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**Interviewee: Mara Kiesling**

Interviewer: Bill Burton

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**Abstract:**

Mara Kiesling was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania in 1959. Mara is a transgender woman, who is a transgender rights activist and founding executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality based in Washington D.C. In this interview, Mara discusses her upbringing in a political household as her father had political books and always watched the news, which influenced her interest in politics and activism. Also, she elaborates on her various jobs and the relationships she established and maintained at those places. Mara explains her transitioning stage and how she frequently traveled to different states to be a part of groups where she felt most comfortable in the journey to finding herself. She also explains her reactions to transgender people when she occupied certain spaces, prior to transitioning. Furthermore, Mara compares her experiences as a transgender women in cities versus small towns. She constantly acknowledges how lucky she is to have one of the best support systems in comparison to other transgender people. Ultimately, she expresses the strategic way she came out to her family, and their reactions.

**Bill Burton:** Okay, so it's recording so- perfect-okay. Okay, my name is Bill Burton and I'm here with Mara Kiesling, on the half of the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania. Today is September the 15<sup>th</sup>, this interview is taking place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mara do we have your permission to record this interview?

**Mara Kiesling:** We sure do.

**BB:** Okay [chuckles], let's get started. First of all, we got some routine questions, but let's just start talking about growing up, where you were born- I know you were born in Scranton, Pennsylvania- I looked you up. [Laughs]

**MK:** Yup. I was born in Scranton and we moved to Harrisburg when I was three or four.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** I don't remember because I was three or four. I grew up in Harrisburg.

**BB:** So how many is in your family?

**MK:** My parents had seven children.

**BB:** Wow, where did you fit in to that?

**MK:** I am the third and as of now—we we range in age now from—oldest sister is 60 years old and my youngest sister is 48. So it's seven of us in about a 12 year period. Both of my parents are still alive and living in Harrisburg.

**BB:** Wow. So what brought you to Harrisburg? Your father—I mean your—

**MK:** My father had a job—got a—I it was a job thing, he was a communications director for the newly elected governor Scrin (ph) and moved to Harrisburg for that.

**BB:** So he was a—I know he ended up being Chief of Staff for-

**MK:** For Governor Casey.

**BB:** Ohhh.

**MK:** Yea somebody put that somebody who is not me, put that on my Wikipedia page. That's not correct.

**BB:** Oh.

**MK:** He was governor Casey's Chief of Staff in the 80's, but in the early 60's he was Communications for Governor Scranton.

**BB:** Oh, so he was always involved in politics?

**MK:** Pretty much.

**BB:** So is politics a big thing in your family?

**MK:** Yes, it has been. It has been- we grew up in a very political household... always watching the news... my father always had political books around that we read and it always been an interest of mine.

**BB:** So, was your mother political too? Or was she just-

**MK:** Not as much...I mean she could hold her own but she was a stay-at-home-mom... ya know, in the 50's style and didn't really work until the mid-70's... she started working.

**BB:** Yea?

**MK:** Yeah, and you know she started doing retail and she ended up being the office manager for a small state agency in Harrisburg.

**BB:** Yeah. So was your family religious or did you have a big religious-

**MK:** No, nope. Both of my parents were brought up fairly religiously but they didn't bring us up that way. Yeah. I think one of my siblings became religious later in life, but we're not in a special religious family.

**BB:** So that really didn't [MK coughs] religion didn't play a big part in your-

**MK:** Well, I don't know about that. My father grew up and was educated in a Jesuit tradition in Scranton—at Scranton Prep then Scranton—then the University of Scranton, both of which are Jesuit run. That's probably had a big impact on his thinking and ways of thinking, so it has on mine as well.

**BB:** Yeah. So what about you? What about your education? Within your education from-

**MK:** Yeah- I

**BB:** Elementary school- I Mean

**MK:** Well I started off at Mercy Crest Kindergarten [BB laughs] in the early to mid-60's. You know, back then, kindergarten wasn't a regular thing. Kindergarten was an extra thing to go out your way to find and pay for. It was around Herr St. kind of near Latchmere, kind of on the Susquehanna Township, Harrisburg line. And it was a convent... the Sisters of Mercy and they had Mercy Crest kindergarten and my teacher who I did not like was Sister Mary Damien, who was a play-writer, turns out—I didn't know it at the time but I found out later that she had written hundreds of children's plays. I really think it was hundreds [police sirens in the background] and maybe she topped a thousand, but she was apparently very prolific children's play writer. I think I learned that when she passed from her obituary.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** You know at the time, you know—when you're in kindergarten you assume this teacher must be 180 years old and the 50 years later you find out she's currently 75 years old. And—so yeah—I started at [sniffs] Mercy Crest Kindergarten then we lived in Cedar Cliff area until sixth grade, so I went to Highland Elementary School. I \_\_\_\_??? as a really good student and was sort of the nerd- the nerd in the family and the goody-too-shoes in the family. Then in sixth grade we moved over to Susquehanna Township, which was a big shock in a lot of ways. [Sounds of a zipper] Not bad or good, just different... as I was growing up in the 60's in Cedar Cliff, on the West Shore, it was very, very white. There was just no Black people in our area, no Black kids in our school and moved to Susquehanna Township where the school was- I don't really know the makeup, but we used to say it was a third black, a third Jewish, and a third other white. I don't know if that really how was, that was what everyone used to say but that was a big difference and it had an important learning thing for me. To not just be around people who were identical to me. You know my neighborhood before had been full of kids of state workers and business people and all white. And some of Susquehanna Township was sort of refreshing that way. And then I just did not like several of my middle school teachers... I think that took me down a wrong path educationally and I was not a particularly good student in junior high or high school.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** I mean I did fine, but I was definitely under—underperforming. And I was super shy, very introverted and very shy and kind of-kind of a one good friend at a time kind of loner.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And... what else do u want to know?

**BB:** So, then you went—so where did u go to college? You went to Penn State or you-

**MK:** So I went to Penn State my freshmen year and just hated it. I hated the... the separation of it. You know Penn State is such a huge place-

**BB:** Huge... yeah.

**MK:** If you're a shy kid... it's really hard to get by unless you the kind of shy kid who can just lock yourself in a way- a way in a room and do your work as you're supposed to. I always wanted to be just more than shy and alone, so it was not a good place for me so I- after a year I took off. I took off a semester to start applying to schools and I got into the University of Chicago, which I started Penn State in September of '77.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And in June I took off and the following April, so it would have been '79, I started the University of Chicago. Interestingly, I think it was- I started the weekend- the week after the Three Mile Island Meltdown.

**BB:** Hmm.

**MK:** So I was on a train when Harrisburg was evacuated, I was on the train from- my folks dropped my off at the train station. I was on an overnight train to Chicago, that was back when train was a lot cheaper than planes and [laughs] when I got to Chicago in the morning- I remember there was no cell phones at this point.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Couldn't find my family- I mean they knew had- it was obvious that Harrisburg had been evacuated and they weren't announcing mass casualties. So I knew they were safe somewhere, I just didn't have any idea where. And-and- going back a little bit [stutters over his words] one of the most important things about my education was when I was a senior in high school, my friend Marc Sussmen (ph) got a job working for state senate... a pollster in the state senate doing telephone interviewing. And this would have been 1977 or maybe even '76 when polling was still \_\_\_?? It wasn't a new thing, it had been around a few decades but it really was just-there was a lot of candidates who didn't do polling and a lot of congressional candidates in the US senate and governors who didn't do polling at all. There were all starting to more and more. But I

started working doing telephone interviewing and became a supervisor and when I was home from weekend-on weekends from Penn Sate I worked, when I was home for Christmas I'd work. And then when I [Sounds of a zipper] took the time off to find a new school after my freshmen year... I... I worked for this pollster. So I went to the University of Chicago about a year and a half later, I liked the city a lot more than I liked the school- in retrospect I really did like the education there-

**BB:** Yeah-

**MK:** It's really amazing.

**BB:** Yeah, Chicago is an amazing city.

**MK:** Yeah and... and...but a very rigorous school that really grounded me in kind of the classics of Western civilization that I didn't been exposed to before [someone in the background talks to someone else]

**BB:** What was your major?

**MK:** That wasn't – that wasn't a thing until you were a junior or senior you didn't have a major. And- I- so I left because basically my boss, the polling boss, was- called me up on day and said “hey you know, things are kind of blowing up big here, how'd you like to take a semester off and work for me?”-Oh in the 1980 I had- I was really goofing off at school and worked for the pollster who was doing Ted Kennedy's [BB mumbles ‘oh... yeah while MK is still speaking] And you know- I just wasn't doing great in school- I mean-I mean I was doing fine, but I was more preoccupied with other things... a couple people in the dorm and I had a side business doing some public opinion research, and I was working for this pollster and that pollster. So I decided to take some time off and...so... probably in January or so of '81 I kept thinking through it...I dropped out, moved back to Harrisburg and started working full time at this polling firm, which became very big [stutters her words] almost instantaneously then. We were constantly doing governors races and senate races all around the country- you know all my friends were still in school and I was making a salary...a salary which now seems super puny-

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** But at the time, it felt really good and I could get a car. And after four, five years of that I just kind of burnt out. It was the same... you know... 90-100 hours a week and it was the same poll and the same survey over and over again, which is different names plugged in the same media buy. We were also doing media-buying, and it was the same. My boss was having significant difficulties of sorts and I just needed to get out of that, so I left. [Zipper sound] And was trying to figure out what to do next... and a friend asked if I would want to help setup a survey research center in Penn State Harrisburg, so I did that. Actually, first, for a summer I sold Buicks.

**BB:** [Laughs] you don't seem the type.

**MK:** No... it was... I liked it and I did really, pretty well. I liked it. I didn't like hanging out with car sales guys all the time. You know... it was six days a week you were just sitting around most of the time with the same 10 guys... you know... just talking non-sense. I don't mean they were particularly nonsensical or the car sales people are but it was the same nine guys, who all we had in common is that we were selling Buicks. And you could never get Saturdays off because that was the big day and I think you got one Saturday every six weeks off or something. And it was just... I did it for six months and I made a lot of money. I think that summer I made like \$14,000 which was, for a college student, was you know... \_\_\_??? So with Penn State, and the deal was I could finish my undergraduate degree there. And set up this survey research center and it was kind of a really cool job 'cause we were- you know Penn State campus was really small then, it was basically one building. There were other little buildings but it was really that building, that's where all the classes were, where the library was, where the Survey Research Center was... and so I could you know- be at work for a while then I'd go to a class then I think if anyone really looked at my academic records, there were be a lot of college that were sort-of ashamed of themselves. [BB laughs] But I don't... I... I... I got a lot of credits for the stuff they give credits for that aren't classes. I got credits for being on the debate team my freshmen year, I went into Penn State my freshmen year with all sorts of advanced placement credits in History, in English and they gave me more in English. And, needless to say, I did not do four years of college, I probably total did two and a half, but I got a degree. And I had a partner at the time who I actually met at Penn State Harrisburg. She wanted to go to law School and I had been working at Penn State noticing all of these professors who basically were on campus 10-15 hours a week and then did whatever consulting they wanted. A lot of times it was with the survey research center and I thought "well that would be good to be a college professor". So, my partner and I started looking for a place where she could go to law school in a good program and I could go to grad school. And we ended- we applied for like 13 or 14 places- and we ended up at Harvard because we had agreed we would go to Harvard or whoever give us the most money and Harvard gave us the most money. So it was a really easy choice for us [BB repeats 'yeah' while MK speaks]. And we moved to Boston, lived in Woodbourne.

**BB:** Oh, yeah.

**MK:** Where, at the time, I don't know if this is still the case, but it was very much a hometown kind of place where everyone was from there except us. And almost all the women were named 'Morene' (ph) [BB laughs] and they went by 'Mo'.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Wonderful people, but we were definitely outsiders. And we didn't have the great Boston accent they all had. And we had a son who was in second, third, or fourth grade in Boston. And so my time at Boston was mostly spent at school or sporting events or reading.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** It was a pretty vigorous program I was in. [zipper sounds] So after thr-three years when she- I was done with my coursework and took my general exams [BB coughs three times] and she got offered a great job in D.C, which seems like a really great place for me to write a

dissertation in American Government, which was what my focus was. I just didn't-really didn't have the interest in it. My department was really quantitative and I'm not really a quantitative person. I think early on, both the school...the department and me... and I mistakenly thought I was a quantitative person because I had did the survey Research, and that's not really where my heart was. So we moved to Harris-D.C and I was in D.C for six or seven years. But mostly at the time, and while I was in grad school, I was doing a lot of consulting for different state agencies an advertising agencies in Harrisburg and some other entities, but mostly in Harrisburg. And that seven years when I lived in D.C I was commuting up to Harrisburg three to five times a week for meetings and such. And then that relationship ended, and that's where I decided I needed too transition. In '96 I went to a transgender Conference- they call it a conference, it's more like a retreat in Provincetown, Massachusetts. It's still going on, I'm going up in two weeks. I'm going to Key Note at that conference two weeks from now, it's called Fantasia Fair. And do you know Provincetown?

**BB:** Well... yeah...

**MK:** Yeah. It's the week after Women's week. Women's week is usually the first or second week in October, and the last in-season week in Provincetown for the year. And then everything starts closing down, and that's Trans week and Fantasia Fair week. So you know... when I go up there in two weeks about half of the stuff would be closed, but it is a really nice town. In the 80's and 90's when this was starting that mattered- that helped, because it was still very dangerous to be out in public. And if u could be in this little harbored town that was super- at least gay friendly. And most of the people were gone anyway, it was a really great place to be-

**BB:** Let me- can I go back-

**MK:** Yeah.

**BB:** Can I ask you- I mean when... when... and how did you discover your gender identity?

**MK:** Oh...-

**BB:** \_\_\_???- did you always know?

**MK:** When I was three. Yeah, when I was three. Somebody- my aunt or somebody twenty years ago told me that I had gone to be parents when I was three wearing my sister's Brownie uniform. I thought that that would help them understand that I was really a girl and I'm pretty sure that it was my aunt Maridale (ph), I'm not positive with that. But she said that my father very nicely said "no you're a boy, you have to be a boy", and then that was the end of it. And I know I couldn't talk about it again. I don't fault my dad for that at all, that was what anybody knew in 1962.

**BB:** Yeah.



**MK:** You know... he sat down quickly at the computer and typed up some stuff and my mom said 'what are you doing it's 1962, we don't have a computer'. [Takes a deep breath] It was a joke [Laughs].

**BB:** Yeah I was \_\_\_\_\_???? [Laughs]

**MK:** So there was nothing- no way for my parents to do it so I've known this-

**BB:** They couldn't google this stuff.

**MK:** They couldn't. They couldn't google it, there were no experts. You know kids-kids who were coming out to their parents back then were ignored, or beaten, or had shock therapy, or got a bad mental health diagnosis of some sort, but there were no real experts.

**BB:** So what did you think? Can I ask I mean-

**MK:** I...I thought I was different and shameful. And I mean it must very much be like what's it's like for somebody in the 1960's to know for sure they're gay, but also know that there's no real gay people, that's not a thing.

**BB:** Right

**MK:** And the people who are gay, it's a shameful thing that you can't be because if you are you're an outcast. In Harrisburg there was this woman who I assume was what we would think of now as a trans-woman. She-I don't know her name, I was terrified of her not because she was scary at all but because I knew she was trans and I knew I was too. And if I was anywhere near her or nice to her or talk to her everybody would know that I was too and that was, you know, terrifying. But she used to be downtown sometimes near Market and Cameron. I'd see her sometimes at the Colonial Park Mall. She had like- she had a...a cut...denim jeans in strips so it was almost like a skirt and she wore makeup and had grown her hair long. And one of my friends, I remember, I was out with a friend and his father once and he said her name was 'CupCake' and I bet that's not the case. I bet that was some sort of slur.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** But, I was too closeted to explore that for myself. [Stutters] I... are... to explore knowing her, so I never talked to her. I...[Laughs] in the early 80's I was managing by boss's apartment building at Green and Her St and we got a call one day-we put an ad in the Patriot News for a tenant saying we had an apartment for rent. And this person called and was just like I'm going to tell you the truth right now because you're going to find out anyway, "I'm a transsexual and what that means is I was born a boy but I'm going to be a girl and I need an apartment and my doctor says I need to leave my roommates and get an apartment of my own and nobody would rent me an apartment. I just want to know if you would rent me an apartment?" And it was a terrifying moment to me-

**BB:** [whispers] yeah.

**MK:** I... I am very proud of myself that I said 'Oh that's not a problem we don't care' because I knew my boss just wanted the money.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And he was not the kind of person who would of, I think who would have cared too much about that.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** So... then the person never called back and... so they didn't rent from us but not because we wouldn't... but I just saw them, that that person was having real problems and could not find anyone to rent to them because, you know they were trans. At the time transsexual was the common word.

**BB:** Right. But no one understood it. I didn't even as a gay man. I mean I didn't. Except I just kept on trying to be gay. [Giggles]

**MK:** Yeah... Yeah. [BB Giggles]

**BB:** [Giggles] understand me you know... It's a...

**MK:** Yeah...yeah... absolutely...

**BB:** I mean, so how did you come to grips with it? I mean-

**MK:** So-

**BB:** There is a couple ways- we all have to come to grips with our [pause] our identity. So how did you... was it difficult? I mean... If I can-

**MK:** [mumbles] No... So I am a-I'm an incredibly rationale person. So when I was a little kid, all the information was available to me said everybody was either a boy or a girl. There's mommies and daddies and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and grandmas and grandpas... and that was an important distinction between boys and girls.

**BB:** Right.

**MK:** And... all the information I had was that if you were a boy you're always going to be a boy. And if you were a boy you were going to grow up and fall in love with a girl and have babies. And if you were girl you're going to grow up and etc. And if you were a boy, by the way, you're going to do boy things and look boy ways and be into sports...and if you were a girl you were going to be a girly girl and you know...we...we have this what I call gender innocence. [Stutters] I... I think that term bothers people a little because it...it feels sort of pernicious from where we sit now, but at the time it was what we all knew. It was what we had been taught- and by the way it's what most people in this culture is still taught. You know... we... we are still

gendered now before we're named. When people say I'm having a baby, the first question they get asked-

**BB:** Boy or girl...

**MK:** What is it... yeah. And... and people don't mean human or alien... they don't mean healthy or not... they mean boy or girl and- so I struggled with that. And then when we were moving to Boston [Pause] it was getting harder as I got into adulthood to outrun the Trans thing but there was still nowhere... there was still nothing to do except to try to outrun it.

**BB:** Did you feel like you- I don't know if you...did you get married or did you feel like you was with a woman because you felt like that was a role you should play?

**MK:** No... I... no... I never done anything like that. I never done something to try to trick myself. I just... that's just not me, I never been that way. I-every relationship I was ever in was because we were in a relationship... you know... I liked her, she liked me or both [Laughs] But no I never joined the military to prove I was... I don't do things to prove I-

**BB:** Were you in the military too?

**MK:** No

**BB:** Oh [Laughs]

**MK:** No... No... no no no. But no, a lot of trans people meet and they would tell you they joined the military. You'll talk to Transwomen who say I joined the military back then to prove I was a guy. And then you'll hear Transmen say I joined the military to prove I was a guy. [Laughs]

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** It's a really interesting thing. And there's lot of reasons people join the military... some believe it's a responsibility... some have a family thing... some do it for financial reasons... some- anyway, So it was getting harder so in 89' when we were looking...we were going to move up to Boston, I drove up to try to find us a home. And while I was up there I called- I had visited- there was a magazine called the *Tapestry Magazine*. Tapestry was put on by the international...put out by the International Foundation for Gender Education... I-F-G-E. And one of the interesting things that people...Trans people today don't understand is that the only information you could get being on being trans in the 80's was in porn stores. I assumed it was the same as being gay, pretty much. Like gay books was sold in porn stores...

**BB:** [whispers] Right

**MK:** *Tapestry* was not pornography by any stretch of the imagination. It was some really thoughtful articles about what it was to be Trans gender and then there was a thing in the back that listed support groups all over the country, which was a remarkable thing.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And... so... I knew about I-F-G-E in 89' when I went up to Boston, I called them up very exploratory and they was like... well I'm thinking to moving to Boston and I want to know is this a... you know... [Stutters] I'm Trans and \_\_\_\_???. And she said oh come on out to Walfan (ph) and we'll talk. I was like oh I can't come she said oh come on we'll sit and talk and Evin (ph) Clip Riley, who is still a friend today, was running I-F-G-E at the time and I went out there and sat with her for two or three hours. It was a snowy day and... [Pause] it was...it was kind of terrifying... but it was my first... my first real connection with the Trans community and a Trans gender person. Interestingly, I lived in what was called the 'Red Light District' at the time... I don't think they call them that anymore in Harrisburg at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Forster (ph), technically 3<sup>rd</sup> and Susquehanna. There's a subway in the joining building now but-

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** I lived there some point in the mid-80's. It was, it happened to be the place where the transgender sex workers worked.

**BB:** Wow.

**MK:** Totally coincidentally, like I didn't know that when I moved in. One night I'd come home from being out in the bars or whatever and I was sitting in my car listening to the end of a song. And somebody knocked on the window and scared the bejeepers (ph) out of me, and I rolled down the window and the person said 'do u want a date?' and I...I thought somehow they knew I was Trans, like I mean I was tot- I was a guy it's \_\_\_\_??

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** But I just didn't know how they knew and I could read that this person was trans and it was sort of terrifying, but I kind of struck up a friendship with that person over the following months. Where, you know, we'd say 'hi' when I was coming and going. We didn't have the date, I found out what date meant, and we didn't have that. [BB laughs]. And then in the winter a couple times she and her friends came up for hot chocolate and I don't know what they thought I was... like I don't know if they knew I was just-- or if they just thought I was this nice person or if they knew or if they, you know-- who knows what they thought. Maybe I was a broke John who didn't want to pay them. But I'd give them hot chocolate. And I only lived there for a year and a half but that was my real first experience with transgender people. [Giggles]

**BB:** Right... what year was this again?

**MK:** I don't know... 84' or 85', probably not later than that... you know it would have to been actually because of which relationships I was in, it would have to been 85' or 86'. I think that's right [zipper sound] but I'm not too positive.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** So in 89' I lived in Boston and meet people and then I'm just in a relationship, I have a family, I'm in school... there's not that much trans stuff going on in my life, except the internet is starting to happen. And the internet is the single, most responsible thing for why there's millions of trans people all over the place now.

**BB:** Really?

**MK:** Until 1990ish, I don't know whether it was 89' or 92' there was no trans community. There was little pockets of trans communities, support groups. You know, with that time I was in Boston, I think-sometime, I think it was that same trip that I was in Walfan (ph) [Zipper sound]. I called the support group, the- aw man I know this, what's it called-The Tiffany Club-

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Was a support group and they were... they had a meeting house out in somewhere like Lincoln or something, outside of Boston. And what you had to do was you had to call a number, which you got from *Tapestry Magazine* or u could get it in the back of the Boston Phoenix, which-which was the alternative newspaper. I know you know that.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And you'd get an answering machine and you'd know what—Hi my name is, and you make up a name cause their no way you would use your real name.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Yeah. And you'd give them a phone number... member there is no cell phones at the time.

**BB:** Right.

**MK:** So this is super dangerous because you have to basically out yourself...kind of. And I said 'I'm really interested in maybe coming to support group meeting' and they said 'okay'...so they called back and they said "okay..." they asked me some questions to make sure you're really not somebody who's there to bash people but is someone to you know.

**BB:** Right. [Coughs]

**MK:** And then they make you—then that Saturday night I had to meet them at a gas station.

**BB:** WOW. [Laughs]

**MK:** Where two of them came from the support group meeting together... and met me to make sure they felt like I was safe to bring back. They never [emphasis] put maps or addresses on support groups until probably the late 90's or even after the turn of the century. It was... [Stutters]

**BB:** Dangerous, I mean I—

**MK:** It was...it was really dangerous... it was physically dangerous, economically dangerous... Anyway so we moved to DC and we broke—my partner and I broke up shortly after that. And in 1996 I had the guts to go up to this Fantasia fair thing, and what was pivotal about that was I, at the time I was among other things, I was teaching college, at George Mason University and Marymount University (Virginia) as an adjunct professor.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And I was teaching Political Science and, [stutters] in Province Town I met a six foot inch-a six foot two inch tall college Professor and I was that. And that meant, somebody like me could be t rans and could transition. And then, I knew I had to do it. And then in 1998 I... I didn't really do much until 1998. You know, the next two year were like 'I got to do this... I can't do this... I gotta do this...' I was seeing a gender specialist--

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Therapist... talking it through and you have to remember in the late 90's what we told each other in support groups and on the internet was "when you transition you will lose your job, you will lose your family, you could lose your home, you could be bashed, you could lose your health" and it was really dangerous. Now people still lose those thing...

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** But back then, the assumption was you lose them now the assumption is you'll hang on to them... most people will hang on to them... most of the time. But everybody loses something still until this day, and a lot of people lose everything. But at the time, I knew I was going to lose everything and I was trying to save up money and... [Pause]

**BB:** [sound of flipping through pages] this is a coura—on my God, this is a courageous thing to do back then... I mean, it still is.

**MK:** Well you know it's really interesting because you don't—generally people haven't thought it felt courage while they were doing it. I think that's because while you are doing it you may feel really scared, so you don't understand that feeling scared is what makes it courageous or not. It's what you do even though you're scared.

**BB:** Because you have to be yourself.

**MK:** Yeah.

**BB:** I mean it's like... you got to save your life.

**MK:** Yeah. But once I transitioned and I started seeing everybody else and I saw how absolutely courageous everybody else was, I realized I probably was courageous too. And when I was doing it, I deci—so, for reasons that aren't really important...in 98'—so I went to [Zipper sound] another conference called Southern Comfort and I met amazing people. I went to Southern Comfort without having a name... I went down there, I knew while I was at the conference I would have to present as a woman... didn't know how I was going to do that and I didn't have a name. And on the airplane down, I actually have a list 10 names that I was trying to figure out which one I was doing.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** I used to go on to AOL to try names. I would just go into these chatrooms and I [stutters]—starting in the early 90's there was a thing on AOL called the *Gazebo* which is... which was a chatroom for transgender people and there turned out that there were thousands of us, and it really helped up build community. The person who invented... or who started the *Gazebo* was when [Pause] Oh my gosh when's that—I was just reading a tweet \_\_\_??? Guin (ph) Smith, who's still a friend and is also who started the transgender day remembrance thing, after Weda Hester (ph) was murdered in 98' in Boston. But—so Guin has been somebody who has revolutionized the trans community and made trans community possible both with the *Gazebo* and AOL and the day of remembrance which has been the real cement of our community for a long time. But I went down to Southern Comfort and it just radicalized me, I mean that in the political sense. It made me understand that I had to... I had to not just transition but I had to do activism. I had to be a leader in some way. And there were people there like Sabrina Marcus and Holly Boswell (ph), who— and Marissa (ph) Richmond, who just became my friends and became my activist models.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And then I spent the next two years plotting how I was going to survive this... how I was going to afford to have some electrolysis and some other things. And then I put it all together in my head and got some things buckled down with my son that were important to me. And then I made the decision I would move back to Harrisburg to transition, which is a counter-intuitive thing. But for business purposes, my business mentor and good friend Caroline Smith, who ran the advertising agency that was most of my clientele at that point, was just so amazing and accepting and supportive and wanted me to come to Harrisburg because I'd have family support, I'd have her support. And so I did. I lived in Harrisburg from 2000-2002, started getting involved there.

**BB:** So did you resign as your adjunct professor shifts? \_

**MK:** I had stopped doing that... that had \_\_\_??? Had just been... yeah I was too busy in traveling back and forth to Harrisburg and I had just stopped doing that. So I had been doing the consulting... doing market research it's still polling—

**BB:** Yea

**MK:** Its still focus groups and stuff. But for public health things...

**BB:** So that's how you had your money? I mean that...

**MK:** That's what my occupation was, yeah...

**BB:** So in order for you to transition...

**MK:** Yeah, but I knew—

**BB:** So you said you went back to Harrisburg, \_\_\_???

**MK:** Well, that's where all my clients were.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** So it was actually economically it made [cell phone rings] it made sense. I'm going to use the restroom, if u want to turn that off or leave that on. [Recorder turns off]

**BB:** [Recorder turns back on] I guess this starts a whole new [Pause] yeah it starts a whole new section [giggles] okay it's alright. [Clears throat]

**MK:** So... so two things happened in Harrisburg that were pivotal to where I am now. Number one was I met lots of people in the Trans community through...

**BB:** Was it a big community in Harrisburg? \_\_\_??

**MK:** It was getting there, including— it was centered around a thing called Renaissance which I think still may exist too. It was a support group that meant at the, at the time, at the M-C-C Church on seventh street near Division.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** In this sort of like old warehouse is an odd place for a church but it may still be there. But they let us use the church on Saturday nights or I think it was Saturday nights. And then... and there was some great, just some really great people there. Some who are still involved, you know people like Ellen... I won't do last names... but you know people named Ellen [Zipper Sound] and Alberta (ph). Well [Stutters] I'll talk about Alberta Ham cause she was super public, she was this senior citizen who's probably 70 or 72 at the time.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** Who had been- who career had been as an appliance salesmen at Montgomery Ward...



**BB:** I wonder if I met her with that- at the... at the L-G-B-T center in Harrisburg?

**MK:** Maybe she's- white hair and [Stutters] sight impaired...

**BB:** I don't know

**MK:** Virtually blind at this point, if she's still alive... and I actually don't know that, which I'd be embarrassed to admit. But she... she had been an appliance salesmen in Montgomery Ward up in Sealengrove (ph) and then moved down to Harrisburg after she retired to transition. And she had went back to Hack (ph) she had never had a college degree and we went back to Hack and she got elected, probably in '01 or '02. She was elected President of Student Body [BB chuckles] as a senior citizen, disabled, blind, Trans Woman. [BB chuckles again] And it was because she was just so kind and just such a good person, everybody got it and... back at the time that was an astounding thing nationwide.

**BB:** yeah

**MK:** You know... it was just really great. There was a person's who name I'm- escaping me right now, names are getting harder for me as I get into my exempting years [BB chuckles] but there was a—

**BB:** [Mumbles] I know what it's like

**MK:** who had... who had won a very important court case in Harrisburg it was nationwide. It was one of the Dolphin (ph) County judges refused to change her name because he didn't believe in people transitioning from male to female or female to male. So he refused to do it and she won the court case and it's still a court case that matters today that says you're allowed to pick your own damn name unless you're trying avoid the police or avoid debts

**BB:** Right

**MK:** You know... a judge can't tell you can't have a new name. And you know interestingly, Renaissance pivoted a little probably 10 years ago and started a conference called the Key Stone Conference which happens every March or February or April—

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** In Harrisburg... and it's now one of the few growing Trans Conferences in the country.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** They had like 800 people there this year.

**BB:** I think we're covering that—

**MK:** Yeah

**BB:** In this chapter

**MK:** Yeah. It's really an amazing thing and it's been run for last than a few years by a hand full of people including Janeen Rushum (ph)

**BB:** Yes

**MK:** Who's now professor up in the Burkshers (ph) [pause] in like Smith or Julio or Williams

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** One of those schools. But there's just other people like Christy and Ellen was [Stutters] was a lot a lot of folks. So that community was really important to me... and then one night I was at a Renaissance group and this guy Nate, who's name isn't Nate anymore, he has a new name. Nate said 'yeah I'm going up to state college tomorrow night to do a job fair kind of panel for L-G-B-T kids and they couldn't find a Trans Penn State grad so they just asked me if I would do it'. And I was like I'm a Trans Penn State grad. And he said 'oh come on up with me', so I did.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** Now what's important about that is the person who is putting on that panel was a person named Sue Rankin (ph) who was a kinesiology or something like that... gerontology professor at Penn State and who had been working hard really hard to get the L-G-B-T center off the ground. And now it's a very big, vibrant part of Penn State, at the time it was still fighting against everybody to try to get it. Anyway, I went up there and Sue at the time was also running Spark, the state-wide Pennsylvania Rights Coalition, which is one of the components that turned what is now Equality Pennsylvania.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** Equality Pennsylvania was that and the center for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights... Andrew Park and Stacey Souble (ph) and some other people started and ran. But a couple groups merged into this new Equality Pennsylvania, but Sue was running Spark at the time along with Steve Glassmen who's now at the \_\_\_?? Center

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** and Deb [Sighs] I was doing so good there with first and last names... Deb Sieger, S-I-E-G-E-R, who was a social work professor at Kutztown (PA). They... they were really the keys and spark- I mean there was some other really great people involved...

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** up in the Leigh Valley, Steve Black and some others but they had a group up there... And anyway, they were... they met me in my office at the time was about 200 feet from the capital down State Street [Stutters] on 2<sup>nd</sup> and— Sate and they were like ‘Oh. We really need you to come to some lobby meetings. You know we’re trying to pass this state Hate Crimes Bill and we’re trying to put Trans Gendered people in but we can’t find any Trans Gendered people who can lobby’

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** And so I got involved with that and I was one of the four primary lobbyist for that bill in ‘01 and ‘02

**BB:** Yeah Steve was telling me about that

**MK:** Yeah

**BB:** He was at our house the other night—

**MK:** Yup

**BB:** For Mazoney (ph) thing

**MK:** Yup. And... and then while that was happening and then very briefly I became sort of the managing director of Spark. I—Spark was an odd sort of amorphous (ph) coalition and I was sort of care-taker-manager of it. When Sue... I think Sue had some other things, she couldn’t do it so I did it. And then we started another thing called Pennsylvania the Gendered Right—oh Gendered Rights Pennsylvania, [Pause] which primarily was really just a vehicle, for me, to say that there was a Trans group that was lobbying Harrisburg. It’s super closely tied with Spark but it gave me a title and unfortunately when you’re doing lobbying and other kinds of governmental advocacy...

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** it really helps if you’re not just some person. [Takes a deep breath]

**BB:** Right, you need a title—

**MK:** You need a title, so we had Gendered Rights Pennsylvania—Pennsylvania Gendered Rights... God I can’t believe I don’t remember that. But, at the same time, all over the country there were 50 or 100, I don’t know, people who were really trying to get a national movement going. Remember, until 2001—well don’t remember because you may have not known this—but until 2001 there was not a single Attorney in the country who’s who job was to do Trans rights. There had been some—

**BB:** You know, I didn’t even know that

**MK:** yeah, there had been some Lawyers like Phyllis Fry (ph) and Channon Menter (ph) and Jennifer Levi (ph) who did a lot of Trans work—

**BB:** [Stutters] were we even using the words L-G-B-T then? I mean that came...

**MK:** No, we were still—

**BB:** Gay and lesbian

**MK:** there was still—yeah there was some G-L-B-T except there was—

**BB:** Not much

**MK:** at the time it was sometimes G-L-B-T sometimes L-G-B-T the L-G-B-T kind of won out eventually but... yeah it was a newish thing.

**BB:** Because that kind of came to play in 1997 right?

**MK:** Right

**BB:** With the March on Washington...

**MK:** Correct

**BB:** The L-G-B-T ...

**MK:** Yeah

**BB:** Came into—

**MK:** By the time I was actively involved around the turn of the century, the task force—the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, not the Philadelphia Lesbian Task Force. But the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force was around using L-G-B-T and I think the National Center for Lesbian Rights was also. But a lot of the organizations were still resisting... still resisting that. And... so we were all talking about what—how we were going to do it. There were a hand full of little groups that were trying to do—I don't mean little in a bad way, they were just smallish...who were trying to do lobbying. There were a couple lobby days in D.C that, you know, got 20-30 people, which is amazing, nobody ever seen anything like it and every one was terrified that their pictures were going to be used against them and things. And you know, this year we had like 260 people for a lobby day and that sort of \_\_\_??

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** these day and everybody's proud and we stand on the Capital's steps and Nancy Paloski (ph) came to speak to us this year...

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** But I—it was different then. In 2001 when we were lobbying in the State Senate for the Hate Crimes Bill, Steve and I and some other folks like probably Steve Black and Stacey Soublle (ph) were at—were meeting with Senator Robert Melow (ph), who was the Senate Minority Leader at the time in Pennsylvania. And we were trying to get gender identity put into this Hate Crimes Bill because it only had sexual orientation. And he said ‘no, you’ll lose all the democrats’ you know, there were 19 democrats and 31 republicans at the time. And he said ‘with just sexual orientation we’ll get 17 out of the 19 democrats. If we put gender identity in, we lose everybody but Sara Cookavitch (ph), who is our lead sponsor. We like—a bunch of weeks later, not many but some weeks later we won. We got it in and we passed it in the Senate with every democrat and 13 republicans. Still, the point of that story was he said ‘no’ ‘cause we’d lose all the democrats and then he said ‘Mara look at the bright side, five years ago I wouldn’t have let you in my office’.

**BB:** [Laughs]

**MK:** And it’s true. You know... harsh but it’s true. We, you know, we... when we started working in D.C, you know... there were Senator, liberal Senators who wouldn’t meet with us. I never had a meeting with Ted Kennedy. Ted Kennedy died just really starting to get a handle on what Trans people were—and I know today if he was here he’d be just a lion for us.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** But at the time, they weren’t there. [Police sirens in the background] You know, I was on a [Pause] L-G-B-T committee—leadership committee of some sort for the Carey (ph) Campaign in ’04. And the time the Senator was meeting with us, they forgot to invite me. And I was told later it was because they didn’t want to risk having his picture taken with a Trans Gendered person. Now since then—[Stutters] it wasn’t Senator Carey...

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** You know, it was some Nervous Nelly staff person.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** Since then, I’ve been on the stage with Senator Carey or Secretary Carey and [Stutters] it isn’t him, he didn’t do it at the time—he’s not in his heart now, he’s a great guy...

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** I worked on his campaign when I was in Grad school in Boston, it was his first re-election campaign, I think in probably 1990.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** Probably... maybe '92

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** And you know, now... you know Nancy Paloski (ph) came to our lobby day this year to speak. When President Trump did his bullshit tweeting about Trans Service members and screwed them over. You know, something like 36 members of the house and I did a press conference outside...

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** Congressmen Joe Kennedy would—spoke then Nancy Paloski (ph) then I spoke and they're not afraid to be with us anymore.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** They are all so supportive, we have great republican supporters in Pennsylvania and in Washington...

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And it's changed a lot... but at the time we were trying to figure out how to do—how to have a professional voice in Washington for Trans people. And it was rough because almost everybody involved was dirt poor. I had a little more resources than most, I wasn't rich by any means but I had a job. And at some point in 2002, I... I passed the point where my activism was getting in the way of my job to the point where my job was getting in the way of my activism.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And about that time we lost our biggest client, which was the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Governor Ridges' Communications Director granted the contract to one of our rival agencies, which he now—within a year of then, he became the president of and now he owns it.

**BB:** Oh...

**MK:** Still seems a little fishy to me—

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** [Raises her voice] And I'm not afraid to say it on tape. But we lost our biggest contract and you know...in a way it was dirty how it happened but you know, you lose contracts and you get

new contracts that's not a big deal. But I just decided, I didn't want—I needed to do this and so... some of us started the National Center for Transgender Equality.

**BB:** That sounds \_\_\_???

**MK:** Yup...yup! Then I moved down to D.C in November of 2002... opened our office inside the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, they gave us free office and free copies and free phones and stuff. We opened on January 6, 2003 and for 14 years and nine months, that's what I been doing.

**BB:** So, how did you [Pause] I mean it's obviously growing, you have a staff now. How big is your staff?

**MK:** We basically have 20 people, I say basically because we have 18 currently and two job openings.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** Possibly three job openings but we're about to fill them. We will have 20 any second now.

**BB:** How do you... how do you fund it? I mean do you fundraise or—

**MK:** Well, initially I funded it. So I was full time without pay for the first... I don't know, the first couple years. And for our first staff person I was paying that too. So initially, I paid for it which I'll recover from someday.

**BB:** [Laughs]

**MK:** Now we're funded through some grants, we have a lot of individual donors... we get a little bit of speaking fees. We have some...some—a small number of corporate sponsorships now. We've been very selective about of corporate partnerships.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MK:** And haven't had a lot so, we have a roughly two million dollar budget now... Uh-Oh!

**BB:** Which ones mine?

**MK:** No idea. That's probably... that's got to be how it is cause your—I wouldn't have put the lid in the middle of your stuff. So [Something drops on the table] that's how we... how we got started.

**BB:** So, it's an amazing story. So, a couple things...I mean you answered some of my questions that I had had. [Pause] What could—how did the conservative attitudes in central Pennsylvania effect you? Or did they? [Pause] Given at any point of your life... I guess growing up and then later.

**MK:** I don't know, you know, my... my experience that last 20 years watching Trans people all over the country, knowing Trans people all over the country... I mean one of the best parts of my job and this experience of serving Trans people is I've gotten to meet certainly thousands of Trans people and maybe tens of thousands. There is definitely a difference between living in big cities and small towns and rural areas, but some of the best most welcoming people are in the smaller places. [Shuffling of papers] I... I can't say I've ever had much trouble in Harrisburg [Pause]. The couple of times that I was most physically threatened about being Transgender have all been in either New York City or Washington D.C. I—people do face discrimination in Harrisburg and violence in Harrisburg but you know, Harrisburg, generally speaking, is a pretty decent place. You know, the legislature have been kind of screwed up for a few decades with people coming in and out of the legislature and in and out of jail and you know... the Jury meandering makes the state legislatively looks super red when it's not a red state. It's a purple state. But I don't think the conservative attitudes in Harrisburg—if anything... if anything what they did [Shuffle noise]... So, I'm a huge central Pennsylvania fan... I expect I'll retire to central Pennsylvania. I'm not like small-towns-oh-my-god-what-do-you-people-do... like I'm fine. But, [Pause] when I was—so those three years 2001, 2002, 2003, when I was living in Harrisburg, I was also working a lot with Common Road, the youth group.

**BB:** Yeah

**MK:** It started – it had a different name when I started, and I actually—how I got into it is Steve Glassman when I met him through Sue, who I met at Penn State. When she found out what I did professionally, he asked me if I would help the group rename itself. It had one of these old names.

**BB:** It was – I just wrote on it, it was...by...G...it's like (\_\_\_?) but it starts with just a colon. It's by and Gay, Lesbian...

**MK:** The one in Boston is still called (\_\_\_?).

**BB:** yeah, it was something like that but it was like...

**MK:** Huh. Yeah it was somethin' –

**BB:** When you read oral history, the kids...when they pronounced it they pronounced it “BGLIA” (ph).

**MK:** Big Liah?

**BB:** Yeah. 'Cuz they would lie to their parents about who they were...



MK: But what did we – what did the adults call it? Biglia?

BB: Biglia, something like that. But they'd mispronounce it, Big Liah. [chuckles]

MK: Well, so Steve asked if I would help them find a new name so I did a name-changing exercise with some of the kids, some of the adults. And the name that the kids originally came up with, that they wanted to change it to was... "Sexual Minorities United Together".

BB: [laughs]

MK: Or, S.M.U.T. 'Cuz they thought that was funny. But, anyway so every Friday night I would go – not as often as Steve, Steve went every Friday night. But for about a year and a half I was going most Friday nights. And hang out with kids. And what was really clear, you can understand how brain drain happens. There were a lot of kids there who just felt like their families or their communities or their schools could not imagine the...just didn't have the imagination to really understand who these kids were and what their possibilities were. And, so a lot of these kids were just new, just biting time 'till they could get out of Harrisburg. It wasn't always actively bad stuff...now, there's a guy in D.C. named Rob. I don't remember Rob's last name, Steve would, but Rob went to – I'm pretty sure Middletown high school. And while we were – while I was there...so, around 2000, 2001, 2002...Rob's car got firebombed. You know, this is the kind of thing we think, even 15 years later, "wow, that must've been a hundred years ago." But it wasn't, he, y'know one night, his car was set on fire and the word "fag" was written all over it. And y'know, Rob is...y'know Rob got out of town as soon as he could and moved to D.C. And a lot of, a lot of those folks just didn't feel like there were enough possibilities for them in Harrisburg. In central Pennsylvania. I don't think I ever really felt that. I do like living in big cities, but...it's not because I don't like cities like Harrisburg. It's just...I've just ended up in big cities [chuckles] for the last 30 years.

BB: Yeah.

MK: Yeah, probably about 30 years.

BB: What do you think...do you think its different for the transgender community versus...if you're trans versus whether you're gay or lesbian? Do you think it's difficult, more difficult? I mean, do you...

MK: I do, I don't think that's answerable because where we are in 2017...the trans community is changing so much. It's almost ridiculous saying that there's a Trans community. The trans community is getting younger, folks are coming out very frequently now at age three, seven and 10. They're having...there's more and more parents involved. In different ways, this isn't just kind of a p-flag kind of...y'know, "I support my kids". This is a...this is much more akin to parents of children with special healthcare needs. Parents who realize their kid is at risk if they don't throw their whole lives into it. And if they aren't advocating all the time for their kids at school, and on sports teams and in life...the community is becoming quickly more non-binary. That is, maybe we could've said that we couldn't have really but it was easier to say back, around the turn of the century that there are people who transition from male-to-female and female-to-male. But now, bigger and bigger chunk of our people...our survey of 28,000 trans people a couple years ago showed that a third of our folks are saying the trans that they are is a non-binary trans. It's not male or female, it's not transitioning that way. It's transitioning from one of those things to a very personal, individualized gender space. Which might be a fluid gender space, or it might be a rigid gender space. But on a spectrum, not either fully male or fully female.

BB: In the non-gender conforming...?

MK: Non-gender conforming, gender-queer, lots of different words for it. The current word dejour is non-binary. Binary meaning yes or no, up or down, male or female. So it's changing so much now...y'know a lot of the folks who would've said 10 years ago if they were in college, I'm gay, are now saying I'm trans and non-binary. So it's really hard to – it's really hard to say there's a trans community. That never was possible to fully say. Just like you can't really say there's a gay community. But, the trans community such as it is is shifting so much right now. That it's harder and harder to say.

BB: So –

MK: So I don't know whether it's the same or different. There's certain things that are the same, y'know there was a guy who was a gay male identifying person but who often wore dresses and makeup who everybody knew as Bubbles. Who was just murdered the other day. I don't know yet how the investigations turning out. I don't know if Bubbles was wearing women's clothes or men's clothes, so I don't know if it was a anti-gay crime, an anti-trans crime, a y'know, a random street shooting. I mean, I don't have any idea. But, it is still the case that has always been the case. When somebody is out committing hate crimes, they don't always think carefully about the identity. And...if I'm a victim of a hate crime, they're probably gonna be calling me fag. And just – you know, when you were growing up if you were noticeably gay you might've been accused of wearing a dress. Or, y'know. We are tied together ... and so many trans people coming up come out as gay first and then they're like "yeah, it's not quite right". And so many trans people are gay, and bi and asexual and everything else.

BB: Yeah, because your first (\_\_\_?) with those male and females roles, you'd get confused. I mean I think that's because you're programmed. You know I read that book – you probably know her, Nicole Maines (ph). That was a really enlightening book, really enlightening parents.

MK: Yeah, Wayne's a character.

BB: You know, that was...I mean the mother, to recognize that with Nicole, so early on. It saved so much hardship on her.

MK: If you meet Nicole and her brother...I'm spacing out his name now. Jonah maybe?

BB: Yeah, something like that.

MK: Josiah? If you meet them now, you can't believe they're identical twins. He's taller, he has a deep voice, he seems like a late teens early 20's guy. And she seems like a late teens, early 20s girl. And the early intervention –

BB: Because, you know, she wasn't allowed to go through puberty as a male. I mean, that makes a difference in the world.

MK: It in fact does. I – y'know, I don't know what it would have done for me. I probably wouldn't have been this tall. I assume...I'm actually a lot less interested in the science of this than people would expect me to be. But I have to focus on the, focus on the policy. I don't think a lot about the why. I'm not a theorist, I'm certainly not a scientist. But, yeah. It's...yeah.

BB: So I mean, that was interesting. One more question – when you come back to...going back to Central Pennsylvania, do you think that there's been a change in the community accepting...acceptance of transgendered people?

MK: Absolutely. Y'know when I...so I graduated from Susquehanna Township High School. And my favorite teacher was Dave Vulkman (ph). I had a couple teachers I really, really loved. Alice Farren (ph), Anna Gosnel (ph). Both of whom were not most people's favorites. But, they were super smart and really demanding of us and taught us interesting things. Dave Vulkman did all of those things and he was super nice and everybody's buddy. So we all loved him. But he also was super important to me getting turned onto politics and things. He taught us civics, or political science or American Government or something. He later became the principal, and then became the superintendent of the school. And as I recall, he didn't come out as gay until he

became superintendent. And, at the time, that was a big deal that there was a gay superintendent. You know, folks think that there's – you know, there's always been gay people out, but they wouldn't have let a gay person...you know, in 1977 if he had come out as a gay teacher, even, that would've been super bad. We had a teacher who all the students knew was gay. The students all knew he was gay. And in fact, later, I found out he was gay, but he could not be outwardly gay. But Dave Vulkman was and you know, he became our superintendent. And y'know, I'm sure some whiny troglodyte would complain if a superintendent was gay now but they wouldn't have a lot of support. You know in the Cumberland Valley school district right now there's a mother of a trans kid who's very open about it. A good friend of mine, Nick, as in Nicole Miller, who's running for school board because the school there is not treating her children like they should be treated. And so she's gonna mom-bear all over them. And she's running for school board. That wouldn't have been possible...back when I was here, we would've called Cumberland Valley Cow Valley 'cause it was way out, passed Mechanicsburg. No way there were ever gonna be people living out there. Now, it's very densely populated and y'know, a core part of Harrisburg. But things are changing so much, you know the support group doesn't hide anymore, it can be out in the open. The Keystone Conference happens out at the Sheridan, on Haulks (ph) Road off Eisenhower Boulevard. I think it's Haulks Road...but it's very out in the open now. They even have a...at that conference they take busloads of people downtown to eat at restaurants in downtown Harrisburg.

BB: Yeah

MK: That would have terrified the bajeeprs (ph) out of me, fifteen years ago.

BB: Yeah

MK: Not because it was me—you know there's something I wish I had a picture of. You just reminded me of this... so we... [Laughs] When I was living in Harrisburg in the—in the turn of the century, I was at a... Im spacing out on the name of this support group I already told you what it was... it's in there now but... yeah

BB: In Harrisburg?

MK: Yeah in Harrisburg—anyway I was there one night and I was mentioning that the support group I been at in D.C, after the support group meetin we'd go to this one restaurant. And you know, we'd have the support group from seven to eight- thirty or seven to nine then we'd all go out... a lot of us would go out to dinner and get drinks. So some of us decided we were going to try that. So three of us were pointed a committing and I don't really remember who the three of us were... I know I was one of them. And... so I know it was July... I remember it was July so it was probably July of '02 or '01. Because the reason I remember it was July is because we were scouting out bars and restaurants we could go to, that would be safe.

BB: Yeah

MK: For Trans people, not all of whom would be passable...it could be dangerous if we picked the wrong place. So we were going out to test out these places and we went into one place... I

can't remember the name of it on Front St, it's this great little bar with really great good... I don't know if it's still there. And we went in and the reason I know it was July because it was during the Gettysburg Battle anniversary.

BB: Yeah

MK: And the place was full of Civil Warian (ph) actors

BB: [Laughs] Oh my God

MK: So here we were getting up the nerve to go into this place... you know dressed as women. I had transitioned by that point but the other two hadn't. And so it was a scary thing for people and we walk in and it's full of revol— or a Civil War soldiers and there's Civil War-country-folk women you know...

BB: Oh my God

MK: And it was a really terrifying thing, we didn't pick that restaurant... I don't know if that was why we didn't pick it but that was just a weird little thing

BB: Yeah—one more question and then I... I've got to ask this. What was your—your families' reaction? Your parents or your brothers and sisters?

MK: Universally positive...almost universally positive. My parents were phenomenal. I was terrified of coming out to them...to everybody. I had—but around 1998 I started having two lives. I had my Transgender life, where I knew all these Transgender people and then I had this other life of the people I had always been with my whole life, my friends here, my family here, my friends in D.C and around the country and none of them knew about the Trans thing. It was a real hard thing for me to keep that all together, but when it was time to come out in May '99 I wrote a 30 page document explaining the whole thing because remember this was not a go look it up online—

BB: Yeah

MK: This is a, you know had heard rumors and what did this mean and so I carefully laid it out in 30 pages. And I sat down with people in a specific order, I told my friend Mark first and I told him at the same time I told his wife, Kathy, who is also a dear friend of mine.

BB: Yeah

MK: I wanted him to have someone to talk to. And then I told my mom next, my parents weren't a couple they were still pretty close and then I told my dad after her then I told my other really close friends. But I wanted Mark and Kathy to know first... first of all because they were the—Mark was always sort of my centering person...

BB: Yeah

MK: But I wanted somebody my mom could talk to and I knew they'd be perfect. And then I wanted somebody my dad could talk to and they'd be perfect and I knew my mom and dad could talk together. So my mom's first words were—so my grandmother when she was alive and she was at the time she was always swear. Her swear was 'Jesus, Mary, and Joseph'

BB: [Chuckle]

MK: and so I told my mother and my mother said 'well I always said you each get one Jesus, Mary and Joseph from grandma and this would be yours and then she started to cry. Then she said 'I wish you would have told me when you were little so I could help'. Now the truth is she couldn't have helped.

BB: Yeah

MK: She would've and they were just amazing. So then like the next night or the night after that, I told my dad and his first words were something like 'wow, well what can I do?' or 'how can I help?' or something like that.

BB: Wow that's just incredible

MK: My parents had been amazing. My parents came to me and asked if they could rename me, they said as my parents they had a right and obligation to name me. And they helped me pick the name...they basically picked the name.

BB: Really?

MK: I'm still the only Trans person I know like that.

BB: So your parents picked Mara?

MK: Mhm... yeah. So I been super lucky and my siblings were all really good. One of them took longer than the others but they been great. I lost one or two little clients that didn't matter. I really learned from it, in times of stress people act like who they are. The loving people act like good kind loving people and the jerks act like jerks. And I been very fortunate to not have a lot of toxic people in my life and to have mostly amazing, wonderful people. And they acted amazing and wonderful. [Shuffle of papers]

BB: I'm glad I asked that question.

MK: Yeah

BB: That's really it...

MK: Anything else?

BB: No I think you have an incredible story. I'm glad you that you got the center—

MK: God I've been so lucky. This movement has gone faster than any other social justice movement in history and to get to be a part of it is just amazing. And to get to really serve these amazing people... and the people I meet is just so lucky.

BB: And it's great that you got that voice...I saw some of your interviews like with Chris Anthony. I saw on You Tube, I mean, out your name up there and you get some of the—your voice is there and that you can advocate and speak out—

MK: Yeah I'm really lucky

BB: And help educate... you know the rest of the world.

MK: Yeah

BB: I hated Megan Kelly. God I hate her... I still don't like that women.

MK: So that interview... yeah... that's the one where it closed and we ran out of time and she basically said 'I have nothing against you people but you scare children' or something you know. She didn't say that exactly but that's basically what she said and then there was like 'So hey, we'll have you back another time...bye' that was like—

BB: You know she was like—I'm going to stop this. [Recorder turned off]