

Interview with Gurleen Singh Part 1 of 2

00:00:01 **SPEAKER_SB**

And we're live. Okay. This is Sukhmony. Today is June 10th, 2023. I am interviewing, for the first time, Gurleen Singh. And this interview is taking place virtually, respectively in both of our homes. This interview is sponsored by Jakara Movemen and is part of the Storytelling and Settlement through Sikh LGBTQIA+ Oral Histories Project. Thank you for being open to sharing and being open to this interview. So we're going to start a bit broad with our conversation through this idea of temporal development. So one way people understand themselves is by thinking about stories that help them understand themselves. These stories can be specific to you, like coming out stories or memories from some formative events of your life, or they can be stories that you have heard throughout your life, or have been passed down to you. So yeah, when you think back to your experiences of growing up, could you tell me a little bit about what comes to mind for you?

00:01:17 **SPEAKER_GS**

Cool, and we're talking about queerness?

00:01:21 **SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, but honestly I think it could be any, anything formative for you that shapes your identity. And maybe it plays into queerness or Sikhi, but maybe it doesn't.

00:01:40 **SPEAKER_GS**

Oh and Sikhi! It's like I forgot completely who I was and where I was for a second. Okay, cool. Well, I don't know what I was listening to. I'll start with this. Lately, and it just like really— oh, it's a podcast. Let me start really weird with a podcast about a woman who was like... No, no, no, anyways, I'll just start with the podcast. I'll get into the other stuff later. Anyway, she was saying like when we're young, it feels like we have to hold on. We're like grasping to figure out like who we are or like where we belong.

00:02:37 **SPEAKER_GS**

And so we're like, oh, yeah, I don't, like, I don't know, football. That's not who I am. And so you're like, okay, so that world, you know, I don't like sports. So that world doesn't mean— I'm a nerd. What am I, you know, I'm an artist. Like you're just like kind of going through the world and you're like figuring out what you like and what you don't like. And it feels, um, at least for me a little desperate, there's like a desperation to like, figuring that out and like putting these name attachments to us. And slowly, as we get older, those things just don't hold the same weight. But for the time being, it's actually very important to have that identity and hold on to that identity. Because you're looking— we are looking, I think, to attract that energy back towards us and like group up with like-minded people, you know? And then at some point it's like, oh yeah, I guess that's part of who I am. And, also, I think there's an opening of the heart that can happen. This is a little abstract, but like, to be like, oh, that's not who I am, but I'm like, I like that too. Like, I love that too now. And I'm happy to explore that. Silly, silly example. Growing up with this sports thing. Like, my brother and his friends were the basketball people. And like, you know, we had this kind of family-friend circle. All the girls would hang out and all the boys would hang out, whatever. So all the boys were always talking about basketball all the time, like, the whole thing. And all the girls were like eugh! It's very gendered. Anyway, you know, whatever. And because my brother was so obsessed with it, I had to form an identity “anti” it. Now, like 29, gosh, years later, I deeply fell in love with the NBA finals this year. Like, I was— it was weird. Cause obviously, obviously you must know the Kings made the playoffs. As Sacramento people, it was a big deal for us. But I continued to watch after, and it was partially my sister-in-law coming in and her love, and I was like, oh, okay, I can like things my brother likes. But like, I had to let go of like, some piece of myself and that attachment to it to be like, I can now be open to everything. Like I'm so, I'm so deeply secure in who I am, in this aspect of life. And more, but you know, that like now everything is in the world is open for me to love. So I don't know, I just thought it was darn beautiful and it really made a lot of sense. Because any conversation— and I've struggled with this in queer spaces about identity— I barely identify as a person. Like, I— you know what I mean? Like, I consider myself so fluid in existence that like, holding on to labels, it's just not. Like people will ask me like, what's my predominant identity? Like, beyond Sikh, like it's really hard for me sometimes. And even nowadays, like that's hard. No, I can't say that. But like, it's all so fluid. But I think it's because subconsciously throughout life, I was going through this process of like holding on, and then it became irrelevant. So I'll give you a story that, and it's

not about queerness, but I can get to those stories as well. When I was a kid, I was with the girls. And I had two best friends. And this is what I wrote my college essay on. And this is when I fell in love with writing. Anyways, I had two best friends. We would go swimming. We grew up from age seven onwards together. So we're the best of buddies, right? We went through like puberty together. Like we all got our, you know, periods. Woo. And like, you know, our bodies changed and our self-esteem changed. And we were like on the spectrum of Sikh people who didn't cut our hair, long and whatever, and families who didn't drink alcohol. But we're modern. You know, we went to the pool. Like we were— but at some point, like we all stopped wearing swimsuits and we started wearing shirts and shorts, or whatever. And at some point we stopped wearing shorts outside. Like it was only acceptable while swimming. Like everyone's— only wore pants. You know what I mean? Like we weren't shaving. And then one day— and it was like this unspoken pact. You know what I mean? Like those things are really formative at that age.

00:08:33**SPEAKER_GS**

I was probably 12, and one day my friend comes in wearing shorts and there's no hair on her legs and my paranoid ass goes through her cabinets and I found Veet. What? Then I approach her about it. Oh, I saw this in your cabinet. She was like, no, it was my sister's, and it wasn't mine. Oh yeah, okay. But I struggled, and I had this— it was one of the first empowering moments. I decided, she's wearing shorts, I'm going to wear shorts. I'm not going to shave my legs. And I'm going to go to school because I also want to wear different clothes and not be hot in the summer. And for, that was freshman year of high school. For the next eight years, I would say being a girl, woman, who didn't shave the hair on my body was such a big part of who I was. It tied into my Cal— being at the College of Natural Resources, like hippie. Also finding white women who didn't shave in the first year of college was so annoying to me because I was like, I struggled through this and now you guys are just making it [inaudible]. But it was probably something I thought about every day. Like I was the girl who did it. And I don't think about it anymore. I also, then at some point in the last two years, decided to start threading my face and this thing that had become the predominant, it was my main identity. Now, I was able to be flexible with it. And that's the evolution that happened. So anyways, I think it's a good example, at least in my head of how identities change, and how we evolve, and how we hold on, and we let go. And then we're just free to be who we are and what we want to be. Now you tell me, should I talk about queer— I can tell you story upon story, should I tell you about the queer stories, the Sikh stories? There's good stories on both ends, but.

00:11:12**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, well, firstly, I really enjoyed listening to how you framed all that. And then also the story about body hair and like, I guess I wanna know did you just have this feeling of like, I'm just gonna like show up to school in high school like with my hairy legs and it's gonna be it? You know, I struggled with that too a lot and it wasn't until my undergraduate years, as well, where I was like, okay, finally I can just like be who I am. And I guess what kind of prompted you around that time to just like— do you think it was because you were surrounded by other Sikh women who were going through those shared kinds of struggles, or it was just, it just kind of was in you?

00:12:13**SPEAKER_GS**

It's a really hard question. I felt alone in it. I had my mom— sorry, there's a WhatsApp. Can I delete it? There's something pinging me. I'm gonna cancel it out. Okay. Yeah, my mom did not remove her body hair. There were some aunties who did. And we talked about it. But then there were the majority who did. And once the girls turned, it felt like the aunties turned too, like suddenly people were changing and evolving. You know, but as a kid, I'm like, I thought we were up, you know, all in this together. Even my mom was like, you can if you want. Even though she didn't, she didn't want me to feel hurt. And I felt, I was so upset that she— even though it was actually a good parenting thing to say. It was like a very logical, like, I don't know, I felt like a force just like rode into me and was like, you can, you too, like shorts, it doesn't— shorts aren't just for people who don't have body hair. You want that, you do it. Period. And I remember like at school, the first couple of days, couple of weeks, I would intertwine my legs as tight as I could, you know, cross my legs so there was less surface area shown. But I really have been blessed throughout my life. I was never bullied about it. You know, I was never, no one even said anything about it. I lived in Folsom. Like I lived in like 90% upper middle class white, maybe not 90%, but you know what I mean? Like every blonde-haired girl wearing Abercrombie and me going to JC Penney and Gap. So I don't have, I wish I had a good answer, but all I know is that that moment was so strong in me allowing myself to believe in myself and that I could make choices that were different than other people and feel like they were hard, but good. Like I can still remember the pain of like searching through my friend's cabinet and the pain of that conversation. But I can also remember the strength of walking over in Gap, away

from the pants and picking out a pair of shorts that I liked and being like, my turn. But yeah, to your point, the fact that we all struggle with it, like how, I think it's just knowing that each of us have that in us, whether we want we believe it or not, and whether we see it or not, but that it's, I don't know.

00:15:18**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, that's, I think it's very cool when— I'm very much an overthinker. And so I feel like even if I had this force overcome me, I would question it. And so it's very cool that you just follow that, and I feel like that's also part of being young. You just kind of sometimes do things without having a full strategy behind them. You're just like, I'm just going to do it. Do you feel like— I guess, could we talk maybe a little bit about, you know, starting from that story, maybe going to college or later in high school, how did you come to terms, or open the doors to what your relationship is to gender and sexuality? This sort of, maybe the beginning of this fluidity that you mentioned that you're floating in all the time?

00:16:29**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, out in space... I had a thought around it I was going to share... Well, I relate to it, being an overthinker. People told me that, and I actually hated it. I think it's just because we're deeply emotional people, actually, like deeply sensitive people, and thoughtful people. I mean, I'm just putting it out there, you know, and society doesn't always value that, you know? So, then we're outcasts, but actually there's no shame in it. There's no, you know, you're a thinker. You're a believer. And I am, you know, I am too. You're thoughtful. That's all it is. I just wanna throw that out there, but I can go on and on. The reason I wanted to bring that up was because I sit deeply in my emotional space, and in a way that, I would think of it as overthinking before, but I shifted. And what I've realized, and I think that was one of the first moments, but what I've realized is: any moment where I'm deviating from my truth will end up hurting me more. So once I like, and I'm fast forwarding, but it's like once I came out to myself, it was like, I came out to everyone. And then I came out to the world. Like there was no stopping it, and it's like whether I'm in relationship with someone, and I— it's like once I know this thing about me like I can't unsee it. You know, there's no going back. And when I try to, I feel it, the inner turmoil of it. And it ends up hurting me more. So over the years, starting with that moment and others, of honoring that truth, that inner voice self, that's like, this is who you are. This is important to whoever you are, you know, as a soul being in this body like you got to live it. So, um, okay so my freshman year— is that okay if I keep going?

00:19:04**SPEAKER_SB**

Yes.

00:19:06**SPEAKER_GS**

My freshman year of college. I don't even know, but I got to college and I was like, this is how I'm gonna be. And I started wearing a jūrā on top of my head. And there's a rebellious spirit. I don't know if it's come through at all yet, but deeply. I don't know why she wanted to do that. I was 17, but everyone was like, what the heck is wrong with, you know, aunties are like, get that off the top of your head it's for boys and I'm like from here to here we've decided huh? Boy, girl? Got it. But yeah every— people would look at me very odd and I felt like this is good. Let me— my queer, you know, I need to stop saying it because it's not empowering others. It's not empowering to myself. But I say it to people I came out to late in life, 24.

00:20:00**SPEAKER_GS**

So I didn't know in college, but this is like some of the... and I deeply, deeply searched for that middle school, elementary school crush that, oh yeah, it all makes sense, and now I feel valid as a person! No, I mean, at most I could say I had a crush on Keira Knightley briefly and I didn't understand why people had pictures of men up in there, you know? Like I didn't get that like, oh, like talking about this boy celebrity and this boy celebrity and their abs. I'm like, I'm not, it doesn't make any sense to me. But anyway, so that was the first sign of like, you're a little oddling. And, and then I flash forward to like junior year. I remember this moment, junior year of college. I had this boy over that I very much liked. And we were talking, late night chat. What do the young kids call it? A situationship. I had a situationship for four years of my life. Empowered in some sense and unempowering in others, in the romantic space. And I remember telling him, ahh I just wish I could dress like a lesbian. And he's like, that's so offensive. And I'm like, gosh, it is isn't it? But you know, my spirit was calling something, right? The last day of college— I went with my friend to Stanford and Alok was speaking.

00:22:19**SPEAKER_SB**

Wow.

00:22:24**SPEAKER_GS**

I know!

SPEAKER_SB

I mean, you don't have to disclose what year this event was, but I'm kind of curious.

SPEAKER_GS

What the event was?

SPEAKER_SB

Like what year this was. Like, was this a long way back? I don't know.

00:22:30**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, no, no. It was, kind of. 2015.

00:22:33**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, so were they studying at Stanford at that time? Because I know...

00:22:39**SPEAKER_GS**

They were graduated because they're kind of old.

00:22:42**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, I guess so.

SPEAKER_GS

They're old. They're older than me. I graduated.

00:22:46**SPEAKER_GS**

I think they're probably in their early late 30s or early 40s. I don't know.

SPEAKER_SB

But yeah, regardless.

00:22:46**SPEAKER_GS**

They had come back, and I didn't really care. I was like, I don't know. My friend was like, let's go. And I'm like, okay, let's go. And I don't know what they said. They had a couple of powerful things that— but we walked out, we're walking in the parking lot, walking to the car, and [my friend's] like, I think I'm queer. And I was like, yeah, me too. Didn't think about it. For years, nothing. But it was these moments where people would identify themselves and it felt— and at that point, I thought of it in a gender way. Yeah, I hadn't thought about it in a sexuality way. So it just felt like with the jūrā and the, all these other things that I was doing that I knew that like, I'm not exactly like other girls, so, but powerful moment. Yeah, so then fast forward to right before I start my master's, I went to some Sikh camp, Sidak, up in Canada for two weeks. It's like a two-week, by Sikh Research Institute. I met my first boyfriend. And then, and I met someone else. Like I met two queer women. But I remember just being like, yeah, I like girls. Like I never admitted it to myself, but suddenly like I was just

saying things out loud. And you know, at the same time, I was having these like kind of romantic moments with this girl. Yeah. At a Sikh camp you know where they say go learn about Sikh things. It was one of the most formative experiences, spiritually and like queerness-wise, that whole camp.

00:25:34**SPEAKER_SB**

That's so beautiful, but also I can imagine so messy in that moment. You're like, what is happening? Yeah. Feelings are spilled out on the ground. Like, I don't know. Do you feel like you kind of leaned on Sikhi to navigate these feelings during that time or in other moments?

00:26:07**SPEAKER_GS**

It just wasn't a thing. Like, there was just no questioning it. As I described to you in the pre-interview, all these years of Sikh organizing up until this moment, I was so deeply Sikh and I so deeply believed in... there were things I struggled with, like why weren't the Gurujis women and any of the writers women? There were, yes, that's there. But a lot of things I understood, if it didn't feel good, it might be lost in interpretation. And there might be some piece that I don't fully know. Or maybe it's uncomfortable, and it's uncomfortable. But I was so deeply Sikh. There was no issue. Like, it was just... you can be gay and Sikh. That's it. It just, and I, all I need, all— for me, all I needed was, people my entire life had praised the Anand Karaj. Oh, it's two soul beings connecting closer to the divine. That was all I needed. I didn't need anything else. And for other people I've talked to, and they're like, all I needed was Ik Onkar. What else do you want me to, what's the issue here? It's all the fluff that people add to it. You know, no, there's the husband Lord and the soul bride and no, you know, look at all the gurus, look at who they married, you know, look at Grist Jeevan, you're going against Grist Jeevan, you know. That was their mindset as human beings and they were biased and they were stuck in the box of the reality that they had constructed, but it just wasn't an issue. So, for me, the struggle was never Sikhi and queerness. The struggle was I have a mom who has wanted me to be married since I was 21. And like, deeply, it's her deepest anxiety. I'm 29. Eight years of torture. Love her deeply. She's tortured me and has no emotional capacity to understand that. And I tell her that. But like some Punjabi families, it's like, oh yeah, you should get married. Like if I live at home, it's a conversation that comes up every other day. It's the worst. I'm not married. It continues. And so it wasn't about Sikhi. Like Sikhi was like, God and I love each other. Like we are together, you know, like I was always seeking the divine and seeking, you know, not always— but yeah, always, you know what I mean? So, the struggle was more like surviving. So when I finally came out to myself nine months— like actually, even though I was admitting myself to, in all these like truth moments, when I finally came out to myself, it was, can I tell you the story?

00:29:37**SPEAKER_SB**

Please, yeah.

00:29:40**SPEAKER_GS**

So yeah, we'll see what has to be redacted later, but yeah, as if you were the FBI or whatever. [Laughs] Redacted. Anyways, so this moment happens right, there's like romantic moments with this girl. Me and that friend, we were, we started talking again, basically, like a year later, like nine months later. And then we're on the phone, I was like, hey, do you remember that night? And she's like, yeah. There was a night we were in the kitchen together and I think I fed her something. Like she had worked all day, and I was like, let me feed you. And I was like, yeah, I really wanted to make out with you. And she's like, me too. And that's when my world shattered. Like that was the moment where I was like, oh. This is the thing, those normal, those feelings are so normal, right? To want to kiss someone. It's just like a thing. People want to kiss each other. Like not all people, but some people, a lot of people do, right? But then I was like, oh, that's what it means to be queer. Holy, that's, I'm that, and I couldn't even use that word. Someone, I told them, oh, I like girls. They're like, oh, you're queer. Oh, it was the worst. Like them putting that label on me, it was like, when you're not ready to hear it, it was like, terrifying. It was so scary. I think I had that moment where I told our mutual friends, called the mental health hotline the next day. I was a hot mess. And it was because of my mom, because I— who am I gonna marry? Am I gonna marry a boy or a girl? And I went to like four years of therapy to try to work it out. I couldn't. There's more to the story, but yeah, it's funny how the truth reveals itself, but then it hits like a ton of bricks. I'm from this upper middle class Punjabi community in Sacramento. We do these like eight-day weddings. I mean, it doesn't matter what class you're in, those things can happen anyways, but you know, like big deal weddings, like my brother's wedding was like that. I just finished another one, like big deal weddings, you know. All the aunties talk about their suits for like six months prior, and'll buy two or three outfits reach cause they're like no.

It's the worst. I have to buy another one. It's like, that's all they care about. It's like waiting for the next wedding. Like that's the community that I— I'm the only, besides my cousin who doesn't count, now she counts, she's 12, but you know, she didn't count. I consider myself the only girl on both sides of my family. I was the princess. I was, everyone else in my family is a boy. Like of my cousins, obviously between me and my sibling, like I was the poster child of being a girl who was gonna marry a guy, you know? The weight of it, I cannot— I could go on and on to you about how, and that's why I called the mental health hotline that night and like saw someone that morning who was like, maybe you should try like a LGBTQ circle. And I was like, no! It's not gonna help. Nothing would help. Nothing would help. I don't know if you've been in that level of distress before, but I'm sure you could imagine like nothing could help. Nothing could help me. It just had to flow, you know.

00:33:34**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, in that moment. And yeah, there's the moment like you were saying the truth is revealed. And then how do you live with that truth after that? And that is— it unfolds in so many ways I think. Yeah, I'm curious because then the truth has to unfold for the people around you in their own ways, right? So it may be apparent to you, but then how does that truth look like when it exists bouncing around the people around you like that. I think that's where it gets messy and then it comes back to you and you have to deal with that. I'm thinking about like coming out and like, I don't know, that phrase is used a lot and I think it means many different things and I think people come out at different times. How do you relate to coming out right now? And how did you relate to it back when you first came out?

00:34:57**SPEAKER_GS**

So, okay, so. I guess.

00:35:01**SPEAKER_SB**

What does that mean to you, I guess?

00:35:02**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, and I know it's complex and definitely 100%.

00:35:09**SPEAKER_GS**

It's not a one-time thing. It's like a, it is a daily experience. But yeah, I can't remember. I used to be more critically engaged. Like there's people who have issues with it, and I don't know if it's because of that, but definitely, I definitely can relate to that. With all of my, I don't know, formative moments or hardships or traumas in life. The way that I work through them is I do something about it. I act in service. Well, at least I used to when I was a more dynamic person. So, in college, I had experienced some sexual harassment. There was a lot around that field. I'll keep it at that. Like that was truths being revealed by other people and myself experiencing my own hurt. All of this. I ended up doing my Master's of Education with a focus in sexual violence prevention and I was working in that field before that and I, you know, ended up getting a job and working in that field, and hope to one day return to it. So queerness was no different to me. It was very clear once I started going through my own journey that... once I got past a couple hurdles, so it wasn't super clear, because there was a part of me that was like don't tell your parents until you have someone. You know what I mean? But it, yeah, it's another story. But it spilled out of me, basically. I like got this cute little tattoo. Can you see it? I can't do this. It's like a little book.

00:37:01**SPEAKER_SB**

Oh, yeah, I see it now.

00:37:04**SPEAKER_GS**

Maybe it's a cheesy white girl moment, but I read this like Maya Angelou quote that said, "There's nothing like the agony of having a story inside of you untold". Yeah, and I drew like all day. I was like drawing on my arm and then I went to the tattoo artist and I was like. And it was a queer tattoo artist.

00:37:30**SPEAKER_SB**

I love that. And it's like yeah, it's a— I love that. It's like a good reminder.

00:37:42**SPEAKER_GS**

Well, and it was a, *Hey, I can't tell the world, but I can tell myself*. Yeah. And then it spilled out that night; I came out to my mom. It was a whole story. But then I knew I was like, I have to do something. So I came out to myself. Then nine months later, I came out to my mom. And then a year later, I came out on Instagram, because I was like, I got to. I have to tell everyone because I'm gonna do some stuff around this. And I did, and it happened, and it was amazing, and it was everything that I needed. I think. It was a joy. So nowadays, though, so here's me fully out in the world, right? Now, I'm transitioning jobs into this very vulnerable workplace. For the first time, this job was the first time where I was like, I'm not gonna be out. In my old job, there were pictures of me as a queer person around the campus, because I was at a university. Now, working in business, working with developers, I was like, I'm not gonna risk the job. I need the job. And it was the first time I decided the job was more important than my identity. Going back to the original conversation, we can flow through different levels of security to get to that point where that's okay, at least for me. It's still evolving, right? I might be out to my whole fam, and I— the multiple times coming out, you know, every six months, whatever, like all that. But it's evolving depending on where we are circumstantially and what's safe. And I guess that's how it will be when there's vulnerability that prevents us from going on. What's your thought?

00:39:44**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. I'm coming back to what you said. I think the very first question about like, there are these beliefs that you hold in your childhood that sometimes evolve and like, how do we relate? Like taking that framing and taking it to your present moment, identity, beliefs, and your like past selves. And it takes work to contend with, like, oh, does this still align with me and with where I am today? But it is necessary to keep living your truth and also protect yourself and do what is in your best interest at any given time or space. So yeah, just kind of reflecting on that because as I get older, I'm sure my relationships to my identity and what that looks like within my communities also changes. But yeah, anyway. So now I think we can transition to more like, you've shared some notable stories and moments in your life, but kind of thinking of like identity formation, I'm curious, like, do you feel like the communities or family or friends that you have surrounded yourself with over time, have those often reflected your inner identity? Have they helped shape your identity in any ways? And yeah, you could talk maybe about the past, but also you can also talk about like right now where you are in terms of your identity, how fully formed does it feel, I guess, or how “shifting” does it feel?

00:41:57**SPEAKER_GS**

I will say I couldn't figure out, like any label just felt really hard in the beginning because I, because this journey started like from 21 to 24.

00:42:13**SPEAKER_GS**

More, you know, like it arose within me more predominantly, like there were boys in the past. And so I was like, am I bi? You know, like, but I want, I don't know, I almost wanted to fully reject that part of myself. It was funny, like the last relationship I had, like, she was queer, but like, I was the first queer person she was with. And I'd be like, yeah, but you're probably gay. You know, she's like, no, I definitely like men. I'm like, no, like probably not. But I was like projecting that I wanted to reject this other part of myself, so I wanted her to reject that part.

00:43:11**SPEAKER_SB**

Like the part that she likes, that she likes both female- and male-bodied people onto you?

00:43:21**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, yeah, or like yeah. I was rejecting the part of myself that like, meh, you know, whatever, masculine people, and like, and she was so confident in that, like no just because I like you doesn't mean that doesn't exist, and I'm like yeah but maybe you just need more time. Like I was just being a dummy, but I think months of having those conversations I was like um oh I guess it's okay to hold it all. And like seeing that she so confidently did, that like it, yeah, it just allowed me to be like, all right, maybe some part of it's true. And

maybe, maybe really it is like 90% women or 95% women. And, but yeah, like, there's been a place for that. And that, but I think the societal expe— maybe I don't know how other people experience their queerness, but I think because once I leaned so deeply into that truth of like, I'm queer, I like women, like my family wants me to be with a man, I just wanted to reject it, you know? But it's not fair to like identify ourselves based off of trying to defend ourselves from our families. It just makes listening to them very confusing. Yeah, just really, yeah.

00:44:53 **SPEAKER_SB**

And I think there's also maybe an element of like trying to reject this, the patriarchy in that statement as well, right? Like, sure, maybe there are guys out there that yeah you might find attractive or whatever but it's like overwhelmingly the experiences of men has yeah been so distasteful. I don't know.

00:45:19 **SPEAKER_GS**

Oh, what were you saying? Overall—

00:45:20 **SPEAKER_SB**

Been distasteful and like, I don't know. I feel like lately I've been kind of, I don't know— Like I feel like there are different phases too, right? Like, yes, depending on where you are emotionally, even geographically, but I definitely understand that level of resisting something and that helping to form your identity.

00:46:01 **SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah.

00:46:01 **SPEAKER_SB**

You're like, ugh! Is this my true identity or?

SPEAKER_GS

Yes.

SPEAKER_SB

Or am I? Yeah. Can you have a true identity? We can get really existential here. Like, or is—

00:46:15 **SPEAKER_GS**

You know, I would love that.

00:46:16 **SPEAKER_SB**

You know, in relation to like the other people around you. Who would you say are like your core communities like you have right now?

00:46:31 **SPEAKER_GS**

Well, let me let me ask you one question. I mean you confidently were like I'm pansexual queer. How do you hold that?

00:46:42 **SPEAKER_SB**

I— and it's funny because I say these words, but I definitely relate to what you're saying of, I don't know, like sometimes the language just feels like it fails us. I used bisexual a lot when I first was coming out to myself and, you know, there's a history behind that word, but also for me in here in this present moment like it just felt like it was capturing the binary in that word, and I didn't really like that, and so I felt like pansexual made more sense for me. But then, I don't know, there's also like stereotypes and associations people have with pansexual. So I

think I'm still figuring out, like I would say like literally two weeks ago, I was like deep in, like, is this what I want to identify [as]? So I have these moments and phases. I think queer is a word that I feel the most comfortable with. I don't know. And I think also a question I had for you, cause I'm curious is, as like a Punjabi, how do we communicate this in our mother tongue? I don't know, I think that's a whole other thing, but I think it might relate to Sikhi and like the language we use to describe like um I don't know I feel like maybe the relationship to describe connection to God is sometimes, is a lot of times heteronormative, but there might be ideas that we can put into words in Punjabi that can help form like this queer language in Punjabi. But I don't know. Those are some thoughts.

00:48:30**SPEAKER_GS**

It's a good question. Yeah, because so often I feel like if you translate it to Punjabi the way that it is relationally understood, let's say two queer people in a relationship, maybe you're introduced as like the friend, like, you know, *ey onadi saheli hai*, or something like that, you know, because there isn't language for that. So I'm the worst person to ask. My Punjabi skills have trickled down to like so little. But I feel, and this was some of the queer work organizing stuff I was doing, was like, I feel so strongly about rewriting the Sikh narrative, at the very least. You know, about what's getting in your head to open your heart to the possibility that people are just more than what you think they are and love more than you can think they are and like gender can be more, you know? Like what's the obstacle? So anyways.

00:49:54**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. I mean, I feel like my Punjabi skills are like, yeah, no, it's totally okay. But I think we all have those thoughts, right? Like how do we communicate this to like, I don't think I would ever communicate to my grandparents, but like, how would I, if I were to talk to, you know? And it's like so much of that obstacle is like the language. And then of course, I think the culture, historical like memory of like, where maybe like, yeah, queer and transness has existed within our culture is like, gets in the way too. Yeah.

00:50:41**SPEAKER_GS**

Do you mean like in sort of understanding that, oh my god, I can't even, What's it called when you're trans in India? What's the word for it?

SPEAKER_SB

I—

SPEAKER_GS

Hijra, hijra?

00:50:58**SPEAKER_SB**

I'm trying to, I don't know, I'd have to look it up, but.

00:51:01**SPEAKER_GS**

Okay, okay. Yeah.

00:51:07**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. It's just, yeah. But I don't know, what were you trying to?

00:51:12**SPEAKER_GS**

Well, because you were saying the way that queer and trans people were understood in India, and I was gonna ask you, do you mean like how the hijra people were sort of... in some cultures, brown cultures, they were esteemed and in some they weren't? And so I thought maybe you were talking about like in the cultures that they're more stigmatized. Does it, the general stigmatization, stigmatizing of queerness? But—

00:51:45**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, that's kind of what I was referring to, like whether you see it in movies, or I don't know. I don't know, just kind of like these more popular culture scenarios, because I feel like that's what I've encountered mostly. And even like the language, I think— I just made this connection, like, even the language around, you were saying you did work with like mental health, or I guess sexual violence, which I think maybe relates to mental health and like the language around that as well as I think [is] lacking, or [is] stigmatized like the way, yeah, and I think it's just fascinating to think the ways that maybe holding that language constricts perspectives. But then we have like Sikhi, which is a religion, and that, and I think a lot of the values of Sikhi just expand— have the potential to expand people's vision. And I, it's just, I don't know, fascinating, like, [what] the day-to-day of being a Punjabi-Sikh kind of looks like versus the scripture, what that looks like, and how we can maybe pull more of the scripture to our everyday lives. Like that's a struggle I think, but yeah. I would love to know more. Oh yeah—

00:53:18**SPEAKER_GS**

Just one more thought on that. I'm just gonna put this out there, like is the language the issue or is the heart the issue? Is the culture the issue, or is the heart the issue? Obviously, language informs the culture and culture informs the heart. But I'm just thinking like talking to queer Sikhs— not so many, but talking to queer South Asians over the years, I've met people with similar situations to me or like worse or, you know, or the opposite where it's like a non-issue like even Punjabi-Sikh people where they're like, yeah, my parents come over and we like hang out with my partner or like my, I've talked to my nani. Or like that story, I don't know if you remember, this was a long time ago of the Sikh person who came out on YouTube with— like was explaining it to his mom. His mom's like, you know, *sara rup da kel ha* or like *rab da kel ha* or something. And like, she was speaking in Punjabi, like, you're okay. It doesn't matter. Like, you're God's creation or whatever it was, I can't remember the exact— but like, it wasn't like she had the language, but she was like, damn, gosh, darn it, I really don't care. I love you, darn, you know, to the deepest extent. That's— nothing about what society says matters. Like, you know who you are. Cool. You know, like, so... part of it is an opening of the heart and part of it is a letting go of fear of what's unfamiliar. So it's all related. But I just think like, yeah, why her versus my mom, or versus whosever's parent? What is it that she is holding in her reality that's just full of this undying love?

00:55:36**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, that's a good reminder. Cause yeah, I sometimes think it's easy to. It's harder to understand the heart and the forces that for someone to say or do something, and it's easier to look at what they do and say and try and change that. So yeah, I like that you brought that up. Well, what I was going to ask was, I was curious about your organizing work and if you could just share some of maybe highlights, memorable moments from organizing [with] queer Sikhs.

00:56:20**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, okay, cool. I'll— let me try to think, what would be helpful.

00:56:33**SPEAKER_SB**

How do you kind of get into it, I guess?

00:56:35**SPEAKER_GS**

The origins of it.

00:56:37**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah.

00:56:39**SPEAKER_GS**

Okay, up until that point in my life, I was— this was during the pandemic. So I'm like two years into my queer identity or something, roughly two or three years into it. And I was ready. I did all the steps, come out to myself, check. Come out to mom and dad, check. Come out on Instagram, check. Blow up the community, check. You

know, like it all happened. And I was like, cool, now I can organize, like, let me, let me heal through being with others. I had queer people, queer Sikhs in my life, like, not everyone does, but somehow, somehow the universe offered me those people. However, I didn't feel like they wanted to talk about it. You know, like they didn't want to like talk about their queerness and their Sikh-ness, I guess. And so I felt still alone in that. And I needed community. I wanted community. So I wanted to do something. But by this time, what I'm 26 or something, I've done a hell of a lot of organizing. I'm trying to be smart about it. So I, it was awesome. It was COVID. So I went to a Sarbat event. Sarbat is the LGBTQ [Sikh] organization in the UK. I went to a Zoom in the middle of my workday, which was the best feeling to hop onto a Zoom around, with queer Sikh people, like more than the two or three that I knew. And be like, they're right there, in front of me. Ah! And also that you can do that because you're like on Zoom and it's the middle of the workday. It was really awesome. Anyways, So I ended up connecting with them and a couple people there and I was like, hey, can I just add to what you're doing? Show you my own thing? Let me be thoughtful about it and not be like, I'm the savior, I have all the answers. If there's something good being done, I want to connect with people, I want to do this thing, let's do it. We decided I would host my own separate event, you know, and my roommate was a big, my roommate who has, you guys have the same face, parts of it. Yeah, she was like, no, I'm here to support you. Like fully, like we would talk about it every day after work and what this event was gonna be. Being a facilitator is still one of the greatest honors that I get to do and I love. I love asking people questions. And so I put together an agenda and then I brainstormed every queer Instagram influencer I knew and I reached out to some [inaudible] help me. And it was just one of the best things I probably will ever do in my life. Like I don't I'm not a big like I don't have a lot of people on my Instagram but I messaged Rupri Kaur about it, I messaged Raveena, I messaged Sikh Knowledge and I got responses from them and they all reposted for me. And I kindly asked everyone to help me, and I think like 700, 800 people liked that post. And I had a Google form and I just told my roommate, Thamun, hey, it would just be nice if I, like 30, like I want 30 people in a room. And I think we had 150.

01:00:34**SPEAKER_SB**

Wow.

01:00:37**SPEAKER_GS**

And the listserv that I had was 350 people who signed up.

01:00:46**SPEAKER_SB**

Can we tap into the list serve? No, just kidding.

01:00:50**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah! I don't do a lot with it. It's here. I mean, yeah, we definitely can. For the project? Definitely.

01:00:58**SPEAKER_SB**

We can definitely talk after to see if—

01:01:00**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, I wasn't sure how many people you guys are interviewing, but I was— and I did see it's US specific, but I was like, there's so many amazing Punjabi drag queens in Canada. But, there's no, there's amazing. Yeah, so we can definitely connect on that. But it was mind blowing. I mean, and I had a queer, Sikh DJ reach out to me. I don't know if you follow No Nazar?

01:01:37**SPEAKER_SB**

No. Nuh-uh.

01:01:43**SPEAKER_GS**

No Nazar. Okay. They're like queer-led femme DJ South Asian group. Basically, they're like multiple DJs and they put out these like really cool dance parties in LA. And one of them is—

01:01:59**SPEAKER_SB**

Oh! I think I was reading an article recently. I don't know, I think they were part of some sort of DJ South Asian event in LA. So maybe I know them through there.

01:02:14**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, and they were flown out for Vancouver South Asian Pride or whatever they, they're big, they're getting big. I mean, they were, I mean, they were big before I knew him, obviously. But she reached out and she's like, let me DJ, like, in the beginning, and that way we can just welcome everyone into the space. I just thought it was the coolest thing that we had a queer Sikh DJ as 130 people or whatever like from seven or eight countries around the world, tuned in from every time zone to this event, it was just electric. It was, I could not sleep that night. It was the best thing. And after that event, you know, I connected, a lot happened after that event, but I connected with random people over the years. And they're like, I went to that event. And I came out to my parents that weekend. Which makes me wanna cry because I don't know, it's almost like me going to that Alok event, and being like, hey, I'm queer. And that's all it takes? Sometimes it's just like one thing to help you see like I'm not alone in this world and I feel like a little more courage to tell the people I love who I am. So yeah I ended up doing two more after that and I ended up putting together a whole team and we eventually worked on the Queer Sikh Network Instagram page and we're doing some and prabh, I think, was a part of it for a while. Sarba wanted prabh and I to do a podcast together. But I just met the best people and I have friends throughout the world. I was even invited to a queer wedding. And I was gonna fly out and I got COVID the day before. So that friend is now pregnant, and I hopefully will, if the stars align, get to see their baby. So yeah, I don't know. It's just magic. The whole thing was magic. Yeah. And I wanna tell you one more story about the recent, something that happened recently, but I'll pause.

01:04:54**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, I, that's yeah, very beautiful. And I think is a good reminder that like, oftentimes we're community organizing for like specific political moves or you know specific things which is kind of the point of organizing but I think also the point of organizing is gathering people and I don't know I think that that's really cool that across borders and across space like you guys have that, those events um to gather community and those relationships that are still lasting like three years later. That's, I don't know, that's very magical.

01:05:42**SPEAKER_GS**

Completely, yeah. Yeah, completely. Well, here's the story, I'll tell you, of the latest queer thing that happened in my life. Back last year, last year, a couple people had reached out to the Instagram and they were like, I wanted an Anand Karaj. And there were two couples reaching out. I said, okay, let's make this happen. Cause the project I was working on was called *Queering the Anand Karaj*. It was amazing. I just ended up in a relationship and losing all my energy and couldn't find my way back to the project. So we would research, how do we counter the narrative, basically. What is it that the Akal Takht is saying that's stopping people? What is it about the Rehat Maryada? What is about Gurbani and the interpretation? What is it about Sikh history? And like rewriting all of those narratives. It was a big task. It was a big task, and we were just big hearts trying, right? And so we had released our first chunk and that's what you see on Instagram. It was like just like the gender and sexuality, basically. But the Anand Karaj is something I've always been passionate about because Gurbani is something that like, there's a lot to it. But I considered it one of my greatest mental health resources. And so I always wanted people to have access to that because it's different than therapy. It's different than meditation, but like actual Gurbani is, is something else. There's something to it. So anyways, two people reached out on the Instagram, they're like, we want queer weddings. I'm like, okay, we're gonna make this happen. So I'm like, come in networks, let's do this. And I connected one of them and I set them up and I was like, everything was— I thought everything was good, you know. The other one I didn't respond because I was in Pakistan, and so I messed up and they planned their, you know, I just didn't catch it in time, unfortunately, but if— they said if they do a year, they were gonna have a regular ceremony and they might, they might do it next year. So hopefully I can make it happen because they wanted to do it in New York too, like, I know so many people in New York who will do it with you today. You know, like, the other city that we were in was a little harder to find people. Basically, the week of the wedding, they had some help from the, not the week— two or three weeks before the wedding, you know, the Anand Karaj was supposed to happen. They had some family who were gonna help, distant family, and then some organizers who were gonna help. They didn't, I think they moved up their wedding. Something happened. I think they moved it up. Then the organizer couldn't do it, but they were going to use the family to do it. Basically, they had seven or eight family people coming, and every

day another family person dropped off.

01:09:17**SPEAKER_SB**

Okay.

01:09:19**SPEAKER_GS**

So they had, uh, no, no, no Kirtan, no Guru Granth Sahib, nothing. Like no Sikh people even in attendance. They were marrying someone who was not Sikh, like at this ceremony, they're like gonna cancel it. So then I run to the forces, trying to help this person, and I'm calling every single person I know, reaching out to whoever I can. Long story short, I ended up booking a flight to fly cross-country, and I said I would read the Lavaan. And I was going to read it off of my phone. And it was like a trickle. One family member down, down, down, down. I booked my flight. One volunteer, another volunteer, another volunteer. In the end, we had ten volunteers. We had five people singing Kirtan. We had a Guru Granth Sahib. Like no one from their family showed up. Which I don't know if you have aspirations for marriage or like a queer Anand Karaj, but it, for someone like me who does, it was just the most devastating thing to watch. Now, some, you know, circles of queerness, like, it's like, we don't need to get married. Like, there's like, there's a lot of, but for me it's important. It's a big thing. Obviously, I ran a project on it. And just to see my reality flash in front of me that that could be me and people don't show up. They don't show up to support, and they like create a lot of drama around it. I can't tell you. But anyways, I officiated an Anand Karaj and I read the Lavaan, and the person who got married, I said— said equally the queerness, but more than that, like just even seeing a woman read the Lavaan was like [inaudible] for them and they're married and they're doing their thing and they're happy. And it was one of the most wild moments. That was in January in my life. So I just, even though I, the organizing has stopped a lot, things like this, it's just an honor to be a part of and to show up when, you know, other people don't.

01:11:54**SPEAKER_SB**

That's so beautiful. Yeah, I think about that sometimes. I think, I personally don't, well, if I were to get married I would love to have an Anand Karaj, but it's that feeling of like it's almost the community or the family that makes it what it is, you know, to some degree. And yeah, this feeling like, yeah, like, again, like, I'm like, I don't see like, a lot of family going to something like that. And it's, I think, a project, yeah, like rewriting. What's the Instagram again?

01:12:47**SPEAKER_GS**

Queer Sikh Network. Yeah.

01:12:50**SPEAKER_SB**

Okay. Yeah. Like rewriting like Anand Karaj and all of that like, I think is very important because that is like the center of where like you were saying in your family they are looking forward to the wedding after wedding after wedding and that is such a center of so much community. Right? And if we're able to disrupt or like transform what that looks like through a more queer lens, I think that is going to be met with so much like resistance, but also has so much potential. I don't know. Yeah. So that was really beautiful because I, yeah, I hope one day to attend a queer Sikh wedding, I'd love to. Yeah. Anyway. Yeah. Okay. Those give me, the stories give me so much hope and bring me so much joy.

SPEAKER_GS

Oh, good.

SPEAKER_SB

Yeah. I hope more of these experiences are waiting for you in the future. So, yeah, so I'm kind of curious, you mentioned like maybe the geography of these places and the Anand Karaj had some influence on maybe who showed up and in what capacity. Can you share a little bit, because you mentioned you grew up in, I think, Tennessee, or you were born in Tennessee. It sounds like eventually you made your way to California. Can you share a little bit of how the areas and neighborhoods in which you grew up influenced your relationship to

yourself and identity?

01:14:50**SPEAKER_GS**

Can I pee and then answer that question?

01:14:55**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. We can also take a mini break.

01:15:00**SPEAKER_GS**

All right. I will just— Perfect.

01:16:38**SPEAKER_GS**

Sorry, I'm an old lady with an old lady bladder.

01:16:43**SPEAKER_SB**

Oh no, you're okay. I'm dehydrated probably, so.

01:17:50**SPEAKER_GS**

Okay. Well, this is what I wanted to say. I wanted to say two more things about the Anand Karaj because I was like, I'm getting lost in my own thoughts, which I tend to do. But when we read the Hukamnama for after the Anand Karaj, like the main takeaway was like, the guru shows up for its sevadaars. Like if you love, you'll be taken care of, and I wanted to cry. I think I did cry. I cried so much they were like *Are you okay?* But I was like, that's all I need to know. Cause there was so much doubt. All of the sevadaars who showed up there showed up with deep fear. Like there were phone patrol people being like, you know, the whole thing. Cause everyone was so scared that this would end up somewhere and we would, you know, threats of violence would be enacted or something, right? So, so I guess like to anyone who listens to this later in life, like the archive, like, I just— if that's what you want people will show up. You know, and I missed it for the other couple, a little bit, but like, people will show up. And when I did message, *Hey, let me help*, like 20 people messaged that they wanted to help with that New York one. And we're not a big influencing group. Like we don't have that many followers or anything like that. But just know what you want in your heart and put it out there because it can happen if that's what you want. And so you were saying hope, like I really hope people know that. And this isn't the only, I know a 3HO couple, not personally, but I was sent their picture of their Anand Karaj. And obviously there's been a couple of public ones that have been more, you know, public. So I know other people who have officiated queer weddings, queer Anand Karaj's. This isn't a single in-moment thing that happened. It's happening. It's not— people are making personal choices if they want to go public about it because of everything that can happen there. But dream big. Dream big and get the moment that you want, you deserve, that you have a right to based off of your cultural and religious upbringing. So that's it. That's it on the, on the Anand Karaj.

01:20:36**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah.

01:20:37**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah.

01:20:38**SPEAKER_SB**

I love the breaking of the fourth audio wall. I don't know.

01:20:48**SPEAKER_GS**

Yes. That's really funny. Okay, so geography. How does geography tie into identity? Is that the question? Sorry.

01:20:58**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. How did the places you have lived in affect how you think of yourself?

01:21:08**SPEAKER_GS**

This is a tough question. This is probably like round two, I'll have more to say. Well, I told you a little bit in the pre-interview, like doing all of the Sikh organizing I did as a kid. I had the most special upbringing in California. Really. I think because of Jakara and because of California— there's so many Punjabi people around. Like I barely had white, non-Sikh friends. I did, like, when I left college, I left with four friends. They were all Punjabi-Sikh women at Berkeley. And that was a personal choice, you know, but it was possible. The deep sense of community and being in community. Once I got to Boston... the moment it really hit me in Boston was I was standing in line for food with my co-workers and like no one passed the plate back. And I was like, this is barbaric. How dare you? No one should expect it, but it's such a beautiful courtesy. You eat before I eat. You go ahead and eat, you know? Or we're eating together. Like we're in this together. Not I'm gonna get my food and you're gonna get your food. You know? So community was so— the importance of it was so deeply, deeply ingrained. And why I wanted a community space and why I continue to organize when I do organize, why I show up... On a spiritual level, I mean, we're all extensions of each other. So we're showing up for the oneness, right? So I think seeing that not reflected in Boston was hard. This is more of a California thing, but like, um, especially a Cal thing, like being in the Bay area. When you walk across the street, like you say hi. I found that I say hi to people. Like casual social interaction is so deeply important to me, like, especially as an introvert, despite how much I'm talking in this interview, especially as an introvert, like, it just like, I might not talk to anyone else, but like talking to the coffee shop person, waving, making eye contact with the driver, like all of that was so powerful to me, and in Boston that— it's just like, *I see you*, you know, even at the most fundamental level, I see you, I acknowledge you, right? You exist, I exist, we're here together, even for three seconds as you walk by me. Something about it, it just feels like it's acknowledging our humanity. In Boston, when people walk by you, they look down. And it like tore me apart in the first couple of months, the cultural shift. So I think being in California, being around Punjabi people, my— up until what, 23 or something. Now I'm on, you know, it just, yeah, it solidifies some values, but now I'm on the return end of that. Four years of individualism in Boston. I'm trying to relearn that, you know, it's— some part of that left after being there for so long. The recognition to like obligation to family and I don't know and community and social events and stepping it back into that world, there's a balance that has to be formed. So, you know, you have a smirk— what's going on?

01:25:05**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, I mean, I just love the way you phrase that, like, just seeing a person, you know, even if it's for like a few seconds, like, I think it's so much more powerful than we give credit to because, yeah I don't know, we're like just taught like *Oh I don't know these people* but they're part of our community, they live near us, isn't that important? And I feel that so much living in [my city] because, yeah, it's— first of all, it's not a very walkable city. And so, yeah, it's— if we, it's usually people in cars, looking at other people in cars, but— which makes me feel some type of way. And then when we do go on walks, it is that same thing where it's like, let's pretend the other person isn't there. And I know I maybe do it from, honestly, the sense of fear, like to protect myself, because I'm like, I don't know. Like, I don't know my neighbors. I don't know what these other people's intentions might be. And I don't want to give the wrong impression. So, I think there's so many thoughts. But at the end of the day, it's just like, just saying hi. Like, what's wrong with that? So I don't know. I have lots of feelings about that. And I think I want to try and smile and say hi more often. But...

01:26:41**SPEAKER_GS**

No, I mean, it's important to me, but I think that being a, you know, femme presenting person and being young, I think, yeah, there's fear. And.

01:26:56**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, I mean, I do recognize that. And I think that's where the fear is coming from to protect me. But also, you have to be a little bit fearless to change something, even on a small level. I don't know.

01:30:06**SPEAKER_SB**

The world is a completely different place when you are looking at it through fear versus you're looking at it through like love or fearlessness and... yeah and I think I've lived a lot of my life being afraid and stuff and so I this is like a continual practice for me to like unlearn this fear-based thinking and trust the people around you and trust the humanity. Yeah, I don't know. And also I think kind of listening to your gut because I think fear can obscure your gut and if your, yeah, if your gut is— if you're attuned to it, like it'll let you know when to walk away.

01:31:06**SPEAKER_GS**

Huh. Well can I ask you where that comes from?

01:31:14**SPEAKER_SB**

Like my belief in, kind of, the fear?

01:31:17**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah.

01:31:22**SPEAKER_SB**

Oh, I don't know. I think it might come from some semblance of like, previous lives, maybe? Like I feel like it's just been kind of ingrained in me for a— I was like, quite a pretty shy person, child growing up. And I don't know, I think it's a combination of a lot of things. Part of it's like, I was the eldest daughter, I am the eldest daughter, and there's this, was like, imposed this image of like, the good girl for a very long time. So there was a lot of fear associated with doing anything that could be wrong, perceived as wrong. And that manifests in so many different ways. And so I think, yeah, it wasn't really until college that I really contended with this, that I was like, a lot of my actions that led me to this point were based out of fear, of like failure, fear of like doing something wrong, like just from that place. And when I went to college and I was like, you know, I don't actually want to do pre-med. I want to do these things I care about. And I was scared of myself for a long time too. And so it took a lot of time. But I think now I'm, yeah, I don't know. It feels very good to be in a different mindset, but still acknowledge that place where I was from. And I think, yeah, I'm still working through some of that stuff, but yeah. I don't know, some of these things like run really deep in you and in people and yeah.

01:33:19**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, and I think there are moments, thank you for sharing. I think there are moments when we transcend it, you know? Like you're like, hey, I want to study English. I don't want to be pre-med, you know, and you're like, damn, I've come so far. Like, look at all these bold decisions I'm making. And then all of a sudden, like a moment could come and you're like, wait a minute, you're still there? Like, I thought we talked about it. We're no longer doing this thing. And um.

01:33:59**SPEAKER_SB**

Totally. These patterns, they repeat themselves in like a myriad of ways, like over your life. I don't know, maybe my life, I don't know, hopefully not, but hopefully I break out of them soon. But yeah, they like come around every once in a while. Or like I've noticed recently, I think this is also the weird thing about growing up is like, the more years that you live and experience, the more, obviously, memories you have. And as like the years go by you're like, I don't know. Something happened to me where I was remembering a moment from like four or five years ago and like my body like remembers certain things and they like come up over like, I was like, this happened years ago, why is this coming up now? But it is absolutely insane how your body stores certain things and they come up maybe around that same time of the year, or all these things. But at the end of the day, like hopefully like you are in a different place and you have more tools and like ways to like look at that emotion or thing when it comes up. But I don't know, it's kind of cool, but also like what does this mean? Why are you showing up again?

01:35:24**SPEAKER_GS**

I totally get it. To whatever degree. Every time I experience something else, especially around heartbreak I'm like *again?* we've done this, no more. Like what? No! And I'm like oh yeah, I'm an evolved person, this isn't gonna destroy my existence. Yeah. But no!

SPEAKER_SB

The first time it nearly did.

SPEAKER_GS

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah, exactly. So...

01:35:58**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. There's something so precious about the first time you experience like something big like that like heartbreak or grief or like really big joy, but then there's also something that I'm learning so cool about re-experiencing those feelings.

01:36:16**SPEAKER_GS**

Okay, please.

01:36:20**SPEAKER_SB**

No, not like romanticizing it in any way. It's like.

01:36:21**SPEAKER_GS**

No, no. I need it. I need it. I resist life. Yeah.

01:36:26**SPEAKER_SB**

Like, I, yeah, I'm like in a little situationship right now and I'm like *do I want to open my heart up to this?* because I'm very slow to like open up because then I'm like I'm opening myself up to heartbreak again, but then I'm like I learned a lot through my last relationship and I would be closing myself off from learning from that. I don't know. I don't know. There's like all these feelings, but I am also very slow to act. So, I like I think about all these things, but it is, I don't know. It's like rereading a book, right? Like the first time you're like, whoa, the second time you're like, it's the same story, but it like hits differently or different parts hit differently. And you remember what you thought about that book the first time you read it while you're reading it the second time. There's all these, so many cool things that rise up that you learn about yourself. But yeah.

01:37:26**SPEAKER_GS**

Okay, I'll take it. I'll take it. Yeah. Yeah, I hear it.

01:37:32**SPEAKER_SB**

I'm still young to my experiences. I have a lot of life to live still.

01:37:36**SPEAKER_GS**

No, I think it's wise. I think as a person, like, yeah, there's a lot that plays into it. But I feel like I dragged my feet a lot through life. Because at some point I realized, oh, that's life, is that you're kind of doing well and then there's a thing and it creates a roadblock or a moment and you got to work through it. And you're like, oh my God, I learned so much for that. And then you move along and you're like and then another thing happens, and I was like wait a minute I didn't sign up for this. Yes, I did, but you know, like I think I— no one told me that that's how life works, I think they said go to college and everything else will work out.

01:38:19**SPEAKER_SB**

Nobody told me what to do after college is the problem.

01:38:24**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, you know, so I appreciate the like— because sometimes I'm like, I get a little exhausted from it all. And so I appreciate that. Yeah, it's nice to pick up a book a second time because you're right, there's so much more.

01:38:41**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah. Things you missed, things you want, you— you're like, *oh, I love this. I'm so glad I'm reading it again.* Soaking it up.

01:38:49**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah, and also uh well to your point of a situationship and like hey I've, I've experienced heartbreak but like do I close myself to the possibility? But who knows what lives on the other side of that door. So, on the other side...

01:39:07**SPEAKER_SB**

There's only one way to find out, too.

01:39:08**SPEAKER_GS**

There's only one way to find out, yeah. Yeah. And, yeah, every relationship is meant to teach us something, so, and meant to bring us certain joy.

01:39:28**SPEAKER_SB**

I have one more question about geography. Were there any historical events, or even, I guess, personal events, but I'm more interested in like the historical events or like social movements that occurred, like, in any of the places that you lived that you feel were really important to you?

01:39:52**SPEAKER_GS**

Well, I do think around queerness, I mean, around sexual violence, the Me Too movement happened and that, it was pretty powerful, but around queerness, when I was in high school, Prop 8 was big. And I remember... Yeah, I just remember like the conversation around it and like having debates with my dad about it and convincing him that, you know, it was all okay and whatever. I can't remember if it was we needed a yes or no. I can't remember how the law was written or whatever. But yeah, I think about that sometimes, that it was one of the first social issues that I actively debated. Again, not knowing, you know, internal feelings, like such a strong advocate or whatever. But I mean, my time at Berkeley was so special. My freshman year was the Wall Street 99% – 1% movement. My freshman year, people were camped out. There were always people camped out, but you know. And my last year was Black Lives Matter, the first phase. Yeah, and there were graduate students who were protesting about their income, which now I know how little they make. So anyways.

01:41:25**SPEAKER_SB**

You're probably not a grad student, but you *were* a grad student.

01:41:30**SPEAKER_GS**

I did do my master's later, but at that time I was an undergrad witnessing it and not really knowing what was going on. But I was— I just feel very grateful for my social education and everything that was happening in history and being not a part of it, but kind of, you know. Like my friend, I dropped him off at the highway to shut down the highway. You know, he was one of the people. Yeah, during Black Lives Matter. So anyways, yeah, lots of very powerful things. And now just to rant, People's Park is turning into housing. And I just happened to turn on the news and I was like, *No, it's so much history.*

01:42:21**SPEAKER_SB**

What's the update? I haven't been following it recently.

01:42:25**SPEAKER_GS**

I don't—I think it was denied and then I think it got passed. That's what I thought. You probably know more than me. I just happened to turn on the news.

01:42:35**SPEAKER_SB**

I thought it sounded like something had gotten denied because they were like planting wildflowers and like having community events still. I don't know.

01:42:47**SPEAKER_GS**

Well, being in development.

01:42:50**SPEAKER_SB**

That's honestly—it's been, I mean, I shouldn't say impressive. It was necessary that like it's a multi-year fight because yeah, like how much history that place has. But yeah, three and a half years later, yeah, people are still standing that ground.

01:43:13**SPEAKER_GS**

They should. Yeah, they should too. Yeah. Yeah.

01:43:18**SPEAKER_SB**

Cool. How are you feeling? We have like the desire, intimacy and dreaming section left. We can also like move out to next time because I feel like we've chatted for well over an hour.

01:43:35**SPEAKER_GS**

Oh yeah. Has it been two hours? Yeah, I'm hungry, personally.

01:43:46**SPEAKER_SB**

It's like lunchtime. Let's...

01:43:49**SPEAKER_GS**

Why don't we pause?

01:43:53**SPEAKER_SB**

I feel like we dove in a lot of different areas and

01:43:57**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah

01:44:01**SPEAKER_SB**

I think that, yeah. I also encourage you to take care of yourself after the interview because yeah it takes a lot out of you, I think. And yeah has probably surfaced a lot of like emotions and memories, so yeah.

01:44:19**SPEAKER_GS**

Thank you. Likewise.

01:44:20**SPEAKER_SB**

Eat something yummy.

01:44:24**SPEAKER_GS**

I'll eat the kale rice bowl.

01:44:26**SPEAKER_SB**

The kale rice bowl. If that is your definition of yummy, go for it.

01:44:34**SPEAKER_GS**

Yeah. Someday, someone's got to eat that. It'll be good. It'll be good. No, and likewise, I feel like I say a lot of things, so you know, in case they were— I hope they weren't triggering at all, but you know, likewise to taking care of yourself because it was a lot of time and it's hard to listen to someone for.

01:44:55**SPEAKER_SB**

No, I really enjoyed listening. But yes, I will be taking care of myself because like, like so much focus and like hours, but yeah um— did you just want to like sign on to the calendly [for the next interview] or...

01:45:16**SPEAKER_GS**

Oh, well we can stop recording and then we can...

01:45:20**SPEAKER_SB**

Yeah, let's stop the recording. Okay, that's a good idea.