NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ANDREA LAWLOR

Interviewer: AJ Lewis

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Transcribed by Olivia Streisand & Connie Hua (volunteers)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #174

AJ Lewis: Alright, hello. My name is AJ Lewis and I'll be having a conversation with Andrea Lawlor. This interview is being recorded jointly for two oral history projects. The first is the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Program, which is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. This interview is also being conducted for LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa, a project of Grinnell College that documents experiences of LGBT people who've lived in Iowa. It is August 8th, 2019. This is being recorded in Northampton, Massachusetts. Hi Andrea.

Andrea Lawlor: Hey.

Lewis: Thanks so much for your time today. To start, can you slightly introduce yourself briefly for the recorder and then we can get going talking about your early life.

Lawlor: Oh sure. Yeah. Hi, I am Andrea Lawlor — that kind of introduction?

Lewis: Whatever you want listeners to know about you - situate you.

Lawlor: I am a writer and I teach at a college and I lived in New York for some formative years of my early adulthood and also lived in Iowa city. Similar times so those are maybe relevant to this discussion.

Lewis: And you're from the East coast originally, right?

Lawlor: I was born in Philadelphia and really shortly after two weeks later, my mom moved us back to New Haven and we lived with her parents and then when I was about five, we moved to Naugatuck, Connecticut, where we lived with my dad, my step-dad. I grew up in Naugatuck until I was about eighteen, which was a factory town where most of the factories closed in the 70s. It's a lot of unemployment. It was famous for Unirail and Keds. Unirail was a chemical manufacturer, complicit in all the terrible uses of chemicals over the years and now there's a lot of brown fields. Keds was a kind of a tennis shoe. So rubber. Rubber and chemicals. And then there was also a Mounds/Almond Joy factory which was up the road from where I lived — which was a - sort of like an actual chocolate factory — like Willy Wonka kind of chocolate factory — except that the candy was terrible. And I remember as an elementary school kid going on a field trip to get to see the chocolate factory and sort of getting free Mounds and Almond Joy and none of us wanted them. Naugatuck is located between New Haven and Waterbury in Connecticut and so I mostly lived where my parents still live on a sort of a house that was on a spit of land between two highways and I went to the public elementary school in my town and then to a Catholic middle school in Waterbury — Catholic all girls middle school in Waterbury, which was a nightmare and then I went to a — I was a day student at an all girls boarding school in Middlebury, Connecticut which was a very rich town about 15 minute drive from where I grew up. So there was a lot of strange sort of like class stuff happening for me in middle school and high school.

Lewis: It was your mom and your step-dad?

Lawlor: Yeah. My dad. My mom married him when I was five. My mom had been a nun for about 8 years in the 60s, left the convent. She became a nurse while in the convent. It was a sort of Catholic worker style convent that was very progressive and she actually got involved with anti-Vietnam War activism at that time. When she left the convent, she stayed in Philly for a few years. Other friends who left the religious orders around that time — it was right after Vatican II, so many Catholics were having a different relationship to the church and she was involved with a number of anti-war groups at the time, primarily as a medical person. She was a hospital nurse in Philly and then when we moved back to New Haven to be with her family where she grew up to live with my grandparents, she was a hospital nurse in New Haven and then we lived with another single mom and her kid and then a nurse who didn't have kids. So there was three nurses and two kids in this brown house, it was a kind of proto Kate and Alli situation which was very sweet in New Haven before we moved to Naugatuck. My mom then moved into working for the Visiting Nurse Association in New Haven and working—organizing with them and then she became a—then she worked for head start for a number of years as a nurse administrator. And then she moved into school nursing and she was a school nurse in New Haven for most of her career and later then became a school nurse in Richfield, Connecticut, which was just a calm fancy rich town quite far away from where we lived. So she commuted there and my dad was a school social worker in New Haven for pretty much his whole career so they were kinda public school workers and....

Lewis: Did you like growing up there?

Lawlor: I loved New Haven. I did not like growing up in Naugatuck. Naugatuck was not a place where I felt like I had much, you know, friends or community. I was as they say—we lived in this house, as an only child we live in a house that was sort of like on a spit of land between two highways. There were a few other houses on that—you know where you're driving and you're like “who lives there?” We lived there. And the other people who lived in that same sort of like area of land—like now there's a Walmart pretty close, there was an adult video store for awhile, it's just like a stretch of ex-urban land and my parents were like the closest people in age to me. Like they were the youngest people besides me in that spit of land, it was like all elderly people who had sort of not figured out a way to get out of that area. I played a lot by myself in a cemetery that was sort of the only the green space about a city block away which is very Smiths of me. I had some friends, like I went to the babysitter’s after school in elementary school and I had friends in that neighborhood. One of my friends who I am actually still in touch with and he actually lived in Iowa City at one point too and now he and his boyfriend live in Tennessee, or Louisville, which is where he’d grown up after he left Naugatuck.So like I—we weren't out to each other until college but—yeah so I didn't have a great experience in Naugatuck and then going to a Catholic school in another town was sort of further alienating and then going to a really a fancy high school was the nail in the coffin. So I don’t really know anybody who lives in the town except my parents and one good friend of my mom’s who she met volunteering at the — actually working in the children's library in town after she retired, she made this friend who has now become my friend as well and he's like in his maybe mid twenties now. But she became friends with him and another friend of his when they were in high school and they would constantly like invite her to go flyering at night for a liberatarian

candidate [laughter]. He became this cool interesting person and we're still in touch and that's sweet but I don't know anybody in that town and I don't — it's a — for me it's not a place I go to aside from seeing my parents.

Lewis: Did you have — what kind of things you were into in your early life? In addition to playing in graveyards [laughter].

Lawlor: Yeah. Mostly reading. And when I wasn't at the babysitter's after school I mostly got dropped off at the bus — dropped me off at the library and I stayed at the public library and just read. A library as a babysitter I think is a common story for a lot of people. I was into reading. I was into- [Phone buzzing]. I was not into certain things, like my dad really wanted me to do ballet and tap dance lessons and that was — you know I — from a very early age, I was like "Well, I'm a boy" and I don't want to do certain kind of things that I associated... well, they just weren't of interest to me. There was a lot of variety of things going on where I don't want to be made to take dance classes but my dad's niece had like a dance school and there was a lot of like dance class stuff. We had to go to these recitals every year. It was not of interest to me. Then later, when I got older, I was sort of like "oh, musicals are kind of great." And I appreciate dance now but I just didn't like it. I bargained that I would get to—I wanted to do little league or something like that but this was the 70s and actually, you know, girls were not allowed to do that and I—at least where I was. I — what I managed to get was I got out of the dance lessons. It was really torture. I have some tortured photographs which I keep around. But I managed to get to do some soccer after that and I felt enthusiastic about soccer but I have essentially no athletic ability. People often think I used to be like a jock but I think it's just like, you know, it's very generic. I was a goalie in high school. I've actually been this height since I was 12 and then when I got to high school people just — and I stayed this height, people would just, you know, they would just kick the ball over my head. So I was a poor goalie but I was enthusiastic about throwing myself on the ground to impress girls and soccer gave me that opportunity. But yeah, really, I was mostly interested [laughter] in reading and girls. Like really, my whole life. Making up stories, playing with Star Wars action figures in this dollhouse I had. I had this thing where I would—and I played with those Star Wars action figures really until I was like 13 when I finally gave them up. But I would have—like I had this dollhouse and this attic and I would have Luke Skywalker and Han Solo be agents of the French Resistance. And they were like hiding people in the attic. I had a whole dollhouse thing that was really — and I'm an only child and so I did what I now learned was an only child thing — a lot of sitting in my room talking to myself, just playing. So yeah. I was again — a lot of the — you know —I have a very I think that kind of standard trans narrative and that I was made to do all these coded girl things and I didn't like to do them and I had resistance, although I lived in a pretty hierarchical household where there was sort of like very top down parenting. Not the kind of parenting I do, but very sort of like "you're doing it, we're the adults, and that's why." And so I was made to do brownies which is like the — and they tried to make me do girl scouts and I actually had a real civil disobedience moment at that point and it had to do entirely with the uniform because the brownies kids were allowed to wear pants. And then you moved to girl scouts and you were suppose to wear a skirt and I was just like "over my dead body." And, so then at that point my mom found this thing called 4H which was not a huge deal where I was but it was nice because it was all gender and although it was supposed to be agricultural you actually had a whole thing where you could do

arts. So I did a lot of photography, cooking, and drawing and stuff like that. So I was always really arts focused, although I didn't — and my parents were really, you know they always bought me a lot of books and supportive of those things, but also they had grown up poor, working class and they were very much like "You need to study, you need to go to school, you need to get a good job, you need to be like a lawyer. It's nice you like to write. That means you'll be a lawyer." Like they were very focused on that and as an only child, they were sort of like "we are investing everything in you." It was very pressureful in that way and I think that's again a very standard story. Yeah, so... like another similar thing around that time — this has to do with class and gender. My dad had a lot of ideas about like he would go — like he really enjoyed — he's an aesthete and he grew up very, very, very poor. His parents were factory workers in the town factory. You know I think when they had work and he had — he lost both of his parents and his older brother when he was in his early twenties and he has an older sister who he took – who took care of him a little bit. But he had then became somebody who really wanted the finer things. So he took a lot of pleasure in doing things like going to thrift shops or consignment shops and finding like really fancy, really girly clothes for me that he wanted me to wear and look like, you know — he had a particular thing that he wanted. And my mom— and before she had met him my mom had been sort of like subscribed to Ms. magazines, stories for free children, wear whatever you like, totally a feminist and she is a feminist and she is progressive and they're also of their time. They were born in the 30s and they grew up in pretty — my dad is an Italian American, my mom in working Irish class. Her mom came over to be a professor - a live-in maid at a Yale professor's house. That's— their backgrounds were sort of like — they were the most educated people in their families. They had kinda rocketed to middle class out of their families, whom— and then they wanted me to kind of like go the extra mile which I clearly have done. I would having two — two graduate degrees. Crazy. And so my dad's thing was he - I think he wanted me to kind of like come correct and wanted me to look a certain way and present in a certain way. So he would get me these things like these Florence Eiseman dresses and he was really into labels and he would like find these fancy dresses that these like rich kids would wear. And he would put me in them or he would buy these clothes for me and then I would be made to wear those to my public elementary school in a poor town. And we were by far like— we were like the rich people in the town and you know really I would say middle class, like you know very working class culture. And I was just like "this is a horror show" on so many levels but because these clothes were like fancy, I had play clothes that I had in my bag to wear and change into the babysitters. So every morning at the elementary school from like Kindergarten on, I would get to the elementary school, I would go to the bathroom and change into my play clothes. So the bus was torture but once I was in my play clothes I was fine. I had tough skins. I had this little tough skinsuit with like a cowboy collar and little pants. I still have them.

Lewis: To what extent was being interested in girls and wanting to impress them something you were sort of like aware of at the time?

Lawlor: It was really early, early awareness. I don't know what, you know, what people — it was early awareness like 4 or 5, you know, like before we moved to Naugatuck I remembered, you know, playmates. My cousin just sort of being like "oh, you know we're different." She's a little bit younger than me and I was sort of like "we're very different." Like I had that and we

would play together a lot and that sort of interest in girls sort of being just more interesting on some level. Although and then when I — from elementary school on I often had mostly guy — boy friends. Little boys, not guys. But you know most of my friends outside of school and part of that had to do with being an only child and my parents — it wasn't play dates, It was the 70s. But they had friends that were only children too or who had friends who had kids that were only children too. So we did a lot of that "Here you are. Just play together" type play. And those were largely boys which I — you know — I felt like very much the same. And I did grow up in a pretty, you know — it was — because it was the 70s there were certain kinds of freedoms that were maybe — that were like in the larger sort of mainstream that trickled down or trickled into my life. And then it still was pretty — like things were pretty gendered. Boys line up here and girls line up there. That kind of thing. I can't remember what you asked me.

Lewis: I asked about being interested in girls.

Lawlor: Oh yeah. That's so funny and then I went right into gender. Yeah, I don't know. I think part of it was like "I like girls. I must be a boy." I remember around 11, I had that moment where I was like "well I guess I'm not turning into a boy," spontaneously I wrote this in my journal, so I was like I guess I must be a homo. I liked that word homo. I didn't like it but I did like it. I never used the word lesbian. That was always a sticking point for me which I later came to have some understanding of why. But I think I sort of — I did — I had an early connection of gender and sexuality and maybe part of that was also seeing my dad and — one of my dad's best friends who's gay was also very — like he had a lot of really coated feminine interests and he was - I was very close to him as well. But he was like a florist and an interior decorator for his work and he and my dad were into things like cooking and antiquing and stuff like that. So I was around men who had interests that were coded as not masculine and it was great and fine. My dad actually got a lot of praise for — he always cooked in our house and so my parents' friends would always be like "oh" you know to my mom, "oh, you're so lucky to have a husband who cooks." There were a lot of really traditional heteronormative gender roles happening in my house but there were these some things — I didn't necessarily have a strict binary breakdown of activities. I never, for instance, had a sense of my own masculinity being threatened by not being interested in sports. I was sort of like "well, not everybody is interested in sports." But the interest in girls was, you know, really like crushes — I remember in elementary school and I remember people being like — there was this one kid named Chris. I'm not going to say his last name but I still remember his last name. And he was like a tiger beat pin up at like age 7. He had that beautiful surfer hair and everybody was like "oh Chris, oh Chris." And I was like, you know, "oh Chris." Meanwhile I was like "oh Joanie." Yeah. So it was really clear every year it would be like "oh this year I have a crush on this person whereas last year I had a crush on that person." And it was really like — I knew not to talk about it but it was very strong and clear. And there was no questioning. I also knew like the library was the place I could get information, the card catalogue. But also that it wasn't something I really — I didn't talk about that with anybody until I was in high school. And then when I was in high school in New Haven there was actually a women's bookstore which had tons of — it had a gay section and I would get all the gay books there. Around 13 or 14, I started having access to more and actually even maybe before that, because of Atticus bookstore in New Haven, the Alcott bookstore and this bookstore, I think was called the Golden Thread or something. And the three of them I

remember like I got this book Young, Gay and Proud which was about like gay youth culture in Britain. It was for youth and I think I got it, I like shoplifted it from the Alcott bookstore when I was maybe 12. Around that time, I stumbled on a copy of Edmond White's The Boy's Own Story at the public library in Waterbury, which I read without checking out. One time around 12 too I was babysitting for some family friends and the kid had gone to sleep and I was just you know — and now as somebody who hires babysitters, this troubles me but I was scouring their shelves and opening drawers and I found a copy of The Joy of Gay Sex, again by Edmond White, my entry into gayness. And I was sort of like "oh my god, somehow this speaks to me." I'm not exactly sure why [laughter]. You know I did a lot of shoplifting of gay things but once I found these bookstores and once I was able to get myself to a bookstore and hide things in my backpack I started buying a lot of gay books. And then in high school, I came out to some people when I was like 14 or 15. There was one person who was sort of out in my high school and it did not go well for her.

Lewis: And that was when you were in Middlebury?

Lawlor: That was when I was in this high school in Middlebury, Connecticut. Yup.

Lewis: Was it all girls?

Lawlor: Yeah, it was all girls. So that was also weird, but on another level it gave me a lot of freedom. I hadn't — it hadn't been my choice. It was sort of, you know, in many ways chosen for me and I was on this scholarship and it was really stressful because it was expensive. There was a scholarship and all the day students were on scholarships and all the boarding students were largely not. And so there was a lot of like — class was the primary access of difference in that experience for me but also like coming into sexuality and coming into sort of a sense of gender stuff. Like I was always, in middle school and high school, If there was ever a time to dress up I was always be dressing up in costumes that allowed me to have like a painted on mustache or something. It was all that kind of thing so I didn't really — I was certainly, on some level, trying to have a girlfriend in high school but that was not happening for me even though it clearly was happening for others and it was happening for people who were sort of like "I'm not gay, I'm just sleeping with my roommate." I was like "great, thanks."

Lewis: Were you like — so books were a major sort [inaudible]. Were you aware like in the 70s and 80s of this sort of like beyond books, sort of LGBT world at large going on around you?

Lawlor: In New Haven. So another thing that would happen is that sometimes if I —

Lewis: I'm sorry. May I ask, was Atticus the name of the women's...

Lawlor: It was the bookstore. No, no, no. it wasn't the women's bookstore.

Lewis: What was the name of the book store?

Lawlor: The women's bookstore I think was called Gold Thread or something like that. It's not still there. I think it was on State street and it's possible to find that out. Atticus is still there and it's on Chapel street. It's a famous and wonderful independent bookstore. The Alcott store was a couple blocks away from Atticus and part it has not been eaten up by Barnes and Noble or something as horrible. At the time it was a huge, amazing resource and my parents would often take me to New Haven and like basically drop me off for the day like in middle school and high school if they have work and I didn't have school, where our schedules were different or if they had meetings or something. And they would just be like "okay, just hang out at bookstores all day" and that would be amazing for me because I would — you know — A) I would do a shoplifting rampage of downtown New Haven but B) because I was sort of free to just sit around and read gay books all day which I did. And there weren't so many at that time that you couldn't read them all and I mostly did.

Lewis: And so were you aware of the LGBT life and culture [inaudible]?

Lawlor: Oh yeah. So In New Haven, I was aware that the college students — there were lots of queer college students so that was obvious to me. Once I got to sort of — in middle school, I had a sense of it but by the time I got to high school, I was like "okay, I've now been reading about this stuff for a while so I can see the signs." I was involved — In high school, I got involved in stuff like nuclear disarmament organizing and I remember I was maybe a sophomore in high school, maybe it was like 1987, I went to a student disarmament conference at Yale and it was overnight and of course, you know, you can imagine that was great. A) I got my first pink triangle button. They had some ACT UP stuff, that the first time I learned about ACT UP. But I also found myself -— I don't remember exactly how I did it but I got myself to a gay Yale party in a dorm.

Lewis: [inaudible] What year would have that been?

Lawlor: That would have been like '87. Maybe '88. 'Cause it could have been in the winter. It was in the winter, probably was 88. I remember really nice — like must have been like a first year college or maybe second year, he seemed much older but really nice gay guy basically being like, you know, "you were wasted, buddy. I'm going to get you home safe" but like really sweet. It wasn't - I was just like wasted and a mess but I was also like "okay, so you gotta get to college and that's where the gays are." And that's where you can like just have your — and a lot of my childhood was sort of like "just get through this so you can get to college or a city." Which I did. So that was the plan and I succeeded.

Lewis: So you were sort of in a holding pattern until...

Lawlor: Yeah, I mean and there were gay people in my life in terms of my parents' friend Gene, who was about 10 years younger than them and he was — I came out to him in high school and he was really like lovely and supportive and not — we had our own relationship in which I was confident that he wasn't sharing things with my parents so I had like a kind gay trusted gay adult in my life. There were other people who were sort of like I knew were gay but nobody would talk about it. But It wasn't — I didn't — the extended family was pretty like ambiently

homophobic but my parents were more — when they found out I was queer, they were like sort of more in the, you know, "I just don't want you to have a hard life" vain of things, which at the time I was like enraged by. And now I'm sort of like as a parent, I'm like, well, I feel you [laughter]. Nobody wants their kid to have a hard life. We had some struggles around the time I was in college and coming out as queer but by my late 20s, our relationship was really getting much better and they're wonderful and supportive now. And I told them not to read my book and they say that they haven't so — which is for their own protection. But I — they've been actually — they've rolled with everything around gender, they're really happy — like they love my partner. My mom is sort of like "the daughter I never had." So that's really nice for me actually.

Lewis: What was it like when you fled to New York City?

Lawlor: It was great to be in New York but I, for a variety of reasons, ended up at Fordham which was not a great place to be. I was one of the only out queer people. There were like three of us out undergrads. That's a school that is 30,000 people in the Bronx, Rose Hill. We knew some gay Jesuits who would sometimes take us out to dinner in the viillage and they were very kind but they weren't out. And I — we started a group called Fordham lesbians and gays which was very of the time in terms of the language so this was 89-90. We had to get all our straight friends to sign the petition as members because we couldn't find 10 out people on campus. So that was hard, you know, we couldn't — I knew that I had a — I had a professor who was queer and I think she was more out than others but and I'm still in touch with her. She was wonderful and in many ways life changing. But it was a place where my friends and I routinely got death threats, like pinned to our doors, our dorm room doors. We got chased. It was really, you know, it was a kind of a fortress of a campus and what was scary was inside the campus walls. And it was a place where before our group got approved, which it finally did, another student group was approved called Preserving a Cathoilic Tradition which was a student group composed of really, really violently homophobic students who were also involved in other work like the Lambs of Christ and Operation Rescue stuff. So I ended up being actually on the other side of the lines from them and doing stuff like I — I started getting involved in things in the city like ACT UP to some extent, Queer Nation largely, Dyke Action Machine, WHAM, which is Women's Health Action Mobilzation so doing like clinic defense. Stuff like that. Pink Panthers - Pink Panther Patrol, and of those Queer nation, Pink Panther Patrol, Dyke Action Machine were like the things I was most involved in and like WHAM and ACT UP were things that I was sort of like "I'm here," like rank and file, like I'll come out or I'll do a thing but I wasn't — you know — I was a teenager. But getting involved with that kind of activism was helpful because A) It was, you know, a way to sort of see a different kind of way to be queer and be political and a lot of things I'd seen in other kinds of organizing up until that point were being done in such amazing ways in those groups and B) It was a real comforting alternative to what was happening on campus. And I dropped out of Fordham — we got the group approved and I dropped out. It just wasn't a good situation for me.

Lewis: Was there a particular reason why you ended up at Fordham?

Lawlor: Yeah because I had — I wasn't like — I wasn't a particularly good student in high school and I mean I was an okay student but I was uneven and I'd been suspended at some points in high school — like I wasn't a great candidate for the kinds of schools in New York City that I might have really had a good time at. And I knew I couldn't apply to any place that wouldn't give significant financial aid so I didn't apply to NYU or Sarah Lawrence or The New School because they didn't have financial aid to speak of. I mean they had some but it wasn't significant. I knew I would never get into Barnard or Columbia. I didn't understand about Hunter. I — like looking back and I thought about it, I would have loved to go to some place like Pratt but it didn't occur to me I could go to art school. It was sort of like how do I get to New York and Fordham somehow seemed like the most possible. And also having grown up in an Catholic world even though I had never been involved or interested but it had been sort of part of — I understand that the Jesuits were considered more progressive than maybe the people who ran the other Catholic schools I could probably have gotten in New York. It was just really like — you know — opportunistic.

Lewis: You just wanted to be in New York.

Lawlor: I just wanted to be in New York and that was the only way I could figure out how to do it. And then when I dropped out, I realized — I dropped out I got a job working as a receptionist at the Putumayo warehouse in Soho. Putumayo was like a clothing manufacturer and they've gone into world music but I answered phones in this warehouse, and it was great, you know, it was fantastic. I just really — I went out every night, did a lot of — you know — I went to meetings, I went to clubs. I had a whole life and then I just had this day job and I paid my rent and it was great. But I realized in the course of that working fulltime in a job that was what I could get at that point at like 19 that I wasn't going to be able to pay rent, eat and pay for college in New York like if I tried to go to Hunter even within state. I had like worked it out and I was like "there is no way I'm going to be able to do this." At that point, I was not in great touch with my parents. So I started researching places that would have a good English department, that would be like queer friendly and that I could afford and I came up with Iowa which turned out to be totally true. I didn't tell myself — I didn't let myself think that I wanted to go there because of the workshop and the presence of the creative writing. There — I was sort of like "It has a good English department." I didn't — I wasn't writing and I didn't really let myself think of myself as a writer. But that was of course a big piece of it. So then I went to Iowa city.

Lewis: I do wanna hear more about Iowa but I'm curious about your life in New York City before you left - do you remember like the first time you went to a gay bar?

Lawlor: Oh gosh, that's a good question. The first time I went into a gay bar - not a gay night like a gay bar? Maybe the first time I went... I wonder... I think it might have been with that friend of mine who was out in high school and she was a year behind me. She was my age but she had — she was a year behind me so she was still in high school. She came up to visit me maybe the first semester of college and it must have been — it might have — no... maybe. A memorable time was going with her to what I believe was called a Dutchess Two, which was in the West Village. I went — I became pretty quickly a — you know I had a fake a ID and I became pretty quickly a regular at places like Crazy Mannies in the West Village, that was a big one.

Dutchess Two I'm pretty sure closed not long after that. Crazy Mannies, I must have been around the Clit Club — the Clit Club was just one night. It was like Fridays and then we would also—- so when I dropped out my friend Stuart dropped out too. I won't say his last name [inaudible] So we had an apartment together. Oh god, we sublet a squat — we didn't know what we were doing — on Clinton street in the East Village. Some guy basically conned us into subletting this place he was squatting. It was such a disaster but it was great. It was a basement, tt was so filthy but we were delighted. We would kind of switch it up going to bars together. There was this place called Wonderbar. I don't know if it's still around and it was close to where we lived but this was — that was more like in 1991, 92. But in 89 like when I first got into the city probably like Duchess, Crazy Mannies, there were like some sort of informal gay nights at these bars in the Bronx and I would go to those with my gay friends from Fordham. Queer friends, whatever. I went to a lot of men's bars just because I mostly hung out with gay men. But I would go wherever, really.

Lewis: What was your sort of like — I mean how would you — what was your sort of like scene. Like what was it like being queer? [Inaudible]

Lawlor: Well once I got really more involved with like Queer Nation stuff that was sort of the — I would go to ACT UP meetings and Queer Nation — they were really — it was hard to distinguish them at the time and I was very much like it wasn't really even rank and file, it was sort of person who was showing up like what can I — I'll go pasting with people or whatever. And it was really like a... Stuart and I both had this quality of being like pets, you know, like we were teenagers. I mean I was 20 when I left the city so it was really — I realy like I remember when I turned 22, I was like "no one will ever think I'm cute again, so old." Very like gay feeling. I think we were treated like some mascots in a way but very much included and appreciated for being there but we weren't like — I wasn't somebody who was like necessarily total — there were many young organizers who were really doing the work and who were really taking control. I was not. I was sort of like "what's going on? He's cute. What can I do? But can I do it with somebody cute?" But it was — most of my social life was concentrated around the people I knew from Queer Nation, from ACT UP. And Stuart and I both did Pink Panther patrol for quite awhile and that was really cool because we were with people we knew from other, you know, from that — that was our scene. Our scene was like, we're going to the center and there's going to be a meeting and we would go and we would do some stuff. That was just the scene. But the Pink Panthers — I was you know — we would patrol weekend nights and we had these little shirts. I still have mine.

Lewis: Can you explain briefly what the Pink Panthers were?

Lawlor: Oh sure. So the Pink Panther patrol was a group of queer people in New York in that time of late 80s, early 90s that would walk in — we would sort of have a pack and we would walk around in the neighborhoods in which queer people were getting bashed. There was a lot of violence against people around gay bars, around the meat packing district, the piers, so we had these different routes and we would patrol the routes. We had our whistles and self defense training and our presence was really just meant to sort of hopefully intimidate people out of bashing and provide support for people if people needed to be escorted somewhere or

walked out. If they were wasted and they needed to be walked to subway, or whatever it was. We did that kind of thing that community people patrols do and it was a great group of people and it felt like something really concrete to do. Aside from a lot of the other activism I'd been doing was more on the level of symbol. Lots of — like a lot of Queer Nation what we were doing was to do with like — we had a kiss in at a bar. A lot of it had to do with representation. And you know putting up posters and gap ads, stuff like that so it was, it was a different register but many of the same people. That was around the time I met Sarah Coleman for instance in those circles and have stayed in touch with her and she's really — she was really a key member of those things. She was somebody like who was also kind to younger people. The thing I remember about that time is how kind the older people were to us. Yeah.

Lewis: Are there any particularly memorable patrols?

Lawlor: Not really, no. It kind of all blends into one.

Lewis: Like how big a group would you guys patrol usually?

Lawlor: It was probably — it was so long ago — I don't really remember but I think it was probably 7 or 8 people if I remember. And yeah, eventually — I think there was a lawsuit about the name. There was some sort of cease and decease from like MGM. Yeah, yeah. Which is so annoying and stupid. But it was going when I left. I left the city — when I left the city, all of those things were still sort of in, they were sort of still happening. I'm still in touch with a lot of those people.

Lewis: You mentioned that you were pretty involved in the Dyke Action Machine?

Lawlor: Yeah, that was a much smaller group and some of the people who were really involved — so a lot of those people were artists and graphic designers and worked in — you know — They were — they were people in their 20s and 30s and they were out of college. They were working in creative professions and it was really interesting to be mostly hanging out with or some of them were like graduate students. And that was a pretty small group. The kind of core group was sort of in 10 or 15 people range. It later became a project Cary and Shafer, Schafner, oh god, I lost Carrie's last name — Carrie. These two photographers who had done a lot of the design work. They weren't the only people doing the design work but they sort of led it. That project kind of — if you google it now you will see it as their project. But it had been a working group of Queer Nation and that was, in that iteration of it I was sort of involved with those people.

Lewis: Like what did you do?

Lawlor: I mean I really — we pasted stuff, I flyered, we went to demos. I was never somebody who was at the center of anything. I was always, you know, I was just a person who was just there but not organizing if that makes sense. Really it was very rank and file.

Lewis: What was it — do you remember what it was that drew you to activism. Like you mentioned like going to disarmament in Connecticut and sort of falling into Queer Nation and ACT UP and LAM and stuff. Also on campus you were...

Lawlor: Yeah, I think part of it was — being in those scenes and those groups was a way to be with people. It was a way to meet queer people which was like my prime directive. And it also — I mean really I will say like all of my interest in activism always began with like "I'm going to meet cute girls." I'm not proud of it but it's just true [laughter]. And it also was coming out of like of a parallel sense of "there is injustice. I am and — you know — against injustice." And so the queer activism — so the disarmament stuff — I think in the 70s and 80s, when you're kind of growing up and just sort of like really a kid and you're realizing that humans have the capacity to blow up the planet and you're sort of like "wait what?" It actually is — once you sort of realize that, it's sort of hard to — everything is destabalized. It's hard to trust anybody and it's hard to understand why adults are just going about their regular lives and you're sort of like "what the fuck, you guys. No, this is not. You can't. We can't like let this stand." So I think there was a sort of a sense of crisis but then at the same time, you're like "oh god. I have a zit. I'm in class with this girl I like." It's sort of like you're holding both of these things, like the world is about to end and you have to stop it and also regular life goes on. So I think the — because nuclear war is literally annihilation and how do you hold annihilation with life continuing, like the threat of annihilation. So I think that sort of culturally I was primed for that and then when I came into queer life, it was at the time where queer sex was starting to become associated with annihilation. And so I think that those that — you know it was certainly not an articulated or conscious connection but it seemed like a very clear trajectory in a way. And also like that the disarmament stuff was like the activism that was available where I was you know and I think it just happened to be what — I did Amnesty International too but I was a little bit like "Alright I'm writing a letter on this airmail paper and that's cool, but really? We gotta go like protest these trident [inaudible] and stuff like this is a different order of magnitude in terms of like what I — bodies on the line." And so I really — I think having throughout the 80s, the early 80s having a sense of AIDS primarily because of our family friend Gene. I remember, it must have been in the early 80s, I remember being in the car with him and my mom, my mom was a nurse as I said, and Gene was saying sort of like "well you know there's this thing, this GRID thing, and what do you think about it?" to my mom because my mom was the person everybody would call for free medical advice. That's what nurses get and doctors but so Gene would always be sort of like "what do you make of this" or "I saw this article" or whatever. So it was ambient knowledge for me as a child. And then as I got into high school I was getting the Village Voice when I could in New Haven, I was reading whatever gay periodicals I could get to. I got a post office box in high school in the town I went to high school in and I got gay things sent to me there which was really — when I look back I think I was quite intrepid [laughter]. And that also led into zine life later. But I think that what was really appealing about the activism I was around and those scenes were that people were working together on multiple fronts and like there was a lot of people who were really different from each other, having this kind of solidarity because it's like annihilation. It's like nuclear disarmament — It's like nothing else matters at that point. It's just we have to stop this thing. So people have to work together across difference to stop a thing. And I think you know that's what it felt like a lot of the organizing, like ACT UP felt like the umbrella for everything else that was going on and people had been coming from anti-war

organizing, from nuclear disarmament stuff, they'd been coming from women's health, like tons of different kinds of you know radical leftist organizing traditions and bringing that information and that knowledge and those tactics and strategies to ACT UP. So it was really it also felt like this sort of — and it was a coalition like coalitionist politics but it felt like this also kind of really intense, really large seminar on radical possibility and radical movements. Because you can be talking to somebody and you find out that they had like you know been arrested with Daniel Barragan or something. You would find out all this stuff about the older people and the older people were really generous and they knew so much you know and they were — they took young people seriously. You know I didn't take myself that seriously but they took us seriously and people — there was a lot of infighting. That is where I learned the word infighting. There was a lot of you know - many people I knew obviously did not feel seen or weren't seen or heard but that was where I even learned it was possible for lots of different people to want to be seen and heard in a group that was organizing against something that was affecting everybody even if not everybody was realized it. So I think that was what was exciting. It was like oh these people are living in reality and really personally, it also was a time at the late 80s, early 90s there was a lot of like lesbian and gay circles there was a lot of sort of like "lesbians are here and gay men are here." There was nothing else, you know like bisexuals, trans, nothing was being discussed but Queer Nation was like queer and I was like "oh, okay. So I don't have to pick a side" and that was really helpful to me to be just be like I identify as queer and that can include everything. It can mean gender, it can mean sexuality, I don't have to have a word that I don't — that doesn't resonate for me for whatever reason. And it was like punk you know, it was exciting in that way like "fuck you." But I also like that most of the organizing within those groups wasn't divided by gender but Dyke Action Machine actually was and it was you know people who identified as dykes. I sort of like was provisionally okay with identifying as a dyke, which I saw as a sort of another word for butch even though it wasn't being used that way but I was kind of into that. I could get my head around that, I could accept it as sort of like okay. But it was really just because that's what there were. Like the younger — there were college aged people that I could and dig deep so that was sort of again opportunistic. But I liked a lot of that organizing being not separatist and that was really — 'cause I really was sort of like constantly being interpolated into this sort of like lesbian space or sort of like being invited to these things and I'd be like "thanks but no thanks. I'm going to meet or whatever. I'm going to the Eagle and get cold fish all night but it's better than this." So I think that there was a gendered piece in that that felt like — you know I didn't articulate it at the time but later I could look back and say that was part of what attracted me to that world was more of a sense of expansiveness and more of a sense of possibility and also just people talking about language and you know.

Lewis: And that sense of possibility comes through in your novel pretty strongly, that sort of moment of openness and sort of contact across difference, ages of queer. So your social world was also like mixed in the same way? [inaudible]

Lawlor: My social world was like... Yeah, at that moment, at that time, in that sort of like — when I was in New York in 89, 92 period, my social life was like five percent Fordham College undergrads and like 95 percent queer activists and of those queer activists it was really super mixed in terms of men, women, what we now would call cis queer people, trans queer people.

It was people who were — it was not hugely racially diverse. It was still skewed white — my social group not all of that, but more racially diverse than any other social group I was part of. Economically pretty wide ranging, like there were definitely in ACT UP like you definitely knew there were these rich people who were sort of like using their privilege and it was amazing but you could also kind of smell them. And then there were poor working class people who were sort of like saying "these are my issues and they're really different." And it was really interesting to be not only seeing that in that sort of like political sphere but also then just like going out to the bar after, which was a lot of what we were doing was going out after. Dating or hooking up or whatever. And so I really met a huge wide range of people at that time. And again many of them I'm still in touch with which is exciting like weirdly thanks to the internet.

Lewis: And then eventually you decided to finish undergrad?

Lawlor: I went to Iowa and then I — In Iowa I was there for four years doing this sort of like on again and off again. I would go for one semester, work the next semester. I went for a semester and thn I dropped out and lived and worked and got instate tuition which made my life a lot easier. I was bartending at this queer bar, the 620 club, which was also cool 'cause it was a huge night club and it was like mixed which was very midwestern.

Lewis: The bar that's there now - it's like studio 13 or something. That's different. 'Cause I know it's been there for a while but it used to have a different name.

Lawlor: Yeah. The 620 was a warehouse. It was like 620 north Lind St. You know where the post office is?

Lewis: Yes.

Lawlor: Past that but like two streets down, there's like a Come and Go on the corner.

Lewis: So what did you think of queer Iowa city after coming from New York?

Lawlor: Oddly enough, it was a fantastic and exciting spot to be in. In some ways, I was also getting to a point where I was feeling a little overwhelmed by everything I didn't know. I remember this guy Matt Foreman, he was like head of AVP at the time. I think he's gone on to other directorial things now. Him and his boyfriend had like some big party at Twin Donut right before I left. And he was like "Oh, you're going to Iowa. Oh, that's really interesting. You're going to go to college and that's great. You need to know your history." And I was like "thanks, Matt." It really stuck with me. I was sort of like "okay. I got the blessing." And then I really did not — I was not involved in activism for a long time afterwards. I think I was in many ways like in Iowa I was sort of like working and studying and trying to figure out if I was going to grad school or what I was gonna do. And after that I mean it really after that initial moment of really intense involvement in organizing — I haven't really been a particularly active person. I sort of feel like the reserved core [inaudible] I was doing stuff but it was sort of like in that reserve core way. Like "okay, there's a meeting and this is what we do when these things happen. We go to the meetings, we go to demos, or we do these things." And so that's yeah I think it's sort

of — I think I realized ultimately that I don't necessarily have the head for some of that organizing. I've often wanted to be more involved. I mean my partner and I over the last few years, she made a documentary about Judy Barry who was the first organizer in northern California. Really amazing person. And through the course of my partner making that documentary, she became, this was now at this point 15 years ago, she got really interested in the environmentalist movement, which — up until to that point both of us and many people I know thought of that's just like boujee like white men are interested in that. And then it was because of Judy Barry, who was this labor organizer who became interested in working with timber workers and environmentalists and was bringing these movements together before she ultimately died. She's sort of like I think was the person who for both of us — well, for my partner and then later for me through her made us realize like global climate change was something that was like the place where if we were going to be putting our energies would be the place putting our energies in the same way. And I think for the both of us — well I haven't really done that I mean, you know, this is just the truth I haven't really been an activist in most of my adult life. But I think like global climate change and immigration stuff are the places that make sense to me. There were a lot of things that were coming up around like — LGBT activism has never been much of an interest for me since that early time. I'm grateful for the work that people have done. But for instance, marriage equality or stuff to do with various religious organizations is not of interest to me. The prison abolition work that many of my friends have been involved with I think is amazing and something also I feel like is an LGBT issue. Like those kind of issues prison, abolition, poverty, stuff like that. Those are things to work on. I have found that I just I go to a meeting, I get excited and then I can't — It's like this early burnout or something is still there and it get triggered and I don't continue but I think probably that's gonna have to change at some point. Well, becoming a parent also I think is something where you're like "oh my god right. We have to actually do more things than we're doing and sort of starting putting our money where our mouth is."

Lewis: What did you spend most of your time doing when you were in Iowa City?

Lawlor: Drinking and hanging out with girls and studying. I was — at that point I thought I would go to graduate school and do like some kind of queer studies degree. Kevin Kopelson was my teacher and mentor. And I had amazing professors at Iowa, not only Kevin but Doris Witt and so many, actually too many to mention, but really amazing professors who not only did you know queer theory or queer studies, but also were really like wonderful Marxist academics, Marxist literary critics. I had a zine for a while. That was a fanzine for Judith Butler.

Lewis: Was that the Judy?

Lawlor: Yes, it was called Judy.

Lewis: I [inaudible] of yours.

Lawlor: That was my contribution to Iowa City culture.

Lewis: I think I wanna teach that next year.

Lawlor: Oh my god [laughter]. Yeah, I don't know if it holds up [laughter]. Well, you know, that was a different time. It was before the internet. That was in Iowa City. Actually, this guy Kembrom McCloud wrote a thing about Zephyr [inaudible]. He's recently — do you know Zephyr? So he wrote an appreciation because it was closing and he talked a little about Judy in it. It's like [inaudible] has it I think. Yeah. But so I was — I think Judy is a good example of my sort of academic mindset, like frivolous, queer, like interested but not that interested. Like I turn out really not to be a theorist and I was excited about queer theory and like Kevin was one of the people who got me excited and other professors I had I was trying to figure things out and I had questions. I thought queer theory and you know feminist film theory — I thought that those were the places I was going to get answers I needed about life and those — I didn't necessarily get the answers I needed but it was I think I was in many ways shaped by the reading and the thinking I was doing at that time. Even to the extent that I even understood it. But being turned on to like Foucault was huge for me and I think you know, again, with Butler maybe I didn't understand like 5 percent of what I read but it was still formative and helped me understand more things about my life. I think there was a point where I was trying to — I was often trying to read things on my own. And like not in the context of a class but then going to the professors and trying to talk about things I was reading. I remember I think what happened ultimately for me was that I kind of crashed on the rocky shore of derardyle and I was like "life is meaningless, nothing has any meaning, I'm done." Like sort of — I think I lost faith in the possibility of finding answers in critical theory around that time. At the point, my social scene and social life was largely graduate students and people from the bar. Some crossed over there. So I met a lot of people from the workshop because I was a bartender at the queer bar and some of the people I was friends with are people who you would know like Alex Chee was very close to one of my girlfriends at the time and later friend and I've known him for years and it was very sweet to watch his career you know because he was — he was just like a guy in the workshop and Reginald Sherpard who — I was very close to him. We had a falling out as many people did but he's a very beautiful poet who — he died maybe 5 years ago? I don't know how long ago, it seems like a long time ago but we hadn't been in touch for a long time but he was a very good close friend of mine. So there were queer writers that I knew through the workshop but there weren't very many people who were out and queer at the time. But a lot of people I connected with I'm still in touch with like workshop people. And then a lot of the other people were graduate students in other programs because I was at that point a nontraditional age college student so my peers were graduate students and the people I knew at the bar, so yeah. I can't remember where else we were.

Lewis: I think I asked you about queer theory or something. I want to make sure we have time to talk about writing in later life and stuff. I have to ask you specifically about sex or dating either in New York or Iowa city, any relations and entitlements that standout that you want to comment on? [laughter]

Lawlor: Oh my goodness. How should I say this? That was a time where I was interested in exploring. Yeah, it was a time of going wide rather than deep.

Lewis: Did you — I know that your novel is something you worked on for a long time before it got published. Was that something — was like writing — I know you had not been in school for writing or anything at that point yet. When you were in Iowa city was that something you were working on? [Inaudible].

Lawlor: Oh no. I didn't even start that — so one of the things that happened was that when I made that zine Judy, I'd been somebody who was writing for zines since really pretty early days of zines. Like end of high school, beginning of college I was writing for all these Canadian zines like JDs and Bimbox and all that. Like GB Jones and Johnny and]inaudible] and all those guys Rex and I got really involved with writing away for things like from Factsheet 5 and Larry Bob Roberts, Holy Tit Clamp zine which was the queer zine, the queer zine explosion, he had a column in Factsheet 5 and it became Holy Tit Clamp's review zine of queer zines. So I would go to Chicago and go to homocore stuff, I was sort of interested in that world so Judy was the moment where I was like "Well I wanna make a zine. What do I have to make a zine about?" And I wasn't really interested in like — so I — I wasn't really necessarily interested in making like a personal zine so I was like "I'm going to make this funny fanzine for Judith Butler" and I was surprised at the response it got because the zine world at that point had like a lot of — it was like really punk, really personal stuff, it was a little bit before Riot Girl. But it would be a lot of like reviews of stuff or you know — I liked zines like Guinea Pig Zero or 8 Track Mind or whatever, that were super specific. 8 Track Mind was this guy who loved 8 track tape cassettes and he would talk about that. And Guinea Pig Zero was this guy who worked as a guinea pig, like a test subject for money. And Dishwasher was a great zine, this guy Dishwasher Pete who was trying to wash dishes in every one of the 50 states. So I love those zines that were weird and specific and I got all the queer zines but none of them were weird and specific and not for me. I loved Tammy Rays, I Heart Amy Carter was great and there were a couple of other things that were really cool. And sometimes I would be able to find things that were coming out of San Francisco like whispering campaign that were more literary anthology zines and more in that sort of like new narrative Dennis Cooper world that I got excited about and then wasn't able to follow up on it for a while. But when I did Judy I was sort of surprised by the response and I had this girlfriend in New York when I left. Right when I left I started dating this person who I had one of those like "do I want to be this person or date this person" things about, and really in many ways this person was my butch role model and I was like — we were sort of like nine months like we would say non monogamous at the time, you know like open or long distance. That was our relationship but it was this huge thing and I was really like so influenced by this person in so many ways. And I remember early on she was like "we're not gonna be together in five years because in five years you're gonna be too butch for me." And I was like [inaudible] but I was certainly at that moment in my life trying to be what anybody wanted me to be. I had long hair. I actually had long hair until I was 27. I really thought I looked like Chris Cornell from Soundgarden. And it really was many years before I realized I would have if I had a beard. And so it was sort of like that was the thing and then I was very stubborn which I attribute to being like kind of like [inaudible] and butch. I was like "I can kind of have long hair and be butch, like girls like, what?" Girls know. And It was true. The girls I was interested in dating, which aside from like two, well really aside from that one relationship, were really all people who identified as fem would maybe later identify as fem. Mostly I've been pretty like butch for fem but I think I've also like been interested in other experiences but the thing about

this person who I was dating, the butch who I was sorta like trying to be really, was that — she was friends with a lot of graduate students in other places who were like really you know queer theory, people who become like kind of queer theory people. I won't name any names but I — so I made the zine and part of it probably was also to impress this person and so that kind of got passed around to these graduate students and I got — I don't know — this is way before your time but there used to be an academic magazine called Lingua Franca and this writer Larrissa Farquor who now writes for the New Yorker interviewed me about Judy for it. And it was like way too much attention, right. And I did a second issue and Judith Butler called me and and asked me to stop doing the zine [laughter]. Looking back, again, looking back — now this is before the internet. The thing that's kind of funny is like you know there's like seventy million similar cultural productions on the internet now and no one is going to be calling saying like "please could you not do this anymore." [laughter] But It was a different time and it was a tiny circulation, but it had because I had this —

Lewis: What did she not like about it? [laughter]

Lawlor: Well, you know, I think it was probably pretty revealing. It was gossip [laughter] and I think that the objection was, and I will actually say that I have sympathy for this now as a teacher and a parent. I don't think she talked about being a parent but I think she had an objection of being sexualized and there was that through the course of — the zine was highly — as she said, it's a highly perodic cultural practice. So I made that be the tagline [laughter]. You know and it was — she was like my hero. It was totally amazing and intimidating to talk to her and I was pleased she thought it was funny, which she did, but she was also like this is too revealing. And I really do have sympathy for that now and there are certain things in it now, like there's language that I use in it that I would not stand by now, certainly that I didn't understand about. But it's not like putting something on the internet. It had a very different kind of circulation. But when I got — when this interview in Lingua Franca came out, which again, fairly low circulation, just academics, but I got a letter from an editor at like Random House, some one of these random — I think it was — I don't remember where it was but it was one of the big publishing housings in New York that was like "I saw your zine, it's hilarious. Would you consider writing a book." And I just shut down and didn't write another word until I was 30 [laughter]. I was just like "this is way too much." I had total shut down panic, like just felt overexposed. I also was like too pressureful, I was like "I'm an imposter. Yes, I wrote that but some of the jokes are from other people" but you know which was mentioned in the thing but still I was like sort of like "I'm not really funny" you know, whatever. I just thought "I can't do this." And then I didn't write again aside from some Chandler Ross slash [laughter] but I didn't really write again until I was like 30. And my girlfriend at the time and to this day — not straight through but still, she was like "I don't know why you're in this soul crushing job." So at this point I was back in New York. I had worked at NYU press for a number of years, which was a great job and then I — trying to get into editorial. I'd been in marketing, I was trying to get into editorial so I moved to this web development company. It was — I worked with great people but the work itself was terrible and my partner was just like — she was in film school at the time and I think I had that sort of sense of like "well if you can do an MFA, like, if you can take yourself seriously like maybe I could take a night class." So she was like "you're a writer." And I was like "okay, alright." And again, doing something to please a girl. Literally the thru line

of my life — a woman. And you know somebody who knew me and sort of was like "I see this in you" and I was like "okay, like if you do it, maybe I can try." And I ended up taking a gotham class — this is like these classes they have. You pay for them, they're like not part of an institution. But the person who ended up being my teacher was Carter Sickels, who is this really awesome writer. And he was very encouraging and not particularly like "oh my godI You're a genius!" He was just like "you can do it, buddy!" and I was like "oh, I can do it" and then I — this was right before my 30th birthday and so for my 30th birthday my present to myself was I put all my stuff in storage, I sublet my apartment, I took an unpaid 2 month leave of absence, I think I had like $1500 saved at this point, and I rented a room off a friend in a house, the off season rent in Provincetown. I was like "I'm gonna go for two months and I'm going to try to write and I'll go back to my job." But I got laid off a month in. And so I got 3000 dollars of severance, which was like a huge chunk of money and New York state unemployment which I got — you know — I think of that as my emergent artist grant and that was the moment where I started writing furiously then.

Lewis: What year was this when you went to Provincetown?

Lawlor: I had been in Provincetown earlier than that but this was back when I turned 30 so it would have been in 2001. Yeah, it was 2001. It was like April 2001. And I ended up staying the long season there and you know working a little bit but not really, trying to write and really just struggling with writing but really trying to take it seriously. And this was a period where — so I've been involved with my partner like we've been involved like 22 years but this was in the early period of on again, off again. So I was at the end of that period trying to figure what I should do, where should I go. I didn't really want to go back to New York. I was sort of scouting around, thinking about places where I might live. We were in an off again period.

Lewis: What kind of writing did you think you wanted to do?

Lawlor: I wanted to write fiction because it was the thing I most wanted to be in the — I mean novels for me like that's the conversation I wanted to be in. I always read a lot of poetry and maybe gone to more poetry readings and been friends with more poets but I just really loved novels. So that felt like what I wanted to do. But I had no idea how to do it. So I ended up, in the fall of 2001, I ended up in San Francisco, sort of in my, in these kinds of wanderings. I — when I thought I was going for a weekend but I ended up staying for three years and in the course of that — so when I first got there, I was still on this unemployment and I found a place to stay with some friends. Like a week turned two weeks and then a sublet opened up and another sublet and I found myself falling into this life in San Francisco that was really, really wonderful. And really the first time in my entire life that I felt like falling into a place with ease. I mean I loved being in New York but it was sort of like "here I am" like this kind of dorky person on the outside trying to scrapple in. Now I'm making my friends. But in San Francisco I had friends I already — I had friends who moved there, who were people who I knew through my partner, again we were not together at that time but you know some friends who sort of introduced me to a scene and I sort of like — everything was so easeful, which is not the normal San Francisco experience but for me it really was. And part of it was at a like sort of the first tech bubble had just burst. So a lot of people were leaving the city and it was a little bit cheaper

than it had been. It was much cheaper than New York or Provincetown to be honest. I just had all this ease and I got — I knew Eileen Myles by this point personally. I'd been you know like a huge fan of theirs for a really long time and we'd known each other kind of ambiently for years. But they'd started dating my ex a few years before this. So we become friends and they were like "oh," I was sort of like "Eileen are there any workshops I can take in San Francisco that you know of" and they were like "why don't you write to Dodie Bellamy and asks if you could be in that workshop." So I — Eileen introduced me to Dodie so I took Dodie Bellamy's workshop and Kevin Killian was in that. He's Dodie's partner, was Dodie's partner. And so that was — and I ended up doing that for like a year. It was like her living room and that was in many ways —- it was the second time I'd taken a creative writing anything because I'd never taken any creative writing courses or anything like that up to this point except for Carter's class in New York at Gotham. But this was sort of my introduction and I was in a room with people, some of whom like Alvin Orloff and Tara Jepsen, Mark Hewert, Julia Block. Many of them had either MFAs or published books and I was really intimidated. Like Kevin Killian had published a lot of books and was, to my mind, Dodie and Kevin were these stars and I couldn't even believe I was in the room with them, let alone you know in a workshop. And I had no idea what I was doing and I was like "oh shit. I got to figure out how to write a story" and so I started rewriting Greek myths as a way to have a plot. And I was sort of like laying this autobiographical material on a skeleton Greek myth and like the beginning of Paul is me trying to work out something you know in my life, laid over a Greek myth and the Greek myth fell away. But that was where I started working on things that became Paul and that was in like the winter of 2002.

Lewis: When did you start with Greek myths? Like what triggered that?

Lawlor: Well, I think two things. 1. I had always had that — there was a book of Greek mythology for kids, D'Aulaires' book of Greek myths. I can show it to you my copy is probably over there. My kid has it now. And that was a favorite of mine as a child and there were — there were — I had been sort of like working through these ideas about like queerness and sexuality and gender that felt somehow connected to those stories and so I was like okay "what if I just retell the story as a way to sort of figure out what this was." And the other thing was that, part of it was like again to impress my at that point ex, now the once and future girlfriend. So I was always trying to, you know, and she loved Greek mythology and I was like "yes." I — so when I started writing what became Paul, I was writing about things that had happened 5 or 10 years previous that felt recent history to me. So that was like 2001, 2002 and some of the things I was writing about were probably in the — yeah they were like the early mid 90s. And so it didn't you know feel so far away.

Lewis: Can I pause this really, really quick?

Lawlor: Yeah, yeah. Totally.

Lewis: Recording — I'm sorry, thank you. See you were describing — you started out writing Paul sort of as this kind of autobiographical thing that was overlaid with a retelling of Greek mythology.

Lawlor: Yeah.

Lewis: And when did you actually — see you're sort of were working on this before you went to school?

Lawlor: Yeah. So I was at that point I had started working on it in Dodie Bellamy's workshop and around that time my unemployment ran out and I had been doing certain kinds of other things to get by - pet sitting, etc. and...

Lewis: [Inaudible] Did you have a favorite like bad job over the years?

Lawlor: Oh. I've so many jobs.

Lewis: Was there a bad job that you really liked?

Lawlor: I don't know. Well I was gonna say that around the time I was starting working at Dog Eared Books, which was one of my favorite jobs I ever had in my life, and I got the job in part because Alvin who was in Dodie's workshop worked there and encouraged me to apply and then I spent a number of years of working at Dog Eared before I realized that I couldn't really —I was starting to want to take writing more seriously — I was doing — I had read out a little bit, like Michelle T. and Tara Jepsen had this night called Cratch at Sadies Flying Elephant and that was like a queer open mic and it was really great and I featured at that, it was one of the huge things for me. The first thing I ever read as a feature, actually this writer Erin, I think her name was Erin White or Erin O'Bryant maybe? Erin O'Bryant. And she organized this reading at Dolores cafe and it was me and Julia Serrano which was really awesome for like my first non-open mic feature. And Michelle T. asked me to read at a benefit at El Rio and that was sort of like I was like "Okay. I can be getting into the literary scene here." I really dug the literary scene in San Francisco because I felt like people were doing exciting things and there were some MFA people but it was also a lot of sort of like I was also in the kind of more queer open mic world. And when I say open mic I'm not meaning like spoken word or slam. I'm meaning more sort of like you're reading yourself at a bar [laughter]. Well, it really the thing was that particular scene I was excited about and interested in was more dominated by prose writers so it was like Michelle T. and Tara, like those were all prose writers and who have also written poetry but it wasn't the same kind of a thing. I was living with Shauna Verrago at sort of the end of my time in San Francisco for a year and a half, who is in a band called Shauna Verrago and the deadly Nightshades. There was a really cool queer art scene, trans art scene that was, that felt like fun and fresh and invigorating. I loved working at the bookstore and one of my colleagues — So Alvin Orloff was there and Artie Bonious, who's a poet, and across the street, at modern times Tisa Bryant was working as a book seller. So we had like a lot of writer, bookseller, everybody on Valencia, that feeling. I thought this was really good but I felt overwhelmed by trying to make work while having a full time retail job which I loved but I just wasn't quite pulling it together in terms of — and I had cheap rent but I just couldn't — I felt like I just couldn't quite make it work and I didn't really feel like I could say I was a writer.

Lewis: Were you living in that area? Like around Valencia?

Lawlor: I lived on -— when I first moved to San Francisco, I lived on Downey street and then I lived on Preceda, a couple apartments on Preceda, and my last apartment, the longest place I lived was in Noe Valley on 27th and that was with Shauna. and then I — yeah. So it was very much, it was sort of very like Mission, Haight, Preceda centric. And this was in like 2001 - 2004 range. And in the course of that time when my partner and I had gotten back together and we decided to move to Philly we had some adjunct work and I was a come with guy. And I loved Philly, I wanted to go to Philly so that was fine with me. So we left San Francisco, moved to Phily and I realized at that point that I also wanted to apply to graduate school, an MFA program so that I felt like I could say "I'm a graduate student" which somehow seemed easier than saying I'm a writer. I felt like I had an alibi. And I did end up — I applied to graduate schools, I applied to four graduate schools, got rejected from three, and the one I got into was in Philly where we already were. And it was at Temple with Samuel Delaney and I got funding. So I went, even though it was a masters and not an MFA. So I was sort of — it has since turned into an MFA. But I wanted to work with Samuel Delaney and I'd only applied to places where you know my partner and I both felt like we could both live and get work. So I did that program and that was really a big deal for me in terms of feeling like I could say I was a writer and also working with Chip was phenomenal and he really was the person who — at the time I was still sort of doing Greek myth retelling but I had moved into this sort of like more anachronistic retellings that were less autobiographical. And I brought — when I brought what was, what became the first bit of Paul into a workshop with Samuel Delaney, he was like "I think you're not done with Paul." He was like "this is the thing you should be working on, not this other stuff." But he was supportive of me working on the other stuff.

Lewis: Was Paul always Paul in the book?

Lawlor: Yeah.

Lewis: Because you've described it being kind of autobiographical.

Lawlor: Yeah. So yeah, I think, yeah. I mean there's a lot of — I'm always hesitant to talk too much about, you know, like my intentions and I don't know how interesting that is or I don't know how useful it is when writers talk about their intentions, but to the extent that it was autobiographical, Paul you know is a character — like I — a lot of people suggested that I change the pronouns for Paul, dependent on [inaudible] Paul's embodiment. And I felt very strongly throughout, like I would not do that. And I was not able to articulate it until much later when I realized that like after defending it for a really long time, and finding that I was defending it, you know, in places like workshops where it was mostly like cisgender readers who were just like "how is it possible that you're not using she here" and I'm like you know "let's destabalize the pronouns." I realized later that part of it was you know just this desire to sort of like destabalize — like by the end of the book I hope that the pronoun "he" doesn't have, like I hope that it's not so meaningful.

Lewis: It's interesting that the [inaudible] takes you by surprise by doing the opposite.

Lawlor: Right. Exactly [laughter] but when you're talking about his vagina and you're talking about it for a long time.

Lewis: It defamiliarizes it.

Lawlor: I think there's a way and it's not the book that I would write if I was starting to write a book now but it was a book that I worked on for a long time and I felt like it had its integrity and I wanted to do that. I also, I don't think it's irrelevant, I haven't really talked about this at all but, that Paul did feel like a, in many ways, I am not Paul but a lot of me is in Paul and I chose to use a close person narrator for a variety of reasons that have to do more with crafting what is possible but I — at the time I was still using she/her pronouns. In the course of writing the book I did end up shifting to they/them pronouns and the pronoun thing is not really my fight. I think it is incredibly important to respect people's pronouns. I've been finding a lot of space in the they/them pronouns. I was unable to write something autobiographical that used she/her pronouns. It felt completely dysphoric, dissociating, just like totally like "well, not gonna be able to write that." And so I think, to me, it's part of — I could just as well be using he/him pronouns for myself now. I happen to not be particularly but I think to the extent that Paul is autobiographical the things I was working out, I needed them to remain complex and I didn't like that sort of easy parallel, like you have a particular embodiment, you use a particular pronoun. I think it's easier now to say that. Even 10 years ago people were not really picking that up or I was trying to explain it in a workshop. I've gotten better at explaining it I think or maybe it just isn't one way of thinking about things. This is why I'm not a theorist because I start rambling and I can't really talk in an articulate way about these things. But yeah, so I think of Paul as a character for whom I have been able to work out some things. A lot of the things are not — don't map on to my life, but some of the things do.

Lewis: Was Paul always a shape shifter in the early stages of the book?

Lawlor: Yeah. I originally started — the very beginning of the book was — I don't think it's evident at all now but I was trying to retell the Terisius story in Greek mythology where there is this person Terisius who is you know a man and he's punished by the gods and turned into a woman for seven years and then he's punished by the gods again and turned back into a man and blinded. It is an interesting story, I don't think you can even see a trace of it in that beginning but a lot of the stories I was interested in in Greek mythology and Roman because Avid is somebody who loves a shape shifter who loves a trans narrative. And so I think those stories were attractive to me because there's so much about shape shifting all the time that gods are constantly shape-shifting. Zeus is constantly taking the form of a swan or whatever.

Lewis: pigs and stuff.

Lawlor: Yeah. Yeah. But it's not just animal stuff, you know, it's like Zeus is taking the form of a mortal man or, you know, but many of the, the, the gods often would also shapeshift in terms of gender or species, mortality, all these things.

Lewis: Was it, is that what I'm trying to think, how to ask this? I guess I kind of wanted to ask just like, sort of, I mean, I understand that it, it comes out of mythology partly, but, um, it strikes me as interesting that there's this, I mean, clearly it's like kind of like having a magic moment, you know? Um, but I, I was sort of interested in how you sort of decided to organize a book, since you started writing it, um, you know, years ago before sort of current, like speculative kind of like, um, I mean, what was, was that simply it, like, you were just sort of interested in sort of body changing possibilities in mythology and classical texts like that?

Lawlor: Yeah. I mean, I think like many queer and trans people, I've been always looking for stories that somehow speak to my experience and, you know, shape-shifting stories are something I've been really like hunted. Yeah. You know, like there aren't actually that many really satisfying novels about shape-shifting. I've read a lot of them. Um, really many of them are not satisfying, but you know, like one of my favorites is Wildseed by Octavia Butler, which is more about, um, body jumping, but it has some similarities there. And while she's, you know, working through legacies of the trans Atlantic slave period, and she's, you know, her focus is really different. I was really excited by her sort of science fiction, you know, fantasy, like, she's just like, she's just going into it telling a gripping narrative story about people who are in different bodies. And that was, you know, I remember I was, I was cat sitting for a professor in Iowa city and she'd left a bunch of Octavia Butler books out and I was, I had a huge crush on her and I was sort of like, "Oh my God, whatever she's reading, I'm going to read." And I just remember sitting in her house and I was sitting with her, petting her cats and just like blasting through like 10 Octavia Butler books. Um, and that was when I sort of got excited about that. So those got in really early, but I was really into science fiction. I mean, Samuel Delaney was one of the people for me — I came to Samuel Delaney's work through, through Marilyn Hacker's work, who was his ex wife. And she's a lesbian poet whose work I love. I, there was a special issue of Ploughshares, which I read in, in high school that had all of these amazing people. It had Marilyn Hacker, I think was the editor, but had like Marilyn Hacker, I mean, Miles, Samuel Ace, um, all of these people. So I got obsessed with them and I started trying to research them and through Marilyn Hacker, I discovered Samuel Delaney and then I read his memoir The Motion of Light and Water, which is about his relationship with Hacker and coming out as a queer person, a science fiction writer, and living in the East village in the sixties and seventies. And, and I was like, "Oh, that's what it means to be like, that's how you can have like a queer adulthood as an artist." And it was really exciting. Their relationship was interesting. Um, but so from that book, I then — I had already liked science fiction as a kid, but then I got really into, you know, queer science fiction and Delaney was my gateway there. And in the early nineties, there was a lot of cyber punk stuff happening, which I was also really, really, really excited about. And there's a lot of stuff about bodies and AI and different kinds of, and gender and stuff like, um, you know, like Maureen McHugh and Pat Cadigan and Emma Bull, like all of these writers were asking questions about gender that were really interesting and that were happening in science fiction that weren't necessarily happening elsewhere. But there was also a queer, like there was new queer cinema in the early nineties. And there was also like a queer literary explosion where you had writers like, you know, Sarah Schulman and Dennis Cooper

and I mean Miles and Heather Lewis and, you know, Essex Hemphill and all these amazing writers. Bob Gluck — really exciting directions for me. So I was excited about science fiction. I was excited about shape-shifting. I was excited about any kind of queer cultural production. And it, I think like, well, Chip would always say the last three books you have read, come out in your writings or read good books. Samuel Delaney I called Chip. Cause he would always tell us that. And I think that, you know, it's more than three books. It's like, whatever. I've been like stuffing this stuff in for years and it all came out in Paul. So it made sense that it doesn't really fit in any one category because I'd been pretty excited about a lot of different categories. Um, but I think, you know, it doesn't really work as a sort of — the book doesn't cohere for real science fiction people because I don't get into the shape shifting abilities in the way that is satisfying for real science fiction people. And I knew that, and I, I always felt sort of bad about it. Like my dream would be to write a satisfying science fiction book or a book that would satisfy those people. And I don't know if I can do it. It's still a fantasy. It's still a dream. It's still a goal. There was a really, yeah, I just, I knew that that was not going to be the thing. So it's nice that there are other people who are writing things right now that are in a more, I think of a fabulist, like a queer trans fabulist moment where it's sort of slipstream magic realism, you know, science, some science fiction, fantasy stuff, but like I'm delighted by work like Kai Chend Thom or Carmen Machado, um, River Solomon, more of a real serious science fiction person, Jordy, obviously, you know, working within historical fiction and science fiction traditions, but messing with them. It's exciting to be, sort of feel like, you know, to feel like there's something happening that's more widespread because it's also, for me, that's more of the stuff I want to read. So, yeah.

Lewis: Have you always been a science fiction reader?

Lawlor: Yeah. Yeah. Totally.

Lewis: What's your — I'm jumping around a little bit at this — What's your, what's the book's reception been like for you?

Lawlor: Startling. Um, I mean I'm really happy. I thought — so when I was finished with the book was — I finished a draft maybe right before our kid, my partner had our child and I was revising, I remember when our kid was about six months old, I was finishing up a revision to send the agents. I sent to some agents. I got very kind rejections. And I felt like I had done that. I got the message that this was not a book they could sell. And I knew some people at Rescue, which was a small press space in Iowa city and Ohio actually. And they were really wonderful editors and, and mostly public. They made these beautiful books and they were like, "we have this open pros submission period. We do like one book of pros a year, or you should submit." And I did, and they said "we want to do it." And I just was like, "Oh my God, like, okay, great. This is amazing. Like, let me just, it's small press." I love the small press roll that kind of came up in a literary small press culture. It, I think, you know, it was small press books are often, you know, where you can do more innovative things. And I thought, "well, this is great 'cause that's like a conversation I'm also in and appreciate." And also like I wanted to try to see if I could get

it, you know, like get an agent and go like the mainstream route. Cause I'm not opposed to that. And I thought, “well, okay, well I'm going to do this and then I'll get this book off my desk. Probably people aren't interested in gender or the nineties anymore. So I can just... but I did spend a lot of time on it and I, I feel like it's as good as I can get it and I would like it to be out. And then maybe I can write something else and I'll have a book and I can apply for jobs” beause I was adjuncting, you know? And so in a lot of ways it was sort of like the sensible move, but also I really loved editors and I love that press so much. And they're really, really wonderful people and they made aesthetically beautiful objects which is really important to me. So then, you know, they, as small presses, can they put all of the resources behind the book. And then for a variety of reasons I still don't understand people seem to still be interested in gender and the nineties and that's been [laughter] that’s — I think it has been in a lot of ways a surprise for me. And I've said this like a lot of times, and it's become like a cliche, but it's true. Like when I started it wasn't historical fiction, it was like, I'm writing about things that are just, you know, recent past. And then it became historical fiction over that course, recent history, but still historical to the point where I had to fact check my memory. And, and that was really pleasurable actually and it got me excited about that. But I, I think that I, I have no idea what I was talking about.

Lewis: I asked you about the book’s reception [inaudible].

Lawlor: Yeah, I guess maybe at that point people became interested in — it was far enough away in time that people were interested and, um, yeah, I don't know. I am, I am really grateful and excited and surprised. So one of the things that happened was I —the book got a small, briefly noted review in the New Yorker, which I didn't necessarily understand was going to mean this, but it was really life changing because after that review — it turns out a lot of people read the New Yorker. So after that review, there were some queries about foreign rights, um, and about film and TV rights. And so at that point, my editors at Rescue were just sort of like “do you want us to help you find an agent to kind of handle these things? Or, you know what, you know, do you need help?” And I was like, you know what, “I'm going to go back to one of the agents who originally had said no” and he was the agent — I kind of had an agent crush on him and he's like this queer punk, like awesome, well, just aesthetically I was like, “Tim it’s always him,” you know, “maybe now he'll take me on.” But I sort of said like you know, “I don't know if you'd be willing to take another look at this or if you would even just know somebody good, ‘cause I trust your taste, who could help me with these things.” And he was like, “okay, like, let me take another look.” And he was like, “I'm not gonna, you know, say I was wrong before, but I think the timing wasn't right then, and it's right now and let's do this.” And he then took me on as a client, which was really cool and exciting and Rescue was amazing about it. And he then said, like he was working on getting it published in the UK and working on like film and TV rights stuff. And that's, you know, I think that's why he took it on because it's sort of like at that point it was sort of clear that it was something that from a business perspective made sense, whereas it didn't the first time around. So it kind of had to happen that way, but one of the things that happened was he, you know, with working with Rescue and in a situation

that I think hopefully will continue to be good for them, sold it to be reprinted by Vintage Knopf. So, and then, and so they, so Rescue gets like half that advance and then if it earns out the royalties they'll always get half. So hopefully that will continue to benefit Rescue, my benefactors, while also allowing the book to have a wider distribution and sort of stay in print, which is sometimes can be harder for a small press. Although they do an amazing job, they're wonderful. But sometimes some things are just harder for a smaller press. So this has worked out really nicely, but again, it's like really surprising to me. Um, Jordy had been asked to be in this interview in the New York Times and then because he is very kind and my best friend and my housemate, he was like, "Hey, do you want to also talk to my housemate? You know, who's another writer." And so this guy, Peter Haldeman from the New York Times interviewed both of us and for this feature on like trans lit, which is kind of weird to be in that category as somebody who feels like trans-ish or never quite trans enough to count. Although I, I do feel myself to be trans-ish, trans masculine. Language stuff again, not my favorite. But happy to be in that number. And then, you know, the guy included other people whose work I'm really happy to be in conversation with like again Kai Cheng Thom and Rivers Solomon and [inaudible] and some other people, and Jordy, obviously, but that was another weird thing that happened that happened through, you know, these social connections because Jordy's book came out on a big imprint of Random House and in a really different way. And so his sort of publication road was like really, really, really different. And so like people were, you know, doing like these big features and thinking of him in that way. And Rescue is amazing, but they don't have that level of like, they'd hired this really cool, awesome publicist to do their marketing, they didn't have a marketing person. So they hired somebody to do like that work for my book and another book that came out at the same time, you know, part time before the launch, but it wasn't like Random House. And it's different now working with, you know, Vintage and then also Picador in the UK, who's been really cool and amazing. And that's been surprising too, that in the UK, I also thought, "well this won't translate outside of the US" but for whatever reason it has, and that's also really exciting and, and, and a way to sort of like meet all these new people, younger people and older people that I have found myself connecting with. Yeah, it's really — to be honest, I don't know what to make of it, but I'm really happy about it.

Lewis: Can you talk a little bit more about your kind of thoughts, reactions to the book being received as a trans novel.

Lawlor: Yeah, I mean, I feel like, like, I felt like really clearly like this is not a trans narrative or like, I don't want this to be like an anthemic trans book. Like I don't, I don't want that because it's not — I don't love the idea of like a representative book or, you know, a sort of like — I'm happy when people write those because I want them to do lots and lots of books, but I don't want to be this sort of like vector of like making an anthem. It's not for me. Let other people do that. I like the idea of something that's like small and weird and like not as easily categorizable, um, or medium sized and weird. And less categorizable, which is more how I identify as medium sized. But I think that it is a book that I hope is of interest to trans readers. Like it is a book that I would have wanted to read and I think that I don't expect it to be a book that is of interest to

all trans, you know, it's like it's of interest to people to whom it's of interest. Like, if it's interesting to you, it's interesting to you. Like, I don't, I really like I hate the — I have so much trouble with the idea of these sort of like cannons of, of like, you know, like the 12 books you haven't read already and if you haven't read them, you're a bad person. Those kinds of like, listicle canon making kinds of moments that are happening. And I, and I like, I'm grateful to be on lists, but I like it when they're lists of like 171 books, rather than, you know, like there's some lists where you're like, "oh, that's awesome because that's like, that's going to take a couple of years to get through that." And there are some lists where you're just like, "now I just feel like a jerk because I haven't read these books" or "I have read them so do I feel great?" I don't, I don't like that. And I really — there's a way in which — I understand that it's probably good for me professionally or in terms of career stuff if my book is like taught, but there's a part of me that's just like, "don't require anybody to read this." Like, I, I love the idea of like things that are not required. You know, I remember when we worked at Dog Eared ee used to keep track of like which books were most stolen, you know? And it's kind of funny to often have like [inaudible] books were always, people were always stealing those books. Um, Phillip K Dick, but it's like, I liked that idea, like the idea of, of like you stumble on it, you know, and it's not necessarily like doing work of positive representation, which I think is finding good work. I think there's —we need lots and lots of books and lots and lots of representation. And I heard Ocean Vuong was talking at his book launch here for On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous or just, he was talking about how he decided to — he had written this essay for the New Yorker called A Letter to my Mother that She'll Never Read, I think roughly that, and then that eventually became this book On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, but in the course of writing out that narrative, he said, this is a novel and it's a novel, it's fiction. And he said, one of the things that he feels strongly about is holding that space for, you know, queer writers of color to say, like, this is art. Like I am — not that creative nonfiction or memoir essays isn't art, but to sort of say like, "I am, I'm claiming the space of fiction and the space of art." And, for me, that really resonates. Like, I think I liked the idea of, of what fiction can do is, sure it can offer positive representations or, you know, ways of thinking about how to be a person that may be useful for people, and it can like teach and, you know, help people build empathy. Like all of those things I think are probably true, but they're not the reason why I read and I don't know if it's, you know, I, I think what fiction and what art can do is offer these things that are sort of like messy and unreasonable and not articulated for you and not like some perfect hunk of like Crystalyn theory that explains the world. It's sort of like, "nope, have some feelings about this." And you know, I think if somebody hates my book, maybe that is of, you know, like that is abuse. Like why do you hate it? Great. Like what's there, or what do you hate about it? I mean, I don't actually want anybody to hate my book, but like a strong feeling to me is good once do art. I like the idea that we are at a moment in publishing where there can be lots of different books that can come under the sign of trans or queer and that can mean a lot of different things. Like there's a book Normal People by Sally Rooney. She's this young Irish writer who wrote this book Conversations with Friends, which is, which has some queer, explicitly queer content. But Normal People is her second book and it's about, you know, like these straight cis white Irish

people and their relationship. I think it is such a queer book, you know, and I have this whole story about how it's this really like super queer narrative and I love it for that, even though on the surface it looks like just a very straight love story. But there's, to me, there's a moment that's happening where queer and trans people are changing publishing and changing art. And there's so much stuff that's exploding and so to be a part of that is really exciting. And I think the thing that troubles me is when I, I see the ways in which like in that New Yorker or, I mean, not New Yorker, in that New York Times feature on trans writing, they have this big picture of me and Jordy at the top. And, you know, Jordy is very handsome and it was a fine picture. I looked extremely raggedy and tired, which is accurate because that's normally how I look being the parent of a small child. And I think, I get that we have an interesting story because we're old friends and now we, you know, are housemates and, you know, queer kinship and all of that, but there was a way in which it sort of like, we are these like white trans masculine people at the beginning of this feature and there are a lot of writers of color in the story and like why and there are beautiful pictures of some of those writers and like, why weren't those pictures up top. And, you know, I, I think like I don't, I don't want to be a representative of anything. I don't really think there's a danger of that, but I do feel like a resistance to that. I liked the idea of just like a, well, I would prefer a huge group photo, but obviously have to get people from all over to come to one place. But in general, like I think just more books, more films, more TV shows, more music, more of everything.

Lewis: If I may ask a sort of I guess a kind of on the nose identity question for our trans oral history interview. If you're comfortable, could you comment a bit, cause you also mentioned like knowing folks who sort of like, I don't know if you use the word transitioned, but like sort of, you know, like came into trans like later in life or whatever. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about, if you want to, your experience with that, and also other folks in your social world who've come into trans as adults.

Lawlor: Yeah. Well, you know, I think like as a very small child, you know, again like four, four or five, I remember having a strong sense of like, I'm a boy. Things are going to grow eventually. I had to sort of like, I came to some sort of realization in, you know, like late elementary school, early middle school, that seems like it's not happening and I guess I must be queer, having to do with gender and sexuality together. And yet I still always had this sort of sense of like identifying in any situation I would identify with whatever was more on the boy or man or masculine tip. In terms of social dynamics, in terms of sexuality, anything that always just felt more, just sort of like, well, that's who I am, but I also was actively trying to survive high school, you know, and trying to seem like a girl. Like I was at this all girls school. I was, you know, I was trying, I grew my hair out in my like junior year of high school, I think, or senior year of high school, because I was like, I was like determined. I was like, I'm going to try to see if I could look like a girl. And also, you know, I think there was a part of me that was like, “I’m gonna see if I can look like a pretty girl so that nobody can ever say I'm gay because I'm ugly,” which I think is really common story. And really soon, you know, I got to New York, I had this girlfriend, my first, really my first actual girlfriend, like I'd had these people who were not really my girlfriend,

but my first actual girlfriend who I went out with for like two months. I had long hair, she had short hair, she was totally fem. And it was, it was a time of like, everything was like lipstick lesbians in New York at this moment. She was like totally fem, she went to Barnard. I, it was like totally a secret that she was fem and it was totally a secret that I was butch. Like, it was just like a, that was like secret, you know. It was just like, there was an internal thing and a private thing and that was sort of like in public, you had to do these other things. And so much of it also had to do with like representational politics. But you know, like for instance, around that, like around the time I was like 19, I had like really curly hair and it's really, it gets like really large. And I was sort of like "ugh!" like I was really ambivalent. And this is, it's kind of funny now because like under cuts are a thing. I did not know they were a thing and they weren't necessarily a thing in like 1990, when I had everything shaved here and then like really long hair on top, which I had until I was about 27 and cut my hair off. But I remember like, I, I knew some people who were doing drag. I remember the first time I ever bound in public, I had like my hair stuffed into a baseball cap with just the undercut showing and I bound and it was like a poker night. It was like '89 or '90 probably at the time. These, like, I thought of them as much older, but they were probably like 25, these artists I knew who I knew in the East Village, Lower East Side. Like I remember I drank too much and like thought I was going to pass out because I didn't, I think I had an ACE bandage and I think I was like, it was way too tight. And that was one thing that I was sort of like, I wasn't, nobody was telling me anything about it. I didn't have any support. I wasn't like I wasn't in a community of people talking about stuff. I knew trans people.

Lewis: Did you get the idea of binding from like drag shows?

Lawlor: This was before drag King stuff was common, or even really, yeah. I got the idea to bind from reading HQ 76 from start to finish.

Lewis: Of course.

Lawlor: Um, you know, I, I think I was, I was just, this was a time where A Different Light and Oscar Wilde, there were two queer book shops in New York city and, you know, I spent a lot of my life in those book shops. So, you know, I probably got it from Radclyffe Hall, which was a book I also read, Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness and Ruby Fruit Jungle in the same weekend when I was 14 [inaudible]. But yeah, I mean, I think like I'd always known about those things, but I hadn't really started doing them in public until like I was probably around 19. But I was very, very stubborn, but then I also, I had, I was dating this one, this person was butch, who wanted me to be like fem or whatever and I was sort of like, "okay, well I can't cut my hair I guess." Like I had this whole thing where I sort of like, I wanted that attention. And then after that relationship, that was that nine months long distance non-monogamous thing. Hugely formative to my life. And I obviously failed like really miserably at being fem because I wasn't, but also I was trying, I wanted to please whoever was the person I had this desire to please. You could say "go analyze that, listeners." But I then had another girlfriend for a long time again, long distance and open so there are a lot of other people in those times, those periods too. But

I had another girlfriend who was at the time fem, who had a whole thing about me keeping my hair long. And I like, I didn't have that sort of inner sense of self where I was like, "I can risk this person not being attracted to me." Like, I didn't feel like I could, like, I'd been wanting to cut off my hair, but I was sort of like, A) I don't want people to not be attracted to me who I am attracted to, even if they're attracted to me in a way that doesn't totally resonate for me, I was still attracted to them. And then the other thing was, I, I felt like a sort of stubborn sense of "I can have long hair and be butch, be masculine and have that recognized and reflected back to me." And it was by, at this point more — like New York was pretty, was getting more butch fem at that point, and I was kind of getting, and in Iowa city that was much more operative. And then when I came back to New York, it was like heavily butch femme. So I think that I was sort of more legible as a long haired butch at that point, like in my late, mid, in my mid twenties. But then I finally broke up with this person and it was like "I'm cutting my hair." And then I was like, "Oh right." And when I cut my hair, it's kind of interesting because when I cut my hair, then everybody I knew was like "are you transitioning?" This was probably in 97, 96, 97. And I was, I was sort of like, I mean, No, I just cut my hair. I'm exactly the same person who's wearing exactly the same things I've been wearing since I was 14 years old. You know, like Levi's chords and a button down or whatever. And so I, I think I was always a little bit like, what's the line there? Like, I don't know what the line is. Like, I'm more legible and that's pleasurable, but I was also — like I have been thinking about medically transitioning like, you know, I would say, I think about it every day for the past like 25, 30 years, like NBD. But I still haven't and it doesn't mean I won't, but also I'm 48 at this point so there's other factors. And some of the factors had to do with different things in life stage. I mean, you know, like a lot of people, I read Stone Butch Blues when it came out and I thought, "Oh, well, I am Jess. That is clear." And I think I — and I think that book was the book that allowed me to use the word butch for myself and feel like it didn't necessarily mean lesbian. 'Cause I, I think that the thing with Stone Butch Blues is it's sort of like, "you're just a butch like now," and that felt like a clear category to me until in the last like five or 10 years, it's felt like a category that has been in some ways evacuated. I think people are reclaiming in a good way, but there was a period where it felt like a lot of people I knew who identified as butch were like "I am a butch woman. I am a butch lesbian," and I was like "fair enough. But that isn't, that doesn't work for me at all. And if you need to claim that space for being what butch means, I can totally see why and I honor and respect that, but then I don't feel space in butch for me at that point." And that was around, you know, — so like in the last 10 years or so I think I've been sort of more like I identify as like trans-ish or transmasculine, or sort of like, whatever word is floating around I'm sort of like, "okay-ish." Like I never really liked the word gender queer. I don't really like the word non-binary because I think I'm pretty binary [laughter]. You know what I mean? But I don't, again, not a theorist. I'm happy to like provisionally fall into any of those categories and I'm happy to let other people do that work and then sort of like use whatever is at hand to communicate. And I also have a lot of, you know, I, I live, I have, I've had, I've been involved with the same person for 22 years, which has been a really wonderful formative relationship in my life. I have a kid, we live in a town that is really queer and trans friendly in my experience. You know, we, we never, for

instance, like go to the playground where we don't see other families that have, you know, similar configurations to ours. Like it's a really unusual thing in that way to have that kind of reflection. So I don't feel — like I feel like in a good way, like in a bubble that's containing and sheltering and I haven't felt like I have to defend certain things. So I've been able to, in many ways, just sort of like avoid identifying, which is kind of funny because when I was young, i was sort of like, "Oh my God, these people who are like labels aren't for boxes. And like, I was just like, come out already, you know, out of the bars and into the streets!" Like, you know, it was a real political imperative in my youth for people to be out. And at that point, you know, as queer and that had to do with you know AIDS crisis and also homophobia in the workplace and all these different things. And I think like around trans stuff, it feels really different. There are different kinds of political imperatives, but I guess it's sort of a place where I've been able to not, I've been able to sort of just be like, I feel like largely seen and understood by the people for whom it means the most to me to be seen and understood by. I lost track of the prepositions in that sentence. Um, and, and that is, that is okay with me. Um, and yet I still have this yearning, you know, to, to, you know, I don't know. I don't know if — I have a lot of ambivalence around, maybe it's around self care. Maybe it's around taking the time. You know, I have ambivalence, I've just, I haven't ambivilance around the structures of medical transition for myself that it could just be like, again, like the stubborn thing.

Lewis: You prefer not to [inaudible].

Lawlor: I tend to generally identify strongly with Bartleby [laughter]. Well, you know, on the other hand it's, but it's like true ambivalence. I really want to, and I really don't want to. And so I have for a long time just been like, "okay, well then just like keep going like this and see." Doesn't mean that, that won't change. It's a funny thing to sort of be in that place of unknowing. I don't know. I would say that I don't mind being in the place of unknown. And I think that that is, for many people, really untenable and really painful. And for me it, for a variety of reasons, has been tenable and isn't particularly painful. Does that make sense? No, I don't know. Or does that, is that clear?

Lewis: I mean it sounds like partly, and when I want to say it's like [inaudible] the fact that we're sort of like inculcated to know with like precise, exhaustive detail and all the things that are in our gender and sexual selves. Like it makes sense to me why people feel that and also like what we don't have to feel that way.

Lawlor: Yeah. I mean, I think part of the thing that I get stuck on is this question of like, how do we know what we know? How do I know how I feel? And I think I don't — there's a point at which I'm sort of like "okay, well stop thinking and just be," you know, and then, yeah. But as I, as I'm getting older, then some questions arise about things that may be fine and workable and in youth and middle age may not, you know, as like in the future when I get much older, some things I may want to change for reasons to do with aging. And so it's just, yeah. It's stuff I think about. And it's something that's interesting to think about. I imagine it might be nice to free up the thinking space to think about other things. But I'm also okay with working with what is, so

yeah. Yeah. I will say that lots and lots of people in my life have transitioned in lots of different ways, but I, yeah, so a lot of people I know are — identify now as trans or a lot of people I know, interestingly, a lot of people I know right now who had identified as butch are identifying as nonbinary and moving into they/them pronouns and who are, you know, sort of more my age, a little bit younger and a little bit older too. And it's interesting to me to know some of the younger people, like 10 years younger, maybe like your age or something who are, um, who maybe didn't even identify as butch, but I might've identified them as butch, sort of like coming to a non binary identity and using they/them pronouns. In a way that feels really interesting and kind of exciting to me. I feel, I do feel like I have some, I do have some friends who identify as like butch lesbians who are not, um, who are, you know, not transphobic, obviously. Who have, who are in circles that can be that. And I think that's really stressful for them. And I think that that's good work to try to, you know, work with people in those circles who were, yeah. Like for — I've, I've sort of like, I hadn't really been in a lot of like lesbian circles. So I'd mostly been in like queer scenes. And so it doesn't really seem like I know very many people, like most of the people I know, I think identify as queer or trans. And I mean maybe, yeah. I don't know. It's funny. I can't remember what we were talking about, but maybe that's okay.

Lewis: Yeah. I think we were talking about like transitioning and knowing or not knowing and also now occupying those sort of liminal butch, non-binary, gender queer kind of spaces.

Lawlor: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you know, trying to sort of talk to our kid, we've come up with language of being like an in-betweener, which when our kid was really little, was useful to sort of, you know, but then some of — my partner and I sometimes, you know, I think we also wonder if that is, is like polarizing and like sort of binarizing, you know, gender in a way and sort of saying like, well, you know, pushing things to the polls. I don't know. I mean, I feel sort of like in-betweener is fine.

Lewis: I've noticed recently that like LGBT youth organizations seem to be using the language “gender expansive.”

Lawlor: Yeah. Well, and not only youth but children, like there's a lot of stuff around yeah. Or gender creative. Well, gender fluid, I feel like it's pretty specific, but gender creative and gender expansive, I actually think is, is helpful language around very small children. Like really, really small, which is different from youth. So I, yeah, but I don't really know. And who's coming up with that language. Is it the kids? Is it the nonprofit workers? Is it the therapist? Like, you know, and then they always think about this stuff where people are thinking about, you know, coming up with the language and it's, I mean, I think identity formation is so interesting. Sometimes my partner and I joke that like, when we retire, like maybe I'll go get a PhD in sociology, like just for retirement, because I'm, I'm curious about these things, but I can’t... I don’t... but I think like we use this language and then it be — like, I remember a few years ago, in some like academic bureaucracy, somebody suggested using the word non binary and I was like, I don't think any of my students use that. Like, I think they're all using gender queer. That seems like I'm not sure where that's coming from and now it's everywhere [laughter]. Well, but and I think

it's sort of like these administrators somehow got that word from something, I think, you know, social service providers, and I don't know where they got the word, but they got somebody got that word and then it trickled down and then it goes into materials that disseminate to people and then, you know, somebody comes into college and their first year and they're like, “Oh, these are the terms: trans, queer, non binary. Oh, okay. I see non binary, that's the term.” And it’s interesting to see like knowledge production and identity formation happening at that level and sort of being part of it really ambivalently, sort of saying like, I guess you could use that word that seems like that's very niche and now I'm like, okay, I accept non binary.

Lewis: I taught a trans studies class a few years ago when nonbinary was more new to me then and I remember I had a student who like halfway through the semester was like “I just don’t, you don’t have any non binary writers on this that we're going to read.” And I was like, who on the syllabus is binary? [laughter]. That was my sort of coming to terms with “oh there’s a new identity formation around this and I need to be doing more work to explain the history and why that word is not exactly appearing.” There may be historical antecedents to the term itself [laughter].

Lawlor: Yeah, I do think it is really interesting about the ways in which a lot of the people, you know, claimed under certain things might not use that language. You know, it's sort of, like I, I remember when I was in college, one of the sort of big moves was the kind of like queer revisionist history. I was looking back and being like, “well, that person was queer and that person was queer and that person was queer.” But they might not have identified thusly at the time. Um, because it didn't make sense to, that wasn't part of the historical context. That would have been impossible historically for people to identify in certain ways. But then some things you look at like that — there was that, like that doctor, that trans doctor, like early trans doctor who clearly wanted to always, you know, who you know was man and was — had asked for certain kinds of biographical information about his life to be destroyed upon his death. And then it wasn’t. And then now he's being like reclaimed as a, as a trans you know, a historical figure, but then somebody wrote a book about him and used like she/her pronouns and kind of tried to claim him as a passing — so it was really, it's very, it's complex, but it's sort of like, that seems like a clear case of, well, he, he was very clear and that seems like a clear case of you can look back and say that was a proto-trans identity, even though it wouldn't use that language at the time. But then there are other people where you sort of look back and say like, I don't know how this person would have identified. And what would Leslie Feinberg say, you know, were Leslie Feinberg alive today? And it's interesting to see how people use pronouns with Feinberg. Um, yeah. So always sort of like, I don't know, claiming territory.

Lewis: I want to be mindful of time. So I guess I, um, you know, I haven't really asked you much specifically about like family life and wanted to at least give you an opportunity to talk about that more or however much you'd want to, like being a parent and [inaudible].

Lawlor: Absolutely. Very relatedly, I need to pause so I can go to the bathroom apparently.

Lewis: I was just going to ask you about parenting and family life.

Lawlor: So I, I never thought I would be a parent. It never occurred to me to be interested in children or wanting kids. I, as a young person, I certainly did some babysitting and, and stuff like that, but it wasn't — like I liked kids fine, but I wasn't like, "Oh my gosh, I want to have kids" or anything like that. And in fact I felt pretty strongly like I definitely didn't want to certainly bear any children. And that felt clearly to do with gender stuff to me. But also I think coming out into queer life and identity at a time when sex and death were really intertwined and like one of the ways I was thinking about sex as non-procreative and sex as pleasure and sex as good and, and, and like queer sex as good and, and worth protecting, meant that I was just never thinking about reproduction personally and well, I think I was certainly quite exploratory in my youth. I was never, I was not regularly in a situation where that was gonna, like, I, you know, that was not really going to be something that just happened in my life. So it wasn't until — my partner started thinking more about wanting to have a child and we talked about it and I realized that one of my — I kept sort of saying, like, "I just need a few more years. I just need a few because I got to like, get my career stuff together. I got to finish school or, you know, I want to try to finish this thing I'm doing." I realized sort of scratching the surface of that and thanks to, you know, copious therapy, was that a lot of my resistance was — and I had some resistance to even thinking about it really. And the resistance had to do with feeling not just like not wanting to be a mom, but like abject terror at the thought that anybody would ever think I was a mom. And it was like a real place of gender, like sort of refusal for me, where I was sort of like, "Oh, I feel super strongly about this." And then what happened was my partner suggested that we could come up with a parent name that wasn't a mom word for me. And that unlocked everything for me because I was sort of like, "Oh, I actually like kids, like kids are great. I'd be happy to be a parent. Like, I don't know that I can — I don't know that I want to have the endless number of conversations I would have to have if I use dad as a parent name, um, which would be a lot because I, you know, because of my embodiment, I, it would be, it would be a constant explanation." I didn't want to put a kid through that and I didn't want to put myself through that. So even though that felt like in many ways like that, that would work. I also felt like I'm not, I don't exactly, I don't know, you know, like, I don't know that I want to be a dad, although I've kind of come in to more feeling sort of a little bit like —Jody always calls me a normal core dad, as you can see from the full Gap ensemble. And a lot of discussion of lawn mowing which we could do later. But I think that once I realized that I didn't have to be a mom, I became open to it and excited about it. And then we had our child. My partner had our baby six years ago, who is now an actual child, not a baby. And that has been, you know, one of the most revelatory and exciting things in my life and really fun to do with my partner, who's an amazing mom. And I think that, you know, very, very occasionally something — somebody says something of, you know, talks about my, like me being one of my kid's moms and it's usually like a parent of a classmate. And then, you know, we just do a quick correction and I think my kids sometimes gets confused and was like, "I only have one mom who's not here right now" you know, like when well meaning people on the playground are like "go ask your mom" And like, it's just like, she's at work. So it was interesting that sort of plays, you know, having other kinds of language there and helpful language around — I wrote a couple of essays about

this, like an essay about, you know, using a different parent name and an essay about having to do second parent adoption for my kid for this parenting magazine that Michelle T actually started.

Lewis: What was the second parent name that you decided on?

Lawlor: We decided on Baba, which it, we decided because a number of people we knew were using that and also because it's a parent name or like a, it can be, it's a name that's used in a lot of different cultures, none of which are, are particularly connected to our family, but it's used in, in like many, many, many world cultures often to mean dad, sometimes to mean grandmother, sometimes to mean like avuncular presence. So it didn't feel like it was located in one particular culture that was mine or not mine. So it felt sort of like it's a word that's there. It also, we know, like for instance, there's, you know, we know like a number of families, not only in town, but in our neighborhood who have a similar configuration where there's a parent who's a Baba and and we know like in other queer families that we know in the world. It has also sort of moved out of that into Bobs or Bobby now, which is very sweet and feels somehow like easy. And fine. It's nice to be in a situation where there are lots of — where there's like a bunch of kids running around saying "Baba!" And then, you know, we're sort of like which one? Who does that want? Which is a nice feeling, be part of like a, you know, to have like that kind of collective experience that I think other parents get. I don't know how it's gonna, it's been fine. It's been easy and it's yeah, I mean, it's also, it, we certainly do know people who use Baba for as a name, you know, like for dads who use Baba because that is the dad name in their own cultures. And, and so that can be, I think, confusing, but because it's in lots of different cultures, it feels okay. It has felt okay. But it'll be interesting to see where it goes. And I think that — we have one friend who started out as a Baba and turned into a Boppy, and there's sort of, there's something about the syllables too. it's super easy for a baby to say. So they say that first [laughter]. Yeah, so right now it's more Bobs. One of the things that's been, that's been interesting, like for instance, we, my partner and I got legally married before our child was born, despite, you know, I think philosophical and aesthetic objections because it is very clearly, in terms of protecting our kid and family stuff, it is very clearly advised. And advisable. So we did that. I'm on the birth certificate as the father, which I love, which some parents in my situation would not love, but I was like, "Oh yay, you haven't updated your forms. So I'm the father." And then we also had to do a second parent adoption. I had to adopt my own kid, you know, a couple of years after our kid was born, which was in many ways, like really painful. Cause it's sort of like, "I'm this kid's parent. Like, why do I have to adopt them?" But we did it because of, you know, obviously because of Trump and, and just to sort of have all the protections. I think it's called like belt and suspenders strategy. So a lot of, a lot of families do that. So I wrote a book on those two things and it was nice because I got a lot of support or I got a lot of like connection with people who were in similar situations, you know, and I think It'll be interesting as my kid gets bigger to sort of see how, and as you know, how things shift socially. Um, right now it's been very sweet in lots of ways, like as Jordy likes to say very norm core. You know, like we live in this small college town and like we do all these like super normal things. And I'm really

occupied with like really normal things, like getting a childcare schedule in place and mowing the lawn and, you know, like going to the grocery store and trying to get this child to do certain, like take out the garbage or whatever. You know, it's sort of like, I think it's, it's strange to sort of have come into this, this life. And it's strange also to have this book out that is about a very different time in my life and a very different time in queer culture at the same time that I am in this like really very, it feels like it's, it's almost like, "huh, that's an interesting book that somebody else wrote and here's this life, which is very..." Oh man, it's so weird, but it's great. I mean, I'm really, I didn't know it was going to be so fun and great, but it is.

Lewis: Containing multitudes.

Lawlor: Yeah.

Lewis: I want to allow us to wrap up. Do you feel like, as we've hopped around a little bit, do you feel like, are there any like, um, is there anything like big we've missed that you'd want to comment on?

Lawlor: Oh god no. I mean, I feel like I've just been rambling this whole time, but I, um, no, I mean, it's lovely to, to chat with you and I don't — if there's anything I haven't talked about that you think I should talk about I'm happy to do it, but I still sort of, yeah, I don't really know.

Lewis: Well, may I ask you, you talked a little bit earlier about your focus sort of, like sort of like being averse to like the burden of representation around queer trans novelists or whatever. But I was wondering if maybe you could just in closing comment on like something that you would — the kind of impact you would like your work to have.

Lawlor: Oh.

Lewis: And that might be your work as a parent or...

Lawlor: Well, I mean, I think like the impact I would like my book to have would be for somebody to say, "Oh man, okay. Like, I, I could write a book," you know, like, Oh, well, anybody can write a book. I feel like that to me, I remember reading these certain books and, and not in, in terms of like craft, I mean, just sort of — like for me it was Michelle T and Eileen Myles. Reading Michelle T's Passionate Mistakes and Intricate Corruption of One Girl in America, which came out on Semiotexte in probably 96, 97, I remember reading it. I remember buying it at the community bookstore on seventh Avenue in Park Slope and reading it, walking down the street and just like not being able to put it down and just being like, "Oh my God, okay. Like, if she can do this, I can do this." And not because I thought it was it was easy, what she did, but because she was just laying everything bare and I, and also class stuff, you know, I sort of felt like, "well, okay, here's somebody who's just like gonna be a writer, even if that's not something that they grew up thinking that they can be." And I think reading Eileen Myles's stuff I thought — I mean I think like Eileen has been my teacher in this sort of like unofficial like life way, like every one of their poems. I feel like their poetics is like completely has transformed my writing and made me who I am as a writer. There's no question that I feel like everything I know about

writing, I've really learned from reading Eileen's poems and Chip's novels. But also reading Eileen's pros I think I had this sort of sense of like, okay. Not only like, Oh, you could write about that. But also I think with both, you give them sort of the feeling of like, Oh, you could write about that. Um, you could write about these things you're not supposed to write about, or if you've never seen anybody else write about, they both actually grew up in towns similar to the town I grew up in. Well, Michelle especially, the town Michelle grew up in is really, really similar to the town I grew up in. And these sort of like working class, New England factory towns that people don't really associate. Like when you say Massachusetts or Connecticut, they have these ideas. And then when you grow up in a town like that, you're like, it's just, you don't think anybody's ever gonna make art, you know? And then to see these people who made this stuff and they're queer and just like it — I would hope that somebody would read, you know, something I wrote and say like, "Oh, I could write, like anybody could write." And I think that that, like, that was a gift that was given to me. And I feel like that would be my favorite thing. More, more writers and artists, filmmakers, whatever.

Lewis: Well, thank you so much for your time. This was really wonderful.

Lawlor: Really. I would like to now spend the next period of time hearing about your life.

Lewis: Thank you.