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## **Interview #10 Abstract and Transcript, 2001**

Carrie Noble Kline

Anonymous

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#10

**Tape I Side I**

Carrie Nobel Kline: Can you--. I just want to hear your voice on the microphone just for a little bit. Can you tell me your address?

#10: OK. I live at the ... in ....

CNK: I'm going to ask you to say that one more time.

#10: OK. It's the ... in ....

CNK: OK. Well can you tell me in as much detail as comes to you about the place you are from, the people who were around, and the environment that you come from?

#10: All right. I come from ... West Virginia, which is right outside of ... West Virginia. Usually it's not even named. Like nobody even says, "I come from ... " outside of the area. Because it's so small. It's basically the street leading to ... but we have our own post office, so were very proud of that. It is a really concentrated place. The area is very much lower class. Almost everybody is below poverty level. There's nothing really much to describe except for the fact that, like I said, you know, there--. It's just a street with houses along both sides, and there is a post office. We used to have a store, but it's now gone. It's pretty empty place, but it's right beside the river, and there's also an area directly across from my house that is on the other side of the river. That's sort of it's own little independent area, but still a part of the town. Kind of odd but. (...)  
Deep in the valley.

CNK: What's the river like there?

#10: It's very narrow, very dirty. Not very deep. Actually, sadly enough, raw sewage just flows straight into it, so it's kind of a frightening little river. But it's large enough that people can fish in it. I mean there's a lot of--. A lot of kids from the area fish there. But other than that, like I said, very small, very dirty. It's a very strange shade of brown because of the mining in the area.

CNK: Still active mining?

#10: Not anymore, as far as I know. I think there may be one or two active mines not too far away, but all of the mines in the immediate vicinity, and there were quite a few of them, have shut down. So there are still a lot of retired miners in the area, but I don't think anybody in our area actually still is a miner.

CNK: What kind of a place was it to grow up? Paint me a picture of the community, even your home, or what kind of a kid you were in the middle of it all?

#10: There weren't a lot of us, you know, kids my age. About five or six. So most of us were pretty close most of the time. Of course I think, like all kids, we had a tendency to divide into clicks sporadically, but most of the time we were all pretty close knit. There were two basketball courts in the area that were pretty vital to the, you know, scene for us kids anyway. That's pretty much all we did was ride bikes or play on the basketball court. The house I lived in is two story white house that used to be a church, so it's also a kind of unique little building in that there's really no hallways. There's no separation; it's all just big rooms with doors joining them. So it was a really open household in that you didn't have any privacy. The only place you could go and close the door was the

bathroom. Like there were no other--. No other rooms actually had a door. So that was kind of odd. I have one brother and one sister, and we're all fairly separated. There are four years between my sister, and then four years between my brother and I.

CNK: With you in the middle?

#10: No. I'm the oldest or four years between my sister and my brother. I phrased it badly. But we still stayed together all the time even though there was that big gap, because there were so few kids in the community. Pretty much anybody that was within six years fit into the little play group.

CNK: I'm going to your birthdate just to put this all in perspective.

#10: April 29th, 1976. Actually we didn't start living in the area that my parents live in now, that I grew up in, until I was about five I think. Before that we lived not very far away in ... West Virginia. And actually, just to exemplify how strange my family is, the area we lived in there, my grandmother's house is very much set off from the community in that it's the only house across on the other side of the river and is covered--. The whole yard, the whole area is covered in kudzu that my family decided to transplant. And so it's nowhere else in the area except covering that house. You kind of drive through that community, and just look over at my grandmother's house, and it just looks like this mystical place set apart from the rest of the world.

CNK: Tell me more about her.

#10: She actually--. She just died about two years ago, but she was very much, I think, like the rest of my--. Her daughters, my mother and my aunts, was very much a matriarchal center of the community, in that, you know, everybody went to the house if

they had problems or if they needed something or whatever. Hers was the first place people went to. She was very, very, very religious, probably more so than any of the rest of the family. I do have an aunt or two that that are still fairly religious and, you know, go to church every Sunday, but aren't necessarily exceptionally strict. Then my mother and my other aunt have very much moved away from that, have become--. Come to a very different world I suppose even.

But she was a singer in her church. And sort of I would almost call her an assistant minister, although she would not have been happy with such a title, because she was very conservative and didn't believe that women could hold such positions. But yeah, she was very, very interesting. She was the kind of person that everybody adored because she would do just about anything you needed done, or if you needed something she would make sure you found it. But at the same time, if you were doing anything that the community would look down upon, she wasn't a person you wanted to be around. So anybody that didn't exactly fit the standards were pretty much scared of her.

CNK: Fit the standards?

#10: Yeah, you know, live up to the community's standard moral positions. You know, if--. I remember one time actually there was the man across the street was cheating on his wife. And everybody in the town knew it, but she didn't, of course. And when my grandmother found this out she immediately, without hesitation, walked to the neighbors' house, and in front of him told his wife everything that she had heard. So she was really quick to do things like that to make sure that the moral stability was maintained, so to speak.

I'm not sure what else to say about her. She was very, like I said, very loving. But at the same time she was one of those people who you had to expect a lot out of yourself around her, because you know you pretty much lived in fear of disappointing her. But in a good way, I mean it wasn't a horrible, bad thing. I'm afraid that I'm making it sound that way. I don't mean to. I mean I adored being around her. But at the same time I was always careful of what I said or what I did, just in case, because she was very quick to pass judgment in a way that, you know, she would make you understand that she still cared about you and still loved you, because of something you shouldn't do, but at the same time she was disappointed. Which was always a bad thing.

CNK: What sorts of situations would find you with your grandma?

#10: Actually for about three years I lived with her. Of course I don't remember those three years, because they were my first three years. My mother was very much a free spirit. She came a little late for the hippie movement, but was really sad about that and tried to recreate it for herself, I suppose. So she spent several years after I was born sort of still sowing her wild oats. So she just--. My grandmother said, "Look, until you get your feet on the ground just go on and do what you need to do, and then come back." So I stayed with my grandmother for that time.

And after that I would still--. Our family is really, really close knit, so even though we lived you know about 25 minutes away, we were still there for a long time for a huge part of my childhood. Just about every weekend we would go, and my sister and I--. By the time that my brother was born most of my family had moved from that area.

Moved to North Carolina--. But my sister and I, when she was young, we would stay at my grandmother's house just about every weekend.

But I was a mischievous child, to say the least, so I stayed in trouble. But I can remember--. She used to tell this story, because it was her favorite story. She used to always talk about following, following me home from church one day. And I was running, and wouldn't let her catch up, and she kept telling me that she was going to spank me once we got home. And of course I ignored her, because, you know, grandmothers can usually easily be talked out of such things. But by the time we got there, you know, she of course grabbed a switch and spanked me. And I was crying and said to her--. And she just, like I said, she just adored the story, and I don't know why. But I was crying, and I spread my arms out as far as they would go and said, "You hurt me this much." And every time I was bad after that, like even when I was, you know, in my early 20s, and she would find out something that I did that she didn't approve of, she would tell that story, and then tell me that she couldn't spank me anymore, but I should still feel very bad for what I was doing.

CNK: You hurt her that much or something?

#10: Yeah.

CNK: What's her name?

#10: Pauline, but we all called her Nanny. And my grandfather died well before I was born, so I never actually knew him. And my real father's parents, I never knew them much either, because my parents were divorced when I was really, really young. But my step-dad's parents kind of moved in and filled that gap. But, you know, again, within our

community that was an odd situation because my step-dad was black. And the community sort of accepted that, at least our immediate community did, but, you know, once I got outside of that and went to school, and, you know, would find out that these things supposedly were bad--. Which, of course, I would say now is not true. At the time I was really confused from hearing from all of these that, you know, this was a bad thing. But I would say for a while I sort of distanced myself from my grandparents on my step-dad's side of the family, just because I really was confused with the whole concept of how races should interact. Because I didn't realize when I was very young that it--. That it was some, an issue at all. And then I was going to school and finding out from all of my peers that was a very big issue, and so I had no concept of how to deal with that. So my grandmother on my mother's side was sort of my only grandparent for a really long time.

CNK: What was her stance on the interracial relationships?

#10: She always told my mother that it was fine, and she did really like my step-father. And told me, because she saw, you know, what was going on and all, the cause told me that it was a fine thing, that there wasn't anything wrong with it. But at the same time I knew from the rest of my family that she didn't believe in interracial relationship and probably should have figured that out myself, considering how conservative she was. But, you know, she was like that though. I mean she was--. Would always make you feel secure, even if she didn't necessarily like what was going on. And I'm sure even though my mother never said anything about it, that my grandmother cautioned her against it, and

probably flat out told her what her stance was, but once she realized that there wasn't anything she could do about it, she at least feigned support, just to be supportive.

CNK: Tell me about this step-dad. What is his name?

#10: Mike.

CNK: Mike.

#10: Yeah. He's--. My step-dad is a strange guy, but he's a lot of fun. For a long time he had some problems with anger management, to put it nicely, but he's, he's started to deal with it recently, and he's become a much more pleasant person. So for a long time we didn't get along very well, but I'd say in the past six years we've gotten along pretty well. But he was always a lot more dominate than my mother, so to speak. He would make us say "yes, sir" and "yes, ma'am," and things that I really wasn't used to, because they didn't get married until after I turned four. So for a while I was very put off by him, just because he came into this with different expectations than my family had had before, because you know my mothers family is really laid back. They're really relaxed about certain things. I mean there are certain ways you are supposed to react, but--. Or you're supposed to act, but saying "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am" and "please" and "thank you," and things like that are, you know, very optional. So when he came in and kind of laid those laws down, it was kind of an immediate negative reaction. But you know, like I said, things have really shifted. We get along substantially better now.

But I would say it was hard living up to his expectations a lot of the times, not because his expectations were high, but just because that I thought were odd. I mean, for example, as far as grades were concerned, as long as it was a C it was fine. I mean that

was--. And, you know, that's where I excelled. But then as far as sports, you know, you needed to be athletic, you needed to be successful, and, and you needed to be bigger than everybody else and stronger than everybody else. And I couldn't do those things. So that was kind of rough. And he was often very mad about the fact that I would spend whole days in my bed reading when his expectations were that young boys went out to play. And they went out and played basketball, and they went out and did this and did that, and they went fishing. I always hated fishing. So that's again another point that we often didn't get along on, was just that he expected a lot that I personally couldn't live up to. Not that they were necessarily hard expectations; they just weren't my expectations.

CNK: What about this free spirit mother of yours?

#10: She's still very wild.

CNK: What is her name?

#10: Cathy. She again, like I was saying about my grandmother, is very much kind of the matriarchal center of the community. I mean at Thanksgiving dinner, which, you know, just passed, had an amazing number of people there. There were probably almost 40 people at dinner, and I was only related to about seven of them. They were just people from the community who either wanted to come down and get some of her cooking, even though they had Thanksgiving dinner, or didn't have enough for Thanksgiving dinner, or whatever else. Just had had to work the night before and didn't want to cook Thanksgiving dinner, whatever the situation might have been. They all just kind of piled into our house, which is really not big enough to accommodate that many people, but that

doesn't matter. (...) She's very much one of those people that everybody kind of floats around.

But at the same--. At the same time, she can kind of be a troublemaker. There's been more than a few occasions where we've had to rescue her from trouble. Actually there was once when I was in high school, and actually this was her rescuing me from trouble to begin with, but it quickly changed. I'd gotten in trouble with the bus driver. The bus driver was just a horrible woman. But I had to have a meeting with the bus driver, the principal and my parents. And the situation was a very strange situation. I won't go into too much detail, but it was just basically this bus driver said that I'd said something to her, but she hadn't heard, but had kicked me off the bus anyway. My mother got really mad at her for saying that--. The bus driver said that she was a Christian woman and would never allow anyone to speak like that to her. My mother said something about that and the bus driver said, "You would understand more if you were a Christian woman." Well my mother attacked the bus driver, just was pulling her hair and trying to drag her outside. Of course we had to kind of save her from getting thrown in jail from that little incident. So she is a very split person. There is the one side of her that is the community mother and then the other side of her that, that, like I said, is just very wild.

CNK: Do you think she tried to share some of her teachings with you?

#10: I think so. I mean we were always--. My brother and sister and I--. She kind of suggested that we be wilder than we were. I think that has backfired with my brother who is, who is eternally in trouble now. But my sister and I, I don't think ever had the nerve to

be too wild. And to some extent, like the other parts of our personalities that have, you know, have come out defiantly please her, but I think that was a slight disappointment for her, in that my sister and I are not assertive. Both of us are pretty blunt, and don't really hide much when it comes to our emotions, but at the same time, for some reason, neither of us are assertive even to the extent that we can comfortably call the pizza man. It's just very odd.

My sister is probably one of the most sarcastic people in the world and will say anything to anybody if she's being funny, but never any other time. If she has to be serious or be professional it really, really bothers her. For me it's almost the opposite in that I can be overly professional with just about anybody, but to be comfortable and to actually just chat with somebody is--. Takes a lot more than I have really. So I'm not sure why it ended up that way, especially with mother being as, as she is. But my little brother is, like I said, is exactly the opposite. He's very much like my mother was, except that my mother always felt really guilty for everything. You know, she would do something bizarre, and then feel guilty about it. My little brother lacks that, so he's constantly in trouble. He's been on probation, and he stole the family's car once and ran off with it, so. Like I said, incessantly in trouble because he, he just does what he wants and just doesn't--. It just doesn't ever occur to him that that might be bad.

CNK: What about this ethic that you think she actually wanted you to have, and what did she want?

#10: She just really expected us to be the kind of people you look at and both envy, and are afraid of. I know that there were these two people that lived in our neighborhood, this

brother and sister actually, that were never really a part of our group of friends that always did things in our neighborhood, because they were very much bullies, and would, you know, beat up whoever they could get their hands on. My mother's attitude toward that was, you know--. Wasn't like most mothers would go down and have the discussion with their mother, and ask them to stop, et cetera, et cetera. My mother's response to that was, "So hit them. Hit them back." And she would very much promote that. When my little brother got into a fight once with, with a boy who was significantly older than him, you know, again instead of doing what most people would do and going down and talking to his mother, my mom's response was, "[Name of Interviewee# 10], get up, and go beat up the boy that just hit your brother." So it's very odd. But again, I mean, like I said, it sounds a lot worse than it is. It sounds like she was promoting that we just be violent, but it really--.

Violence for her in a way was part of being in control, and being assertive, and being controlling in general, and, you know, being loud and obvious and often seen. You know, those were very much a part of who she was, and it's a part of what made her such a big force really in our community. Everybody knew who she was, everybody would constantly either be talking to, or about her, and she liked that, and she thought that was the way people should be. So that was a lot of the way, you know, she taught us to be, but I'm not completely sure that it worked.

CNK: So interesting. Do you have a sense of what might have shaped those feeling for her?

#10: She was the next to youngest child, and I'm sure--. Both of my aunts are, again, very dominate personalities, to say the least, and she had a brother who died when he was 17, but he was also, from what I heard, just very much a cut up, and very much a person who got attention. So I would say that was her way of getting that kind of attention. But at the same time there has to be more to it than that, just because all of her sisters except for one--. And her youngest sister is very, very passive and fairly quiet, though very opinionated. But you know, all three of the other sisters are very much like that, so I'm not really sure where it comes from or what it stems from. Because, like I said, you know, a lot of where she gets it is competing with those two older sisters and the older brother. But I don't know how to account for the two older sisters and the older brother being that way as well.

CNK: Umm hmm.

#10: It's kind of odd actually, because again, my grandmother was aggressive, but at the same time, she was aggressive in a very quiet, very relaxed kind of way. And my grandfather, again from what I know of him, because he died before I was born, from what I know of him was very quiet conservative guy who was, you know, very much fit that stereotype of the strong, silent man of his times.

CNK: Umm hmm.

#10: So no idea where all of that originated really.

CNK: Have you known other people, maybe where you came from, or in the region, or even through literature of the region, that sort of have that fight back spirit? Does that resound, resonate in a way?

#10: I would say it's fairly typical to have those, to have the two extremes. I mean you--. Most of the people I know in the area are either, you know, very aggressive and loud and make themselves seen in any situation or very quiet and meek. I mean it's one of those two extremes almost all the time. And I think I'd almost say that the literature almost opposes that, but for, you know, obvious reasons. I mean it's, it's very much when you split a whole group of people into two extremes, then you end up very much stereotyping them, which I hope I'm not doing. But--. So they kind of have to defy that to avoid that. But as far--. As far as a lot of people being either very aggressive or very passive, I think it just has a lot to do with the area being known as kind of the area everybody ignores. I mean we were part of the mining area, but at the same time there are no mines directly where we are. So we are just kind of set off from everything else. And now that the mines are shut, I mean there's nothing around there. And so that's kind of the way the whole area is, it's ignored. So either it lives with the fact that it's ignored, or it intentionally calls attention to itself. Those are kind of the only two options.

CNK: You ever think about the years of the mine wars, or even prior to that when, when the coal economy was just getting started and different people's responses to that? And is there sort of a progression or a continuation of some of that behavior in any way?

#10: I would say probably. And--. The mine wars and mining just in general had a huge impact on my extended family, but as far as, you know, just directly tracing it through, through my family, and then my grandparents and then on back, you know, through there--. We kind of avoided the mines, and I'm not sure what exactly that says about our family in general, but--. Like my grandfather owned a mechanics shop and started the

shop just to keep from going into the mines. And his father, from what I understand, was a traveling salesman who did that to avoid the mines. So, you know, the family pretty--. Most of my direct family has a history of avoiding anything that has to do with the mines. Then, you know, I have--. Like my grandmother's brother was in the mines, and a few other people. But most of those people were very close to my grandmother, because she pretty much knew everybody in the family, but I never really had much contact with them. So I didn't know a lot about mining or the mining situation. I mean even though it had such a huge impact on our area, because, you know, the family, like I said, intentionally avoided it at all costs. I mean just did whatever they could to not have to think about it.

CNK: This is really great. Are there other people who were around who were--? Or teachings even that would--? Maybe you accepted for a while, or resisted, or that became a part of who you are? Are there characters around? Role models? Curiosities?

#10: Sure there must have been tons. Actually one of the first people I think of is there was a man in our neighborhood who I just adored, but most people in the neighborhood were--. He was the town drunk, and almost to the extent, you know, the village idiot. But he was brilliant, he was he was really a sharp guy. And so there were a lot of times when, you know, the rest of the town wouldn't talk to him or was ignoring him or whatever, when he would decided, you know, it's time to teach me something. And he would just pick things at random. You know some days it would be hieroglyphics, and other days it would be Algebra, or whatever. So I'd be five or six years old learning Algebra from the town drunk. Let's see-.

CNK: He picked you?

#10: I think it's just because I would talk to him. Like most people very, very much ignored him and thought he was insane. But when he would start talking about things, I was fascinated. But he would talk about, you know, he, he has a friend who is an Archeologist, and he was telling me about some of the things his friend had found. And everybody else he was telling this story to just reacted with, you know, "Oh its [Name unclear] who's drunk who's making this up." But I was fascinated by it. So everybody else would leave, and that would leave me to listen, and eventually that just--. We started skipping the process, and just not telling everybody else. It was just the two of us talking.

I'm not really sure much about his history except for the fact I know he was a Vietnam vet, but that was pretty much it. I'm pretty sure he didn't really have a college education, and that, you know, the things he knew he just came by randomly. But it was always a lot of fun getting the other(...) And him deciding whatever we were going to be talking about that day. Sometimes we would even go out even, you know, later in the evening and he would show me constellations or whatever. Just whatever was interesting him at the moment. I'm not--.

I'm trying to think of other people in our area. Just the way our area was in general, I mean I had of course a lot of role models, but it was the kind of situation where children in general were to be seen and not heard, and were not necessarily--. You know they were taken care of to the fullest extent, but you know the adults didn't necessarily sit down and have a lot of chats with the kids so--. There was a lot of people that I looked up to as you know exemplifying something, but not necessarily because we discussed

their views, and really you know really got a good grasp of that. So a lot of it was really ambiguous. A lot of it was really implied.

And I think it, you know--. I was always sort of the weird one in the community, of course I'm always sort of the weird one anywhere, but I was always sort of the weird one in the community because I don't think I ever really fathomed all of that, that I ever really you know--. Not that I didn't understand it, but that I didn't accept it so willingly because you know--. My sister is another good example. I mean she is very accepting of you know whatever people tell her is the way things are done, that's the way things are done. And then that's the way she will do them. And so she's very--. Almost very much normal as far as the views of our community, but--. You know because she just followed examples.

And most of the time I was really bad as a child for--. I was one of the infamous children who constantly asked why. And I think that got me in a lot of trouble growing up in more than just annoying people. (.) I just kind of ignored things until somebody could answer my question. You know if somebody didn't say this is why then I would say, "OK this has no purpose," and ignore it.

But one my aunts is actually--. Is very much kind of had a huge influence on the person I think I would acknowledge myself as being today, just because she is very, very much odd to put it nicely. I was trying to think of a way to phrase that that was not so blunt, but--. And--. She's the kind of person who you know she wears very long broom straw skirts and walks barefooted through Kroger, and knows everybody in there. And so I stayed a lot with her when I was young, mainly because my cousin, her daughter was my

age, and we were pretty much best friends for many, many years, so I would stay at their house a lot. But my aunt always fascinated me because she was really just kind of apathetic about the whole rest of the world. I mean she had books, and books, and books, just any kind of book you can imagine, and would decide some days if her husband wasn't home, because he was very, very strict, and a typical southern West Virginia husband I suppose. But if he wasn't home she would make us things for dinner like spaghetti and pickle sandwiches. Just because that was what we wanted, and she would think that was perfectly fine.

I remember when I was in Jr. High, she showed me, and I eventually stole it, but that's all right I'll pretend I didn't say that, a copy of Leaves of Grass. I ended up getting into a lot of trouble with that book. Because--. Suspended from Jr. High for a friend of mine reading all of the dirty parts aloud in the hallway to a big crowd of kids.

And she gave me things like--. Like I started reading War and Peace when I was young because she gave it to me. Of course, it was way too long, and I didn't understand it, but she gave it to me and I attempted it. A lot of different books--. She gave me some books by Virginia Wolfe which again I had no idea what they were talking about at 14, but she would sit down, and try to explain them to me as much as you can explain Virginia Wolfe to somebody that young. So I think you know her eccentricities had a lot to do with me doing what I'm doing now. Just because it didn't matter to her that I didn't understand it. She would just ask, "Did you like it?" And I would say, "Yeah, it was beautiful." I (...) know what it was talking about, but it was beautiful. And she'd say, "That's all that matters. I mean that's the only thing that is important." And so I think

that is you know very much an attitude I've taken as a reader and as a writer, and just in general. I mean just looking at life in general saying as long as it's fun and pretty then who cares.

CNK: She selected some gay and lesbian authors for you to read then?

#10: I think Whitman was the only blatant--.

## **Tape Side 2**

#10: Were the only obvious gay author she really gave me to read. And I think you know that that was just her picking someone big and influential. I'm not sure--. With her it's really hard to tell. I'm not sure with her if that was an actual decision on her part, but but yeah I mean I think that did have you know--. That was something I noticed when I was reading them when I was younger, and was very fascinated by the fact that you know she would have something like that and that it was--. That things like that were written and that you know she would allow me to look at such things especially since you know Leaves of Grass is a bit explicit in places.

CNK: Did you have a sense of his gender identity as you were reading that?

#10: Sort of. Like I still have a problem to this day, and I always had it you know when I was younger too of thinking that I was reading things in, into a work that wasn't necessarily there. And a lot of times that's true you know I'll read something and have to say "OK. Is this really what the author is intending or is this just what I'm pulling from it?" There are sections of it where he's you know pretty straight forward when he talks you know there are--. There are a few lines where he talks about you know what it's like to love a man, and there are a few lines where you know he talks a little more graphically

about what it's like to love a man. And those things you know I sort of even then picked up on, or at least thought I did. I'm not sure that all of the sections that talk about loving men are really about necessarily being homosexual, but that was where I read them then. And you know those lines allowed me to pick up on the more subtle ideas in the text. It kind of gave me access to it. By saying--. By reading that then I--. It kind of changed the way I looked at the rest of it, and I think I picked up on a little more than I think I would have otherwise. You know like I said I had a pretty good idea, and when I got in trouble for reading it in the hallway, the school principal told me that that homosexual filth were not to be read aloud in his school building. So you know that was a pretty good hint there too.

CNK: A hint?

#10: Oh yeah. I mean you know it because clear(...) if Whitman was a homosexual writing that what I was reading into it really was there. But then you know also it became pretty clear that such writing was not generally accepted. This was not a book that even though--. Even though the book is part of our cannon, not something that at least within our smaller community was something people were too ready to have around. Which you know--. Again taking that even further you know kind of made me feel like my personal identity was something that that might not be very acceptable. So. That was a lot for one book to do for a person but--. It was a pretty quick process acknowledging all of that at once.

CNK: Talk more about your own--. The development of your own gender consciousness.

#10: I think you know--. I've talked to a lot of my friends who tell me these stories about how you know they suddenly come into a realization, and I've always been fascinated by those stories because I'm not sure that I ever suddenly came to realize anything. For me it was as soon as I began to develop desire at all you know, as far as most people do you know when you are hitting that stage. Probably right before puberty where you're just starting to desire anything it was just automatically--. You know I was desiring boys, was desiring men, and I was very aware that that was not--. At least the way it was viewed by the people around me that that was not a normal thing. So it was something that I really kept to myself. But you know it wasn't a sudden shift or anything. It was just kind of came very very you know slowly and gradually.

But for me the big realization came not really in developing my own desires, but in realizing that there were other people that shared them. I mean you know--. Because I just completely thought it was just--. I was a genetic fluke or something I don't know. But there was a man that lived not far from my house, I mean just probably 12 houses down that I found out when I was about 12 was a homosexual. And I never really knew him. I mean he was really reclusive, but you know just, just discovering that you know all homosexuals didn't live in San Francisco was a big thing for me. I mean just finding that out that it wasn't a small group of people doing something strange that it really was something wider spread than that. It was when I really came into an identity because for me like--. I think--. I think it's hard for me to say that I could base my identity on simply a desire, I mean just wanting something. For me it's more about--.

Identity is relative, I mean you have to compare it to something, and there has to be something there to compare it with. And to establish my identity as a homosexual took more than just you know quote being a homosexual. It took actually seeing that there were others, and seeing these other people so that I could make that comparison and make that you know that connection. Because otherwise it was just the heterosexuals and me. Which is you know just exclusive. I mean it's not, you can't really--. I think it's hard to identify yourself as the thing that does not fit.

CNK: How did you find out about this man?

#10: Mainly through just listening to people talk. I mean my parents didn't hide much of anything in our house, and would just talk pretty openly about stuff right in front of us. And they just mentioned one day--. My step-dad was repairing his roof, or his porch, or something. And they were just talking about the fact that he was a homosexual, and that he wouldn't--. He refused to date men in the area because he had more respect for his parents than that, which looking back on is a horrendous thing to say, but--. But that's you know the way they looked at it, and I thought just hearing that was kind of fascinating for me to know that you know A) there was a homosexual living down the street, and that B) there were homosexuals in the area for him to be dating. So it was just you know kind of overwhelming for me sort of to realize that, like I said, that this wasn't just something really isolated, and way out there, and only in places other than where I was.

CNK: And they used the word homosexual, very sort of neutral term like that?

#10: Actually I'm pretty sure they used the word gay. And I mean the people in my area, like I said, are pretty conservative, pretty old fashioned so you know a lot of language

flies around, but my parents are pretty consistent with the term gay. And I'm not sure why that is. I'm not sure if it's you know a conscious decision, or whether it's just a word they like. But you know, I have an uncle that usually uses the term queer. And yes, the area is pretty inconsistent I mean you know, everybody has kind of their own terminology or just uses whatever. And like I said my parents are--. I think just about every time I've heard them say something about a homosexual they've either used the word homosexual, or the word gay.

CNK: For men.

#10: Or homosexual, or lesbian for a woman. My sister actually came out as a lesbian a few months ago. And actually trying to remember exactly. It would have been a year ago--. A year and two weeks ago because the Thanksgiving before last before the one that just passed she brought her girlfriend to Thanksgiving dinner. That was her way of coming out to my parents. Which is an interesting choice to say the least. But my mother was convinced for a really long time that she was just going through a phase. But I think in the past year all the stuff that has happened with her you know, the different people she's dated, and she's in a fairly serious relationship now. I think my mom is starting to acknowledge that it's not a phase, which is odd because I don't think she ever thought that I was just having a phase.

CNK: (...)

#10: I don't know I mean it's--. My sister has always probably pretended better than I did you know. She liked men, dated men, et cetera, et cetera, until she got to college. But I

pretty much faked being asexual instead of being the other way. So I think that that probably complicated my mother's process in handling it.

CNK: In your case, or in your sister's case?

#10: My sister's. Because with my sister it was a much more extreme shift. Or you know at least seemed to be a much more extreme shift. But with me it was you know it was more like finding out the secret I suppose, because you know they didn't--. Couldn't have known either way I don't guess.

CNK: Tell me more about that progression for you in your own consciousness.

#10: Like I said, I pretty much hid away the fact that I was gay. From myself probably for a while, but not for very long. Probably until I was about 13, but then from my parents until I had gone off to college actually.

CNK: Did you date girls along the way? In high school?

#10: Not usually. I depended really heavily on the bookworm persona. You know it was pretty accepted that you know if you were extremely scholarly and kind of nerdy, that you could kind of get out of that. That it wasn't something that you were concerned about.

So that's kind of the way my parents looked at it, is that I was very much the bookworm, and did a lot of things in my high school as far as--. I was the editor of the yearbook, and, and I was president of the Latin Club et cetera et cetera. So that I was more concerned with school than with girls. At least that is the way they looked at it. Until college, and then when I was in college--.

My coming out process was kind of problematic in that it was a process--. Like most of the time it's a you know--. You tell somebody, and then it's done. But with my

parents it started with a person I had sort of been seeing walking up to my mom in a grocery store and saying--. Asking her if she was my mother. And she said yes. And he said, "Oh well I'm his ex." So I sort of lied my way out of that, sort of, but I'm not sure it worked completely. But you know my parents were wanting to be in denial, so it was a little bit easier. But then what sort of cinched it all is my Junior year of college I was home on break, and I accidentally left a Playgirl in the bathroom. And that was that was my coming out process. I could have blamed it on my sister, but she wasn't there, and nobody else in the house would have had it. So they pretty much knew then. So you know my poor mother--. If it isn't enough to have two children who are gay, she had to be shocked into it both times.

CNK: What was that like for you?

#10: I was kind of amused because by that point I was considering coming out anyway. So at first I was really embarrassed, just the whole idea of my mom handing me a magazine and saying that she found it in the bathroom. I was like oh no, but then after that I was--. I just kind of laughed it off because I was just like, you know I wanted to tell her anyway, but didn't really have the nerve to say it. So then I didn't have to say it, so it was kind of a relief.

CNK: No one ever had to say the words?

#10: Right. I mean we've talked about it since then, but you know it never had to--. As far as the coming out process, it never had to be said, it was just kind of there. My, my sister was sort of a little different because she did actually sit down and tell my mother that that she was having a certain kind of feeling. I mean they never actually took it to

that point, but then of course, my mom thought it's natural to have those kind of feelings. But then when my sister brought home the person she was dating my mom was--. You know that kind of cinched that. So in both cases it was kind of--. My sister almost led up to it, and then just slammed it in. And then with me it was, it was--. There was no almost leading up to it. It was just there.

CNK: Let's take a little break.

#10: All right.

CNK: Yeah. What were you saying about vibrancy?

#10: And I'm very much split between those two people.

CNK: Which two people?

#10: There's my vibrant self, and then there's the self that's much more reserved than that. And it always confuses me when my friends tell me that I'm very showy, or very flaming is the term they use quite often. And you know just energetic in general, and that person who wants to be seen and wants attention. Because I see that person in myself occasionally, but not nearly as much as I think it's there. Because my friends, like I said, talk about it a lot. But personally I see myself, and often am this self, as this person who's very probably overly professional, and sometimes a little bit stuffy. And I think for me it's comfortably. It's, it's when I'm in a situation where I'm sort of intimidated, or not even necessarily intimidated but not completely comfortable. I respond to that with being very formal, and very professional because that's the part of me that thinks the smarter you are the more dignified you are et cetera et cetera, et cetera, then that's going to get you out of trouble.

But being comfortable gets me into trouble because you know once I get comfortable that's when I become showy, or flaming, or however it is you want to say it. Because you know I think once I've hit that point of being comfortable that being seen, and being noticed is really important to me because just because I'm being acknowledged, and because you know people see that I've entered the room.

When we--. When my friends and I go out together even walking through Wal-Mart or something where there's really nobody to pay any attention to you, I mean for me it's almost a show, you have to be the person that everybody's going to look at. That often gets me in trouble because especially in my situation now with teaching and with having students and et cetera et cetera you know I'm--. Here I'm the person who's very formal, and very intellectual, and puts on this good show for them. But then you know I met a student of mine the other day. We were in Gabe's. And I was just being loud, and we were parading through, and I was buying clothes, and nail polish, and ran into one of my students, and I was at first kind of bothered. I thought you know this is not this is not a good thing, but you know I eventually kind of got over because I was--. Realized pretty quickly that if I'm going to make teaching my life, I can't give up the whole rest of my life for it.

But probably even a little more problematic was--. A student in my creative writing class on Thursday opened up the newspaper, and pointed to this ad for the all male review that was on Friday. He said, "Are you going?" And I was like--. I was really taken aback because I was like why would a student be asking me this? And then I remembered that I saw the student at a gay bar at the last all male review. So you know it

kind of made me happy that he was comfortable enough with seeing me there, and with me in class to ask me if I was going to the next one. But at the same time I was kind of, kind of--. You know I thought most of my, you know--. None of my other professors would be put into a situation like this. It just wouldn't happen to them, so you know is it OK?

And that's something that I'm dealing with right now, and trying to bridge that gap between the serious self and the flashy self. And I'm not sure if there is a way to completely bridge it. Although it's something I'm currently dealing with just because these situations have all been pretty recent. But I suppose we'll see how that will end up.

CNK: How do you gauge that in any one situation or community?

#10: For me when I start to, to really become myself who is--. I think really is the flashy see me person, is completely accidental almost. I mean it's really a matter of being comfortable. I mean it's really a matter of being in a situation where I'm not at all nervous, or I'm not at all intimidated of if I'm around people that I'm really comfortable with. My best friend Mary Anne--. She's one of those people that no matter--. I mean if we are in just about any situation, if she's there I can be the flashy me. And you know I've--. A few, a few of my gay friends are also you know--. My straight friends get really mad at me, or some of them when I'm around my gay friends because they say that I change around them. That I become this much different, much louder, much more aggressive person. And I'm not really sure why that is. Except you know an increase in that comfortable factor I guess. I mean, but even if I'm completely comfortable around these straight friends, once I get around the gay you know--. Once the gay friends are

also there I mean it is taken even to a new level. And it--. The complicated part of it for me again like I said was getting those to fit on more than just a personality level because you know I can change the way I'm talking really quick. That's not anything I need to worry about, but at the same time you know how I want my hair to look, and how I want whatever.

And I used to before I started teaching I used to paint my nails. And I just about--. Less than a week ago went out and bought some nail polish because I've sort of decided that I'm going to do it again anyway. Whether I'm teaching or not. And I think that's part of my figuring out how to compromise those two things because it's the visible parts of those that's hard to work through. You know I can't paint my nails on the weekend, and all the time remember, and have the time to get it off by the time the week starts. And I think that's just part of the conscious the obvious blatant new decision making process because it's always been a factor. You know my hair is two different colors, and has been since I started teaching, and that's something that sort of worried me at first and I thought oh well. And then Thanksgiving break of last year I got my tongue pierced and was really kind of worried about that as to what kind of image that is portraying.

CNK: In ... or at home?

#10: In .... Actually it was the day before I went home.

CNK: But the image is...

#10: Oh yeah both. Not in ... in and of itself, but just as a teacher and also you know--. At home being flashy isn't that big of a deal just because I've been seen as eccentric my whole life. Even before anybody knew that I was gay. I mean that is just something that

was, and was pretty quickly accepted. And since then I'm pretty comfortable at home too because once my mother dealt with the fact that I was gay it pretty much was no longer an issue because, like I said, my mother is a pretty dominate personality in our community, and everybody is always at our house so it was kind of a--. She made it pretty clear that people could either deal or go away. So it's never been a huge issue either. But it does you know--.

Actually for me at home being my serious self is harder for me because it's you know--. The people there can at least understand a homosexual. You know they can see that, and be like oh that's you know that's a gay person even if they don't like it or don't necessarily completely understand it. They have some grasp of what it means. But when I'm being really serious, and really you know this professional person that I often pretend to be, I have a tendency to over analyze things, and talk about things on a level that they don't like. I mean it's not that they can't understand it, it's just that they really don't want to understand it.

You know when we are watching movies, and I point out the symbolism in this movie(...) Shut up we don't want to hear that. And even me being funny is often too serious because, like for example, I was at home and a whole lot of friends of our family were sitting around making all these jokes about poop. I mean it was really a weird thing. But I said something about the humor becoming very scatological, and was told very bluntly that I was not in ... and was not allowed to use big words. So.

CNK: So being educated is as much of an issue and a distinguishing issue as sexuality in some ways?

#10: Well, yeah I think, I think that's part of it, but a big part of it is just showing it off is the way they look at it. If you don't talk about things the way they want to talk about them then you are showing off, and you're you know you're bragging about the fact that you are educated. Which I can understand to a certain level. I mean it's not--. It would bother me if someone came into a room using language--. Intentionally using language that I couldn't understand. But at the same time it's not always intentional, like I just you know--. When I said the word scatological I wasn't not consciously thinking I'm going to use a really big word, and confuse people, but they didn't like it at all.

CNK: Have you come in contact with other gay people since you've come back home? Either the one you were aware of as a child or other people who he might have dated?

#10: Not really. I mean the there were two guys that were a couple of years younger than me that I knew were in a relationship through most of high school, and actually they started dating in early Jr. High which is kind of odd. You know I knew both of them, and I actually sort of dated one after the two of them broke up, but you know I was never really around them when they were together. And the other I was only around occasionally. It was--. We sort of dated for about two weeks, and then after that I saw him three or four times. But I never really knew either of them that well. So I know of them in the community, and I know them enough to say hello but I never really knew them extensively.

CNK: Was that a courageous act to be dating even in Jr. High?

#10: They weren't necessarily very open about it. The only reason I really knew about it is because one of them--. His best friend was a really good friend of mine, and it kind of-

- She said, "I'm going to tell you something, but you can't tell anybody else." So I'm sure there were other people who knew because I'm sure I'm not the only person that got told the thing that nobody else could know. But it wasn't really widespread. Like I'd say very, very, very few people knew, and a lot of the people who had heard I'm sure just kind of started gossip. And actually I wasn't for sure that it was true until later, until I went out with one of them, and he told me about it.

So I mean looking back on the community, and actually even going back there now I mean I see that there is a lot more homosexuality there, and was a lot more there that I didn't really know about. But you know I didn't know about it then so it wasn't very helpful for me. But it's strange now that you know I knew of those three or four homosexual men in the area, but now going back I'm finding out about a lot of homosexual women. And those are the--. And I think just because it's--. Once it started in the area it became very much one of the things to talk about.

CNK: Started existing, or started being talked about?

#IO: Started being talked about. And you know, became one of like the focal points to gossip so now there--. It's suddenly coming out that a lot--. You know not a lot, but several women in the area are having relationships with other women. So you know I think the area is actually probably more comfortable for a homosexual now than it was when I was growing up.

CNK: You talk about those questions for yourself you know how out to be, and how outspoken, and whether to paint your nails. I mean is safety an issue in deciding these things and then just being out at all in different communities?

#10: It's a hard question to answer because I think it probably should be, but I'm not sure it's something I really often consider. Mainly because--. And I think this is something that very much comes from my mother, and how assertive she was, and how responsive she was to things like is that you know you can't really--. You can avoid situations like that, but avoiding them doesn't deal with them. And and I think even though that's not a real safe way to think, I mean it's a way I really often think about it. You know I started painting my nails actually in college when I was an undergrad.

CNK: Which was close to home?

#10: It was at ... so about halfway between here and home. But at the time I mean it wasn't really an issue on such a small campus. Especially a small religious college. Excuse me. With such a small religious college safety wasn't a really big issue so I could ignore it then, but when we went out places I never really thought about it because I thought, if something really does happen I mean it's probably, that would have happened anyway. Because I'm not--. When I'm out with my friends as I said you know they say I'm pretty flashy, so I don't think my nails being painted would make that much of a difference. So I never really think that much about it. But then you know also it becomes an issue of when you let something like that really change who you are. Because I mean if I decide today, and this is another attitude that my mother often took, if I decide today because of the way people will react to it, then tomorrow I might decide that I can't wear this kind of clothes and the next day I may decide that I can only go out on certain days, and you know--. Eventually end up being pretty reclusive. So you kind of have to you

know acknowledge that I suppose, but at the same time if it happens it's going to happen, and I'll just have to kind of deal with it as it comes I suppose.

CNK: Any sense of how people back home are dealing with those issues and how the community is dealing with them?

#10: I think from what I know of the men who are out in the community, it's just--. And actually really it's only the one because the others have since moved away, but he is pretty reclusive, and you know he owns a hair salon right by his house. But he rarely goes out, and when he does I mean he's he's very much that part of the community that's there and you know everybody just kind of walks by, and say, "Oh you know that's so and so he's gay but he's nice." And just kind of ignores the fact that he's there, I mean people will carry on conversations with him et cetera, et cetera, but he's not really a part of the community.

And I'd say for the women that are out in the area it's really a whole different world because--. As far as the community is concerned I wouldn't really know how to how to phrase it. It's almost like it's more acceptable to be a lesbian in that you know the guys are quick--. The guys in the area are quickly accepting of it for various reasons, and women just sort of pass over it like it's not necessarily that much of an issue. And the older people in the area, of course, complain about it, but even they don't pay as much attention to it. I'm not really sure why that is. I mean I'm not sure if it's just me seeing it from a different perspective because I'm not in it as much. I'm not seeing it from their perspective, and I'm seeing the gay male perspective from a direct perspective. I'm not

sure if that's it, or if it's just there is a difference and I just don't know why. I mean it's but it's strange. I mean I don't--.

CNK: Any instances of bisexuality or transgenderism come up back home?

#10: Transgenderism no. I do know one woman in the--. Actually I would say most of the women in the area that I know that have come out are pretty much identify themselves as bisexual, because most of them either have, or still are, dating men. You know depending on the situation I'd say there's, there are two women that I know back home that are now pretty exclusively dating women. One of them has children and just got a divorce. The other is just dating women. And then one of the other women that I know of that's pretty open about her relationship with another women is also still married and has children, and maintain her relationship with her husband so. Kind of a lot of different cases, and not enough consistency to really make any overall assertion about any of them.

CNK: This has been great. Is there anything we missed that you feel we should be talking about?

#10: I don't think so. Think that's my life in a nutshell.

CNK: Any poetry or writings of yours that talk about these things at all that you want to share?

#10: You know I did bring(...)

CNK: OK. And read a poem here?

#10: Right. This is called *A Myth* and it's actually about my grandmother that I was talking about earlier:

I ran as a child through thorn fields opening myself to the pain of it because land is God, and God love, and love to a child is mostly punishment. You were there waiting switch swaying at your waist so you dabbed each cut with saltwater and iodine sighed and jerked my arms every time I flinched. Standing beneath the old pine shadowed by their heavy limbs we watched my skin streak, and spot the color of rust where the bad had been carved out of me. Here in these last three days I hold a glass to your lips, and wait for you to drink. If I lift the bottom of the blanket I can see your feet beginning to curl, pulling in at themselves, creased as cruel sculptures, and catch myself making promises to the dead. What I almost see the above your bed, inches from your swollen stomach has nothing left to do. You are light enough to leave here on your own. My last words to you are a confession. I'm not like the other boys who stand on the corner of West and Liberty with their backs to brick. The ones who smoke hand rolled cigarettes and whistle and the girls who passed. You nod and sigh a slow and quiet say, "I know, I know. You've always, dear, been too good for hand rolled cigarettes" When finally you have had enough of me your nails grown deep into my wrists cutting small moons that open and smile.

This is called *He Calls From A Payphone in California*:

"Listen," he says. I hear the breath of waves, a bird calling far away. He wants to tell me about men who walk the beach alone, their eyes on the ocean like captains wives watching for a sail, and how he is lonely because none of them look much like me.

Between us there are many miles of imagined land. The desert belongs to someone else,

Georgia O'Keefe perhaps, and purple mountains topped with snow are only lines in songs.

CNK: Could you say that line again? Started with purple.

#10: And purple mountains topped with snow are only lines in songs.

[TAPE ENDS IN MIDDLE OF POEM ABOUT TUG BETWEEN FREEDOM OF CALIFORNIA AND FAMILIARITY, LOVE AND CONSTRICTION OF WEST VIRGINIA]