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Interviewee: Heidi Notario [HN]

Interviewer: Liam Fuller [LF]

Date: August 18, 2017

Place: Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

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Abstract:

Heidi Notario was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1973, where she was attending college for biology before moving to the United States in 1995. Heidi discusses her disillusion with the ideals of communism as a factor contributing to her desire to go live with her aunt in the U.S. After arrival, she learned English while working at a daycare center before returning to college, eventually completing a Bachelors in Sociology at Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA, and a graduate degree in Sociology from Lehigh University. Heidi discusses her relationship with her fifteen year old son, and what she has observed raising him as a lesbian and a single mother in Central Pennsylvania. She details her involvement as the vice-president at the LGBTQ Center of Central Pennsylvania, as well as her work on gender-based violence and Latinos at the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Heidi touches on intimate partner violence against LGBTQ, and especially trans-identifying, people, as well as the differences in LGBTQ communities in Harrisburg, Allentown, and other larger cities.

LF: Hello, my name is Liam Fuller. I am here with Heidi Notario and I am interviewing her for the Central Pennsylvania LGBT History Project and today's date is the 18th of August 2017, and we are at Heidi's home in Camp Hill. And first question is, do I have your permission to conduct this interview?

HN: Yes you do.

LF: Okay. So, we're going to start at the very, sort of beginning of your life. Can you tell me where you were born and when?

HN: I was born in Cuba, in Havana, Cuba in 1973.

LF: Okay. And then, can you ... going from that, can you walk me through your early childhood development, and what growing up in Cuba was like for you?

HN: I, you know, that could be a very long answer. I'm going to try to make it as short as I can. I think Cuba is very different from the US because of the political context and climate, and I grew up in a socialist kind of context and very politicized. So, everything about our lives was political. And there, there was one political party, which was the Communist Party, and I was very much a

believer in that system. That's how I grew up. That's what all of the children at a very early age were, I would say, indoctrinated into believing, you know, all of that. And as a child I think I had a very good childhood for what I knew at the time, which was only that that was my only reality. But I was very privileged. My, my father had a job that allowed him to travel internationally, so I had a lot of things, when it came to material things, compared- compared to my peers. I was very privileged in that regard. I was a very good student. I came from a family of grandparents that were teachers. And they owned the school before the Cuban Revolution that they lost after that revolution and everything was taken from people that owned their own businesses, and in their case, their school. But they freely instilled in me the desire to learn and read and it was a house of intellectuals, I would say. I had books all around me, and there was this emphasis on education, and everyone knew I was going to college. That was a given.

Cuba's education—the system is actually very good, and it's free. And the same with healthcare, which is one of the things that is very different from the US. And so I grew up in Cuba, going to school across the street from my house. That was elementary school, and then I went to middle school. I went to a music school. My mother is a musician, so the arts are in the family—in our family. And then I went in high school. I took a turn. I went to boarding school because I wanted to. So that put me in a completely different context and environment, and in Cuba the concept of boarding schools is that you actually work in agriculture in the fields half the day, and in the other half you go to your academics, whatever it is that you're taking at time. It was a very rigorous life in terms of work and academics, and I took it very seriously, too. I was a very good student, like I said, and at the time I was, I wanted to be a doctor. So I really wanted to go to medical school, so that I'm- I've gone as fast as I could, you know, from early childhood, to then middle school, and then high school was a time of a lot of discoveries and I think it was the time that I started questioning the system.

Remember I said I used to be a believer in the Cuban Revolution and everything else, but I started questioning some of what I was seeing and I remember creating the newspaper in the high school and it became a, a mechanism for us to complain about the system. And I remember a day that we got picked up in our classrooms and interrogated for writing, you know, things that weren't, you know, kosher, I guess, for where we were, for that context. So-so that was my first encounter, and it was very minor, compared to a few other people that faced other much harder, harsher outcomes. I was just called to the principal's office, literally, and asked to explain myself about what I had been writing. But I think because I was so good with academics I kind of got a pass. You know, I wasn't really making that much noise, it was just that we were threatened, "If you continue with this line of writings, we're going to close the newspaper." And—and many think ... I'd remember being like, "I thought we could say whatever we want to."

So that was the first, I would say, encounter with how that system ... It was in a microcosm but it was, at the macro-level, operated that way, very much so. I just had been sheltered from some of that most of my life. My parents were both very much involved in the Cuban Revolution. Very active, particularly my father. His entire family had left Cuba to come to the US and he stayed

because he believed in that system. So, yeah. That was high school. And then I went to Medical School in college for two years.

LF: Okay.

HN: And then I switched to biology. So I was doing that and studying to be a biologist when I decided to come here. Part of my family had left on a raft. So what happened was that my mother was still a firm believer in the Revolution and very much setting in that, on that path. So was my father. But her sister, her only sister questioned that system from the beginning, never really believed in that, and so then she decided to leave on a raft with twenty-some other people and her husband and child. And they made it safely, thankfully, you know. Nobody died, or anything in the process. Once they were here and I was very close with that aunt, we were very, very close. When she was here, she asked me if I wanted to follow them here, and I thought, “I would kill my parents if I said I’m leaving.”

LF: Yeah.

HN: Especially to come to the US. So that was that experience. And then my decision to leave Cuba actually followed that. I was able to come much easier than they. I came on a plane. I had a Visa. So I had none of their challenges coming here, but it was a big decision because I was 23—

LF: Okay.

HN: When I moved here. So I was an adult already and I had grown up in a different country.

LF: Yeah.

HN: I did not speak English. I ... like most people here studied that as a foreign language in school, throughout school, but I wasn’t fluent at all when I got here, so. Then I went to college here and I don’t know how much further you want me to go.

LF: Yeah, we can go back to college. Where in Cuba did you grow up?

HN: In Havana.

LF: In Havana, okay. Like, what aspects of the, sort of Cuban system were you critiquing at that time and what did you find was sort of the most problematic at that time?

HN: I think what I felt was that it’s two-faced kind of. So it was the, I guess the propaganda was that it was a system for everyone to be the same and for everyone to have the same. No social classes. That’s what that system promotes. There’s no private property, there are no class differences, so it sounds beautiful on paper. Like, it really sounds like, wow, this is utopia, right? Everyone should get what they deserve and what they need, and then I started learning that people that had better positions in the government, they didn’t live that way. They had better things. So there was a new class, actually, created. So I started questioning that. I also noticed

that there were things that were harshly punished. Like if people ... a lot of Cubans have family in the United States. And if you wanted to be a member of the, the politic—the only political party, the Communist Party, you couldn't have contact with any of your family. Like in my father's case, he was the only one that was left behind. He chose to do that. But he couldn't ever be in touch with his family over here.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Because that would have been seen as a betrayal. So I didn't ... I didn't know any of our family. But there was a point in time when that changed and Cubans were told, "Now it's okay to talk to your family." Because they were a source of income. I mean, the money that family members still today send to Cuba is one of the most important sources of income for that island. And it really is. The, the people ... a lot of people send on a monthly basis. They support their houses—their families—over there, so when that started to happen more and more. So, I think it was the realization in a part of the government that you know, do we actually need this dollars? And so it was okay all of a sudden to talk to your family.

LF: Yeah.

HN: And I remember being so shocked. Some people lost everything. Like some people that wanted to be doctors or teachers, if they were ever discovered, you know, connecting with their families they couldn't even pursue what they wanted to. So I was like, "How is that okay now?" So that was another thing I, I questioned. A lot of my friends—I think I would say most of them were against the government even before I was.

LF: Yeah.

HN: They were all like questioning things and they wouldn't participate in stuff and so I was a little caught in the middle for a while. I still wanted to believe in that, but I was seeing things that didn't make sense.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So, yeah.

LF: And the, so, what, I guess, was like the Cuban conceptualization of the United States? Like, why was it so treacherous for you, for your family, for you to move to the United States?

HN: The United States, was, you know, we joke about it now and we call it, we call it the Evil Empire, but really it was the Empire. Ninety miles only from us.

LF: Okay.

HN: That there's also the thing about the embargo.

LF: Yeah.

HN: In the part of the United States that really makes it quite hard for the Cuban—the Cuban people, not the government. The government has been there for half a century and nothing has happened to it.

LF: Yeah.

HN: But for the Cuban people, it made things very hard because the whole concept of the embargo is that you're not allowed to invest in Cuba. Cubans cannot—you really cannot trade with Cuba, so a lot of the countries that have relationships with the United States ... And there are other details that I don't understand fully, but the thing is that others are not allowed, and the US is not going to engage in those kinds of trades with Cuba. So it makes things very, very hard for the Cubans on the islands.

LF: Yeah.

HN: The people that live there. The resources are quite limited. Canada does invest in Cuba and has for a long time, the same with China for political reasons, but before, when there was a group of socialist countries like the Soviet Union—Soviet Union pretty much supported Cuba around oil and a lot of things that many countries need. Cuba doesn't have any resources, like natural resources. It depends solely on tourism. So having that embargo just made things that much harder. When the Socialist countries ... like all of the European countries—all of that fell and switch. Like Soviet Union was no longer the Soviet Union and the same with Germany and everyone else. Then Cuba was left with no one else to support it, you know, the island.

LF: Yeah.

HN: And, like I said, it makes it very hard for the people that live there. So that's a thing about the embargo that—I think it should be eliminated, personally. I don't think it does anything today. Some Cubans would argue, I would tell you, that, "No, we need the embargo." But I think those are usually people that are pretty right-wing in their thinking and a little extremist.

LF: Yeah. Okay.

HN: The majority don't have family there, the ones that say that don't really have family back there.

LF: And then, are your parents still in Cuba?

HN: No. My mother lives with me. My mother came thir- thirteen years ago from Mexico.

LF: Okay.

HN: Remember I told you my mother was a communist. She didn't want to leave Cuba. And she wouldn't have left. She left because I'm her only child and I have a son who is 15 years old. And when you ask her why she came here she tells you she came to be a grandmother. So she left everything behind. She lost her retirement, she lost her house, she lost all of her belongings. I mean, she was only able to bring whatever she could carry. And she came from Mexico—through Mexico, because I had invited her to come as a tourist like three times, and this government would not give her a visa because she was a potential immigrant, you know, being that I'm her only child. Her mother was living at the time and was here, and her only sister, you know-

LF: Okay.

HN: Has been here for twenty-some years, so she could not get a visa to come. I think she would have just come to visit, and she would have done the thing with back and forth and back and forth, but since she couldn't do that. She met my son in Mexico for like two weeks, and it was very hard, having to say goodbye and go back. And after that we talked about her coming and then she asked for political asylum, basically.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: Through Mexico. Cubans at the time had special status if they were—if they would touch American soil and show they could prove Cuban citizenship, they were automatically allowed into the US. But she was 60 years old at the time and still was detained in an immigration detention center for two weeks.

LF: Wow.

HN: With people awaiting deportation, that's who was there. She was just waiting for her paperwork to be completed. But I al—I always think about she was sixty years old, you know, an artist, and she was in jail in this country. But she, she had a lot of fun and made a lot of friends. It was an adventure, because that's how she is. So she's here.

My father came in '99. He had a big, negative experience in Cuba. Remember he had devoted his life to that entire process, and he was pretty much thrown in jail for accused of something that he says to this day that he did not do. No due process. He had a kind of a trial but he was released after ... and when he came over he had no ... There was no record of every being in prison. So nobody understands what happened there. So I think that really—that was a lot for him to take.

LF: Yeah.

HN: And after that his family here invited him to come over. His oldest brother was sick, so they invited him to come through the Red Cross, like a humanitarian kind of a vi- visa, for that situation. So he came and decided to stay. He lives in Miami.

LF: Okay.

HN: He's in his earl—in his late eighties because he's fifteen years older than my mom.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So he's really old. So that's the story. So they're both here.

LF: Okay. And then, like what was the, like when you immigrated to the United States, what was the, like, sort of climate here? It was back in the '90s, right?

HN: '95.

LF: '95. Oh, that's when I was born.

HN: That's really close.

LF: [laughs] So what was the, like, sort of, like, what was the attitude towards immigrants at that time? I think that was like a lar—There was a large influx of Haitian and Cuban immigrants at that time, correct?

HN: I don't know, actually. Maybe there ... well, yes. Because you're thinking about that in '94 the laws changed. So there were a bunch of Cubans that were caught in the middle. In the process between coming here and Cuba. And if you were found in transit, that was the time when the law changed. When my aunt and uncle came, if you were found in transit you got picked up and brought here. When the law changed, and it changed in '94 in the summer, I think, if I remember correctly, of '94, and a bunch of Cubans were in transit.

LF: Yeah.

HN: And when that was going to change ... Then what happened with that particular group of people, they were placed in detention and some went to Panama, and there were in like, in a -- in a camp. In a refugee camp. And some were in Guantanamo Bay. Some ... I have a friend who was there for a year before she was ... So those Cubans all, I believe, made it here eventually.

LF: Okay.

HN: But it took a long time. So, yeah. That was the big influx of Cubans around ... So the Guantanamo Bay folks and the people that were in Panama, and then Haitians probably with—because—of the political climate around the same time. So, yeah. In my case, I feel like my experience was different because I told you that I came on a plane, I didn't have to experience any of that. I came at the end of '95. In November of '95 and I went directly from Havana City to Allentown, Pennsylvania.

LF: Oh.

HN: And I found people that actually didn't know where Cuba was.

[**LF** laughs]

HN: Some folks asked me if it snowed in Cuba, I mean. So I—it was a shock for me because I grew up hearing about the United States ... and they're evil and they want to kill us. And some people, people could care less about Cuba when I came here.

LF: Yeah.

HN: They were like, "Oh, okay, well, cool." Some people that knew about Cuba, "Oh, isn't that cool." And they would ask me immediately about Fidel Castro, and "What do you think is going to happen when he dies?" So that's usually how the conversation went. But people didn't really care about, deeply, about Cuba in the way that we had lived. We had been led to believe that—we were pretty much presented a psyche of all Americans, and Americans were like, "Okay. I'm glad you're here."

LF: Ohh.

HN: They really didn't care. So that was very interesting for me to see that. You know? So that was ... In terms of the immigrant, was it an immigrant-friendly kind of environment? At the time, I didn't experience anything overtly against me. But I also have the privilege of my skin color, so I tend to be a little lighter, and I'm not ... When people think of stereotypical Latinos, they think of the indigenous features of Mexicans, for example. And because I don't have those, I would be asked sometimes if I was Italian, for example.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: I did have challenges around communication because I did not speak English. So I would be struggling to learn the language, and then people immediately could tell that I wasn't from here. As soon as I opened my mouth that was evident. But before I said anything they would speculate whether I was Italian. I got Greek the one time. I've been asked all kinds of different things, yeah.

LF: And Allentown has a fairly large Latino population, correct?

HN: Yes. But they're mostly from Puerto Rico.

LF: Okay.

HN: Different scenario, right? The immigration concerns are not there and many of them are bilingual.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: That's how they were raised, typically in schools and stuff. So, those are ... In my process of learning the language and all that before I went to college here, I was working at a daycare center. And that was perfect because I was working with children learning to speak English.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: So that helped me a lot. But some of ... I remember having a colleague from Puerto Rico, so she was my everything. My safe haven, if you will, because I could go to her in Spanish, and we could understand each other.

LF: Yeah, okay. And then, so you said that Cuba's economy is largely supported by tourism. Since there was such large restriction between people from the United States travelling to Cuba, who is, like, travelling to Cuba then? Like, who are the main tourists?

HN: Canadians.

LF: Canadians?

HN: Europeans also go to Cuba a lot. Spaniards. They're actually the ones that are the biggest investors, I think, are Canadians and the Spaniards.

LF: Okay.

HN: So a lot of the hotels that are there now are owned by primarily those two.

LF: Okay. And then can you start talking about your college experience?

HN: In Cuba or here?

LF: Both.

HN: In Cuba, you know it was very different from here. I—because I went to college in Havana, I didn't stay on campus.

LF: Okay.

HN: So I pretty much just came and went. Didn't have the experience that people have here in college. Very, very different. I didn't have like a college life like I see people have here.

LF: Yeah.

HN: It was more going to school for my classes and then leave. That's what I did. And I think it was ... I was still, especially at the very beginning in med school, I was still very much ... I still believed in that still—the system, you know. I was beginning to grow. It was only high school I was wondering, questioning things. In those two years I was still, you know, enamored a little bit about some of that. But then when I moved to biology it was—it was a little different. That's

when I started ... Like, things weren't making any sense and I kind of felt like I was ... I got kind of lost.

LF: Yeah.

HN: And then I decided to come here. When I came here, at first I was doing volunteer work, and then I was, again, trying to learn English, and then I think in two years I started going to undergrad here. And I went ... my goal really was to continue in Biology, but I always wanted to study Sociology. Sociology didn't exist at the time in Cuba because nobody wants Sociologist questioning the system, right?

LF: Oh, okay. Oh.

HN: So I think it exists right now. It's open, so people can study Sociology in Cuba. I don't know how they do it, but they do. But when I saw it listed as an option, I was like, "Oh, I always wanted to do this." But then I was worried that none of my courses would transfer. I brought everything. I went to Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania for undergrad, and the Dean at the time was very supportive and I remember being concerned about my language skills, and I was like, "I don't know if I can make it." And she was very, very supportive. So I did. And some things transferred, others didn't because I switched drastically paths, you know? But that's what I did. I went to Moravian for undergrad. Again, I was a non-traditional student because I was working and then going to school at night and in the summers, so I did everything I could as fast as I could. So I remember doing what I had to do. And I did have—I had to take some elective and those kinds of things, but I did everything in like three years then. And then I went to grad school.

LF: Okay.

HN: I went to Lehigh for grad school. All Sociology.

LF: Okay.

HN: So, again, non-traditional student, so. So, I didn't have the experience of students here, basically. That's why it never happened for me that way. I was always the oldest in my class, and that kind of thing.

LF: Okay. And what was that like? Being the oldest person there?

HN: One of the, one of the ... in grad school, there were a few like me that were working and going to grad school. But in undergrad, that was ... it was interesting and, you know because, remember I wanted to do things as fast as I could, so I would see people, like, you know, in my opinion wasting time and partying and stuff, and I would be like, you know, "I got to get this done." That was—I was on with a different, different "frame-of-mind," you know, different goals. So I didn't quite fit in that. I remember there were two like me in undergrad, in undergrad,

that were much older, and we were trying: we were working and wanted to get it over with, and do as much as we could. So I was, I was really close with that small group of people. Like three of us, or four maybe.

LF: Yeah. And was it difficult, like, shifting to being taught in English?

HN: Oh, yes.

LF: Yeah?

HN: I would sit in the front row, like really ... I remember obsessing, making sure that I heard everything.

LF: Uh-huh?

HN: Yes.

LF: Yeah. And so when you were like a kid and you were in school, what did you enjoy about school?

HN: I think learning. I mean, I—I loved, usually, you know—I switched to sciences momentarily there for a while that no one understood why, because I was really more into literature and writing and history. I was always into that stuff. For a long time I was going to be a journalist.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: And then I completely shifted paths. I don't know why that was. But I think I did enjoy those kinds of things. And I enjoy—I loved writing also, like really enjoyed that. So, and I, I really had a good time in school. I, I loved it.

LF: Yeah. And then, what about the shifting in subject matters? Like when you went from med school to like Biology, what about that shift made you start questioning things more?

HN: Well, I don't know. I think it was the environment more than the actual subject matter.

LF: Okay.

HN: The School of Medicine in Cuba is very political and a lot of my classmates were very much involved in wanting to be Communists and that's what they believed in. And I dating—I dated somebody who was totally into that and believed all of it and still does, still to this day, and that was more of the environment there. When I shifted from the School of Medicine to Biology it was a completely different crowd. People were much more to—into what they believe in. And there were, a lot of them were questioning and they, they were much more open. They were less militant, I would say. It was a different crowd.

LF: Yeah. So then from grad school what sort of fields did you start working in?

HN: So when I was in grad school and my son was ... So that was, that was important. He was a year old. Or two. Like, he was very, very young. And at the time I was working for a community based mental health organization. I worked with young children and, and youth. I think there were younger and like teenagers that had some connection to [???] in some form and they had a mental health diagnosis. Before that, I did work at a neighborhood center and I loved it. It was more like community social work, that kind of thing. So the, the neighborhood center I was in undergrad school and I remember one of my professors saying, “Don’t you think you want to do social work?” So he was really talking me into social work. Like, he felt I had naturally landed on that. But I was still interested in more into why things happen and the way they happen. I—I wasn’t that interested in being a clinician. So the thing about social work, I was like: “No.” So that’s what helped me decide. But that was the kind of work that I was already doing, like, social work and then working with kids that had this diagnosis and were struggling. I ended up being—becoming the advocate of the Latino kids whose parents only spoke Spanish. So I started doing that and trying to pay attention to the things that didn’t make sense to me, like why they were so represented in the system. And then ... I—when my son was very young, I had discovered this job doing advocacy work for people with disabilities. That was like a—it just happened. It was in the newspaper, they were looking for somebody part-time, and I tried it. And that was my passion for many years. And that was what brought me to Harrisburg, actually.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: Because I was working for a, a chapter of our national organization that advocates for people with intellectual disabilities, and then I started looking into violence against people, especially women with disabilities, and then I was able to go to the state-wide advocacy organization that at the time was Pennsylvania Protection and Advocacy, which is based here in Harrisburg.

LF: Okay.

HN: So, very much in line with advocacy, social justice, so I started doing more of that.

LF: Okay. So are you still working in advocacy work for the intellectually disabled at this time?

HN: Nope. I actually ... from there I moved into doing just primarily anti-violence work.

LF: Okay.

HN: And I moved into the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, and then—I work now for a, still a national organization but it, it looks at the intersections of gender-based violence and Latinos, in particular.

LF: Okay.

HN: That's what I do right now.

LF: Okay. Interesting.

HN: Yeah.

LF: And they—I'm going to guess there was no major religious sort of presence in your childhood?

HN: No.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Definitely not.

LF: Yeah.

HN: None of us—in my generation, some people were religious, but it was usually behind closed doors. They couldn't openly say they were, and then in my family, my parents are not religious, so I never was exposed to much of it at all.

LF: Yeah, yeah. Doesn't that conflict with, like, Communist values?

HN: Yes. Religion is the opium of the masses.

LF: Yeah [laughs].

HN: That's what Marx said, so.

LF: And then when did you, sort of, go through your coming out process?

HN: Oh, that was much later.

LF: Uh-huh.

HN: I'm a late bloomer when it comes to that. So, remember I had a son, and I was married to a man. And when my son was very, very young I had this epiphany of, "Oh my god. I think I'm attracted to women." So that was really—it was a shocker. Of course I was: send me directly to therapy, because I was like, "What?" I had never really thought of it, you know? I came from a world that was very heteronormative. That's how I grew up. And very male-centered, and heteronormative, so it had never occurred to me. In retrospect, when I think now, I had a friend in high school, and we were very, very close, and we were in boarding school together. Nothing really happened there that I could identify or label it as I was sexually attracted to her, but we were very, very close. So, never even paid attention to that, like I said. And then I moved here and met the father of my son. We are still friends. We live on the same street, actually, just a few blocks apart.

LF: Okay.

HN: But, that happened. So I was like, “Oh my God. What’s going on?” Eventually I— obviously my marriage ended, and there I was with a small child. And then my mother came. I had to tell my mother. I had to come out to my mother, which was quite agonizing as I had no idea what she was going to say, what she was going to do. She’s been super supportive. That has been wonderful.

LF: Okay.

HN: But it was coming out to my mother, then coming out to my son when he was like six years old or so. And just sort of embracing this new identity that I didn’t think I had.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Yeah. So it’s ... the processes of coming out, I would say... I am not out to my father. We’re not that close, and you know, I see him very little.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So it’s really something that I’ve decided not to, but when I went back to Cuba three years ago, after not visiting for like sixteen of those years, and then there I had to come out to my friends that didn’t know. They knew me as heterosexual. I was never gay in Cuba, okay, so that...

LF: Yeah.

HN: So I went back and it was a new, you know, experience. So...

LF: And what was their attitude, attitude towards that?

HN: Well, my very best friend in the world is gay. He lives in Barcelona, and he’s okay, thank God, with his whole thing. But he, he tells me that knew it. He knew all about me I—he—I don’t remember. He said he ... Once he asked me, and I told him, “No, no.” And he said, like, he was shocked that I said no. He’s always known this, okay. But, and I have, you know, I have my friends there. Most of my friends have left Cuba, so I have very few behind and that decided to stay. One of them is also gay. I have another one who is a very dear friend of mine and they were all very supportive. I think they all wanted me to be happy.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So I didn’t have any negative experiences when it came to that.

LF: And then what was the attitude towards, like, gay and lesbian people growing up in Cuba?

HN: In, in my experience it was very much not the acceptable thing. I mean, for the most part Cuba is a very heteronormative country. Very, very like, macho kind of, you know, it rewards that kind of behavior. It's a lot of homophobic exchanges, a lot of judgement, things, people. But something has happened in the past few years, and it's that the daughter of the president, she's very supportive of the trans community in Cuba, and she has used her power to really advocate for trans people. So that her presence there and her support of the trans community in particular has given a lot of visibility to the LGBT community. So they, they, they've had Pride marches and festivals, and she always marches at the front with everybody. She's heterosexual but very powerful and has kind of created ... she has been able to move people through the motions much quicker, because she has so much power that whoever wants to mess with her won't do it, so then people are watching this unfold, like, "Oh, look at her now, with all the gays, blah, blah, blah." But no one messes with that because it's her. So I think it's something that has really benefitted the community. So I, I was—obviously I wasn't living there at the time. I didn't get to see that, but I hear about it now, and when I went to visit, I heard people talk about it and I work with Cuban activists now, and there is a documentary and that has done this documentary about lesbians in Cuba that I think is wonderful because it really shows the progression, you know, over the years when people were ostracized, kicked out, like, seen as less if they were openly lesbians, or anyone from, for that matter, in that community. She just did her documentary about lesbians. And it gives you that progression. The things I remember when I was watching her documentary, and it acknowledges the changes, you know, now. Especially with the trans communities. It's really interesting. Yeah.

LF: And then is there anything about, sort of, your like, sort of forming a family as an adult, like your relationship with your ex-husband, your bringing your son into the world, is there anything else you want to talk about that we haven't touched on already?

HN: No, I think the only thing in there is my son being my son, right, and knowing about me and my identity, and I think that has been an incredible journey, I would say. I think my son is an extraordinary person that I—I call him my masterpiece, you know. I think he is absolutely wonderful and very... very much an advocate for the LGBT community, you know. Even, even when he was younger—he's in high school now, but before that he would speak up if he would hear something. He now goes to the arts school here, CASA: the Capital Area School for the Arts. On the first day he said, "I don't know who's gay, who's straight." I'm like, "That's wonderful." He has no idea. Everyone is so themselves where he ... So he's been lucky, also, to be in that kind of environment.

LF: Yeah.

HN: He still identifies as straight, but he's very used to my friends and what I do, and being involved with the center, and he has a lot of friends that don't identify as straight, and a lot of exposure to the trans community, so I think he's somebody of this next generation that I think he has the advantage to come from a family where that's just—for us, it's a no-brainer. And seeing

me ... the aspect of the community that has made him an advocate. I know that not everyone is this lucky. I think a lot of people, especially some of my trans friends go through a lot with their children, but he was much younger, you know, when I came out and in the processes of coming out I, you know, I was as honest as I could be for somebody as young as he was at the time, and I think that has been helpful, just the honesty and the transparency and the truth, you know, for him. I think raising him ... He has his father and, you know, I'm his mother. His father is remarried. I lived with a partner for five years that was very much involved with his life, but he's also, he's in that situation ... Just recently someone ask him, oh, something about me and he said, "Oh, my mom is a lesbian." And they said, "Oh, so you have two moms?" That's what the person asked, and he said, "No, I have a dad, too." "What?" So then he had to explain that, and so he was telling me in passing, "Oh, yeah, this happened, like, you know, I had to explain this." So I think it's, it's been quite a journey with him. And a good one, you know.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Of explaining, of exposing him. And the same with my mother. And with his father I think I, I've been quite fortunate when it comes to that.

LF: And then ... So, I don't think you, like, touched on this. You never were involved with the military in any capacity, right?

HN: No.

LF: Okay. And so can you, you—can you talk about your role within the center and any other sort of local organizations that are dedicated to like, LGBTQ awareness or activism?

HN: I am the Vice-President of the Board at the center. I am very involved with the center. It's like it's taken over my life. Especially now, figuring out the next ... Louie has been a lot of work. So I care deeply about what happens at the center, but I care deeply about the center because I'm very committed to the young people that come to the center. That is the group that I, I ... If I could do something to protect that group in some way, I would. So, I feel like I owe a lot to that group. I feel like we, any of us, that identify as members of that community have a responsibility to the young people in that community, so I feel like a lot of them go through a lot, and a lot of them don't have any support in their homes. We have someone who killed herself, you know, a few—couple of months ago that was devastating for the young people. And I think for that I'm, I'm really involved in the center. I also care. I think for me, being a lesbian is a political position, too.

LF: Mmhm.

HN: It's not because of the anti-violence that I do. It's a part of my identity that I don't always put in the forefront. It depends. I mean, I'm not always talking about my sexual orientation, but I think sometimes it is a political thing for me. And being affiliated with the center is a political

statement, also for me. Like, what happens in the community, who is behind the center, how can we make this better, and how can we make ... And this, that is one of the reasons to why I'm involved. How to make the Center's reach more intentional around diversity. I think the LGBTQ movement, I would say is, has historically in the US context, [been] very white and male. And I, I'm very interested about people like me, and other people that are come from different—have other dimensions to their identity other than a white male. So I'm interested in that, too.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So, that's one, is the LGBT Center. In the work that I do, doing anti-violence work, primarily in Latino communities, I'm particularly interested in violence against LGBT people. So intimate part of violence is one that I feel like we don't talk enough about. I think a lot of people experience violence in their relationships and don't talk about it. And the, the tremendous power that homophobia plays there for people to come forward and say, you know, "I'm—this is happening to me." Some of them, they have to come out as they're talking about it and they may not be ready, you know. So that's one of those layers. I think that the violence against trans people has something to that. Yes, it's very important to me to expose and to do something about. So in my work, in my daily work, that's one of the themes, or areas that I never lose, or try not to. And then my volunteer work is with the center. Totally involved in that as much as I can. I would like the center to become an anti-violence project, because I think there isn't anything like that in this community, and the center—and that would allow the center the space to track violence against LGBT people, to educate people about that, to get funding for that, so that's one of my agendas also being involved with the center.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So.

LF: And then what, sort of, what are your sort of responsibilities as vice-president of the board?

HN: Well, with everyone else on the board, [I] like look at the, the operations, you know, support the center, the staff. And the center is very small in ... For the center to increase their funding streams—and that's something that I personally am not great at, but I support whoever I can doing that. I think also the board has the responsibility of getting involved in education, too. So I do some community education activities whenever they need me to. I go and represent the center. I think support for the youth program and volunteer with the young people that's something I do when I can. I think presentation and education: when there's the GSA summit that happens at Dickinson. So I typically go there and present at the summit. Really making sure that the pro- that the things that are working, you know ... what people need and—and worry about how to keep the center open, you know, and getting involved in fundraising events, participating in the, the gala that is coming up at the end of September and any other fundraising opportunity that could benefit the center. So that's ... the board really looks at ... that isn't—is very much a working board, so that's why now, when Louis left the entire process ... So I chaired the

search committee. Not because I have the time; you know I travel quite a bit, but I found myself being very interested in who the next ED [Executive Director] was going to be. And I thought, “Well, maybe I should do something about it.” So that’s why I chaired the, the search committee.

LF: Okay. And so do you just travel like within the state of Pennsylvania for your job or...?

HN: No.

LF: All around?

HN: I barely travel in Pennsylvania.

LF: Oh, okay.

HN: I actually travel more by plane than by car these days.

LF: Uh-huh.

HN: I travel all over the U.S. but I also- I’ve been in the Caribbean and Mexico for work as well.

LF: Okay. And what was that event that you named as happening in September? Sorry, I just...

HN: September 30th is the Gala FAB.

LF: Oh, okay, yeah.

HN: The Fall Achievement Benefit.

LF: And then... what have you like sort- sort of... how do I phrase this? What sort of steps have you taken to make the center more aware of diversity within the community?

HN: Well, first with the board president Shaashawn, who is an African-American amazing activist, so she had recruited me for the board, so I think I’m the only Latina still on the board, but we have a couple of other folks that identify as people from other communities now, I think. So the first step was to diversify the board. Then ... I’ve tried before. I was on the board also to do something around engaging women that are between the ages of 30 and 50, because that’s a group that’s my age group that I don’t know ... still a big question mark on how to reach them. I don’t have all the answers, but I think one effort was to do this gathering and ask them what they wanted. So that brought a pretty diverse crowd and we heard all kinds of interesting information. In my work, we do a lot of community engagement. So really it’s to get in community and work from within the community so that’s the next step—that’s what we’re hoping the next ED is going to do and that has been a big piece in our interview process, really, to ask the candidates, you know, what are their plans for diversifying the center.

LF: Okay.

HN: I doesn't help that the center is 100% white in terms of the staff, but, you know ... I think ... and what is the role of allies? And we've talked a lot about that. So I think in any piece, like with--

LF: So, allies to the LGBT community?

HN: Allies to people of color that are--

LF: Allies to people of color within the LGBT community.

HN: Yeah.

LF: Okay. Yeah.

HN: Exactly, exactly. I think, too, with the young people that come to the center for programming that they, they voiced concern about the lack of diversity. So it's really listening to them, being intentional about what we do, and how we do things, so they've also been part of the search committee for the new ED, because we wanted them to ask what they wanted to ask and, you know, and be very much involved in the process. It's also about not tokenizing people; just getting people because they are a person of color. We ask ... for the ED we're looking for a lot of things in one person. So, you know, it's been a- an intense process, but I think in all of the way the center does programming, the way we talk about the center, I think how we- how we showed ... Right now, all of the images on the website are of white people. That's not good. I mean- so we need to change all of that. Our face to the community—what is our face to the community? I mean, so it's a pro-, it's work that is going to be on-going.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So, we give input as part of the board and all of that, you know, about being intentional.

LF: And then you—you were mentioning earlier talking about like, like violence, like towards the LGBT community, or like within the LGBT community.

HN: Yes.

LF: In terms of partner violence. Why do you think that affects the community at—to such a degree?

HN: Well, I think, unfortunately, it's a human issue. It affects everybody in all communities. I think the problem with the LGBT community in that—in terms of LGBT- or intimate partner violence is that because of homophobia, having to go for help requires people to navigate through systems that could be very much homophobic. So, if you're going to look for help from an advocate that does anti-violence work and the person has a problem against gay people—or against, especially against trans people—that They meet a trans person and they go using the wrong pronoun and then they feel uncomfortable and “Why are you dressed that way? And why

is your hair that way?” So, I think, makes—you’re going there for the violence, but then you’re met with all of this barriers. So I think people think twice and three times and four times before they come forward. So that’s one thing. I think the same is true for other systems, like law enforcement. The relationship with law enforcement is convoluted, it’s complex. It’s another area that we’ve been working on at the center—quite a bit about that, because I realized that the police, they don’t know who we are in the community. And I feel especially in today’s climate, political climate, that demonstrations and protests are not going to end. So I feel like ... I walked away from the intimate partner violence piece but I’m talking about community violence. Like it could be because your neighbors could be homophobic, because the police could be homophobic or transphobic. So these are systems and people. So it’s violence at the community level, so when that’s happening, too, the intimate partner violence becomes secondary because you have to survive in your world. So people tend to not speak up about what’s happening at home. That’s another thing. I think people, again talking about trans people that are in transition and that kind of thing, the violence takes, like, all kinds of forms, from interfering with treatments and medical processes, to turning out people that may not be completely out as trans or with their other identity, so an intimate partner who is violent can use a lot against LGBT people just because of homophobia and transphobia at the societal level. So I think it complicates the responses to a kind of violence. It complicates the options available to people. So I think that’s—that explains some of it.

LF: Yeah, and that relationship with the law enforcement aspect, was that sort of, like, triggered by any sort of event that happened in the area or were you just noticing a tension between the two communities?

HN: Historically, I—I’ve known the tension. Also for people of color it’s not new that the relationship with law enforcement hasn’t always been the best. And then we did have an incident on the Capitol steps where a young person was assaulted by a hater who had a sign. I don’t know if you guys heard about it. There was an article about it. And just the aftermath, you know, the ... And granted that this young person made a mistake ... They grabbed the sign from the protestor and, and all that ... so that [is] a mistake that they made. But you know, putting that aside, the aftermath—I mean, the police response, the ... just really treating people, staff from the center, as if ... I- I- ... Based on that, I concluded that they just don’t know who we are, you know?

LF: Yeah.

HN: So, yeah, we had a meeting with the Capitol police and it was a thing about, “This is who we are”, you know, “We are the LGBT Center, we live here. These are the kids that come to the center.” Kind of like, you know, it’s just not ... But at the same time, I could say—I could speculate that perhaps the people that were so inappropriate, the officer in particular that was so inappropriate, maybe he’s homophobic. And that’s the danger of having somebody who could be biased in any form with a gun. I mean, the combination could be lethal.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So.

LF: Yeah. It's so weird how such a little thing, you know, like messing someone else's sign can then trigger this whole other chain of events just...

HN: Yeah. Exactly.

LF: And then it's ... You bring it back to that and it's like, "How in the heck..."

HN: What caused this, right? Because there is so much more underneath, yeah.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So I don't know if I answered your question about the ... yeah.

LF: Yeah. And then, can you talk about ... You, you kind of touched on this before, but can you talk a little bit about how your identity as a lesbian sort of affects, like, other aspects of your life? so ... be it your family life, social life, all the categories here are family, social, religious, civil, and political, and then spiritual.

HN: Okay [laughs] social. I- this community is very interesting. It's very small, and I think that I wish it was- I had a bigger community in terms of other lesbians and that kind of thing. I think everybody knows everybody else, and that's sometimes a challenge for me, honestly. I think in my—politically, in my work it's actually great. I work for a very inclusive organization, and being out, I'm one of—there are like five of us that are openly from the LGBTQ community in my team, you know, so we're very inclusive in that regard, very diverse. And I think I've been also lucky, you know, when it comes to work that I have—I don't have to hide or pretend that I'm some- someone that I'm not, you know. We have benefits, too, that are- exten- extended to our partners. Even before equal marriage, before it passed, we had [it]—because it reflected the intention of the organization to be inclusive, so. And I come from a place that's quite progressive. Being a mother, I think is interesting sometimes. There are stereotypes that I need to dismantle, but I don't feel particularly stressed, because I have a son that goes to a very inclusive school. And he's been in that kind of school since he was in elementary. He went to also another school all of his life, all the way up to high school, and then in high school: he's not in this ... he goes to the Charter school for the Arts in Harrisburg— that the principal is gay. So I think everybody ... maybe I would be stressed if I had to worry about him being bullied because of me or something like that, but he's not in that and I—that's wonderful.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So, it's all of these areas where I'm privileged and now that I'm talking to you I'm thinking like, "Wow, I really am privileged." Now does that color the issue that I'm ... I'm a lesbian, everybody knows it. Like in this neighborhood everybody knows it, and not everyone is super

progressive. I have neighbors, like across and on the other side, that are not. People openly Trump supporters that I don't really know what they think about my sexuality.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Do I always feel free to hold my partner's hand? Like before when I was in a relationship with someone, did I always feel free to just walk down the street holding her hand? Not always. And I think it's this whole thing around being out and negotiating your safety at every step, and that's the piece that's exhausting at times. It's quite true, you know, so, no I don't live in San Francisco, I was just there a few weeks ago and I loved it, but this in not San Francisco, or even Philadelphia. I just think Philadelphia is much different than Central Pennsylvania. It's a little bit of that. It's also ... At the same time, I'm also older. So I'm a little bit on the "I don't care what you think" kind of phase, and I know that that comes with- with privilege that I have, you know. I- I'm at that point in my life that I could be like, "I don't care." But sometimes I do care. And it's about safety, usually. I think—I'm not religious, although I am a lit- ... I'm a Buddhist, and I'm very much—that's a path that I'm very much interested in and I- I'm openly gay in that community as well. And I think, for those that--that I practice with, they know who I am in that regard and I—I haven't had any issues there either. But I think Buddhists love everybody, so that's a good—that's a good path to choose, I guess. What else? I think I'm in other larger communities; I'm very involved with a community responder's network here in Harrisburg that is looking at biases, like all instances of bias against all communities, and they know that I'm a lesbian in that group. And I sit at tables with Muslims that are orthodox. Muslim women—people that come representing the Jewish community, with people from other culturally-specific communities that are not Latinos necessarily, and they all know what my identity—all the intersections of my identities—they all know what they are. So as a person involved in community education and work and stuff, I'm very open, and I feel safe in that circle. I haven't had any issues there.

LF: Okay.

HN: But that doesn't negate the fact that I still sometimes am not sure about holding somebody's hand, you know.

LF: Yeah.

HN: That's unfortunate.

LF: Yeah. And so you haven't had any sort of adverse reactions from any of your neighbors then?

HN: Not overtly. Not overtly. I think at times I've sensed something, but, you know those kinds of things that—macroaggressions we call them, but not overtly. Maybe something—maybe the

tone in their voice or something like that, but no, I haven't been the target of any overt homophobic attacks or any of that, no.

LF: And then is there anything in terms of your, like, engagement with the greater community that you, the LGBT community, that you haven't talked about that you'd like to bring up?

HN: No. No, I don't think so.

LF: Yeah. And you're not involved in any other organizations besides the center?

HN: That do LGBT focus work? No.

LF: Yeah. Okay.

HN: I- I am on the board of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and working, again, at the intersections of violence and LGBT communities is one of their—is an area that they're always committed to, but they are not an LGBT organization per se.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Yeah.

LF: And then ... are there any important turning points in your life that we haven't talked about?

HN: I don't think so.

LF: Okay.

HN: I think I told you the coming out process and all that. No, I don't think so.

LF: Yeah. And what changes have you seen over time in terms of acceptance of or celebration of the LGBT community, and then what challenges do you think still remain?

HN: I think, obviously, marriage equality was a huge victory, but that brought a lot of visibility to the community. I think that more visibility has given, has allowed people to ... I think, some people that were in the dark a little bit or wanted to know more, to be more educated, and again I keep mentioning trans community, but I think the trans community is—I believe is a community that is going to change the world as we know it. The people that ultimately push all boundaries of everything. So I think [it] really is the community—the revolutionary community within the LGBT movement. So that ... I feel like that community also has more visibility now, at the same time, is a community that ... Where we hear, every year, looking at statistics of violence. So, talking about what remains, what are the needs? I think trans- violence against trans women of color in particular is at levels that is just horrendous.

I'm also very concerned about the youth. LGBT youth and homelessness, and I wish that a concerted effort towards marriage equality would have-would have been the same to end

homelessness among LGBTQ youth, and I wish that's—that would be an area that would people would take on as passionately as they did with marriage. I—I think we have to think of solutions, at the community level, solutions to, to respond to that. I think LGBT- LGBT young people on the streets is just horrendous. I mean it. I mean, I don't have to go down ... What happens when, when the kids are on the streets and they have nowhere to go and all that? I really want the movement to take that on as a priority. So I think that would be an area of need for sure, for sure, to really address.

LF: Yeah, it's hard because so many organizations that are committed to solving homelessness in the United States tend to also be religious based, so that causes for a lot of discrimination in that regard as well.

HN: For sure. That's why I do think that community-driven solutions, like somebody was saying the other day, "Maybe we should have ..." In some communities, people have done this: host-community members become hosts for the young people.

LF: Yeah.

HN: On a temporary basis, you know, but I think that's better than having these kids on the street. And I know right now of two of them that are, have found temporary solutions, you know. But I know these kids. I see them. I know who they are. And they, they're not loved by their families. So what are we going to do as a larger community, you know, to- to protect, to support? I- I think along those lines a mentorship of younger people. I think that's super important, like showing that you can have a life—a full life, you know. I think that's super important. It's one of the things I really enjoy about the GSA Summit; being able to come and talk to people. I don't know. I think—this probably sounds a little crazy, but I think being more political in terms of the community itself ... I sometimes feel a sense of complacency with the community. And I wish people were more, like, committed, you know, like to really see that an act of violence against one person is against all of us, you know, and I think sometimes people are more like, "Well, it doesn't affect me directly, so it's not my issue." Within our community, I mean.

LF: Yeah.

HN: So, I think more options for LGBT elders. I feel like the students are very similar. Some of the challenges that people experience, to really think down, you know, like plan ahead as much as possible, but to really be supportive and think about the complexity of supporting LGBT elders.

LF: Yeah.

HN: That's another group that gets, you know, is to be so complex, you know, and so hard, and I think we don't do enough with intention to think about that group.

LF: Yeah. We were interviewing—our first interview that we did this summer was with an older transwoman who was talking about how worried she was for the aspect of living in a home.

HN: Yeah.

LF: Because she just doesn't know how the home would treat her.

HN: Yes.

LF: Yeah.

HN: A very legitimate fear, right? Imagine that. So somebody at those intersections of the trans identity—an older adult.

LF: Yeah.

HN: For sure, yes, of course. And I think, for trans people, the rest of the community as well. And for some people, I mean, not everyone is as lucky as I am that I have a son that's—that tells me now that he's going to take care of me because that's what he sees with his grandmother—that she lives with us. But not everybody has that, you know, and I—who knows, right? I mean, it's ... I do think that we have to be more intentional about prioritizing this thing. I think, too, in the larger scale, like really more intentional studies that look at the quality of life for LGBT people. Like, what are the factors, or the things that really have to do with quality of life for—of course I'm—the sociologist is talking now, but I think that that's important to, to really know more—as much as we can. And to look at the intersections of the queer identity and race and ethnicity and national origin. I think all of that is important, too.

LF: And is there anything through your work on the Summit we haven't touched on that you would like to talk about as well?

HN: No, I don't think so.

LF: Okay.

HN: Maybe self-care is the one area that I do talk to the young people about, like self-care and self-love that I think is another piece that we all could get more of.

LF: Yeah. And then ... oh! A question that I've been asking a lot of people this summer is, just in general, what is it like to be a lesbian during the Trump presidency?

HN: In my case you can add “a lesbian and an immigrant during the Trump presidency.”

LF: Yeah.

HN: And I do have to say that my son was the person that kept me grounded. I personally got violently sick after the election. So I had a weird case of vertigo and hypothermia that no one

could explain. And I really believe that it was my body blowing up from everything that I had seen. It seems too real. Remember that I'm an immigrant. I came to this country looking for a better future. It negates everything I believe in. My, my work—the things—all of the progress that had been made in the past eight years around women's right, LGBT rights, trans rights, it's—all of that is in danger right now, or it feels that way anyway. So it's a moment of profound reflection. It's a moment of engagement, like I feel like I need to do somethings so I had to get past my illness and get on with the program and the fact that well this is happening so what am I going to do about it? And it's also been a time for reflecting on self-care. I think that, yeah, is important. I, I think living in this time, too, has been helpful. The one thing that I always tell people in the community if this comes up is that it has forced us to work together. Like, really come together where our ... We have one common ground, one piece of equal something, but it—it has ... and I mean everything that is happening now around what just happened last week, and what just happened yesterday in Barcelona. I mentioned that my best friend lives in Barcelona, so it just shocked me. I had to call and ask him if he was okay, you know it—it ... These are times of uncertainty, and I feel they are a symptom of what's happening here. I think this hatred just for the sake of it and so blatant is, is affecting all of us. So I think for those of us that live at many intersections, these are difficult times, you know. I was with the people that looked to moving to Canada at that point. My son who said, "We should not leave. We have to stay and fight." So he, he really helped me, you know, stay grounded.

LF: Yeah.

HN: Yeah.

LF: And then you mentioned earlier your mom's process to get asylum, do you think that would have been easier under a different administration, or do you think that it would have been just as hard?

HN: I think in her issue, just remember that as a Cuban, she had special protections at the time. I think it definitely depends on what the laws are at the time.

LF: Okay.

HN: Having said that, we can speculate that right now anything that's immigrant related—this isn't a good time to come here right now, right?

LF: Yeah.

HN: I mean for anybody. So, under an administration like this one, I think for anyone, except for perhaps Europeans, you know, but I think for Latinos in particular, this is a time of a lot of hatred and targeted violence when it comes to Latinos.

LF: Yeah well they've proposed a few weeks ago to start a bill to start limiting skilled migration.

HN: Yeah.

LF: To the United States, which is, like, so contrary to the direction that I think we should go in [laughs].

HN: Like many things else, like many other things, right? You're like, "Is this really happening?" Like it—it feels like a nightmare and that we're going to wake up soon, but...

LF: Yeah.

HN: Yeah.

LF: And are there any topics we haven't touched one that you'd like to bring up or...

HN: No, no. I don't think so.

LF: Okay. Well, I think that's suffices, unless you have any questions?

UNKNOWN PERSON: Did you mention what year you came to Harrisburg?

HN: I came to Harrisburg in- I have to think about this because I came in '95, and I believe I lived in Allentown maybe in 2003 when my mother came. I think it was in 2003.

UP: How many, like, years have you been involved with the LGBT center and LGBT community here in Harrisburg, approximately?

HN: So, close to 10, maybe. Close. Maybe a little less. But 7 years, or something like that I would say.

UP: And was there anything that surprised you about the community in Harrisburg versus what you had seen in like Allentown or other cities that you travel to around the country?

HN: Yes. I think the community in Harrisburg is complex. I don't have all the answers as to why that is, but I do feel like it tends to be a little fragmented. I don't hold anyone accountable for that, you know, I think I really ... Looking at the center, you know, we're really trying to be more intentional and do more community engagement work, but I feel like it's very—there are a lot of people that I never see. I think there are a lot of members of the community that are invisible. Not because they don't come to the center, it's because we don't go to them, is my belief. It gives the appearance of a community very similar, very monochromatic, when it's not. Because the statistics in Harrisburg of demographics, we're only looking at Harrisburg. Harrisburg is quite diverse.

There's a whole community of people out there. There are people of color that are LG- identified as Queer, LGBT. I still—I discover them in pockets, that's what I've learned. There is a whole pocket of, of lesbians, now that I've discovered recently through dating someone, so I was just like "I never saw any of you." Different group. So, it, it may have something to do with

socioeconomics when it comes to women again. I am not aware of the men's scene, I don't ... I don't know what goes on with the men, but with women in particular, I feel like women prefer, perhaps, to go to each other's homes and have house parties. It also has to do with women still make less than men.

The whole closure of the women's bar. That was—it was tragic. You know that was the one bar. So now there is *704* in between, and I guess there are more women there, but still, I—that was so tragic, losing that bar. So, I think the community here is interesting. I, I've been in other bigger cities, smaller cities, so I, I've seen and I usually try to visit or find, you know, the bar or the center if I have more time. I know this isn't San Francisco. I know that. There are issues there, too, you know. So incredibly expensive. But, but I—I'm hopeful. I think Harrisburg has a lot of potential. There are a lot of great things happening now. And I think the center is at a very good moment too. And hopefully, you know, some good things will happen. But this, this community is interesting. And different, I would say.

LF: Okay. Well, thank you.

HN: Thank you both.

LF: Yeah.

HN: I hope this was help-

[Video Ends]