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Title: LGBT Oral History: Emily Newberry

Date: October 11, 2014

Location: LGBT Oral History – Newberry, Emily – 086

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Interviewee: Emily Newberry

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Videographer: Lonna Malsheimer

Date of Interview: October 11, 2014

Location of Interview: Waidner-Spahr Library at Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA

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Abstract

Emily Newberry was born in June of 1944 in St. Louis, Missouri, shortly thereafter moving to West Haven, Connecticut, and then Schenectady, New York, after her parents got divorced—a shameful and hidden family secret—and her dad remarried. Emily moved to the Central Pennsylvania area when she attended Dickinson College. Emily became involved in advocacy work while attending Dickinson. After graduation, she became a member of the Socialist Party and was involved with the organizations the Cleveland Draft Resistance Union and the American Communist Workers Movement, Marxist-Leninist. Working as a machinist and then as an organizational development consultant, Emily has been married three times herself, and today, lives in Portland, Oregon. In this interview, she discusses her experience repressing her transgender identity throughout her life until 2005. After coming out, Emily has faced discrimination from her workplace, insurance company, and therapists. She also discusses the importance of her women’s circles in fundraising enough money to have gender confirming surgery. Today, she continues her advocacy work as a performance poet and writer as well as attending panels regarding LGBT issues. She expresses how welcoming the Dickinson community has been during her visit back to campus.

BL: Well, welcome, Emily. We appreciate you coming to be interviewed today.

EN: Thank you. Thank you.

BL: I am Barry Loveland, an oral history interviewer with the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project, and I’m here with Lonna Malsheimer, who’s our videographer. Today is October 11th, 2014, and we’re interviewing Emily Pittman Newberry ...

EN: Yup.

BL: ... at the Waidner-Spahr library at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. And Emily, do I have your permission to videotape our interview today?

EN: Gladly, yes.

BL: Great. And we have a consent form, which you’ve already signed, so that’s great. And at the completion of this interview, if you decide that you want anything restricted from the interview, just let us know that and we can put that on the form before you leave.

EN: Okay.

BL: And also, let me assure you that any time during the interview if you want to take a break, just let me know or if you want to stop the videos, let me know, and we'll do that, and we can take a break. [camera is obscured by fingers for a moment]

EN: Okay. Sounds good.

BL: Alright. So, Emily, if you could talk maybe a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up, and your family and so forth?

EN: Okay, so I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, June of 1944. My—I had an older sister at the time.

LM: Stop.

EN: Yes?

LM: We haven't got that mic.

EN: Oh no.

LM: [stands to fix microphone] Thanks. That's why. I'm sure it'll be good, you only have one sentence, say it again!

[everyone laughs]

EN: Am I loud enough?

LM: Oh definitely.

EN: Okay. Alright.

LM: Alright. Wait. Just one ... Okay, shoot.

EN: So, I was born in June of 1944 in St. Louis, Missouri. My dad had grown up—been born and grown up in Springfield [Missouri] and very quickly, we moved to West Haven, Connecticut. My dad got a job at Winchester Arms during the war. He was a research scientist. He divorced my mom in 1947, and quickly remarried my stepmom, who he met at work. And then we moved to Schenectady, New York. He got a job working for General Electric as an electron microscopist. Imagine having to learn how to say that when you're a kid. [laughs] So, Schenectady's where I grew up until I was 18 and came to Dickinson College. I went to Schalmont High School.

Because of the—how conservative Schenectady was, and because of the times, my parents decided to pretend that there had been no divorce, because it was considered very shameful. So I

grew up having to pretend my stepmother was my birth mother and ... She also had a lot of emotional problems after our—my younger brothers were born. She experienced postpartum depression, which they didn't even have a word for then. They didn't do much studying on women's health issues, and so that went untreated and she could be mentally and physically abusive sometimes.

So, we grew up with the shame of the divorce, the shame of my stepmother's problems, and then at—by age six, I knew there was something really different about me. I wanted to wear girl's clothes, I wanted to hang out with the girls, and I also knew, almost without people telling me, that that would be considered "sick" and also shameful ... So I made a life decision—by the time I was seven, I knew I had to just—not only hide it from the world, but take it out of my own consciousness. Not even think about it. Because to me—and this is just something—I don't know if it's me or what, but if I know something to be true, I have to act on it. It's almost—it's not a compulsion exactly, but it's just a strong feeling I have. So, I had to not let myself think about or be aware of those feelings. Of course they didn't go away. They would pop up from time to time, but I made the decision that they told me I was a boy, I was going to pretend. And I did. Anything else about that?

BL: Well, what was school like for you as—having to sort of keep that secret or ... ?

EN: It was painful at times. I did the best I could. My dad was a Boy Scout Commissioner, so I was in the Boy Scouts. He talked about playing football, so I played football in high school, trying—as a way of getting closer to him. My dad was—he's a good man; he accepted me when I came out, but he had certain strong beliefs about ... since he was a Boy Scout Commissioner and also after Schalmont was built. He was on the school board. He had very strong beliefs about not even letting it appear like he was using his position to make life easier for me. So, he would help other kids, but he wouldn't help me. And he—it was partly that belief and partly he believed that you showed what stuff you were made of by the way you overcome diversity—or I'm sorry, adversity.

BL: Right.

EN: And so, he pretty much left me on my own in that way. When he needed me to do things, like we lived—we moved out of the city of Schenectady into Rotterdam [New York] into this big old farmhouse that had been built in the 1830s. And we needed lots of firewood to cut down on the cost of heating the place, so I got the job of chopping the wood. And he taught me how to use sledgehammers and wedges and double-bladed axes and a chainsaw, and he left me just to do those all by myself.

So, on the one hand, it was empowering that he had that trust in me, and also it gave me a way to be in touch with my body that I couldn't otherwise. Because I definitely felt that dissonance between these feelings I had and the body that I was in, even though I didn't have a concept for it. I couldn't—I had no way to think about it, but I definitely felt it. So, I mean everything, after playing football or going to the boys—most of time, I would try not to even take a shower. Just change and get on my bicycle and go home, if I could. And I felt really uncomfortable trying to be one of the boys. I would try to hang out with the girls a little bit, but then they thought it was

kind of strange in those days. You were, “well, you’re a boy, you’re supposed to hang out with them.” And they wouldn’t talk the way they would if I wasn’t there. It was clear to me that it wasn’t considered normal. So, I did the best I could, and it wasn’t easy. It wasn’t easy at all.

BL: Did you end up dating girls when you were in high school, or ...?

EN: I—I ... well, I wasn’t really dating. We ended up going to the junior prom together, but actually all I did most of the time was carry her books between classes, and after the junior prom, she dumped me. [laughs] Because I wasn’t a real boyfriend!

BL: Yeah.

EN: I didn’t have a clue what to do. I thought I was doing the thing, but actually, we lived on the end of a dead-end road, and on—you know—Saturday afternoon, if you walked down to the end of the road, there were these cigarette butts and condoms, you know, laid out. You know, just so far as ... here was one door of the car [gestures with one hand] and there was the other door of the car [gestures with other hand off-camera], so it was clear what other teenagers were doing, but ... And I knew about sex, my ... one of the good things about my dad is his way of teaching you about sex was having dogs and cats, and then watching the kittens being born, and sort of, very—in a medical, sort of objective way explaining the process. So I knew where babies came from.

It wasn’t a mystery to me in that way, but how the relationship went and how to relate, it was a mystery to me. I had no idea what to do. And I had an experience a couple of times in high school. I remember being in the hallway between classes with a bunch of teenagers all laughing and giggling and talking about just an ordinary teenage thing. And all of a sudden, I felt like I was outside of my body, floating above the crowd of us, looking down at us, and having this sense: “Okay, on the one hand, here we are, just these ordinary teenagers babbling away. On the other hand, we’re like these beings inside the bodies and distanced from each other, and just playing all these roles, these fake roles.” And then I’d come out of it and be back in my body again like, [grunts and makes a weird face, looking upward] ... I guess that means I’m crazy or something. I better not talk about that either.

BL: Did you get any sense from other kids in school that they, kind of, knew what was going on with you, or thought...?

EN: No. No. I was an excellent role player. I don’t think anyone knew. [chuckles]

BL: Okay. Well, so you graduated from high school there and then you applied and got into Dickinson?

EN: Yes. I put in ... My parents, especially my stepmother, had, like, very strong ideas about what you were supposed to do, so I applied to a bunch of Ivy League schools—Colgate and Brown and all those. None of them accepted me, because I, quite frankly, I didn’t have that great of grades. I was all okay, but I would do well in something I really had a passion about—I loved Spanish probably because of the teacher. I loved social studies and English, but math and science

were like enigmas to me. I didn't—I didn't take math, or science—or math beyond algebra. So of course, Ivy League aren't going to take somebody who hasn't taken anything besides algebra.

But Dickinson accepted me, and actually, that's a little bit of an indication of the relationship between my stepmother and I. I didn't know I had been accepted to Dickinson. She got the letter, and I only found it, because I was doing some chore that had to do with putting away the good silver, and it was hiding underneath the good silverware in the drawer... this letter from Dickinson! I just barely got my thank you letter back to them in time.

BL: Wow.

EN: [laughs] It's quite interesting. So, I left high school. I was in, in my junior year. Most of the time I went to Boy Scout camp, like I think three times, so I'd go with the whole troop. But my junior year, I went on my own, which you can do. I got a job washing dishes to pay for the—the cost of it, and I think it was the second day, they sent us down to the lake. They had this F-shaped dock with, you know, like this [makes shape with hands] ... And here's for the tadpoles, here's for the beginner's, and here's for the real swimmers. And the lifeguard would ask, "Can you swim? No? Okay, you're a tadpole." Yeah, kinda. "Oh, okay, you're a beginner." And I said "yes," because of course I could. We used to go swimming in the local swimming hole all the time, so he said, "Great, just jump off the end of the dock and show us."

And I jumped off the end of the dock, and the weight of everything I had been going through I think took me right to the bottom. And I just lay there waiting to die. It felt—it felt like a relief, like all the pain and all the hiding was just melting away, and I was completely at peace. I wasn't afraid, and then one of the lifeguards noticed that I had just disappeared, and sent a stick down that hit me in the chest. And I instinctively grabbed it, and he pulled me up. And as soon as I hit the air, I was like, "Oh my god, how shameful that would be. For my family." So, I just got on with it, you know. [chuckles] Got on with the life, that I knew I had to lead.

BL: So, what was life like at Dickinson?

EN: My initiation at Dickinson was the beanies. We came to Dickinson, and we were told—given a beanie—we were told we were supposed to wear the beanie everywhere we went. We were given some little booklet or something about the history of Dickinson College, and there was this upper-class society. I don't even remember what the name of it was—something and key, I think. And any of those people in that group could stop you as a freshman, and you know, demand, "What's the answer to this question or that question?" And if you didn't get it right, they'd berate you; and it was a form of hazing.

And I was totally appalled, because I thought that I was coming to Dickinson to get away from all the nonsense that I had lived under in Schenectady, New York. I thought, "This is a place where people care about learning; they care about truth." You know, they don't want hiding or lies, and to sort of go through that right at the start was really disillusioning to me.

BL: Mm.

EN: I was really angry about that. But I took care of it. I would walk out the door with the beanie on and find a way to carefully take it off to walk around the grounds and a couple of times, I stood on the edge of crowds, just watching what was going on. Just shaking my head and then, when I would get to the—close to the classroom, I would put the beanie back on. I just wasn't going to let them treat me that way. No way. So that was the beginning of my activism at Dickinson College. [chuckles] Some of the mildest form.

BL: So, what coursework did you study here?

EN: I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I thought about history, but quite honestly, I couldn't connect with the history professors at the time. I tried philosophy, but the head of the department gently told me that he thought I'd be better off somewhere else. I think it was because I wasn't a highly academic person. Ironically, I think that I wasn't good at it, but I think that I was more in line with the origins of Dickinson, which was about teaching people to be good citizens and caring about the issues of the day. So from that point of view, I think I was an excellent student, but—in terms of the traditional academic, I didn't measure up.

So, I ended up in sociology. I did—thought about psychology, too, but they didn't have the kind of psychology class that you do today, which are much more interactive. And I cared about society and what made it tick and what made it go wrong and why were some people mistreated. I was very aware of racism and, you know, with the struggles that were going on in the south, and so to me sociology was the place to go. I wanted to learn how to change it.

BL: So, did you become more aware of your own identity at that point or were you still suppressing that?

EN: I suppressed it until 2005.

BL: Oh.

EN: I'll tell you. That's a little bit of a dramatic story.

BL: Mm.

EN: One way that I was able to find pride in myself—my dad is part Scottish and part Cherokee, so I was very up on the history—especially the Cherokee people, but of Indigenous People in general in America, and of the pos—some of the positive contributions they had made as well as the serious mistreatment that they had received, and so that was a source of pride to me. I mean, I didn't walk about parading it all the time, but inside, I felt really strongly that this was—that this is a part of my heritage that I can really grab a hold of—that [clears throat] that it was mine in some way, that I owned it in some way and nobody else could tell me about it.

I mean, I would read various books and take in what seemed true to me, but it was a bulwark for me in terms of having a sense of inner pride. And I wasn't—there was no way I was going to come out. It felt too dangerous. I mean, I heard stories about the gay bars in New York City and the ways that people were forced to live on the edges of society, how bad the repression was. I

hadn't even heard the word transgender. I didn't even have a concept for it at that time, but I just wasn't going to let myself to be forced under the margins.

So I didn't go there. My activism at Dickinson started in a different way. So when I came here, there were ten fraternities and four sororities. And other than things like, you know, the Mermaid Players and the occasional all-college concert, there wasn't much of a social life for independent students—especially men, because some of the independent women could get asked to dates by fraternity guys. But if you were a guy or seen as a guy as I was, there was very little social life, and some kids who got rejected by the fraternities were really depressed. I'll never forget that typical ... It was like they all had the same script—put your shoulder around you one evening at a smoker, take you aside, and say, “We had a meeting last night and your name came up. We think you'd be happier somewhere else.” And after about the fourth one of those, I just stopped going. The free cigarettes were nice, but I honestly, wasn't that drawn to it.

So after rush week was over, two or three upper-classmen who had been through this themselves just put out the word that, you know, “if any of you are kinda done with rush week or feeling bad about it, we're just going to have a quiet little party.” We showed up, and it quickly developed into a whole shtick. So, three or four of us did this fake big brother - little brother thing. We made paddles. We wrote Gamma Delta Iota [makes writing gesture] for God-Damned Independent on them. You know, we joked that the independent handshake was like this [gestures with arms, one over the other] ... Because they talked about us as being nerdy. Handjobs—was the negative connotation—negative stereotype about independent men.

And so we turned it on its head and started building an independent social life. We—in my sophomore year, some of us rented a storefront off campus. We would hold little parties there. We would study. The guys could sleep overnight. The women, of course, had to be back in their dorms by a certain hour ... and it just became a little center. And then the next year, we convinced the college to let us have an old women's dorm [points], which was way off campus. It probably doesn't even exist anymore. And then the next year, when I was a junior—well, '65 to '66, they gave us Matthews House. And I bugged Dean James until he let us have some tables and chairs to put them in the basement. We opened the coffeehouse. We called it The Open Door. So that was—in terms of the college, that was my big rebellion—was just carving out a place for independent students to have a full social life. It was very satisfying.

But I also got very active in the outside world. I mean, I heard about the March on Washington being organized in 1963. Bayard Rustin, who of course, was a gay man, and what's his name from the Brotherhood of Porter Car Workers...

LM: [Philip] Randolph.

EM: Randolph, yes. Brave man who got the whole thing started. Well, I mean, I didn't know anybody. There was a Christian group on campus called Concern, which did some really interesting and in some respects, brave, things, but I wasn't Christian. I had been brought up in the Unitarian church, and so nobody told me anything about what they were doing. I just heard about the March on Washington, and my sister happened to be going to American University, so I quit my summer job early and took a bus down and stayed overnight with her. And the next

morning, I got on a city bus and went down to that March. It was the most liberating thing that had happened to me.

I mean, I... First of all, I had never seen so many African-American people in one place in my—the Wikipedia says that the March was 75 or 80 percent African-Americans, so that was—that in itself was like a [leans backward] “wow” experience. I mean, I was just so happy. People were laughing and singing songs and shouting slogans and just milling around. I was in heaven. [chuckles].

BL: [chuckles]

EN: I thought “There’s hope.” The world is going to change. Look at us. And then the next year, myself and three other students drove down to Washington, D.C. for the March Against the War in Vietnam. And the year after that, I held a one-person vigil protesting the draft [points] at the local draft board here in Carlisle, which was an interesting experience of little old ladies. You know the clerks inside were kind of looking out at me like, “Oh my god, what’s this?” And every once in a while, a car full of fraternity kids would go by kind of yelling angry things at me. But I didn’t care. I was committed to being a ... The world had to be changed, and I was going to change it, so. And then senior year, I was so angry between the war in Vietnam and the violence still going on in the South, and just everything. I felt alienated from Dickinson. Not, well, I think alienated. I didn’t feel like yeah, rah-rah from Dickinson, and I stopped going to most of my classes the second half of senior year, so of course, I flunked those classes, and then I left Dickinson and rented an apartment with one of the foreign students, Romir Chattergee, and finished up my courses at the New School for Social Research, which was just filled with activism. I mean, I had never seen all these leftist groups having these arcane political arguments. I was like, woah! What’s this? [chuckles] But it was fine with me; I was out in the world and ready to change it. What else?

BL: What happened then after you were at the New School for Social Research? Did you...?

EN: Well, I just finished up my classes and sent the grades back to Dickinson, and they, you know, they graduated me. It’s always been a little vague because at first they said, “Oh, we’ll graduate you with the class of ’66,” but sometimes they say I’m ’67, sometimes ’66.

LM: So, are you married then?

BL: In 1967, I had met my future spouse here at Dickinson, and we broke up for a while, and she and a girlfriend went to France, because she had studied French at Dickinson, toured around ... And she came back, and we decided to get married. But her parents, they were skeptical of me, partly because I think they got the sense of the dysfunction in my birth family or my family of origin, and partly because they thought I was getting a little too radical for them. I think they thought I was a bad influence on their daughter.

So she and I came back to Dickinson. I can’t remember how, but we corresponded with Professor Allen, and he agreed that he would marry us, so we came back here. We had to go across the state line to Hagerstown, Maryland, ‘cause they would do it quicker, and we got

married. And we lived outside of New York City for a while, and then I got offered. I became a member of the Socialist party in the meantime—and I got offered a job as a youth organizer in Cleveland, Ohio. So, we moved out there. She got a job in the high school, Cleveland High School, and I started organizing for the Socialist Party, and I was actually being paid a salary to do it.

But eventually they became just too staid and conservative for me. Myself and two other people started the Cleveland Draft Resistance Union, and we were all reading Marx and Engels and Lenin and all. I mean, I was just moving farther and farther that way. And Marx said that the proletariat was the ones that were going to make the revolution, and I said, “Well, you got to be where the revolution’s gonna be made, right?”

And I couldn’t—I couldn’t even remotely imagine being in an office job because of the politics, because of having to live under somebody else’s rules that I didn’t believe in, and because of having to put on the suit and looking like the spiffy guy, so I started working in factories, became a machinist. I could wear these frumpy machinist clothes and engineer boots. There’s something about it that was masculine enough to hide safely, but not spiffy enough to have to look like the standard business masculine guy. It’s hard to explain, but somehow it was easier for me, and plus, you know, that whole thing with my dad and the chopping the wood and all, I just felt comfortable using my body that way. So, I spent the next 30 years as a machinist. And...

BL: And you stayed in the Cleveland area?

EN: I stayed in the Cleveland area until 1973. My first spouse and I got estranged because I collapsed emotionally. See, I had—at the end of college, I had applied for and gotten conscientious objector status. And it—it got hard for me, because—first of all, because it became quickly really clear that this was middle-class privilege. There are tons of working-class kids who had never even been [LM coughs] given the opportunity to think about ... What do they think about ... war and shooting people. They were just drafted and, you know, it was the meat grinder, we used to call it. And so that felt really unfair to me. And then I was—I was, I was getting more radicalized and just angry at the whole system. There was something about going along with the system by ... They drafted me as a CO [conscientious objector], and told me to go back to Schenectady, New York, and work in a hospital. So there was something about going back to Schenectady that was just really distasteful to me.

So, I wrote this very juvenile letter, you know, “Down with imperialism,” and they reclassified me as 1-A [eligible for military service]. And not too long after I got a draft notice, I had to take a physical ... Went through the physical, you know, denouncing the war on Vietnam all along, all [grumbles and makes noises], and then [LM coughs] I got out of the draft, because of middle-class privilege—because I had... let’s call it a fortuitous kidney stone, which got me a six-month deferment. And then by the time that whole thing played out, I aged out of the draft. So, it was, you know, ironic: in spite of my attempts not to go along with the system, in fact it was my privilege of being a white middle-class kid that got me out of it. And that was—I felt really angry about that.

And there I was, talking about revolution, like I'm going to shoot somebody? It was just like, I was not being honest, and I was going ... Just the way I was talking: even the hateful language that people used to use about the President at the time, or the "damn capitalists" and all that. It was—there was some serious way in which it was going against my own soul. So I collapsed emotionally. I was depressed, I think clinically. Somebody would've said it if they had taken me into a therapist's office—for two-and-a-half years. And during that time, my first wife divorced me. Why wouldn't she? I wasn't talking. I couldn't say ... There was obviously something going on. I couldn't talk about it.

So, I spent several years just working. I would eat, sleep, and work. I had become a smoker. I would smoke a pack, a pack-and-a-half of cigarettes every day, guzzle coffee, and I would come home from the swing shift. And—when I couldn't sleep, I would turn on my little black-and-white TV and watch old movies. Drinking coffee at—I would eat a whole Entenmann's coffee ring in a single night and not gain any weight, because I was just churning inside. And I slowly pulled myself out of that deepest of depression, and you know, I wanted to do things in the outside world. I got a ham-radio operator's license and kind of met a couple of hams. I started backpacking, which again was the being in touch with my body in, kind of, and outward way, without paying attention to the uncomfortable parts.

And then finally, I started coming back around to people I had known politically. I helped start a group—I not only helped start the Cleveland Draft-Resistance Union, but, along with some of those folks, we started the American Communist Workers Movement, Marxist-Leninist. We had a newspaper called *The Workers' Advocate*. Did a lot of actually good agitation. We were in Cleveland during the whole episode with—at Kent State. Before that, there had been a big strike by the Independent Steel Haulers with the Steel Union Officials crossing their picket line. I mean, they had the National Guard out for that. We were selling newspapers to workers on strike, and one of the meetings of the Steel Haulers, the president of the organization stands up, because we had a big article on our front page, and holds our newspaper up and says, "Comrades!" A big cheer goes up, you know, because they were so angry with how they were being treated, not because they were Communist at all.

So, I came back around those—those people who had carried on—you know, after I had dropped out and started writing songs for them and a little bit of poetry and doing street theater. And that was what was kinda comfortable for me at the time, and I met—also met my second wife there. We got pregnant, and in thirteen months, we had two sons. That was a lifesaver for me. My—especially my first son, it was the first, of course—was a whole new experience for me. I kind of had always thought that I would have kids someday, but didn't know how, and when Lee was born, it was like a miracle. And I now had a 20-year project. I had these two little babies. They gotta be raised until they're at least in college, right? And I was just in love with them. I remember Lee [LM coughs]... the first time his mom...

LM: Could we pause for one minute?

[video cuts]

EN: Thereby finding some really busy project out there—to stay in my mind and away from my feelings and just get busy—some project that would just engage me. And the other thing was I would start getting close emotionally—the emotional closeness to me was what I looked for in a relationship, but the physical act of making love and the closer it got to intercourse, got uncomfortable for me. So I would have—it was like I was this ball bouncing back and forth, getting close and drawing away, close and drawing away, and that caused estrangement between me and every woman I got close to.

So, I would, especially after the boys were born—well, before Lee was born, I agreed to commit—to quit smoking, I just did it cold turkey at the time, ‘cause it wasn’t going to be good for them. But, you know, I would use food, and then occasionally alcohol every once in a while. Chris would take the boys out to the park and stuff, and I would sit there listening to Stan Rogers, who’s a Canadian folk singer—one song in particular, “The Mary Ellen Carter,” and just drinking. I would get drunk and cry and listen to that music, just trying to hold on, and how does the refrain go? “And you to whom adversity has dealt the final blow/with smiling bastards lying to you everywhere you go/turn to and put out all your strength of arm and heart and brain/and like the Mary Ellen Carter rise again.” And there was something about that song that was a lifesaver for me, and others of his music, too.

So there was that, there was the occasional abuse of alcohol, which of course upset my spouse. And using food... just... It would just feel at certain times like the food I was eating had nothing to do with nutrition. It was like a plunger, pushing my feelings down. And we ended up getting divorced when the kids were around—God, what year? ...It was 1996, so ’81 to ’96... 14, 15 years old. We finally got formally divorced. We—neither one of us wanted to be part-time parents, so we would, literally, have exactly half-time physical custody of both of them. And you know, I think that the one good thing you could say for us is that we worked really hard not to put our boys into the middle. And I think that shows in how much they love us.

And at that time also—there was this big strike at Eastern Airlines. It was another way in which I got back into political activism, kind of. And by this time, we were living in California in Oakland, and I was working for United Airlines as a machinist. So this big strike out with Eastern Airlines ... I don’t know if you remember, there was a really bitter strike. I mean, the owners of Eastern Airlines were just hardcore anti-union. The union was trying to hold on to the bitter end. There weren’t that many people who worked for Eastern Airlines in San Francisco, so others of us who worked for other airlines were, you know, doing the picket lines for them. And there was this phenomenon that came up that happened over and over again in the left, which is, “I belong to a group that’s gonna defeat those bad guys. You also belong to a group that’s gonna defeat those bad guys. But you have the wrong theory, therefore you’re also like the enemy,” kind of. And it happened over and over again, and it—I mean, I definitely participated in it to a certain extent, but it went against everything that my soul was about.

I’ve had this feeling all my life that I’m on this Earth for a purpose and that it has something to do with love. And that wasn’t very loving. And for that matter, the way we talked about the President or the heads of corporations wasn’t very loving either. But it ... Somehow it just struck me in the middle of this Eastern Airline strike [coughs]—excuse me—[coughs] in watching the union people get so angry at each other. I was just done with it.

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So, there happened to be this course in business meeting facilitation at United Airlines. It was in the company newspaper, and there was something about that idea that just caught me. Conflict resolution: Ooh. So, I took this class—a four-hour class, and they had—one of the people whose teaching would mentor each of the students. And they gave me this really difficult team to facilitate. There were several machinists, and a couple of engineers, and a supervisor. And the one machinist they couldn't do without, because he pretty well invented the process that they were trying to get down in writing. He was very irascible. He didn't like engineers. He didn't like supervisors. He thought they were all a bunch of idiots, and he didn't mind letting them know [laughs]. So, it was a really tricky job I was doing. You know, like negotiations, shuttling negotiations between the parties and between meetings. It was really hard, but I was loving it. And the more I did that and loved it ... Then I heard that there was this graduate certificate in conflict resolution being offered at John F. Kennedy University out in Orinda, California. I jumped on that.

So, I went back to graduate school and earned that certificate and started doing facilitation and mediation projects at United Airlines. I got hired on as a contract mediator with the Post Office doing EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] cases, and I did a six-month stint in maintenance supervisors training for United, and then 9/11 happened. It was like passengers, you know, dried up. The money went away, and they're like, well it was nice you did all that other stuff, but now get back to the machine. And because I had enough time in that I could formally retire and actually start collecting a pension, I did. I went on my own as an independent consultant which I then did for ten years. Part of the time in the Bay Area, built up quite a nice little business, started working for a company back in North Carolina, getting all kinds of trainings...

And so, all these things that were happening to me started paving the way for me coming out to myself, first. So, one was my sons. I mean, just the love that I felt for them. The heart-opening that they created. It was difficult and wonderful at the same time. And then, when I became a mediator and facilitator, I realized pretty quickly that there were different energies in conflict resolution, the masculine and feminine. The masculine is more about being—having clarity around the issues, what is the nature of the problem, what is each side's underlying needs and interests, what are the possible ways of meeting as much of each of those interests as possible, and then driving toward a solution.

The feminine is creating the safe space for feelings and stories to be told. And just setting ... even setting aside the idea of reaching any solution at all, which ... Creating space for the stories to be told and for people to actually express their feelings in safe and productive ways. I was instinctively drawn to the feminine side, but I realized quickly that I had to be able to do both, because if all you can do is one or the other, you're inevitably gonna go from the positive way of doing it to the negative. So the negative way—positive way of being of the masculine energies is, of course, the clarity. The negative way is to get into the command and control: I'm in charge here and you guys are gonna solve this, or else. The positive way of the feminine energies, of course, is the creating the safety. The negative side is manipulation. I know what you need to do, even if you don't, so I'm gonna ask the gentle questions that will, without you knowing it, lead you to come up with the right answer yourself [laughs].

BL: [chuckles quietly]

EN: And of course, people would resist that, so you start manipulating them. But if you can combine both of them and realize, “Okay, we’ve done enough of the safe storytelling, now we need to get a little more real with ourselves about the ways in which you two are trying to manipulate each other,” and call it in a gentle but firm way. Call them on it, but say, “You know, I could be wrong, tell me if you see it differently,” and so, inviting them to disagree with you, but nonetheless, kind of holding their feet to the fire. Instead of trying to manipulate them. There was a much healthier way of doing it, but I had them and I had to do a lot of inner spiritual work.

What does it mean to embody masculine and feminine energies? It's not—I mean, you can learn techniques, but at some point, the techniques don't help you. It has to come from in here [pointing to center of chest], so I did all kinds of workshops and spiritual exercises. I learned how to meditate. I did a thing called holotropic breath work, which is a way of getting into altered states of consciousness without using drugs, and unbeknownst to me, it was peeling away the layers of repression. And so my inner emotional and psychic and spiritual life was getting closer and closer to the surface. [clears throat] And then my ex-wife came back to me and said that she thought we had made a mistake in getting divorced, and I had that inner belief that a lot of the transgender women I've met have had the same belief, that if I could just find the right woman to love me, it would save me from having to be who I really am.

So, I had sort of... started to have feelings about, you know: I would like to slow down, just earn enough money and have inexpensive enough living expenses—like I can just stop and breathe and think more and get more into "Who am I?" and "What am I doing in life?" And she came back and said that. Well, I was happy. [chuckles] You know? "Somebody loves me. I don't even have to think about whatever that was!" We got remarried, we bought a house together, which meant our housing expenses went up, because this is the height of the housing boom that we did it in. And so, now I was under pressure to earn more money.

So, as I said in one of my poems, with the way in which I was peeling back the layers meant that thean ... And that I was having to market myself and be, and to live outwardly more the spiffy, guy-image. It was ... The pressure became worse. And peeling away the layers took off the weight of the mountain that I had built to repress it. And one day, I had been working on a computer, doing some research and writing, creating materials for my next workshop. And I stopped and had lunch. And I was sitting on the couch. And this intense ball of feminine energy starting buzzing down into my hips and rose up through my body. It felt like the top of my head exploded off. I was stunned. I just sat there for a while, kind of gradually coming back to mundane reality, and I knew what was quote-unquote [makes air quotes] wrong with me all that time. I just knew that I was transgender and that I couldn't hide from it any longer. It was like, you know, the infinite spirit, God, whatever you want to call it, finally got sick and tired of my repression and just whacked me upside the head. [chuckles] And once—

BL: And this is while you're still married for the second time.

EN: [nodding] This is while I was still married, for the second time. Well, for the third time—twice to the same woman.

BL: Okay. Yeah.

EN: Yes, and so I was just stunned. I went back to the internet, googled "transgender," and oh, God, I ordered a couple of books, and the next day, I told, now my ex, what had happened. She was surprised to say the least, and so we spent part of that year trying to think it through. Me trying to figure out, "Okay, what does this exactly mean? Who am I really?" You know, "Am I gonna just wear a skirt once in a while, or what? What does this mean?" And she, bless her heart, you know, tried her best at times to accommodate it, tried to understand it, sometimes she'd just feel really angry, of course. Why wouldn't she?

And then our son had moved to Portland, Oregon, in the meantime. He'd become a stagehand and found good work up there. And visiting him—we really liked the city, it was clearly less expensive and less hectic. She was a visiting nurse, so driving around to people's homes all the time. And the house really was—I mean, we could afford it, but it was way too expensive. So, we sold—we lost a little money on the house, but we got outta that house just before the real crash happened, and we moved to Portland. So I took on the job of selling the house, you know, finding the real estate agent and helping with the staging, fixing things up, getting us out of the house so it could be staged, finding—excuse me—finding a place to live in Portland ... all these busy, busy projects—I kinda forgot about being transgender for a while,

We moved up there, and I got really entranced with the idea of co-housing. We got involved with a budding co-housing community called Daybreak. We were some of the original members, working hard. I was one of two people who did organizational development projects with them. Conflict resolution. Oh I was so busy! But, after a while, even that wasn't enough. I was just sick with still hiding, and I told her, you know, I just have to—I have to at least wear skirts around the house.

So we would go around and around about it. I went back into counseling. We did couples counseling. But by the end of 2008, it became clear that I'm a woman. That I'm gonna live full-time as a woman. She's not a lesbian, so the logical thing to do was to break up. So we split up. She stayed in the apartment we were renting at the time and I got my own place. I found an all-rental co-housing community that had been started by a husband and wife the previous year and moved out, and that was in November of '08.

I was—actually, I saw a transgender therapist first, and he—I think he was just trying to be kind and supportive, said that, "You know, when you're ready, I can just get you started on hormones." And there was something about that was too early for me. It kinda scared me. So, I stopped seeing him, and I got the—somehow I got the idea that I needed some kind of alternative therapist, so I found one who was skilled in dream work and who also claimed that she had worked with people transitioning, all the way through transition as transgender men or women. So, I started seeing her, and at first, it really went well. She was giving me insights into some of the dreams.

She was the first person that helped me understand how important that attempted suicide was. 'Cause I didn't think about that—I knew what had happened, but I didn't really think about it, over the years. But at this point, I realized that that metaphorically going to the bottom of the lake was something I had done emotionally over and over and over again. So, it was—she was really helpful, but after seeing her for months and months, at one point I said, "You know what? I think I'm ready to try hormones." And she kind of freaked. She's like, "Oh no, you know, we still have things to talk about!" And I'm like, "Well, what?" "Well, you know let's get back together next week and, you know, we'll talk about it!" I said, "Okay," you know, and I told her about another dream I'd had, but all a sudden, where before, the comments she made on my dreams were really insightful, and they made sense to me, this was totally off the mark. I had this dream I was in this hospital-like setting, and I was with this guy, and he was lying in the bed, and there was a way in which my presence had been healing for him. And then the next day, I know I'm running down this hallway, and there's this Indigenous warrior running next to me, and—I can't remember. He said something to me, and then he runs on—it was something about "this is the way we do... something." I forget the exact words. And he runs on. And she—and I was saying, you know, there's a way in which I am a healer, and by that, I meant the conflict resolution work, and she's like "Oh, well, wait, no, you're not a doctor or a nurse or something."

It was like really weird what had happened. So, I kept saying, "Look"—and then she would say things like, "Well, you'll have to wear a bra for the rest of your life!" And I'm like, "Well, yeah." [chuckles] You know? And you know, "Drew, don't you understand that this is a serious operation?" And I'm like, "Look, I've looked into all this stuff. I know exactly what I'm getting into," and I said, "Look, I want you to tell me—I get what the possible dangers are and the downsides as well as the upsides. Why do you think that I personally am not a good candidate for the hormones?" And all she could say was, "I think you have masculine issues," and I go, "Well... anybody can have masculine issues, what does that mean?" She couldn't tell me, so I stopped seeing her and then found another therapist who really had taken transgender people all the way through, and she was like, "Well I couldn't prescribe—I couldn't write you a letter for anything until I see you at least three months." I said, "I know the protocols." And three months later, she said, here's your letter.

So, that was in the middle of 2009, I started taking hormones. And it was wonderful. I felt—started feeling normal for the first time in my life. Then later that year, I didn't have the money for the full surgery, so I just got the bilateral orchiectomy. Removal of both of the testi—testicles, which meant that I didn't have to take one of the medicines, anti-androgens that put me on a patch. And my doctor ... I've been with Kaiser Permanente for decades, you know, like 15 years or something. When I moved from California to Portland: it's a different Kaiser, believe it or not. So, I had to find a new doctor, and I wasn't out at the time, I just, you know, "What's your training, what's your, you know, background," and all like that. I just picked one.

So, when I came out, decided I needed hormones, I went into to see my primary care doctor, and I told her what was happening to me, and she said—first of all, she said, "Did you know about me when you picked me as your doctor?" So I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "I tend to get all the transgender patients." [laughs] I said, "No, I had no idea!" And the second thing she

said was, "Well, I need a letter from your therapist, but in the meantime, I'm going to send you over to the lab, we're gonna draw some bloods and do a baseline test."

So, I lucked out, I picked the doc who knew what the score was and was just ready to roll. And so, I got my letter and started taking the hormones. And then, she also—my doctor at Kaiser also wrote me a letter saying I was a good candidate for surgery. Which is ironic because later ... I knew that Medicare wouldn't pay for it. I was on Medicare by this time, and Medicare wouldn't pay for it. So, I was trying to pay for the surgery myself. I didn't have a lot of savings, and I had been trying to market myself as an independent consultant, and I, quite frankly, faced discrimination. So, I would go to the Portland Business Journal power breakfasts with my business card and my brochures and my elevator speeches, you know, just like everybody else. "Hi, I'm Emily Newberry, and I'm blah blah blah." I over and over again had this experience, especially with guys, that at first, they'd talk to you. They'd be polite and all like that, but then the next thing you know, there'd be this guy over here that they'd make this really good connection with. And I'd be like ... Next thing you know the guy's going like this [turning his back], and I'm leaning in [leaning inwards], trying to stay in the conversation and throw in a comment once in a while, "Oh, that's interesting!" Boom [leaning inwards], you know, like that. They're just cold shouldering, but in a sort of superficially polite way.

Then, a company that I had been doing consulting for—I would work as one of the small group mentors in their classes—all of a sudden found reasons why they couldn't use me. And the first excuse that the owner gave me was that he'd been talking to some of his gay and lesbian friends about what to do about this person who's coming out as transgender, and he claimed that they told him that the problem—that the real question is: "Is she comfortable in her own skin?" Heaven knows what they had said and how it got translated through his mind, but that's what he made up his mind. He didn't feel comfortable having me come back and, you know, work in one of his classes, 'cause he was afraid that the students would all be sitting there, not focusing on the...on learning the material, but wondering whether this was a man or a woman that they were seeing.

So, he said, "You've gotta do a videotape of yourself. One of your own workshops to demonstrate that you're comfortable in your own skin." And I said, "Well, actually, when I wasn't comfortable in my own skin was when you first brought me on board as 'he.'" You know, pretending. But he was adamant about it, and you know, as an independent consultant, you don't really have the same rights and, as a transgender person, of course, you have none at all, at that time. So, I try—I couldn't get ahold of a video camera, but I made a four-hour audio recording of myself presenting the same concepts that he teaches, the same ones that, you know, he had brought me on board to teach. And the person he had working with me said, "I don't see any red flags, you know. Did all right to me, but I don't think that's what he's looking for." So, in the meantime, they're reworking their structure, and now, they were gonna have consultants, senior consultants, and executive consultants. They had [LM clears throat] this whole list of competencies. She said, "Now, he wants you to make a video tape to demonstrate that you have..." What do they call it? "...executive board presence," whatever that means. She said, "You'll notice that just for an ordinary consultant, that's not one of the requirements, but we decided that if we don't have confidence that you could quickly move up to the senior consultant level, then we're not going to keep you on." And I said, "Well, I have a lot of concerns about

that. I'd like to talk about it. First of all, my clients are not high-level, large corporation clients," which they knew, "and I honestly don't see how me making a video tape is going to demonstrate that competency." And they just say, "Well, if you're not gonna make the video tape, then you [points] are deciding not to move forward."

So, I wasn't doing—not only that, but—whereas in the past, I was able to use their intellectual property in my own classes; I would just check in with them if they were okay with how I was doing it—Now they said the lawyers have said that if you're not one of our official consultants, you can't use our intellectual property. So that meant I was gonna have to completely start over, completely revamp all of my materials, and I was running out of money to market myself. In the meantime, I had become a part, serendipitously, of a women's group. It started out as a group of organizational development consultants. We got together, because one person who knew us all got all excited about this book she was reading called *Theory You*, and wanted us all to get together every month and read a chapter and talk about it, which... all of us did at least once, and some people pretty much every month for a whole year, and at the end of the year, there were seven of us. Five other women, me having just come out—so they all knew me before I came out—and this one guy, and us six women decided that we wanted to continue meeting and meet every month on a Saturday for three hours and be really committed, and the guy, you know, because the way his own practice was going couldn't do that. So, the six of us started meeting later. One of them dropped out.

Five of us have now been meeting for six years, and it's turned into this deep sharing women's group, and at one point, the six of us—there were still six at that time—went to a spiritual retreat called Spiri—called Warrior Monk. And so the monk aspect is looking inside of yourself, what's your personal spiritual path? What are you here on Earth for? What's the challenges you're running up against and how do you work with those? And the warrior side is how do you show up in the outside world and what are the challenges you're run up in that phase? So, at the end of the four-day retreat, they said, "We think it would be really good if you would make some kind of a specific commitment on how you're going to show up in the outside world, and I agreed to write a poem a day for six months, and that six months of poetry writing turned into my first book, *Butterfly A Rose*. What else? [laughs] What other questions do you have?"

BL: Well, what—did you find any difficulties, I mean other than you mentioned the career difficulties... other difficulties in going through the transition process? Other people not—feeling like other people not accepting you, or?

EN: Yes. One was in health care. I went on a two-year journey with Kaiser Permanente trying to get them to pay for the surgeries, and because Kaiser—they're a Medicare provider, but they're a Senior Advantage provider, which means they don't bill Medicare for every procedure. They get a lump sum, and they're not only allowed to, but encouraged to compete with each other, partly on price and partly by providing services that Medicare won't pay for.

So, I thought, well, Medicare won't pay for the surgery, but that doesn't mean you can't. In fact, it would be unjust for you not to. [chuckles] So, I had a two-year letter-writing campaign with them in which at times they lied to me, other times they just thought up problems that didn't exist, which I had evidence didn't exist, and in the end, they just stopped writing to me. So, that's

the beginnings of a book. The working title is *Polite Brick Walls*, and it'll be—I think it'll be accessible to anyone who's run up against a bureaucracy that doesn't want to do the right thing. So that was one aspect of it.

Another was... I was really lucky, actually, in coming out to my family. Some of them were, in the beginning, like, "Well, this must be a phase or something." But in the end, most of them were at least accepting, if not joyous [raises hands, smiling]. And my—I have to say that three people I would remark on in particular: my dad, who's now 99 years old—he was 94 at the time, and you know, born in 1915, raised in Southern Missouri, went to a part-Cherokee Southern Baptist Ministry, so you know, not the traditional American culture in that way. Nonetheless, you know, I didn't know how he would react. I called him. I sent him an email first, and then I called him. You know, "I'm transgender, and here's what's happening." And finally my dad, he's not the kind to listen if something is on his mind—he doesn't talk very much. So I finally said, "So what do you think, Dad?" And he said, "Well, I guess we all have a little male and female in us." [laughs]

BL: [chuckles]

EN: Which was a big relief to hear that. My boys, you know, it was like, here's this person I grew up with—the machinist with the engineer boots and all that stuff and going back to graduate school and becoming this consultant. So, yeah, it was a surprise to them, to say the least. And you know, like... one of them wondered as his mom did, "Is this just a phase you're going through? Is this real or what?" But I took the time to sit and talk with both of them, and they were just wonderful. I mean, very quickly, they said, "You know what? We don't completely understand it, but if this is what you need to make yourself happy, we're for it." And what else can you ask? You know, from someone who doesn't—who can't—who doesn't have a clue what it's like to be you. And they've been really wonderful.

I wrote to—I wrote to everybody. I told all the professional people I knew... I mean, I just came out to everyone. So there was an email list of people from my graduating class in high school, and I had actually gone to a couple of reunions, finally, which I hadn't done early on. And so, the guy who maintained the email list wrote back to me, "Stop! Go back!" You know, "You'll confuse your sons! Don't do this!" So, I tried to write and say, "It sounds like you're a little concerned," and "Let's just talk about it. Here's what it's like for me..." "No! Don't do this!" and finally, he just cut me off. So I was no longer in the email list. I don't get emails about the reunions anymore.

Other people were—a couple of others I was friends with on Facebook stayed friends with. Another one wrote to me, fairly angry, and the basic content of the email was, "You transgender people are selfish. You only think of yourselves." So, I said, "Wow, it sounds like you had a difficult experience. I wonder if you're going to say what happened?" Turned out that her spouse had come out as a trans woman, and that whatever happened—of course I wasn't there—but from her point of view, it didn't go well, and she thought that some things that her ex had done were selfish. So, I just said, "Well, it sounds like you really had a rough time and if they did what you said they did, it wasn't right." And she softened up right away, and she's actually very conservative politically. We had some interesting—we would post different things during the

elections from opposite sides. We're still friends on Facebook, you know. Not bosom buddies or anything...

Then there was when I did my campaign to raise money for the surgery. One woman from my graduating class wrote me an email, "copying" seven or eight other people. So clearly what had happened is a bunch of people had been talking about it, and sort of one either volunteered or was designated as a person to write me the email. And, so what she said was, "You know, I got your email about, you know, wanting to help with the surgery. Quite honestly, I think this is a want and not a need, and there are starving children and, you know, all these diseases that blah blah blah, that you know, are actually worthy causes." So I wrote her back, and I said—still copying everyone else: "You know, in a way, I agree with you. I think it's a shame that anybody—I should be asking anybody to contribute toward this. I think those causes that you listed are really important. The problem is ... " And I just told her what it was like to be me growing up, how painful it was, and the discrimination I had run up against from the health care system and that transgender people in general run up against. And how unjust I thought that was, and I said, "My way out of the depression and the pain of living without the surgery is to ask for this help." And she wrote back, bless her heart, and said, "Thank you. I didn't know all that stuff about transgender people." We had a couple of other exchanges, and then, you know, it just ended. It ended very positively. I've been lucky in that way, I think.

BL: Did you have any opportunities to connect with other transgender people in the community?

EN: I did. There's a group called the Northwest Gender Alliance, which I, you know, Googling again, as they say, I found. And just as I was, you know, after we moved—we moved to Portland, and I realized I had to do something about this. I thought, "Well, here's a group of people that are transgender. I can at least go and see what's up. You know, what's this life I'm getting into?" And it was very kind and gentle. They would have meetings. Some of them would be just sitting around and talking, socializing. Sometimes they would have speakers coming in, and people who already had come out more fully than I were kind of sensitive about checking in with new people and saying, "How you doing?" and then listening to what—not in the therapeutic way, but just to listen. So that was very healing, and it helped me—it helped me to be calmer and to really focus, to really understand that the key thing is I have a lot of inner work to do and to focus on that, and to not take myself too seriously, and to help with that.

Then the other thing I want to say is, in terms of raising the funds for the surgeries. So, my surgery cost \$17,500. It took me another \$450 to raise that money. The way it happened was I'd been meeting with this circle of women. We call ourselves the Presencing Circle, which has to do with the *Theory You* and anyways [waves hand]. It's not that interesting, but that's our name for ourselves, and for us, that means being present with each other fully for three hours of every month, and we do.

The first thing we do is we check in. We tell each other everything. We give each other a lot of support, and so they heard everything that was happening to me with the discrimination in the jobs and the discrimination in the health care, my trials and tribulations with this and that, and finally, one of them said, "We need to help Emily raise money." Just like that, out of the blue, I wasn't even thinking about doing it on my own at the time. And I was just like [puts hand to

chest], "Oh wow." I started crying, and... it was such a blessing to find this women's group. So, we did! They were my main team. We went onto—I went onto Indiegogo. One of them found—had a friend of a friend who—actually husband—or boyfriend of a friend who was a videographer. He came and by this time, Daybreak co-housing had started up. I couldn't live there, but—I [LM clears throat] couldn't afford it, but one of the women did, so we set up in their common house and made a film.

They asked me questions and I would answer them, so the first part of the film was all my answers to the questions, and then, at the end, they did a little piece of each of them saying a little piece of supp—why they supported me, and then I organized—I call them appetizer parties, so I'd ask the people, "Contact your friends. Have appetizers," so trying to make it low-key and easy, just a few refreshments—of course some people would put out a big spread and others would be crackers and cheese and tea, you know, but I was totally like, "That's—whatever appetizer means to you is fine." I said, "I'll come, I'll read some of my poetry, and I'll answer any questions that people have about what it's like to be transgender."

So, it was really successful. I raised—between that—most of the money came from the house parties. Some of it came through the Indiegogo, because some people didn't—they just felt more comfortable doing it online for whatever reason, and they raised over \$14,000. The rest I paid myself, of course. And so that group of women were really key, really key. I was—I told them after a while, I said, "I can't even begin to tell you how important it was to me to find my first women's group. It's just like, you know, home! Yeah.

BL: So how did you feel once you'd gone through the surgery?

EN: Ah! It was like, once again, more normal than normal, even. It just felt—it just—"this is the way it's supposed to be," you know? Liberated. Of course, you know, there was ... The surgeon I went to did it outpatient. So, you go in, here's the surgery, wake up—you know, they put the needle in your hand, and the next thing you know, you wake up and you're in the recovery room. My friend Karen drove me home, and she stayed overnight with me, and then I went on Meal Train. It's a website where people can sign up to bring meals and stuff like that, so for the first week, that's what happened.

People brought me everything but breakfast, and somebody helped me with my laundry, you know, a little cleaning—housecleaning and stuff like that, and yeah, and I was just on the road to recovery. It was like the next ten or eleven months were about focusing on the physical healing. But also, I was seeing a therapist at the time at Kaiser, and this is also instructive. Actually did a nice job of helping me talk through how things were going, you know, dealing with the physical recovery and also some of the challenges. You know every once in a while, you run up against people who don't get it or whatever, and it can be tiring, so just a nice place to talk to someone.

But also, I was talking to her about what was happening with me, writing to Kaiser. 'Cause I wrote to them starting the year before I had my surgery, and I continued writing to them after, even after I had the surgery. So she knew about what was going on. At some point, it was like I felt like things were getting a little too superficial between us, so I—I didn't exactly think about it this way, but really what I did was I tested her. I said, "So, I'm just curious, I think you said

you know what the protocols are for transgender people and the standards of care." And she said, "Yeah, of course." And I said, "Do you believe, knowing me and having seen me all—talking to me all these months, that I fit the diagnosis of gender identity disorder—dysphoria?" And she said, "Yes." And I said, "Will you write me a letter to that effect?" And she said, "I'll let you know next time." She came back, and she said, "My supervisor told me, 'Give her excellent care, but don't become her advocate.'"

So we tried to keep going, but the trust had been lost. And it wasn't about her personally in terms of her as a therapist, but [shrugs] I wasn't getting the care that I needed. And it wasn't because she wasn't trying. So, I stopped seeing her, and somehow I had heard about Hakomi Therapists, which is about like body center therapy, and a friend of—one of the women in the women's group told me about one she knew, who I went to who... I'm not quite sure how to describe it.

I had done a lot of therapy over the years, even before I came out to deal with the depression, but it all had been more on the intellectual level, like learning cognitive behavior techniques, how to question your negative thoughts to pull yourself out of a depressive feeling, which I could do. And I—by that time, I was—my little mind knew, "Okay, you're coming to a therapist. It's an hour, but actually it's a 50-minute hour, so at a certain point of time, no matter how deep you've gone, you have to start putting yourself back together." So I went to see this new therapist, and I was getting ready to, you know, put myself back together. She asked me some question. I don't even remember what it is, and it was like I kinda looked to the side like that [looks to the side], and she said, "What just happened there?" Just like that. And I started crying. And she said, "That's okay, you know. Just take your time. We've got plenty of time here." So, I did. I took my time, I cried, we talked some more. I mean, it was a really excellent session, and we went for an hour and a half, so I tried to pay her more money and she wouldn't take it. She said, "That's my choice, you know, to do that."

So it was like a shift happened. My little intellectual mind was so good at understanding the situation, knowing the rules and how to fit into them. All of a sudden, what happened to all the rules? And it's allowed us to go deeper and deeper than I've ever gone in my life. She's the most skilled therapist I've ever been in that respect. A real gift. I'm still seeing her. I'll tell her about this. [laughs] Of course!

BL: Is there anything else that you wanted to share with us? Or can you think of anything else?

EN: No, I'd say my activism continues. I mean, I'm now a poet, a performance poet, a writer, I serve on panels back in Portland helping businesses and universities understand transgender issues. Sometimes it'll be all transgender people, sometimes it's gay and lesbian and transgender. And I can't tell you how happy I've been coming back to Dickinson. I didn't feel... You know, I mean, it wasn't like I was ashamed of having gone to Dickinson, but I didn't feel attached to it, and when I heard that they had opened the Office of LGBT Affairs, I was like beyond happy. I wrote to Brian Patchcoski, who used to be the director, and said, "You know what? Dickinson has bought this artist book that I've collaborated on, what an opportunity, you know. I'd love to come back and do stuff". He got busy, and then Erika [Gordon], who took over after he left, continued just to open up all these opportunities to talk in front of classes in the wellness center

and it's been so welcoming. It's been a homecoming for me in a way that I never had before. I'm really happy.

BL: All right. Thank you so much for sharing your stories with us. We really appreciate [LM coughs] it.

EN: Thank you for asking.