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Title: LGBT Oral History: Gretchen Little

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Interviewee: Gretchen Little

Interviewer: Sarah Goldberg

Date: November 19, 2015

Location: Harrisburg, PA (Midtown Books)

Transcriber: Sarah Goldberg

Proofreader: Sara Tyberg

Abstract:

Gretchen Little was born on October 26, 1958 in Elmira, New York. As a child, Gretchen was interested in sports and experimented with wearing women's clothing in the home. While studying Media Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, Gretchen told some female partners about her interest in presenting as a woman, but remained largely closeted. After law school at the University of Pittsburgh, Gretchen went on to serve as the District Attorney for Sullivan County for several terms and then moved to Harrisburg to work for the Pennsylvania District Attorney's Association. While in Harrisburg, Gretchen worked for TransCentral PA and helped organize the first Keystone Conference. In this interview, Gretchen discusses the vocabulary she used to describe her feelings during the sixties and seventies, her past relationships, her work with TransCentral, and the process of finding an authentic presentation in balance with her professional goals and personal relationships. She also discusses some difficult movements of confrontation, her relationship with organized religion, and her perspective on dating in the future. Gretchen concludes the interview by talking about how she chose her name after a domestic violence advocate she met while she served as the DA.

SG: So we're here with the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania's History Project. My name is Sarah Goldberg and we are interviewing Gretchen Little today, which is November 19, 2015. We are in Midtown Books in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Gretchen, do you – do we have your consent to be interviewed today?

GL: Absolutely, sure.

SG: Great! All right, so we'll start off with some basic biography questions. Can you tell us where and when you were born?

GL: Oh my gosh, I was born in Elmira, New York in 1958.

SG: Okay.

GL: Yeah. October 26th, 19—I share a birthday with Hillary Clinton.

SG: Oh wow, that's a good birthday.

GL: Yeah.

SG: So can you tell us a little bit about your childhood and your family?

GL: Well, my childhood was not common, I suppose. Let me start that again. My childhood was probably a little different from most in the early 50s—late 50s, early 60s. My parents were both college professors, so, you know, not only was there kind of the emotional stifling of the late 50s and early 60s, but there was also kind of a, you know, pressure from my family I would say to express yourself more from an intellectual perspective. So we moved around a fair amount, and my father taught piano and composition. My mother taught political science. And so I spent about four-five years in rural Pennsylvania, and then we moved out to St. Louis, Missouri, and that was in the 60s. We moved back—my father actually re-joined the faculty at Mansfield University, which was then Mansfield State College in 196—1968. So, it was kind of a—kind of weird there. Felt pretty much at home in a city environment actually, to the extent to which St. Louis was a city environment. And so it was kind of a jolt to go back to a really small town, but I, you know, adapted fairly well. There were things that were great about living in a small town in the late 60s, early 70s. There really wasn't too much trouble to get into. So, that's basically the hist—the general background.

SG: Okay, so what were your interests as a child?

GL: I really enjoyed sports. I enjoyed music. My father wanted me to follow in his footsteps as a pianist. It just wasn't something that I was set out to do, or you know, I was not put here for that purpose, I think it was pretty clear. I just didn't enjoy practicing, and I never felt—I mean, I took lessons for about ten years, but I never really felt comfortable at the keyboard as though anything was really flowing out of me into music, so—I mean, I still enjoy singing, and I love music, but I guess I'm more of a music appreciation than participant.

SG: And how about socially, what was that like for you?

GL: Socially was odd. From a Trans perspective, I knew very early on, I think. I had a really good buddy in St. Louis, Abigail, and my parents always used to give me, you know, grief about oh, you know, “you and Abigail” and everything. I mean, I think—I don't know what Abigail is up to now—I'd love to know, but if I had to guess, she's probably a transman, and here I am a transwoman. So we—we never really talked about that specifically, because in 1964, 1963, those—you know, we didn't have the vocabulary to talk about that, and it certainly wasn't something you were going to hear about from your parents or from the school or from church or anything like that. So, you know, but we just kind of glommed onto each other, and she was far more masculine than I was, but, you know, that just was for a couple of years. It was great, but the, you know, when we moved back to the small town it was sort of like, okay, that's over there, that's not something I'm going to think about a whole lot, because there just wasn't any—there just wasn't any place to express it. I mean, I—I fit in fairly well. You know, I developed sort of a class clown persona when I was younger. I was really fat, I as a really fat little kid and you know, I can look back and armchair quarterback and say it was because I was stuffing my—I don't know if that's really true or not—maybe I just had the, you know, metabolism and then grew out of it once I got to be a certain age. But in any event—so, the big thing in Mansfield, Pennsylvania was sports. So you know, I tried really hard to fit in with that, and I played soccer, I played tennis, I played basketball. I got cut from the basketball team a couple of times before I finally made it. I mean, I really – and I still do – I really enjoy basketball but you know, I think if

anything I was you know, kind of overcompensating as much as possible socially, because that's what you did. There just wasn't really, there wasn't a clear alternative path in those days.

SG: So, I guess when did you start seeing an alternative path? Or being exposed to more of that vocabulary or ideas?

GL: Just really over the last ten years or so. I certainly—I started dressing in women's clothes when I was about nine or 10, you know. And I had, you know, my own little stash and everything but that was kind of just something that—I mean, once I started dating, which was kind of later for me, but once I started really dating and being on my own and, you know, being intimate with women for the most part, I would let them know. You know, I wasn't really one of those people who was, you know, ashamed of it necessarily. I mean, the first couple times I told people, it was a little difficult, but you know, that was always something—so from that perspective, I guess it's been a long time. But from a perspective of actually living in an authentic way, that's just really been over the past eight or 10 years.

TA: Can I ask a question?

SG: Sure, go for it.

GL: Sure.

TA: What were the words that you used before you encountered a Trans vocabulary? Like—when you said the first few times that you told people, you were—it was difficult for you.

GL: Well, the first time was really my first long-term girlfriend and I mean, I didn't tell her right away. I wasn't like, third date, “Hey, by the way,” [laughs] but the idea just kind of came up naturally around Halloween that we did a gender shift thing, and so you know, a couple of days later we were—and I kinda said, “Listen, there's something you really need to know, when we did that, that's like—that's something I've been doing for a long time.” You know, I didn't use the word cross dress. I don't honestly remember specifically. When I first started coming out to people down here, I found the term “presenting as female” to be helpful. You know, because it really didn't—I mean, by then, the idea of crossdressing, at least to me, was kind of already—that was way outside of my reality. Some people still look at it that way, I suppose, I have a couple of family members who I think maybe think of it that way, but you know, for myself, that was probably the start, and then I started in therapy with a, you know, gender conversion therapist in the last couple of years that I lived in the north—northeast part of Pennsylvania. So that was very helpful.

SG: Do you want to talk about that, your work with your gender therapist and how that's been?

GL: Well, this was in—I mean, we can go into the setting for that, the way that that came about.

SG: Yeah, sure.

GL: Yeah, I mean so... after the small town – we'll just kind of take it in chronological order if that's okay?

SG: Yeah, that's better, don't want to miss anything.

GL: After the small-town experience, graduating from high school. And during that entire time, like at night, most nights, I had little outfits that I would put on to sleep in. We lived in a big old house, and I kinda had, you know, an entire wing of it to myself, and my brother was already in college, so you know, nobody came in checked on me, and, you know, so that was a—I guess a coping mechanism to a certain extent, and you know, I would wake up in the morning, and it's like, “Oh jeez, I have to go back to being a guy,” which was some times more difficult than others, and so then I moved to—went to college in Texas in Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and you know, you live in a dorm, it kind of limits your gender expression in the—in 1976. So, you know, I was kind of away from thinking about things for a couple of years, but I knew just from my dealings with women that you know, I felt more comfortable in a friendship role a lot of times. It was very—I don't like the word aggressive, but just very not—I was never the one in a relationship to move things along. And so you know, I always felt a lot more passive, and that felt comfortable for me. Anyway, so I stayed down in Texas for several years afterwards and started—again, that was when I had that first discussion about—with my—Jeanine was her name. Anyway, [sips drink] that relationship didn't last. I don't know that it, you know—there were a lot of factors, we were in our twenties, what do you do? So then finally I kind of hit a dead end in Texas, and I went to law school. I went to law school in Pittsburgh, at the University of Pittsburgh. During that time, I guess I had things pretty well stuffed away. I mean, I would – there were a couple of occasions where I felt the urge to find some clothes and put them on and stuff, but law school's a pretty harrowing experience, and it'll, you know, it'll turn you inside out psychologically, and I think it did that to me. I wasn't particularly happy during a lot of that time, but you know, I self-medicated [laughing] with alcohol when I wasn't studying, and that seemed to work okay. And then I ended up moving back—it was a kind of a perfect storm of stuff my last year of law school. I really liked Pittsburgh, and I was thinking that I would probably want to stay there, but we had some family things, and my dad died. My mother kind of needed somebody a little closer with her, and you know, jobs were tough that year, and so I actually got a job clerking for a judge in the county next to where I had graduated from high school. So, I went from clerking for a judge to being an assistant district attorney and then the District Attorney in the county south of there actually resigned during his term, and I—I mean, I was out of law school for a year and a half, two years, was stupid enough to say well, “I can do that.” So I put myself up for the appointment and actually got it.

SG: Wow.

GL: And I became the DA and was elected to three subsequent terms. Now, this was a very small county, and it was pretty conservative so, you know, I kind of boxed myself into a corner there to some extent. Now, I was fortunate that I met a woman who was very open-minded and very—she was actually a counselor at the women's center. That's how we met because, of course, I was prosecuting criminal cases, and she was an advocate for survivors, so you know that was—we really meshed for a long time as far as that went. And she—I was able to open up with her, and I don't know that she understood every—I don't know that I understood everything

at that point. But you know, we had a good—we were together for almost twelve years. So you know, we had a good relationship, and she certainly wanted nothing but the best for me, but I also—you know, as far as me presenting as female in private, she had no problem with that and, you know, it was not—I think she enjoyed it some, too. But, you know, when push came to shove, I think she really wanted a male figure in her life, which is totally understandable, and I was not really sure at that point where I was—[mic slips] uh oh, where I was headed—changed—moved the microphone for a second, hopefully you heard it [reattaches mic]

TA: Yeah.

GL: Okay. And it was about that time that I realized that I really needed some help. And I started looking for—for counselors in the area and found a woman in Williamsport [Pennsylvania] who—I mean she had not counseled many Trans people, but she came fairly well recommended from what I could tell in my research, and she took it on and did a very good job with me in the early going. I mean, I was—I was definitely ready to get into the whys and the hows and, you know, the—the where from here—

SG: At this point, are you still the DA?

GL: Yes, yes.

SG: Okay.

GL: So, obviously that was my first question, “this is all confidential, right?” because that’s never really—I mean, I think there’s a picture out there, somewhere—again, on a Halloween thing where I went to one of the bars you know, dressed as a woman [sips drink] but you know, that was—whether people thought something, I don’t know. I mean, ‘cause, you know, Linda and I were together for 12 years there. We never married. There were, you know, a couple of reasons for that may or may not had to do with me being trans, but in any event, I’ve maintained friendships—I’m actually going up there tomorrow as a guy to help them with a big event, and I emcee stuff, I’m just good at that, and they don’t have a lot of people up there who can do that, so I’m going to do that for them. So yeah, I started into the therapy then. I think really my counselor and I kind of learned from each other, you know, because as I said, I mean I was up front with her from the very start as far as here’s why I’m here. This is—I mean, I know enough to know that in a perfect world, I’d ditch the guy. But you know, it’s not a perfect world, what do we do? And then, we made some good progress, and, you know, one of the things I realized is that I just had to get out of living in such a small area. I mean, there were certain things that were very nice about it. I live in the woods, had a nice little cabin—

SG: And where is this, sorry?

GL: Sullivan County, Leporte, [PA]. Eagles Mere [PA]. Eagles Mere is a beautiful resort community that a lot of people from the major cities in the northeast have been going to for years. It was a big deal before air conditioning is what some of the people say, ‘cause it’s like up like 2400 feet above sea level, so it’s really in the mountains and there’s a beautiful natural lake

that's spring fed and, you know, no motorboats, just sailboats and you know, kayaks and rowboats and stuff like that. It's cool.

SG: Okay.

GL: And you know, there are pockets of acceptableness there, too. It's funny, I always joked with people—heaven help a gay man in Sullivan County, but for some reason there seemed to be a lot of gay women. And like the mayor of one of the towns is an out lesbian and has been for a long, long time, and I don't know whether people just kind of ignore it or kind of file it away or something or what—but in any event, so you know, through therapy and through, you know, my own realizations, I knew I had to get to a larger area, and so a job came up with the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association. They needed a resource prosecutor in the area of traffic safety, okay, impaired driving, homicide by vehicle, those types of—they're very difficult cases. They're actually very complex and you know, with sixteen years' experience as the DA, I had done a lot of those cases, and I felt pretty comfortable from the subject matter background, and I was kind of, you know, my family history of education—I was going to be doing a lot of trainings, you know, for police and prosecutors and serving as a resource, and I figured that was something that I would enjoy doing, plus it would get me to Harrisburg, which believe it or not, to me was moving to the big city [laughs], so you know, and I applied for the job, and I got it and moved down here and in the course of my looking into what was what in Harrisburg, of course, I found TransCentral PA and you know, went to a meeting as soon as I could, and that's when the vocabulary really started coming in to play for me and you know, at that point, still I wasn't really convinced one way or another as to what my true identity would be, was, is going, is progressing, however you want to looking at it, but you know, it was certainly helpful to finally have people that understood all of this that I've just explained to you [laughs] talked about it, came from similar backgrounds and, you know, certainly weren't judgmental about it and you know, I had a lot more to add, and then I started seeing Amy Kiesling here, who—and she and I have maintained a you know, a therapist-patient relationship, although we kind of are on an as-needed basis now. I don't go all the time, you know, I don't always schedule appointments, just when I feel it's necessary or something big happens that I want to get a—want to make sure I'm processing it effectively so, yeah.

SG: Okay, so what year was it you moved to Harrisburg?

GL: [takes a sip] 2008.

SG: 2008, okay. So can you tell us a little bit about TransCentral PA and the kind of work that they do?

GL: When I first went to a meeting, honestly I had only been out in public like maybe two or three times. It was only when I had travelled pretty far away. I think I—you know, it was in San Francisco, London, Philly a couple of times. So—and you know, some of those were specific events that were more social and that was sort of what I expected TransCentral to be. I didn't realize at the time that it was more of a resource and advocacy organization and at first I was kind of like ooh, I was just kind of hoping to get pretty and hang out with people, you know? [laughs] You know, go be disruptive, but after going to a couple of meetings I really got to

appreciate the work that they were doing, and so I ended up actually being an officer for a couple of years. We were—I was involved as an officer when we made the initial decision to start doing the Keystone Conference, which has just blossomed into one of the major gender conferences worldwide now. We were on a shoestring budget the first year and really you know, we kind of figured that we were either going to bankrupt ourselves putting on Keystone or it was going to work, and it did. And that was probably for me the most empowering experience I have ever had as a Trans person, you know, now I wasn't the brains behind the outfit, I was more of, you know, carrying stuff around and making sure that people had what they needed and all of that—and working behind the welcome desk and all of that, but it just went so well, and the people who came—I think the first year we had like 125 or 150 attendees. Now we're up in the 600-700 range. We're actually at the point now where we sell out the hotel, the host hotel, and have to look at booking alternate lodging for some of our attendees. Yeah, yeah, it's been amazing, it's been amazing. And of course, Jeanine Ruhsam was the president at the time and she had the contacts in the Trans community, the Mara Keislings and Donna Rose and Jennie—Jenifer Finney Boylan, all of whom have come participated in the Keystone Conference from the start and really lent it instant credibility. And a lot of surgeons have underwritten, a lot of doctors, a lot of therapists—and plus the, you know, very important, you know, image consultants and make up people and vendors for hair and stuff like that. Now, we have always made the effort to include transmen every bit as much as transwomen. It seems as though we've been kind of relegated to more of a transwomen's group although we do have transmen's get togethers and classes at the Keystone conference. But in any event, yeah, as far as TransCentral goes, that was within the—I guess those would be my first—you know, the really three most empowering experiences that came from being involved with TransCentral: The Keystone Conference and helping make that a success, Marching in my first Pride Parade which was huge, I just, you know, tear up if I start thinking about it too much, but you know—because this was at a time when I was still not out to people at work. Certainly wasn't out to anyone from where I used to live and you know, Harrisburg's a larger city than I was used to living in, but it's also, you know, the political center of Pennsylvania, and I was involved in politics, you know, I was an elected DA so I—I know Judges, I know Supreme Court Justices, I know the Attorney General, all these people on a first-name basis kind of thing, so I was in the back of my mind going, “All it's going to take is one person to see me, and they're going to poof [gestures] whatever—so that Pride parade was really important. The other thing that I was—that was a real milestone was when we obtained 501c3 status for TransCentral PA, and that happened the first couple of years of my being involved. And I helped Jeanine with that and what a big deal, and that's continued to pay dividends, obviously, as we are now able to accept donations on a tax-free basis and you know, with organizing something like the Keystone conference, very helpful, so, yeah.

SG: So have you found sort of a more social community in Harrisburg as well?

GL: I have, and interestingly enough, it's been through roller derby. And my derby friends are all totally accepting, welcoming. I announce for Harrisburg Area Roller Derby. I announce for a couple of the other women's leagues in the area also. They all know—I mean, you know, the guy still does some of the announcing which—you know, I should probably say that at some point, we can talk about it. But yeah from a social perspective, I think the derby world has really good friends, you know, very accepting, and fun! You know? [laughs] Roller derby has gotten a lot more serious than when I started as an announcer, you know, it's an entertaining sport, but it's

not sports entertainment. It's a, you know, legitimate sport, and I think the women that play derby now are much more serious athletically than probably back in 2008, it was more a novelty. So that you know, the partying is you know, it's still there, but it's not the main focus the way it was at first [laughs]

SG: Okay, how did you get involved with that, just curious.

GL: You know, when I started doing research and knowing that I wanted to move someplace that was a larger area. As a licensed attorney in Pennsylvania, I figured my three best shots were basically Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Harrisburg and so, you know, as I started looking into what the cities had to offer I realized—'cause, you know, I was in the sticks. I hadn't yet heard about the revival of women's flat track roller derby, but, you know, in my research, I saw that ooh, this is going on, this looks really cool, and I saw that all these cities had leagues and just kind of, you know, filed that away. Then when I moved down to Harrisburg, I, you know, saw that there was a bout, and so I was like, "Oh, I gotta go. I gotta go." And I loved it. I loved it from the start. You know, the strong female energy, the creativity, the—I just loved everything about it and so, you know, I came back to work the next day at the DA's association and we eat lunch in our conference room, and I had the program with me, and I said, "I had just had a life changing experience," and I put the program down on the table. So, I went to the next game—and took a couple of my friends. When I was—you know, before going to law school and after, actually—I worked in radio. I did play by play for basketball and football and stuff like that, so you know, I know my way around a microphone. So anyway, I go to the next game, and I took a couple of friends this time, and the woman who's announcing says, "Is anybody interested in being the announcer, because I can't do it anymore." And they're like, "Come on, come on, come on," and I'm like "All right." So I went up, and I talked with her for a little bit and ended up announcing with her that game, and the rest is history as they say.

SG: That's very cool.

GL: Yeah.

SG: Okay, so how have you sort of dealt with sort of, your public life as a DA, and professional life in sort of dealing with being trans and being more visible?

GL: It just kind of happened organically. I got to be a lot more comfortable. Harrisburg is a city in Pennsylvania that does have an anti-discrimination ordinance and you know, I talked it over with a lot of people and realized that you know, the DA's association, while it certainly is a political and fairly conservative group as a whole, was also not in a position to make a fuss if you will or to take issue with my gender presentation and my gender identity. And I think once I kind of internalized that, I shared with some of my coworkers and one of—actually, it was at a keystone conference where the attorney general's office had—had a meeting with their detectives a couple nights before Keystone. So, I'm over at the Keystone conference with some of my friends and one of the detectives—and I think I remember seeing him out of the corner of my eye. Whatever, in any case, he went back and kind of mentioned it to a couple—the word got out and one of the friends who I had shared with, you know, had my back and told me about it and said, "Oh, you know, I think they're talking." And so, I approached the people that I felt I

needed to approach at that point who were part of the conversation that was described to me and just said, “Yeah,” you know, “I’m—I consider myself a transwoman. I don’t always present—I’m not full-time—but you know, the male presentation is kind of more of convenience than it is of true identity.” And it was fairly well received, actually. Not everybody gets it, and I understand that. You know, I’m a trained attorney, so I’m used to looking at things from both sides and trying to understand the arguments pro and con, so you know, there are some people who I’ve worked with who, you know, are very, very polite, but they were, you know, not really accepting which is—you know, and that’s cool, I understand that, it’s not really you know, it’s—we all have our blind spots, I guess I could call it that, but, you know, they wouldn’t necessarily call it that, and you know, I don’t have the monopoly on being right, so. Anyway, now I recently retired—semi-retired—from the DA’s Association, which has led to my certainly being a lot more free to present as I—as I choose. I still am not in a full-time basis but a lot closer. I actually had a wonderful experience over the summer where my coworkers who knew suggested, put it in my ear—and you know, they weren’t trying to talk me into it or out of it, but they said, “You know, this is going to be your last summer banquet with the association unless you come, decide to come—you should think about coming as Gretchen.” And so I thought about it and kind said, eh, really back and forth. In any case, I said well, you know, I’ll pack for both, and we’ll see how it goes because—in any case, that’s the end of our summer meetings is this big banquet and everything, and the president from one year to the next is installed at this banquet, okay? And this was 2005, or 2015, was the year when the first female president of the Pennsylvania District Attorney’s Association was going to be installed. And I’ve known Risa [Vetri Ferman] for 20 years. She is, you know, very deserving of that honor. And it is a big honor, because the DA’s Association in Pennsylvania has been in existence over a hundred years, and there’s a wall of presidents on, you know, which is like the old white guy’s hall of fame [laughs]. And, you know, it’s a big deal—it’s a huge deal that Risa was going to be our first female president. And it kind of hit me that if you know—I’d better talk to her before going any further, because I wouldn’t want her to feel as though you know, I was trying to horn in on her night or—just, her daughter was coming, you know, a lot of things were—so I talked with her the first opportunity that I had at the meeting and explained to her the situation, and she couldn’t have been more welcoming and gracious and said, “Oh, you have to.” And she’s like, “What are you going to wear?” Because she’s very, very fashionable [laughs] and always, always looks extremely well put together. And I had done my shopping, I had an appropriate dress for the occasion, and I told her about it, and she was like, “Oh, well, yeah.” But—and yeah, said, “I’ll introduce you. I want—definitely please.” And she did and it was really a wonderful experience. I had—I got a lot of emails from people who weren’t there who found out about it, you know, offering their encouragement—had a lot of people—a couple of people were kind of like, “Oh, this is freaking me out,” but overwhelmingly people were very supportive and went out of their way to come over and wish me well and everything, so that was really—I’m glad I did that. I think it sort of put a—it put the entire thing into perspective, I think, for them and for me. Okay, which was, you know, very nice, very nice. I was very thankful for that opportunity.

SG: That’s great.

GL: Yeah.

SG: So how about with your family or friends from Sullivan County?

GL: Well, I don't think too many friends from Sullivan County really know much.

SG: Okay.

GL: I just haven't gone there. I think it's best for them to find out and ask me. Maybe that's wrong, but I don't plan on—like I said, other than going up tomorrow and helping them with this event, and there's another event that I announce for—you know, we don't really stay in touch that much. It's not a—I mean, it was a part of my life, and I love those people, but it's kind of a need-to-know thing. I don't know that—it hasn't come up, let's put it that way. If it does, I'll deal with it. I'm not looking at, you know, retiring up there. If I—you know, if I decide to relocate again, it's going to be somewhere where the weather is a whole lot nicer, so yeah. So actually, some of my high school classmates are on board completely, which is nice. I'm actually going to see one of them in a couple of weeks. Now, that's not everybody, and that's not all the friends that I had, but you know... I think you know, I've got a forty-year high school reunion coming up next year, and I would have to guess that Gretchen's going to be going to that, and hey [gestures] it'll be a good time. I'll have enough people in my corner for that already that it's not going to be that big an issue. And I can't imagine it would be that big an issue anyway. It really—what do people care? You know, when it gets right down to it, it's not like—as far as family, my dad passed away when I was a lot younger. I think he would have been okay. My mother, you know, I just never really got there with her. She was questioning—she never questioned me about, like, some—you know, I was presenting as male when I would visit her and stuff like that, but you know, it's—my arms are shaved, my legs are shaved, all those kinds of things, and you know, she noticed that. She didn't ask me about it, of course, she asked my brother, and his response was, “Well, you'll have to ask him.” So, he knew, he's been completely supportive. He doesn't always understand everything, but yeah, he's in the academic world. He's a professor so certainly has kept up with the, you know, the human rights strides that we've made over the last several years. I have a cousin who—a first cousin who is very accepting, and he and his wife and I go out when we get together, and it's—they have parties at their house that are lots of fun. They invite a lot—they live in Florida, that's who I'll be visiting over the holidays. They know some really fun people and their parties are great and you know, I'm totally welcome and, you know, know their friends and like their friends. That's really a good thing. His brother is the oldest. He's a little more circ—he's not totally on board. I think he's, you know—he's the oldest again, and is definitely socially conservative when it comes to that. I think he just—I mean, I think he's going to come around. He's an extremely cosmopolitan individual. He's too cosmopolitan not to get it, for gosh sakes, but you know, it's just going to take a little more time before he realizes this isn't just something that I do to get kicks or you know, whatever. Yeah, as far as my friends from the Texas days, they all know. They're all totally good. You know, that's nice. We still—you know, I worked at a bar for like eight or 10 years, partially when I was in school and partially after on a part-time basis and like four of us just have stayed in touch over the years, and we get together at least once a year, and when I told them, they were, “Oh cool, when are going to meet you?” And so ever since when we get together for our weekend-long card games and wine festivals [laughs], you know, and it's just totally great. It's really nice, you know, be—to you know—and of course—[laughs] my friend Roy who—he and I worked together in the kitchen at this bar for many, many night shifts and had some crazy experiences that we won't go into, but he said, “Well, you know, I'm going to try to look up your

skirt.” [laughs] I said, “Go for it, Roy, whatever floats your boat.” [laughs] So yeah, you know, it’s kind of as far as the future... honestly, I haven’t decided completely whether to take the legal steps necessary to change my name and again—it’s one of the reasons that I’m taking this sabbatical and my semi-retirement is to kind of figure that out, and I know, you know, some trans people see, you know, transitioning in place in whatever job they hold as the best approach, and I’m sure I could have done that, but I just didn’t really see that as what was, you know, what I wanted to do. Because I mean—I basically have done the law—the prosecutor thing, you know it’s my—whatever career steps I take in the future, they may or may not involve law, but you know, I think I want to move in other areas. So for me over these next couple of years, I need to find out just how comfortable I am on a daily basis and whether I want to go through the physical steps that you simply have to go through—I mean, you don’t *have to*, but you know, I don’t want to be... you know, an eye sore. I’m vain. You know, I’m in the process of having my beard removed through electrolysis, and that takes a long time, and it’s a pain in the neck, literally. [laughs] And you know, all those other things that you have to do, let alone any, you know, major confirmation surgeries. So you know, we’ll figure it out. If there’s a—you know, if there’s a, you know, complete legal change, then so be it. If there’s not, well, we’ll see that way, too. I don’t have anything against the guy. He was a very good person [laughs], you know, and still is, but—so, yeah, that’s kind of—I’m taking it one step at a time, you know, and that’s kind of where I see it.

SG: Okay, yeah. So, have you, I guess, seen the Trans community around here change while you’ve been here or just even more nationally, broadly, how have you seen changes in what people talk about?

GL: Well, you know, we’re really in a media cycle as far as Trans issues right now, for a number of reasons, and so that—that’s hard to miss [laughs] for obviously... I see more acceptance. I see more conversation, which is a good thing. You know, even people who think they hate you, you know, if you get them talking about it, at least it’s in their minds and maybe that’s the first step towards rethinking.

TA: Your microphone is falling.

GL: Oops.

TA: I can still hear you but—

GL: Yeah, okay [reattaches microphone]

TA: Sorry.

GL: Sure, not a problem. TransCentral has become a really integral part of the entire LGBTQIA+ community in Central Pennsylvania. I mean, it never wasn’t. I don’t want to say that, but I think through the leadership of Jeanine and now Joanne Carroll who’s taken over as president—yeah, the group has really stepped up and become an important vital part of the greater efforts, and I think that’s great. And I think that the community sees us more clearly and you know, respects and seeks out our viewpoints, and—because, I mean—like I said, the fact

that we have grown the Keystone Conference from sort of a regional niche two-day conference to one of the premier four-day, five-day major heavy-hitter conferences in the world in, you know, five or six years is a big deal. Last year, our keynote speaker was Nicole Maines from up in Maine. You know, we have, you know, really, really asserted ourselves, I think, and that's—that's a really good thing so, yeah. I feel more and more comfortable personally and also, I'm not as involved with TransCentral as I was—you know, that may change now that I'm not working. It may not. I, you know, don't know, you know, a year from now I may decide I want to move somewhere else. You know, that's—that's all on the table. But as far as the, you know, I think—I think the Trans community is extremely well-represented here, and I know from talking with people from several larger cities that, you know, there're a lot of cities that have nothing like the concentrated and, you know—TransCentral has the ear of, you know, a lot of the people in Harrisburg, which is a good thing.

SG: So what are some of the political objectives of the organization now? What are you working on specifically?

GL: [takes a sip] I think the number one issue has to be a statewide non-discrimination statute. You know, there's so many issues in Harrisburg right now that, you know, we're kind of derailing a lot of other legislative work. I would like to get more involved with that when I get back and am, you know, spending more time in Harris—I'll be out of town for the next couple of months, but when I get back and am spending more time in Harrisburg, I'm kind of hoping I can be involved with that to some extent. As I said, you know, there's some—there's some representatives and senators who are going to be fairly shocked to meet this gal walking into their offices, but they know the guy, and I think they'll have to take the meeting, and I think they would—you know, they'd have to listen to what I have to say. You know, it's not coming from some lunatic fringe, it's coming from, you know, somebody who has put in the time and represented the people of the Commonwealth in courts of law and know what's at stake, so, you know, I hope I can do that. I think that's really by far the major push that we need to have happen. I think from there everything else kind of falls into place. There are always going to be exceptions, and there are always going to be people who are going to... you know, are going to—going to not... accept the diversity of gender expression, but that doesn't mean there should be essentially institutionalized discrimination, so, you know, which is kind of where we are right now without—that's—we're probably getting off topic here, but you know, that's the thing that I hear a lot of the legislators often say, "Well, we don't want another protected class." Yeah, but if you—you're not so much creating a protected class as you are... preventing wholesale discrimination. I mean, and that's something that, you know, I think they're going to have to get with in any case—so that's by far the largest and most important objective that I see right now. Beyond that, I think—you know, I think—I think most Trans people would probably agree, although I'm certainly not speaking for anyone but myself, I think despite the great strides that we've made and the acceptance that we've seen, I think it's still something that on a very basic level that people kind of have to do for themselves. Being out is important. Being out is huge. But I—believe me, I understand how difficult it is and you know, not only is it you're facing a, you know, big bad world out there that looks at you, you know, out of the corner of their eye, but it's also, you know, very—you know, presentation issues are huge. And if—if for some reason an individual can't afford the—you know, electrolysis isn't cheap, you know, all of the various—you know, maintaining two wardrobes isn't cheap. [laughs] All of that. So, those are

real impediments, but I don't know that anybody can really do anything for people in that respect. I mean, it would be great if we could, but I don't—I don't see, you know, social—I don't see the social utility quite frankly in doing that. Now making sure that certain treatments may be covered under health insurance, sure. I think that's important, you know, I'm still quite honestly wrapping my head around the treatments that are available to Trans youth now that god only knows. You know, I would be a very differently presenting person had I been able to, you know, be involved in some of those treatments when I was in my teens. Now, would I have—I wouldn't have known enough, and they didn't exist, so it's really almost a, you know, parlor game, but nonetheless, I mean, my goodness. And from that perspective, making sure that treatments are covered under standard health insurance policies is a really important thing. If this—if this level of medical intervention is going to be a part of the, you know, treatment protocol, then you know, it's—it's really not a—it's indefensible to only allow it for people who can afford it, you know. It's like, sorry you get to be yourself and not you. That's—you know, we're better than that. So—so, that would probably be number two as far as an objective. I think those are the big ones. I hadn't really thought about it until right now. You know, again, I think a lot of the acceptance just has to come on an individual basis and from being out and, you know, being a part of the world. You know, there aren't too many places anymore that I won't go, you know, and I guess a certain level of confidence people see or, you know, they just—people are busy with their own stuff. Once you reach a certain comfort level, that's what you realize is that the person may or may not be accepting and understanding of the issues that Trans people face, but that's not the number one issue on their mind when they're at the grocery store or waiting in line to get their driver's license or something, you know. That's—they're into their own stuff. So, yeah.

SG: Have you had to deal with any discrimination or bad reactions when you're out in public spaces?

GL: You know, I've been fortunate. There've been a couple of times when I was—was, you know, out on a Friday or Saturday night downtown where the drunk men are and—you know, and younger. You know, I mean—and you know, I think a couple of words were said and whatnot. It was uncomfortable, but really no. I mean, I've been—I've been fortunate in that respect. The most uncomfortable thing—and unfortunately, this is one of those things that are truly kind of difficult, how do you prevent it? You know is the misgendering. If someone says "Sir" or, you know, uses a male pronoun and that sort of thing, and I haven't had that occur too often, but when it does it's just kind like, "Oh jeez." You know, sometimes you wanna be confrontational, but I don't know that does any good either. I mean, you try to get your point—one time, I was waiting for a coffee, and you know, I wasn't really dressed in any overtly feminine way, because I was getting ready to go to a yoga class, and so you know, but I was, you know, presenting as female. And so I'm waiting at a café and you know, "Sir, your coffee's ready." And I went all passive aggressive and kind of just kept reading what I was reading, and just—just, you know? [laughs] You know, I could tell out of the corner of my eye who they were looking at and everything, and then they started to again, and then kind of— "Um, ma'am, your coffee is ready." "Oh, thank you." [laughs] So, you know, there are—there are ways to deal with that, and I am a believer—you know, I'm not an extremely confrontational person, so sometimes you just have to take it and move on. A lot of the people—like one of my yoga classes recently, one of the gals who is really—you know, we're—we're yoga pals, and she's a—

TA: The battery's about to die, so I just want to stop you for a second, so I can get all of it and then put the new battery back in. I'm so sorry, keep your train of thought right there.

GL: Not a problem.

TA: I'm so sorry. I was hoping there would be a natural point to change the battery, but not the way that things work.

[End Clip 1]

[Clip 2 Begins]

GL: Okay, okay.

SG: We're good?

TA: Yeah.

GL: So yeah, I was at one of my yoga classes, and I had actually recently had some surgery. It's been great, I'll show you afterwards if you want to see, but yeah, a fat transfer surgery where I had fat lipo-ed from my belly and my back and put into my hips and my butt. And you know, I don't know that it makes the difference as far as, you know, but it certainly helps with my confidence. And so since then, I've been going to yoga exclusively as Gretchen. I had before but not always. And one of my pals from several classes came up to me, and I know she felt bad, she referred to me by my male name a couple of times and everything. And she said, "Listen, I'm just going to be straight with you. I completely accept you, and I have no—but it's just going to be very difficult for me. I think of you as him, I—you know, so if I don't—please don't take offense, it's just, you know, my—I'm trying." Which you know, that's all people can do. You know, it's all right. You know, my brother does that. You know, it's to be expected to a certain—and that, when's it's someone who I know who just, you know, has a slip-up or something like that, it's usually—it's t's actually a lot easier to deal with than, you know, someone you don't know who may or may not be trying to diss you. You know, they may not be. They may just not know. But, you know, so—so those are difficult situations, but you know, it's kind of the price you pay. And again, I think the more that you are out and about, the less that happens, at least that's been my experience. I mean, I'm not—you know, blessed with a five-six, 140 lb. frame. You know, I command a certain presence when I enter a space. You know, that's not always a good thing if you're just trying to go about your day, but you know, I'm not going to change that. There's no hormones, there's no surgery, there's no nothing that's going to change my height and my bone structure, so you know, I just have to deal with that.

SG: Talya? Well, let's see. We never really talked about your religious affiliation, I don't know if you currently have one or grew up with something?

GL: That's interesting. One of the jobs that I had out of college before I went to law school, actually, was I worked for a very large church. I was a—I actually studied media arts in college and so I was—this was a very large Methodist church, like 8,000 members in Dallas [Texas],

and—so, I was their media person. And during that period of my life was exposed to a lot of religion. [laughs] Prior to that, I was an Episcopalian, and I was, you know, I did the—we didn't call them altar boys, we called them acolytes. So, I was an—I was an acolyte when I was in high school for a while. I've had prayers answered. I don't have any particular religious affiliation right now. I like to think that, you know, despite some of the chatter in my mind that's not always, you know, the most—you know, we all have negative talk in our mind and sometime my negative talk is outer directed. I wish it weren't, but sometimes it is. I like to think that despite that I try to, you know, live a righteous life. So from a religious perspective, I feel like, you know, whomever is good with me being who I am—I certainly don't have any qualms, you know, about my status in the spiritual world—if anything, I think, you know, personally my status in the spiritual world has probably increased as a result of, you know, a more authentic presentation or, you know, at least a more interesting presentation, I don't know [laughs]. I guess, I've kind of gotten away from the organized religion thing. I don't know that Christianity is necessarily where I am, but I do believe in karma, I believe in good works, and I have had prayers answered. I do know what that feels like, and it's pretty awesome, so you know.

SG: [to Talya] do you have anything to add?

TA: Well, I don't know if you want to—I don't know if it's too personal, if you want to talk about it, but you mentioned past relationships that you've had with women. Do you—are you—do you have any current relationships that you're in? Do you identify—you know, how else maybe do you identify within the LGBTQ spectrum?

GL: Yeah, I've kind of opened up over the last couple of years. And it's difficult. For somebody as you know, I don't know what—you know, one way of saying it would be committed to at least a dual-gendered existence, if not a transgendered—I guess they're both the same thing. But I guess, you know, it's—you know, that limits your social opportunities from, you know, a relationship perspective, unfortunately. But then again, if you're going to be—you know, what's the point at, you know, my age, I'm almost 60 years old—you know, why be in a relationship if I'm not going to be who I am? So, I have dated women, I've dated men. I'm open to most, you know, experiences out there, I suppose. At this point, I guess, you know, pansexual is a thing. That [applause from downstairs interrupts] I just got a round of applause—

SG: There you go, they approve.

GL: So, yeah, as far as moving forward, I don't know. I don't know—and that's something I've gone into pretty deeply in therapy, and I really don't—I think I could be perfectly happy in a relatively open kind of, you know, relationship situation with just several good friends. I don't, you know, you get to a certain point and you know, the biological imperative may still be there, but it's not there to the extent that it is when you're a younger person, at least not for me. And so that's kind of nice, because it opens up a lot more possibilities of, you know, friendship and companionship, really. So, you know, as long as those—I don't know that it's really—that I'm headed into a committed, two-person type of relationship as I get older. You know, I'm never going to say no, but I'd be surprised quite frankly at this point, yeah.

SG: Have you had any important events or turning points in your life that we haven't already covered? I just want to make sure we don't like—

GL: I don't—I think those are the big ones. Yeah. Yeah, I think those are the big ones really as far as—and you know, it's been a—boy, you know, you can compress a lifetime into a very short period of time sometimes and some of the—some of the biggest moments you don't realize at the time either. I travelled a fair amount when I worked for the Methodist Church. That was a very—that was a great experience. They—they sponsored these work trips—they were sort of like short-term missionary work in a variety of places, and I went along and documented those. And that was very cool.

SG: Where did you go?

GL: Went to Kenya (??), went to Haiti, several places in the West Indies, yeah.

SG: Wow.

GL: Yeah, so. And actually, kind of came out, even though I was not—during one of those trips. The first time I ever saw the Southern Cross. And we were sitting on—my friend Martha and I were sitting on the roof of a building that we were working on late at night. And, you know, I felt comfortable telling her that—and it was really, it was the first time I had ever told anybody that you know, I really felt as though I should be a woman. And she was like, “What in particular,” because she was a counselor and had an MSW [Masters of Social Work]. “What in particular about femininity or womanhood is the draw?” Or you know? That's not exactly—

TA: What a question.

GL: Yeah [laughs]. And I wasn't really able to give a really good answer at that point.

TA: How can you?

SG: That's a tough one.

TA: [unintelligible]

GL: Okay, yeah [laughs]. Yeah, so that was one of those moments that you know, you'll take with you forever, but you know it just kind of came up out of nowhere.

SG: Yeah.

GL: And again, you still, I couldn't answer that any better now I think than I—I think at the time, I was—you know, didn't really, again, didn't really have the vocabulary—the word that was used when I was a kid—about the only word was “transvestite.” And of course that was a word that even then carried some pretty negative connotations. And, you know, so—but there was a time when, you know, that's what I thought I was. I didn't know any better, I didn't know any different. You know, it's like, “Ooh, I guess, you know, I better not let too many people

know that.” You know, and—so there’s—and I think a lot of Trans people or at least transwomen—I haven’t really had the conversation with a lot of trans men—as far as—at least some point in their development there is you know, a fetish angle to certain articles of clothing, etcetera and all of that, you know, which I think, you know, some people stay there, but—that’s fine, I’m down with that if that’s, you know, if that’s—whatever floats your boat, but I think also it’s a way of understanding—even if that’s not what’s going on, at least that’s a label to give it and you know, if you haven’t really thought through your identity you know, that’s more what you might think that it is, you know.

SG: Great, well.

TA: Anything else that you want to add?

SG: This has been a great interview.

GL: I don’t think so. I hope my hair look alright.

SG: Your hair looks great.

TA: Your hair looks great. Honestly, this lighting is really working.

SG: You actually look very good in the lighting, so [laughs] well, awesome.

GL: Well, thanks!

SG: Yeah, thank you so much this was wonderful!

GL: Yeah, yeah.

[Clip 2 Ends]

[Clip 3 Begins]

SG: Alright, so we’re back. [laughs] I feel like I’m on a TV show.

GL: After a commercial pause. [laughs]

SG: Alright, so go ahead, continue.

GL: I think at some point in every budding Trans person’s past, they need to choose a name. And that’s something that, you know, some people just take a masculine or feminine version of their given name. Other people choose their name for a number of reasons, as many as there are snowflakes. But my particular name is, you know, very important to me, because as I said, back when I was the DA and, you know, my relationship was, you know—we were on the downhill slide, and I was the only prosecutor in my office. So not only was I the elected DA, but I was—you know, I had every case, from first-degree murder down to appeals of traffic tickets. And the Violence Against Women Act had gone into effect early on in my time as a DA and my office

received grant funding through that stream, and I always tried to get them to use the funding for other things because they wanted—I don't think the administrators at the statewide level ever really realized that I was the only one in my office. They said, "No, this money needs to be used for trainings. We want you to go to trainings, you know, around the country on domestic violence, sexual assault, best practices, and etcetera." I said, you know, that's great and totally behind that. I always felt as though those were some of the cases that meant the most to me as a prosecutor, and I, you know, took pride in the fact that I was able to, you know, do a good job with those cases and see some justice for survivors, but, you know, it's not nanotechnology, it doesn't change every six or seven months, and so, you know, I was like, I'd really like to use some of this money to buy a computer or you know, some of other stuff that I need in the office, but they made me—so I said, "Okay, I'll make the best of it, you know, I'll go to Florida, I'll go to Oregon, I'll go to San Diego [California], I'll go to all these nationwide trainings on these subjects." So, I was in Tampa [Florida] at a nationwide DV [domestic violence] conference. And this particular one was fewer prosecutors and more advocates. Now, prosecutors, even those of us who are totally in line and get the specific issues involved with domestic violence and sexual assault, we're still lawyers, and we still have gallows humor, and, you know, it's kind of like, you have to set it aside and just, you know—at the end of the day, go out and have a few cocktails, enjoy yourself, and go back and deal with it the next day. Well, a lot of the advocates in the—at this particular training didn't have that philosophy. I mean, they lived it. You could see it in their faces and their bodies, you know, they were, you know, unfortunately just—you know, their spirits were consumed with the vicarious trauma of dealing with survivors on a daily basis, and so, it wasn't a very fun conference. And, you know, it's kind of wearing off on me at this point—and I didn't know anybody there, and, you know, I've gone to some of these conferences, and I've met people immediately and had friends to go out with and whatnot, and other times you go and you feel pretty much by yourself, and it's not a pleasant thing. Well, this was more what this one was heading towards. And they had a break out session at the end, and it was on self-care and dealing with the stress of the work and so I said, "I gotta go to that." So, I'm in there and I'm like, "Oh, I hope this is good, 'cause I'm not—you know, I'm tired of feeling bad, because I don't feel worse," and in walks this tall, blonde, good-looking, very self-possessed woman who's teaching the course, and she's barefoot. She's got this peasant skirt—just, I mean, everything about her is just—she's comfortable, she's this completely effective, but on her own terms woman. And her name was Gretchen. And I was at that point in my career as a trans person that I was looking for a name and it was like, you know, the minute I saw her, you know, it just really resonated because of the [laughs] grief that I had been exposed to over the past three or four days. You know, and here comes this breath of fresh air who's just like positive feminine energy—this is—that's who I want to be. I want to be Gretchen, so, and that's why I am [laughs], for what it's worth.

SG: That's a good story.

TA: Did you keep in touch with her after that?

GL: No, no. And I have her information and I—see, and I've asked a couple people—I never really even thought to at first. And I had gone through so many changes that it wouldn't, you know, really—but now I'm at a—I'm going to send her a letter. And she's still working—she's

an advocate with the... she actually works for the District Attorney's office in a county outside of Tampa so, yeah.

SG: Cool.

TA: Anything else that you got going on?

GL: No, that's it [laughs]

SG: Thank you.