

Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas

LT
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

February 27, 2008

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LT: Narrator
Tami Albin: Interviewer

ALBIN: Okay so today is March—no February 27, 2008, and we are in LT's house. Thank you—

LT: You're welcome—

ALBIN: —very much. So I will start off this interview the way that I'm starting off most of them which is, Tell me where you were born and when.

LT: I was born in Wichita, Kansas in 1963.

ALBIN: Okay—

LT: July 7, 1963.

ALBIN: Okay. And what was your childhood like growing up in Wichita, Kansas?

LT: Well that's a good question. (laughs) My—I think my childhood was not average. I mean, my father was a boxer. He was the manager of the Golden Gloves in Wichita. And he was sort of larger-than-life in many ways and sort of a local celebrity, which little kids don't really understand what that means a lot of the time. And we lived in Riverside which is a beautiful neighborhood. We lived very close to a park, and so a lot of my childhood is about the park too, because I spent so much time there and we were close to the river. But there weren't a lot of kids in my neighborhood so until my younger sister came along four years later I was pretty much—played by myself and there were—there were some kids that I played with, but—but I don't know that I was like necessarily a lonely child but we—since I didn't have a lot of friends in the neighborhood

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and I definitely was a loner child, so I spent a lot of time with my dog, Sabrina, and—and my father was an alcoholic so a lot of his time was either when he—because he would go on binges. He would binge drink and he would be drunk for a really long time and then he would go to the VA and dry out and go back to work. And he was a contractor and painter, decorator, interior decorator so he would—being self-employed he could kind of get away with that a lot of the time, and a lot of his clients would just wait for him to sober up. (laughs) So there was that. I have an older sister, who—she's seven years older than me and she became pregnant at fifteen and left home and got married. And it was, I think—and a lot of people I talk to I would say I'm probably typical in some ways of that kind of sort of volatile family. But—because I—when people talk about having these sort of *Leave It To Beaver* kind of families, I don't know any of those people (laughs) so—so I would say that in some ways that I did have a typical childhood.

But I did know from a really young age that I was a lesbian, I just didn't know what it was. Because I think I was probably seven years old when I was crushed out on my second-grade teacher and knew that there was—that there was a problem with that and that—I remember this particular moment when I was sick and my dad came to school to get me and he was flirting with my teacher, who was very young. And most of my teachers at that school had been quite older. They were the same teachers that my older sister had had. But this was a new teacher who was very young, fresh out of college, and he was kind of flirting with her. And I just remember being really angry about that. It's like, What's he doing, that's so gross (laughs) kind of thing. And I still didn't really understand what it was. But I did understand that from what I knew from popular culture there was something wrong with having that kind of connection with other women. And so I think I was really aware at a really young age that this was something that I needed to suppress, and that's what I did, so— (laughs)

ALBIN: And what about your mom?

LT: My mom was a very reserved, quiet woman who was from the Ozarks and sort of dreamy. My sisters and I had always referred to her as, Well mom was kind of checked out. And had I not known otherwise I would have said that she might have been one of those moms with the Valium (laughs). But no, I don't think she was. But she didn't

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drive because my dad didn't want her to learn how to drive and she didn't work outside of the house. So she was always there and we would take the bus downtown to pay bills or whatever, or we would walk to the grocery store and those kinds of things. And she was very—I think I got a lot of my love for popular culture from my mom because she was always really interested in movies and music and had like scrapbooks that she had started in the fifties and those kinds of things, and was just interested in a lot of those kinds of things. And my parents were both older than all of my peers' parents. My mom was forty when she had me and my dad was fifty. So a lot of the things that they were into also became things that I was into that also kind of further ostracized me too from my peers because I was—and probably another reason that I should have known that I was a lesbian if not that gay man in a lesbian body kind of thing, because I was listening to Judy Garland. I mean, I was Judy, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis. All of those people who are our icons were the people that I loved growing up. And Barbara Streisand was my best friend, so, (laughs) I just—but our house was really volatile.

My dad was incredibly racist, incredibly bigoted. I spent as—when I got old enough to understand racism we fought, and we fought for—until he died, about those things. I mean, I did eventually lose contact with him a couple years before he died in 2000. But until that point we were fighting about race or about—he was terribly anti-Semitic. And we would have these just incredible battles about these really ignorant things that he would say. (laughs) And I—because I would come home from school and I would say, I just learned blah, blah, blah. And he would say, Oh that's just that liberal crap. (laughs) So it was—it was—there were always—he was a tyrant and there were always riles about one thing or another, so I became even more involved in books and those things that a lot of kids reach out to that are sort of saviors in a way.

ALBIN: You had mentioned that through popular culture you knew that you had to suppress being a lesbian at a young age. Can you think of any examples?

LT: Oh yes. I have several actually (laughs) because I never forgot them. I saw the film, *The Fox*, when I was a child and that to this day bothers me, that story about the teachers in the country. And *The Children's Hour* I saw and then read the play also. And I think—those are the two big ones. I'm sure there are others that I'm just not thinking of. But those are two that I saw when I was young that left the impression on

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me that (whispering) there's something wrong with those people, that it was—and it wasn't about morality, it was like some kind of character flaw, was my impression. And I think that's probably how my father talked about it. I don't have—my partner and I were just talking about this the other day. I said, I really don't know—my dad was so hateful about so many groups but I don't really remember him saying too many things about queers. (laughs) Maybe he didn't mind them so much, I don't know.

But I was—I was growing up in the seventies when Wichita had their ordinance and the referendum, and I'm sure Bruce talked to you a lot about that. And so I was a child watching people. I remember the marches. And since we lived near the park we would see—my sister and I would go to where we went to play on the swings and the equipment was right across the street from the bathrooms where men were doing the tearoom thing. And we would watch them coming and going all day long while we were playing in the park. (laughs) And we just knew it was those people but we didn't really—I don't think we really understood what was going on in there, not really. I mean we kind of did from what adults would say, but—but that also sort of gave me the impression that there's this sort of—I don't even know what the word would be for it—this kind of desperation or this kind of—the hiddenness of it, that this is something that you don't want people to know about. So I can remember I think I was probably a teenager when I started thinking about how there would be some time and place where I would be myself but I don't know that I actually believed that—I was perfectly not happy, but I was sure that I would probably spend the rest of my life knowing this about myself and never doing anything. I was quite sure about that so— (laughs)

ALBIN: So did you have friends when you were in public school, in like grade one through grade eight?

LT: No, I didn't have a lot of friends in elementary school at all, I mean, a few. I had a couple of friends who had moved to the neighborhood that then moved away really quickly. One of—there was a little boy that I played with a lot who lived down the street from me when I was four, five, and six years old who, as soon as he got old enough to dislike girls he became my nemesis, so that friendship didn't continue. And there weren't any other girls in my neighborhood. We were near the park across the bridge, across the river, and the school district that I was in was almost a mile away. So there

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were a lot of kids just in the general area of the school who hung out, but I was just a little bit too far on the edge of the school district. And just the general vicinity around our neighborhood there were not very many small children. Most of our neighbors were like in their eighties. So I didn't. My little sister and I did a lot of things together. I didn't—it wasn't until I got to junior high that I actually made a couple of friends.

In junior high I was pretty miserable too (laughs) as a junior high can be. And this is where sort of my father's racism comes around again too. The first African American family that moved into our neighborhood had several children. I think there were three or four kids. And they would make attempts to get to know us and we used to play basketball, my sister and I, in this church parking lot across the street from our house. And those kids would come over and my dad would come outside and call us home. Well those kids hated us. They did—of course, they hated my dad but they had access to us. So my first year in junior high I was beaten to a pulp by one of those children. And I still to this day don't really understand what happened. I know this girl like came up and smacked me in the back of the head and I turned around and did this sort of, You better leave me alone kind of thing. And then the next thing I knew teachers were pulling us apart. So I don't—I still to this day know that I sort—I fought back but I just sort of blanked out on what happened. So that didn't make things any better for me in junior high because here I was like fighting my racist dad but all of the kids of color didn't like because they just put me in the category with him so it was really difficult.

And then I think it was in eighth grade that I made a couple of friends in band and in choir and we sort of just started hanging out. And it was that interesting thing about we weren't the kids that were shoved in lockers and things like that. We were just a little bit in the hierarchy of people who were bullied; we were a little bit above that. And so we—it was just interesting to me how you're othered and then—but as a group there's the certain safety there, and I really got to understand that just having these people to hang out with made things somewhat better. And by the time I got to high school though I—this—my—one of the friends I made went to a different high school so we didn't hang out as much anymore. And one of my other friends, we still kind of hung out a little bit.

But I met another friend who became probably my first love in many ways. I was just so totally crushed out on her and just couldn't really—couldn't really communicate that of

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course. And then my mother got sick and she had a brain tumor and went really, really fast. I mean, it was like I was sixteen, I think they found it in October, operated, and she died in December so it was very fast. And I ran away from home (laughs) with this friend. We ran away to California and we—well first we robbed my dad (laughs) because he kept cash around the house. He had quite a bit of cash around the house so we took—we took this really strange amount, I can't even remember, it was like \$2300. Why \$2300 I don't know. But—and we made up fake names, got on a Frontier plane and went to LA and stayed there for I think four weeks before we started realizing that we could not live there, we couldn't—we were sixteen years old, we—the fantasy of, Oh we're going to get jobs and an apartment and stay here wasn't going to happen. We were running out of money. And it's amazing when you think about now, \$2300 would not get you very far. It got us pretty far then but—and this was '79. So we came back.

And all of this was happening while my mother was sick. I had this amazing sort of—she had—when she had the operation for her tumor, she was just not quite the same when she came out. And she would just say these things. And I still remember we were—had been kind of joking about running away because my friend was in—staying with her dad and she had been moved around to a lot of family members over the years because her dad was an alcoholic. And at this point she was staying with him but it was kind of looking like he didn't want her staying there anymore and she was trying to figure out what she was going to do. And we would make these jokes about, We should just run away. And then I went to visit my mom one evening and she was doing this like, Now you just do what you got to do. And she just kept doing this thing. And I was like, She's telling me to do this. So I did. But then when I came back and then she died shortly after that and I ran away again (laughs) and did the exact same thing—took some of my dad's money, ran away, ran out of money, came back.

So I went to stay with my sister for a while after that. And she was very weird because this whole—this—it was one of those things that is very much like the popular culture that had formed my understanding at that time about what it meant to be a lesbian was, that my family felt like this young girl, my friend, was—had some kind of weird hold over me which, in retrospect yeah she did. I was crushed out on her but, in a way—but everything that I did they just blamed on her. And (laughs) they sort of—and then I sort

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of became this child who can't think for herself or whatever and this kind of stuff. But I—so I went to stay with my older sister for a while. And there were all these things about how—and you think that this is a cliché but I know that they used words like unnatural about our attachment to each other. So we were forbidden to see each other for a while. Eventually we found a way to do that.

My friend's family were very scary evangelicals who had a church in their house. And my—a friend from junior high and I had decided that we would just pretend we were saved and we would go to the church and this way Jackie, the other friend and I, could see each other. And that's what we did for a while. And then—but Jackie and I were always passing notes, and we were constantly joking about everything serious. And at that point, she wasn't staying with her dad any longer, she was staying with a family who were members of the church. And we were passing these notes back and forth and I was—I don't even remember what we were joking about but we had made reference in one of those notes to Rick—one of the people she was staying with and something about how we would just take care of Rick and we'd throw his body in the river. And it was a teenage thing, a joke. There was no seriousness to that. They read it as baby, and this couple had a new baby. And so one day I was supposed to go to this church thing and they were going to pick me up. And the person picked me up and they took me to these people's house, and Jackie and I were sort of sat down while her family came in, my family came in—and I had laryngitis at the time, I couldn't even speak—and (laughs) and [they]¹ proceeded to tell me about where they were going to put me away and how this was a terrorist threat. Scared me really bad of course and I'm crying and all this. And then—so my sister doesn't want me to stay with her anymore and when we got back to her house her children come up to me and she calls them away, which was just this kind of really mean sort of melodramatic thing my older sister would do. We aren't—we're not in contact anymore either. (laughs)

But—so anyway, to make a long story short, I did go back to living with my dad and that was hell so I moved out and got a job at this catering place. I worked at a nursing home for a while, then I got a job at this catering place, these minimum wage jobs. Had many, many minimum wage jobs after that. Started driving a cab in my twenties and I did that for a long time until I started dispatching cabs, and did that for a long time. And in

¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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between there I dated men for a little bit, but I just was not interested and not—and the men I was dating were not cool.

So—(laughs) So it was—finally I think I was twenty-one when I just did this like, I'm not doing this anymore. And then I was celibate for ten years, close to eleven years after that. I just—I was just like, Well okay I can't do what I want and I can't do this. I just will do nothing. So I spent like probably yeah the next ten years working my job, renting movies, reading books, hanging out with friends. I spent—I had a close friend who was the ex-boyfriend of the friend I made in junior high, and we used to go to Our Fantasy, the gay bar in Wichita, all the time. And of course we were both doing that like, It's the music. The music's better. (laughs) And then also at that time that was the place where we could get in because we were—at that time I think we were eighteen. And so we would go—I was always in the bars but never 'fessing up to being a lesbian. I had all of these gay male friends. I had the fag hag label going on and I had all of these friends. And I kind of quit doing that too around the time I was like twenty-four or twenty-five. I just—I lost interest in that because I think I—think some of it was too close to home in a way. It was like, I can't keep pretending that I'm not a lesbian and hang out with these people.

So finally I did this sort of thing where I was like, I have to be back in school before I'm thirty, I just set this day for myself. And I think I had just turned thirty when I quit my job and went to WSU [Wichita State University] and did my undergraduate there in sociology, women's studies, and English. And what I've always thought was really funny about that is I did this thing that college girls do where I came out in college but I was just thirty instead of eighteen or whatever. The more—the longer I was there, the more comfortable I was, the more confident I was. I got involved with Ten Percent, which was the—Bruce may have told you a little bit about Ten Percent, I don't know. They were the campus organization at WSU for a long time. I got involved with Ten Percent, I made a lot of friends and I was just—and that was kind of how I would do things. Then all of a sudden I was out. I told my younger sister. I never came out to my dad. We didn't have a lot of contact then anyway. I saw him like once a week, I did his laundry for him (laughs) like once a week but—I did eventually come out to my older sister who was just kind of like, Oh it's fine but let's never mention it again kind of thing.

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But anyway I—so I was just gung ho. I had not been with a woman, I had not dated a woman, and I was working Pride. I mean, I was doing the—I was doing the tables at Pride, I was the merchandising chair for Pride that year. I was doing all this stuff. I was part of getting Liberty Press going. I was involved in all of these things, just really out there. And it was just funny to me because it's just that thing about—in a way it was sort of cliché but it was just happening to me much older. I was sort of acting like an adolescent. I was falling in love with all these people and all this kind of stuff. But—but it was really interesting too because the—I don't know had I not gone back to school if I would have come out because I think I was just in a space. And at that time—and I don't even know if that's possible now in Wichita because Wichita's changed a lot. This was the early nineties and we—and Wichita was sort of going through this kind of activism spurt, which it kind of does seem like that happens in Wichita where around the time I was getting involved with things Pride was really big.

We had started a community center and I was part of like getting that—I remember cleaning up that building and being involved in all of that. And then my friend, who was president of Ten Percent, a really close friend that I made there, she went off to Syracuse to do her Ph.D. and I took over as president of Ten Percent. And I was president off and on until like 2001 because it was just so hard to keep people interested. People would sort of come and they'd tell us what they wanted the group to do but they never wanted to do anything, and then they'd leave. And then I'd say, Okay I'll be president again and then it just—it just went on like that for a really long time before I finally—finally left, and I don't think Ten Percent exists anymore.

Ten Percent was replaced by a kinder, gentler group called, That Gay Group, (laughs) and activism became really—people were just not interested in activism anymore. And I just—I felt like I sort of didn't fit in there anymore because I was constantly saying, But what about—because it felt like I just—the exclusion of some groups over others was bothering me. There was just a lot of interesting things. But Wichita is kind of funny that way anyway but—so when Mo and I met I—and I—we had been up—we had been to Lawrence a few times and liked it a lot. And I started working from home, or was going to work from home not too long after that. And we were like, Let's just move. (laughs) So we moved up here in 2003 and have been really, really happy here. Lawrence is a very, very nice place to live, but—

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ALBIN: So when you had that period of time where you stopped going to Fantasy and you kind of just hung out, did you start to read any kind of queer literature of any sort? So were you renting like *Personal Best* or (laughs) anything like that?

LT: I did see *Personal Best* but a lot of that stuff I would just do that, that's not me, kind of thing. I did not—I didn't really find too many things that I felt spoke to me and spoke to my experience. I read—at that time I did read *The Color Purple* and that made a big impression on me. I read everything that Toni Morrison had written at that time, and I was really interested in African American women writers because they seemed to have a voice that was very uniquely American but also it just—I loved that. I read a lot of those. But I didn't read queer stuff hardly at all. I read *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison. But I didn't start reading any of her like creative nonfiction until much later so I didn't. It wasn't until I went back to school that I became exposed to people like Sarah Schulman and people that I thought actually spoke to me and—that I became involved with more of the activist side of things. I tried to start a lesbian Avengers chapter in Wichita but it didn't last very long. (laughs)

But—because I've always been—when I was a kid I was interested in activism so it seemed like a natural thing to me when I came out to be involved with that because when I was growing up I always felt like I had missed out on the sixties because I was too young. So I missed out on all of that and I really—I understood that. And so when I came out that's what I wanted to be and that's what I tried to do in Wichita. And it was—Wichita is a very hard place to be an activist. And it—it just—I think Wichita is interesting too because it's a community where we used to—and I think it might have even been Bruce that said this—where we used to see each other at things and say, It's not necessarily a small community but it's always the same thirty people. (laughs) And I think in any community where people are that marginalized, there can be a lot of infighting and bickering, and I think that's true in a lot of activism, it's not just true for queers. And a lot of that was happening around the mid-nineties when I also became less and less interested in being a part of that kind of activism anymore but—

ALBIN: So do you think it's the infighting that makes it difficult to be an activist in Wichita? What do you think it is that makes it—

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LT: I think Wichita makes it—(laughs) No, Wichita is—I don't know. I used to say that—I mean, I always thought that Wichita was a fairly moderate place to live when I was growing up, but I also wasn't an out queer trying to live in Wichita. But I think Operation Rescue descended on Wichita in '90 or '91, I can't remember which, and things started changing. The evangelicals had more of a voice, and they were—it was a hateful voice. I mean—and there were just more—I think things became more us and them than they had ever been. And I—because I was working at the cab company when the Operation Rescue Summer of Mercy hit and it was our company that was taking the women back and forth to Dr. Tiller's office. And we were getting bomb threats, death threats. One of our drivers had someone put antifreeze in his dogs' water dishes. Thankfully they didn't drink it. But just terrible, terrible mess. And it just seemed like from that point things got worse. And I think that there's a—I don't even know how I would describe but there's—Wichita is all about the stuff. It's like one great big suburb where everybody buys things and talks about what they buy. And that—I'm sounding really cynical because actually Wichita was a nice place to live (laughs) but—in terms of quality of life, it's a pretty good place to live. But it's very diff—it's an apathetic community. It's very difficult to get people interested in anything but their stuff.

I was still living in Wichita when 9/11 happened and it was as if nothing had happened. There was a gay and lesbian organization that was going to do a protest about the county not offering domestic partner benefits and they wanted to have it—it was like a couple of days after 9/11. And I had suggested to them that they might want to think about rethinking that, and they were just like, Why? And I—it was just a very difficult place to get people who think outside of their own little space and I think it probably still is. But they—so that was always our quest in the community, is one of the things I was so grateful about coming up to Lawrence was—and I remember saying to my partner, We can actually just go to organizations instead of having to start the organizations that we want to be part of? I'm just so tired of, Oh I want to be in a book club, I have to start one. (laughs)

And the apathy was really—was really difficult to deal with because if people weren't apathetic, they were wearing down the people that were trying to do things. And it became what I thought was a nasty place to live with a lot of bad energy that I needed

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to get away from. So where was I going with that? The infighting, I think, is just the result of living in a community where people feel really oppressed. And I remember having a conversation with somebody at one of the bars after two women had gotten into this knock-down, drag-out fight, and there was at least one every weekend. And we were saying, This is kind of what happens when people are feeling so closed and having to be so closeted during the day and then they're coming out here to the bar, which was really their only space, and a lot of people are drinking too much. And for a while I was one of them. I was one of the people out there drinking too much every night too, so I can identify with that also. So it's hard to get people involved. And the other part of that when I was involved in activism there was—that—there was a lot of class issues that nobody wanted to talk about. And the way that they framed it at that time was, There were the activist people and the bar people. And the bar people didn't like the activist people and the activist people didn't like the bars and always talked about how they wanted to get people out of the bars. And those of us who didn't have a problem with the bars but were trying to sort of bring people together were having a really hard (laughs) time doing it. So it was an interesting experience, especially as newly out as I was because I just felt I—in some ways I was really idealistic about what I thought I could accomplish and in other ways I was old enough to feel a little bit defeated that things weren't better, that I wanted to come out in a better space where people were nice (laughs) to each other and all of those kinds of things.

ALBIN: So what did you do with Liberty Press?

LT: I was friends with Kristi Parker. And we were driving around one day, and I think it was probably when we were doing stuff for Pride. And there was a paper at the time that we all used to kind of make fun of—and I don't even remember what it was anymore—and she kind of did this like, I think I could do better. And I was just doing this, Well why don't you? You could do this. And she did it. And I remember we—I remember the first issue, I did—the first interview was with Linn Copeland, the owner of The Fantasy, and I interviewed her and that was interesting. And I wrote music reviews and film reviews for them for a while and did features and other stuff and then sort of became less and less involved over time. But it was—it was cool.

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ALBIN: So you did your undergraduate degree in sociology, women's studies, and English. Did you go to graduate school as well?

LT: I went to—I went through a lot of sort of fits and starts about that. After I finished that I was going to get my MFA in creative writing and I started the program through Antioch in Los Angeles. And I went out there for the residency and was really disappointed because I paid a lot of money for it and I got out there for my residency and I was in these workshops with 150 people. And I was kind of like, What? I sort of felt like I got scammed in a way.

So actually—I actually left before it was over and came back home. And then I decided I was going to do my MFA at WSU and wasn't very thrilled with the English department there and then decided that—a friend of mine, my friend from junior high, was a lawyer and she was going to go into practice for herself and she said, Are you still working in the library at WSU? And at that time I was working in the library and tutoring for Operation Success there and I said, yeah. She said, Well do you want to be my runner? And I was like, Yeah that'd be cool. So I did that for a while and I eventually became her paralegal. I just worked—I worked for her through for like eight years. So we—so I decided—and I was working full time for her so I just—I was going to—after I had decided not to get an MFA I decided that I'd get an MLS.

And I had—I took several of my classes and—but then I had several that were only offered during the day, so I wasn't really sure what to do with that. And then so I started looking around online and I found that Capella had a Master's in Education. And I wanted to focus on adult education so I did that and did it online so that I could keep working full time. And then when I finished that I just kept going. They had a graduate certificate in online teaching and training so I did that. I did a graduate certificate in diversity studies. And at the time I really didn't—when I first started at Capella I really didn't think very much about the possibility of teaching online and I was about halfway through the program doing this like, Hey this could be cool. Because that was—had always been my plan was to be an academic, I just wasn't sure how I was going to do it. So it just sort of happened that way. I started—I applied at National University in Los Angeles and they liked that I had the diversity studies certificate. So after I finished at Capella I did some adjunct work there in teacher education. And I just really loved

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distance ed because I really love the access that it can provide to so many people. And that was my motivation was that we can—if we do this right, we can give all these people access who would not otherwise go to college. They either would not have time or money or whatever. So that's how I got really interested in distance ed. And while at National, some of the people there developed an MFA program in creative writing. And I was like, Oh well now I'll get my MFA. So I just finished that in December, finished my MFA through National. But—so that's what I've been doing ever since is teaching distance education and being involved in workshops on distance ed and those kinds of things.

ALBIN: So how did you meet your partner?

LT: We met online. (laughs) which is really funny. We like to joke about it. (unintelligible) these things do work. We've been together almost eight years now, so—but it was just this kind of funny thing. And that's kind of a cliché too is I had just broken up with a person who I was just kind of like, Why did I do that? We weren't even remotely compatible. And I had kind of gotten to this space where—you reach the space where you're like, Oh I just don't care if I'm alone that's fine, whatever. And that's always kind of when you meet somebody that is really meaningful is when you just sort of give up on trying to pursue it. Because I had been through all of these things that I thought were great loves that I was not even remotely compatible with these people. And so she—I had just sat down and was just looking at ads and wasn't even thinking about any kind of romantic thing. And she had placed an ad for similar reasons. She was getting ready to move and she was like, I'm going to be moving and I'd like to take some online friends with me kind of thing. And we just started communicating via e-mail and both really liked to write and really liked to read and we had these like really lovely exchanges of letters about all kinds of different things but not romantic. And eventually we just—that just happened. So yeah.

ALBIN: So since you've moved to Lawrence, have you been actively involved in organizations?

LT: Nope, I have not (laughs) which is really interesting because I keep—sometimes I think that I would like to and then other times I'm just like, I'm just not really—I'm still—I

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still feel kind of burned out, I guess. That's really the only way to describe is that we've been—we've gone to some of the peace vigils and we've gone to—I keep meaning to go to NetworQ. I want to, I just haven't. I haven't made it. I've been involved in a lesbian book group here that Susan—I don't know if you know Susan—that she runs and that's really cool, I like that. I've met Kim and Arla and they are cool. And so I've met some people here but we're still—we're still kind of connecting. It's like, it's weird. It's like we've been here since 2003 but we still sort of feel like we're still sort of getting out there little by little and meeting people here in the community and stuff and—and every once in a while I think, I just don't know if I want to do that kind of activism again because I—because I write and I want my writing to be sort of my activism and I want to spend more time doing that. And I work a lot of hours so it becomes like, Well what do I do first? But I think that that's kind of the nice thing about Lawrence too is there are a lot of people here doing a lot of really cool things. And so yeah I don't know. (laughs)

ALBIN: Because the community here is much, much smaller than Wichita and there isn't really—I mean, NetworQ is like the social group.

LT: Yeah. Yeah.

ALBIN: So—but do you feel that you've met a lot of lesbians in town or—

LT: Not really. I mean, certainly when we're out we're like, (*whispering*) Oh yeah—you can—It's like—gaydar is such a cliché but it's like you're out places and you're like, This is so cool how many lesbians are in Lawrence. (laughs) And I remember when I was at KU having a conversation with somebody about—and this person saying—he's like, I'm not sure that Lawrence is a place for single people looking for other single people. He said, It seems like everybody I meet is coupled up and doing their own thing and it's just not—it's like—he's like, We have no bar. (laughs) And I'm like, Yeah that would be kind of difficult. Because I just take for granted now—I'm very happy in my relationship and doing that married thing, and I don't think—sort of that time seems really long ago, so I don't—but yeah I haven't really met a lot of lesbians here except the ones that—through NetworQ. I mean, because I'm kind of like the research—I like doing research so before we moved up here I had joined a couple of lists and put out little feelers saying, Hey we're moving to Lawrence. Where's the queer-friendly blah, blah, blah? And a lot of

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people were really—just wrote me back and gave me these long lists of their favorite mechanic, their favorite—it was really nice. I think it was Mike who sent me an e-mail like, This is where we go to the vet, this is where we get our hair cut and it was—this is my dentist. And those things were really helpful, so I definitely felt a sense of community here and how people sort of will come together and that was neat.

ALBIN: So what other things have you been up to while you've been living in Lawrence? I mean you finished your MFA.

LT: Finished my MFA. We bought this house, which was a big move for both of us because neither one of us have ever owned a house (laughs) so that was kind of cool, but—and also kind of weird in a way. I mean because my process of coming out made me always feel a lot younger than I was and also a little bit ashamed in how people will think that they should be on a certain track. It's like my friend that I worked for, we were the same age. We went to junior high together. She went to college in the right timeframe, got her Ph.D., was working for a corporate law firm at the time I was still driving a cab. I mean—so there are these parts of me that was kind of like, I'm really lagging behind here. So—and then at the same time when I was coming out and doing a lot of activism I felt like—I felt very free for the first time. I felt like I was getting to live a dream in a way—that my fantasy as a teenager had been to do things like have my own—it was very simple—have my own apartment, read, be involved in something like that, go to school, (unintelligible) write, and that I was getting to do those things was really cool. So—and they were things that I had not really thought I would be able to do. So when we moved up here and Lawrence is so neat and we bought this house but—but anyway, every once in a while I would think when we—after we bought the house, Now I don't have that like, Oh I'm young and not free spirited and an artist. And now I'm like—and I had this old Mustang that we had all these bumper stickers all over and it kind of—we were kind of like, Oh we got to get—we had the really bad hail storm a couple years ago and it had these holes in the top that were like—because it was a convertible. And it was raining in it every time we went anywhere in the rain. (laughs) It was raining in the car. And we were like, Oh we have to do something. So then we bought this Honda. And we're like, Now we own a house and have a Honda. Were just like all the other lesbians. (laughs) It was like, Well we didn't get a Subaru Forester so, (laughs) we're a little bit different but—

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ALBIN: So have you come across any kind of discrimination while living in Lawrence? Have you been hassled in any way or—

LT: The only thing that happens—because we have a lot of bumper stickers on the car. And I never know—we have like a couple that are obviously like queer things. But then we have the Bring 'em Home bumper sticker and the, I Love my Country but I Think we Should Start Seeing Other People, (laughs) just some of the standard, that kind of stuff. And every once in a while I'll get cuff off in traffic or somebody'll tailgate me for a ways. And I think it's the bumper stickers. But I never really—I don't know if that's the queer stuff they're reacting to or the anti-war stuff they're reacting to. And—but I can't really think of anything like that. I mean, like I said, my experience at the university was kind of weird in that everybody kept telling me how wonderful it was which made me think that things probably weren't so wonderful. (laughs) And—but I haven't had any—the thing that really—that really threw me about the difference between Lawrence and Wichita was that what I was saying earlier that Wichita has a really high quality of life. I mean you can get—we would—this house, that we feel like we paid a lot of money for, would have been half the price in Wichita. When we moved up here we rented a house that was infested with brown recluse spiders and we had to call the guy who did his Ph.D. at KU, who was like an expert on brown recluses, to help us. And he did. He was really cool. But—and we were paying more money for that place than we paid for this beautiful duplex in Wichita that was like nearly 1800 square feet. So the thing I think that really bothered me was this whole slumlord thing and how student—the students are—renters are really taken advantage of in Lawrence. That was something that sort of threw me. And I think a lot of places have their class things, but—but that's been the thing that's really kind of been the big thing for me since we've gotten here was sort of feeling like Lawrence could be this really neat place and they treat their homeless people really bad, what's with that? (laughs) But I haven't really felt any kind of anti-queer stuff. I feel like what's been cool is that—because I always say, My partner or she, whatever. And in Wichita we would get those things like, You mean business partner? But I've never had anything like that happen in Lawrence. I've never had anybody do the double take when I say she or be strange about it, so—and that's been really cool.

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ALBIN: I'm just going to switch the tape.

LT: Okay.

ALBIN: All right so we got that going again. So out of—you came to Lawrence. Did you think about going anywhere else? Like why—why stay in Kansas?

LT: That's a good question. (laughs) We liked Lawrence. I mean I—I mean, it's certainly more affordable to move two-and-a-half hours away than to move—my partner's from New York City. And when we would talk about living there it's kind of like, she was—she was wanting to get out of there and it's a hard place to live. It's a very expensive place to live. And when we go back to visit friends—the last time we went back in October we were like, Wow, we're really—we were really homesick, and it's just—

ALBIN: So what were you homesick for?

LT: Our quiet neighborhood. I mean, it's so quiet over here. I mean being able to—when we first came to look at this house, we were driving down Learnard and this—there was a hawk along the side of the road that had a squirrel. And we got really close to it. And we're like, Oh my God. And I'm like, I never saw anything like this in Wichita because it's just a lot more urban in all the places that I've lived. And so we've seen hawks, we've seen a little red fox out in the yard, we saw a coyote one day out here in the street, rabbits. I mean we love our little quiet neighborhood and the fact that we're all so super close to downtown. So we like the Merc, we like downtown, we like—it's a nice mix of really neat things that—as much bigger as Wichita is, Wichita didn't have but also a very quiet place where you don't have to—I don't like commuting, I don't like—I don't really like to drive, having driven a cab for all those years. I want to go where I'm going and that's it. I don't like to drive a lot, so we like that. It's just a good vibe. I mean, after the 2000 election we talked to an immigration lawyer and we were going to leave. We were going to Canada. And we decided that Lawrence was a cool place, that maybe we wanted to see what happens here and maybe be part of that. And when—in 2004 we talked about going to Canada again. (laughs) I think it was actually

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in 2004 was when we actually talked to the immigration lawyer again because it was like, Oh my God it happened again. (laughs)

ALBIN: So in that sense then, what do you see the future happening with American politics in terms of GLBT issues?

LT: Scary. It's scary. I mean—because I think that—I think that right now—and a lot of people would probably say—would probably argue with me about this, but I think that right now it is so much bigger than our issues. There are so many things going on right now. We're committing genocide in another country. I mean, when I heard like a couple of weeks ago that a British firm had figured the numbers of dead Iraqis around a million it just—I wanted to vomit. I mean, it's just—I can't—it's hard for me to even fathom it in a way. And so many of my students are there. And they either—since I teach writing, I'm seeing stories about PTSD right and left and about friends being blown up and all of these things. And so I think—I think I would agree with a lot of people that marriage is an issue that's used to rile up the evangelicals and in Kansas that seems to be (laughs) working. I read *What's the Matter with Kansas* (laughs). And I did see that happening in Wichita during the Operation Rescue stuff and the abortion stuff so it does make sense to me. But I think that—and I think that's the thing that as I get older I—my politics, I'm trying to be as inclusive as I can be. When I was coming out I was very single issue, I was very like focused on. And now I'm interested in everything, and I think that I have to be and I think that all of these things matter because we can't have—we can't have—be for marriage and then have—like not have access for somebody who uses a wheelchair or I mean have—or class or—they're all connected. I became—working on becoming a vegan. I mean, all of these things are really, really important to me so it's hard for me to separate them. But I think that—I don't trust Hillary (laughs) so—and I think that there's a lot of people who feel like she's the one but I don't know, I just can't—I can't really—I mean, I think that the issues now—that it really matters that a Democrat wins in November, it matters a lot. I don't want it—I'm definitely supporting Obama, but I don't really—both have said that they're not in favor of marriage, that they're interested in—I don't even know if civil unions is the right way to describe it because I'm not clear on what they exactly mean by that. (laughs) But—so I—and I don't know what they're going to do, and I think that—I don't—it's that thing about I think in—politics being what they are now, I think that

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neither is going to send a message right now that's more liberal than what they think people will stomach. And that may change when either one of them gets elected and that's what I try to be hopeful about. But I think—it's a bad time and I think being in academics I've noticed—I think it's a really hard time to be an academic right now. I mean, my students (*whispering*) say the darnedest things. (laughs) They are really—and I think this is different at a lot of traditional schools, but in the online schools in this for-profit environment where it's very—it's hard to deal with disruptive students and be supported, because there are chairs or managers whose job it is to keep people in school so students are allowed to bully teachers a lot more than they would be on a traditional campus. So—but I've had—but I've definitely seen—the politics of my students is scary. And the papers that I read make me question why I'm staying a lot of the time because they're—I get papers from students who still think that Iraq was somehow responsible for 9/11. With everything that's out there, they still think these things. I got a paper a couple of months ago from a student who—and I mean this is a man in college who was writing this argument about how, If we have gay marriage he might be forced to marry a man. (laughs) And I'm like, And where does this come from? I mean—and it's scary. I mean there is a lot of ignorance out there. And I—when I was in Wichita doing things and we would—at Wichita State, and we would try to sort of reach out to KU, I would say these things like, Oh those liberals up there. They've got their nice little cushy spot in Kansas. They don't have to deal with this crap we have to deal with down here. (laughs) And now I'm like up here doing this like, I am so glad we're in our little spot here. (laughs)

ALBIN: So what do you do when you get those—I mean, if you get thirty papers from students and they're all saying the same thing, how draining is that—

LT: It is draining—

ALBIN: —to try and explain or do you even bother to try and explain?

LT: My job—the way that I approach it is that—I'm sure that it's clear to most of them what my politics are, but I always approach it by questioning their evidence and their critical thinking. I—I never do it with this like, Oh you're wrong. I do it with, Well the source isn't legitimate, try this one, or, this is a logical fallacy. This doesn't work. You

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can't say all blond are blond. And usually my example is, If I have a boss who is blond who is mean to me, does that mean that all blondes are mean? That's how ridiculous your argument sounds. (laughs) And a lot of times that stuff works. But so much of the time my students are just trying to get by from paper to paper, I'm not even sure they're reading my comments a lot of the time. Like some of them do but—but my—I sort of feel like my job is to try to teach them to think critically. And if I can get them to do that, then I will be right. It's sort of like my subversive thing about, If I can show them how important it is to think critically then they're going to come around to this stuff on their own and they don't really need me to tell them, You're being a bigot or whatever. And some—but does that work? I don't know. I mean, some of them I think do but I think they already started that way, the ones who are really closed down, I think they just say, Oh intellectuals they're elitist, I don't like them, (laughs) kind of thing. I'm not sure they listen. I think that's when, (whispering) I start thinking about leaving the country. (laughs)

ALBIN: And this brings me to the next question of, we talked about why you stay in Kansas. Do you see yourself staying in Kansas? Do you think you guys will stay here forever?

LT: I think so. I think—if we can get over this, this hump, and even if it's Hillary. If one of them wins in November and it's not McCain, I think we might see change. At least I want to be hopeful about change coming, and then I think we would stay. If that doesn't happen, we might seriously consider leaving again. I mean, we go back and forth on it. Because I think it's just more than our personal rights, it's that thing of feeling—feeling just like if most of the population—if half, which is a lot of people, feel this way, this isn't really a place I want to live. Even though we're very safe, or it feels very safe here, and I think that—I think that a lot of people—my partner's Jewish. I mean, she has family members that were—that were killed. I mean, we—people—people are very quick to think that can never happen, and I think that we're both sort of paranoid enough (laughs) to think that it could totally happen. (laughs) They're going to start putting us on the train any day now. (laughs) So I think that it's not wanting to wait too long. And then that may sound paranoid, but I don't know. One of the things I did in my MFA program that was really kind of fun was I had to write a screenplay. And I wrote a screenplay about a young woman who was very apathetic who's going to Kansas

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University. And she has some friends who are always protesting one thing or another and one of them—her friends kind of start disappearing. And she ends up being sort of a revolutionary and creating her own little queer underground railroad. (laughs) to move these people to Canada. And I had a lot of fun writing it but at the same time I was sort of imagining. Because I mean, even as a child I think—I'm kind of a nerd and so my—I like those post-apocalyptic zombie movies. (laughs) So I—as a child I was always sort of imagining how I would survive. And then of course as I—when I was in high school I was really interested in how we were all going to die from nuclear war. I read everything I could about it. And then *The Day After* came out and it was filmed up here and that was all I talked about. And so I was always imagining what my life would be like after this apocalypse. And so I—in my screenplay I was sort of taking that into like, Well if I could do—if I was this woman—if this is me, how—what would I do? Would I be as brave as she is, and that kind of thing, but at the same time feeling a little bit weird about it because when I workshopped it in one of my classes I had it set like very—in the every near future, like ten years out or something like that. All of my classmates were like, This will never happen. And I was like, How do you know that? (laughs) Because they were like, I think you should put it like a hundred years in the future. Because I had created this whole party called the Responsible Values Party (laughs) and they were jailing people and all of this kind of stuff. And my classmates were like, That's never going to happen. That couldn't happen. That's not believable. (laughs)

ALBIN: That's funny. So what do you think about the future of Kansas politically?

LT: I think it's a really interesting time. I mean, we have Kathleen Sebelius, who seems to be popular with a lot of people, not just Democrats, and her endorsement of Barack Obama was kind of cool. I was really surprised at how well he did in the caucuses. I just thought that was really neat. And I think that there's all of this buzz about her being vice president material or future presidential material. And I just don't know if Kansas is—I would love to see Kansas kind of swing back to the moderate that I—or at least—I mean and maybe it wasn't that way at all, but that's the way I remember it. I remember—and I could be totally wrong about this, but I remember—because my parents were Republicans. I think my mom was a closet Democrat (laughs) but my parents were Republicans. And I remember this mention, and I may have this wrong, of

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Bob Dole being pro-choice at some point. And I'm always telling people about this—I remember when Bob Dole was a moderate, but—and I may have this wrong, but I think that it would be wonderful to see Kansas sort of start swinging back that way. And it makes sense as people, particularly farmers, realize just how much they have been screwed by these policies that these people who promised them these things based on all these cultural issues are really just not interested in them at all, and definitely not interested in their best interests. If Kansas started sort of swinging back the other way, and I think we certainly could. I mean, we have a history of being very populist and we're not—I think it could happen. It's hard—it's hard to have that kind of faith though. I mean—when I left Wichita I was getting Bible tracts on my car every single day at work and they were those like, You're going to rot in hell things. And it's very hard to sort of feel positive when that stuff's coming at you all the time. I mean, it just—it was a constant where I worked because I parked—my space at the law firm had my friend's name on it and I had the car with all the bumper stickers, and I had had this little run-in with a client who was an evangelical about him not paying his bill. And from that day for almost two years I had these bible things on my car every day. I mean, that was a lot of effort on his part to (laughs) make this little stop to do this to me all the time. And so it—and the neighborhood that we lived in before we moved up here, in College Hill, was a very pretty neighborhood. I really liked the neighborhood. But our political signs were constantly getting torn down. There were just these little things that just—and it was a lot of times little kids that were doing it which is just kind of sad. It was like when Gore and Lieberman were running and these little elementary school-aged children were coming up into the yard and taking our signs. It was just sad.

ALBIN: So is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you want to mention?

LT: I can't really think of anything. I think it's interesting because—I mean, I love what you're doing because I'm really interested in narrative and people telling their stories and sharing their stories. I think it's really important because I think everybody has a story. But particularly because I think Kansans—so much of the country thinks of this part of the country as just nowhere and that people here don't—not only do we not really think about issues, we're just not really a part of issues. We're not—and we don't—we're not activists, we don't do—we don't create art. There are all these things that it's

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hard for the coasts to see about us. So I think that's—so that's the other thing that I think is really cool but—

ALBIN: Did you find that—like, when you go to New York to visit your partner's family or friends, do you run into that?

LT: Just a little bit. I mean, I think that her aunt and uncle, who are these really, really sweet people, and he's an academic and he's very old school academic. He's very sweet but he's (whispering) very intellectual. He makes me feel really dumb. I mean, I kind of get the feeling that they don't really get what we do (laughs)—what it is we do out here in Kansas. But it's not a judgmental thing. It's just kind of like they're in the center of everything. I mean, they're in Manhattan. I mean, they're in the place. And I think sometimes the rest of the country feels inferior compared to that. So I don't know if they really—it's—but I don't—I did get a little bit of—when I went to Syracuse to visit my friend—a little bit of that. I had went to a flea market and there was this young sort of baby dyke there, and I bought a suitcase from her because I'd bought so many things while I was in Syracuse that I needed to buy a suitcase. And she did this like, They have Doc Martens in Kansas? (laughs) I was like, Yes we do. I rode my horse into town to buy them. (laughs) I mean but—because sometimes you do get this thing of like, and then I have to use the party line to call my friends. (laughs) But I think most of the time people are pretty cool about it. [The]² first time I went to New York I had my Wichita State shirt on when I went to a restaurant in Manhattan. And this guy was like, Shockers, love them. (laughs) And I was like, Wow. So it's a smaller world than it used to be but—

ALBIN: Well if there's nothing else, I think we may be—

LT: I cannot think of anything.

ALBIN: (*unintelligible*). Excellent. If you do, let me know. I can always come back, so thank you very much.

LT: Oh thank you. I hope I didn't ramble on too much.

² Edited by narrator during the review process

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ALBIN: (unintelligible).

LT: (laughs)

[end]