosexual.

Jake: Haha probably around twelve with the identity, with going to my mom and then I just, by default called myself a lesbian because I didn't know what else to call myself. And I don't even think I had that. Like, in high school I kind of turned all that off. I was into sports. And then that got eroded because I was drinking and getting high all the time. So, I just, that became less important. And I also battled with depression, suicide attempts. It was not a nice time. Um, so, I really struggled and probably had my own internal homophobia. I know I did. When my friends would joke about queers and dykes or lezzies I would join in and laugh. Secretly, I was intrigued, but I was like, well I'm not gonna you know, I suppose I was worried about my safety as well. But, I also wanted to fit in, like any normal teenager. I just did not want to be the odd person out so I just played along. had my own internal homophobia to deal with.

Nikki: Do you remember any specific moments where you felt uncomfortable being raised as a girl? Any specific memories?

Jake: Well my mom was always trying to get me to like dress feminine or buy dresses and then probably, yea I just I don't know. I just remember being confused. Even as a kid like what? Like, I didn't identify with being a girl at all. So I just walked around confused. I didn't have any language for it as a child, for sure. And I don't know where I came up with, "I feel like I am in the wrong body" at 12. I don't know where I heard that or just felt it. Something I just felt. I always felt like I was kind of not normal and hiding something, like all the time. So, I always felt a sense of "You can't let anyone know what you are thinking or feeling cus it is not safe." Although at the time I wouldn't have used that language, looking back on it now. Probably then I was just thinking I want to be normal and I want people to leave me alone.

Nikki: What was coming out to your family and friends like for you?

Jake: Ah, well when I first came out, my first coming out was as a lesbian. I identified as a butch lesbian. When I found that out I was like "Ok yeah, that is way better than lesbian." Cus I used that label cus I was dating women and well I guess "God doesn't make mistakes" so I felt like "Ok I guess I am a woman, I am a lesbian. There we go." Although, that never felt entirely comfortable. So, when I found the butch community that was kind of a little bit freeing, but, um initially difficult. Lot of fear. Lot of "What are people gonna think?" I came out to my mom first, not until I was 25 or 26. Um, she, that is an interesting, we were talking on the phone and I was going to be coming home for the holidays for Christmas time and I said there was something I wanted to talk to her about, but, not over the phone. And I was gonna plan to come out to her face to face and she said, "No tell me now." And I said, "No I don't want to talk about it now." And then she said, "You're not gonna tell me you have a different lifestyle are ya?" And then the phone got disconnected somehow we just, I was like, "I don't know what happened." I called her back, and this was pre-cellphone days. I dont know what happened. So, then I just, I was like, "Yea mom, I am a lesbian." She was like "Ahhh!" She, well her first question was "How do you know?" and I said, "You don't want to hear that answer. And she like "Nevermind." Um and then she was kind of like a little curious, almost. Like um, she wanted me to give her some books to read. Like first it was like, "Ok well I'm going to roll with it." But she said, "Don't tell your father right now, just let me, I don't think he will take it well." I was like, "Okay fine." So, initially, she was fine with it and then she started um having concerns that I was gonna go to hell and all that lovely stuff because she was religious and um, so we, there was a time period where I didn't really talk to her that much cus she would just quote Bible verses and tell me I was going to hell. I would say, "Mom if you are going to say that I am going to hang up the phone." And I would. I'd say "Ok mom I am hanging up the phone now. Talk to you later. Bye." So, my friends, it was not as big of a deal because I had moved away from home so all my childhood friends... I was, I was in, where was I, I was in Albany New York, outside of Buffalo New York. I only got out there through treatment. That's where they sent me for treatment for alcoholism and drug addiction. For treatment. And I was in a halfway house there, and um, so most people didn't even, they were like, "Okay whatever." Friends, that

wasn't that big of a deal. Although I was still trying to, I was trying to be straight and had boyfriends and was like, "Agh this sucks." It was awful. It was a nightmare haha. So I did the same thing in high school. I had a boyfriend, "boyfriend", and I remember the first time I actually had sex and I remember going home crying. Thinking, "Oh my God. I have to do that. I have to marry one of those things." That's about how I thought of it.

Nikki: I am sorry.

Jake:

It was like "Ahhh!" It was like a nightmare. And I didn't say anything. But, ya know, I never really dated guys seriously. I did have attractions to women. I didn't say anything to anyone about that to anybody because I didn't, I didn't feel safe or didn't know how people would take it. So coming out in the beginning was, it was a little awkward. But, with my mom, it was definitely awkward. Like I said I was 25 when I came out. It probably was the first time I actually kissed a woman, probably when I was, I think 19. You know I, you know I thought about it a lot and um, so, but that didn't, she was experimenting. I wasn't.

Nikki: Did that kiss feel right to you?

Jake: It did. You know? It did. I was like, "Wow, I never felt this way when I kissed a guy. You know, I was like, "Woah! What is that?" Like ugh.

"Oh! That's what they were talking about kissing boys but I don't feel that way kissing a boy. I feel that way kissing a girl, so."

Nikki: Was there anything in your life that encouraged you to come out? Maybe the first person you told or any movie star or any idol that you had looked up too?

Jake: No, I don't think so, really. I think I just kind of, there was this one guy who I was in treatment with and he used to tease me all the time and say "You're such a dyke!" and I would be like "I'm not gay!" I would argue with him and he's like "Ha! I beg to differ, yes you are." And he was a gay guy, um so he kind of you know probably knew before me. Um, and one part of treatment when we moved out we moved

into and apartment, he lived you know, downstairs and I lived upstairs and um, so I did eventually. He was the first person I think I came out to, so.

Nikki: Did you ever face discrimination in your social life after coming out?

Jake: Social life, huh... My friends? Umm, yeah! Because I was a butch lesbian I really did get some degree of flack from, I don't know.. I'm going to use air quotes "normal lesbians," you know the more feminine, the more feminine looking ones or at least the ones trying to get along and again, this is the 80's and the 90's. The '90s were a little bit better but in the '70s and the 80's you definitely didn't want to be queer. You'd get beat up, threatened, shoved in the uh... I just no you were not doing that. Definitely not in the '70s. When I was in High School you would definitely not tell anybody "I'm gay." You would be ostracized and bullied and so that is not something I was ever going to do. The '80s is when I came out, umm, yeah early 80's, I mean 83' or 84'. It still wasn't the... it wasn't like it is now like where it's really accepted. It was starting to get a little bit of acceptance but really not that much. '90s were a little bit better, but I was pretty much, like I work as a teacher, a public school teacher, and I was told by some of my colleagues who were also lesbian that I should dress more feminine and try and give me unsolicited advice, because I didn't ask them. I was like "Um no." Well, I am not saying wear makeup or put on a dress. "Well maybe you should put on light make-up" I was like "No I'm not wearing makeup and I'm definitely not wearing a dress." So you can just bite me pretty much. And then, I just said you know what? I expect this from heterosexual people, I do not expect it from you. I am trying to help and you're not. You're making it worse. I said, "And furthermore, what is the message I would send to the kids if I were trying to hide who I am?" You know, we're supposed to be role models and there is probably, I am sure there are queer kids in that class. And so what message am I going to send, I'm going to hide, I'm going to pretend to be somebody I'm not. We don't tell the kids that. So, that was it with her ya know. And some of my other lesbian friends were like "Oh you're too man-ish." Ahh you know.

Nikki: How did your lesbian social circle react when you came out as trans?

Jake: Um, some of them don't talk to me anymore. Some really distanced themselves a lot but will be cordial to me. "Hi, how ya doing?" But, it's like I intuitively know like they know once I began my transition. That was the other thing when I was identifying as male, but pretransition I still got somewhat accepted because I still had a female body. Which is kind of weird, I don't even know how to explain that but then some people distanced themselves even further. Some don't talk to me. But, I don't, you know, the funny thing is I just don't care. I think because I'm older I'm like "Well it's your loss I guess." So yeah, are some people not in my life? I'm like "Nope." But I don't really sweat it. The people that do show up and do care and do support me, I just try and focus on them.

Nikki: What impact if any does being trans have on you in the workplace.

Jake: Oh well now see there's another. Again, I only recently transitioned about 18 months ago, medically. I started taking testosterone in June of 2018, and then I had top surgery in August of 2018. So, the hysterectomy is coming up in February of 20'. So um, all through, even before I transitioned when I was just identifying as queer, butch, lesbian, lot of flack. I think because I wasn't, it was okay if you were a lesbian who was more feminine. That was acceptable, as a teacher. But, I never fit that mold. It's interesting because people hired me and I didn't look feminine so I don't know why they were trying to shove me into it a-- I think back now and I think I wonder if that was tokenism. "Like, we hired a gay person."

Nikki: What year was this?

Jake: My first teaching job, I think excuse me was 1997.

Nikki: Was the world different in attitudes towards ah lesbian and gay people?

Jake: I think there was more acceptance of it in 97', not like there is now, but there definitely was more acceptance, but, I

still think there was some people who didn't know quite how to react to it. I'll give you an example. One time I was being harassed by some students. They were calling me "dyke" and "fag lover" and stuff like that. So, when I brought it up to the principle, I don't know it was just left on the desk so I don't, you know, know which class it was. It didn't even matter, it was happening. So, when I went to the principle she pretty much said "Well you know you're the health teacher so just talk to them" and I'm like "Yeah I already do all right?" I do talk about it with them when we cover sex ed, I do. But even then I didn't cover a lot because there wasn't a lot out there. Sex ED was very heterosexual. It still is. Um so, but I did you know, mention LGBTQ people in the curriculum. Ok, not everybody is straight so. Which again probably got me in trouble, because parents weren't happy about that because that would be "Promoting and agenda." I definitely didn't, I was not out at work in my first 5...5 to 7 years of teaching. I didn't talk about it, I just didn't talk about it. I didn't say I was straight but didn't talk about dating women, either. So, anyway the principal said it was my job as a health teacher and I said: "You know if somebody used the N-Word they would be suspended." And her response was, "Well it's not the same thing. So I said well actually it is ya know. "Fag lover?" "Dyke?" I said that is very equivalent to the N-Word. And I just even to this day, won't use that whole word because I don't think it's my place to use it as a white person. But, um I, so you know we went back and forth on that and then she started being...Well, she was just a mean person anyway, I think she was pretty unhappy in her life and I think she enjoyed terrorizing people. So she started being, the state was coming in because that was when no child left behind was real big and all the state testing the state was coming in. And so she literally came to my room, now I dressed khakis, button-down shirts, I wasn't like dressing like a slob or anything and she came up to me to tell me that I should dress appropriately. And so, at this point, I was like "I am so sick of this!" So, I looked at her and said "I just want to ask you a question before you leave" and she said what's that and I said, "Are you asking everyone on staff to dress appropriately, or are you just asking me, because I'm a lesbian?" And she just walked out! She didn't even answer me! And I said, "There's my answer!" So yeah, so yeah, work has been touch and go. And then, I moved to Maine about 6 years ago, and uh, a couple years ago I was

working in idk, should I stay in the school district? I don't really care. RSU 14, I was out in Raymond, and the principle there again, I swear to god they just hire people like "look we have a queer person on staff." I got there and teachers were running up to me like, "Oh my God, we need somebody like you in this school" blah blah blah. By the end of year two, I got a non-contract removal. And again, students harassing, and I can deal with kids. I'm like fine, "They're twelve right?" They're hearing this stuff at home. I can deal with that. It's my job to educate them but I would love to have support from the other staff. That's not what happened. They started taking kids out of my health class. I've lost a couple of jobs because of my gender expression and identity. And I know it, and they will never tell you that and everyone says well there are laws that protect you. Yeah, there are laws, however, particularly as a teacher, in your first three years of your job you're on probation and they can let you go for any reason at all. They don't even have to give you one. And that applies, so, if I was working in I don't know, Sanford, and then I started working in another district in Maine, my three years starts over every single time I go to a different school. And that's not just Maine, that's a lot of, some states just have a two year one, but most of them are three year probation periods so yeah, I've gotten a lot of crap from students, from non-support from staff and people looking. And when I do, in the beginning, I think I did want to believe it. I was like "No this can't be happening, this is just not happening." But I just, it started wearing on me because it does. Even when you know, "Like okay, I'm losing these jobs." Not because I'm bad at what I do but because it's just because of who I am and some people probably parents have an issue with it and if you have an administrator who is not a good leader who won't say, "I'm sorry I'm supporting my teacher" you have to have some kind of evidence to support what you're saying. Like okay if the teacher isn't there, tell me how. What do you mean you say I don't like your demeanor? What does that mean? Well, I told em I said "It's code for we don't want a queer teaching our kids" and he goes "That is not what they're saying!" And I was like, "Exactly! they're not going to say that, they're going to use the word demeanor." You know? So, but, I was pretty much shut down by him but ultimately they ended up cus they were paying my insurance up until September, so that's when I started testosterone and

had my top surgery so that district essentially paid for my transition.

Nikki: As a teacher, are there any changes you want to see in how sex and gender is taught?

Jake: Ugh yeah, and it's really slow and I think people, I really think a lot of people want to but they just don't know how to do it. Um, even though there is curriculum out there, there is a language, there is people that will help you, there is guest speakers, there is Equality Maine, Gia Drew will come in and do talks to kids, she'll talk to staff. You know, whatever you want. You know there is curriculums out there. In the beginning, this is what they did to make did to make it more inclusive, they would just use gender-neutral names. Which was a good beginning, but it was like "Oh here, we'll just switch some names." And you know, talk about sex. I'm like, "Okay that's a good start but you gotta go beyond that." So I think there needs to be a much more gender-expansive curriculum, gender-inclusive curriculum. In the very beginning, I go over terms. When I do scenarios I don't just change their names and I'll use curriculums where they actually say, "This person identifies as non-binary, this person identifies as bi-sexual, this person identifies as you know, this person is an assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman." All right, so they use that language at the center so the kids, the kids don't have a problem with it now right. They don't, at all. I don't ever get any slack. As a matter of fact, I was just doing this a couple of weeks ago and we were going over terms and I said there's probably more terms that come up that don't exist right now and one student said "What is the term Demi-Sexual mean?" and I didn't know what it meant so I said, "Heh I have no idea, let's google it." And so we did that, we googled it and we learned together and so this is what I mean. Just being open. I think administrators just need to see a sex ED curriculum. Because the reason I lost my job my job in Raymond, is because, a part of it I believe is because some parents thought I had a transgender agenda again. Just because a student asked me a question! You know, I include those terms while we are talking about it but a student said he had some questions about being transgender or what it was. Like, legit questions, like "I don't understand." So that got that got interpreted by some parents as I was "pushing an

agenda." It's always, same things when I was identifying as a queer or lesbian it's like "It's like you're pushing an agenda," but nobody ever sits down to you and says "how about you come to my classroom, come the curriculum that I'm teaching. Plus in some states like Massachusetts, they have an opt-out. If you don't want your kid in class, you have an opt-out. In Maine, same thing! If you don't want your kid to hear it, you can opt them out. I'm not forcing them to be there. So, I think they should be there, and I think they want to be there but in the end, the law says if you would rather teach your children. And that's the other thing I said, I said well if they are going to withdraw that student for that unit then it's proficiency-based learning right so they have to meet that standard so then how are you going to demonstrate proficiency in that standard. Is the parent going to teach them? How are they going to do that? How are they going to do that to me? "They don't have to do that," I said "I know but how am I supposed to assess them? Send them to the library?" Give them book work? On what, genetics or something? So I said which I'm willing to do but again I think administrators are a problem. They have a lot of power, and I think sometimes if you get an administrator who is either, perhaps strong enough to stand up to parents and that's a lot of them and then you just have cisgender, heterosexual males in that position mostly in those positions specifically on the Super Intendant level it's... They don't know. Like, I really think some of them are decent people but they're just really ignorant and just have a lack of awareness. Then when you try to they are like well it's easier to throw you under the bus. You're one person, I've got these five parents breathing down my neck who are going to the school board and now they are breathing down my neck. So instead of educating themselves, so that they can say to those parents and to the school board, "No. This is the curriculum that's open to everybody." My god when I send out the letter saying where I'm going to be teaching at I send out the link to the curriculums on that site. So it's not like I'm hiding stuff. You know? But nobody wants to go to bat for it. That's the issue. I then the people teaching health, I think again if they are heterosexual and or cisgender, particularly cisgender they don't know how they don't want to make a mistake. You know they are not doing it because no I don't want to do this, it's like I don't want to make a mistake or say the wrong thing or what if I don't know something, oh my god what am I

going to do. So I just think the majority of the teachers are like I just don't want to talk about this. So I think I may be, I may be the only one who goes into such detail in Portland even. Some might, I don't know. I haven't really talked to other health teachers because we don't get those opportunities either, to collaborate with each other and to meet with each other. Even within the district. It's very rare. So I think there needs to be a collaboration with the Department of Education, that like I said trains administrators what it is. Maybe we have parent nights and say, "Hey, what do you want to know about sex ED?" Come and show up. Other health teachers need to be given more training specifically on transgender, non-binary, gender-expansive because they if they don't know it, like I said earlier I really think most teachers are like I just don't want to give the wrong information and I feel hopefully inadequate to be teaching this. So there needs to be more training for health teachers. But, then you have to take time off and you know, we're busy and health is only 10 weeks and we only have like 44 classes to teach this huge curriculum. So there are so many levels that have to be addressed. It needs to be a longer course, it needs to be taken more seriously... Um, I could go on. There is lots that need to be done.

Nikki: What do you think are the most common questions with your students that they have with you about LGTBQ terms and safe sex and other issues.

Jake: Um, lately it's the transgender and non-binary because they just don't have the ah the awareness of it. With transgender, sometimes they'll say so, "If you're transgender you make a choice to be another sex." And I'll be like "NO. No, a person who is transgender actually identifies as either as either male or female even though they were biologically born with the genitals that were associated with being either female or male." And then you have the non-binary people that don't even buy into that at all. They're just like "Ugh, gender is a social construction." It's made up and I don't want to put into those roles and who made those rules anyway. Um so and then the gender fluid... And then they are like okay. So they have, they are like "Oh okay." I also have guest speakers come in to. They're great. "Through These Doors" The Youth Adult Abuse Prevention Program. They come in and do, and I've talked to them. They do a

Jake and Caroline skit, you know and I said, "Have you ever thought about making that a same-sex couple?" Because it happens, but there is different things, fear of outing somebody or...

Nikki: What happens in the Jake and Caroline skit?

Jake: It's an abusive relationship so it shows, in like a twenty-minute skit they go through when they start dating and they are like taking the cellphones and you know the possessiveness and the name-calling and the threatening suicide and the where were you and why didn't you answer your phone. It's a good skit and Dan is a really cool guy and he said, "We have thought about it." he said, "I think we do it this way because most of the abuse that's reported is male to female. Like queer people don't actually report it. And so we don't have a lot of data so we're trying to..." But he's open to it. So, he's like "But, I'm really thinking yeah we should probably change that up. Now they do say at the end of the skit, "Okay this can happen in a same sex relationship, this can happen in a transgender relationship." Okay so they're using that language too, right? And they have different power and control wheels for a trans-specific woman or an LGB-like lesbian, gay, bisexual one. There is even a Muslim one. So they have different power and control wheel so, I think they have the LGBT one and then just the regular one. I like that they also have the equality wheel on the back. Well, this is what it should look like. He's bad this is good right? So, they're a really excellent program and they also talk about gender stereotyping and they just started a new class on sexting. So, they are a really great resource and think very highly of Dan Kip, at YAAP. He's really good, he's a good guy and he really wants to do right. He really wants to do right. They even do a thing to dive in straight, the non-binary concept. They do a forced-choice with them like, would you rather have pizza or a taco for lunch, you know? And then they'll say what would happen if I said: "You don't have to have either?" What if you don't like pizza or tacos? Right? Or what if you want them both? So he kind of rolls it that way too, so I do invite outside speakers and sarcasm? Gia Drew does a really good thing on consent and they talk about LGBTQ relationships as well. But, I have to say that most of it is still heterosexually centered.

Nikki: Have you ever been a part of any Social Justice organizations or have you heard of them?

Jake: Oh, well I belong to the Southern Maine Workers Center, and Wabanaki Reach, which works with the indigenous communities in Maine. I've been involved in 350 Maine. My very first activism was ACT UP, back in the '80s. We did some "die-ins" in the middle of intersections, in Albany. So, I've always been kind of a social justice activist. I've also co-chaired the Lavender Green Party, which is the queer arm of the green party and I show up for people. I've been a part of SURGE "Showing Up For Racial Justice" I don't know... All sorts of things. Immigrants rights, you know refugees, asylum seekers. Any form of injustice I really kind of show up for that. Yeah so, queer rights, transgender day of remembrance, you know all that so. I'm kind of like all over the place. And sometimes I do get tired. It's like there are so many things happening but I'm really concerned about what's happening with Transgender rights. Especially after this current administration.

Nikki: Yeah, can you speak more on that?

Jake: Yeah well, they just passed, it's all guised under religious freedom. But now they are pretty much-given license to educate and education, so they are trying to take away the student's rights to use the bathroom in which they identify with. Homeless shelters right here in Portland I just heard stories where they forced a trans woman, they said, "We won't accept you in a woman's sober house" and then gave her information for a male sober house. And so this is still happening and uh, Substance abuse services, housing, started with like a cake. And now it's just across the federal government. Housing, urban development, substance abuse services, homeless shelters... um, it's just frightening. Transgender Military ban, all of it. It's just, and AND, they are trying to define your gender by what your biological chromosomal birth is. So oh, you have a penis so you are a boy, you have a vagina and a vulva, you are a girl. So they are really trying to get that into the legal definition of gender. So this administration is literally trying to erase transgender and non-binary people.

Nikki: What issue in 2019, are you most passionate about?

So much again, again, so much. But, as a trans person, I'm really worried about what's happening. I'm also super concerned about what's happening at the borders and um, the rhetoric of you know, Mexicans being rapists and drug dealers and Muslims being terrorists. I'm worried about the climate because let's face it, we're gonna, people are going to be bickering over this but we might not have a planet in 10 or 15 years. We might not even be here. And there are still people saying, "Well I'm not sure if climate science is real." It's just there are so many things going on. I even, I just started talking about running for the school board in South Portland, which is where I live. So um, I don't know I'm all over the map. Politically, you know, um again I get a lot of flack for that from my friends cus I'm green and that's the spoiler party and now we're going to end up with Trump. And I'm like no "We're going to end up with Trump because we have voter suppression." You know we have tearing away at voting rights, you know Gerrymandering, you know. This is why we have Trump, not because you know, "I voted for Jule Stein in the last election." No. That's not how it works. You know so, um. People, I think, well it's coming from fear, I think people are just fearful and I too am sometimes fearful. You know, I've said to my partner, you know if that guy gets elected again let's move to Canada. You know, I'll seek asylum there as a trans person. I probably won't do that, but I mean, I think about it because I think about my safety. I think trans women are far more in danger, especially trans women of color. They are really getting murdered at an outrageous rate and nobody is saying anything about these things. It frightens me and I hear people talk and it frightens me. The level of hatred and animosity and bigotry. And again, I think it's all coming from fear and I'm not getting what I want. And the one thing, as much as my mom and I, we struggled for a long time. She died in 2006, but, I think we came to an understanding. I never came out to her as Trans, but here's the interesting thing. When I was visiting at one time, it was probably about six months before she died. I was packing up and getting ready to come back "home" at that time, I believe it was Massachusetts and I, well she looked at my dad and she goes "who's that guy over there?" And my father goes, "Who, what?" She goes "That guy right over there." And he goes, "That's your daughter!" And she just kind of looked confused and I thought "Huh, maybe she

had to get terminally ill to realize..." But so, the queer thing I think our conversations overtime adapted from, "You're going to hell!" and quoting bible verses to, "Well I love you and I want you to be happy, and if this makes you happy then so be it." She even mentioned her own religion saying, "You know it goes against my religion so I can't really one hundred percent accept it, but I do love you." And I want you to be happy I truly want you to be happy. To the point where, when I was going through a breakup and I told her about it she actually said, "I'm sorry, I know that you really loved her." So that grew, you know what I mean? And I think again, my mother was fearful of what was going to happen to me.

Nikki: For my last question, would you like to have a closing statement of any piece of advice that you would want to give to young trans people today?

Jake: First of all, a lot of people will still say to me, "You're very brave." and I'm like well no, I'm finally being authentic. And uh, I appreciate the sentiment of you're being brave and courageous, which, is super helpful. And I probably should also say that I am in recovery and the AA community in Portland, Maine has been incredibly supportive in my transition. I started at meetings, I said, "I'm going to transition, this is what it means" and they were like "Wow that's really cool." And in fact, if anyone has had a problem they just haven't said anything to me. Which is fine, I'd rather. But, I guess anybody who is transitioning, young people or at any point of your life. Be true to yourself. And there are going to be people that surprise you on both ends of the spectrum. People that you would think will be there to support you no matter what, won't. And then people you think, "Oh God they're just going to totally diss me and not be my friend anymore" and they end up being some of your biggest supporters. So um, but in the end, if you're true to yourself that's what matters. Go with your heart. You know, be yourself. Don't hide. Um sometimes it gets hard, but support yourself with people who are in your corner, who support you and love you, who care about you. There are going to be people who don't. You're going to go through struggles. You might go through struggles in social situations, you might go through some struggles in the workplace. We're evolving but we are also going backwards

right now. Really, find the people who love you and care about you and support you and stick with them and don't hold stuff inside. When I, of course, it was a different time, but in the '70s when I was just initially struggling with my own sexual identity, gender identity, I had no one to talk to because nobody was talking about it anyway. And, I turned to alcohol and drugs and ugh, became depressed and attempted suicide on several occasions. Um and I wish I had somebody I could have talked too, somebody that understood. Even one person would have made a difference. One. It's all it would take. But I don't have to have, I do not need the acceptance of the masses. I need a small group of people who love me and care about me, and that means the world. There are people that will be there for you. Find them and listen to them and drown out the other noise. Which won't always be easy, but you'll be okay.

Nikki: Wow, thank you Jake. Thank you for agreeing to contribute to the preservation and collection of LGBTQ Histories. Thank you so much.

Jake: Thank you.