NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

DENNIS NORRIS II

Interviewer: Claire Crews

Date of Interview: December 12, 2019

Location of Interview: NYPL Mid-Manhattan Library, New York City

Interview Recording URL:
http://oralhistory.nypl.org/interviews/dennis-norris-ii-lz9lzi

Transcript URL:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/oral-history/transcripts/NYC+TOHP+Transcript+194+Dennis+Norris+II.pdf

Transcribed by Avery Panganiban (volunteer)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #194

Claire Crews: Hello, my name is Claire, and I will be having a conversation with Dennis Norris the second [Dennis Norris II] for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is Thursday December 12th, 2019 and this is being recorded at the New York Public Library Manhattan branch. Hi Dennis!

Dennis Norris II: Hi! Thank you for having me. This is so cool.

Crews: Thanks for being here in room 67 A.

Norris II: It's a beautiful room. I feel very fancy. [laughter]

Crews: [laughter] Yeah! Great carpet... So, I'm going to begin with the question -when did you begin to write?

Norris II: Okay. So, I usually tell people that I began to write a little bit in college. I took a creative writing class and I wrote a story that I wanted to be a long short story. I read a couple of very short things in that class and halfway through I was like, let me write a real short story, like a short story that has some girth to it. And so I wrote this story. I didn't finish it, but I wrote maybe like fifteen pages—ten to fifteen pages—and I took it to class and I had a really interesting response when it was workshopped. Which is that half of the class really liked it and half of—all of the students of color in the class really liked the story. All of the white students did not like the story. The white students were all white then. But everyone agreed that it was interesting and that it wasn't a story, that it was a novel. So I was really intrigued with that idea and I thought I would go through my life, have a career, and then retire at like 65. And then sit down and write this novel, and then have a second career. That's kind of like what I tell people—that that was the catalyst because then when I graduated, it was 2008, the economy went to shit. I was living at home trying to get like any, literally any job. I applied to Dick's Sporting Goods even [laughter]. And since I had no job, I had nothing to do, and I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, I thought well maybe I'll just write right now. I'll work on this novel. And then by the end of the summer, um, I realized that I wanted to write and that I didn't really know how to write. So that's what I tell people—that moment in my life—but in fact, there's a whole nother time. Which is that when I was in middle school, all my best friends went to a different school than me. I know them through my parent's work. And they lived on the other side of Cleveland, so we would talk on the phone all the time 'cuz we could only see each other really on weekends. And so we would talk on the phone, and we would write stories to each other, um, on the phone! And it was almost, like, we started off doing stories where you'd tell me a sentence and then I'd tell you a sentence, and then we'd be on these calls, these like massive three-way, four-way, five-way, six-way calls—and we'd just go in a circle like the game telephone. And then we started writing like our own stories and we'd read them to each other. And like, kind of workshop them without knowing that we were workshopping them. And then I remember that I was also really in love with Harriet Spy [Harriet the Spy] at the time, so I made my parents go out and buy me one of those notebooks, like one of those mead notebooks with the black and white cover and that's where I started writing stories. And I was also trying to go around and be like Harriet the Spy and do journalist work, like just go record what people

were doing, but I actually didn't find it all that interesting [laughter]. So I just started making things up! And I wrote my first novel in that notebook, which really wasn't a novel, but in my head, I think it was like fifty handwritten pages. So in my head it was a novel. So I always tell people, or what I should tell people rather, is that I started writing probably when I was like eleven. I think I was eleven then, yeah.

Crews: The novel that your classmates in college told you could be out of this short story, um, is that a novel that you still imagine? Or think about? Or did it kind of like… it was more the idea of it that…?

Norris II: So it's funny. I have no interest in writing that novel anymore, and that gets into some of the stuff that we're talking about here as well with this project. That novel was about… the idea was an old black man, who was a recluse, and he was a recluse because he was almost like a political prisoner from like 1916's era race riots. And I had this idea that he in some way, he had been active politically. Not quite like a black panther type revolutionary, but he was sort of like almost like a Dr. King [Martin Luther King Jr.] figure, and he got caught up in a sex scandal in which he was accused of raping a white woman and hadn't done it. And it all came from—in high school I learned about the trial of the Scottsboro Boys, like that whole situation, and I had always been kind of fascinated by it. And so I knew that in some ways there was this connection to that. I think maybe he was accused of sitting on a train, I think maybe in that… I don't really remember because this was a long time ago, but what I came to understand—because I went to graduate school to write that novel. I had written part of it, I applied to all schools with it, I took some workshops at the [inaudible] that year that I was applying to grad school. And my writing teachers in Philly [Philadelphia] said that that was stronger than the short stories that I had tried to write as well, and they were like, "You really are a novelist. Like the way that your mind works, the way you layer stories, like you really are a novelist." And they weren't saying that I shouldn't write stories, but just that like I was a novelist! And that made sense to me. But during that time that I was in school, I kind of began to get a much stronger sense of what stories were specifically important for me as Dennis Norris II, as an individual. Being the person that I am, the stories that I needed to tell. It sort of felt like anyone could tell that story and that many people had told that story. And other than the character being black and having southern roots, I didn't really see anything of myself in it. But it took a lot of time and energy to figure out that those things were going to be core to my vision of my writing life, and what I wanted to do. When I started graduate school, I always tell people, when I started graduate school I was very proud to be someone who wrote stories about white people. As well as stories about black people, stories about straight people, stories about gay people. I thought that that made me higher minded and more disciplined because I wasn't just writing stories that were rooted in my own experience and my own perspective. I think that's great for some people, but within a year of being in graduate school, I had lost all interest in really like not writing about queer, fem, black people, and queer people of color in general. So the funny thing now is that during my first year, I took a research class 'cuz this novel, I had to do a lot of research to write it, I felt. So I took the class about research and my professor who—I run into him at events in that city all the time, he's really lovely—he still asks me about that novel. Like he's still like "That is a good novel! Are you going to write that?" [inaudible] He's really been a mentor to one of my good friends from grad school and so we were both at the wedding. And we were I think

seated at the same table at the reception. He's like, "I still think about that novel, Dennis." [laughter] I was like, "Thank you so much! I am not going to write that novel." It would have to change dramatically. I guess I could make the character queer and maybe I'd be interested, but I don't think I will. Anyway, the point is that I get asked about it still occasionally.

Crews: Wow. [laughter]

Norris II: Almost ten years later!

Crews: Are you working on a novel now?

Norris II: I am. I am working really hard on a novel. I've been telling people for years that it's almost done, but now it kind of really is. But yes! I am working on a novel. And this novel, actually, I started also as a short story. I started it with the intention of just writing a long short story. There's a [author's name inaudible]. Especially very early in my writing, [author's name inaudible] was a very influential writer for me. The sentences were just so beautiful and she wrote about really everyday situations in Queens [Queens, New York] that felt incredibly fascinating and thought provoking, and just beautiful. So in her third book, [book title inaudible] which is a story collection, the first story is the title story and it's about sixty—it's almost a novella—it's like sixty pages long and it's really... it just sort of tells the story of this marriage that has kind of its first cracks in it. And I wanted to write a story like that. I wanted to write something that length. I wanted to write something that had multiple perspectives that still felt contained. And so that's kind of how the novel began. And all through the first semester of my second year, at my MFA program, which is Sarah Lawrence [Sarah Lawrence College] the students—we were workshopped three times in that semester and everyone kept being like, "This is a novel, Dennis. It's not a short story. It's a novel!" and by the third workshop, one of my friends even wrote "novel" in her critique and had crossed it out and wrote "story" with the rolling eyes emoji because I was insisting that it was a story. And it took about six months of work because I had started it in, I think, June or July of that summer, and I—by this point this was like December—and over winter break I went home. And I was like, you know, I'm willing to stick with this couple in this situation for many many years and I had never felt that way. Prior to that I would maybe revise a story once, and then I would be bored with it. And I would just write a new one. And I was like, I think I'm willing to work and work and work and work and work to get this right. So let's try to write this novel! And that's kind of how it happened.

Crews: That sounds like a relationship.

Norris II: Oh my God. It is. It's like a marriage. And I'm not sure that it's a healthy marriage.

Crews: [laughter]

Norris II: To be honest, especially with your first novel. This is my first, really, like I never finished that other novel. So this is my first, and um, you know it's taken me almost ten years. If I were to sign a book deal tomorrow, by the time it was published it would've been ten years.

And I think that's very common and so I'm not like—I mean I wish it were going faster, but I think that's very normal and it's worth it to get the work right, but the obsession that you kind of have and the amount of self-doubt and insecurity that there is in everything, right? Like in every aspect of shaping a narrative and creating something that is not just a collection of sentences, but something where the sum is greater than the whole of it's part—I think, is that the expression? Like you obsess over every little detail even when it's not proven to do so. So that's not healthy. Like that can't be... that's not what a good marriage looks like, but it's still like a marriage. You're committed to seeing it through. So yeah, I think it is a relationship. I think that when it's done and gone, and knock on wood, out in the world and I've moved on to something else, I think I'll look back on it with a great amount of love and tenderness. Which is, when a good relationship ends, I think eventually you want to get to that point with your ex, right? It might be hard and you may not get to that point, or if the relationship was trash and the ex is trash, then don't feel pressure to get to that point, but you know hopefully I won't feel like my book is trash.

Crews: Yeah. [laughter] Were you in New York for those ten years?

Norris II: Yeah! Yeah. I have—because—so well I went to grad school at Sarah Lawrence and after when I was graduating, I was like, okay: I'll either move to Seattle [Seattle, Washington], because I had visited Seattle recently and just fallen love with it and I had some close friends there, I would've had a really good support system there. It was beautiful and just like a totally different thing. And I was very intrigued with the idea of doing things that I hadn't imagined for myself. And so I was like, "Okay you're going to move to Seattle or move to Brooklyn." And it took me a few months to figure out where I was going to be. I had this sort of side job through Sarah Lawrence that summer so I lived on campus in [inaudible] and I had the whole summer to kind of figure out where I wanted to be. And I ultimately decided to do New York because I thought if I left New York then, then maybe I wouldn't come back and I thought... I looked into it for a few years. I'd like to try it and see what happens. So I moved to Brooklyn, into the Parks Neighborhood, and I got a little two bedroom apartment with my best friend from high school who had just moved to New York and had had an internship, and got a job at the same organization. And I did that whole first year in New York thing. I was completely broke. I worked two part time jobs. I had one job that was everyday from like 2pm to 7pm at The Juilliard School. I was an administrative assistant and it was really really cool because I was in an art centered place. And I also knew some students there. I had [inaudible] with people who were in graduate school at Julliard, so that was kind of funny because I was running into these kids that I used to play with many years ago when I was in high school. And I also had a job at the company Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics with the fancy bath bombs and the soaps and all of that. But this was the thing that was really difficult—because of the hours at Julliard, from 2pm to 7pm, and the hours that the Lush store was open, I did not do another job on weekdays because there just wasn't enough time to do another shift beforehand, so I could only work at Lush on the weekends. And then being a part time employee there, there's certain laws about how many hours you can work and how long a shift can be, so my ability to make money in those two jobs was kind of very limited because of these logistical things. So I was very very poor that year. But, I did it. I did it. And then, you know, I almost left New York after that first year because I

was like, I don't see this. I don't know how I'm gonna... this isn't sustainable. And then my life changed in some ways and things became sustainable. So yeah.

Crews: Has music been a part of your life since you were young?

Norris II: Yes! So music is a huge part of my life and always was. I mean, we'll start with the idea that I grew up in church. My father was a Minister and he was a Pastor for many years and right after I was born my family moved from New Jersey to Cleveland [Cleveland, Ohio]. My father was like, sort of like the Baptist equivalent of a Bishop. He was over like 40 churches. So I was in Church every Sunday, and my mom was really really musical all her life. Played the piano, and I think had wanted to be a concert pianist, but grew up very poor. And in between being black, being a poor black woman in the 50's... that was not really a viable thing for her. So she didn't. But because of her musical ability, she always lead the youth choirs in the churches where my dad was a pastor, where my sisters were a kid. And so singing in the choir was big in my family. And my mom was also very insistent that all of us take musical lessons and she wanted us all to take piano lessons! But I said I wanted to play the violin because I had friends in school who had been playing the violin since they were three. And I just thought it looked beautiful and I wanted to play it. And so I was going to play the violin, and then our next door neighbor was a professional violinist and she told my mom, she said, "You know, if you have Dennis play the viola, he'll get a lot more opportunity because not that many people play the viola and even fewer play it well." So in school I tried the viola and I tried the violin and they looked the same and they felt the same. They are not the same. But when you're nine, you don't really know that. And so I played the viola. I obviously did not end up becoming a professional violist, but for a long time I did want to do that. There aren't that many violists out there, especially professional violists who always play the viola. But I've never even had a violin lesson. I started on viola, and so we're like our own little clique, you know? And I go to the violist, "Which of us started off viola, and which of us switched over because the violin is naturally repetitive?" Or they preferred the sound of the viola was often the thing. So that was really funny. The other thing that I should say about music is that my sister is a singer. She's a jazz singer. She went to college for vocal jazz performance. And she was in an R&B group that was really popular in the 90's called [inaudible]. They had some hits, including some [inaudible] that you still hear frequently at bars and clubs. And I think that happened when I was like in the second grade. Music was everywhere and as a kid who grew up with a piano in the house, my mom—actually in order for me to even figure skate, my mom was like, "You know that you need to be practicing the viola." Like that comes—school came first and then the viola, and then if I wanted to do something else I could. So it was a huge huge huge huge part of my life and it still is. Mostly in that I always play music when I am writing. It really really helps. It helps me form sentences and figure out the rhythms, and think through how I want the sentence to fall on the ear of the reader. And that's very important to me and always has been to my sensibility as a writer. I remember I was really good friends with the writer [inaudible] in grad school. We're still good friends, and we went to this summer writing workshop together and the writer Mary Gateswell had workshopped my story and it was really rough. And I went back to my dorm and I cried in my friend's lap. She took a look at the story and she just read the first couple sentences and she's like, "Well it's obvious you were a musician." And I don't think she even knew that I played music. She's like, "I can tell by the sentences. You were obviously a musician." And I was

like, "Oh my god! I was!" So it's an omnipresent part of my life even though I don't really play anymore.

Crews: What kind of music do you like to listen to when you write? Does it depend on what you're writing?

Norris II: It depends a little bit on what I'm writing, but I rarely listen to music with lyrics because that's too many words and that can get confusing. But occasionally I do. It really depends. I like to listen to stuff that's very atmospheric. In a lot of more contemporary instrumental stuff... so like, Phillip Glass the composer. Phillip Glass is a very very... a number of his compositions are like the most played on my Spotify and my iTunes because as soon as Phillip Glass is on, I can just start envisioning scenes, words and sentences start coming to me—it's very generative. So a lot of Phillip Glass. And then a lot of music that's sort of similar characteristics. So the score to the film, Moonlight, a lot of my novel has been written to that. And that composer, Nicholas Britel, I love a lot of his stuff. But when I've written stories, I've listened to pieces of music that really reflected the emotions that I was feeling—that either I was trying to achieve in the story and that I felt sort of represented or interpreted what I was feeling inside as I was writing the story. So there's this piece by Peter Gabriel that I think might also be from a soundtrack, but I'm not sure. It's called The Feeling Begins. I know about it through figure skating. It's a very popular piece in figure skating. And Michelle Kwan did an iconic short program to it many many years ago. When I was writing a story of mine called Daddy's Boy, and it's published, I just threw that piece on. It was on repeat for two days and I wrote this very tiny short story in just a fury and I was just listening to that. And that's very different, like that piece of music is very different from what I would normally listen to when I'm working on a novel. So I think it really does depend a lot on the project, but there's a way in which the music gives me something, usually what I want to eject into the work I think. It's all very like [vocalizes] but it's all part of my process.

Crews: Yeah. That's a tough one. How does figure skating relate into your practice of making—or does it?

Norris II: That's a good question. I definitely think it does [sighs] and I think even like forgetting the actual practice of writing, I think that having been a figure skater really influences—has influenced the fact that I even have any kind of literary career to speak of because this is a sport where the learning curve is very straight forward, but you just have to chip away. Like you're just going to fall and fall and fall and fall, and fall and fall and fall, until finally you get the skill right. It'll be the first time and you'll get it right. And then you'll probably continue to fall and fall and fall and fall, and you'll get right back up again. And eventually you'll know how to do the skill. And that's the process. It can take years to learn single skills and that specific kind of determination I think is very similar to the process of writing and then the process of publishing. Where it's like rejection, rejection, rejection, rejection, rejection, rejection... more rejection! And then it's like just years of chipping away at it. So that's the first thing. And I remember when I was in graduate school, my first workshop professor, said that, "You know, there's something to be said for talent, but the biggest factor is not going to be—in terms of who makes it and who doesn't—it's not going to be talent. It's going to be who makes it. Who

swims to the end of the lake, and who halfway there turns around and comes back to shore." I think that I'm used to doing everything I can to swim to the end of the shore. Because that's how figure skating goes and I always felt like if more of the people who had gone to graduate school had been figure skaters, more of them would still be writers today. So that's how it influences sort of like everything about my writing life. I think there's a way in which, when I'm skating, and I had just recently started skating again—like I have a coach, I take lessons once a week, it's wild but it's so fun—and also its muscle memory. It's been fifteen years since I've done this shit! It's still in there. I have a different body. I have a different weight [laughter]. I'm older! I'm like in my thirties. But it's still in there. Muscle memory is very real. But there's a way in which you have to kind of be well rehearsed enough to shut your brain off when you want to perform, and that means you have to have figured out every possible scenario that could really happen with each skill and with your whole program. I think that's kind of what it's like to actually be writing. There's a certain way in which I have to kind of shut my brain off sometimes, and just take what I'm sort of hearing or what's inside of me and pull it out of me. If I'm too in my head, If I'm thinking too hard, If I'm like editing while I'm just trying to get it out, then it's not going to get done. And I can't always control my brain in that way, but that's like the task. And so I think doing a sport, having done a sport, that is so much about yourself and a certain kind of precision, it's not "take out the other guy!" You really don't have to be concerned with what everyone else is doing. You only have to be concerned about your own process and your own techniques and what you have to offer. That sort of insularity, I think, translates really well to the writing process.

Crews: Will you speak a little more about where you're from?

Norris II: Yeah! I'm happy to. I have a love hate relationship with Cleveland Heights, Ohio, which is where I grew up. I was born in New Jersey in South Jersey near Philly [Philadelphia]. My mom's entire family is in Philly. And when I was one and a half, my family and I moved to Cleveland Heights, Ohio. It's a suburb of Cleveland. It's kind of the first suburb on the east side. It's a really interesting place. It's a very progression, suburban area of Ohio. It's very artsy, so a lot of members of the Cleveland Orchestra for example, live in Cleveland Heights because it's very close to where they perform. It's very close to Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Art, which is a really well known art school at the Cleveland Institute of Music. It's a really well known music conservatory. It's a very artsy place, so I was fortunate enough to grow up in a place where the idea of cutting funding for the arts and the public schools would have been unthinkable. They would never have done it, and have never done it. Not only was it unthinkable, it's not an idea that would occur to anyone there. That was very cool because I grew up in this place where all of these interesting minds were supported and encouraged and so I loved that about it. It also felt like a sort of idyllic place. The street that I grew up on was and still is really beautiful. These big houses that all look really different from each other. It's not like a housing development. Every house looks completely different from the house next to it. That's very cool. I've always enjoyed that. My house in particular has a garret over the front entrance, which is really cool. This was just a space that was very conducive to imagination and creativity.

Crews: You mentioned growing up in the church. I wonder about early queer spaces that you had access to, or if there were any queer spaces when you were a young person.

Norris II: Oh man... [sighs] Well, it's really interesting. This is maybe a stretch, the definition of queer, or how I'm using queer. First, I would say there is an idea among the world and we are seeing it right now in the conversation around Pete Buttigieg [Peter Paul Montgomery Buttigieg]. There's an idea that queers of color are more homophobic than others, and that conversation right now is rearing it's head specifically in relation to the fact that Pete Buttigieg has almost no support from the black community. And people are saying it's because he's gay. And this is not true. This is not the reason. The reason that ?I find that whole narrative really interesting, is because there's an argument to be made that the idea of the black church is a queer space. Even kind of before queerness had the language that it had, it was the idea that there could be black space as far back as slavery for example, was a queering of space. And that's what church was. That was the first place where black people could congregate on their own. That was one of the spaces where literacy among black people during slavery began. And it wasn't necessarily talked about, but I could say that I remember men in the church who were clearly gay men. I didn't understand that as a child and it wasn't named, but I could look back now and say oh... oh.... Oh! Okay! Like I have that now as an adult, in many of the things that I take refuge in as a queer person now, my earliest connection to those things happened in church. It's interesting because I think there was a space without me knowing it. Maybe it wasn't a queer space exactly, but it was a space that was porous enough for my queerness to seep out. And there was space for that. That was okay in those spaces. Another thing, much more straightforward, ironically, is that when I mentioned early that I'd talk on the phone with these friends and they were friends from my parent's work—it was this group of friends that I had. There were two brothers. One was a year older than me and one was a year younger than me. And their parents worked for my dad. They are not both gay. And one of them and I used to flirt around a little bit when we were in high school. Nothing really serious, but we would flirt a little. And the other two friends were two girls, straight, still straight as far as I know. Their father was a pastor at one of the churches at the association my dad was over. What's interesting is that friend group in it's own way was its own little queer space. And maybe that kid was the first person who didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with how we were talking and what we were doing. Didn't seem tortured about it in any way. I was a little tortured about it until I just decided to not be tortured. It sounds crazy, but it's true. In some ways my relationship to church was hugely influential to my queerness and the embracing of my queerness. Is that... I forget, is that the question?

Crews: Yeah, yeah. I was asking about queer space and that is, that's a perfect answer. What has queer community, or community, looked like for you in New York?

Norris II: Oh! It's been amazing. It's funny. I just have the best friends. I'm so lucky. My life in New York feels like the first place where I kind of created a chosen family. That's not really true because I have an incredible group from college, many of who are in New York now. I have incredible friends from graduate school, but there is something about, to me, the idea that the friendships that I've cultivated in New York City are not really related to institutions. In the way that a group of college friends are related because they went to that institution at the

same time. There's certain things about it. At the core of that community is a friend of mine who I went to music camp with in 2004. At the time he had a girlfriend and I told everyone at camp that that was obviously a farce, which it was. And that's kind of just terrible on my part. I mean I wasn't saying anything that anyone wasn't thinking, but you know. Maybe he wasn't quite ready. But anyway, we were always keeping up on Facebook and he would reach out to me and when I got the little apartment with my best friend from high school, it happened to be six blocks from where he lived. I had posted on Facebook like, "I'm going to be on this interaction! It's where I'm going to live. I'm so excited, it's exactly where I wanted to live." And so he reached out and was like, "We should hang out. I'm literally five blocks from you." And so he actually worked at Lincoln Center [Lincoln Center of the Performing Arts] at the Metropolitan Opera [Metropolitan Opera House] and I think he got me a job interview. He passed around my resume to someone for a job with the [inaudible] Review Society. But then we kept trying to get together and didn't, but he came to my birthday party. He brought his sister and one of our other really close friends from camp who I hadn't seen in years. And we became really good friends and then I introduced him to my friend from Julliard. I was trying to fix them up. But that didn't happen and we all became like best friends. And this whole sort of group kind of blossomed from there. It was like, "Oh you'll like these people!" and it kind of just came together. It was really amazing to sort of watch that evolution without the bubble of being in the same institution. And so there's that community, right? And that community is very queer. My college friends are very queer. Largely. Some of my friends who are women who I thought would end up with men, just married women this year, which is amazing. It also, like my college group looks like a Paletton ad. We're just all different colors, which is so joyous for me. And so there's that community and some of my friends from different parts of my life have become friends, which I love. Then there's also something about literally just living in New York City and feeling like you're in community with the other people who live here, even people that you don't know. And you know, you can see someone on the street and you're like, "Oh I can tell you're a tourist by the way that you're walking." Right? Versus someone that like lives here and is like, "Get out of my way." There's community on the subway sometimes, especially when something happens, and somebody breaks down or something. I love that. When I was a kid, my oldest sister lived in New York for eight or nine years. She lived in Brooklyn. So I was in New York often for a kid growing up in Ohio. I always felt like she talked about New York City like she was in a relationship with it. It was some entity, it was a person and I didn't understand the idea that a place could be like that. Once it had been a year of living in New York City, I was like, "Oh. I get it." Like I just get it. And everyone who also lives here, gets that and knows that because it is. Yes, without the people it's just a piece of land, right? So it's really the people that do that, but in that, it becomes its own... that spirit becomes its own thing. It becomes this kind of like spirit of New York and then that forms, that creates a bond that you have and so that is community for me. It's part of why I maybe will stay here. We'll see. But yeah, I love that about it and that's why I feel like people who live in New York are so misunderstood. People think we're mean. We're not mean. We want things to be functional and we talk about it, but we're not mean. We're not mean spirited. I lived in Philadelphia for a year before I came here to graduate school, and when I was lost on the sidewalk, people would not stop me, ask me if I was okay, and try to help me with directions. I would come to New York once in awhile, even then, and if I looked lost on the sidewalk, people—multiple people—would come up to me, take

out their phones, help me figure out where to go, and then they'd get in arguments with each other about who's giving better directions.

Crews: [laughter]

Norris II: It's amazing. I remember a year and a half ago, I got hit by a car crossing the street and I was... I mean, I broke my ankle. I broke my wrist. I had some back issues from it. It's all fine and everything is better now, but this was midnight and I was with four friends, three friends. But in addition to my three friends, two different people were right there and gave me their business cards and were like, "If you need witnesses, if you need to sue, we will do that. Yes, you should probably call 911." Like they were helping me out and then—this was in Chelsea—there was this big skyscraper apartment building that this happened in front of. And a guy comes down from the top floor with a giant water bottle and a huge bag of ice, and he's like, "I saw everything! I am an attorney. If you need help, I don't specialize in this, but you know, I saw everything. Here you go. I'll wait with you and your friends until the ambulance comes." You know what I mean? I don't know if that would happen in Philly because Philly people are actually angry and they have reason to be. I don't know. I feel like this is a magical place, and community is a real thing here. I don't know if it is in other cities, but it might be. I just haven't looked at those other cities. So I don't know.

Crews: What spaces have been important to you in the city?

Norris II: Um... I mean there's the personal spaces obviously. My friends and I have an apartment. It feels like it's all our apartment, but it's my friend's apartment that we refer to as a place with this address every time we talk about it. It's been passed around our little family. I'm maybe next on the list to live there. We want to keep it in our little friend family, just like the apartment in the TV show, FRIENDS. So that space is really important to me, this kind of focal space that my friends and me can be. In terms of the city, actually, Pride Park is one of my favourite places in New York City. When I was in graduate school, and I would take the train in from Brownsville, and I would meet all my friends, we'd always meet at Pride Park. It was a central easy place to meet. I always thought it was beautiful. There was always things going on there. It's been this constant throughout my life. I'm notoriously like really bad with directions, I get lost all the time. I truly don't have a sense of it. I can't figure out sometimes when I'm under how to get off the subway to position myself the best way. I just take whatever exit to get up and once I get up, I know I can kind of orient myself a little bit. I'm just like really really bad. That part of my brain just does not work. Pride Park was a place, and also a landmark where I could orient myself. I could come to the park and know okay, I need to go this direction or I need to go that direction. It is kind of in the center. It's always been really important to me for that reason. It's just like a beautiful place that I love. I love The High Line. One of my best friends has worked for them for about five years in the office doing fundraising, and I love The High Line. I have some really great memories there. I love love love Lincoln Center. It's such an incredible space for the performing arts and I love the fountain in the middle of Lincoln Center. I love that fountain. And that first year that I worked in New York and I worked at the Juilliard school, my office was right—like when you enter Julliard, there's this huge glass floor to ceiling several floors up of just windows. My office was right there. You walk up the main entrance,

you go up the security desk, and then you turn around and almost walk back to where those windows were on the second floor and there was my office. Because my hours were 2-7, when it was getting dark in that last hour, I could look out and I could see all the lights in Lincoln Center. And I felt so much love for the city and so much love for my sad, extremely poor entry level assistants. Sometimes when I would leave work, I would instead of getting on the one right there, I would walk through Lincoln Center, go by the fountain, and walk down to Columbus Circle. And I just loved walking that strip and feeling like a real grown up making my way through the city. So I'm always looking for jobs at Lincoln Center. I would love to work there again because I really love the performing arts. I like being around it, and I like the people that do it. It's like art spaces. Beautiful spaces are the ones that are really important to me. And of course queer spaces. Hell's Kitchen used to be very important to me. It still feels very white cisgender gay male space, but it was the first time I kind of felt safe-ish in that kind of space. I have found that as a queer person of color, if I'm looking for those spaces, which are really important to me, they are moving around. We don't have one set of neighborhood's that's ours or one set space. It makes me think of, I don't know if you've read Harry Potter growing up, but there's the room of requirement that just only shows up when you require it. I sort of feel like that's sort of the mystery of my QPOC [Queer People of Color] spaces in New York. It's like Poppy Juice. I'm not really a big partyer, so I haven't gone to Poppy Juice very many times. But for me, it's sometimes the spaces that I create with my podcast co-host on Food 4 Thot, or certain folks that just get together to have a dinner party or go out to eat, and now that table is a space. You create space in that restaurant or in that place. It's a movable space as well. That's really important to me.

Crews: You mentioned, you just mentioned Harry Potter and you mentioned Harriet the Spy earlier.

Norris II: [laughter]

Crews: What types of books and media do you find inspiration in? Do you find resonance with?

Norris II: It's funny. With books, I have a pretty wide taste for reading. Even if I feel like what I write is rather specific. So I love, I mean I certainly love sort of like literary fiction. That's really my first love and in a way always has been. So I love the writer Elizabeth Strout, who just published a book called Olive, Again and I love the first Olive book. I love her whole body of work. But from there, I also really enjoy like fun, not like romances, but fun sort of like love stories. I'm forgetting the name of the book right bow, but there's a gay sort of romance that just came out earlier this year. It's like the Prince of England and like, the President's son or something. I can't remember the name right now. I'm really excited to read that and I know I'm going to love it. I also love some science fiction. I love Ender's Game and I loved Kindred by Octavia Butler. And I think the common thread in a lot of fiction that I like, is that I like stories where there's a hero. But I like stories where that hero comes to the edge of maybe not being a hero. Or where sometimes the hero is a villain, and that idea that there's all of that duality. I think I could say that about all of Kindred, like as a character. These are again realistic literary books, but I feel like I could say that about her and many characters in her books. What that really is about is just this idea that I understood from a pretty young age. And I don't remember

where that came from—maybe reading, but understanding that we were all as human beings fully capable of everything that was within our grasp. We are fully capable of being incredibly compassionate, and tender, and loving, and we're capable of great cruelty. I remember—again, I don't know if this was high school or college—I remember at different points, you know some sort of story that needed to be about some horrible person committing some horrible crime and people being like, "They don't seem capable." And I always thought that's the most ridiculous thing to say. Of course they're capable! We're all capable. It just... I never understood that thinking. Stories that really embrace that fullness are probably the most important to me, and I think those can be found anywhere. They can be found in any genre. They can be found in any sort of type of narrative. Any time period, I mean you could probably say that about Odysseus as well. And what was his wife's name...? You could probably say that about Penelope. God, it's been a long time since I've read or even thought about that, but yeah. So anyway, I think that is what I'm most drawn to. And also, and this is part of where I do love poetry. I am also drawn to work that isn't necessarily a narrative line. Where there's this beautiful lyricism and there's slices of moments, or slices of life—there's that phrase like a slice of life. And you're just seeing something play out in some way. And maybe you don't even see the whole thing. And that's sort of how, my brain that does love a narrative, that's how I look at poetry. When my brain wants to give it narrative, but I'm very interested in fragments. I hope that's not too esoteric. [laughter]

Crews: No, not at all. I love what you said about the room of requirement, and it like being a moving space for Queer POC community. I wonder about how your room of requirement looks for writing and how you create that for yourself as a working person.

Norris II: Girl, it's hard. And this is the hard part about New York is that it's so freaking expensive that it's hard to make room for things that aren't necessarily paying you. So my room of requirement, to be very literal—I need a desk. Ideally, a big desk. Really ideally, something almost like a dining room table is what I like. I do not have that because I live in New York, but I do have a nice size desk in my room. I need a decent chair. I need decent support because I have back issues, probably because from all of the figure skating and the viola, which is not always great on the back. And I need heat. I cannot be cold. You know how some people get hangry when they're hungry? It takes a lot for me to get hangry because I don't like to feel full, so I can be hungry and be comfortable for a long time. But if I'm cold, I turn into a bitch.

Crews: [laughter]

Norris II: I just will be nasty. I will be moody. I will not be able to concentrate on whatever work I'm trying to do. I cannot be cold. It is just not... it is ugly for everyone. So I really need all of that. A couple of years ago I got the good fortune to go to The MacDowell Colony and they take artists of all different kinds of disciplines. I think most institutes that take artists of all different kinds of disciplines, kind of like writers, will take more writers because we need less. We don't necessarily need a whole bunch of space. We just need a desk and a chair and we need to be fed, and you can leave us alone. Other people need huge installation spaces and all these kinds of things. We don't need that. So when you get into The MacDowell Colony, they send you a questionnaire of what you need and they'll do everything they can to make it happen. It's

really an incredible place. It is Heaven. All I said is that I need a big desk if I can. Sometimes I'm writing long hand and sometimes I'm writing typing, but sometimes I'm going from one to the other very quickly. And also I have notebooks around and I have novels that I'm reading that are maybe influencing my writing a little bit, that are going to be scattered there. So I take up all this space if I have it, and it's good for me to have it. It gives me a little order to my otherwise chaotic brain. And so I said that. I said I needed good heating because I said I was going to be going in April - May. And they ended up putting me in this studio that they'd just renovated. I was like the third person in it since they renovated it, and it was gorgeous. I had the biggest desk. Sometimes you become friends with the other people and you go into each other's spaces and hang out or chat or whatever. I never saw a desk that was bigger than that one in any other studio. I didn't go into every studio, but I went into many and I never saw a bigger desk. So I was like check! They listened to me! Even if it wasn't the biggest desk, it was big enough for me. It felt almost like a dining room table, but it was a desk. So I had the biggest desk and I also had this studio that had this great heating system that I could control. It was very environmentally friendly, which is great, and so I had to heat it. I was like, they really listened to me. They gave me the two things that I asked for. It was amazing. I wanted to recreate that in New York, but I hadn't been able to. So you just learn how to work with fragments of what you need in your real life because there are limitations. That's what I've done. I don't need that much. I just need some coffee during the day, some wine at night. The desk. The chair. I don't need the internet, even though I have it, I don't need it. I would be better off if I didn't have it. Those are the things. And sort of beyond literal, I need to not feel needed actually. It's harder for me to write when my roommates are home. Right now, I have these great roommates and they are really nice. We're friendly, but we're not close, you know? It's kind of perfect because I don't feel like they need me, whereas when I lived in my earlier apartments, I lived with really close friends and that in many ways is wonderful. I kind of miss it. I think I'm going to text the two roommates and be like, "let's go out for drinks." They're cool, I like them, but when I live with people I'm very close to, it can be hard because you feel more needed just because. One of my friends, dearest dearest friends from college, when we lived together—I'm the type of person when I come home from work, I need to go into my room and shut the door for thirty minutes and just lay down and just be, and just have quiet. She's the type who comes home and is like "Hello! I'm home!" And wants to talk and process through her day and process through your day. We've been close friends for a long time so we knew that was going to be something we'd have to negotiate, and we had lived together in college, so we knew that and we did. It was not too difficult, but we had to have some conversations about how to navigate that for our own needs. If there is anything... like if there is a pet in the house, which there is not right now, it just creates a thin barrier. I can't completely lose myself in it. The other thing about residencies that's so great is that even if I wake up and I have four hours to write, and then I have a commitment—I have to do something, I have to go somewhere, I have to see someone—I can't completely lose track of time. I have to be clued in a little bit to the real world, you know? I think it's really hard to remove yourself from that space unless you're out of the residency. So I do love residencies and places like Macdowell because you are really fully allowed to do that and it's easier to tell yourself that you're allowed to do that in ways that—like you can tell yourself that you're going to do that at home, but it can be hard. And things just happen and you have to do things so yeah. That's a lot more than you sort of asked for, but finding that mental space is the big thing.

Crews: I think on the subject of time, we were talking about a little bit, thinking about time non-linearly, and I wonder about your thoughts on time. Either on thinking about your life or in thinking about narratives.

Norris II: Oh my God, I have so many. Well the first thing is like, just in my own life, I'm almost never on time. It's terrible. It's like a real struggle for me to be on time, and it's not that my life is necessarily so packed. Sometimes it is, but it's not that it's so packed necessarily, I just am really bad at that linear thinking of, "Okay. I have to do this at this time because this might take this long." I'm just not very good at that kind of planning, and that's also a challenge. That same sort of function is challenging for me in other ways too. So it's not just this, but that's very difficult for me. The fact that I was on time for this is—I mean, I was trying really hard all morning. I was like, "Okay. You gotta be on time. You gotta be on time. She rented a room, it's reserved, you don't have all day. You don't want to just email her and be like 'I'm thirty minutes late!'" This is my life all the time and I'm always trying to figure out how to do everything right to make it happen and I'm getting there, but it's just hard for me. I think that's influenced by the way that I do think about time because I don't think of it as being a liner thing as we said. I think that memory and intuition are things that we experience, and there are things that we can experience in any way and at any time. To me, it's just this one swirling mass of life. What's really interesting to me is that in those first couple of years after graduate school, when I was writing, I realized something. I wrote this short story that became the first story I published and when I finished it, the minute I finished it, I was like, "Oh, this will be published. This will be the first thing that I publish." And it's like three pages long and in the middle section, it just tells the backstory and goes back in time to this character's childhood, and I realized what seemed like the most simple thing in the world to write—which is something that is chronological—was not something that I was able to do. I could not even write three pages without going back in time, without doing a back story, without going back. And I was like, "that's just not how my brain works." Around the same time, I started reading the novel Love by Toni Morrison. And before I read Toni Morrison, I look for all of the interviews, all of the conversations she did around a book. A lot of these things were on the radio and have been put onto podcasts now so you can find them in really interesting ways. And it's also important to know that at that time, I had a full time job working for the Harlem Children's Zone. We would go into after school sites and sort of do literacy intervention. My supervisor, I think, at that time was my friend who is somewhat of a Toni Morrison, maybe scholar. It was a team of black writers so we were all deeply influenced by Toni Morrison and we would have these incredible conversations about her work and her life, among other black writers. Anyway, so I'm listening to this conversation that she has talking about her novel Love. She says, "Well you know, time isn't linear." She just says it like that. And she starts talking about memory and she starts talking about ways in which we move back and forth in our lives everyday, all the time. I was crossing the street, heading to the subway to go to work and my mind was completely blown. I think I stopped in the middle of the street and then someone honked, and I was like, okay now I have to keep going [laughter]. Because I had never heard anyone say this. I had never had language for it, and I thought, "There is the language right there for the way that I write and the way that I live my entire life." Time is made up and it's not linear and we try to beat it into our lives, to beat it into people that it is, but it's not. I had just never encountered that idea before and I

immediately adopted it. I said, “This is correct. This is how my brain works.” And then I started trying to kind of research it a little bit more and think about it and I came across something and I don’t remember what it was. I don’t remember where it was. I don’t know if I could find it again. I don’t even remember everything that it said. It’s silly that I’m even going to talk about it. It was like a think piece or something probably, but it talked about this idea that time is actually, as a construct, or like a concept, is a white supremacist thing. It sort of went into how those in power have found a way to exercise control and influence upon those who are not in power. I think I probably read it very quickly at work so I can’t say anything more sort of intelligent than that. I once tried to find it again and I couldn’t, but I found the idea very interesting. I certainly... the places where I was finding freedom around this thing that felt like such a construct because I used to be so bad at being late all the time. My friends would get really pissed at me. They would tell me, you know, a forty five minute time earlier for a reservation so I would show up on time for when the reservation actually was. Sometimes this is just wise when you’re dealing with me, but it was a little bit a point of contention, so that’s when I was also like, “Okay I really do need to try to figure out how to be better about this.” And I have, but the place where I found freedom around time and where I felt like my understanding of whatever it was, or my experience, or how my brain worked and processed it... was in the work of the person that I think of as maybe the freest minded writer of color or scholar. Think about it. Toni Morrison is the one who without taking anything away from the work of James Baldwin, or the work of Richard Wright, she is the one who when she talks about Invisible Man, the first thing she says is, “Invisible to whom? Not to me.” And that’s another moment where your mind is blown because you immediately understand that she is saying, “Who is this written for? What gaze is this written for?” You know, I had never thought about that idea. A book is written for a certain gaze. And that we all are assuming most of the time that that gaze is white because the craft is going to be different. The language is going to be different if it’s not written for a white reader. I remember coming.... I think it was that year that I was applying for undergraduate schools and I was reading Toni Morrison. For every book that she wrote, she did an interview with Charlie Rose on his show. And these were amazing conversations, and you see clips of them flying around the internet now because she just sometimes... they were friends, but I think sometimes she was very tough on him for good reason. So you see the clips like easily on Twitter and the internet. But that was the first place I ever heard her use that language, and I remember not really understanding what she was saying but understanding that it was important and trying to understand it. Like listening to it over and over and thinking about it. It took a few years before I began to understand how that influenced me and the purpose of my work and what I was trying to do. But in all of that, I guess my point is that this person who by this point, I did understand these things, here she was saying that we’re all wrong about how time works. So for me, it’s not lost on me that this is the person who has said this, whereas here are the people, these are the people that feel very tied to it and feel that we must all be very tied to it, and live our lives in an orderly way that works in accordance with this. Obviously when your friends are waiting for you forty minutes that’s rude. I get that, but these two different ways of thinking about it, it’s not lost on me that one way is in one place, or one community, and one way is in another community. That sort of influences the way that I approach it with regards to my work. Does that make sense? [laughter]

Crews: Yeah it does. Thank you. So it's been an hour and fifteen minutes, and I want to be sensitive to the time [laughter] But I wonder if there is... I guess if there is anything else you'd like to add.

Norris II: Do these like go, like is this something that's just going to be housed here or does it go out into the world? Should I be like, "Oh you should listen to my show. Read my book."

Crews: You can, yeah. It's going to be kind of a digital archive and it's made accessible online.

Norris II: So cool. That's so cool.

Crews: And then there will also eventually be a transcript of it that will be sent to you, and that will also be available with the audio.

Norris II: Amazing. That's so cool! I don't know... I feel okay. I don't really have anything else I have to do today. I'm just going to go home and write, so if there's other stuff that you—like I know there's stuff about gender we didn't really talk about. So if you want to we can, but if you feel good about where it is, I feel good about it too.

Crews: I'd love to talk a little bit about gender.

Norris II: Yeah, we can! We absolutely can. I'm happy to.

Crews: Yeah we've been talking more about queer spaces, but....and talking some about growing up. Where were... like how.... did you see gender as a young person and how did that change throughout your life?

Norris II: That's... a really interesting thing because I feel like it's not something that I was really conscious of as a young person, but it was very much there. I am coming from a two parent household with a father and a mother and in my household there were four children; two sisters and two brothers. And I was the youngest. So when you're the youngest—and I was the youngest by a lot; my siblings are seventeen, fifteen, and ten years older than me. My parents were forty one and fifty when I was born, so when you're the youngest person and you're a baby, then a toddler, and a child in that scenario with all of those adults around, young people are like sponges anyway. When you really.... There's just a lot to absorb with all of that sophistication happening. I was certainly picking up messages and there were messages about... like there were messages that were coming from the home and there were messages that were coming from the world. In my home, the sort of message was that there was not any difference in terms of men and women in terms of, you know, what you should do with your life, having choices, being educated, having careers, being ambitious, versus not. There was no difference in that. And that's sort of what was said. But in the world, there was a difference, right? There are certain things that women should aspire to and there are certain things that men should aspire to. And then, for me as a kid, my dad absolutely had this very active career, was the breadwinner, and my mom didn't work for a long time when I was very young in age. There were a few years when she wasn't working, and then when we moved to Cleveland she

was working sort of part time, very casually, and all of that. So I felt that there were ways in which the messaging was one thing in my home, but what was happening was, in my sort of shallow child-understanding, was another thing. Even though, as I got older I kind of learned, but my dad always wanted for my mom to have a very active career; she had been trained as a teacher and he wanted her to go for that. And I think that she did not heavily feel that she wanted to do that in that way. So I had these sort of aggressive-ish impressions, but that felt really unique, and I don't know what that was. I mean it was the 90s, it wasn't like it was the 40s. I just understood that's what was expected of me, and one of the ways in which that didn't play out was that I played the viola growing up, and when I was in highschool I was like "I wanna be a professional violist" and I'd felt that way for four years. It was more like eight years actually because I felt that way mostly through college but I didn't go to music school. And what was interesting was that my parents were certainly the type of parents who were like "we will support you through whatever you want to do", but my dad was like "you're really smart, do you still wanna be a lawyer, don't you want to be a lawyer?". And then when I graduated college soon after that I realized I wanted to be a writer, and of course I applied to these MFA programs. And what was interesting was that my sisters, my one sister had gone to music school and is now a singer. My other sister worked in theater in New York for nine years, she worked at the public theater. She went from being a production assistant or like intern maybe, to all the way becoming the company manager. So she was in the arts. And I think that there was an underlying assumption of " well, that's okay for them, they'll just marry a man who'll provide. But you are going to marry a woman and you will be the provider. So you really had either better be good enough to be hired by an orchestra and they'll pay you, or maybe you wanna be a lawyer because you're a really smart kid". And I think that was sort of really underlined there. So as I began to recognize my sexuality in high school, I began to think about this in this way. The other thing is that for highschool I went to an all-boys school, all-boys prep school in a place called Hunting Valley, Ohio. I was forced to think about it because I—well I need to first acknowledge the fact that it was an incredible privilege in certain ways to be able to go there, that my parents could afford to send me there was huge. I got a phenomenal education, I got a lot of individual attention, especially during my college application process. And I got to take a lot of classes that I wouldn't gotten to take if I had gone to a public school in my neighborhood, which was quite a good school but there were just some classes that they didn't offer. Teachers with specific backgrounds could choose to teach certain classes, electives, so that was really cool. But it was a really difficult place for me, and I think that there was this sort of unbridled masculinity in the space, there was a lot of "boys will be boys" among the leadership and how they handled the students, and I just did not fit in at all. And it's not that I was, I don't even know that I knew that a person could be born male and feel like they were a woman. I had no language for anything around that I don't think, until I got out of college. So I just remember understanding in a very keen way that I would have been happier at the girls' schools, which were Laurel or Halfway Brown, versus at my school. I would have felt more a part of things, I would have felt a kinship in a way. And that's not to say my experience was all bad at this school, and it's not to say that I didn't in some ways feel a part of things, because there were ways in which I did that were interesting. Once I came out, a lot of the boys became very protective of me, which was sweet. It was motherizing in it's own way, but it was sweet. But even with that, and it didn't become a more positive experience until I just owned who I was, I felt that I was a girl in a space surrounded by men, and kinda that's just how I felt. And

so I really began to become more aware of that in the language, and nothing ever crystallizes for me until I have the language, and then it sort of snaps into place like the gears fit when that happens. And so it was college when I began to understand "oh! There's a thing called being trans, this exists", and that was really wild for me. And there was a trans student in our school, in college. And it's interesting now because I sometimes think "if I publish my novel and it gets big", there's a really big author that graduated from my highschool, I don't know if you remember the novel All The Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr, but he graduated from that same school many many years ago in the 90s. His mother taught there, she wrote Harvard Innovations, they have a writing program at that private school I went to, I did not participate in it but it had a fellowship that you can do. So they are certainly very proud of Anthony, and it would be a thing for that. Like if my book was big, that would be a thing, but I am not a cisgendered man, so I sort of wonder how they would handle that as a boys school that graduates men. How do you feel about that? I'm not very connected to the school in many ways, I'm on the alumni email list—someone found me through the web. But I wonder about that, like how that would go. I think about the fact that if I do a book tour, I mostly wear these clothes to begin with anyway, but if I did a book tour I'd probably wear a lot of dresses and jumpsuits. When Anthony published his first collection of short stories I think it was around the time I was a student there, and he came and read a story during the morning assembly. It would just be very interesting to see an alumni walk in in a dress, and I don't know how they would handle that. I hear it's still a very conservative place. So I think about these things... But anyway, it was when I was in college that I first began to think that I might be somewhere on the spectrum of people who are not just cisgendered male or cigendered female. And my sophomore year of college was a big news item because Jazz Jennings was a trans, I guess woman now, instead of a girl I think she's 18, 19, 20. But at that time she was a young child, like maybe 6, and her parents were fully supporting her transition, and Barbera Walsh did a whole special on it and it generated a lot of attention and a lot of conversation. So there was some interesting conversation about being trans in the media, but at that time the entire conversation was "I was born in the wrong body, I have the wrong body, I was born in the wrong body and I knew from the time I could speak that I was actually a girl, or I was actually a boy". And I had never felt that way, I had never hated my anatomy. I wasn't thoroughly tied to it, but I never felt like I wanted it gone necessarily. So that was my understanding at that point, so then I thought I must not be trans because I don't hate my body. And I really didn't have the language for being non-binary, being gender non-conforming, all of the ways in which we can be a part of that spectrum without nailing ourselves down to one specific place, like we didn't have that language. So I just thought "well there's a home for me, but I guess it's not". And it wasn't until the last few years when that conversation has really happened and that language has really been there that my own understanding of myself and where I fit in has kind of crystallized. And like I said, it's when I have the language that things make sense for me. Maybe the next step would be for me to write my own language. But yeah that was a very long answer, but my understanding of gender of course is always evolving. I don't necessarily feel like I have a better understanding now than I did when I was 10. I guess I do. I certainly feel that there are more colors to the palette, you know. It's as varied as humanity itself, which is amazing.

Crews: Great... I think that's great. I think that maybe we should end there. Thank you, thank you so much.

Norris II: Oh my gosh thank you, this was so fun, oh my gosh such a good conversation. Ugh, I'm a rambler, I should tell everyone that interviews me that. I'm a rambler, I just like go and go and go.