

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

CALLAN MOLINARI

Interviewer: Meryl Jones-Williams

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Transcribed by Khonner Damon

NYC TOHP Interview #232

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Meryl Jones-Williams: Hello, my name is Meryl Jones-Williams and I will be having a conversation with Callan Molinari for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. In our conversation, we will also be celebrating and memorializing Molinari's wife, Mira Bellwether, who passed away on December 25th, 2022. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is Saturday, January 6th, 2024, and this is being recorded on Zoom.

Callan Molinari: I know there was a lot of, I don't know, but I suspect there was a lot of arguing before they settled on, what was it, trans-identifying people?

Jones-Williams: Yeah, trans-identifying people. How do you feel about that?

Molinari: It's fine. It's very by committee. Like, no, we can't say transgender because then there's going to be people who are like, oh, but I'm not transgender. And we can't put transsexual in because then people are going to be weird about that, and anyway.

Jones-Williams: [Laughter] No, I like it. I like the feedback.

Molinari: Oh, yeah. No, it's, terminology is an ongoing war for as long as we've existed and we have always existed. So.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, absolutely. And it's like ever evolving and changing. So I think their project too, from what I know, is also open to that. So it's like helpful. Um or just like they are constantly like changing their language.

Molinari: I'm sure that they are. But yeah, no, I think they hit on a safe phrase. So there's no reason why they need to change that.

Jones-Williams: [Laughter] Well, I guess maybe I want to ask you first because I was first introduced to you about your intentions to memorialize your wife. But I wanted to ask you if you preferred to talk about yourself first or to go into that first.

Molinari: Sure. I mean, a few questions about me. Yeah.

Jones-Williams: Okay, cool. So um what are your gender pronouns?

Molinari: He, him.

Jones-Williams: Okay. And when and where were you born?

Molinari: Staten Island, unfortunately. And 1985.

Jones-Williams: Nice. [Laughter]

Molinari: Yeah. Height of the needle tide on Staten Island. So we lived by a beach. We just never went to it because it was filthy because 80s in New York was.

Jones-Williams: Can you, yeah, do you have any memories about that time growing up there?

Molinari: Uhh I mean, I don't know. Whenever I talk about my childhood, I feel like I sound like the monologue Carrie Fisher wrote for Dr. Evil. Like my childhood was quite typical. Me, Tom, it's in spring. I don't--Yes, but not anything special or particular. Well, my brother did get very, very sick with what turned out to be kidney failure, which then got better. Long story, I don't know. Um but-

Jones-Williams: When you were a kid?

Molinari: Yeah, I was seven, he was like four. And it was 1992? Yeah, 1992. And um so we were broke working class, despite the boat in the family. Um but-

Jones-Williams: The boat? You had a boat?

Molinari: The ferry, the Molinari ferry. We referred to it as the family boat. But no, we don't have boats. My dad did work at, well, first of all, because a boat is a terrible investment. And second of all, my dad worked at a marina. So he had more than his fair share of boats and did not like the water, did not like being on the water, had no interest in the beach. So no, no boats. Boats are only for work. God, I'm sorry, I told you. Tangent city. But anyway, so my brother is very sick. One of my mom's like 12,000 great uncles. One of them happened to be like a muckety muck at Cornell Weill at the time, which is how my brother didn't die because they got him into a decent hospital. But on the way there, they were transferring him via ambulance. And the EMT who was in the back with them told my mom, well, you better hope he doesn't need blood. Because we were still at that point in the perception of the AIDS crisis in New York. And also, like, it was pretty close to when they did not have a system to filter blood. And, you know, you get your Ryan White and all that stuff. So I feel like that gives a flavor to the time.

Jones-Williams: Yeah yeah, totally. And I don't know if you did, but could you tell me if you happen to have any early encounters with trans community like as a child or did that come later?

Molinari: Well [Long pause], technically, I went to middle school with my friend Leo. And I don't know if he knew at the time. I certainly didn't. I only came out in, well, I'm kind of in a weird Benjamin Button situation, because I have been in trans community for about a dozen plus years at this point, but I am also uh a hatchling of COVID. This is probably where I put a pause and say, are you familiar with egg theory?

Jones-Williams: Egg theory? Like?

Molinari: Or like just the concept of a trans egg?

Jones-Williams: No. Tell me more.

Molinari: I will tell you more. It was coined by this girl named Zoe Wolf, I believe, and Jackie S.

of Daryl fame wrote a zine called Egg Mode, which had it in there. And, you know, it's sort of become ah, it's definitely widespread among trans women, and it's increasingly being used by trans masks. But my life and my heart is always for the girls, so that's the side that I'm always on. So basically, the idea is that you're always a trans person. It's just, you know, when you come out of that shell and realize it. So, you know, so you have eggs who are, you know, trans people and maybe don't know it or sort of, you know, tiptoeing up to it. And it's also used to describe sort of the years before you transition, whether you knew it or not. And like, you know, some of the weird stuff you might have done that looking back, you're like, oh, I was trying to meet a need there. And then when you come out, you hatch. And yes, that is, that's more or less it. It became, I think it also showed up. This is like around 2014, I think. It also shows up in Imogen Binney's Nevada, I believe. So it was definitely like a lot of things that lined up sort of dispersed into trans lit and trans culture and thinking like comes from smaller groups of trans women who are, you know, talking with each other and just sort of conceptualizing their experience, and the trans experience, and all that stuff.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, and like learning from each other in these like social spaces. Um how do you feel, because the initial question was like, if you had, what were your like first experiences were with trans community, do you feel that...

Molinari: Yes, [Laughter] I went off on a tangent.

Jones-Williams: That's how this goes. [Laughter]

Molinari: Technically, because I went to middle school, junior high, with um my friend Leo, which like he was, and this is like back in 96, 97, 98, he was a big Nirvana fan at the time, which in retrospect is a sign. But yeah, so we grew up together, and we both made it off the island, and we met as adults, and he was transitioning. And I uh wasn't. [Coughs] I was still sort of, you know, easing my way into queerness.

Jones-Williams: How old were you?

Molinari: Probably 24, 25 when we met as adults.

Jones-Williams: Mhm

Molinari: And back in the days of Facebook, if that... [Laughter]

Jones-Williams: Still around, but yeah.

Molinari: But back when, I don't know how old you are.

Jones-Williams: I'm 37.

Molinari: Okay, so we're the same age, you know.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, 86. Yeah.

Molinari: Okay. But yeah, like back when that was a big thing, and you know, yeah. So he was always sending me invites to like umm different trans men events, and this was the era of original plumbing, which I don't know if you're familiar with. No. Okay. So original plumbing was a magazine by...

Jones-Williams: I've heard about it, but tell me.

Molinari: Actually, one of Mira's exes was a cover boy, which is funny because now, like we we've been friends for several years, so now it's just like, oh, Jay, I forgot you did this. Oh yeah, you were a porn star for a while. And this is also part of why I am doing this interview, because our history goes like that.

Jones-Williams: Right

Molinari: And like, I am blowing kids who are in their 20s minds with like, with stuff like original plumbing. Let me see. Oh, there's a chat. I can just send you a link.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, I remember you mentioned the phrase, this was on one of my questions, toddlers teaching babies in regards to how quickly...

Molinari: Yes, Mira termed it. Yes, we definitely, we come in micro generations. And a lot of us, frankly, die. Like Leo did.

Jones-Williams: Oh.

Molinari: Yeah, he is, he completed suicide in 2012.

Jones-Williams: Was Leo living in New York City?

Molinari: He was living in Brooklyn with partner MC, Mary Catherine Halfpenny, which was the most Catholic girl name I've ever heard and why they preferred to go by MC. But they, long story short, his mom's a nightmare. His dad also completed suicide, I think jumping off the Verrazano-

Jones-Williams: Oh my god.

Molinari: Several years before. And long story short, he is now buried on Staten Island under his dead name. And...

Jones-Williams: Oh, is that what you were mentioning in your email?

Molinari: Yes. I mean, I don't remember what I wrote in my email, but probably, yeah. So there was, you know, there was him. And umm honestly, I just kind of fell into it. Like friends of friends. I became really close with my friend, Jesse Rose Lee, who actually, I am the one who gave her her middle name, largely because it scanned well into most of the songs from Gypsy.

Jones-Williams: Wow. I love Gypsy.

Molinari: There, you got me, you got me. And yeah, just meeting more people and being around and like getting into dating as a queer adult and, you know, dating other trans people, specifically trans women. Yeah, I mean, 2012, 2013, 2014 was really sort of, it was an exciting time to be a transsexual in New York of a certain age and predilection. Like we're talking sort of, you know, prime tipping point era. Like me and my roommates, watched Laverne Cox and Janet Mock have a conversation. I think either from one of the Kennys or maybe the New School, I don't know, but they were televising a talk between them. And me and my roommates watched it, like it was the Super Bowl, like we had snacks and all that jazz. Yeah, it was, [Long pause] there was a lot of hope and a lot of growth. And you had stuff like Topside Publishing, although they wound up being a disaster. Eventually, like we would not have, let me put it this way. Tori would not have landed on Oprah's book list if, you know, none of this stuff had happened back in, you know, the 2010s. Like people like Imogen Binney and Mira and Casey Platt and, you know, everybody like that really coming to create stuff and write about our lives, you know, for us by us. I think I've wandered off a bit.

Jones-Williams: I mean, it makes sense, kind of like in the journey of finding, it sounded like from what I was hearing, but there was like a social seed and then like that that kind of like created this web and then that time during the 2010s that you kind of like rode that together and it encouraged like a growth of material. Yeah. Is that, would you say that's the case? I don't want to put words in your mouth, but that's what I like received from what you were saying.

Molinari: Yeah, no, I think that's fair.

Jones-Williams: So it relates, I think. And I guess I was going to ask you also if you think how your experience of being trans now compares to that time or the past.

Molinari: Well, first of all, I wasn't out as trans. So there's that. I got called a chaser a couple times, which my response to was always like, I'm the one being chased. Like I, you overestimate me, my good man. But I think the main differences is hope and the absence of. Like, that period was also when trans care first started being covered by New York Medicaid, which is huge because most of us are poor. Good luck to those who aren't. And I had a roommate at this time, who's a trans girl, who quit her pretty lucrative editing job to make communist jewelry, which was just flying off the shelves, as you can imagine. Like her parents were paying her rent. But you know, she liked to talk big about the socialist paradise and all that shit. And one night, Mira was visiting. She wasn't living in New York yet, but she was staying with me and my roommates. And uh-

Jones-Williams: Where was she living at that time?

Molinari: She was back in Iowa. Because she bounced from a whole bunch of places. She was born in Iowa, outside of Des Moines, which she showed me like the business, like downtown business area of Des Moines on Google Earth at one point. And I just started laughing, which in my defense, I was high. But I was laughing and I was like, that's not a city, that's an intersection.

[Laughter] And I stand by that. But they do have very impressively large supermarkets. But yeah, so she grew up in Iowa, like did drag out in the Midwest in the late 90s. Went to grad school in... She would often make fun of me for... And she was right to do so, that New Yorkers definitely have a certain amount of provincialism about everywhere else. Like I would always get the names of like different Midwest states mixed up. But then she moved to Chicago as like in her early 20s with a girlfriend who was going to art school. Then Mira wound up going to grad school and as a women's studies major. And she taught classes and stuff and she was really good and missed that when it wound up not being something she could do. She wound up getting kicked out of grad school because her girlfriend at the time sort of, you know, darvoed her to the campus courts, which is insane that campuses have legal systems in and of themselves. Granted, I went to FIT. We didn't have a campus, we had a sidewalk. So I forget that these places are sort of like self-governing states like the Vatican. So anyway, long story short, her girlfriend who was abusing her was like, no, she's abusing me. And who are they going to pick? The cis girl or the transsexual? So then she was in Austin for a little bit in Texas. Met our friend Giselle there, who I'm still close to. He's great. And then wound up in San Francisco for a couple years, which had good points, but also had a very abusive partner there who... Twitter to work, let's put it that way. So bad stuff happens.

Jones-Williams: And you already knew Mira at that point? Or that was before?

Molinari: Yeah, that was before. This is all long before I'd met her. I met her because she was dating a friend of mine who is crazy. And that's also a very long story. But considers me her nemesis, which is very funny. But yeah, so I met her through a friend who was dating her. And at that point, she was back in San Francisco uh, back in Iowa, because she had escaped the abusive girlfriend in San Francisco. Went cold turkey off heroin in her mom's house in Iowa without telling her mom because her mom would freak out. This is also the period of life where the big scar on her forearm came from. Because if you are perceived as a junkie whore, even in San Francisco, they are not going to treat you well medically. I think, well, her girlfriend liked to stab her, so there was plenty of those scars. I think that one was also a cut. I don't remember if it was a cut or if it was an abscess that got really bad. But either way, she had a big, big open wound.

And instead of sewing it up, like you're supposed to and shit. They just gave her a wet to dry dressing and she just had to wait for it to heal for months and months and, you know. So yeah, so.

Jones-Williams: So negative experiences also with health care and like.

Molinari: I mean, as she put it herself, like there's murder and suicide are not the only reasons that trans women die young. A lot of it is medical neglect, refusal of services. You get a doctor and then they do shit like that to you. Like, you know, it's hard. She. [Long pause] A thing I've had to accept after her death, which with limited success, is that a lot of people and institutions failed her along the way. And I wasn't big enough to fix all of that. And no one is. And like her friend Bryn Kelly was from Appalachia, lived in New York for years, was HIV positive and like the health care was bullshit. Like, Kalin Ward, which theoretically is supposed to have retained the

HIV consciousness of their founding. Like I went in a couple of weeks ago and no one's wearing a mask. Like my doctor is not wearing a mask. Like, OK, cool. But then nobody is anymore. And, you know, the one thing I'm grateful for is that Mira died before that because she died in December. They rescinded masks in February. And even before that, it was an ongoing fight to try and keep her safe. Like I spent a lot of time at the fucking chemo infusion center, Perlmutter, which is, you know, theoretically best of the best doing. They're like, I'm so sorry. I think your- I think your mask slipped. Like, just pull it up a little bit. OK, because.

Jones-Williams: Yeah.

Molinari: Everything's terrible, I think, is the summation of that.

Jones-Williams: Real lack of sensitivity around. Yeah, I've noticed that for sure. And it's not um it's not safe for everyone that it's not. You know, it's like none of us are really safe if we're not like making.

Molinari: It's not safe for anyone. Everyone. It's not safe for anyone right now, but there is just a majority of people who would prefer to pretend that it's not happening. Like I'm hearing ambulances every hour or so near my apartment. Like it's really very bad and that's even with like no testing. Like we're barely testing, no masking. But, you know, let's go eat in the restaurant and go to Taylor Swift concerts and, you know, so on and so forth. You said a bitter face.

Jones-Williams: Well, not to pivot, but I guess we could try to talk a little bit about Mira. And I have some questions and one of them is um like if you could tell me just about your first memory of Mira and a little bit about just the origin story of meeting each other.

Molinari: The origin story? [Laughter] No, I like that. I like that. So I was familiar with her work long before I ever met her because I was dating my first trans girlfriend. And I was just like, how do I not fuck this up? This is important. So yeah, so like I'd been familiar with her zine, had heard about it. And I read it and I fucked it up for other reasons. So there was that. So yeah, so she was, you know, already established in my mind and in my circle as like the Mira Bellwether. The other thing [Laughter] that I mainly knew her from was there was a very short-lived but very sort of explosively consciousness-raising Facebook group because again, of time, called Well-Known Secret Society, which is very funny, which was um, it was just like a private Facebook group of trans women all just having like this sort of moment of like, oh, you're too. And you know, like consciousness-raising again as, you know, as second wave as it is, is really what that sounds like. So my roommate, of course, was in it and most of my friends. And so I would get the gossip secondhand. And she [Laughter] she was known for an internet fight, especially at that point. Very strong opinions, didn't suffer fools, also did not have any pain relief for her very severe rheumatoid arthritis and mixed connective tissue disease. So that made her a little sharp

and when she discovered weed here, she mellowed out. But yeah, that was kind of the reputation that had preceded her. Like very intelligent, very funny, very sharp, will start a war.

Jones-Williams: At the same

time. Molinari: Yeah.

Jones-Williams: For those that don't know, Molinari, can you like let us know what fucking trans women, like the zine, can you just tell us about it?

Molinari: Sure.

Jones-Williams: You mentioned it and I feel like it might be helpful for just people to

know. Molinari: Got it. It is a zine, hence the name, about, I mean, basically what it says on the tin,

fucking trans women. Like there's a lot more in there. Like a lot of it is, in a way, it's sort of a synecdoche, which is a word I never know if I'm saying right, of her in a lot of ways and like of her interests. Because like, you know, it's one part autobiographical and, you know, lyrical thoughts about love and sex and relationships and relationships with your body and with others. And it's one part her. She had a very 18th century style, like amateur scientist vibe, which I always loved. Of just like, I don't fucking know. No one else is doing the research. I'm going to figure it out myself. Which is where you get a lot of the stuff in there about the vagus nerve and about like the actual structure of your genitals and like what happens when you introduce estrogen to it. So, you know, on the one hand, you have like the philosophical part of like a hard penis is not the only sexy penis. And also like, here's some diagrams and photos of myself that I've taken because I don't have anyone else to do it. And yeah, so she not infrequently described it as a manual to herself that she had to write that is also has been and continues to be very useful for a lot of other people. Like for trans women, for people dating trans women. It um so I mentioned that, you know, her reputation as like the Mira Bellwether preceded her. And part of what I mean about that is because there was nothing like it written before. Pretty [Pause] much all of the instructional or how-to writing I've seen about sex with or for trans women is clearly based in it, whether most of them have the graciousness to acknowledge that and, you know, mention it. But it's all still mostly her work. Like there's nothing to surpass it. Like it's still a go-to. And that's part of why she did it. Because if she hadn't, I don't know that anybody else would have or would have thought to. I don't know if that answered the question.

Jones-Williams: That definitely answers the question. I guess, so you had read it

before. Molinari: Yeah, before we met.

Jones-Williams: And you also mentioned like not wanting to fuck it up. And I was curious, like, I feel like another thing that struck me in the zine was I can totally like see like Mira containing multitudes and being like very, very smart and like intimidating in a certain way, maybe, but also empathetic. Like it seemed like there was a chord of like deep empathy and just like-

Molinari: Because of who she was and her relationship to her sisters, whether she liked them personally or not. Like it doesn't- [Laughter] Terry Pratchett has a line about how a gathering of witches isn't a coven, it's an argument. And we would joke that the same thing held true for a group of trans women. Like it's an argument. Yeah, like empathy, love, just wanting people to act right was really at the core. And the fucking up I meant was with my first girlfriend who was not Mira.

Jones-Williams: Got it.

Molinari: It was a product of seeing Amelia. Because I had never had sex with a trans woman before. And, you know, I was friends with a lot of trans women who had had dates who had really hurt them in various ways. So it was like, well, I don't want to do that. So I read it and it helped. And people did, not infrequently, find her intimidating, which was very frustrating for her. The way like, you know, we couldn't go to an event without, like, someone coming up and saying, "oh my God, thank you, you saved my life, you changed my life," which is great, like, but also it's hard when, as she would put it, like, I don't want to be the Mira Bellwether, I just want to be Mira the girl, like, can we get to that part, please? Like, in certain ways, her, however niche it is, her fame was a little alienating for her, which is why I've been making the point that um, you know, like, she put her bra on one boob at a time like anybody else, like, if you admire someone, just talk to them like a person, and, like, if you're intimidated, just go ahead and do it anyway. Like, the worst thing is that they won't respond or they'll be like, go away, kid. So yes, that was hard, like, having to get past that initial, oh my God, it's you, for a lot of people.

Jones-Williams: Um was it different for you? Like, so when you first started dating, like, do you remember?

Molinari: Yes and no. So the way that we met was she was dating one of my friends at the time, both. They were dating at the time and this woman was my friend at the time and no longer. So she was visiting and we were all getting together for me and the other girl, Marie, our friend was having a birthday party. So they come in and I hustled my way down the table. This was at Lily's, which is the Lily Langtree themed bar by Union Square, which seemed fitting, Oscar. So yeah, so I hustled on down and started talking and we both had an "oh no, she's hot" moment and wound up just kind of focusing on each other for the rest of the night, which was not appreciated. And because I am very smart, we invited, we being me and my roommate, invited them over for dinner the next night. And that's when, oh no, oh no, she's hot, really hit for both of us. And we were like, individually in our heads, like, I know what'll make this better drinking. Did not make it better. A lot of just like, I can't look at her because then it'll be too obvious. Which then made it very obvious to everybody else in the room anyway. Like, it was pretty immediate. And she had a terrible visit with my friend. Not because of that. Mainly just because that friend is, as I said, insane. And then she was heading back to Iowa about the same time I was coming back to New York from going out to California for my roommate Jesse's bottom surgery. Because before 2015, we did not have any trans surgeons in New York, period. Like, my friend Zil Goldstein is the one who set up the original program at Mount Sinai. And she got pushed out because trans women, of course. But yeah, before then, like, your choices were

Bowers out in San Francisco or Thailand or, you know, something like that. I drew the line at I am not going with you to surgery in a different country where I don't speak the language. And if something goes wrong, I'm going to have to coordinate that. And then also have to call your mom from wherever the fuck we are and be like, hi, so I know you're kind of a strange right now, but uh you're like, no, I'm not doing that. We're staying in the US. So I was on my way back from there and Mira was going in the other direction. And she was like sending me texts about like how she really hoped we could run into each other at the airport, which wasn't going to happen. But yeah, we both had it really bad pretty early. And I was just coming off a really bad breakup. The kind of breakup where you've been together for a year and then she says, I never loved you. I just started saying it because everyone was saying it at the time because our friend just died. And then I just kept doing it. And I didn't realize you were meaning it differently. It's like, yes, you do. Shut up. Anyway, water under the bridge. And so I was a bit gun shy. And she was throwing hints that I was not picking up because, you know, she's cool and beautiful and I'm me. Like, what is, why would you be interested? And I initially called her Miranda for a while because I thought that's what Mira was short for. It's not. It's just Mira, which she eventually told me. And I was like, well, I didn't want to get fresh. [Laughter] It's like, you've seen my angle canals in print, like it's fine. It's like, okay. Yeah. So this was February, March-ish. We started talking a lot. Getting close.

Jones-Williams: I forget what year that was or if you said it.

Molinari: It was 2014, I believe. So we didn't get a lot of time together. Yeah, so she started coming for visits and her first visit after we initially met and after she had called me and had been like, do you want to go out on a date? And she called me because she was like, you have to call for dates. And I was like, really? Okay, yeah. So she came to visit for my birthday in May that year, which was my 30th. And she wound up proposing to me that night, which neither of us was expecting. And to be fair, there had been a lot of tequila, but honestly, we'd been heading that way anyway because gays. So yeah. And then from that, like, yeah, that was it. Like, that's just who we are. And then she moved to New York to be with me in 2016 because we moved out to Queens. Yeah.

Jones-Williams: And where was the proposal? Where did that happen?

Molinari: It was my 30th birthday party at a bar called Big Bar on 7th. Are you familiar with it? You just nodded like maybe you were.

Jones-Williams: It's more me being like, yeah, tell me.

Molinari: It is a very, very small bar despite its name, hearty heart, on the Lower East Side. And like kind of decorated like a set from David Lynch, but not on purpose. Like they just kind of achieved that vibe without necessarily going for it. Cash only, like there was only ever one person behind the bar who would sometimes wander out. Like the place did not make sense

financially, it has to be a front for something. But the drinks were cheap. There were heavy pours. They did not mind a large group of rowdy transsexuals. And you could bring food in. So, you know, all in all, good time. But yeah, it was there.

Jones-Williams: So it was like public in front of some friends or was it off to the side...

Molinari: No, this was at the end of the night as everybody had left at that point. It was just me and her in a booth. And it wasn't like a big thing. It was just like, marry me. I was like, all right. I mean, not that chill, but you know.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. That sounds really

sweet. Molinari: It was.

Jones-Williams: What in your relationship did you have certain things that you liked to do together, like things that brought you joy with each other?

Molinari: Um I mean, we did. We did. But also just like just being together was fun. Like it was, it didn't matter what we were doing. Like it was just fun being the two of us. But yeah, she was very big into Mystery Science Theater. Actually, one of her many lives involved being running a bootlegging operation for MST3K tapes, which paid for part of her grad school, if I recall correctly. So yeah, so watching things, listening to music, listening to podcasts and books together. Just stuff like that. But I mean, the majority of it was just sort of an unending conversation.

Jones-Williams: Do you remember any like inside jokes that you had with each other?

Molinari: Um yes, but yeah, I don't necessarily want to get into that, I don't think. Nothing is less funny than explaining a joke. Actually, I will give you one. But do you like this?

Jones-Williams: No pressure.

Molinari: There's a David Attenborough documentary series, one of which is a movie about it's called Mammals, a wedding design, which then gets into why mammals are so great. But it became a running joke about basically just how poorly designed our bodies are. So, you know, whenever something was going wrong with some part of ourselves, it would be like a winning design.

Jones-Williams: I really like David Attenborough. I think I've seen that series.

Molinari: [Laughter] Of course.

Jones-Williams: I don't know Sorry, I was on mute. If you, like, since Mira's passing, if there's ways in which both literally and metaphorically, if you still sense her presence, whether it's like an impact that she had or if it resonates to you that you still kind of sense her there.

Molinari: I mean, she did have a very large impact. And I mean, obviously, I do still feel that in lots of ways, one of which being handling different requests from randos about things they want to do about or with or whatever with her work or about her, which not that I'm anywhere on the same level, but I was like, damn, no wonder people hire estate management companies for famous people.

Jones-Williams: It's a lot to take in.

Molinari: It is. And, you know, I've in a weird way gained some sort of very small insight into, you know, the Courtney Loves and the Priscilla Presleys of the world where, you know, you have to handle both the personal loss and what that person and what that loss means to everyone else outside. So sometimes, you know, it's sweet. Like, actually, I should check back in with her. But there's this one girl who sent me a message and I was just like, oh, God, what now? And basically, she just wanted permission to make a personal copy, personal hard copy of FTW for herself because she was in a printmaking course and wanted basically just to like print herself and bind herself a copy with like an ambers type cover. No, cyanotype, which is one of the very early forms of photography. You've probably seen it, but it was a type of sun sensitive preparation that you could put like leaves or things like that and expose the sun and it'll turn blue. And what you have on it is white and, you know, very pretty. And just wanted to know if that was okay. And if I wanted, she could make one for me and CJ. And I was like, yeah, sure. And then on the other hand, you have people like the woman in Canada who even before Mira died, was like hawking her about doing a one woman stage show based on FTW. And to the point where Mira was just like, just do it. I don't care. Don't put my name on it. I don't want to be involved. Just do what you're going to do and don't talk to me. Which she did until I got messages from this girl on every conceivable platform she could think of, like on Twitter, Instagram, my email. She even sent one through the GoFundMe for Mira's cancer care to get in touch with me. Yes. Because turns out when someone like Mira has given their permission and then dies, you're supposed to then get the permission from the estate. And the franticness was because she had not done this yet. And the show was going on stage in two weeks. It's like, okay. She sent me a film of it, which I have not watched yet because I-I don't know. She's a mess. I gather there's an animated portion of like jazz and stuff. I don't know. I don't know. Just like, this will be interesting. Apparently it got some good write-ups in Canada and was partially funded by the Canadian government. So there's that. Or some rando who messaged me out of the blue like shortly after Mira died. First of all, treating her like she's JD Salinger or something and like just disappeared off the face of the earth. And does anyone, what else do you know about her? And can I have like basically treating her like a cryptid when Mira had a fairly large internet presence. So it's like, okay, you know nothing of what's going on here. And then trying to buy the rights to the zine, and I guess whatever else I had lying around that I felt like giving them, to a library in Texas, if I recall correctly. And it's like, no, no, no. First of all, no. Like, [sigh] don't talk to me like my wife is mythical. Oh, actually, this one opened the conversation by just sending me a link to a thing that they had written that was basically like, you know, what happened to Bobby Fischer, but about Mira. It's like, you don't know anything. And also, like, what a fucking weird way to start a convo. And hi, could be good. Turns out they were friends

with one of Mira's exes, one of Mira's stupider exes, frankly. But anyway, people are weird and they want [Long pause] a lot of things, whether it is fitting or not. Like I got, I think like two weeks or so before Christmas, which is the anniversary, I got an email from an acquaintance who is an editor at a small press.

And they're like, I was trying to be sensitive to your early grief, but I've been thinking about this all year and basically wants to do a project where they and I would ask trans women writers to write essays about Mira. And then we would compile and edit it and then try to pitch it to their bosses to get it published. And I'm just like, no, absolutely not. Like, first of all, you, no. Like, you are a trans, like, I hadn't spoken to them in years before Mira passed and they sent their condolences, in part because they were mad at me for telling Mira that they worked at a bank, which they did during an argument. And like, how dare you throw my actual job at me? Anyway, so it's like, I don't really like you. She didn't really like you. According to them, they apologized and she received it graciously, which I was like, because she didn't care about you. So it's fine. And this is all gonna be on spec. And it's like, so you want us to trans men/trans masks to ask trans women to work for free for a thing about Mira, which we are then going to control. Do you not see, if not the ethics, like the optics of this being bad and like the opposite of anything Mira would want? So I sat on it for a little while and sent what I thought was a fairly polite email that started with, "I appreciate your sensitivity, but I would suggest in the future that several weeks before the first anniversary is also not the time to send such a proposal to people." Yeah and the same one who wanted to buy the rights also wound up doing what they build as a fucking trans woman oral history event, even though nobody involved knew Mira. And I think there's only like one trans woman involved in this whole thing. So by oral history, they meant they were just reading it aloud. And I was like, this isn't for you to do that. And then they were creating what they were building as a follow-up scene called the fucking gender, which, oh no, I'm sorry, fucking gender diversity, which is infuriating and also not a funny title. Like you're missing the whole point.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. That must have been hard to be grieving and then like fielding a lot of this at the same time. Like how did you, how have you been coping?

Molinari: Yeah. How have I been coping? Not well. I have a good therapist. So that's been helpful, but I don't know. Like a very much wealthier and cis acquaintance who I keep around because she works in development and access to people with money is always useful. I say in my most Ferengi manner, you never know. Like I don't have resources. You have resources. Anyway, she said something on the lines of like, I don't know how you're still up and walking and sane. It's like, well, the sane part's debatable. And I basically got very real about how my options are. You have to keep going and moving or living or [Pause] I kill myself. And I don't have time for that right now. Like, CJ, our partner, like Mira's best friend, soul sister, girlfriend, like soulmate, all of that. She is facing a terminal liver diagnosis. In fact, in the next couple of weeks, she'll be doing some more testing on that to see where that is. And there's a concern that they will try to fuck with her hormones as part of that. Like, even though they don't go through her liver, but whatever. So, you know, I can't do that

before then, for sure. And yeah, if I don't, I don't have anybody to take care of me. Like, which is also part of why I take COVID very seriously.

Because, you know, everybody wants to go get coffee. But if I go get coffee and get COVID and wind up disabled, you are not coming around to take care of me. Like, my dad died of chronic kidney disease, technically a heart attack. But chronic kidney disease is what got him there. And he was really sick for a long time. And, you know, I saw firsthand how that works. Like, how, you know, no one is really there to help you in the wider sense when you're sick. People don't know what to do. They don't want to get involved. Caretaking is really hard and stressful. And yeah, and then just the last several years of Mira, like, has brought the point home even more so. Like, she spent it very isolated and lonely because especially after year one, people were taking it less and less seriously. And she was getting sicker and sicker. Like, I firmly believe that the cancer itself and her lung and what eventually did finally kill her, which was the massive stroke, while on the ventilator, was from COVID. Like, I don't know whether it was, I mean, I think it was probably from back in March 2020 before, you know, all they had was drive-in testing and all that stuff. Like, I don't know if you were in New York at that point.

Jones-Williams: I was here the whole time, yeah.

Molinari: Yeah, it was bad. So I think you understand what I'm saying when, you know, I say that she was running like 104 fever and begging me not to let her die in Jacob Javits Center or go to like Falwell's kids outside, gotta write no homo to get treatment camp in Central Park. Like I think, yeah, I think a lot of things that came later originated there. Like she had lifelong chronic issues and autoimmune stuff and all that. But yeah, that's when her health started to go downhill. And it became more and more of a project of how to protect ourselves when nobody else seems inclined to. There was a lot of, the thing that always got me was asking like taxi or Uber drivers to wear a mask. And their response is always, who me? It's like, yes, you. Who else am I talking to? You're the one in the car without a mask on. [Laughter] And just like every time, different people, it's just like, why? Why is that the response? I don't know. Like you see my wife to the side of me with an oxygen tank, like you don't think, oh, maybe I should, you know, put this on.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, totally. And if you ask, you know, I feel like that's not, you know, if someone asks you, you're like, oh yeah.

Molinari: Oh yeah. Oh, you'd think. But no, no. Lots of pushback in lots of places.

Jones-Williams: And do you feel like the social isolation from COVID also played a part in, you were saying like people were kind of taking it less seriously? Like is that your friends or is that medical professionals or like who? I mean, the world. Like you have lived in the same world that I have for the last several years. Like there's a reason why everyone's not everyone, but there is a reason why like my Instagram feed and I'm sure yours too looks like it did in 2019. Like, that's what I'm talking about. Like everyone wants a return to normal and they are pretending that that is the case and that it is not. And people like me and Mira are the flies in the ointment that sort of gives the lie to that. And yeah, like my, I was very transparent with my job about what was going on and all that stuff. I actually told them that I could no longer work in the office the

day before they instituted work from home because I couldn't. It was too dangerous. I am not killing my wife or children, swear. It is not that important. I mean, it's important enough that I needed it to support us because Social Security disability payments are nothing. On a good month, she was getting \$800 tops. And that was with us having to legally pretend that we're roommates because if you have a partner, then the presumption is that they will be covering all of your costs and there goes your benefits. And you definitely can't get legally married because then for sure it outsies. I do not remember exactly where I was going with that. But-

Jones-Williams: I think it was initially just talking about like, you know, just grief and the ways in which people have been not really helping you with that process and then also misunderstanding things and also being totally unhelpful and yeah.

Molinari: Yep, that's the reality of it.

Jones-Williams: Do you find, are there any like, you said you have a good therapist, but are there any like communities that you feel good around? Maybe even on like Zoom or do you feel like that's just really hard to find any systems of support or is that something that you're just struggling with right now?

Molinari: Um

Jones-Williams: I guess specifically maybe in the trans community, but I suppose it could be also not.

Molinari: My- Mira's friend, Julia Blair, once said, and this has stuck with me, that in terms of like trans community, this is part of a eulogy at another mutual friend's funeral, that if you can replace the word community with party or scene, it is not a community. And that is what a lot of people have chosen in this current moment. Like actual community is less important than going to this event or going to this dance party or all that stuff. I mean, I have actual friends who are good and kind and care about me and CJ and Mira. But I am much too old at 38 and cynical to be under any illusions that there is such a thing as the trans community. Like a lot of that is just children arguing on the internet, frankly. So like so many of my other answers, both yes and no. Like I have personal friends that I care for and talk to me, but I'm not really a group joiner. When I was first coming out as trans, I was like, well, I'm going to be real. There are a lot of trans men that I love and have known for a long time and all that jazz. But as a group, we are largely dumbasses. So there was a very long period of like, oh, no, I can't be because look at those people over there. Like that's not me. The same funeral about where the quote about community comes from. One of them, one of the trans guys that I knew at the time showed up to the funeral with jerky in his pocket that he had dumpstered at some unknown point previously and was like offering to people at the funeral. So, yeah, I did try a trans mask support group through the center as they're trying to rebrand themselves, the LGBT center. But for whatever reason, maybe it's changed in the last couple of years. But at the time it was like, it felt like you needed a secret

password. Like there wasn't information on the website. So you had to call and then once you called, they had to send you a questionnaire and then you fill out the questionnaire and then they'll let you know if you're in the group or whatever. So I was like, this is bullshit, but I did it anyway. And I went to one Zoom meeting. Again, I found myself in the Benjamin Button situation of being like physically and experientially a lot older than everyone else, but also technically at the same point of transition. And yeah, just nothing to offer me. Like you're 25, you're living in your mom's house. Like this is, I think my issues are beyond you people. And the nail in the coffin was the very last guy to speak who was talking about, oh, no, I can change my TERF girlfriend. And it's like, no, you can't. You're very young. And also, that's fucked up that you're with a TERF. And I'm not coming back. So yeah, I mean, there's no real bomb in Gilead. Like, what group am I going to join? Like, there are caregivers and widows/widower groups, but those are all largely straights as people who are in their 60s. Yeah.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, it sounds like the struggle is real. I think that the struggle sounds like the reality. And I've heard that, too, like that it's not, you know, that it's a struggle to find community as a trans person. (Unintelligible) your honesty.

Molinari: I would dissect that a little bit. It's not a struggle because a struggle would be implying that it's still something that I'm looking for or expect to find, which I don't. And the other point is that it's not because specifically that I am trans. It's because of who I am personality-wise. Like, transness is an aspect of it. But that's not the thing standing in the way, is what I'm trying to say. It's people being idiots or, you know, just not knowing what to do with my experience. Like, yeah. And also, like, what? I am not going to find any solidarity with someone who thinks that brunch is more important than protecting people like my loved ones. And, you know, that's what a lot of people want to do. Like, oh, we should go get coffee. It's like, OK, you have not heard a thing that I have said.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, right. It's like living on another planet or something.

Molinari: Yep. Every day is a different reality from everybody else. But they're having fun. So, you know, we'll see in five years. And then I'll know more dead people.

Jones-Williams: What? [Laughter]

Molinari: I said then I'll know more dead people. Like that is the large, one of the large frustrations of just, you know, seeing people I care about throwing themselves into the wood chipper. Like, like I've had a number of friends actively kill themselves. And, you know, at least with that, it's kind of a surprise. And also you don't get to watch them slowly do it. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get so into COVID. Like I know the party line is to pretend that it's over, but I can't.

Jones-Williams: You don't have to be sorry. I think that it's, you know, it's kind of intrinsic in feeling like people are kind of forgetting that that's not the case.

Molinari: Oh they've forgotten.

Jones-Williams: And so it seems important to actually like counter that with like what you're

saying.

Molinari: And I do. Nobody listens to me, but I do.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. If you could organize your own, like if you could do it differently in the way that people are, what they're not doing, like, do you have any ideas of like how, I don't know, we could.

Molinari: Like put your fucking masks back on. First of all, we can start there. Like I don't know that there is any fixing it at this point. Like between people's apparent willingness to get themselves and their kids infected over and over again. Like the fact that because we've been doing this, like the strains have become incredibly diverse. And most of them no longer respond to the primary vaccines. Like if we had continued doing what we were doing in 2020 for, you know, slightly longer, maybe we wouldn't be in this situation, but we are. And, you know, people who know me and knew Mira very well, and I have been very open and frank about the manner of her death. Just like there's we're friends with a throuple and one of them posted fairly recently about being in the hospital with no mask. And she already has lung COVID. So that's fun. So it was like, because I'm me and I have a wealth of hospital experience. I was like, are you okay?

Do you need anything? I can come by so on and so forth. Especially since her husband was the only one who showed up to the ICU when Mira was in it. Anyway, so she was like, oh, no, no, just getting scans, just getting fetal scans of the third partner who's pregnant. And I'm just like, okay, very worried about how the anatomy scan is going to turn out, but you're doing all this, okay. Well, good luck with that.

Jones-Williams: Do you feel like there's something that, not that your friends are young, but that the youth are not understanding or that there's a gap or something?

Molinari: There is no gap. There's just [pause] ignorance and a committal to normality at all costs. Because I get the same thing from the people that I work with. Like, yeah, it's not young kids being reckless. It's everybody. It's like, you know, plenty of people our age, plenty of people older. Yeah. I mean, you have eyes. You've seen.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. I have.

Molinari: Now that I've brought the mood way down.

Jones-Williams: Hey, one of my questions, but I don't know if this is kind of like, it's quite contrasty, but it's like, if you have any hopes for the future?

Molinari: No. Which is not the answer I'm supposed to be giving, but at this moment, not particularly. A thing I try to remind myself is that the world has ended before and continued. Like, this world is over, I think. But, you know, the dinosaurs thought that they were going to be the world too. Like, things change. I mean, I do have, clearly I do have some hope for the future, which is why I'm doing things like this interview to plant breadcrumbs for, you know, whatever kind of queer or trans people, you know, come after us to find. Because a lot of things get lost

and it's important for them not to. And, like, I'm sure I've mentioned it, but I always go back to the example of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera about, you know, how a trans woman artist did the majority of the academic work of resurfacing who they are, what they did, like the history. And, you know, then gets taken by everybody else. And it's like, you know, yes, queen, tote bag, park, you know. So it is finding a balance between yassification and obsolescence, maybe. Yeah, especially with the what is the increasing rapid rise of fascism. I don't know if you're following the trans laws in Ohio and Florida, among various other places. And, you know, the famous photos of the burning at the Magnus Hirschfeld. And, you know, we lost all of that information and knowledge. And yeah, my hopes are not high, but trying to cast letters in the bottle to the future, such as it is.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, I mean, there seems to be something like very active about what you're doing. Like you're, even if you don't have them, like you might be creating them, [Laughter] like the new breadcrumbs.

Molinari: Yes, no, that's on purpose.

Jones-Williams: Presently, yes. In that act, like, are there, is there any things that you just like want to share about like Mira or yourself that are misunderstood or ways that you're grieving that are not being appreciated?

Molinari: Who is going to appreciate my grieving? Maybe I misunderstand the phrasing, but.

Jones-Williams: I guess just making space for it and telling it like it actually is from your experience. Maybe a more direct way would see a way that you would like it to be remembered.

Molinari: I mean, remembering at all would be a good first step. I had a fun conversation with my boss boss a couple days ago, where he's like, how was your holidays? And I was like, fine, thanks. And, you know, he kept going like, oh, did you leave New York? And I had to be like, it's the first anniversary of my partner's death, which you were there for. I didn't say that part. He was like, oh, that must be hard. It's like, yeah, it is, which is why you almost fired me several times when I was trying to keep her alive. I mean, [Long pause] I do censor myself sometimes, but, you know, I do tell it like it is to the people that I trust and I care about um. But in terms of space or care for grieving, like, who does that like? It's important to me and to people who are very close to her. But for everybody else, life goes on. [Long pause]

Jones-Williams: Do you feel like there's anything that you would want to share or like in reaching out and wanting to, I mean, in some ways, like, because you care about it, like you're making space for it. Is there anything that you feel compelled to share from that impulse to reach out?

Molinari: I mean, the main things that I have emphasized is that you should give, I mean, everyone, but especially trans women, their roses before they die. And, you know, everybody loves to be sad about a dead trans woman when, you know, she can no longer disagree with you or make you uncomfortable or call you out. But, you know, what is anyone doing to keep a trans woman alive? Like, are you giving anybody money? Are you working on getting people

housing? Like, you know, so on and so forth. I started a ah, an annual buy a trans woman a pizza or other food of her choice or cash equivalent day on Mira's birthday. And that was pretty successful. I did the first one this year.

Jones-Williams: And what is Mira's birthday?

Molinari: What's that?

Jones-Williams: What is Mira's birthday?

Molinari: It is March 31st. She's an Aries. And mine is May 31st. So we matched a little bit there. Yeah, I mean, take care of your friends, be there when they're alive, so you aren't, you know, all blue, blue, blue afterwards when you could have been in touch. And I will give kudos to a lot of people who did reach out when they understood how serious Mira's health concerns had come. God, I don't know. I don't know if I'm making my points in this interview or not. But like, I just, I would want her to be remembered in her complexity and um and her love, like she wanted more for everyone. Like a very strong sense of justice, I suppose. Yeah, I don't know.

Jones-Williams: Totally. I mean, I felt like in reading, I don't, you know, I didn't know Mira, but in reading fucking trans women, it felt so giving and loving and tender.

Molinari: Yeah, that's who she is. And that's, yeah. What she wanted for all of her sisters to have. Like, our friend Bryn killed herself, although I have my doubts about that. Long story. And she had what was largely a very nice funeral at St. John's Divine, except for Sarah Schulman's eulogy, which graphically described the manner in which she found Bryn's body and also kind of blamed Bryn for all of her own problems, which was not the case as a low-income trans woman with HIV in New York. Like, it was graphic enough that Mira, who had been very close to her back in the Camp Trans days, came up together, just had nightmares about it the rest of her life. She felt so strongly that it was wrong and that it is important to treat the dead well that she held a sort of impromptu all-trans woman read-through of Agamemnon in my living room, which if you are familiar is about the importance of burying your dead. And yeah. Yeah, my life's a real bummer. Sorry about that.

Jones-Williams: I keep on mute because my heater is really loud, [Laughter] but that's totally, I don't know. I think you're just being real. It's okay.

Molinari: Thanks.

Jones-Williams: Do you feel that, are there certain, like you mentioned Camp Trans, I guess I was curious if you could tell us more about Camp Trans. I read a little bit about it, but just for people when they listen.

Molinari: So Michigan Womyn with a Y Festival was a big, dumb lesbian folk festival, which made increasingly insane commitments over the years to just how much they did not want trans women specifically to visit or be on the land or be allowed in. But, you know, no problem for the muckety-muck that one of my roommate's girlfriends worked with in AIDS Services in New York

who would take his vacation to Michfest and detransition for like the two weeks, you know, but no man on the land. No, can't have that. It's like, okay. So nobody actually really wanted to go to it. It was the point. So Camp Trans was a camp of trans people set up literally across the road having a much better time and making a point about the exclusion. And God, yeah, it's so on the one hand, I am glad that we don't have this argument every summer anymore where, you know, cis women are like, but I have to go, it's so much fun. And, you know, I'm going to change it from the inside. It's like, no, you're not. No. No. Bullshit. But yeah, it was special as an early, late 2000s um space for trans people to just be together, which, you know, there was not as many opportunities for that then. And, you know, again, it's consciousness raising. Like, whatever they thought they were doing over in the forest at MichFest is what was actually happening at Camp Trans in terms of like building an actual community and, you know, camaraderie and consciousness raising and, you know, all that stuff. Meanwhile, they just had at one point, shortly before they stopped, they were finding it increasingly hard to book talent because they've made their TERF position very clear. And a lot of trans people, especially trans women, were very vocal about that being fucked up. Like, I remember one year, what's his face, JT with the little mustache from the Keeney Kill was defending having to play MichFest because how else will I afford my Brooklyn condo and my bike? It's like, okay. Yeah, cool. So a lot of that shit. But yeah, Camp Trans didn't suck. And you would not have to hear bitch three times in a row because they can't book anybody else. And Mira was like pretty active. You were both pretty active in Camp Trans. I wasn't. You weren't active. It was Mira. Yeah, this was, and this was, yeah, that was a number of years before I met her. Like, that's where she met the first trans girl that she ever dated. Yeah, it was formative. Do you remember a time when like you felt seen? On the one hand, I am glad that we don't have this argument every summer anymore where, you know, cis women are like, but I have to go, it's so much fun. And, you know, I'm going to change it from the inside. It's like, no, you're not. No. No. Bullshit. But yeah, it was special as an early, late 2000s space for trans people to just be together, which, you know, there was not as many opportunities for that then. And, you know, again, it's consciousness raising. Like, whatever they thought they were doing over in the forest at MichFest is what was actually happening at Camp Trans in terms of like building an actual community and, you know, camaraderie and consciousness raising and, you know, all that stuff. Meanwhile, they just had at one point, shortly before they stopped, they were finding it increasingly hard to book talent because they've made their turf position very clear. And a lot of trans people, especially trans women, were very vocal about that being fucked up. Like, I remember one year, what's his face, JT with the little mustache from the Keeney Kill was defending having to play MichFest because how else will I afford my Brooklyn condo and my bike? It's like, okay?! Yeah, cool. So a lot of that shit. But yeah, Camp Trans didn't suck. And you would not have to hear bitch three times in a row because they can't book anybody else.

Jones-Williams: And Mira was like pretty active. You were both pretty active in Camp Trans.

Molinari: I wasn't.

Jones-Williams: You weren't active. It was Mira.

Molinari: Yeah, this was, and this was, yeah, that was a number of years before I met her. Like, that's where she met the first trans girl that she ever dated. Yeah, it was formative.

Jones-Williams: Do you remember a time when like you felt seen? Like in a good way?

Molinari; I think I need that question narrowed down a bit. Like by who in what way? Like what are we talking about?

Jones-Williams: I guess like maybe like at home in your body and just an early memory of feeling that way.

Molinari: Umm well my family didn't really see me. So there's that. I also have not been in contact with my mom for the last several years and that was one of the better decisions I ever made for myself. I mean Mira saw me. Like that's Mira saw a lot of me before I saw it usually. Like for years she would just sort of you know gently prod and ask if you know transition is something that I've considered and it would be okay and you know like we can you can play a boy if you want to in XYZ context whatever. So yeah so I know that she saw me and CJ sees me and like the people that I consider close friends get me. Work is still ah, I have he him in next to my name like on Slack on my email on Zoom and you know it's still a constant she which is why I'm growing out the dirt stash to see if that makes a difference. So that's cool but I mean I've been working in my industry for many years and it's only in the last four or five that I have encountered other trans people in the industry and also them being out about it because contrary to popular perception like the garment industry is very small and very conservative at the management level. So you know who's gonna have a problem with what. So it's nice that I have like another like have a non-binary person on my team now and nobody uses their pronouns either. So yeah work in progress.

Jones-Williams: Yeah so workplace stuff has kind of always been a struggle in a certain regard. Molinari: I mean, yeah.

Jones-Williams: Like, have you, I mean, you talked a little bit about like the challenge to make a living or make ends meet. Could you talk a little bit more about that? The real struggle.

Molinari: Yeah. I mean, neither of us came from money, which the week that my dad died, Jesse, who had reconciled with her parents at this point and was still my roommate, just left the \$30,000 check that her parents had wrote her as a down payment for an apartment, just on the kitchen table, like one of those very stark, your dad's rich, my dad's dead moments that you get in life. But yeah, it's a struggle because like, Social Security is not designed to support you. It's designed to get you off the government payroll as fast as possible. Like whether that's oopsie, your family gave me too much help so we're taking your benefits or you have a partner now,

you're their problem, or just, you know, you fucking died. So yeah, it's not designed to be lived on and it can't be like \$800 in New York on a good month. And when I say a good month, I mean, because they eventually found out that she was still getting zine sales, which, you know, on the very best month would be about like \$400 tops. So then they would be like, oh, we overpaid you. So now you're in a deficit and we're cutting your payments and yeah, whole thing. So yeah, so my job, I was raised by a workaholic and have a lot of those tendencies myself. But yeah, the pressure of like, I need to keep whatever job because I went through a couple jobs in our relationship and some of them were worse than others. Like if I don't, then like we're screwed. No one else is going to step in. I don't have parents who can write a \$30,000 check. So yes, there was a lot of pressure to make that work. And my industry is sort of notoriously abusive. So that's a fun combo. But yeah, no, it's, there never was a time where there wasn't worry about money or stability or, you know, something.

Jones-Williams: Was there ever a time where it was like particularly fragile and you had to crawl yourself out? Or it was more just something that you always had to keep afloat because...

Molinari: Always keep afloat, yeah.

Jones-Williams: Yeah and your industry, you said garment, and you said you also went to FIT, but it's in the fashion industry?

Molinari: Yes, yeah. Specifically, I work in children's wear as a graphic artist. So I do graphics and prints and all that jazz. But I went to FIT for illustration, like not for pattern making or anything.

Jones-Williams: Did you draw any of the things that are behind you?

Molinari: Well, that is, those four things were the first pieces of art that I sold. And one of the nice things that my parents did was like frame the little check and stuff. But everything else is by friends.

Jones-Williams: I like the little check. [Laughter]

Molinari: [Laughter] Yeah, that is my, by my friend, Caitlin. Took me a second.

Jones-Williams: How do you feel about living in New York City now? Like, I guess you grew up, well, you grew up in Staten Island, but have your feelings changed about New York City? Do you still love living here?

Molinari: I mean, it's not about love. Like, I just live here. Like, my parents, like I am third or fourth generation. Like, the various, you know, Depression era forebears got off the boat and were like, this is good. And haven't really gone much further. Like, I've never lived anywhere else. My industry is centered here. So that's the skills that I have. So I kind of have to stick around. But also, like, I don't want to live anywhere else. Like, this is my habitat, which is why, you know, people doing the Joan Didion farewell to all of that thing always pisses me off. Like, some people actually just live here and they have lived here for a long time and like good, go,

bye. Yeah, lots of, you know, rich queers slumming it and like I don't know how anybody can live here and the city is trying to kill me. It's just like people live here and have families and they have for centuries. Like I don't know what to tell you.

Jones-Williams: I'm just looking at my questions I ask, you've answered a lot of them. I guess, well, one thing I haven't asked you is what impact, like you were talking about Mira really seeing you and I guess if you, anything you wanted to share about what impact Mira had on you and then also vice versa. Like I imagine, I don't know if that's easy for you to see from your eyes, but just wondering the impact you had on each other.

Molinari: I mean, we made each other better or tried to. Like I would not have figured my gender out, which feels silly to say, but it's true. I mean, being actually unconditionally loved by someone is huge. I mean, she was the person that I loved most in the world. Like what isn't affected?

Jones-Williams: Yeah. Sounds like it was a very um whole relationship.

Molinari: I mean, I tried my best. Like I have a lot of fucking issues that I'm still working through and I was not anywhere as far as I would have preferred to be. But it is what it is. Like we were both in pretty bad spots when we got together and um I mean, I think, I mean, the long and short of it is like, I don't think either of us would have necessarily have survived on our own if we hadn't met.

Jones-Williams: Is there anything you feel that you still like carry with you from the love that you shared? Molinari: I mean, yeah, like it's, it's everything like it doesn't go away.

Jones-Williams: Of course. Yeah. I just mean like if you, if there was anything you wanted to share on that topic, of course that is the case.

Molinari: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, it's just so vast that I don't know, you know, how to put an ebo on that.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, I think you already said two really big things, which are like maybe you wouldn't have found like home in your gender and also maybe you wouldn't be here.

Molinari: Yeah

Jones-Williams: And those strike me as two huge things. So yeah. How are you feeling? I'm just going to check because I know it's, you know, it's a lot to talk about. So I just want to check in with you.

Molinari: Okay. I've been talking about dead people for a long time.

Jones-Williams: Do you need a bathroom break? Like anything like that?

Molinari: I mean. Actually, yes, I will run to the bathroom. I'll be right back.

Jones-Williams: Okay. I will too. We can just take like a two minute pause. So I'll wait for it to just not be, can you hear it? No. Okay. That's good. Yes. Yeah. I guess one thing I would love to hear more about is again, this phrase of like toddlers teaching babies and just like, I don't know, like the importance of the importance of creating history. It's been erased or remembering history.

Molinari: Yeah. Because yeah, Mira always termed it the orphan elephant problem, which, which is from, you know, elephants having their elders, you know, poached or whatever. And so then you have them trying to raise each other without any sort of guidelines or guidance or mentoring from anyone who's... Yeah. Yeah, and like there's a lot of reasons for that. There's, I mean, first of all, just death. Like people die, suicide, murder, illness. Part of that is geographic and part of it is, I mean, just who you find when you're first looking for other people as you realize this about yourself. But yeah, it causes a lot of problems and bad behavior towards each other because we don't know how to regulate ourselves. And yeah, like just having to constantly reinvent the wheel without the benefit of someone being like, oh yeah, we have a wheel, you can use it. So yeah, just sort of like having to figure everything out with people who are not much more well-informed than you are. And yeah, it's important to not let that information get lost as a lot of it has. And some of it is people just not being involved with younger kids coming up because it's exhausting. And they've already been through so much at that point that it's just, I just wanna go live my life, which I think is fair. And talk to people who I don't have to start from 101 with. So yeah, like really small micro generations and people getting stuck in very small echo chambers yelling on Tumblr or whatever.

Jones-Williams: What are they yelling at each other about?

Molinari: Oh, it's always something. I mean, it's mostly on Twitter these days, but I think the current one on Twitter right now is like transgender versus transsexual, which is like the same stupid fights that if they knew any of their history, they would know have been going for at least the past century.

Jones-Williams: Do you feel that, or do you not feel, do you have any intergenerational relationships?

Molinari: I mean, a little bit. Our friends Marlene and Popper, well, I was about to say Poppers because I always call her Poppers, but her human name is Dorian. Marlene was one of Mira's older sisters, so we did have that as a little bit of an example of, you know, a trans woman who was about 10 years older and her partner who was about the same age. It wasn't, you know, a huge gap, but enough to sort of illuminate the possibilities. But I mean, generally, generally it's in the other direction. Like, I've been trying to foster relationships and have financially helped younger trans people because that's important.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, you were saying you've like also blown some younger trans people's minds and that can, I don't know, what's that like for you?

Molinari: It's a little disorienting sometimes to discover that things that were very widely known at one point, not very long ago, like between 5 to 10 years, is just did not get transmitted. Like, they don't know about it. They didn't hear about it. So it feels useful to be a

person who can be there and, you know, provide some of that context and what things are like. But I mean, it also makes me feel really old, which, again, is funny because I'm technically a very young trans years, but that's usually, you know, that's how it goes. I mean, it's, there can be a sort of demoralized, well, it's not that there's a lack of curiosity. There appears to be a lack of acting on curiosity and also not knowing what you don't know for a lot of them. Like, especially since we're sort of like on the second generation of that wave of trans lit so you know they know *Girlfriends* by Emily Zhu but they don't know *Nevada* by Imogen necessarily. I don't know I'm basically just kind of a haunted house for a lot of ghosts.

Jones-Williams: Do you have like a top five like texts that you would recommend or do you like or is that hard to? I mean or anything that just like was meaningful to you.

Molinari: I mean there are things that are meaningful for me because they are created by someone I care about or I was involved in the process. Like I'm in the acknowledgments of *This They've Grown to Love*. Ironically the one who told me that she didn't love me.

Jones-Williams: [Laughter]

Molinari: Yeah well you say it in the back of your book so. We're all so fucked up. I don't know that I have any in terms of like oh yes that's me and my transition and all that jazz. But I mean FTW obviously. *Nevada* was huge like that was really sort of the start of the current trans lit movement literally.

Jones-Williams: When did you read that?

Molinari: I read it when it came out. Yeah but I was involved with the Topside crew as I've mentioned. But yeah I don't know I mean it depends on like whether we mean texts about trans people whether it's texts by trans people or about us or I mean there's no there's no one Rosetta Stone that I can give. I mean *Lipping Girl* is foundational by Julia Serrano and her and Julia Serrano also went way back. Mira actually got her as as in like arranged and you know got all the permissions and set up the event stuff. Got her to come to campus to talk shortly after *Lipping Girl* came out. So they knew each other for a long time and I mean, that's sort of like the core of, not the core, but the seed of sort of current trans feminist thinking and theory. Yeah, I don't know. I mean, usually when someone asks me this, I try and tailor it to them or whatever interests they're trying to fulfill or find or, you know, do you like novels? Do you like nonfiction? Do you like theory?

Jones-Williams: Totally. Yeah. Like in through your own transition, those were like specifically helpful for you and that might be different for each person.

Molinari: Uh yes. I mean, I don't, I mean, I think that's what I said earlier that there haven't necessarily been things that I've read that were like, I mean, because I was already, you know,

living in life more or less like there's, yeah, no, I haven't found anything particularly insightful about myself or trans masculinity or whatever.

Jones-Williams: Did you feel like it was like it added up to like a feeling or like it's like you found pieces of yourself or that it was just inspirational?

Molinari: Inspirational isn't the right word because it wasn't inspirational. Like a lot of things that I mentioned were just writing about life as it was then. Like it wasn't inspiring because I was also living in it. Like it's inspiring in the sense of like now you can be a trans person and get a book published about trans things and you don't necessarily have to handhold the reader through every little thing, which was like the big revolution of Nevada. Like it just takes for granted that you know what she's talking about and if you don't, you can figure it out or fuck off. And I mean the same thing with FTW. Like there was a need and no one else to fill it and Mira did. And yeah, I don't know.

Jones-Williams: Mhm, in FTW, I feel like Mira also invites people to like the zine. Did that ever happen? Like-

Molinari: No.

Jones-Williams: No? [Light laughter]

Molinari: She was very disappointed about it.

Jones-Williams: Yeah.

Molinari; Yeah. No, it was intended to be, as she says, like a community cookbook where, yeah, the hope is always that people would add in or contribute. But no, that never happened. Nobody stepped up. She was working on a project with CJ before she died, but that hasn't been completed yet. No.

Jones-Williams: I wonder if that could happen still.

Molinari: I don't know. I mean, we're working on it, but, you know, it's not like either of us are bubbling with energy right now.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. You mentioned the Topside crew a couple of times. Could you talk more about the Topside crew?

Molinari: I'm sorry. Topside was a small press run by Tom Legere, who was a trans man. I mean, he still is. I'm assuming he's alive somewhere. Who's a terrible person, but had money, and he set up a press. And like, the first thing that they published was called The Collection, and it was a collection of short stories. And like, they had like a release party at Slash Reading at Housing Works Bookstore. And, you know, Janet Mock showed up, and we were all excited and still sort of like one of very few people I've ever met in person who just looks like a magazine cover. Like, oh, shit, there are people who do just look like that in real life. I didn't know. But yeah, I

mean, a lot of there were not an insignificant part of sort of the trans tipping point thing. And the work that they did and they published has been foundational for stuff like Tori Peters, Detransition Baby. Like, you don't have that without topside, and not just because she fucked Tom Legere for a while, which is its own punishment. So it's fine.

Jones-Williams: Is there a physical location to topside press?

Molinari: No. No. I mean, they went defunct a long time ago. And even as it was, it was like a three or four person operation actually doing it. So, yeah, not a ton of... No, there's not a location, and there's not a ton left of it, except for Casey Platt, who is now currently running a trans women-specific small press with Kat Fitzpatrick called Little Puss Press, which you know has carried the torch in terms of Casey having been in both. Yeah. But, yeah, it was a very small company, but there's a wide network of writers and friends and people who worked at bookstores and all that jazz.

Jones-Williams: Um is there anyone that, I don't know if you did, but when you were younger, was there a teacher or someone who you learned from that had a positive impact on you?

Molinari: [Long pause] I mean, I don't know anybody specific, but... I mean, I made it my business to learn something positive where I could.

Jones-Williams: When did you first start drawing or being interested in illustrating?

Molinari: I mean, before I can remember. My mom does the same job in the same industry, so I just kind of grew up with it and the skill set that I have. But yeah, there was never a time before I was drawing or interested in art.

Jones-Williams: Yeah, you just remember not...

Molinari: Yeah, no. I was like the 10-year-old carrying around the literal art history college textbook. That's where I was.

Jones-Williams: Do you mostly do it for work or do you turn to it as like a...

Molinari: It's mainly for work, which has been... Personal work is a whole thing. I don't really want to get into it, but...

Jones-Williams: All good.

Molinari: Yeah. So, yeah, not a ton of... Did I mention the time that Muffing came up on Tucker Carlson?

Jones-Williams: No, you didn't. You want to talk about that?

Molinari: Sure. So I think, I forget when exactly this was. It was pretty recently. Let me find, he like had it in the chyron and everything, which was hilarious. Here, I will send you. Anyway, just want to send the picture. That works. So he was claiming that children were being taught

Muffling in school. So our initial thoughts were, okay, who in that office came across this? Also like wanting to be a fly on the wall for whoever then explained Muffling to Tucker Carlson. Laughing a lot and then being like, oh shit, time to batten down the hatches because Muffling is so singular that it would be very easy to find Mira from that. And I believe this was also around the time that we were fundraising for treatment. So it's like, okay, we don't need the crazies on us. So we battened down social media for a while. And I still have a Google alert for Muffling, which mainly gets me football players who have fucked up because apparently that's a well-used term, like Muffling a punt or whatever.

Jones-Williams: [Laughter] Sorry.

Molinari: So on the one hand, it was like really funny, but also like really concerning for a couple weeks in terms of like, who is going to find us and cause a problem? Shortly after a Wikipedia page popped up for Mira when there hadn't been one before. So that also kind of got our antennas up of like, okay, who's paying attention? And that was kind of creepy and weird, but everything, we wound up not getting any blowback and it was all fine. And then we didn't know who'd done the Wikipedia or why. Most of it was like more or less publicly available information from like family obituaries and stuff like that. It was pretty specific. So then after Mira dies, I get a message and it is from the trans girl who had set up Mira's Wikipedia because she had gone to look for one and there just wasn't one, and so she's like, I should make one. It's like, well, that's a lot less nefarious than I was concerned about. And then she sent me a poem she had written about Mira, which was nice, but weird. As Wilde says, "all bad poetry springs from true feeling." Sorry if she ever hears this. But also had the very niche conversation of mourning someone whose death and life is semi-public. Because it turns out her dad was the first journalist killed during the Iraqi invasion in post-9-11. So we were bonding a little bit about that experience of people kind of know, but don't really know. And it's weird and it's public and you're going to see people's opinions about it and their own feelings and all that stuff. So there have been moments like that too of weird and unexpected connecting about a frankly very strange experience.

Jones-Williams: Is there anything that as hard as it's been, any practices that you do to bring you joy or things that bring you joy, even if they're closely connected to...

Molinari: Not a lot of things are very joyful, frankly. Me, CJ, and Mira had started watching wrestling a little bit before Mira died. And so she and I have a standing twice weekly wrestling watching date, and that's nice. But I mean, one day is very much like the same, like the next. I mean, the main difference is like, do I have to work today or not?

Jones-Williams: What wrestling do you watch, if you don't mind asking? [Laughter]

Molinari: Oh yeah, no problem. AEW, which is very fun and very gay and all of the ridiculous stuff about wrestling and really good athleticism and camp and fun without everything that is

wrong with Vince McMahon, which is a lot. Like their business model the years so far seems to be “what has WWE done over the years? Ok we’re not going to do that.” [Laughter]

Jones-Williams: Um, does CJ live close by?

Molinari: She lives in London.

Jones-Williams: Ohh.

Molinari: Which also complicates things, and you know we did not get very much time spent together as a family um, or you just you know together physically very, because of the distance. And yeah and there was really no way to make it possible for us to all be together in the same city permanently. Because, I mean, first of all, if you're disabled, which CJ is, they do not want you to immigrate. And, like, CJ and Mira very much had... So they've gotten a lot stricter on green card marriages. My first girlfriend's brother was in one where his wife was the one getting the green card. And he's like, “I don't know where she is. I haven't seen her in years.” So they've gotten a lot stricter about, like, going through your social media and you have to show them messages and proof that you've been in, you know, this whole real long relationship. And, like, me and CJ did not necessarily have that as proof. So it wasn't even like I could marry her and bring her over. So, yeah, borders. It sucks.

Jones-Williams: How did you meet initially?

Molinari: Mira met CJ on Mastodon, I think, which is a Twitter alternative. And, you know, they became friends and became very close and, you know, opened up to include her.

Jones-Williams: Was there ever a time that you were hanging out, like, in the same place?

Molinari: Oh, yeah. Yeah. No, she came to visit several times. She helped us move to this apartment. She had visited before that, too. She almost overstayed her visa when Mira started chemo in the September before she died in December. Like, CJ had been there since July on a visit, but also because, like, we knew that the cancer was likely back. And we were waiting for a confirmation on that. So on the upside, we – she had her first American Fourth of July in the hospital in NYU Langone right by the water. So we had a great view of the fireworks from the hospital room. And we were just like, CJ, you essentially got the entire experience, like the emergency room fireworks. Like, we just have to find you a hot dog somewhere. And it's an classic American Fourth of July. So, yeah, so we definitely got some time. And, you know, they had, Mira was able to go over there a couple times to visit. I was usually stuck with work, but not enough. I mean, nothing would have been enough, but especially not enough.

Jones-Williams: Yeah.

Molinari: And I went to visit CJ in this past April in London. So that was nice.

Jones-Williams: How do you feel like, sorry for the sirens, but how do you feel like in your transition, like presently, do you feel like it's continuous or do you feel like you've arrived somewhere or just how do you feel now?

Molinari: Uh I mean, there is no arrival point because you keep living. I mean, I found a surgeon who will perform top surgery on people of higher BMI because my other options would be losing, would be trying to lose like 50 pounds, but actively losing my mind, which is no good. So, you know, like that will be nice to, you know, have these done with. But yeah, no, it's ongoing. And it will be like, it's a process. Like the first puberty took time and for better or for worse, the second one does too. You just have to also be an adult through it, which has, you know, pros and cons.

Jones-Williams: Is there anything that you would want to share about that experience of like being, I don't know, you're not old at all. You're very young.

Molinari: I mean, yeah, technically. And also just my experiences with illness and death, like it makes me sound kind of like a Victorian when I'm talking to normal people. So there's that. I mean, the main thing is like okay, I know how name changes worked 10 years ago. Like, what's the rules now? Like, a lot of that sort of, you know, having to update my mental Rolodex of how things work. But, yeah, I mean, it's good, and I'm glad I'm doing it, and I wouldn't go back. And, yeah. Yeah.

Jones-Williams: Well, is there anything that you would like to add or share that I haven't already asked you?

Molinari: Um I mean, not that I can think of. I don't know how much I've actually talked about Mira or really, you know, presented anything about her, but also I don't know what that would even be. But, yeah, nothing I can think of offhand.

Jones-Williams: I think you have talked about her. I guess we talked a little bit about how you would want her to be remembered, but if there was anything else or any tidbits that came to your mind of things that you'd want her to be remembered by. I'm sure there's so many things.

Molinari: I mean, I think another thing would be, like, if you can't find the thing or the person that you need, sometimes you have to be the one who makes that or becomes that person. And I think that's an important thing to keep in mind as a trans person of whatever flavor. Like, we are still small and fragmented, and all we really have is ourselves and each other. And it is important to identify needs and try and get them met. Like, try not to let people go hungry. And just kindness and doing the right thing and not looking for or expecting praise or attention or reward for it just because it is the right thing to do. And that is what you do to take care of your people and your sisters and your chosen family. And it doesn't matter whether I know you personally or if I even like you. But if you are trans or queer, you are family and that takes priority.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. It strikes me that it's hard to do that still, that she was managed to create something that you don't have or see. Do you feel like there's, I don't know, like where that inventiveness came from?

Molinari: I mean, it's because she had to. She was a disabled kid. They didn't think she was going to make it to adulthood. She was very small for a very long time. Her karyotype came out XY, but we definitely thought that she had some form of intersex going on because she was like five feet tall when she was 16. And the doctor in her rural town in Iowa was like, we'll give you some testosterone for that. Bad choice. Because as far as everyone sees from the outside, it's like, well, you're not completing male puberty. So you got to do that, which is all a very roundabout way of saying that she did it because she had to, because for a good chunk of her life, she was rarely around someone who was like her in any number of meanings of the phrase. And also I think, I mean, I know a lot of it also goes back to her academic interests and studies, which she was specializing and writing a thesis on and still had like encyclopedic knowledge. As I tell everyone, like I wish you were having this conversation with her because she knew so much more. But she was very interested and knowledgeable about that sort of late 19th century, early 20th century period in sexology and psychiatry and endocrinology when we were just figuring out enough about how human sex hormones work to be dangerous, which is always the fun point in a scientific field. Like the guy who was transplanting goat testicles into people and you know that kind of thing. So I think it also comes from that, a background of this is what people have always had to do. Like if you don't know something, then you have to go figure it out.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. Well, again, it's still very generous to create it for others as well. So there seems to be like a very deep empathy.

Molinari: Yeah. I mean, she was going generous enough in the sense that she was going to just release it for free. But very wisely, one of her friends at the time was like, I forget who, told her like, no, you need to put a price on this because people do not value things that do not have a monetary value attached to it, first of all. And second of all, like you deserve to get something for your work. Like you don't work unpaid, especially as a trans woman and, you know, just swimming in jobs. So, yeah, you have to find a line between generosity and also making a point about your own value and setting a precedent for the value of the work of people who come after you.

Jones-Williams: Yeah. Yeah, I could see that there might be like maybe like a wanting the people that it's reaching, maybe being economically in a hard place. But at the same time-

Molinari: -It's \$10. Like people, I know people can be in really hard situations, but like, I mean, if you have a friend who has the PDF, like, fine, whatever. We've been trying to get it taken down from the Internet Archive because they have it just for free. And they're kind of being dicks about it. So we haven't pressed much recently. The reason I care, because again, it's \$10, is because of, it is priced for a point. And the point is that trans women are not just content producers who can have their work treated as something literally without value.

Jones-Williams: Totally. And there's not a text that exists like it, so it's incredibly valuable. Yeah. Well, is there anything else that you wanted to share?

Molinari: Nothing I can think of off the top of my head.

Jones-Williams: Well, I really enjoyed talking to you.

Molinari: Same.

Jones-Williams: And I appreciate you opening up about something so personal.

Molinari: I mean, what doesn't get spoken about gets forgotten.

Jones-Williams: Yeah.