

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

EL ROY RED

Interviewer: Zoë Holmes

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NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #021

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El Roy Red: Hi.

Zoe Holmes: Hello.

Red: Hello, hi, hello. Hi.

Holmes: That's perfect. That's supposed to be on like a soft thing. Okay, going to read the thing. Anyway, I'm very excited to be with you.

Red: Same.

Holmes: And not doing anything else. Okay. Hello, my name is Zoe Holmes, and I will be having a

conversation with El—Red, El Roy Red, right?

Red: Sure.

Holmes: Well, what's your [laughs]

Red: [Laughs] What is your name?

Holmes: What is your name?

Red: Well, it is Red. Red is what I've used.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: But El Roy Red is my whole name.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: So that's why it's like I really—I used to go by Red...

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Dash El Roy Red.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: But, so it's—that's why I was like, sure.

Holmes: Sure. That works.

Red: It all works.

Holmes: Okay, as long as it wasn't while you're in here, you're like, actually this whole time my name's been Blue. I never mentioned it. [Laughs]

Red: Oh my god, I met a Blue recently. They're lovely.

Holmes: That's the first Blue I've ever heard of.

Red: I've known a handful throughout my life because of having such a name.

Holmes: Yeah. Okay. For the New York City Trans Oral History project in collaboration with the New York City—the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is March 30th, 2017. Um, and this is...

Red: I'm taking my shoes off.

Holmes: That's fine. And this is being recorded at the Brooklyn Public Library, uh, Central Library I believe it's called, and in the beautiful auditorium, in the basement.

Red: Secret auditorium.

Holmes: The secret auditorium. I want to take my shoes off, too.

Red: V.I.P. status. Yeah. I think that we should get comfortable.

Holmes: Actually, this leads into like one of the questions I really wanted to ask you.

Red: I cannot wait!

Holmes: The first question I had which was like I feel like you have such a beautiful and unique sense of style.

Red: Uh-huh.

Holmes: And I was really curious kind of how that developed, but also like, what are your earliest memories of clothes, or like what was like the first outfit you remember like loving?

Red: Mm. I was a child who was able to wear all white. Um, if that speaks to my socialization [laughs].

Holmes: [Laughs] Does that mean you weren't a particularly messy child?

Red: Uh, Exactemonde.

Holmes: I was the opposite.

Red: I was—so, I was born 3 months premature.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: And because of it, I was quite sickly growing up. There would be whole summers I wasn't really allowed outside because sunlight would adversely react to the medication inside my body. Yeah, it was very serious.

Holmes: That's rough, yeah.

Red: So, I developed quite a bit of solutions interiorly and really created a world for myself. I think that's where the writing comes from. It's just this... it's what I've been given. It's the blessing I've had. I mean, it's not to say that I hadn't spent any time outside or playing with other human beings.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: But, it really wasn't, it wasn't my main gig.

Holmes: Yeah, did...

Red: So, style wise...

Holmes: Style wise, yeah.

Red: I...

Holmes: We'll get back to writing, because that's obviously the other big area I want to talk to you about. [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] Style and writing.

Holmes: Style and writing.

Red: Thank you, that's really sweet. Um, yeah, it's I guess... when I was older, there was quite a chasm between [mimics sound of rewinding tape player]. So, when I was 14 or 15, I came out as trans. Not really talking anything to do with my sexual orientation, but really who I was as a human being. My poor mom, at the time, really had a hard time, and so, though I was socialized in feminine roles as a feminine person my entire life, I was still held to this strange masculine expectation. It was pecu—it is peculiar. It's something that happens to other people, I'm sure. It's not, I know I'm not singular in this. However, it meant that like the things that I really looked forward to, the things that really spoke to me clothing wise were just not options. I mean, I'm a crop top kind of chick.

Holmes: Yeah, exactly.

Red: Even when I was like, young and—it's kind of funny, because a lot of how I dress now is in exploration and freedom and I just kind of go with my gut, I trust my instinct. And I try to try new things, um, and to face my own fears in that way. When I was growing up, it was... I experienced quite a bit of violence and abuse. And so, I really expressed myself wearing like really wide leg jeans and skirts.

Holmes: Like Ginkgo's? [Laughs]

Red: Ginkgo's. Yeah.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And like hoodies and sweaters, other jumpers, just like—

Holmes: So, you were kind of hiding yourself in clothes?

Red: Yeah. It's because, like, that way no one else has to ask about the bruises. That were never,

never anywhere to be seen. Um... so there was that. And I like—I would just try and be creative about it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I did this thing, during like the summer-y months, where I would... I found these like, old man pants that were clearly too big for me. I've been the same, like this is the biggest I've ever really been.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I broke a hundred pounds my senior year. I've been 5'10" my entire life basically.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I was like, just a bean pole of a child and so I would wear like, you know, a little bit larger than I am. A normal size pant, and they were bigger than I am, so I would cuff the trouser bottoms underneath flip-flops and just not have feet.

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: It was so, I was such a strange child with like—

Holmes: But, see, that's the stuff I'm talking about. Like, it would never occur to me to even—I would trip, first off. Me, myself, I would instantly fall over. But that's such an interesting thought to have. [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] I was just a weirdo, just always trying new things. Just like... just finding the strangest ways to feel myself, express as myself.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Um, and so now... it's so peculiar. I can be wearing the exact same clothes as another human, like having shopped at the same shops. However, it just looks different. We just, we go for different things.

Holmes: Yeah. And you accessorize?

Red: Yeah. I wear the same jewelry. I have a certain sense of self that comes through the clothes that I wear.

Holmes: Yeah. Do you feel like, there's been a bit of a like reclamation of sorts—I mean you mentioned like, specifically like crop-tops that you didn't get to wear when you were younger, but like, you [inaudible] of like showing skin, when as a child you felt like you couldn't.

Red: Oh my god. Well, as a feminine being, I really—I grew up, you did not wear your titties out.

Holmes: No. [Laughs]

Red: Even though, like, I may look to have a certain body and certain privileges, I really have not had, like I've more consistently been read as trans and been put in perilous situations because of it than even being really seen as gay. It's just been this weird queer bubble where people have been like, oh, you're femme and so you're this.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And they'll assume other things, but it—the first thing they target is the transness. So, I hadn't until probably last year, actually taken my shirt off in public, and felt like I could. And in fact, I was cycling, and I had put my shirt back on. It was just so warm. I was like, no one's—I was in like this weird space. You know where pumps is? I forget what it's called.

Holmes: Was this...

Red: But, I was travelling like somewhere in like a, what is it called, like a factory—

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Island kind of space.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Instead of a food dessert, it was like a factory dessert.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Non-residential, that's what I'm looking for.

Holmes: Yes, commercial. [Laughs]

Red: Commercial space. I can speak. Um, and that's where I did it. I was like, well no one's going to see, why not? And then I did. And so, it has been a really—my entire life feels like a giant reclamation.

Holmes: Yeah. That kind of also ties back to like, you were talking about like, you were socialized fem but also like given the masculine expectations. Which I think is like, at least among people I know, not an uncommon like trans-femme story. But like, it's so interesting that like, whether or not you felt comfortable like, not wearing a shirt, which is like, acceptable for masculine people to do. But like that was so like, so like the socialization so was like, well I can't because my titties will be out. [Laughs]

Red: It really was, and I'm like, I'm in my 30's. Like, what?

Holmes: It's—it's tough.

Red: It's not even just that it's tough, it's just so... it becomes something that you assume is ingrained.

Holmes: Right.

Red: Or it's just something you're meant to unlearn.

Holmes: Mm-hm.

Red: Because you've just been socialized in that manner.

Holmes: Yeah. Yeah, that's... I'm just now thinking, I'm trying to think of like when the last time I took my shirt off in public was. I don't know if I ever have.

Red: It is freeing. I was just, on Sunday, at a friend's like band's performance. But what it really was, was kind of like a... having the honor of being in the space of a collective group of people who've already shared a lot of experiences and time together. It was for this residency. And then being able to move with them. And so, some people took their shirts off. At one point, people were like, if you feel comfortable, remove an item of clothing. And so, people just took their shirts off and I was one of them. And there were other titties out, and it was just like, here we are. Just free.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: We need more of those spaces. It's a rare freedom, especially being... if you're socialized femme in any way, if your body makes that something, even if you're not, and then if you're in any way of color, there is such a distinct stigma and relationship with one's body that is just different, that one doesn't have the same sense of privilege, given contexts.

Holmes: Yeah. No, absolutely. Man, I want to lead on like 3 different threads, and I'm trying to figure out what to say next. Because I'm like, well we could actually try and move you into New York. Because this is the New York City, like Oral-Trans Oral Project, so, Trans Oral Project. That would be a different thing. [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] Been there, enjoyed that. Tranny for tranny for life.

Holmes: [Laughs] T for T.

Red: Yes.

Holmes: Um, or, I kind of want to talk about your writing because you brought it up.

Red: Sure. And T for T is a poem I've written, actually.

Holmes: Really?

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: Do you want to like talk about it?

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Why not? Um, and maybe at the end of this I'll share it. I'm sure I've—

Holmes: Yes.

Red: I've got it in my bag, actually.

Holmes: Oh, that would be wonderful.

Red: Thank you. That's very sweet of you.

Holmes: Oh, well I love your poems, so.

Red: Thank you. That's an honor for you to say to me. I respect you.

Holmes: Oh. That's an honor. This is going to be like the most loving like interview. [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] They're going to be like, okay, we get it. You love each other. Um, [clears throat] so I started writing because I didn't quite... I didn't have a voice. For years of my life, I was—I didn't speak. I wasn't—it wasn't really something that was allowed in my household. TBH, it was... children are meant to be seen and not heard. And even in that context, it was... we are the people who are providing for you, and so while we're in this place, we've worked so hard, you will be the people providing for us. And it really... there were a range of ways that that looked. And to the public, [laughs] to the public—even to the outside world, to my aunt, who is someone I'm in communication with, both my parents have really left this plane for me. Um, or I should say, like,,, my mom in particular is an active part of my life, though she's not living in a body, she's living in the body of the world.

Holmes: Got it.

Red: I'm blessed she is here with us. She's always present. I'm very fortunate, so, I do not like to speak of her as a non-living thing.

Holmes: Right.

Red: Because she is present.

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: Um, but, that's not to say, that they didn't work fucking hard. I was the person who ended

up cooking. They were working. I minded after my brother. We still had, um, a babysitter because my brother was quite rambunctious. And... it led to just a subservience-y, subservience-y that... no one should really have to endure, I think.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It really... I'm sure I am the person I am today because I have... survived things that are very peculiar. And so, I learned to write because I just, at one point, just shut down. Uh, as a person whose family was nomadic due to work, I had the fortune of living in a great number of places, but it also meant learning how to assimilate and code switch and to remove oneself from language. So, for a long time, I just... I just shut it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I just observed, which is, I mean, it's a key part of writing.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Just allowing it to work. As we were talking about the interiors, like, that's—that's the world I've lived in.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Um, and then as I got older, I had the great fortune of finding people in my life, professors while I was still in secondary school. And I call them professors because they actively taught us at a college level.

Holmes: That's amazing.

Red: 90 percent of my teachers in a public fucking school—

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Really, really worked hard for all of us. In my classes, people had tutors just straight away.

Holmes: Wow.

Red: You entered the, what is it, grade 9.

Holmes: Mm-hm.

Red: Tutor.

Holmes: Wow.

Red: Cause you're already doing, you know, a sport, you've got band, you've got choir. And you've got to—

Holmes: Did you do a sport?

Red: Keep up with AP. I was shamed out of track, but that's what I would've done.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I just, I didn't feel—didn't feel comfortable.

Holmes: Sorry, that was very off track, but...

Red: No, it's perfect, I love—now that I'm an adult, it's something that I very much enjoy.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: But it took a very long time to even feel comfortable because one has to be in their body in those moments, and that was not really a thing for me for most of my life.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: So, in one of my teachers, my drama teacher, Mrs. Fox, she was from D.C. She was very forward thinking, for her—the region and the space. Um, although, clearly different ideas as a straight woman, but she had LGBTQ—LGBT, LGB people in her life.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: Probably, being in theater, and she was just kind and sensitive to me. Gave me space to write and I would just have free periods that I could spend with her and she had a little annexed office, just a little back room. I could play music, I could like scream and shout—nearly scream I should say. But, you know, do as much as you could with the door separating, so as not to interfere with the class, and I could write, and just live.

Holmes: Were you sharing your writing with people at this time, or was it still kind of for yourself?

Red: It was pretty close to me, I would share it with her and a couple other people, and then when I was... I graduated when I was 16, so when I was 15, I got into, like an... prestigious art summer camp. It was like, out of the entire state there's something like 15 people picked to go for specific vocations of the arts. Um, and it was like... they have these for different subjects, right? So, I got into the arts, but there were various stems.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: Like, the engineering program was v—tight. Like, the worlds didn't really collaborate, but, on various college campuses throughout Pennsylvania, which is where my family lived at the time, and I lived with them, uh, you were able to like take a couple weeks out of your life and do this.

Holmes: Wow.

Red: So, I got to write poetry, and I knew that I would be a writer. I knew there something I had desired. I didn't feel I had the agency to do it, but that is where I first understood that sharing one's voice can be healing, for not just them self, but also for the people listening.

Holmes: Wow. Were you always a poet?

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: No pros ever?

Red: Not really. No, it's not me. It's because my brain thinks—I write the way I think, pretty much.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: And, for a long time I allowed myself to speak in such a manner. It didn't go over very well. Um, I found out that, in being acutely articulate that one... so, in German, right?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: You're able to produce words that allow refined specificity.

Holmes: Yes.

Red: In English, and in particularly American English, it's not really the case, and you're not, you're not really supposed to do that, are you? It's... in American English you're really trying to just, how can you say it? Throw the curve ball so that it gets into the glove, and to not... not actually hit the glove. Does that make sense?

Holmes: Yeah, it does.

Red: Yeah, you're meant to kind of talk around it...

Holmes: Right.

Red: With the words that are holding places.

Holmes: You land the point, but necessarily firmly.

Red: Yes.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And I think it shows politically, probably.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Very easily, but also how Americans relate to each other. If you think about how much slang

and, um, nuance of language there is, and how people just decidedly will not understand another human being in American English, while speaking the same language, that doesn't quite happen in other places. It doesn't happen with language. If you were to go to different parts of the world, and people just speak differently, if they're sharing the same tongue, even if their dialects are different, there is a way that they're able to communicate and be understood...

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: From what I've known, I mean, I could also be wrong. Truly.

Holmes: Yeah. No, but this is an interview about you so we don't have to pretend [laughs]...

Red: [Laughs] To know everything...

Holmes: Know everything.

Red: Which I absolutely do not.

Holmes: No.

Red: Yeah, so, I've been able to—and you can hear my accent. My accent is the culmination of having been raised around the world from people around the world.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And I was just talking to my friend from Britain, who is—immigrated from Pakistan. And they were like, where did this come out? I don't recall this.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Every time we speak you're having a bit of a nuance. And I'm like, this is Joanna actually, I can't shake her. I think she's left the corporate world, but she's coming to my body. And I don't—I don't understand it. I'm not—I'm not really having a go of it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's just how it is right now.

Holmes: Yeah. Little bit of Cockney too, which I like.

Red: I fucking hate it to be honest. [Laughs]

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: It's not really—it's not fully me...

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: But it's not not me.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: If that makes sense.

Holmes: That does make sense.

Red: I'm like...

Holmes: It's just what's happening.

Red: I don't even dream in English, I dream in French for the most part, and so like, to then have to sort out with this fucking tongue. How to like, relay things that I think into various languages. It can be challenging.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's poetry that allows that space. Um, and also, now that I am a person who feels more embodied and less disembodied, uh, it's through physical, non-verbal actions that I feel I have a clearer sense of communication with.

Holmes: Yeah, that makes sense. Like bringing more touch into your life.

Red: Or just, um, a different sense of expression.

Holmes: Right, yeah.

Red: I certainly am, uh, I'm a cancer, so I'm a bit touchy and also do not like to be touched at certain points, and vice versa. Like, being aware of someone else's need for space or touch in these moments. But, um, but I've found myself to be more able to physicalize things that are not necessarily verbal.

Holmes: That makes sense. So, this may be a thread that, whatever, is a dead end, but I'm interested, because, selfishly, because it kind of relates to me, but, so I think like, embodiment and like, feeling weird about your body, like, that's you know, definitely a trans experience. But also like—because you mentioned like you were premature, you were very sick—there was also part of that to me, that's like, at least in my experience, like there's this weird, sick kid experience that's like can also be so informative in like how you approach the world and people approach you and what they assume about you. Um, so I was like, curious if you feel like that's had also an impact on like, how you feel about your body or how you express yourself or anything. I'm sure it has, but...

Red: Yeah. I, um, even down to the things that I feel I can or cannot do... One time, I nearly drowned, in learning how to swim. Ba-dum-bump king!

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: Thank you, Kansas. Um, as a person who grew up with asthma and has like, grown out of it, air quotes, um, I've just been thinking about learning to swim again. Not that I'm...like, I don't know how to swim, sure, it's a class that you take in secondary school, that I have had. But, part of my thought was like, oh, you better be able to breathe and work on that.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It also is like, I'm more aware of things like dust and debris, and just moving about spaces. There is um, there is a way one can use time, use time or see or experience time differently from being inside of a building than when one is outside in nature.

Holmes: Yes, yeah.

Red: And so that has deeply affected me, to speak on it toward you...

Holmes: Yeah

Red: And I feel as though I continually try and go back into nature at this point.

Holmes: Mm-hmm. Is that—I mean, cause you mention as like a kid you were indoors a lot, is that also like, now you have the chance to like, you're going to take it as much as you can?

Red: Oh, I like to take it as much as I can...

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: Um, life that is.

Holmes: Yep. [Laughs]

Red: Uh, yeah, I have such a—I have a lust for life, to quote a girl song. Um, there's just for at this point in my life, it's like, oh is it—we can go hiking? Okay, let's do it. Can we, like, just be in the mountains? Which is like, where I've grown up, near the ocean and the mountains. Let's do it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I have a fantasy of like, and I mean to do it this year actually, go skydiving. It's just kind of like, let's do it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Versus, not everyone is necessarily like that and I think that it is partly as a result of having been inside for so long. There's just a different sense of freedom that one experiences. I mean that is just inclusive, right?

Holmes: [Laughs] Right, yeah.

Red: Of one living this life. Um, does that answer your question at all?

Holmes: That does, yeah. I mean, it kind of gets at that. It's kind of interesting though, so you love nature but you live in like the city that's defined by like it's—basically lack—I mean there's parks, but like, why a city then?

Red: There is more of a sense of freedom. That energy that is here is healing. There's a different sense of community.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Um, I don't feel right, because one could go to an intentional community...

Holmes: Right.

Red: Ehhhh.

Holmes: You can move to Ida and just be there all year. I'm not saying that you should.

Red: But that's just not me, is it?

Holmes: No. Yeah, no, it's not. That's why I was...

Red: Can you imagine these clothes there?

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: Like, they're fine for a week.

Holmes: Right. [Laughs]

Red: But, imagine like, I still like to do—there's still a sense of connectedness to humans that I need just as much as a connection to nature. And I find that I'm able to have that here in a different way. It's not the same, uh, what is it called, envelopment? Does that make sense?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: When you are, you're fully immersed in something?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: That's not it, that's not what—what you're going to have here.

Holmes: It's not the word, but yeah. That makes sense. So, wait, okay, very boring question. Wait, no, you were going to say something?

Red: Yeah, but more so what I have here is finding nature in my actual life. And so, for me, I get beautiful moments. I've cycled most of the year. I've a couple of breaks recently because I have to get my cycle fixed. But while I'm cycling, cycling especially, there is... I really am visited by my ancestors. It's not just cycling, but, because I'm more in my body, I'm more able to experience it. So, I have moments where when I feel the wind in my hair against my skin, whether it is, you know, in the negatives. Or whether it is a gentle breeze.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Either way, I know, for me, that is my grandmother giving me a bit of a hug and holding onto me and saying, this is where your body is right now. And I'm here with you. I get to see the sunset and know throughout this polluted sky, city, light devastation, that I'm still transported to specific places.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Um, it's taking a moment and going into a park and making time to meditate under a tree in the middle of it all.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's saying, for me at least, that I'm able to live with this, no matter where I am. We're always connected. And I couldn't imagine not having that connection anywhere I was because I find that that parallels the need and the necessity for interpersonal communication and relationship.

Holmes: That makes sense. Yeah, so it's about finding that kind of... there's only that connection of finding nature when it's not necessarily expected that makes it a little deeper. A little richer.

Red: Yeah. I was in the tube and one of my favorite things, every time, is when you're able to stand somewhere, and as the train is coming into the station, you feel that gust of wind. Some people don't like it though. I mentioned of my asthma, something to do with the olfactory senses. But for me, as a person who cannot smell very well especially...

Holmes: Okay, so [laughs]

Red: It is, sometimes in my life, it's been the only sense of movement I've been able to feel, particularly when I took the tube a lot, it would be, you wake up early, you go to work, you're working a 12-hour day, you come home, maybe you get that wind.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And it's enlivening.

Holmes: Yeah! Yeah, it's like that, um, I used to work kind of, uh, like on Canal and Broadway, and

I would do the 40-minute walk to a train station that was better for me 'cause I just liked to, like I wanted that walk. Like, I'd been inside all day. I need that like moment of, I'm outside. I'm in this city. There's other people. There are things outside of office walls.

Red: Yes, very much that.

Holmes: Yeah. Okay, so very boring question.

Red: Oh, bring it.

Holmes: Uh, how long have you lived in New York, or like, when did you move here? Whichever is easier to answer.

Red: January. I moved like January, first week of January.

Holmes: This year?

Red: This year. Yes.

Holmes: Yeah [laughs] I was like...

Red: Of this year. This is my third, I'm on my third year.

Holmes: Okay. Okay.

Red: Yeah, so, I guess this is, I'm on my third year, so it's been two and a half.

Holmes: Yeah. That sounds about right.

Red: Roughly.

Holmes: Yeah, I was kind of getting, cause like you had—you've lived so many places and had such a nomadic life. I was wondering if this is like, oh just a moment—you probably have no idea necessarily—but if this is a moment you're in New York, or is this like, a place you're trying to be for a while?

Red: Yeah, I'm a New Yorker.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I've been my entire life. That's been—it's been ridiculous actually. My family knew before I did that I'd live here. They knew my life... kind of hatefully so, in all honesty. As kind of a, as a put-off. Don't worry about this, you'll be in New York. Don't worry about that, you'll be in New York.

Holmes: Wow.

Red: Literally.

Holmes: Wow.

Red: I was 5, first time I've heard it. They knew my entire life. They were—it must've been my grand-mom. Then my mom repeated it. It's a beautiful premonition, but also, compared to how it's used...

Holmes: Strange to hear as a 5-year-old.

Red: Yeah, and it really was throughout my entire life. Such a strange—'cause it was throughout the world, I've lived so many places, and for them to just say, oh, you'll be here. And I've tried a couple of times throughout my life to kind of see if it made sense at the time. It didn't.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It took me a bit of time. And, um, yeah. So, I will be rooted here.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: This is it. Uh, my biggest... what I see in my mind's eye is that I will be here in Brooklyn, maybe Manhattan, depending on the place. But probably not really. And I want to be there for a little bit, but I really would love to just stay here. And then I will go out and see the rest of the world but keep coming back.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I really think that it will be my work that will bring me worldwide and I'm... it's going to be tough traveling so much. I can already see, I know what I'll be doing. I know, I know the deep impact I'll be making on this planet.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And it's not going to be easy. Um, because I'll root it in healing.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And really trying to support and uplift communities. Those of us that are the quiet or silent majority while holding no power [laughs]...

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: But here we are. Here we are, people of color. [Laughs]

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: Just filling your, uh, prison industrial complexes and your impoverished communities. That

won't be for forever and I want to be a part of changing that.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Changing the dynamic of what it is to be a person not of color and a person of color and kind of reaffirming the humanity that we have in life rather than allowing patriarchy seen through its many gazes. Racism, all the fucking phobias, I don't need to list them, but, I mean, especially now, I need to mention white supremacy and...

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: White feminist supremacy. Just needs to be said.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Cause that's there and experienced so frequently.

Holmes: Is that something, I mean the answer is that it's experienced all over the world, but is that something that's felt more present in New York in some ways than in other places?

Red: It's just different, isn't it?

Holmes: Different. Yeah.

Red: Like, when I was in Berlin, it was me, like being a part of my own history, and yet still being an outsider, right? As a German Jew. It's a bit funny to be there as a person of color, and to be trans, and just all the fucking things. You're like, oh my god, okay already, stop it. Um, fuck. However. But that's different.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: When you're there, it's not... the racism is a bit more of a nationalism to which people of color see themselves as German more than as black German. It's nearly, at this point, an American invention.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Or, in that way, a very Western, and specific Western invention, to use identity as an empowerment in such—as a tool in such a way. Does that make sense?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And so, [clears throat] I think the relationship anywhere you are in this world kind of lends itself to those little tweaks and nuances.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: So, what one feels and the respect one gets in Chicago is going to be different from what one gets from Houston.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: And it's not necessarily totally different. It's just about how people will relate to you and how they'll share themselves, honestly or less honestly.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Does that make sense?

Holmes: Yeah, that does. Yeah, that, sort of, I mean, I'm from the Midwest and I have an English mom. I certainly know about hiding honesty. Yeah. [Laughs]

Red: It's a thing.

Holmes: It's, yeah. Yeah, sharing is...

Red: You can call it politeness, you can call—cause it's not a civility.

Holmes: It's...

Red: That's not what it is.

Holmes: It's a real lack of vulnerability...

Red: Thank you.

Holmes: Is what it is.

Red: And you'll have all these social words for it, these things that... niceties.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: But they're not really nice, are they?

Holmes: No, it's uh...

Red: When someone in Atlanta says, God bless you, you know what that means.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Or bless your heart. The fuck?

Holmes: Yeah. [laughs]

Red: Like, I know what you're saying.

Holmes: What did I do? Yeah.

Red: Like, I see you and I hear your coded language.

Holmes: The Midwestern version of ending a phone call is to say, I better let you go now.

Red: Oh I've—oh I've heard it.

Holmes: You know.

Red: I've said it at points.

Holmes: I've done it so much.

Red: Ooh.

Holmes: But it's, you know it's like, I can't say that I want to stop talking to you. So, I'm going to—it's this favor I'm doing you so that you can get on with your day.

Red: And, oddly, that is still, that is a bit of a feminine thing.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's not even that that person necessarily always has to go, but it's that acknowledgment that, it's like weirdly sided where you feel like you have to end the call for whatever reason, and it may be that you feel that you're taking up another person's time. It may be that you have to go, but you need them to know that you don't want to inconvenience them. Conversation's over sometimes. It's just, okay, talk to you later. Done. But, that's not really how it's meant to go.

Holmes: No, that's not how we do it.

Red: Not yet.

Holmes: No. [Laughs]

Red: Maybe not ever, but who knows?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's at least one way I know definitely, I know deeply.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Thank you.

Holmes: No.

Red: 'Cause it's been a minute since I've remembered that for myself.

Holmes: Oh man, I once—my little brother and I were on the phone, we said it at the same time. [Laughs] It was ridiculous. It's like, alright, we're just going to hang up now.

Red: And that's your brother.

Holmes: That's my brother.

Red: That's like, of all the people.

Holmes: You just, it's so ingr—I didn't even realize that I did it for such a long time. And then like, you know, read a thing about the Midwest and it just mentioned that that was like a culture thing. I was like, that's right, that is. I do it like all the time. Because I don't know how to like, it's—I mean that's something that like, I—there's definitely habits I've noticed that like I've changed since living in New York. Like, I've adopted the New York style of doing things in some ways. Um, which has been kind of interesting because then I like notice how that shifts when I go to other places or how it doesn't shift.

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: Um, like when I visit family in England, my accent doesn't shift, but I change all the words I use or the ways in which I use them. Like I talk a little, not, I'm still me, but I talk a little bit different because like, you know, my granny is 95 so I'm going to say the, you know, I'm going to say trouser instead of pants so she gets what I'm saying, but also like...

Red: Yeah, because pants are something very different.

Holmes: They're very different.

Red: You don't want to say that to her. [Laughs]

Holmes: One time I was talking to my cousin and I was like 8 years old and I said fanny pack. She was mortified. [Laughs]

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: And I was, there was like 5 minutes where we couldn't figure out why like...

Red: She was also 8.

Holmes: She was also, yeah, she was like 9 months younger than me so it was like...

Red: Yeah that's funny.

Holmes: I was like fanny pack, and she's like what? [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] Ooh.

Holmes: I was like, you know the thing on the you know... bum bag.

Red: And she's like, no, that's not it, and you're like, bum bag.

Holmes: Bum bag.

Red: Yeah, it's not, it's not any better.

Holmes: No, it sounds like a female condom. [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] Oh, god. Any way you look at it.

Holmes: Any way, yeah.

Red: [Laughs]

Holmes: But, um, I mean is that... so I kind of now I have 2 threads, I'm like how have—how has your style changed in New York? But I think maybe another thing is I'm interested in like, this, the thread of healing I see in like your personal narrative air quotes, but also like, in your, like what is... what has been most healing for you? Do you want to start with that?

Red: I'll answer both starting with style.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's, um, it's funny. New York has a very like, it's a very American thing being here, even if it doesn't look completely American, right?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I'm wearing a barber jacket and Levi's. But, the look, completely American.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Like you can't even deny it, even though it's though it's a proper British jacket just as if I were to go hunting but it's spring time. You can finally fucking wear your barber.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Which, lightning, um.

Holmes: I'll show you photos of when we visited our family in the country, it's like...

Red: Yes.

Holmes: And you go into town and everyone has a barber jacket on.

Red: Next time you're—I should've actually given you some pounds to go because they're so much

less expensive there.

Holmes: Yeah that's true.

Red: You could've just got one second-hand. [Laughs]. Okay.

Holmes: Next time. Yeah.

Red: Yeah. Okay, so, on topic, uh... I don't—I think that New York has opened me up to different things like, um... I make a point in my feminism to not change wearing trousers or wearing skirts or dresses. It is really important to me to like, not be unhinged in that way because I don't want to... I'm not holding anyone to the binary, so why would I try and hold myself to it? And the times when patriarchy creeps in, it really... it gives me a double take and I have to be like, the fuck? Like, that's not cool. Um, I have to think about it, so... it's a bit of a... Being in the city, you easily see a way people exert toughness through their style that is, more often than not, for the benefit of them and their make-believe. I've, uh, that is, um, fake it 'til you make it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It's disingenuous, in all honesty. I've seen people who just could afford the clothes and so bought a look, and, it just they're wearing a look that wears them, not the other way around, and I hope to be the opposite. I try very hard to look as though these clothes were made for me because they have been. I've worked hard for my existence. And so, what I wear is something that I'm really trying to be comfortable in, even if it's a fucking jumper and jeans. But then in trousers like, well, here I am. I'm going to be comfortable. And it's about like how I feel and what I mean to share with the world. It's always myself, but it's—what is the function I'm going to and what do I need from the experience if that makes sense. Because that's what you're really doing when you put on clothes, presenting yourself to the world. And so, to... to allow myself to really think about it, even, like at this point, very quickly and to not—not really think twice. I just kind of go with my gut.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: 99 percent of the time, they're clothes I've picked up off my bedroom floor. Truly.

Holmes: I mean, who puts clothes away?

Red: Responsible people who've blah blah blah blah blah.

Holmes: No, yeah. Everyone has a chair just piled with clothes.

Red: Oh my god, that's true.

Holmes: Everyone has the clothes chair.

Red: Yes.

Holmes: Okay, but now healing.

Red: Healing. It's like, um... it's a daily gig, you know?

Holmes: Mm-hmm.

Red: My mom, who is my main connection to my ancestors, uh, my grandmother's always been there. Even while living, she... we go on these walks, I've been calling them witches' walks. We'd go through the mountainside into the forest and just meander every day. Eventually, making our way to the library where I would, oh this speaks so well of me or so notably of who I am as a human being, uh, I would go to the reference desk and check out a specific encyclopedia of roses. It couldn't be checked out, but I would just stare at these roses and try and understand the Latin names and what their—and like try and build relationships between them. Between the name, and then, their sight. Obviously, I didn't have all the senses but I really would just like sit with these flowers and just notice all the nuances. Yeah. And so, she's always been a part of my life in that way. Even to... and she's always come as wind. And whether she's been active in my life, but she's been a guiding force... for me. So that has kind of reinforced this need and this desire and this... home feeling in the outdoors and in... in the elements.

Holmes: Yeah. That makes sense. Yeah.

Red: More so. Um, so I have quite a bit of healing there and in the act of breath. I spent a lot of time leaving this body. Oof, which is like, most of my life. It was Kwanzaa, that's just passed. So, 2016 into 2017, this Kwanzaa Hanukkah, um, some of the deepest that I've had. Prior to that, I was in, um, the countryside, about an hour from Berlin in Germany where two people I'm honored to know, Joy Mariama Smith, my queer trans hero, and Jaamil Kosoko, both performance artists, um, of African-American descent, um, were holding a workshop for people of color who are artists on healing and it really—after years of being a back-and-forth-kind-of spirit, it's where I found most of my advocacy. It really opened me up and allowed me—I made it a point to get there, nearly ten years in the making. Truly, I've known of the spaces called Ponderosa. Known of it for about a decade, just didn't afford myself it. Had the money. Could've always had the money. It really, I mean...

Holmes: That's so American.

Red: Yeah, it's just that...

Holmes: That denial.

Red: Didn't feel I owed it myself. Didn't feel myself worthy of it.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: I was like, oh, these are my savings. What if something bad were to happen? X, y, zed. Pff. Well, I've spent all of it, and I'm building back up and I'll be fine quite frankly. I'm living the life I'm meant to live. So, it really started there, um, and that was over this past summer. I just was able to experience a sense of freedom. I never felt fully connected to blackness. It's not that I didn't experience the world as a person of color and particularly as a Black American, right? Because it's a one drop rule here. If you can at all pass as, if anyone can read you as, that is kind of your thrust upon experience nearly. Because that's how the world views you. But it's not always what it is. And so, I'm quite a few ethnicities and races, and so, never had a full proper sense of community. I've been living in these kind-of isolated spaces within the context of my own family that was quite small and then living throughout the world it's mostly been white. In like various forms, people not of color, people who are white valued, um, but always kind of the wrong side of the tracks. So, there were senses of community, but it's not necessarily been that kind of Janet Jackson poetic justice realness. Rather it's been, you need a cup of sugar, well we've got sugar. Didn't matter, didn't matter for what you needed. If we had, we would. Does that make sense?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: It really was, like, the kind of families where not everyone was afforded gifts at holidays. You pull together no matter what it is. The neighbor maybe goes with you to the Salvation Army as you're waiting to pick up the gifts for your kids and they'll do the same. It's these nuances. Oh, you're going to the thrift store. Maybe I'll take us this time. Maybe next time you'll take us. It's that kind of gig, where no one really—it's a very American thing to not reference race or ethnicity, to just blindly be held in this kind of American departure from the dream. That is—that is really what it was. And so, it wasn't 'til this year that I've really felt a sense of comfortability and agency. And it's not even that I feel that way about all of the ethnicity— [laughs] ethnithithies [jokingly mispronounces] ethnicities that I am, or that I'm fortunate enough to be embodied, to be—to embody. Um, because so many people have lived and loved and hoped for me. Whatever version it is of, they thought of, I get to be their hope in this instance. I feel great honor and treasure in that. And do to the world more, particularly as a person who occasionally thinks of mothering children, how I would do that, how I would not, whether it is theologic or not, don't know. Probably won't, probably will adopt if I were to at this point. But, it happened in New York first and very incrementally, just building and building, building of joy and safety. Understanding various practices to work pain out of the system and ways to guard oneself from it. Not from the pain but from the onslaught of trans-phobia and queer-phobia. More so, the daily racism shown through micro-aggressions. Being able to see micro-joys now.

Holmes: That's a beautiful expression.

Red: Yeah, it's much more honest. It's not just aggression that people show. It's not just the anger, the pain, the anguish in these moments. It's—we have it all. And it's able to be everything

in a second. In the course of conversation, how one feels with another person can range millennia. And there's nothing wrong with that, it should be seen and respected. I'm trying to open language up for myself in that way. Um, yeah and... back to writing, that's where I really am focusing on as I write this chat book: Brown, Black, queer liberation and through that, you know, particularly trans, it's important, but, that's just my perspective but through my perspective, I mean to look at us more deeply and our healing as a society. No one is left behind in this. It's all of us or nothing, and that includes the people who are hate mongers. Their existence is still vital to this world and it's not that their ideologies are doing anything to save it. Quite the opposite. But that does not devalue who they are as human beings.

Holmes: The value of them as people isn't diminished by what they choose to do as people?

Red: Yes, thank you. That's a very beautiful of saying that.

Holmes: I was making sure I was working through it right, but yeah.

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: Yeah, I mean, I feel like this, all this conversation has come out with like... It's something I knew about you but like it's really coming across that like your real embrace of like complexity and nuance. I mean like, even this where you're, like, you know, you touch upon with your family where, like, it sounds like there was some real hard stuff with relating to them but also, like, this beautiful connection to them even now, um.

Red: So much so.

Holmes: You know, and, like, a lot of that stuff of, like, you know, that finding out the like, well it's this or it's that, but it's, like, the middle path I guess.

Red: Yeah. It's to say that I know that I don't know everything. I know that I don't get to have another person's full experience. What I get to have is what they show me. And in that, that's got it. It's always going to be. We'll never fully be able to know another being in the manner in which we communicate right now. What we can do best is allow a space for that person to be more than we know. And to acknowledge that behind any and every action, boundless things that we will not be able to fully articulate, but also understand. It's just not always meant for us, and yet, inside of these little brains, we really strive for it. We strive to put every round peg into a square hole. And it's not—I shouldn't say "we" with specificity, but with a deep generality. That it's...

Holmes: The real we.

Red: Very much so that. And it's not to say that that's not going to change. I really don't believe that it will stay fixed. We're not stagnant. Clearly. Um, and I value the space I'm making the world in trying to change that and recognizing daily how complex we are as human beings. And sometimes that can be quite painful. Um, especially when it comes to the actions of people

rooted in vitriolic and hateful ideology. It becomes much more difficult to allow one the fluidity of nuance and understanding when they can be so rigid and eroding of one's own betterment, self-respect, physical, mental, emotional safety. To know that... having gone to Mercado recently, I wish I had my mobile with me, so I could see, it seems though the person who really is known as, like, the father of gynecology, what that person had done, was take black slave women...

Holmes: Oh yeah. The... go on, yeah.

Red: And repeatedly torture them. And that's not anything new. But I'm filled with so much anger and so much pain. I can feel it so viscerally, my own vagina being repeatedly burned and cut and burned and cut and excavated and that is... there are no words. There are literally no words for what I would do if I were in the same room. I don't know. And those people still exist. The people who would do that are still here, on this plane, enacting and enforcing those things. We don't know exactly who, we don't know who they are, you and I. But I know for a fact that similar things are still happening. It's particularly difficult against, obviously, anyone living in a feminine world. Not just people who are living with vaginas. But also, just so strongly, this work against people of color. This... I've recently heard of this research where when doctors were polled and questioned about their practices with pain medicine as we were in that workshop. What was the last name? Do you recall?

Holmes: Um, oh, Lodes' last name?

Red: Can we just later cite the things that we're citing?

Holmes: Yes, yeah.

Red: Okay.

Holmes: Lodes... I want to say it's, it's not Washington, but I don't know why that's stuck in my head.

Red: Probably a slave name. Hopefully not.

Holmes: Yeah, yeah.

Red: Who knows.

Holmes: Yeah, Lodes, who's wonderful.

Red: Who's amazing, but were citing that study where there's just a lack of understanding from a white person's perspective that a person of color, and particularly a black person, what they deem as a black person, could be anyone from across the world, whether that person agrees with it or not, that they will have a different sense of pain and of humanity. Literally, to this day, in the, what is it, the 21st, 22nd century?

Holmes: One of those, yeah.

Red: 21st century TBH, even though it nearly feels like the 22nd cause I'm living in the future, that people still can look at another human being and disregard them as a human being. Yet that person is in authority and probably the only person who has access to that position because of their privilege. So, it goes across the board. It's not—why is that research not given and being used for police people? Why is that research not given being used to people in government? Why is that research not being used to the people who fucking design our public spaces? It's like all of this is vital. And the dots are all there and yet no one's connecting them. That is part of what I need to do in this life and I've known it since I was a kid.

Holmes: Dot connect?

Red: Yeah, at least point out the dots and allow you to fucking do the work. That's what it is. I think that's more of what it is.

Holmes: I did the connect the dots. You have to connect them. I've made it. You know that there's a picture here.

Red: I mean I think that's part of what it is to be a writer and to do it well. And I'm not saying that that's even me to be honest, I'm sure.

Holmes: I'll say it's you for you.

Red: That's what I would aspire to do.

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: But I've known, I've known, especially thinking about physics. There is something very close to where we're at in our research. And this is why I want to go back to school is because we are very close to unlocking ways of uniting ourselves as humanity in general. I think the reason why there is so much pain and hatred right now in the world is because this is the last of it. It's the last of this whiteness really being able to exist and so it's trying with all of its might to... is it promulgate?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Promulgate itself. And we're just not going to have it but it's going to be very hard in the interim of now when we feel like it's on its rise. Though it's not completely. It's just what's seen and what's visible, that's not everything. And when it finally is dead, because it will leave, that energy will go somewhere and it will be turned back into us.

Holmes: Yeah. Like a wave cresting.

Red: Yes, it's exactly that. Thank you. Um. God, you know that it's something when Angela Merkel

is the voice of reason.

Holmes: [Laughs] For now.

Red: LBH.

Holmes: Yeah, that's...

Red: There were so long in our lives that we were like, this woman crazy. When you felt like she was so on the right, and now things have gone so far supremacist that she is now the sounding voice when interacting with the leaders of this country. It's befuddling, but that's alright.

Holmes: It is.

Red: That's... to quote, is it... oh wait, oh I've got to get it right. Of course, I can't think of the singer, but I can sing with you.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: It's not right, but it's okay.

Holmes: But it's okay [singing along]. Oh god, who is that?

Red: Two hours recording, whoever like, types this out is going to be like [laughs]...

Holmes: Yeah. [laughs]

Red: You dummies.

Holmes: It's obviously...

Red: It's clearly...

Holmes: It's al-

Red: It's got a beat. Is it not Destiny's Child?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Who does everything?

Holmes: Yeah, let's just say it's Destiny's Child.

Red: God, I feel that...

Holmes: It's probably, it's—Beyoncé's involved somewhere in there probably. [Laughs]

Red: [Laughs] It's fucking Whitney Houston, thank you very much.

Holmes: There we go, yes.

Red: The original Beyoncé.

Holmes: Yes.

Red: Oh god, bless her heart and soul. She was the person who allowed herself vulnerability in public.

Holmes: Yes, she did.

Red So, we'll say the original... Barbra in my life. 'Cause even Barbra is not really mine. She's a bit too old for me. God love her.

Holmes: You can have Whitney. Yeah.

Red: And not to compare women.

Holmes: No!

Red: TBH. Whitney Houston, magic on earth and everywhere. Barbra Streisand. God, I wouldn't be able to be who I am without Yentl. Truly.

Holmes: When did you first see it?

Red: I was like--You'll love this. You want hear this oxymoron?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: My mom would buy musicals for me... The fuck?

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: While still being, like, unable to understand the person I am as a human being, while still trying to be supportive.

Holmes: You need to watch these musicals because you're going to live in New York. And--

Red: That's probably it.

Holmes: New Yorkers love musicals.

Red: And it really--and it really, like, hit all of the kind-of bases. I can't even remember all of them. But it's such a weird important part of my life to be... to have grown up with, like, Yentl

and, um, Westside Story. Can't even remember the other ones at this point. It's like my own private Idaho, like, came in right after.

Holmes: Yeah. I'm trying to think of all the classics. It sounds like these were, you know, like, Sound of Music?

Red: It's—I don't even understand—No, I mean, she had it, but that's not me.

Holmes: No.

Red: The Hills Are Alive, please. You can pretend you're Whitman but you're not. Yeah, I've discovered a—a deep sense of self and understanding here. I think that's what they've already—they'd already known for and for me. It's here I've been able to meet trans people and people with a variant gender experience, no matter what that is, whether they identify as trans or not, who have been kind and welcoming...

Holmes: Yeah, I was going to say...

Red: As a community.

Holmes: Yeah. So, to talk about you a little bit more and not just the world.

Red: Oh yeah, whoops. Oh yeah. Whoops.

Holmes: Although, I love this. Yeah, it's fine. I love it. I love all of this. But, um, so you said, like, you came out as trans as 15, but I'm wondering, like, what's your first, like, memory of, like, knowing what trans is or knowing what trans in yourself?

Red: Now that's a bit harder, isn't it?

Holmes: That is a little bit harder.

Red: Innit? Innit. Well, around the same time as coming out, I cannot recall truly if it's pre or post this experience. I think I was... I think I was still 15... I [coughs] I was doing safer sex outreach because what else are you going to do when you're, like, young and queer and in a small town? And, like, have very—That was the other gig is that as a feminine person it means the way you're watched is quite different. So, whereas my brother had the ability to kind of live his life for wherever it was with a sense of freedom. Mine was such that it was, you go to your job, you're picked up by a parent, you're dropped off by a parent, you are allowed to go to certain places but with the knowledge of what that place is, and who will be there, and kind of what that experience you're meant to have will be, and so one of the ways I felt a little bit of freedom, fucking stuffing condom packets, and tabling. Really, and I kind of met people outside of my own sphere. And that was really hopeful. On one of those trips, we went to Boston, no, not Boston, never been, going to have to go at some point, but...

Holmes: [Laughs] Delay.

Red: Still, and not—wouldn't even look at Harvard. I was like, "No". Couldn't. The racism there, especially at the time, so much higher. I mean, this is the city of Marky Mark blinding an Asian man. Getting off with it. He's got free because he's a good liar. Not being remorseful, but still being able to fucking hurt people because of racism. So, uh, St. Louis. I remember getting on the bus to go to this trip with people and there was just another trans woman there. And it was, like, it was way pre-passing. Like, that was not really an option. It was much more, what is it, erudite survival. There's a certain kind of austerity, almost to it where you're not particularly afford it, literally, afforded such things, particularly in the space that I was at, right? Because these people didn't necessarily have the same means as someone who would live in any sort of metropolis. When you're in a larger town or smaller city, and you're one of few trans people, you really are few. And I reca—

Holmes: And you're known, too, in a really...

Red: Ugh, you're so known.

Holmes: You're really known.

Red: Yeah, I found out much later that my kid brother, though, very abusive toward me, did a very find job of trying to hold off a lot of physical violence he saw from any outside community. Not all of it. I mean, not ent—. There were very scary moments in my life from other people's hands and every year I've lived. There were very, very, disturbing times where I have... I am the person I am today because I've been able to survive from at points of daily, literally, daily assault. The nice parts of it were when it was just verbal. And that was, like, that was years. Years of living in smaller places where people...

Holmes: That's really hard, or...

Red: It's just part of it. It's not wholly part of it but in that time, there was less openness because there was less visibility. Because there was less communication. 'Cause there was less connection to say, I'm human, too. And to be seen as such, which is I think why I feel so pained to hear about this fucking proliferation of whiteness, dehumanizing people of color because it's something I've experienced so frequently. And it was, like, three to five years of my life where it was a literal onslaught of pain, and I've worked very hard to understand how to interact with people in my own way now, how to cope with the world, what I'm not able to do in my fucking—take the space for myself and to provide myself with some care and tactics, it can become dicey and it becomes harder. Um, the larger part was healing but the question that you asked, I can't quite recall.

Holmes: Oh no it's fine. I asked, um, a moment of awareness of transness whether in the world or in yourself.

Red: Ah, I was like younger than 15, probably 11, walking to the shop like, no. You'll love this. I lived in a town in which you could drive to, what would be a bodega, that is, um, free-standing. So, the person who works there is on the inside and one goes up to the window.

Holmes: Ah, yeah but it's—you can't go in.

Red: But it's not a petrol. It's not like that at all. It's just, they provided for you. And so, I was buying like cigarettes for my mom and dad, like just normal. Nothing like being 13 and being able to have a relationship being known, right? Because you would be there with your family, and then to know that you could still do that and to not even be a person who smoked because both parties involved would rat you out.

Holmes: Right.

Red: It's never—right, like, no one wanted to get in trouble with someone else. Breaking the law, breaking the law, breaking the law. That's what it was. Um, but it was not that, it was something, it was like maybe I was coming home from school or walking to bus stop, something like this. And I just remembered deeply just walking, making my hips an infinity sign and understanding that in my joy that I'm not only being seen that is then dangerous and that my happiness of this feminine gate is also perilous. And that lasted a block. I remember specifically where I was. I mean, I cannot tell you the names of the streets, but if I were to be dropped in this place, I could go to there. And that is—there's a certain brutality in that, to know that in some ways, that in what you feel is a sense of agency. And you don't have the language for it in this moment. Like it's not that I knew this—I knew this corporally, I knew this physically, I knew this inside of myself, but I did not know this to have language for it. So it's upon reflection now I'm able, like when I'm asked these questions like, oh yeah, there I was just with my fucking faggot body just kind of moving, pretending I had these giant, wondrous hips. Never wanted big tits, that's not really me. It's so funny, in my ideal world, since the minute I was little, always thought myself as a person who would have a very specific body that is mostly, um, mostly seen as another trans experience but not necessarily one that people would put on me. It's just that my body and my—who I am not always match up. I've made it work to feel comfortable within this body but it's not really my own sense of myself...

Holmes: Yeah, so big hips. Beautiful, small tits. Not small, but...

Red: Not even. Like maybe just what it is they are now.

Holmes: Yeah, I mean, those are the tits I was talking about [laughs].

Red: Thank you. Maybe a little more definition, but I mean it's not any different from any other trans man. But I wouldn't necessarily be called that because that's not me. That's why trans person makes the most sense to me. It's like, my body doesn't matter really, right? But it's just that this notion that I'm a fucking human being [laughs] as we all are. And I'm not going to

adhere to any of the rules that are previously set for me. It's not to say that I'm not a person who wants to play basketball because that's just a thing. That's just an action. There's not a gender attached to it. Just like it's not to cooking. Everybody needs to eat. Everybody needs exercise. It's so archaic the way that—

Holmes: It's so funny these very specific things are gendered of like, you know, from little things to like hand gestures to like, you know, right, basketball, a game. This game isn't for transgenders.

Red: Yeah, all of a sudden, you have to be WNBA and not the NBA, whereas the people are just as talented.

Holmes: Yeah, just a little bit shorter comparatively, but not that much.

Red: That's it, but not even truly. Baffles me daily to just think... I'm so... I guess I've always kind of known. And I think that also reflects in my style is that I try—

Holmes: Let me just check the time very quickly. It's 8.

Red: It's 8 now.

Holmes: Yes.

Red: We have about half an hour left.

Holmes: Okay perfect. I just want to make sure we didn't go over.

Red: Thank you.

Holmes: Yes. But you've always kind of had a sense of trans-ness.

Red: Yeah. It's really funny to me. I've never really—I've known that I'm not really meant to be in either box even when I was a kid. And I know just from doing the work for myself that it's not necessarily because I've really—I work hard to divorce my experience with trauma and abuse from who I am because that's not me. I'm a person who has lived through it and experienced it but that's not really—that's not going to diminish or to, what is it, um, harden me. Those aren't the building blocks, truly. I think what it is is the person you mentioned earlier is able to see more than just what is shown, see past the action. That is a little bit more of where I lie. Yeah.

Holmes: I'm just imagining young you swimming your hips down that walk.

Red: I don't even know what I was wearing.

Holmes: I'm putting you in the current outfit.

Red: Doable.

Holmes: But... or in those pants with the trousers and whatever those shoes.

Red: Yeah if I have photos I'll bring them to you.

Holmes: Oh my god I would love to see that. So, you've kind of mentioned like New York City— I'm going to assume it's not like the first place where you were around other trans people but maybe it was but like, I mean you've mentioned like the community, it seems like, I mean community and people are really driving force—

Red: I think that it's the place where I've found myself, where I've mostly opened up with myself and my trans experience. It's been a lifelong experience and yet that doesn't mean that though I've held the identity that I fully embraced it within myself that I've had the experience but not necessarily felt an agency. And it really has been here that I've been able to be like, uh huh. I've felt very alone in a lot of the places I've been. It's not to say that other people haven't shared experiences but I didn't have that sense of community. That I would have one or two friends and even in that, it's not... there just wasn't the same amount of bonding and that is more than likely because I was so outside of myself still. So, I think it's important to specifically talk about my relationship with drugs and alcohol.

Holmes: Okay let's do it.

Red: I also have to urinate.

Holmes: Okay, do you want to go urinate and then we can talk about drugs and alcohol?

Red: Yeah.

Holmes: Perfect.

Red: Should we pause?

Holmes: I don't know how to pause. I'm a little scared of touching things so it's just going to run.

Red: Okay or we can go to the wash room and keep it going.

Holmes: We can keep it going, I mean.

Red: Is that weird?

Holmes: I mean.

Red: Not for you and me but...

Holmes: Yeah, I don't know how to get the sound to be—I'm looking to see if there's like a pause button. Um, I don't get it, I'm not going to mess with it. I love those shoes.

Red: I'll be right back.

Holmes: Go for it.

Red: [Unintelligible]

Holmes: That was fast. No problem.

Red: [Unintelligible]

Holmes: You're good. Also, I realized I just wrote down about the time when you left and put it back, so if they want to splice out.

Red: Okay cool. So...

Holmes: Okay, drugs.

Red: I [laughs] drugs.

Holmes: Let's get into it.

Red: Mmm. [Whispers] Sounds like some pussy. Let's get into it.

Holmes: [Laughs]

Red: Um, I... So, I grew up in a family of people who utilized drugs and alcohol in a way that was abusive, um, as a way to deal with their sense of self and the trauma they lived. My poor father like grew up with his own abuse and then as a kid. And so, when I later found that out, it really—I had already been opening my heart to him, but that was the thing that I was just like, I cannot fully blame you. That would be very limiting of me and disingenuous—dis-ingenuine for like the person I am and the integrity that I feel I have toward myself and to you and just the respect of another human being. But both of them—my mom was not a big drinker and she did not particularly abuse drugs or alcohol in any way that I know of. Um, but her partner certainly did and it really created a lot of conflict for us as a family unit. That, also being partly Native American, there is like a serious history—

Holmes: Ooo, there is like a generational yeah...

Red: It was really, really touch in that way. And it wasn't until I was older that I began to think about that. There is a like... once I left their house at 16, which I had like skipped a grade and I was born a bit early, or like started school early so that's how I ended up graduating before other people because I was quite young [coughs], I didn't know how to quite deal with the world and so I had started drinking by the time I was like 17 or 18. Because I was like on my own—

Holmes: Where were you living then?

Red: We moved—I moved to Pittsburgh.

Holmes: Okay.

Red: I was like gotten to The Universi—I got into so many schools but the one that gave me the most money was the University of Pittsburgh. And that was like what my family like signed off on as people who didn't go to uni. I would've had different, different, different life. Don't know what it would be so in a lot of ways I'm glad it didn't happen. I'm very pleased with the life I have and I'm grateful for what I've been able to experience but, yeah, could've gone to a number of Ivy League schools that just did not—it's not like they were there to pay for my existence. And my family did not know how to negotiate. But, um, I met my closest friend, longest closest, Amy Kayrapa, fondly called radio. And that's where this leaf tattoo came in. I have a tattoo of a leaf on my neck one day after meeting at a local gay bar where we were not carded. Clearly very young, but we didn't do much. All we did was talk about our art that we were making, truly. And she would have one drink, I would have more. I got drunk on this occasion, and we stumbled upon these leaves, and this is an oak tree. I grew up with oak and birch in the village that I was raised in Germany. So really my [unintelligible] when I had stumbled and I fell into them. I collected these particular ones on my neck and I pressed it. Next day, took it to a tattoo artist and Lady Delaware Z, her name was Z, not zed, Z, um, it's also partly why I flip between the two. I'm not ever like—because I think of it in this way than when I saw Z, it's just kind of there with me. And she was like in her 50s, I mean she was a righteous lady. So, she was my first tattoo artist. The coloring was like my mom's hair from a photograph, and like Amy Kay's at the time which was always a red color, and just like these really small, little things that meant a lot to me. Even now, I'm just like, aw. Can't name every single one but all feels right and still. But I really—I developed a deep relationship to using alcohol as a way to function throughout various emotions I didn't feel I had access to in that time of my life. And that continued on for many years. And I would pause every now and again and just stop. Sometimes it would last a year, sometimes it would last three years. I'd like a sense of control. I smoked for a little bit, too, and then I would just stop. And then I would smoke when I drank and now I'm not a smoker. Very much not me. I only recently started drinking, um, because I finally feel like I'm at a point where I acknowledge on when I want to do it. So, after my mom passed, I realized that I needed to not separate, I needed to be communicative, allow myself to have a community, whatever that would look like, and I would not hinder myself in feeling. That I just knew that this person that had meant so much to me that it's not really my place to weaken that relationship which is something I felt drinking would do. So, I owed it to myself in

that moment so I thought into I think to check in. So, I would just check in and I do that still to this day. Do I want to have a drink? Why would I like to have a drink? Does it make sense? What are the repercussions? X, y, zed. Done. But it's I feel it should be mentioned particularly as a trans person. It's not easy to have a relationship with one's body. And the work that one does to it can be a lot. For me it's like I meditate. I have to like make time for all these things, and it's kind of a lot of shit to do all in one day. And it's not hard but it is a lot. And you have to figure out the things that work for you versus the things that work for someone else. So, I'll meditate, whether that looks like on a tree, in my bedroom, planned, whether it is like cycling, um, doing the dishes, like I really just try and—

Holmes: I love that you are making.

Red: Yeah, just do it. I try and clear my head and just be in the body and breathe. Being mindful of breath is just so key. And then I really actively try and up, up, up myself every day and everything. It's not easy being alive here now. It's actually quite the opposite. People I know for a fact that have no clue how to interact with someone like me. I've experienced things, particularly recently, that in all honestly are atrocious that I would never have another human being have to deal with. I mean, these are common places for these people. This is how they interact with the world. There's a different sense of violence now. And it's not purposeful which is concerning is some ways.

Holmes: It's almost, well I don't want to say worse, but yeah.

Red: Well, it's much harder to change. Because it's one thing when someone knows what they're doing because then you can have somewhat of a conversation with them. But if someone is unaware—

Holmes: You have to bring them into awareness first.

Red: Which is completely different. And 99 percent of the—who knows, who knows what the numbers are, but it can be very difficult. So, to be guarded in some ways and to now fully give oneself to the world, and yet to still be open-hearted and understanding, it's a job! It is the job I do of living to try and be forward and present-thinking within my own mind and allow space for people to be narrow-minded while trying to not allow myself to narrow and to give them space to know that their actions aren't necessarily their thoughts even if they are that painful. And sometimes actions and thoughts do correspond and they are that painful. I just try and remember that we can work through it, that it's more than that.

Holmes: Yeah, I'm just thinking there's such like—I guess my question is like the daily actions that you do, but maybe I'll frame it this way, what is something that has happened recently that made you feel very joyful and embodied.

Red: That's a daily experience.

Holmes: That's wonderful!

Red: Yeah, I mean I wouldn't be here—

Holmes: I don't know if everyone can say that.

Red: Not sure. Not everyone, just someone. Um, today it was fucking dancing to Drake.

Holmes: [Laughs] That's—The new Drake?

Red: Just like fucking doing the dishes dancing to Drake, yeah. A lot of it is through movement and movement is a key way I communicate and feel communications with my ancestors. It's probably my most, I almost said honest but that's not quite true. It's probably my most quick form of prayer in a way that I know. Yeah, that's a big thing for me being able to move. Just being able, truly. I got to get gifts for people today.

Holmes: That's wonderful. Who are you buying gifts for?

Red: It's my closest mate's birthday tomorrow, Joshua.

Holmes: Aw, happy birthday, Joshua.

Red: Whoop whoop! Yeah, happy birthday JW. I got to get them, um, things I wouldn't necessarily buy for myself. I'm able to—I'm in a place where I can spend what feels like an absurd amount of money. Not for someone who's making six figures but if you're making like, you know, what is it, just barely making five, 000 [laughs] that's right. Five figures, get with me ladies. I just—I feel I know how to spend my money in a way that produces joy and not just for me but the people I love and other people in life. Because why else would I do it? Truly, and I really have to—I really work hard at that at understanding that this fucking dead tree that is just turned thick paper that everyone puts their belief in that rules this world doesn't get to have the negative power and connotation that is inherent into its form, particularly in this country, it's just so—

Holmes: If we have to have capitalism, we should have the micro-joy in it that we can.

Red: Yeah, and so, especially when I try and spend my money, I really try and make a point the person who's touching it with me feels some of that joy. That's really important.

Unknown: [unintelligible]

Red: Can you give us just maybe 10 more minutes and we can come in? Is that alright?

Unknown: Okay.

Holmes: Okay. We can...

Red: Yeah, let's maybe try and hop off actually.

Holmes: Yeah! Let's do that. You want to...

Red: Um, how should we end this?

Holmes: How do you feel like ending it? I don't know I feel like—

Red: You want to sit on someone's face?

Holmes: Yeah.

Red: Ooo, hello.

Holmes: Yeah, we're going to end it so we can do face sitting [laughs]

Red: [Laughs] I do want to help set Marla though, and Barbara.

Holmes: Yeah, um, yeah, I mean do you have a final thought you want to give? I feel like there's so much covered and so much like, you can't sum up yourself as a person.

Red: Yeah, I definitely don't mean to do that. I think that's just it. I think it's perfect that we're going to end to help another person. And these two people, however are they, what they're doing are, um, they're gotten all these phrases from various authors, um, that are surrounding social justice movements, particularly that of people of color. And they have all been led oppressed and they are now putting them on a, um, big placard and we walked past some and I'll point them out to you.

Holmes: Aw, that's wonderful.

Red: But it's exactly what we should be doing. This is a lovely way to end.

Holmes: We're going to go see humanity in people and give voice and move.

Red: Yeah, exactly. Thank you.

Holmes: Thank you.