NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

GRACE DETREVARAH

Interviewer: Anna Keyes

Date of Interview: February 21, 2018

Location of Interview: Anna's apartment, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn

Transcribed by Chen Kuan-Chuan and Lin Xiaoqiang (

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #069

Anna Keyes: Hello: My name is Anna Keyes and I will be having a conversation with Grace Detrevarah for the New York City Trans Oral history project in collaboration with the New York Public Libraries Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is February 21, it is a Wednesday and this is being recorded at 313A Pulaski Street Apartment 1 in Brooklyn and our zip code is 11206. Can you tell me your name and age?

Grace Detrevarah: My name is Grace Detrevarah and I am a young, 55-year-old spiritual black trans woman.

Keyes: Thank you. What are your gender pronouns?

Detrevarah: Ms., she, and her.

Keyes: How would you describe your gender?

Detrevarah: I'm a heterosexual woman.

Keyes: Okay. And when and where were you born?

Detrevarah: I was born in Detroit, Michigan.

Keyes: Okay. What year were you born?

Detrevarah: 1962.

Keyes: Tell me a bit about your childhood.

Detrevarah: Wow. I grew up as an only child. As far as what my parents could see I was an only child but I had plenty of company. I had a very ... My family is very accommodating, meaning my mother and father. They were very accommodating. They made sure that I had children in my life, like my cousins, very close family members. However it was still kind of lonely because I knew that I was different at an earlier age. And I knew that I came from a family that endorsed tradition. And I found myself always hiding in clear sight because I wanted to express at an early age my identity, even though I didn't know what identity was, but I knew it wasn't like my male cousins. So I had a lot of personal struggles as a young child.

Keyes: Speaking to that feeling, because I felt it too, tell me about, to step away from it, we're going to return to childhood, but tell me about an early encounter you had with the trans community.

Detrevarah: Wow. At age 14 years old, I became a very rebellious child, or a teenager, you can say. And I began to be very rebellious and obnoxious and almost disrespectful to my parents. So I started running away from home. And I used to have this thing that I would do. When I would

run away from home it was always during the day but as soon as it got dark I would just like, "Oh my goodness, it's scary out here," and I would always find myself going to a police station and going to the desk and telling them, "I ran away from home, I want to go home." I did this for the whole year of 13 years old, 14 years old. Maybe even 11 years old. But when I got to be 14, my parents, I believe it was my dad, he wanted to teach me a lesson that you can't continue to hold us hostage with your theatrics of running away from home. And he had the officers put me inside the bullpen. And it scared the living daylights out of me. And he was in cahoots with the people in the police station to try to show some sort of tough love or whatever. However, they were bringing in people who had actually did crimes. Even though they kept me away from everyone, the first encounter with what they called back then a drag queen, but it was a very pretty male person who was dressed in women's apparel, a wig and makeup and they were being described as what they were by everybody from the officers to the other prisoners that they were handcuffed with. Now remember, I wasn't handcuffed, I was just sitting in the bullpen. This was a tough love situation that my father and the police station were going to teach me because remember, I had become very accustomed to when it became like 7:00 at night I would be like, "Oh my God, it's night time. I've got to go home, I'm scared, I don't want to be out here no more." Okay. And I remember what we would call her a trans woman today, but I remember approaching her or she approaching me and she's saying, "What are you doing in there little young girl?" And it was the first time someone actually had said to me and addressed me as a girl in public. And I was just so eluded by it and positively eluded by it to the point where I even remember their name. And remember, I'm 55 now. I was 13 or 14. The person's name was Towana. I'll never forget her as long as I live. She was the first trans person who ever addressed me as I addressed it myself inside my head. And that was one of my first encounters.

Keyes: That is so special.

Detrevarah: Yeah, it is.

Keyes: Wow. Wow. Wow. So tell me, where exactly was this police station?

Detrevarah: In Detroit. I grew up in a middle class integrated neighborhood.

Keyes: What part of Detroit?

Detrevarah: They call it the north side of Detroit. Now it's considered a very ... it's not integrated anymore it's all black now. But in the early 70s and probably until like 1982 it was really a mixture community with Caucasians, Asians and a sprinkled few African American families because the majority of the families that lived there were General Motors, Chrysler, automobile workers which my family were. My mother is a UAW representative today and she's a retiree of working at General Motors and my dad worked at Chrysler. So I come from the automobile industry family.

Keyes: Just to step back for a second, this trans woman, or what we'd say now as trans woman, do you remember anything else about her?

Detrevarah: I never got to see her again. I remember when I did finally leave ... When I finally departed Michigan I remember having thoughts of wanting to find her because she was pretty famous in the trans community back then in the 70s. She was a known sex worker so my thought process and the little information I knew I thought well maybe, even though I'm a little older I don't know why I thought this, but could I find her 10 years later under the same tutelage that I met her as a sex worker? I mean it's pretty sad to say but that's the only thing I knew about her. And I found myself ... We have a very notorious place in Detroit called Palmer Park and that is where, and it's still like that today where you have a lot of sex workers work there. So I remember visiting home as an adult and actually going to Palmer Park kind of dressed down. I put a hat on, a hoodie and so I can blend into the environment and I never was able to find her and never had the experience of actually meeting her or having a communication with her since I was 13.

Keyes: Wow. But it sticks with you.

Detrevarah: Of course it does.

Keyes: So speaking of the terminology and how it's evolved over time, but we currently use the term trans to apply to many different people and it's an umbrella term, right? So my question for you is when was the first time you heard the term trans?

Detrevarah: You know, the word trans, if you're an educated person and me having an associates degree and a bachelor's degree and getting ready to work on my master's it always makes you look at the pronunciation and what the term actually means. Then when you look into a Webster dictionary or any dictionary and you look up the word trans, it means transitioning. So I'm at odds or almost in disagreement when people want to label themselves as trans but there's nothing transitionally happening. They are going along with the narrative that the public or the community has particularly labeled due to nobody wants to be a drag queen because it's affiliated with a taste or a dress up or entertainment or something condescendingly not pure. So I've always had a problem with that word because I look at what the word really means. It means transitioning, it does not mean if you're a drag queen, that's what you are. However, a lot of times people in our community and definitely through the capabilities of people wanting to be politically correct and not hurt your feelings or say something insensitive, they will say trans when the person that they're talking to is not trans. It's like I'll give you an example. Charles RuPaul is not a trans person. However, if he's in a public forum, they will introduce him as a trans person. And I am just so glad that in later years he has come to correct them and let people know that he is a gay man who is an entertainer and who looks good in a dress.

Keyes: Sure. So just to go back a little bit, my question was more so when was the first time you heard the term trans?

Detrevarah: Probably once I finished my undergraduate at Hunter and I left Hunter and I went to NYU at the school of the arts. And we would have these creative writing courses and they would talk about transitioning through different roles. And then the professor would use the word like

transgender and I was like, "What is that?" And come to find out years later, that's me. So that was how I basically, I found out on an educational level and not necessarily through any other type of form or narrative.

Keyes: Sure. Sure. So just to go back to your family for a second, what is ... Tell me a bit about your religious background.

Detrevarah: Wow. A lot of my religious background comes from the structuring of a southern family. My grandparents were southern and they taught their children, which was my mom and my aunts and my uncles to practice the faith of baptist and Pentecostal, Jesus Christ, Jehovah and it was just passed on to us. However, as I got older I believed the practicing of the religion became something that was only done ceremonially for funerals, for holidays. But it wasn't practiced as I practice it today. I meditate, I fast, I'm a regular church going person. But I'm more spiritual than I am religious because I've been very fortunate to have a church where our model says church not as usual. Maybe it's because our pastor and the majority of the people who attend our church are same gender loving people. Our senior pastor Vanessa Brown and her wife, Towana Galls Brown, have been profiled in the New York Times, they've been in Swerve magazine and in many other places. So we have a model at Rivers of Living Water that basically says church not as usual. So that's why I'm always inviting people, because there's no structure. You can come dressed just how you are right now. Our pastor gives sermons in fatigues certain days and then there are days that she will wear her clergy stuff. You never know what you're going to see at our church but we're a very politically inclined church as well because we're a part of the UCC, that's a LGBT affirming ministries and we have 380 churches around the world.

Keyes: Wow.

Detrevarah: And Bishop Talton, who just was on World News Tonight, is our bishop of our church. And he goes to some of our most hell fire places like Uganda and Nigeria and Cuba where we are being persecuted and murdered. And Jamaica where we're being persecuted and murdered and hurt to just open churches where people of LGBT can just affirm themselves with their faith. So I go to a church like that.

Keyes: Yes. So to bridge this more to the location we're in today, what's your earliest memory of New York City? Also just wanted to, this is Melissa.

Melissa: Hello, Melissa. How are you?

Keyes: And we're doing an audio. It's being recorded.

Melissa: Cool.

Keyes: No, you're fine. Just wanted to introduce you.

Detrevarah: Of course.

Keyes: And this is Grace.

Detrevarah: Hi, how are you?

Melissa: Good to meet you.

Keyes: Okay, great. Thank you. And you're fine. You're fine. Okay, set back. What's your earliest memory of New York City?

Detrevarah: Again, I was a runaway child who was being rebellious. I don't have one of those horrible stories that are relevant stories to others. But my story is a different story. I ran away because I was looking for affirmation in a city where I knew through looking at movies, hearing about it because in high school I was a dance major. Ballet, modern dance, whatever. You always hear about New York. And when I ran away, I remember it was 1982 and Port Authority had just been built on 42nd and 8th Avenue. It was brand new. And when I first came here I had my little Detroit Free Press bag because I used to have a paper route and they gave us this little bag. Well I had all my little belongings in there and I'm 16 years old and I come to New York and the first time I stepped out of Port Authority this man walks up to me and says, "Oh my God, you're pretty," and so forth, not knowing that he was a predator, not knowing that he had every bad intention in the world for me. But I hadn't been ... I wasn't seasoned yet. And you had to be very careful, even today, about whom you talk to, what the subject matter. When people just walk up and start asking personal questions, that's usually not a good thing. And it was a very surreal moment when I first came here because I was a little, as we in the black community call it, I was a little country black child in a hip city and it was not necessarily in my favor, but I believe the elements of God or just good spirit, something helped me. Nothing really bad happened to me. I remember just hanging out on 43rd street where they had the legendary places like Blues and Sally's. And there were, as they called them, drag queen gay bars. And I'm hanging out there and I'm new in the area and I'm carrying this little Detroit Free press bag with me and they had some other feminine gay men and as we called them then, drag queens and I'm fascinated. I'm like, "Oh my God, look at these people here." And I end up that night meeting some, as we call drag queens, and they took me home with them. And lo and behold come to find out they were sex workers. But they were so protective of me because the first thing they said was, "Oh girl, we know you ain't from here," and as soon as I opened my mouth I guess I sounded like a country bug or whatever. And I say that with endearment. I don't say that to say that there's anything wrong with having a southern accent, but I use it as a word of endearment. And it helped me. People saw the genuineness. They could see I wasn't a seasoned New Yorker yet. So girls were really helpful to me. So I don't have any negative stories of when I first came here. I just had, like I said, there was something carrying me. My mother likes to say God was carrying me, and maybe he was. Nothing really bad happened to me. Because you hear so many horrific stories when you come to New York as a child at 15, 16. So horrific things could have happened but they didn't.

Keyes: So it sounds like you're speaking to the communities when you first came here. You were introduced to, you were a part of to some extent. And what I would like to hear from you is tell

me more about the communities that you've been a part of in the past and please feel free to say names. I'm very interested in knowing specifics.

Detrevarah: Well I can basically tell you that what led from the Times Square area to Harlem, I was staying with some trans people, what we would call them today but back then they were drag queens. I was staying with them and we were living in Washington Heights in this little cluttered apartment with two bedrooms and there was like eight people in there. It was a bunch of sex workers, two bisexual men who were into sex work themselves and me. And nobody would let me get involved with the sex work. Everybody wanted to protect me. I was like this project for everybody. I was this, "You're going to be our daughter and we're not going to let you do this. You're going to wash dishes, you're going to wash the house, you're going to do all this kind of stuff but you're not going to do what we're doing." And I was like, "Why? I want to do what you guys are doing because you look so happy," or whatever. But years down the line I thought it was the best thing that ever happened to me. At the moment when it was happening, I didn't like it. Because I wanted to do what they were doing. But they shielded me from that.

Keyes: Tell me about how long you were a part of this community. Tell me also years. I want to know exactly when this was occurring and tell me if you remember anyone's names. I would love to hear some names.

Detrevarah: Of course. A lot of these people I speak about in my book that is soon to come out. It's called Grace Transitions and Other Views, a Memoir. Three of the people that I talk about consistently in my book is a girl who was known in the bar room scene back in the 80s and 90s, almost legendary, her name was Pamela Wong from the House of LaLong. And there was Candy Labasa who's still around today and there was, God bless him, LaRock Bay, a legendary choreographer in Harlem, New York who took me in. And the story with me and LaRock Bay was kind of tragic because at the time AIDS had just hit our country. And this man was dying. And while he was dying he had a dance company that was very famous in Harlem. And he took me in. But when he began to get sick, his family and his supporters and people who take care of his finances addressed me and said, "What are you gonna do because LaRock is getting ready to go to the hospital and we don't know you." And I was like his little boy toy or girl toy or whatever you want to call me. He had took me off the streets because I would no longer live with the trannies because they were living very transient. And like I said, there were all these protectors, through the years there were all these protectors. And eventually I had to move away from him and then it got hard for me because then I had to turn to other avenues that were new to me. I had to be creative and I was, just to survive. But I don't have any tragic stories to tell on the streets. Some tragic things happened years later, but when it came to people like LaRock Bay and Pamela Wong, I loved Pamela Wong because when she first saw me, the first words out of her mouth, and I say this in my book, and I say this with endearment. She said, "Girl you are so cute, you need to take your ass back to Detroit where you came from because this city is going to eat your ass alive." And I was like, damn, for a pretty little young lady why is she being so hard on me? But Pam, excuse me. Damn, I didn't think this would happen. Pam was the first person that saved me but I ended up trying to save her. Pam was ... Wow, I didn't think was gonna happen. Oh my God. Pam was very ... Pam had a drug problem. Pam was a heroin addict. And there was

this place that sex workers used to go to and those who remember the 80s, everyone remembered it. It was called the Cameo. The Cameo Theater on 8th Avenue. And I'm still living with LaRock Bay but I'm always finding myself going to Times Square and finding Pam. And I end up getting my, when LaRock died, I ended up getting a room of my own in Queens. My first room, my first place. And I went to find Pam and when I found her, it hit me that everybody, she lived up to her nickname and her nickname was stay stoned Pam. Even though she looked like a smaller version of Diana Ross with the pulled back hair, and the big ole eyes and pretty. Back then we used to call them real as rain because she was unspeakable. You could not recognize that this was a trans person. She was just that pretty. Little and so forth but like an identical Diana Ross. And I came and I brought her back to my little room that I had on Queens on 141st between Foch and Rockaway. I'll never forget it. And I let her dry out. And I went to the grocery store. When I came back she was gone. And I think like three days later I went to the Times Square to find her. And as I'm walking toward the Cameo, there's an EMS in front of the Cameo and they're bringing her out on a gurney. I didn't know that until I got the yellow line and it was Pam on the gurney and she had OD'd in the theater. And it hurt me because I just wanted to return back what she did for me as a 16-year-old person. It hurt me because she was the first person who told me to leave, go home. And she made sure, it's like I had so many guardian angels but her, out of everybody, Pam loved me and she would go out and do her sex work and then she would ... Nobody would let me do what they'd done, even though they were doing it. Nobody wanted me to be her or be what they were doing. And when she left me, I made it a vow to never, I would do everything else but I would never, because then I would be dishonoring them. I would never do sex work. And when I finally did do it, the one or two times that I did do it, felt that I was dishonoring their hope for me. And that's why I knew that I couldn't do sex work because I wasn't good at it. And I knew that they were looking over me, "What are you doing? You are not meant for this, you're better than this. We're doing this because this is all we know." And I was a child who came here from a middle class family. I didn't need to even be in New York, I was being rebellious. I don't have none of them stories where my family was mistreating me or beating on me or going through idiot narratives that you hear, relevant stories that you hear about other trans people. I don't have any of those stories. But because I had those stories, those girls didn't even know my back story, but they knew by looking at me that this was not for me. You know? So ... Oh wow. Oh Pam, I love you.

Keyes: Do you need some tissues?

Detrevarah: No, I'm fine.

Keyes: So actually, you were speaking about ... Just to go back a second, you were speaking about experiences in your childhood and how you don't have necessarily the narrative that ...

Detrevarah: Of tragedy.

Keyes: So you were telling me a story a while ago about when your family would leave and you would turn on the blinds. Can you recount that story for me?

Detrevarah: Being an only child, my parents came from a very stern type of family where they ... You got chores in our house. Even though I was the only child and I had my own bedroom, my own bike, I was a spoiled little child. But I still had chores to do. And I was forming into the woman I am today. And I would wait until my mom would leave and my dad would leave and I would go into my mother's closet. I wouldn't put her clothes on. I only did that one other time and that came out tragically because I actually wore my mother's coat to school and the principal called home and said, "Your child has on a coat that looks like it wasn't meant for him." They didn't say it was a girl's coat, they didn't do any of that. And I never did that again. So my next step was I'm still going to play dress up but I'm going to not wear her clothes. But I'm going to wear her shoes. My mother always had the most beautiful, decorated ... My mom was a very high stylish woman, she still is. And I would take her shoes and I would wear her shoes and I had to do my chores. So I would be vacuuming in her shoes. My mother wasn't a wig lady but I remember I found a hairpiece or something and I combed it out and put it on like a wig and I was in there vacuuming and all this. So as I have spoken before, that was my transition in the dark. Because I hadn't become relevant. And relevancy, to me, is when you come into the public. What's done in the dark, in my opinion, does not make you relevant. It makes it very secretive and something shameful. So I was still in my shame territory because it was done in the dark, it was done in secrecy. So in my opinion, I believe that that doesn't make your transition relevant until you actually go out into the public and you have no qualms or any type of thought processes or even boundaries to be trans.

Keyes: Sure. So to then bring it back more so to New York, how do you think the trans communities that you've been a part of have evolved over time?

Detrevarah: Whoa. There's a, in my opinion, there's always going to be those groups of people who move forward and then there's those who are going to be stagnated. That's why this community, the trans community in particular, is always a work in progress. And I think it will always be like that. Because you will have most trans people who will, their transition will still be secrecy. Their transition will be out of convenience. Their transition will be out of necessity. And then there will be the revolutionary girls like myself, Laverne Cox and so on and so on. And Janet Mock and the numerous women who live their truths out. And my idols, Lourdes, Ashley Hunter, Madison Gathers, people who have lived their truth regardless what the world or even the trans community thought, felt or believed. They lived their truth when it was disgraced by the community and by the public at hand. They were always women. And those are the women that I've admired, those are the women to go forward. I've always looked over my shoulder because I knew that I was standing on theirs.

Keyes: Sure. So tell me about your experiences with your education. I would ... Yeah, tell me about your experiences with your education and specifically how you've come to be where you are at now as far as the organization's you work with, the speaking engagements you do. Tell me how you got to where you are.

Detrevarah: 15 years ago, 2002, I was in a situation where I was involved with a lot of criminal activity. And what I mean by that is I was a part of a ring of people who had access to stolen credit cards. And I was arrested. And I was sentenced to a state penitentiary. And while there, again, more angels came to protect me. But this time they were not necessarily gay people, they were just a bunch of progressive thinking men. For some apparent reason, my behavior has always been an enigma for people to be curious, like why is this person here. I was always in environment where I stuck out like a sore thumb. And here was another avenue. From the street I stuck out. Even though I was relevantly in a place where I should have been because I committed a crime, I still stuck out because I wasn't comfortable there. I was introverted there, I was scared, I was fearful. And most people in those environments assume if you've done what I've done, then you shouldn't be scared of anything. You shouldn't be introverted. You shouldn't be frightened of this environment. But I was. And again, through guardian angels, through people were able to just watch my behavior, they saw that. So things like attending college while incarcerated was one of the first things that was offered to me and I took it. Because of the time I had there, I had only 18 months there, I wasn't able to complete there, but when I came home I was able to enroll in Hunter College. And while I was at Hunter College I met a beneficiary who was able to have me transferred to NYU school of the arts. And with this person, this was a romantic relationship that I had with this person and I was able to obtain my first degree. And that was an associates degree with Tisch School of the Arts, part of New York University. As a trans woman, I have just learned through, and I wouldn't say learned, I just did it. It never became a part of people recognize me acknowledging that, "Oh I'm trans." I just show up and that's just what they saw. And I never really concerned myself with if I was accepted, if I was sanctioned, if I was a spectacle. I came there with my makeup on and my girl clothes, girl apparel, my girl mannerisms and I just did what I saw my idols do, Pam and Madison and Candy Labasia. I just did what they'd done. Maybe not as good and well and convincingly as they was, but I still did it. So places of education were always curious like, your name is ... Then I had a male name. But you're coming to school in wigs and heels and all of this. And they never saw that but there was always these looks of astonishment and curiosity and sometimes just raw shock at how unapologetic that I was at doing it.

Keyes: Yes. Yes. Yes. That's al I'm going to say to that. Yes. So speaking to identity, how does being trans relate to other aspects of your identity? Your race, your class, your ability.

Detrevarah: Whoa. You know, I have a really small circle of friends. I have friends like Jada Downes and Ronald Caldwell and my rock, Daniel Williams. And they are the three people who have been replaced by people like Pam and Candy and Madison. They are my rock. They show tough love, they're supportive and I can come to them and cry but they also don't take any shit from me either. But I need them and I think we need each other. We hold each other up.

Keyes: Yeah. Just how does being trans relate to the other aspects of your identity?

Detrevarah: And then because spirituality in my later years has become my bond, I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. I'm a follower of meditating. I'm a follower of learning how to be kind to others through how I conduct myself. A lot of times people can say the words but the actions don't necessarily match. I can be in my high style apparel but I can also, at the same time, be very

empathetic to those who may not have the things that I have. And that's a work in progress for me, as it may be for anyone else. But there's no effort to do that for me. I'm not doing it to be patted on the head or to think that that's a part of it. But I just know that that's part of my advocacy, that's part of my passion to go the full spectrum of humanity here. There's so many more things to me than just being trans. I'm a spiritual black woman, I'm an advocate, I'm a mentor, I'm a very funny person if you get to know me. But I'm also a very private person. With my circle, they're working with me with learning how to be a little more less so stiff. They say I'm stiff. They say that I'm so business like sometimes that it can come across as intimidating to people. And I'm working on that. However, it's been so comfortable to be like this. This is the type of woman that I'm comfortable with. So there's only so much of that change that I'm gonna do. I'm not getting ready to be Shaniqua. I'm not getting ready to be her, sorry. And I don't mean that Shaniqua in a bad way, but I mean that in a very organic way. I am not gonna be her. More power to those people who can be that, I like being a very upstanding and classy lady, even though there will be some moments where it intimidates some people. And then a short phrase that may sound cold, that's on them. That ain't on me. I don't really suffer fools for that. I've worked hard to become this lady and I'm not getting ready to go backwards to make somebody else feel good knowing that I would be uncomfortable. Even in my lowest days when I came here as a 14 year old, as a 16 year old, I had this type of behavior with me. Because you stood out wherever I went. I was not as, I never lived up to the stereotype or the environment that I was in. So I've always been different, I've always stood out. And it's always been genuine. So when I hear people who would say that, like one of my best friends in my circle says to me, "Oh girl you need to loosen up a little or girl you're just too stiff," or whatever, I understand it and I tolerate it from my full circle because I know that they have my best interest at hand. But there's only so much shit I'm gonna take from them as well.

Keyes: Sure.

Detrevarah: I'm not getting ready to be Shaniqua. I don't know who she is. She does not live no where near me. Or in me. And I don't have any judgment towards Sheniqua, it's just not me.

Keyes: Sure. So pull it back to New York City, I want to hear two things from you. I want to hear what particular places and spaces in New York City have been most important to you. I'll let you say that, yes.

Detrevarah: One of the greatest things about this city is that memories. On the way here, I was pleased that I was able to walk by a former place that I used to live. I used to live in a brown stone over here.

Keyes: Where exactly?

Detrevarah: On Lewis. It was 9107 Lewis Avenue in Brooklyn. And that kind of means a lot to me because a lot of growth came out of that apartment. Then there's places like Port Authority where I learned how to grow up and see different types of personalities and meet different types of people, the good, the bad, the horrific, the predators. And even some wonderful people.

Another place, NYU Tisch School of the Arts meant so much to me because the benefactor who was able to send me there, he moved to Provincetown and he never got to see me graduate. I continue to look up Albert McMean. And Albert McMean has either fell off the face of the earth or died or just don't want to be bothered. But I find myself at least once a week finding myself near Tisch School of the Arts. I have to walk by it. It's like a good spirit to me. And then there's the recent. There's my church, 86th and Broadway, Rivers of Living Water, how they have affirmed me and made me come full circle, the human being that I am, the woman that I am, affirming who I am spiritually as a black trans woman, as a spiritual woman, as a person who receives support when some of the most horrific things like the estrangement of my family at moments and how they've been able to counsel me, to understand me, to be there for me. And then there is prison. Being in New York State Correctional Facility and being able to survive that and not have it affect me like it more than likely a lot of people feel that it should have. It didn't affect me as harshly as it may have affected other people. And I figured that that's a blessing because I never went in there assuming that I was innocent. I went in there because I did something wrong and I paid my debt to society. And I never looked at it as a them and us situation. It was this is what you do when you break the law and this is what happens when you do that. So it has always held some sort of affirming me and it keeps me structured to never venture that life again.

Keyes: So this is a big one. And I really, if you just happen to think about it, feel free. My question for you is, are there aspects of the trans community in New York City, whether it be past or present that you want especially remembered?

Detrevarah: I want to remember that we, as a community, should remember that from the beginnings of Stonewall, before Stonewall and as we are now that there are a lot of unsung people that don't get mentioned. That young trans person that's sleeping on the pier still in 2018, that young trans person who's still putting clothes in a bag and changing clothes in a bus station, to that young trans person who's coming from Utah and coming to New York to affirm and to receive freedom. And knowing that this city and maybe even this country has allowed certain metropolitan cities to accept them and to take them in and to allow them to free themselves. I believe that they will always exist. I'm just so glad that this city continues to be the anchor that doesn't sink for trans people. Of course there's difficulties, there's growth that needs to be done, but it's better than the child that's in Utah. Or the trans girl who's from Jamaica, the Caribbean or from Uganda or from Nigeria or from Russia. Coming here to this city where there's a possibility to look and see people who look just like you, talk just like you, express themselves like you may want to or you are expressing yourself. I want this memory of me to know that I was one of those people. I am one of those people.

Keyes: Yes. So speaking more so to that and maybe more so to the issues that we face as trans people now and systemic issues, my question for you, and feel free, you don't have to go into any specific details if you'd rather not. But have you ever been discriminated against at your job or school because of your gender or other aspects of your identity? And we can skip over this.

Detrevarah: No. I can answer it because mine is pretty quick. If I have, I didn't recognize it because I was so busy with my narrative. I've never lived apologetically. Even when I didn't know what apologetically meant. I remember being on the train in 1983 and there's cut in my hand right here. I remember being on the double A's. They don't have it anymore, it was the Double A train. And I remember I was going to the village because we only had territorial places in the city there to go to and I was going to the village. And there were these, what we called dangerous boys or inaudible boys or just ignorant people. And I was on the train and there was this guy who had this piece of steel in his hand like he had took it off of a car and he was coming through the trains. And as he bumped me I said, "What the hell?" And as he went to turn around, he swung it and I did this on my hand and he cut my hand right here. And this is when St. Vincent Hospital was still open. And I went to the emergency room and they sewed me up or whatever. But I remember that this city has ... I've always lived unapologetically. Even, when it was not necessarily popular or comfortable to do it. And this is why I say when I see young trans people living their truth in Brooklyn at 3:00 in the afternoon affirming themselves where maybe in 1982 they couldn't affirm themselves as they do today, that is progress any way you look at it. When the word faggot is no longer about identity, it's about lack of a manhood. You hear young boys saying, "Stop acting like a faggot," and it has no sexual tone to it, it has no identity to how it used to mean. And to me that's progress. The word is still ugly, the word still holds some pain there, but it has progressed. We're taking baby steps but at least we're taking steps.

Keyes: Sure. So tell me a bit more about, you mentioned a hospital just now. Tell me a bit more about your experiences with healthcare.

Detrevarah: Wow. With healthcare I have always, and this is something new for me. When I got my bachelor's degree in general business and executive law for state, county and federal forms, of course you become very, or rather I became very affluent in knowing the language. But I became very concerned as we were, our narrative as trans people, as LGBT people was becoming relevant in this country on every scalp of the word. That it became a part of my passion to be a part of the learning process. Because everyone's not gonna get the opportunity to go to college. Everyone's not going to want to go to college. Some people don't feel it's necessary and it may not be necessary. However, it is my duty as part of my narrative and my passion to move it forward, to push it forward, to pass it out. I don't move forward if I don't give it back.

Keyes: Just to bring it back a little bit, maybe some more specifics, when ... If you've accessed medical transition how did you do that? And as a follow up, have you ever gotten healthcare outside of licensed or legal means?

Detrevarah: Yes. There's a thing called the back rooms. And the back rooms still exist today. There's that person who knows how to go to the warehouses or wherever they stock up their home or their back room with illegal medications and syringes and pills and so forth. Those places still exist. I remember going through a couple of pumping parties where you would have a person who knows how to put silicone and glue and other foreign objects in your face or your chest, in your hips, in your wherever a person felt the need for it. I've experienced that. However, as we progressed as a community and we were able to get away from the marginalization and advocate

for legitimate healthcare with our state government, we were able to have things like Medicaid and other insurance companies to have us do those procedures in a legal type of way.

Keyes: So what about hormone access? Can you talk to me about hormone access?

Detrevarah: That has changed so much and it continues to change according to the administration of the state. In the Pataki years it was very complicated to get anything on hormones off of Medicaid because we had an administration that was so anti-trans that he hired a health commissioner that sanctioned his policies. And when he left and we got in Andrew Cuomo, Andrew Cuomo brought in an empathetic administration, a very medically, medical first and mental health first, priority. Not necessarily trying to follow some narrative or political narrative that was influenced by religion or someone's financial goal. They were able to allow us as trans women to get progressive healthcare. And that's where we are today. In this state, New York.

Keyes: Yes. So set back from specifically ... Yes. Do you have ... you have to go at 11, correct?

Detrevarah: 10 after.

Keyes: 10 after? So we have a little bit more time? You know what? I really have to pee. Do you have to pee?

Detrevarah: No.

Keyes: So what I'm gonna actually do, this might sound weird but can I ask you a question and then you can answer it while ...

Detrevarah: Mm-hmm.

Keyes: Okay. So the question I have for you, and feel free to take your time with this one, I'll be just a second. Sorry. For those listening. Do you feel that you've ever had to choose between expressing your gender identity and economic security or safety?

Detrevarah: Yes and no. When it comes to me having to explain it, I'll explain it to a governmental entity like Social Security or HRA or a medical organization. But spiritually or generally speaking to a group of people at a function or an empowerment group, that's a choice. That is not something that is mandatory. I think that it's not useful unless I'm trying to use it in an advocacy type of condition. It continues to be a work in progress. I don't particularly feel that it's necessary that I, or anyone for that matter, explain to someone about their medical condition to a bunch of people that have no reason or access to help take away or add to.

Keyes: So thank you. Do you have any experiences with mental health or mental illness?

Detrevarah: You know, the process with this transgender healthcare, there seems to be this narrative that if you're trans that you have some sort of mental dysphoria. And it's almost insulting. And you have to have a strong ... It's almost required, personally, that you have a strong tolerance for the language that's gonna be asked of you. However, if you become very emotional about it in front of these people, like medical doctors and psychiatric entities, it will slow the process to obtain the things that you want to obtain. So you almost have to just get through it. It bothers me that that's so sad because everyone's not that strong. A lot of people have issues that affect their mental health. So for me, I have not allowed questions about my mental health to become a barrier for me. I just get it over with because if I don't get it over with, I may not obtain those hormones. I may not be able to get the things that I need. So I try to, I wouldn't say speed the process up, but I surely don't want to lag the process or slow the process down because I feel some sort of way that someone's talking about mental health. I know that this is one of the requirements that still exists today. Maybe 10 years from now, one year from now, six months from now we won't have to address mental illness because of my health status and the health conditions that I'm trying to obtain hormones. Or if I'm a trans male I'm trying to obtain T-shots. I shouldn't have to go through this questionnaire about my mental health. Because to me, I thought it would be different. But to those in the bureaucracy, obviously they don't think so.

Keyes: Absolutely. I totally hear you. There's a lot of gatekeeping in the medical community.

Detrevarah: Yes.

Keyes: So you have a little bit of time left and I wanted to move more towards our concluding segment. If you wanted people to hear one thing from you, what would it be?

Detrevarah: You have to keep your eyes wide open, your mind able to move past your fears, your intolerance that's given to you or that you may even have to move forward. Because when I have done that, meaning that when I haven't been progressive, when I have been stagnated, when I have been hurt, when I've allowed pain to lead me or stagnate me, nobody wins. And starting with me. You must get over the hump of pain and transgressions and the ability of people holding you down or an entity holding you down like HRA, our government, our president, our mayor, our health commissioners, our service providers. You have to know what you want your situation to look like. Even if you may not get there, you've got to know what you want. You cannot, in my opinion, go about it day by day. You've got to know what you want to get to, even if you don't know how to get there. Because if you don't, someone else will pick your narrative for you and you will be left behind more than likely. You won't move forward because that won't be your vision, it'll be someone else's.

Keyes: Yes. Yes. So if you wanted to be remembered for one thing, what would it be?

Detrevarah: That I was proactive not only for myself, but surely for those who are coming after me by having the examples through my narrative and through my blood, sweat and tears and time and efforts that I did something that ... And my name might not necessarily be what's

important. That they do know that there was somebody who's been here before. That they're not on an island.

Detrevarah: Because when you're in this lifestyle and you're ostracized or marginalized or you believe that you are, you will live up to that and all those negativities that come with it. And it starts with you. If you don't believe it, don't expect nobody else to believe it. If you do believe it, it gives you the opportunity to move forward. Let them catch on to you, not you catch on to them.

Keyes: So to kind of wrap up, one thing I didn't ask you a lot about is that you've written a memoir.

Detrevarah: Yes.

Keyes: Can you tell me a bit about that process?

Detrevarah: The process was like therapy. It was a therapy session on paper. It was writing journals like a diary, it was telling stories and getting pain off of me, out of me onto a piece of paper so I can move forward. If I didn't know how to write I would probably be a therapist great client. And I took a shortcut and said I'm going to get therapy through self. I'm going to get therapy through writing it on paper. It was a therapy that continues today, just not in part of the memoir because that had to stop at some point. My book is about my personal journey as it was, as it is and how it will be through what I've lived through and for me by me but to others. That they're able to see that it ain't easy for nobody. It surely wasn't for me. And it ain't gonna be easy for you. But when you know that there's a road map, there's an idea, there's a concept that you can grab hold to, maybe this story can help just one person and more than anything, it helped me. If that one person was me, then I did what I needed to do.

Keyes: So do you have anyone else in mind that you think would be interested in participating?

Detrevarah: Yes.

Keyes: Can you say those names?

Detrevarah: Probably, I have another person who I'm very close with. Her name is Alexis Dishanel. Her, there's probably the person I mentor, Christina Nichole China Black. You can Facebook these ladies.

Keyes: Christina who?

Detrevarah: Christina Nichole China Black.

Keyes: Oh I see. Thank you.

Detrevarah: I mentor her. She's a young person who I believe her story is relevant. And then there's Alexis Dishanel who is a good friend of mine, someone who I vibe with. And then there is Jada Renee Downes who is a part of my inner circle. Because I only have three close friends. And we're all a little base there. So those are the three people that you could probably look up on Facebook.

Keyes: Thank you. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

Detrevarah: I'd just like to say thank you that you gave me the opportunity to participate in such a wonderful, necessary and relevant project. More than anything, I'd like to just put the word on relevant. We need to record and historically put our stories into history and seal them and release them onto the generation before us. Because as we make history, so will they.

Keyes: Thank you.

Detrevarah: You're welcome.

Keyes: It's been a pleasure, Grace.

Detrevarah: Thank you. It's also been a pleasure. Thank you.