



**BROOKLYN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**



**CROSSING  
BORDERS,  
BRIDGING  
GENERATIONS**

### **WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies, other reproductions, and reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

- Brooklyn Historical Society is not responsible for either determining the copyright status of the material or for securing copyright permission.
- Possession of a reproduction does not constitute permission to use it.
- Permission to use copies other than for private study, scholarship, or research requires the permission of both Brooklyn Historical Society and the copyright holder. For assistance, contact Brooklyn Historical Society at [library@brooklynhistory.org](mailto:library@brooklynhistory.org).
- Read more about the Brooklyn Historical Society's Reproduction Rights Policy online: [http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn\\_Historical\\_Society\\_Reproduction](http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn_Historical_Society_Reproduction).

### **GUIDELINES FOR USE**

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.

2. This transcript is a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. As such, it may contain the natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, and repetitions that are common in conversation. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
3. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
4. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
  - Oral history interview with Narrator's Name (First Last), Year of interview (YYYY), Identifier/ Catalog Number; Crossing Borders Bridging Generations Oral History Collection, 2011.019; Brooklyn Historical Society.

**Oral History Interview with Svetlana Kitto  
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.099**

**Interview conducted by Manissa Maharawal at the narrator's home on June 5th, 2014 in  
Crown Heights, Brooklyn.**

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: This is Manissa McCleave Maharawal interviewing Svetlana Kitto on June 5, 2014, at her apartment in Crown Heights as part of the Brooklyn Historical Society Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations Oral History Project. Svetlana, do you want to start by just telling me where and when you were born?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I was born in London, England. [Date redacted for privacy]

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And is Svetlana Kitto your full name?

SVETLANA KITTO: My full name is Svetlana Julia Kitto, if you must know. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So let's start -- do you want to start by telling me about some early childhood experiences?

SVETLANA KITTO: Sure. What comes to mind? Well, I don't really have many memories of being in England. I kind of don't think I have any, which sort of sucks. I came here when I was three and moved to Hollywood. We lived on a street called Formosa. This was like when Hollywood was really dingy and druggy, a very druggy place. And it still has that quality to it, but not nearly like it was. I remember that there was a Chinese restaurant on the street that I lived, and it had like a big lobster or something on the side of it. And we lived in an apartment. I'm probably conflating two apartments, I'm not sure, but it was me, my mom, my dad, and my parents had like no money. But they wanted to give me like a little space of my own, so there was a kind of closet in the apartment that they tried to make really beautiful for me apparently and painted. I think I remember that place, and I think I remember like trying to read there. (laughs) My parents were drug addicts when I was a kid, like active drug users, so I don't know like if I really -- basically what I remember of being like a really young kid is like -- I just remember it being dark. Like I remember things being kind of dark a lot, like in the house like. I just don't remember a lot of -- I don't have a lot of -- I mean, I think most people don't have memories like before they were like five or something. But I do have

memories of preschool though, and that's when I was like three. So I went to a preschool called Christopher Robin, and, you know, I liked school, even when I was a little kid. I just liked school, I liked kids. I remember like naptime. I remember that was really hard for me to nap. I remember that there was a boy in my school named Matt who liked me, and he couldn't whistle, and so he would say "Treep troo" all the time, so he would be like treep troo to me. And I remember telling my dad that and him thinking it was so funny and like saying it to me all the time. My dad is English, and, you know, like I had a sense when I was a kid that my parents were foreign, and I have like thought it was so fun the way my dad was, and that was like this loud English person, and I half just wanted him to shut up all the time. And he was like, you know, very loud, just like a loud crazy person, like really extroverted. And I always had this like feeling with my dad that he was going to like make a joke and that it would like embarrass me. I mean, I'm saying that just because like I remember like with that little kid Matt, I remember like some sort of sense like "Oh, I hope my dad doesn't come to pick me up and like embarrass me somehow about that." And what else? I remember like the teachers at the preschool, this woman Maria, this woman Susan [00:05:00], and I remember like a lot of things being kind of like oriented around having to like go to the bathroom in preschool. It was like, "Who needs to go to the bathroom?" I don't know, it's just like I remember it was like a lot of like potty talk. (laughs) And... yeah, in terms of early childhood, like early, early, I think that's kind of it. No, I remember I had a best friend named [Chantilly], and I remember like her a lot around my house. We would play like make believe games all the time. Like we were really sort of left to our own. Like we were really kind of like left to our -- like me and then once my sister was born.

So my sister was born when I was five, and I think the age of five was a sort of big deal because my sister was born, and my parents got sober. So starting from like five on, I remember a lot more stuff. But before then, for whatever reason, I don't know if I blocked it out, I don't know if I actually am just like just don't remember it, but I don't have like strong recollections of it, like vividly. But I remember the night my sister was born. I was -- I had an aunt who was my -- so my mom is from Latvia, she grew up in Latvia. She has a sister who lives like in the Los Angeles area as well, and they were not

close, and it was always like they were so different from one another. My mom is thin, Sophie is big. My mom was like the talented star, Sophie was like the one who my grandparents were mean to or something like that. And my mom just had like a lot of sort of like animosity toward this person, and yet she took care of us all the time.

Like she was so -- like my parents were just not -- they were young parents, they were, like I said, drug abusers, and they were just not like very equipped to take care of young children. So they were always like sort of dumping us off onto like my grandparents or my aunt. And I remember having the sense of this and mentioning it just because it was like I remember like feeling like "You don't like my aunt, but you always leave us with my aunt." And she was -- so that, so somehow my mom, they moved here when I, when my mom was like 17 or something -- no, no, no, she was like -- sorry, that's not true. They moved here when she was 14. She went to high school at Hamilton High, which is like where I went to high school as well, totally coincidentally. And, you know, she describes it as like it was just so mind-blowingly crazy to her to be here. Like it was the '70s, there were lots of like big blondes with big breasts. It was like very like - - it was a very sensual time. (laughs) And my mom was like this scrawny Latvian child, like she was a kid. She wasn't a grown up at all, like at all.

She moved to the States, and she was just thrust into this public school environment, and she -- like I remember being at, like I'd be at my grandparents a lot, like my grandparents were like, you know, like they were just -- they didn't know what to do with kids, whatever, and I would just like be in their house sort of like entertaining myself, and I would just look at these pictures of my mom in high school. And like she had this like long blondish-brown hair, and it like so shiny and so straight and parted in the middle. She was so pretty, and I would just like look at her like sort of longingly like "Oh, I wish I was with my mom." I loved hearing about like her as a kid. So when she was in high school like she was obviously like really out of her element. She just hated it. And she didn't speak English, they didn't speak a word of English, and they had no money. My grandmother worked as like a seamstress, but when they first moved [00:10:00] to the States she worked in some kind of sweatshop situation, and my

grandfather, I think he worked -- I mean, he ended up working like in like some sort of manual labor job that was like shipping, and I think he was just doing work like that.

So I guess I should just talk about my grandparents a little bit. So my grandparents, they moved to the States when they were in their '40s, and they had already had like a full crazy life before they came here. They were Holocaust survivors. My grandmother grew up in a very big family, like a kind of lower-class family, Jewish. They spoke Yiddish in the home. She had like nine brothers or something like that, and she had a mother, a stepfather, and I think her father -- her mother like divorced her father or something like that, which was really weird. Anyway, she grew up with a lot of shame about being poor. Those are the kinds of stories she told me about, like going to school and like being embarrassed of her jacket and like hiding her jacket so that people wouldn't see it and stuff. And just really being so obsessed with that, obsessed by that. And when she was like I want to say 12, but I'm not totally sure, she was walking home one day -- oh, also she told me once that like her parents -- I was interested in this because there's so much like addiction in my family. So I was interested in like -- and she's so like saintly and she's like -- cause my grandfather was like a pretty bad alcoholic, and she's like so saintly about herself. So when she was still alive I would ask her a lot about like what her parents were like, and they were apparently really into gambling, and she hated that. Like she would, when she was a very young child, she would like try and stop it from happening. Like she was -- I mean, my grandmother was like wonderful, but she was like a really controlling person, like "You should be like this." She was very bigoted about many things. I never came out to her. Like when my sister had a black boyfriend, my grandmother basically wouldn't speak to her. Like she was, you know, she had these really horrible bigoted ideas. And I fought her on it like most of my life, and then in the last few years of her life I just kind of like tried to just enjoy her and like not change her, cause it was like never going to happen. And I never came out to her, and that was fine. Oh, I'm gay. (laughs) I feel like I should say that, because it's like, what does that mean? Right, I'm gay. So, but anyway, it's interesting, like -- I'm, I guess, whatever, she -- so she grew up like a very oppressed person, you know, with no money and just trying to like piece together a very basic life of like eating,

you know. And then when she was around 12 years old, she had just started going to school -- it's like really sad. You know, she had just started going to school. Somehow that happened. Like she always loved learning and wanted to learn and like be educated, and it was like somehow that happened, like maybe her stepfather managed to put her through school or they knew someone who worked at the school or something, something. And then all of it sort of fell apart when the Germans invaded Latvia. She was on her way home walking to her mother's house, and she heard gunshots, and she got really scared. She saw her Tyotyia Sonya, who was her mother's sister, so she was my great aunt? Yeah. She was like fleeing the city to get on a train, and my grandmother was like, "Where are you going?" She was like, "Come with us," like "The Germans are here." Like "It's a shit show." Those weren't her words, but -- and my grandmother was like, "No, I can't do that. I can't leave my family." She started to walk toward the house, and that's when she heard gunshots, and she got really scared, and she turned around and got on a train to a village in Russia and spent the rest of the duration of the war at like some sort of work camp in Russia called like Polkor [00:15:00] or something. I can't remember the name. And, you know, it was like, she was there with her, with Tyotyia Sonya, and they -- she's like -- she told me a bit about it, like how it was like, you know, there were rations and like she learned how to like cheat the system a little bit so that she could get more food, get more bread, get more potatoes. Everything was like about bread and potatoes basically. She also told me a story about like how like someone who in some sort of position of authority had a thing for her. She was very beautiful. There were pictures of her over there. She was -- both my grandparents were very gorgeous people, and at some point, you know, I think she was like kind of like aware of her like sexuality, and she -- but she was -- like whenever she would tell these stories she would be like "But I never gave it to him." (laughter) "But I used it" kind of thing, like that was the insinuation.

Anyway, she didn't know what was happening with her family, but when she came back she found out, and that was that her parents and her brothers were killed, like all of them murdered. And there were two sort of major kind of cleansing actions that happened in Latvia during the war where -- I mean, there was -- people were rounded up and put into

a ghetto, was what it was called, and I'm pretty sure that they were in the ghetto, and then there were two kind of rounds of like mass murders where people were marched to forests and killed, gunned down like, you know, just another one of these stories of people like walking in the cold, having to -- like in the murderous cold and the winter and like having to un-- get naked, undress, and then just getting shot like en masse.

So I didn't really -- I grew up like knowing that my grandparents were Holocaust survivors, and that was like sort of my entire relationship to Judaism. Like we didn't celebrate holidays, like I didn't go to Hebrew school, like there was nothing Jewish about my life, because my mom also like has very complicated relationship to Judaism, you know, which makes sense. Because basically after the war my grandfather's story is that his parents were murdered, too, and his sister was like taken. He was put into the ghetto actually, my grandfather was. He didn't escape. Then he escaped the ghetto, then, you know, then he like went to a work camp, then he like joined the Russian resistance. He spoke a lot of languages, so he came from a much more educated family than my grandmother did. He spoke German, he spoke Russian, he spoke Yiddish, he spoke Hebrew. He spoke Latvian, they both spoke Latvian. So he was like able to outsmart people and like convince people that he was German or like, you know, these sorts of stories. And he joined the Russian resistance, and he ran away from the Russian resistance because he -- they wanted -- you know, they were going to put people on the front line, and it was like the Russian resistance was great because it was like a counterbalance to like German -- to Nazis, but at the same time it was like "You die for Russia," and like... And it didn't care if you were Jewish or anything, and it had no sort of sensitivity to that sort of thing, like... (laughs) There was just like Russians and Reds. So on one hand like I grew up with the, like being told that the Russians saved my grandfather's life, because they did, but on the other hand like he's Latvian, so -- my grandparents just had this very sort of mixed thing. Because on one hand they were Jewish, but on the other hand they were Latvian, and so they had like Jewish allegiances and then they also like grew up in Latvia and loved their country. Like they really had that feeling of loving their country, like -- which I think is sort of like a thing that I don't like identify with, you know. So they grew up loving their country and loving the



traditions of it, as in like the foods and the costumes and the songs and like that kind of thing. But like they were Jewish, so they also had their own thing going on. And it was - - I think, my understanding of it is like it wasn't that there wasn't like anti-Semitism, but it was sort of -- like they were just around Jews, like my grandmother was. Then my grandfather was in like a different class [00:20:00]. He just sort of got to like be privileged, you know what I mean? He was privileged. And then it was taken away, and I think it felt like a really big betrayal, because it was like people who were his parents' friends, like the, like the sheriff of the police, like sold them out and like took them to their death. So there was that sense that the Latvians were the -- like there was always like the Latvians -- the Germans, Germans came in for two days, and they didn't even have to stay because the Latvians were happy to murder us. But then, so all -- knowing all this, it's just interesting that after all this happened where there was like a 100,000 Jews, and they were murdered down to like 10,000 or whatever it was, that my grandparents returned to this place. I mean, where else were they going to go? People are always like, "Why did they go back?" and it's like such a like American way of looking at things. It's like, where are they going to go? They're Latvian. Like that's where they grew up. Like they're not going to like move to like Barcelona or something. Like you know what I'm saying? Like it's like -- so they went back, but it was like now it's Russian. Now it's Soviet, you know. We're all Russian or something. And so I grew up being told I was Russian. I was like Russian. I thought I was Russian. And then Latvia got independence, and then I was Latvian. I was Latvian and Russian, but then I wasn't Russian anymore, and like now I'm not Russian at all. It was like... (laughs) But I always grew up with this thing about Russia, like I just -- and then it developed [over time and maybe I'll talk about that.

Anyway, all of that to say that my mom was an immigrant in the States and very embarrassed of where she came from, like very. Like, you know, my grandparents always said, "We lost her when like we moved here" and stuff. And -- cause she -- she just rebelled really hardcore, like... She was a musician, a violinist, and very talented. It's kind of noisy here, isn't it? It's OK. Like very talented and like got scholarships and like went to Cal Arts, and it was like the '70s, and it was like Cal Arts had just started and

it was just nuts. It was just like this school that was just so hippied out, and my mom lost her mind and had so much fun, and everyone was like naked all the time, and like that's how she describes it. And then she got into drugs, and it was like forget it.

But I think before any of that happened, like my -- the people who sponsored my parents to come, my grandparents to come into the States were my grandfather's cousin, Dell. Dell was like this classic American Jewish woman, like four nose jobs later kind of thing, like so Jewish American. I don't know, like it's a sort of a stereotype, but it's like her daughter, you know, was -- the story was that when she had her sixteenth birthday, like she -- there was like a Corvette with a pink bow around it or something like waiting for her, which is like, it just couldn't be any further from like what my family was like, like they just were not materialistic people, nor did they even -- like they grew up -- they, it was so like Soviet communist times, you know, so they didn't like, after the war they had just very humble lives. I think they were like in some ways very happy. Like they had a community. It's sort of hard for me to understand it, because I'm like how is it that you lived there -- anyway, how is it that you lived in Latvia and it was like -- how did you feel OK? But I don't know.

Anyway, so they had friends who were Jewish, who were not Jewish. They became atheists, like they sort of denounced any sort of like -- I mean, it was also like Soviet times, but... But my mom was blonde, and she didn't look like them, and I think she tried to like deny where she came from and stuff. Like she actually did, when she met my dad, told him that she was half Jewish, which was not true. She was fully Jewish. And she was very smart, and she like lost [00:25:00] her accent and like, you know -- I don't think she was trying to be American though. It wasn't, it wasn't about being American. It was about being not what she was (laughs) and like being sort of I think cosmopolitan and like -- I think it was more about class than anything else. Because she was a violinist, and I think she was embarrassed of like my grandparents actually. And my dad like came from such a different background. Like it just couldn't be more different. He was English. He came from like a kind of aristocratic background, like his mother -- his mother's parents, her father was -- I don't really totally know the story exactly very well, but he was an imperial officer in the Raj, and he did some things. I

don't really know all of them. He, you know, they lived in Peshawar at one point, like with my grandmother, Esther, and they raised her to be an aristocrat, and she like made choices to like completely separate herself from that stuff, which is sort of a weird way of putting it. Basically she got pregnant at a very young age and embarrassed them. And like it wasn't the '60s yet, but she was sort of behaving that way, like it was. Like my dad always like talks about like it being like the '60s started kind of like in the '50s -- it's like hard to say (laughs) -- and continued into the '70s. But anyway, so yeah, she's a really illustrious character, and I've written about my, this side of my family, both sides, because they're interesting. She just was kind of like trying to be bohemian, and she met my dad's dad, Francis, who was like a -- you know, he wasn't like an aristocrat, but he came from like an upper middle class family. He went to Cambridge. He studied classics. And basically they, and she, and, you know, so, yeah. I mean, there's, whatever, I could go on and on and on. I haven't even talked about myself. I don't know if I should. But anyway, I'm just going to keep talking, I guess.

But so her and my grandfather decided that they wanted to start a school. My grandfather was like a pilot in World War II, which was something my dad is very proud of, which is interesting because like I don't have those kinds of feelings, but it's interesting how proud of that he is. And he had studied classics at Cambridge, and she was sort of like flopping all around. I don't really know what she was doing exactly. I think she was working, Esther was working like in London. She was actually really good friends with Quentin Crisp. That was like one of her best friends. So they decided to start a school in like 1945 I want to say -- right after the war. There's a lot of this kind of like postwar idealism happening. So they wanted to start a school and sort of answer to England's like horrible school system. And there was a lot of like liberal schools popping up, and they like went with that and ran with it and like started a really crazy school that was like insane actually. And started with the most positive and beautiful of intentions, but ended up being like a real shit show, like with kids doing whatever they wanted, drugs, rampant drug use, abuse, and eventually like the school had to be like closed, because it was so far gone and insane.

And that's where my dad was raised, like in this sort of like -- so the kids who were at the school were kids, so in England it was like, you know, kind of what you like think of like Charles Dickens and stuff. It was like kids who like grew up poor or kids who were abandoned by their parents just literally like had nowhere to go. So like their school like took in all these kids from all these sort of [00:30:00] harsh backgrounds and were like, oh, yeah -- there was like no real structure, you know. It was just like -- it was just an experiment that was happening at a lot of different schools at that time. They took their cues from like -- I can't -- Summerhill, which was like the big, the first like liberal school in England. And it was an experiment that sort of really backfired, and my dad grew up in that environment, and he started using drugs when he was like eight. Like it was crazy times, and he was like, you know -- it was just a really -- it was, yeah. And basically like it ended up being kind of horrible, I think, really, and like all his siblings were abused, like -- I don't know how much to go into it, because it's kind of, whatever, but basically it was just -- it didn't work out. (laughs) And, you know, my dad -- so that's where my dad came from. He came from this sort of like, you know, English family that like ended up being sort of epitomizing some of the spirit of the '60s before it was the '60s kind of thing. Then he, my dad, was like a very -- you know, he was really into music. He played in lots of bands, did a lot of drugs, was kind of like, you know, like music was his thing, and literature. So yeah, they came from really different backgrounds. I feel like my dad - - I don't know. I mean, like I want to say like I feel like my dad had a lot of kind of... Like, I don't know. Just to say like I think that, you know, he had some kind of like xenophobic ideas, my dad did, and I think that like my mom lying about being Jewish wasn't just because of her. That's my sense. Because my feeling growing up was like my grandparents -- my grandfather like really didn't like my dad, like really did not like him. And he'd always like tell me stories about him, like over -- my Jewish grandfather would like always tell these stories like over and over again about how "Did you know your father one time said to me that, said 'Why aren't Jews a race? Why don't you just call yourself a race?'" And I was like, OK, well, I don't really know what that m -- I know that that's bad, like I know a lot of people think that's bad. I don't really understand it though. Like he just had this feeling about my dad, that he was anti-

Semitic. That was his feeling about my dad. But really the problem with him also was that he was nuts and wild, and my parents were fucking nuts like and wild, and they just wanted her to marry someone like normal, you know, and not like this rocker something something, like crazy person, like unstable person. Like they just -- my mom did not like do what they wanted her to do basically. They wanted her to be -- my grandmother. It was mainly my grandmother. My grandfather was always just kind of like mouthing off and angry, but really he was just drinking all the time, and that's what was going on. Like he wasn't as invested. But my grandmother lived through my mother when she was a child, and my mother was like a ballerina and a violinist and they gave everything to her to make her into like some kind of success, you know. Not even like a star, but just like a success. Because my grandmother had had her childhood like basically taken from her by the war and by so much poverty, so... So for my grandparents, they were just like why -- to them, like my mother just like took all the opportunities and flushed them down the toilet. That was how they felt. But for her it was like she was just really suffocated by them, like she just felt really suffocated by them and like -- so she rebelled. Like sometimes I think she's still rebelling, which is kind of weird, because she's like -- because they're dead, and she's like [00:35:00] in her late fifties at this point. But I feel like she's still finding herself in this way. But anyway, so that kind of influenced a lot like how I was raised, because I was raised very hands off, like my mom was like "I'm not going to like suffocate you." So when I was a kid I -- do you want to ask me any questions?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I was wondering how your parents met.

SVETLANA KITTO: They met at a party. They met at a party in LA, and I think that they were really crazy about each other, like really really. And they would just like sit around talking, like that was their sort of thing. Like I feel like I've heard that described, like they would sit around talking for hours at parties, and just like they were very emotionally connected. They were also very passionate about one another. And they got married in Los Angeles, and then they moved to England because my dad had so much family there that they thought it would be -- like so many family and so much friends, so many friends, they thought it would be easier. He was a chef. My dad was a chef. And

so they moved to England, but I think like the drug stuff was just too crazy and like having me. So they had me there. And then they decided to move back to Los Angeles to be near my grandparents, who compared to like all their family friends, you know, I think seemed pretty sane. Because like -- so my dad just like had this -- he like rolled deep. Like he had lots of family friends like who were like not -- I mean, I guess I'm calling them, they were like friends who were like family. Like when he was like 17 years old, he -- he hooked up with this woman named Antonia who was like 20 years older than him, and she already had like a brood of children who were like close to him in age. But she was with him -- he was with her for like 10 years, and, you know, she was like really into India. She would like go to India all the time, like English people do, you know? And then my dad went to India, and he just like really -- he was really, you know, interested in like spirituality, and like he learned a lot of that stuff from her. The relationship was very important to him, and those children ended up being like his children slash siblings. So those people are kind of like my somethings. I don't know what they are. And their children are like my cousins or something. So -- but it -- you know, so it was like a really like New Agey time, you know, with like just weird stuff going on and a lot of experimentation happening. And I think it was just sort of actually very toxic and like fucked up in lots of ways, but it seemed like enlightened or something. Anyway, so my dad was very much like a product of his time, you know, like he like got an Om tattooed on his hand and like he was really into Otis Redding. You know, he was just like in the '60s, whatever. He didn't like the Beatles, he liked the Rolling Stones, he -- So I think they -- yeah, so they met, and I think that my mom to him was like very -- I mean, my understanding of what my mom was like was that she was like very loud, very opinionated. She was like -- because English people are not that way, you know. And my dad kind of is that way, but like when I would go visit my English family I'd be like -- I just feel like no one is talking, and no one ever talks about how they feel, and like I feel so uncomfortable. Like I just feel like everyone hates me. Like that was my feeling. Like I would go -- not like all of them -- anyone who's listening -- but I just like some, you know, like I would just be like -- like a friend of mine said recently, like a German friend of mine was like, like she was living here and

her visa ran out, and she had to go back to Europe. And she's living in London, and she was like "There's something about the English. They're just fundamentally ill at ease." And I was like, yeah, that's what it is. But my dad [00:40:00] is not that way. Like he's very sort of American in how like emotional he is and direct. So -- and my mom is like -- they're just talking about themselves and their feelings like all the time. It's like constant, you know. So -- but anyway, so yeah, they were living in England. I think it was really rough. I don't totally know the content of it, but they came back to the States and like probably stayed with my grandparents for a while.

And then they got sober, and that was a really big deal. So this was like the '80s, and they -- we were in LA. And I have like a lot of memories of going to AA meetings when I was a kid, like in Hollywood, and it being -- like in my mind I sort of romanticize that time, for sure. I know I do. But -- But I just remember like the meetings in Hollywood. I remember like I would go -- you know, they took me -- they went to meetings all the time, so like I was at meetings all the time. And I was like -- I remember there was like, you know, a meeting that they would go to like in Hollywood on Gardner like, and there was this babysitter guy named Dennis, and he took care of us and he wore a skirt. They had lots of gay friends, my parents, like tons.

And my dad was a caterer at this point, so he had this like small catering company, and he would do all the prep work like in our house. So the first sort of like major house that I remember is our house on Detroit. That was like also in Hollywood, like really in the heart of Hollywood. Like houses are so expensive there now. When I was living there, it was like drug dealers in front of our house every day and graffiti on the wall of like -- I remember there was this one graffiti that my dad would paint over it over and over again where someone would just would keep painting like a giant dick on the wall, like on the driveway wall. And I was so embarrassed of this, like I was just mortified. Basically a lot of my childhood was feeling embarrassed, of like feeling like I wished my -- like on one hand -- it was like, again, on one hand I thought it was fun, but on the other hand I was like why can't it just be normal. Like I would watch -- I watched a lot of movies and a lot of TV, and I just wanted to like have a sort of what I saw to be an American childhood. Like I wanted to live -- I wanted us to live in like something from an '80s

movie, you know what I mean? It was just nothing like my family was like, not at all, not even remotely, you know. Yeah, like my dad drove a giant Land Rover from the '70s that sort of like hulked along, and it was like this giant cream-colored car. And it didn't have any seat belts, and we just -- me and my sister would just sort of like roll around in the back, like who even knows. Anyway, so I have a lot of memories of that house. It was like such a strange intersection of things. Like on one hand -- like they were just sort of like -- it was sort of shitty, right? Like it was a kind of like -- the house was falling apart, and the neighborhood was kind of broke down, you know. But on the other hand, it was like we always ate like the most amazing food, because my dad was a chef. And my dad brought like some of his like English upbringing, like he grew up on like a sort of -- like the school was on land with animals and stuff, so we always had tons of animals. We had like ducks and geese, and at one point we had like cats, dogs, ducks, geese, a turtle and two rats. Like it was like that. And I remember be-- Actually, as I'm saying that, I remember being like "We have four ducks, a goose," like just like the way I talk. I was like very proud of that or something.

And -- but I also had this feeling of like not wanting to bring people back to my house, because I just felt like it just wasn't up to par. That's -- that was the feeling that I had, that like it just wasn't good enough, like it wasn't like my friends' houses that were like just sort of like middle-class people. It just -- I don't know. It just -- it was just -- and also, you know, like to be honest, like it was also [00:45:00] kind of like, crazy a little bit. Like my dad was kind of -- he could be really fun, but he could also be like raging, you know. And when I was -- I mean, things got better and better like as they were sober for longer, and this is what happens when people get sober. It's like their lives improve, you know. But when I was really young it was like the couch was like really shitty. It always smelled like piss. There was like cigarette burns in it from when they'd just like pass out, you know what I mean? So there was like evidence of that. And like, you know, but like -- I remember like -- so my parents divorced when I was eight, and my mom left. And that was great, as far as I was concerned. I wasn't upset about it at all. My sister was like devastated. My sister always was like the sort of emotional something of the family. Like she was sobbing, and like, you know, she would just like, and I didn't have any



feelings about it. And my mom left my dad and moved into an apartment like right by -- it was on Sunset and Laurel, and that was like right at the mouth of Laurel Canyon. And I went to school, I went to elementary school in Laurel Canyon. They like got me into that school. It wasn't like my district school, but like that was one thing they did was they got -- they made sure that like we went to like a school that, you know, had good -- like a good infrastructure, like that wasn't falling apart. Because there was a lot of schools in Hollywood that like just had no funding. So it was like "Don't go to Gardner," like as if like if I go to Gardner I'm going to be pregnant at eight. (laughter) Like that was the kind of like... But like -- so they got, you know, me into this like good school, Wonderland, Wonderland Avenue Elementary School. It was great. I loved it there. And so my parents, yeah, they divorced, and like I said, my parents had lots of like gay friends, and my mom, her best friends were these two gay men, Al and Daniel, and both of them died of AIDS. And it was like this thing that happened where it was like literally I could name eight people to you right now, they all died, and it was all like within a few years. It was like this sort of huge wave that happened. Oh, and a lot of their friends were from their like sober community. Well, no, all their friends were from their sober community, and like my dad employed people, and I just -- and he had like relationships with these men. And it was interesting. I don't know. It was like he was always sort of like mocking homosexuality, but he was also like a very sort of effeminate person in some ways and not in other ways. So I don't know what he was doing exactly, but, but he was -- also my dad was always falling out with his friends. Like I remember that. It was like, you were really really close, and then they were out, and they got into a fight because he said this thing. My dad was like -- anyway, so I remember that. So that was really intense for my mom, like these people dying. Like these were her best friends, and like I remember them pretty well. I remember Daniel quite well, like his -- you know, he came from a sort of like rich family, and we would go swimming at their house in the Hollywood Hills, and I remember that very well. And he was dying, and his parents were like, you know, like they felt guilty that he was dying, but before -- but like he hadn't -- you know, they hadn't accepted their gay son until he was dying. So it was just like, you

know, and I was -- I remember being really aware of all this stuff when I was a kid. There wasn't like much of a barrier between me and like the grown-up world. And my mom took me everywhere and my sister everywhere, and I just remember loving it. Like it's kind of like the highlight of my childhood, like when I was like eight and nine and my mom got her own apartment. And this thing I'm saying about like wanting to be normal, like I don't think it was like that I wanted to be -- like in some ways it was like that I wanted to be like American, but it was also just that I wanted to be taken care of, and like I wasn't really being taken care of in nor-- like we weren't being taken care of. But something happened to my mom when she moved out of my dad's house. She like -- she stopped being a violinist. She was like "I don't want to do that anymore," and she started working as a music editor in film, and she started to like supporting us and her, and we lived in this tiny apartment. And it wasn't about -- like it wasn't that it was -- we lived in a one-bedroom, like me, my sister, and my mom. Like we lived in a bed. My mom sometimes slept [00:50:00] on the couch like, and I didn't feel any of that. I wasn't like, "Oh, we're so poor! I wish we lived in a mansion!" or something. Like I was just thrilled to be being taken care of by my mom -- I'm actually just realizing this right now -- and like her just doing her fucking thing. Like she was doing her thing. She bought herself a little car. She did -- you know, just making money, and like I really -- it really like -- I loved that she was doing that. I remember having that sense about it, like she was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry like that I'm home so late," but to me like I was just like so proud of her. And also I just thought my mom was so cool. Like she was cool. She looked -- she had like great style, like she wore like velvet leggings and flannels and like combat boots and like little hats, and like she was just -- she looked great, and I really looked up to her, you know. But she was actually really depressed and having a hard time because she wasn't like with someone new, and my dad was. So that was my dad's girlfriend at the time, Teresa. Teresa was like Irish Catholic American person, so like we would -- she sort of like introduced us to this like American world that I was like so about. I was like, this is so fun. Like we never went to Easter parties with egg hunts. She made us meatloaf with ketchup on it. Like I was just like, yeah, we're Americans.

Like I loved that stuff. I mean, I loved the mixture of it, you know, but I loved that Teresa was around.

And so, yeah, I grew up kind of like -- I guess when I was a kid I like really romanticized the English side of my family, because when I was nine I had this life-changing thing that I did where I went to England by myself. My parents were like "You need to go spend some time in England like and see where you're -- and meet your family," you know. So they sent me, and I had like my own stewardess lady and like -- it was a big deal. Now looking back I'm like that was kind of crazy, again, but at the same time it wasn't, because it was great, you know. So I went to England, and I loved it. Like I lost my mind. I like loved my aunt, loved my cousin, loved my other aunt, like I just had a great time. And it was so fun. And like it's always fun when you go on a trip, and it's not really how life is, you know, but I was like "Oh, I wish I lived here," and that my aunt was my mom and that I loved -- and then I had all these ideas like, "Oh" -- because we didn't have any family, you know, in Los Angeles. Like we had my grandparents, but -- so we had my grandparents, but we didn't like all do things together, you know. And then there was my aunt and my cousin, Alex, but my mom didn't like them. I just like inherited -- I was like, well, you know. And I -- I did like going to my aunt's, but we didn't have, like, you know, she was like sort of an emotionally shut-down person. Like we didn't like a relationship. It wasn't fun, you know. I loved my cousin Alex. But like in England we had fucking hordes of people who knew us and were like, "Lana, I haven't seen you since you were three," da da da da, you know, and I was just like of course got tons of attention. And I was just like I loved English things, like I wanted to eat bangers and mash and sausage rolls and, you know, eat like Cadbury's chocolates and, you know, like I just -- and I had this idea that we should have never left, like if we hadn't left then we'd have this giant family. And I sometimes still feel like that, like -- because now it's been years, it gets to be years and years and years between seeing these people, and it's like I don't feel like as connected to them, you know. But when I was little I did. So I have to say like when I was young I sort of like was really interested in the English side of my family like more than I was with my mom's side of the family. And I think that's kind of -- like looking back I feel like I sort of like got some weird idea

there that like -- like I just -- I don't know what it was exactly, but it was like I just felt like it wasn't as impressive or something like that. Like I felt sort of like, you know, like the Eastern European side of my family, it was like [00:55:00] there was a lot of darkness there, and there was a lot of unhappiness there. And like, I mean, my grandparents were never treated for what they went through, you know. Like they were never like -- my grandfather like -- I mean -- they almost starved to death for like five years, and then their entire families were murdered, and then they just went on and lived their lives. They didn't like live their lives very happily, you know. I would go to my grandparents' house on the weekends, and that was like, I don't know. I spent a lot of time with them when I was a kid, and that was my connection, like I said, to like being Jewish, to being from that part of the world. Like that was it. So it was like, "Oh, I'm Jewish, I guess." Like that's how I felt about it, like, "Oh, I'm Jewish." It's funny now because like I do this like Jewish history project, and people like think I'm so Jewish or like I know stuff about Judaism, and I actually don't. Like I don't -- everything I've learned about Judaism I learned like in the past few years from doing this like Jewish history, Jewish studies project, and that was an accident that I got it. But I was really -- so when I... Anyway, so it took me a while to understand that like they were really interesting. Like I didn't understand that they were interesting. I like sort of -- what I'm saying is I sort of absorbed my mom's like running full-fledged the other way from this side of her family. Like I just was like, you know. And like the English side of my family was so like happy and crazy and like, you know. I don't know. So yeah. And in terms of like the house and how it was, what it was like, to live like -- you know, it was like I'd go to my grandmother's house and I wanted them to just feed me. Like I loved the food. I loved my grandmother's cooking so much, like latkes, matzo balls, like that was like everything to me, you know. And then I loved my dad's cooking. Food was sort of a big thing and still is for me, like I'm looking at that right now, but it's like -- it was like I loved food. Like I just loved it. I wanted -- I loved my dad's cooking, I loved my grandma's cooking. I loved my mom's cooking, too. So -- so, yeah. I guess my feeling was just kind of like that -- I just didn't really understand who I was. Like I

just think I felt sort of confused about who we were. Like who were we? I didn't... I knew we weren't like American, but like I was growing up American, you know. And about me, like I -- when I was like in elementary school I got scouted by like an acting person, and I started doing acting when I was a kid. And it was great, because it was like a way for me to like get out of my house when I was a kid, where I like -- you know, it was just like sort of like "Do whatever you want," and no one was like entertaining us or me. And so that was really fun, and I really liked that. And just all around, I was very like sociable, and I liked kids and I liked school. I loved to read, like I just consumed books. Like I would read all night, kind of like addictively actually. And I, you know, like, I was just -- I mean, I don't want to be too psychological about it, but I just didn't -- like as a kid, a really young kid, I didn't get like a lot -- I just got a lot out of school, because I wasn't getting a lot like in terms of like being taught to read, you know, all these things. I just, you know, as soon as I got into school I was like, phew. I just like sucked it all up, you know. And like I loved the acting thing, and I just, you know, yeah. I just liked doing stuff. I was really into stuff, you know. I was really into like movies, books, like me and my friend wrote plays. Like we just did stuff, you know.

Anyway, then when I got into junior high it was [01:00:00] like a different ballgame. It was like suddenly things were different. Like you couldn't just be a kid, you know. It was like do you have boobs, who are your friends, and I just kind of like stopped trying at things, and I just like started like trying to like hang out with kids. Like that was like all I wanted was to be around, like just hang out. Like I stopped doing well in school. Like I just ditched school and like hung out with like the kids at my school who I thought were cool, and that would like sort of change from year to year, you know. And it was like I was really into like hanging out with the kids who listened to alternative music, and then I was like really into like hanging out with the taggers, you know. And like I started wearing a ton of makeup, like a ton, like it's ridiculous. Like I won't ever wear that much makeup like in my entire life that I wore in one day. Like I was just really like going through this thing of wanting to look -- like, I don't know, my parents just sort of watched me do it. I was just like wanting to be and look really different than what I looked like or something, and not feeling like -- and just wanting, yeah, just

wanting that, you know. Things just kind of kept coming to a head where I was like I had a bunch of friends over and we got drunk and then like someone like freaked out, and we had to call the police. Like just weird things like that, you know. Or like -- also like I was starting to like negotiate like sexual feelings, and I did not know how to do that at all. Like I basically was like I wanted to like kiss all my friends who were girls, and I was like that's disgusting, you can't do that. (laughs) So that was hard, and like, you know, I don't know. I mean, I think for a lot of people that age is just like kind of really -- I mean, for me it was like kind of revolting. Like it was just not pleasant. Like it just all --

END OF AUDIO FILE

Kitta Svetlana 20140605b

SVETLANA KITTO:[00:00:00] -- the feelings that were coming up, and just like the kind of shame, like the kind of shame that you experience on a daily basis just like being in your skin was really hard. And I also had this thing with acting happened where like I was doing all these like fun projects and da da da da da, and I liked it, you know. I don't know, did I like it? I mean, yeah, I did it. I liked it. Like it was fun, you know. I don't think I'd ever had that feeling of like "I love this," but I liked it. Like it was just a fun thing to do. I was a kid, you know. But then I remember like being like 10 or something and my mom taking me on an audition. It was like a real audition for like a Levis commercial, and we had to like fill out like our bust and our -- and I just remember feeling like I don't want to do this, I hate this, like cause I knew I didn't get the audition. And I was like -- it just stopped feeling fun, and my mom was like, "You know, you don't have to do this. Do you want to do it? I don't think you should do it." And I was like, "Yeah, I don't really want to do it anymore." Which like sometimes I'm like, was that the right thing to do, you know, and I just don't know.

I mean, I'm -- I was really grateful for my mom being like -- because my mom was a very like feminist person and like taught that to me very young. Like she was always talking about feminism like all the time, and like she hated Madonna! That was like her big thing, because we loved -- I loved Madonna. My mom was like "Madonna has set

the clock back 20 years!” Like she’s, you know, like a Catholic -- a girl dressed in a Catholic schoolgirl’s uniform being dragged away by two men, like that was from her book *Sex* or whatever. My mom would like talk about -- like she had these sort of sound bites, and that was one of them. Anyway, so -- and she was very pro-choice and was like really into that, and like I knew -- like she was very vocal about like how she had had abortions and people should have abortions. And like it was sort of like people should have abortions like more. That was like her kind of bent, which you -- you don’t hear a lot of that anymore, but that was like a thing. So she was like pro-abortion.

And like politics was a big thing in my house, by the way. Constant political arguments and like political discussion, like my mom and my dad. It was a very political household, like my mom was like “I’m a communist.” She was like “I grew up” -- I mean, she would say this stuff like she was like “I’m a communist,” but it was like, well, I hear you, but like you’re not really a communist, because like we live in Santa Monica. Not like you can’t like live -- but you -- like she wasn’t like in a communist organization.

Basically what she was saying, which I understand, was that she had like Marxist -- that was her like ideal. That was what she wished the world would be like or something. And my dad was like “I’m a socialist.” Anyway, they just were very political and like argued about politics and talked about politics like all the time. And I had these sort of like formative political experiences as a kid, like I remember like feeling sort of like as a young kid like maybe overly identified with like -- like just feeling very sort of like geared towards like identifying with people who were marginalized, you know, in a way, like maybe because we were an immigrant family. I don’t know why, really. But that was kind of the message I got in my house, and -- you know, mixed with other things though. Like sometimes my dad said really crazy offensive shit and still does, but it was also mixed with this kind of liberal leftism, too, you know, but also like mixed with like some white like non-awareness of one’s whiteness self kind of thing. And also like -- I don’t know, like -- lots of different things. I mean, I could go on and on about that.

But so -- but when I was a kid like the first kind of crazy -- well, first of all, I remember the LA riots, like I remember them very vividly. Like it was a huge deal in LA when that happened, and we lived in a neighborhood where there were riots. Like I remember there

was like an electronics store like down the street, and it got looted, and I remember like people running down the street with like TVs in their arms and stuff. And I remember the feeling in my house being kind of like “Yeah!” Like “Loot the shit!” Like that was [00:05:00] like the feeling, you know. And just like, yeah, being like identified with that, like that was how my dad was anyway. And I remember like his girlfriend at the time, Teresa, she was an artist, and she like painted with like glitter and like sequins, and I remember she like made this like piece that was like skyscrapers on fire. And it was like -- just the aesthetic then was interesting, like in LA it was all about like Mexico and like Mexican art and like the Virgin everywhere. And that -- like, Mexican art was all over my house. Like my dad loved Mexico. He used to take us to Tijuana all the time. He spoke horrible Spanish. He thinks it’s really good, but it’s like terrible. And he always had someone -- we always had like babysitters who were from like, you know, Guatemala or El Salvador or Mexico, and he would just speak horrible Spanish to them. (laughs) I’m like -- actually this woman, Emerita, who used to take care of me, like her daughter recently wrote me on Facebook, and it was so weird. But anyway. That was like really a part of LA living, you know. It was like -- that still is a part of LA living that’s so different from New York is that like, you know, every apartment building has a gardener. It’s like everyone -- people have like housekeepers and like that’s -- even if they’re not rich. You know, it’s like Brazil in that way. So that was like sort of the economy. I don’t know what it’s like now, but that’s what it was like when I was growing up.

Anyway, so, but -- so the thing that happened to me when I was a kid that was like a really big deal for me was when I went to this camp called Brotherhood Sisterhood Camp, and it like changed my life and like probably like -- I don’t know. It was a very formative experience. It was this camp. I went when I was 14, and it was like a camp -- a social justice camp. That’s what it was. And like I had political feelings as a kid. I don’t know. Like I was like -- I don’t know what they all were, but like I had them. Like I was like we had gay friends, you know. It was like people need to be defended, people need, like voice -- like I knew that. I knew that there was bad stuff happening, and that it wasn’t right, you know. I had like that sense. I also like had that sense because I grew



up in a house that felt very unfair to me in some ways, and I feel like I have this acute sense of things not being fair! And like it's not fair that like, you know, my dad says we don't have any money, and yet he spends all this money on himself, like stuff like that. Like I remember feeling very sort of like it's not fair, you know. And with the -- I somehow had the sense like with the AIDS stuff that there was something about it that wasn't right. It wasn't right, you know, and I think I felt very proud of the fact that like we like had gay friends and, you know. I don't know why, but I think I did.

Anyway, so I went to this camp, and it was like this camp that was all about like learning about race, gender, and like about like institutional racism and institutional sexism and how -- and white privilege. And like they did all these exercises to sort of illustrate those things, and it was mind blowing. Like it was really -- for kids who were like young, it was maybe weird a little bit, because we were all nuts anyway, and then it was just like sobbing, sobbing. Like, you know, it was like people talking across race about this, that, and the other, and people were being like, "These are the stereotypes that you have about us," and "No, no, no, no, no," and it was like, whoa! And then like the institutional sexism one, it was just like half the women were "I was abused." And it was like everyone had been fucking abused or raped, you know, like all -- that's when I became -- that was like my first like real thing was like I was like probably a more intense feminist than I am now. Like that's when I was like, "Whoa. All women get raped. What the fuck? This is fucked up." Like... And I was like my mom. (laughs) I went around telling everyone what I thought about everything. And I was in high school and I was like "You're not allowed to say 'bitch' to me or 'ho,' and you can't be my friend if you say that." And like I was like really on that.

I also have this memory -- I was interviewing someone yesterday, and I thought about this. Like the O.J. Simpson trial was a huge deal, huge. Like my high school I went to was like -- I don't know what the exact racial breakdown of it was [00:10:00], but it was like probably like 40% black or something. It was like a huge -- just the whole thing. I don't know what that was like here. Like I don't know if anyone cared about the O.J. Simpson trial here, because like it happened in LA, but it was a huge fucking deal, like huge deal. And people were like watching the trial, and like when he was acquitted at my

school it was like everyone was so happy and like lost it, you know. And I remember it being this real divide in my family, because my dad was like -- my dad had this sort of race politics that were interesting, where he was like -- maybe because he's not American -- where he was like "How could"-- like he understood racism, you know, and he was like "Well, it makes sense that like this system is fucked up." Like it makes sense that people feel like, you know, redeemed -- like there's some redemptive feelings here with him being acquitted, because of all like the black men who have been put in jail, you know, wrongly and like, whatever, like racism happening on that level.

And then I remember at the time my mom was -- so my mom was no longer a music editor. So what happened with my mom is just a bummer. Basically she like met this music supervisor guy who worked in films. He was her boss, and he was like kind of wealthy. And she was like, "I know what I'll do. I'm going to not work and like take care of you guys and his sons." And she just -- it was not a good fit for her, and like she's kind of been struggling ever since, because she liked stopped working for years, and like it wasn't right for her like at all. So at this time she was with Jeff, my stepdad, and I remember his reaction to the O.J. Simpson trial was just like, you know, just this like kind of white guy reaction. And I remember feeling squarely on the side of like that this -- that like "Do you believe that this system works anyway?" So like that's kind of how I felt about it is like what -- you know, and really having this sort of developing understanding of like systematic racism and sexism and just being really interested in that stuff. Like that's kind of what I was into, you know, and feeling less interested in like what was right or wrong or something like that, like about the O.J. Simpson trial, like if he was guilty or not guilty, and just more interested in like why people would be happy about that, how that made a lot of sense. And how, I don't know, just the feeling -- I just hated my stepdad for the way he was thinking about it. Like I was really like -- and I just, in general, like me and him used to get into a lot of arguments about race actually, and me and my mom did, too. Because my mom was like "You care more about -- You care more about, like, people of color than you do about women," and "This is what -- women always get thrown under the bus," and da da da da da da la la la la. She'd

argue with me and my sister about that all the time, probably still would, or something, as if it's like that, you know.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What was your stepfather's reaction?

SVETLANA KITTO: Well, I'm like trying to remember like the things that he said, but basically he was just like -- he was a fucking murderer, and he got acquitted! You know. I mean, that was like his reaction, but he was so angry about it. I'm like "Why are you so bloodthirsty for this man?" Like that's gross. That was my kind of reading of it, was like that it was like -- like an angry like white mob reaction to him getting acquitted. Like -- people get acquitted of things. Like why is this so -- why do people care about this so fucking much, you know? And that was kind of the sense I had. And he did. He cared about it so much, and yeah, he did.

So yeah, that camp like was a really big deal for me. I went on to be like a counselor at the camp. Like I was just really into that kind of work. Like I just thought it was like -- I guess I just felt like you couldn't be like in this world and like be smart and not like understand this stuff, and if you chose to like ignore it -- I had like very rigid ideas back then about -- like politically. I was like you're either, like you're either like choosing to ignore things, and you're an idiot, or you're like on -- like I felt very like, you know, like -- you know what I mean? Just like a very kind of us-against-them feeling about that, and I went into college like in that kind of [00:15:00] frame of mind, I think, like activism-wise.

And I also was like very confused as a young person about like what I wanted to do. So when I was in high school like I basically fucked around completely except when I was in English class I was like happy. When I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade I had this English teacher, and we had a section on poetry, and I remember the first poem I wrote was about money, and it was like "Money is evil, money is green." Like it was really bad, and it rhymed and everything. And my teacher was really into -- like he was trying to break me out of that. He was like "Go deeper," like, "Don't rhyme. Stop rhyming." And then I wrote this poem about Formosa Avenue, my first like street in LA. And he was like, "That's really good," you know. And I sort of like understood what writing was a little bit, what it was about for me, and I started to really like it. Like I was like "I love this," poetry

specifically, but only that. Like I didn't write essays, like I didn't want to do any of that stuff. I just only wanted to write poetry and stories, too. And -- anyway, but I was also like really into activism, and I like didn't know how I could like do both. Like, to me -- like I was just really confused. And I went to college like being like "I'm going to be a women's studies major" -- no, "I'm going to be an ethnic studies major" -- no, "I'm going to be -- I'm going to major in English, with creative writing" -- "no, I'm going to go to law school" -- "no, I'm going to do poli-sci." Like I was really confused about what to do. Like I just was like what is important? I was really -- you know what I mean? I think still about that, too. I'm like what is the best use of me? Like I felt -- and I really felt like it wasn't OK to just like be a writer. Like I didn't -- anyway, yeah.

So -- do you have any questions you want to ask me or should I just keep talking?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: You can just keep going.

SVETLANA KITTO: OK. Then I was a -- I'm just trying to think of anything important in high school. I mean, yeah, like so I had a boyfriend, and I like, whatever, it's not interesting really, I don't think. But I was sort of like, you know, yeah. Whatever. Anyway, I had boyfriends, and I was like -- I didn't like it, but I always had one. (laughs) And it never felt that great to me really. Like I was just -- like I was just like I didn't really like it. I don't know how to explain it, I just didn't like it. And I got my heart sort of broken at a very young age by a girl, actually, and I was so hurt and heartbroken. I mean, whatever. Like I thought she was going to like be my best friend or girlfriend or something. I was very young. I was thirteen, so like I don't know what I wanted, but I thought like something was going to happen with us, and then she just like never wanted to talk to me again. And it was very painful and I felt so ashamed, because I was like, I had these feelings that were gay. And I was like, this is -- and I was just -- I don't -- I mean, I don't know if I want to say like "Oh, I never liked any of the boys I was with or anything." But for me it was like it just made a lot of sense when like I had my first girlfriend. I was like, "Oh, OK." Not like it was so great, but it wasn't like "I don't like this."

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: When was that?

SVETLANA KITTO: My first real girlfriend I had when I was like 23. But I had like hooked up with girls and tried to be with girls, and it was always just sort of a disaster for some

reason. It was like she had a boyfriend or like I couldn't handle it. I mean, I wasn't like the most well-adjusted person, like young adult. Like I wasn't like -- I didn't know how -- I was like "I don't know how to do this," you know what I mean. I don't know what that means actually, because I'm like, who is? But anyway, like I went to college. And I went to UC Santa Cruz, and, you know, I took every kind of class, and I felt really confused. And I took this poetry class, and I remember my poetry teacher, he was like, "You should be [00:20:00] -- you should join the department and major in poetry." And I was like, "But I want to change the world," and he was like, "You're going to change the world by being a politician?" And I was like, "I don't know. How do you change the world?" Like I had this really acute sense of that, you know, that I -- sometimes I'm scared that I've lost... Like I feel like oral history has ruined me in some way, because -- but I mean, I can talk about that. But basically you know I just feel like because of where I came from, I just really felt really like identified with different kinds of voices than like the dominant voice. Like those were the books I liked, like I was just interested in immigrant stories and all kinds of different stories. Like that was like my interest, you know. And I just felt really like very -- like, you know, when I was in college like the big thing was Mumia. That was like what was going on.

And I got really -- so when I -- so I went to Santa Cruz, and I was like this is not working for me. I don't know. I was like constantly moving. Like nothing was right. Everything was always wrong. And it was like Santa Cruz is not working for me. Like my best friend was driving me crazy. I couldn't live with her anymore. I didn't know how to like just be like "Let's not live together," so I was like "I'm going to move and go to a different college." (laughter) And so I went to Mills. And it was in Oakland. And my closest friends at the time were at Berkeley, and they were getting involved in this like communist organization, and it was like -- have you ever read that book *The Secret History*? Well, it's a good book. But basically it was like so exciting and so interesting to me, and like they were like real leftists, like beyond anything even I -- like real radicals or something, or they were becoming real radicals. And I was like, "Whoa!" Like their analysis was so -- it wasn't even like the liberalism that I knew, it was like really about like smashing the state and not like as a joke, but for reals. And what was going on at the

time at Berkeley was there was all these ethnic studies cuts, and there was like all these protests and stuff. I think there was like a hunger strike, and it was a very big deal. And I was like so interested in it, and I -- it wasn't going on at Mills, but I would come to Berkeley all the time. And then simultaneously like my friend Mary Ann, who was like a big influence on me -- she's Egyptian -- and she was getting involved in this communist organization. And then our friend Omen, who's Indian, was getting involved with this communist organization, and then our friend Laura, who I went to high school with -- me and Mary Ann and Laura went to high school together, and Laura, like who had been like this like kind of goody-goody perfect girl in high school, valedictorian, was now like getting involved in this communist organization. And I was like "Wow!" I was so -- I was just like this is so cool. And they were -- I'm not going to like mention their name, but basically they were really crazy. And I was like so interested in it, you know. And I kept feeling -- like the big thing at the time was like about Mumia, and it was like people being divided between like new trial or just free Mumia, and that was a very big distinction obviously. Like what do you demand? And it was like just a lot for me is like loaded in just that, because that's what I learned about right then was like do you speak in the -- like do you ask for what you want knowing that like it might never happen? Or do you like, you know, look at -- like know the system that you're in and just try and work within it and ask for a free trial. But we were like, "But he's innocent. We don't think that he's possibly guilty, we think that he's innocent," you know.

So anyway, I would go to lots of protests and like, you know, I started meeting with this communist organization. But really my favorite thing in the world was just like to listen to my friends talk. It was sort of a magical time. Just listening to people talk about stuff was really interesting to me. We were all sort of like discovering different things and like new ideas and phrases and things that I had never thought about before that I was learning by like learning about Marxism. And it was a really big deal. Like I was like this is just true, like this analysis is true [00:25:00], and it's like does that mean I want to be a communist? I don't know, but this analysis of capitalism, that it's like rotten, that this is like a system that was based on slavery, that that's still here with us, you know, that that's not like -- the civil rights movement happened, and now things are what's-the-

problem kind of thing. Like all this sort of analysis was like very exciting to me. It made everything make sense. It was like, oh, yeah, yeah, totally, you know. But at the same time, like I would meet with these people. They were like really wanting to recruit people. I would meet with these people, and I was like I just don't feel like I want to do this though. And I felt really bad about that, because all my friends were like communists at this point. (laughs) I was like -- I was like why don't I want to do it? I was like I totally think it's true, but I guess I just felt like there was something about it that was too rigid for me, and I felt like I'm an artist, too. Like what about how I'm an artist? And I remember like I met with this one woman, and I still think about her all the time, and I know that my friend -- so two of my friends from that organization dropped out of it, but one of my friends who's a really good friend of mine -- she lives in New York -- is still in it, and she's like the managing editor of their paper. And I know that she's still in contact with this woman who used to meet with me. And she was a writer, and I remember she said to me like "I decided that the world could live without my novel, but that this work was more important." And I was like, "Whoa." Like that was so meaningful to me. But then I guess the question is -- for me it was like -- but I can I live without my novel, you know, or my work or my other things about me? Like am I ready to just give myself entirely to something like this, and I just didn't feel like I was, and I felt like I was really weak or something for not wanting to do it. But anyway, so that was a big thing in college.

And I lived in Ireland for a year in college. You know, like there's also like this backdrop always going on where like I was always in some sort of relationship, and it was like always kind of nuts, you know. Like I had this boyfriend, and like he lived in another city, and we talked every single day for like five years on the phone. And then I moved to LA after college, and we lived together, and it was like -- it did not work out. And like but I was always like in a city with someone somewhere. Like it was always like some thing, like it was like there was always like this -- I always had this sort of unwillingness to like just be where I was or something. So when I went to Ireland it was like I was still with my boyfriend who was in LA and like he was also my best friend and da da da da da, and then he, you know -- like the year became about like trying to

preserve that relationship rather than like being there, you know. Also like -- I don't know, I'm reading about Ireland right now, because I'm reading *Angela's Ashes*, which I never read before, and like Ireland is -- I don't -- I didn't like Ireland, you know. I was like "Why am I here? I'm not Irish. I don't find this like magical or anything. Like I just find it dreary and depressing, and I don't like it, and I don't know why I'm here." (laughs) So I ended up wishing I had gone somewhere else for my year abroad.

I also was like sort of pretentious. Like I was like I want to study Joyce. And I was like I don't like Joyce though, actually, as it turns out, you know. But I had lots of like sort of pretentious friends, and they were like "I love Joyce." And I mean, not that people don't really love Joyce. I mean, I read all of *Ulysses*, and I actually do love parts of *Ulysses*, but like -- I -- I'm just thinking I know I have it somewhere. But it wasn't really my thing, you know. There was a lot of just like trying to find out who I was, that's all. I mean, it's like really typical of like people in their twenties, like to try to find out who I was. And then, so...

Are we?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK.

SVETLANA KITTO:OK. So I moved back to Los Angeles after I was at Mills. In Mills I started like -- I came back to my creative writing. That was sort of what I came back to. And like my boyfriend, who lived in LA, was like "OK, so you're moving to LA now, right?" And I was like, "Um." And I was really happy in Oakland. Like me and Mary Ann were like going to live together. You know what I thought? Like you're just going to have a boyfriend in another city for the rest of your life? It's so crazy. He was like, "Well, we can't just stay together. Like, you have to move back." And I was like, "All right, I'll move back." So I moved back, and that was like whatever, it was what it was. [00:30:00] And we decided to live together, and we lived in downtown, and it was like his first place like out of his parents' house. And I was like "Can we just get a shitty apartment, like in Glendale or something, like why does it have --" but he was like "No." So we like lived in this loft that I could not afford. I had no money. And, you know, he like built this loft and like bought all this fancy furniture, and I was like -- we were basically like playing grownup, and it was we were like 22. (laughs) And we lived



together in this place, and I got some weird job working at the American Institute for Architects like being an assistant there. And we broke up because I was like really unhappy, and he was like -- for lots of reasons. And then -- I didn't really know what I was doing. I was kind of lost for a long time. I didn't know what I was doing. But I went on this like trip to Russia. I did this writing conference in Russia. It was kind of amazing, because I didn't really have any friends who were writers at this point, because like most of my friends were my boyfriend's friends, and we were just like in this scene of music and it was all about like going out and like doing a lot of cocaine and just being like sort of a dirtbag and like really not doing anything. Like I didn't have friends around me who were like interested in what I was interested in. It was kind of weird, like I just was like -- I left all my friends up in northern California, moved to LA, moved into like his life, you know, and didn't really have any people around me who like mirrored me at all. And then I went -- and then we broke up. And first I moved in with this like lesbian into this apartment. Then I went to Russia, and I met these writers from Kenya. And it was like the first time where I was like -- I had been like forming my own ideas about literature all on my own with no one to talk to about it, and I like met these writers, and they were like really interesting, and we had these like great conversations about literature, and I was like, oh, I'm like -- I felt like I was like in my element or something. And, you know, my writing was like -- it was what it was. Like it had great things about it. It was very like undeveloped, you know. But then I left that experience being like I need to go to graduate school, and I need to be a writer. But I also kind of hated writing, like I found it really painful, and I didn't really like it in some ways. And then kind of when I came back, like this old friend of mine like became my girlfriend. It was like really weird. It just happened. And, you know, she just kind of like changed my life in a lot of ways, you know. So it was part great, but it was part also like, again, like I sort of moved into someone's like crazy life that wasn't really exactly like my interests and stuff. But it was also like a great relationship, because it was a gay relationship. It was my first gay relationship, and it just -- everything made a lot of sense, you know. I was like, "Oh, well I know I'm gay now." Like that's been kind of like what's been -- because basically my sense growing up was I just -- I just never felt like a

girl or something. Like I just didn't feel -- like I always felt wrong in my gender or something, like I just felt really weird and like -- I don't know, it's kind of hard to explain. But when I was with boys I always felt like I wasn't a girl enough for them or something, and I always felt like kind of like fundamentally like I just didn't like them, like I was just kind of grossed out in a way. And then, you know, and then I was like with women like in sort of secret and all this stuff, which isn't really the same as like being in a relationship with a woman. So that was like really important, you know. And she was a really interesting person, like she was half-Jewish and half black, and like her Jewishness was really interesting, her relationship to race was really interesting. She taught me a lot. I learned a lot about myself. And I guess that was like sort of when I started thinking about like my own identity in a way, like what I was. Like I was Jewish, right, and I was like English, and I was like -- you know, I just didn't -- like I basically like didn't have anyone around me like [00:35:00] telling me anything about myself. Like I don't know, it was kind of hard to explain. But like being with her was sort of like a wakeup call in many ways about like where I came from and like, you know -- also things that were hard, like about my family that I didn't really want to look at, you know. Like that my parents were -- that my mom was drinking at the time, and I didn't know it, and like that I was ignoring it and that, you know, just like a bunch of different stuff like that, you know. And it was really an important relationship for me.

And then I moved to New York, and I did this MFA program. I mean, it was a lot of things, you know. It was like I was in this MFA program. I have this like kind of new gay awakening awareness, and I'm like -- I had this like thing where I was trying to write about people who were not me, you know. Like I was like trying to write a story about like a gay kid from like the Bronx who like -- just like all this stuff like that was like not my story and not really my story to tell, you know. And I just -- I was trying to make political work is basically what I was trying to do, and I didn't know how to do that except to like tell other people's stories or something, which now looking back I'm like yeah, that's not really -- for me, like that's not really what I -- like that's not what I want to do. But I had to kind of go through that. And I was in this MFA program, and I just kind of hated it, like I was like -- it was nothing like what I thought it would be. For

some reason I thought it would be like really diverse. I was like, it's going to be New York, like isn't that what New York's like. (laughs) I don't know what I thought. I thought it would be like my retreat, my Russia retreat, that was very international and very interesting, but it wasn't. It was like really, really monocultural racial, like for some reason. Like I don't think all MFA programs in New York are like that necessarily, but for some reason my cohort, it was like -- my class was like mainly white guys who were straight, and I was just very disappointed by it. And I like -- you know. I just felt like they didn't -- I didn't want to read their work. I was like I don't want to read this work. I hate this work. It's fucking boring. I mean, but also like this was at a time when I was really rigid about that stuff, and I was like, you know, you're like this because you come from -- you know what I mean? And it's like, now I'm like, no, not really. Like it's not really quite that simple. But at the time I was like I don't want to be in a -- I don't want to be in this fucking class with all these white guys like critiquing my work and like the one person of color like in the class. Like I don't want -- like I just had this real problem with it. But I think a lot of it was also just that I wasn't ready for it. (laughs) I wasn't ready to be writing full time. Like it was just -- I was like 25, which for some people is not young to do that, but for me it was. And anyway, I quit. I quit the program, and I was like I don't know what I want to do. Something that happened sort of simultaneously was that I started copyediting, and I was like -- it was like the first time I found something to do where I used my skills, and it paid me well, and I was like, what? This is amazing. I was like -- I thought I was going to have to like wait tables or something, and I was like this is fucking awesome. I'm like working at all these fancy magazines and making like a lot of money, like -- I was like this is so cool. I don't want to go to school. I just want to work a lot and like go out to gay clubs, and that's what I wanted to do, and like that's what I did. (laughs)

And then something happened where I met an oral historian. And it was kind of like this weird sort of thing where I met this oral historian. We hung out. He was this guy, and he was like "I'm an oral historian." And I was like "What's that?" And he was like, "Well, you know, I interview people about history and their lives." And I was like, "That's a thing? That's kind of amazing." And then he was like, "Yeah, like I worked at

Columbia, and I did this project on gay cops.” And I was like “Gay cops? Who cares about cops? Fuck the cops.” (laughs) And I was like “I don’t want to hear from the cops. Fuck the cops.” Like that was my -- and he was like “Well, I hear you, like, but also like this is what’s interesting about oral history, you know. It’s like -- it’s com-- people are complex. They’re not just cops, you know, and this project is interesting because it’s about cops who are gay and what’s that like and the complexity of identity and people.” And I was like [00:40:00], “What?” Like it really disturbed me. I was like, this is -- and it still does actually. Like I have not put this down. I can’t figure it out exactly, but basically what he was saying to me was like just because someone’s a cop doesn’t mean that you know everything about him or something like that, and everyone has a story, is what he was saying. And it was just sort of like this Pandora’s box for me, and like sometimes I’m like God, why did this happen to me? But basically like... Then it was the -- you know, I sort of like went nuts. Like that girlfriend I was with for a very long time, we broke up, and then I was like just kind of like -- I went nuts and was like partying all the time and like had a lot of fun and like dated a bunch of different people and stuff. And then I got tired of it, and I was like what am I doing with my life? So me and this oral historian and this other person started this like writing group where we started writing all the time. And he was like “Just write down what people say.” Oh. I brought him my story that I like wrote in my MFA program that I thought was so interesting about this like gay kid from the Bronx who came from immigrant parents and da da da da. And I’m not saying it wasn’t interesting, but it was -- whatever. I gave it to him, and he was like “Why don’t you write about where you come from? Like it sounds pretty interesting, right? Like your grandparents were like in the Raj and aristocrats, like your mom is like this Eastern European Holocaust family, and like the school. Like it sounds pretty interesting. Like why don’t you write about that?” And I was like, “Cause I don’t know anything about it.” But he was -- he basically gave me instruction to go out into the world and just write down what I heard and saw and stop commenting and like making up fictional characters and just write, do that. And it was sort of this like clouds-parting moment for me. For the first time I was like -- I didn’t feel like writing was so hard, cause I was like -- and then -- it’s been a -- you know, so

whatever. So then we did that writing group, and we met, and then in the meantime I'm like having all these like gay adventures and like whatever, like it's like Williamsburg 2008. (laughs) And it's like, it was -- you know, Williamsburg like -- it was fun. It was like a lot of gay people lived there -- and still do, but it wasn't like it is now. And it was like, you know, it was fun. It was like a fun time. And basically I lost all my jobs when the economic downturn happened, like all my copyediting jobs just went away. It was so weird. And I was like what do I do? This person was teaching in that oral history Masters program, and I was like maybe I'll just apply to it. I don't -- I really just was like I don't -- oh, I went on unemployment, which was really helpful.

So I applied to Columbia, and I got in. And I was like, oh, no, I got in. This is so crazy. Like what am I doing? (laughs) And then I was like well, I guess I should live up there, cause like I can't really live in Williamsburg, above these two nightclubs, and like go to graduate school at the same time. I just don't think I can do it. So then I like applied for housing and got housing up there, and then like in my first week I was like what have I done? I got like 500 pages of reading, and I was like -- I felt like such an idiot. I was like I can't do this. And it was sort of a really harrowing year, like it was really hard. It was like, you know, a lot of politics in that program, a lot of egos, like it was just like -- and it was like graduate school, and it was very serious. But it was an amazing experience, because I felt like I was having the experience that I'd always wanted in school, like in my MFA program that I didn't get, which was like a pretty diverse class, all women, and like doing like a lot of activist projects, not only, but everyone was doing something. I mean, oral history like kind of by definition has -- is political, in a way, you know, like taking up voices that haven't been heard as a practice, you know. So people were doing all kinds of interesting stuff, and I was like what do I do? And, again, I got into this sort of battle with myself about like what's important, you know. And it was a very academic program. Like whatever they say, however they advertise themselves, like it's an academic program, and if you do a creative project, good luck, because it's hard there to do that. And so I -- at first I was going to do this project about AIDS and gentrification and the East Village and [00:45:00] da da da da da, and it was again that I came back to that thing of like -- it's like this question, like does this project have to be

done? Does it have to be done by me? Does it have to be done by me now? And it was like -- I mean, not to say like that's not interesting, because it totally is, but it's like -- it just didn't feel like it was the work that I needed to do, you know, like at that moment, you know. Like there's been tons of work done on that. And I think it would have been fine if I had ended up doing that project, too, like that's great work. But like there was something else I needed to do, which I didn't want to do, which was like more sort of like not difficult but personal, which was like do this project about my family, you know. So anyway, that's like where, you know, I started to really take that seriously. And I'm still working on that work. And it's where I did my first iteration of that work and just kind of coming full circle back to like this place of where I came from. Of like looking at all these different histories alongside one another and -- when I first started writing about my family like I was in a really different place politically where I felt much more kind of rigid about things. And like over the years I'm just kind of like -- there's a million different ways to be a person, I've learned from interviewing so many people at this point, that I'm just kind of like -- not like I'm sympathetic to like -- not like I'm like excusing -- like my grandparents, for instance. Like I just was so embarrassed of their -- of them when I was growing up. And I was really angry at them, too, for being like so close-minded and stuff. But now they're dead, you know. It's like, they're dead. And I'm just so grateful that I like spent so much time with them and got to know them and just stopped trying to change them, because it was never going to happen. And like by listening to them and like recording them, which I did a lot of, like I was just able to understand why they were the way they were, and that's I think what's really interesting about oral history, is that it's, you know, like you interview someone and then where you arrive at, like in terms of their politics or whatever, it's like, oh. And it makes things complicated, which I think is good, you know. Like it's good to like come from a place of like humanity and love and be like you've had a complicated-ass life, you know, instead of like, oh, this -- like I just can't even be near you. I can't speak to you, I can't share space with you, I can't breathe the same air as you. That was kind of like the attitude I had, and, you know, I don't know. I mean, I don't know, maybe I'll -- maybe it will change again, you know. I mean, like it's kind of like I come from a place now

where I'm surrounded by people who sort of think like me, so it's sort of easy to -- but I definitely -- with my grandparents, I mean, it's just what I'm thinking about right now. It's just like with my grandparents and stuff, like I think -- you know, like I interviewed yesterday who was talk -- I interviewed someone yesterday who was talking about how like from a very young age he absorbed like the white supremacists' structures that we live in, like from a very young age, you know. And I think like my grandparents like moved to America and like just grew all these really awful ideas that they didn't have in Eastern Europe because they weren't -- it was a different -- they just didn't have ideas like that because they didn't -- it wasn't the same thing. But it's like, when my grandparents used to talk about like immigration and stuff, and I'm like "You're fucking immigrants. Like what are you talking about? Like that makes no sense at all." But it's like, you know, they live in America. They're European immigrants. They've taken on like the European immigrant like mentality, which is really like fucked up. (laughs) But, you know, I think like that oral historian that I met, I mean, the different people that I met along the way like just really helped me to understand that like it's -- it's interesting to just walk through life with an eye toward history and to be like -- to have -- it like explains everything, and I feel like it started with the Marxism stuff or it started with like that camp. The camp was very emotional, right, and like identity politics, and then the Marxism was like [00:50:00] very like scientific. It was like this is why, you know. And the oral history is like everything. It's like it -- it embodies like everything or something. It's like -- so it's just multiplicity on top of multiplicity with like just no end, it feels like. So... Basically, yeah, I feel like I've just come to this place now where I'm kind of like -- how to have an opinion, (laughs) how to know, how to like know what to do with one's self like or something. And also like just negotiating that stuff like constantly, like really on a daily basis. Like what do I think? And then also how can I think that and also like, like be with the world and not in this way that's like I hate things or people or whatever, you know, because that's a lot of how I felt politically when I was younger, was very like hateful.

And so... Yeah, it's just it's this kind of mixture of like stories and political stuff and like activism all coming together and trying to like, in my life now, like not to be like

whatever, but just trying to... I don't know, I like the message of multiplicity and complexity, like I really like that, and I feel like it's a great place to start with any sort of anything, if that makes sense. Yeah, that's it, I guess. (laughs) Here we are, right, and I live in New York and been here for like eight years, and I'm like I guess I just live here now. (laughs)

Oh, yeah, and like honestly, like I just feel like -- I feel like my -- where I've come to is just sort of this very like inter -- I'm just very -- I just feel like I'm a very like interdisciplinary person, you know. And like when I was younger my friend Mary Ann was like "But with you like I don't see you as just writing. I see you as like doing something with talking." She used to always say that to me. And I was like -- because I'm good at talking. I like talking to people. I'm good at getting people to talk, and I also like talking myself, and like -- and my work is very dialogue -- like I feel like -- like life is talk, you know. And so, yeah, it's kind of like what I'm into I guess and making use of and just seeing where it goes. That's it really, unless you have any other questions.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you want to add anything?

SVETLANA KITTO: No. I think that's it. I hope that wasn't like an advertisement for oral history and how great it is, cause I actually don't even know if it's great, but it's good. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughs) Thanks so much.

SVETLANA KITTO: Thanks.

END OF AUDIO FILE