

ginainterview

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SPEAKERS

Gina Weekley, Rylee Dolezal

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- R** Rylee Dolezal 00:02
Hello, my name is Riley Dolezal. And I will be having a conversation with Virginia Weekly for LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa and projects at Grinnell College. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of LGBT identified people in Iowa. It is April 25, 2020. And this is being recorded over zoom due to COVID-19.
- R** Rylee Dolezal 00:28
All right, so I'll just start with how is your weekend?
- G** Gina Weekley 00:32
Whoa. It's been different—like a roller coaster up and down with the governor's announcement about school and then all of the rise in COVID cases locally. In my city, it's been very different times. We have a couple of families that have been impacted by the virus so it's making our work a little more difficult and emotionally and mentally draining. So. Yeah.
- R** Rylee Dolezal 01:06
And where are you located?

G Gina Weekley 01:08
Waterloo, Iowa.

R Rylee Dolezal 01:10
And what's your work?

G Gina Weekley 01:13
I'm at risk student supports coordinator for the Waterloo Community School District. So essentially I serve our families and students that are deemed most in need, whether it's mentally, academically, behaviorally.

G Gina Weekley 01:32
It's my role to serve as like a bridge between community resources in school families. I also serve as the district's summer school and summer program coordinator. So as you can imagine, that it's going to be a little more difficult this year. So trying to figure out alternative means to reach our students before they head back to school next year.

R Rylee Dolezal 02:00
Do you enjoy the work that you do?

G Gina Weekley 02:03
I love the work that I do. Oftentimes I, I just find joy in what I do and find myself emotional, but in a in a good sense because I'm living out my dreams if that makes sense, getting to do work in my home community, give back, but also do the things that as a kid this this is what I wanted to do. So I love it.

R Rylee Dolezal 02:35
Alright, so I'll kind of start with, um, where did you grow up?

G Gina Weekley 02:40
I grew up in Waterloo, Iowa, actually on the east side of Waterloo, Iowa, near—in the backyard of the local boys and girls club. And right next door to UNI's Center for Urban

Education which is right in the heart of what is considered the east side of Waterloo.

R Rylee Dolezal 03:05

And are the different sides like important? Like are there different connotations?

G Gina Weekley 03:10

Yep. Um, so when you think of Waterloo, you think of it in two sectors pretty much the east side of Waterloo, which is dubbed more the urban, poor neighborhoods. And then when I was growing up the west side was more like prominent white, middle class neighborhoods.

R Rylee Dolezal 03:35

So how was that for you?

G Gina Weekley 03:38

Ah, it was, it was different growing up, because I'm biracial. My mom is white and my dad was black. My dad passed away when I was nine. But my mom was the mother of five biracial children back in that time, so early 90's late 80's We both know that still was new. It was a new era. And we were like the only mixed kids on our block.

G Gina Weekley 04:09

So I'd love to say that we were well received by the kids in our neighborhood, but a lot of hesitancy from the adults—which is rightfully so—to our mother, and sometimes to the kids as well. But I'm very fortunate. That's why I made sure to state that I grew up in the backyard of the Wood's Girls Club in the UNI-Q because those programs and services truly wrapped around my family and I don't know what we would have done if or, personally, I don't know what I would have done if I didn't have those agencies right there.

R Rylee Dolezal 04:53

What were you like as a kid?

G Gina Weekley 04:55

What was I like, huh? [laughs]

G Gina Weekley 04:58
Um, was very much tomboy. I grew to love the game of basketball, I always thought I would be the first female NBA player. I was one of two girls of my mom's five kids. And my sister is the eldest. So she oftentimes play as the mom. So I essentially grew up with my brothers. So as you can imagine, I was a true tomboy, always being pushed and pumped around by my big brothers, and forced to play with my little brother. So I spent a lot of days running, playing baseball, football, basketball.

G Gina Weekley 05:45
But I was also very rebellious. I like to test boundaries. But I also had this very shy and timid side to me. Yeah.

R Rylee Dolezal 06:08
And what were the type of boundaries that you would try to push?

G Gina Weekley 06:13
Um, so when I say boundaries, it, we did a lot of naughty things as kids.

G Gina Weekley 06:21
So when I think of being in the neighborhood, we would do things that we knew absolutely we were not supposed to: go into abandoned buildings, um, naughty stuff, naughty naughty stuff like when you see kids these days running in packs and doing stuff they're not supposed to be doing—I probably was one of those kids back in my day. Throwing rocks.

G Gina Weekley 06:49
We used to, my grandmother would pick us up every Sunday—for Sunday school at the Salvation Army—and as soon as she would drop us off to like the youth church, we would skip church and go and run around through the city and try to time it for as long as church would get out and then we would rejoin her for, like the regular service.

G Gina Weekley 07:15
We would go in shops and shoplift things. Just stuff we knew we weren't supposed to be

doing. It was, you know, fun to us at the time.

R Rylee Dolezal 07:30
What was your friend group like?

G Gina Weekley 07:33
Um, when I was younger my friends consisted of my brothers pretty much. When I was about five, six, we were relocated to the east side from the west side, a poor neighborhood of the west side. Um, and moving over here, there weren't a lot of kids our age that lived directly around us. So we eventually joined the Boys and Girls Club, where we met a lot of kids our age. But initially, I didn't, I didn't allow myself to open up because it was different for us.

G Gina Weekley 08:16
But as I hit about middle school, I met two of two girls who are now still my best friends. So we've been friends for well over, shoot, 25 years almost now, um, and we became friends and clicked, clicked pretty instantly. One of my friends, the other one, I didn't like her very much.

G Gina Weekley 08:42
Um, but each of them are very..we're very similar in the sense that we had similar struggles within our childhood. Meaning our traumatic experiences or our parental experience.

G Gina Weekley 09:01
Each of us had family members that either struggle with substance abuse or some sort of traumatic experience. So that immediately kind of gelled us—we had those connections—but and then we also all played basketball together. We had other friends that also, we clicked with, but we were all kind of the good kids. So we found something that we love to do. We maintained our grades. But we also were the kids that always tested boundaries. So the kids that would test all the rules, test all the teachers. The class clowns.

G Gina Weekley 09:55
The kids that probably every teacher that we had, remembers this even still, like, I still have teachers that seek me out on like Facebook, and it's like "Weekley, how are you? I

always knew I would remember you and you would be something whether it's you know".

G

Gina Weekley 10:16

So it's kind of cool to think how, think of how our, our personality and our behaviors as a kid kind of shape who you are as an adult as well kind of follows us.

R

Rylee Dolezal 10:33

What role does religion play in your life?

G

Gina Weekley 10:38

Um, as I stated earlier, my grandmother always, always, always, always had us in church. Um, and that's from as far back as I can remember. Probably the only pictures you see of me when I was a kid in a dress was Easter Sundays or Christmas programs at church with my grandma, my grandma was a very religious, spiritual woman. Her life was very much guided by the works of Christ. So, having that as like the center of my childhood, it was very much of a guiding factor and played a role in the person in my personality, my morals and my values.

G

Gina Weekley 11:25

Um, as I grew up, I, we know how like society shapes our beliefs, I began to not want to go to church where my grandmother went, because we lived in a black neighborhood. I began to identify more so as black than white and the church that she took us to was primarily white.

G

Gina Weekley 11:53

So I ventured out on my own and found a church home. And I was probably about 13, 14 maybe like 12 12/13 and started going there, um, where my pastor at that time, had become like a mother figure to me. So, throughout my high school, middle/high school, I was very active and engaged in church, actually. My friends began to dub me like the church girl. My nickname was "Churchy". Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, like I spent at church and youth groups and it just like, it became who I was, and like, I stopped listening to like secular music. And, yeah, it was it was a big part of my upbringing.

R Rylee Dolezal 12:53
What were the names of the churches that you were a part of?

G Gina Weekley 12:57
As a child, I was a part of Salvation Army, a local Waterloo core. And then growing up, I was and still am a member of the Ambassadors for Christ Church.

R Rylee Dolezal 13:14
So does religion still play a big role in your life?

G Gina Weekley 13:19
Absolutely, um, with the exception that, um, I've come to learn that religion is more so like, man-made guides and beliefs, feel that I'm more so spiritually guided by Christian principles if that makes sense. So in my life and how I live it, I believe that the greatest gift that we can give to anybody is love and love through action. So and that very much is a Christian based principle, and that, that is like my guiding force in life is to make sure that every person that I know and meet feels the love and light within me.

R Rylee Dolezal 14:24
All right, so maybe it was kind of a shift, but, um, how do you identify in general?

G Gina Weekley 14:32
Um, so I identify as gay. I just don't prefer the term lesbian. Um, I don't know, it just seems very frilly. When I think of lesbian I think of like, lipstick lesbian, very feminine women. Nothing against that by no means but just does it fit my persona. So I prefer to be considered gay. I'm married to a woman. Yeah.

R Rylee Dolezal 15:10
Have you talked to your family and friends about your sexuality?

G Gina Weekley 15:16
About now?

R Rylee Dolezal 15:18
Mhmm

G Gina Weekley 15:19
Oh, yeah. Um, it took a long time. Um, and as you can imagine, growing up in church, it played a major role in coming out, or the lack of coming out. Rather.

G Gina Weekley 15:37
Um growing up, I often, almost always knew that I preferred women. As a kid, I can even remember having like those school day crushes, but they weren't ever on boys. Um, it's kind of weird and I was like, "Why do I like them like that?" And I would always try to suppress that, of course, because we're taught in church, that that's a sin, and you're going straight to hell for that. So always I would suppress that. Even up until, you know, my teenage years when I really knew. Like 12/13 I knew that I wasn't attracted to guys, I knew that I didn't want either sexual or physical, emotional, any sort of connection with a male. But I also knew that I couldn't be that person that I knew I was.

G Gina Weekley 16:43
So I tried to suppress it and probably is even more so why I got more involved in church and tried to "fix myself" per se, or allow church and those beliefs to fix them. Or keep me from acting on what I knew I was. Which led to in high school, as you could imagine, a lot of confusion, a lot of sadness, a lot of isolation, although I had friends. I wasn't the friend that like, I didn't like to go to school dances. I didn't. I didn't like that because when you go to school dances you have to have a date or you have to choose to wear a dress. And the only dances that I can really remember going to and feeling comfortable were like homecoming, where we could wear jeans and I could be in my element.

G Gina Weekley 17:45
And it was hard. It was really hard for me. Because I, again, knew who I was. So my most comfortable times during high school and middle school is when I was on the basketball court. I could be in my baggy clothes, I could go play ball. I could be in my element and nobody had to worry about it, right? Because she's the girl who loves basketball and plays basketball.



Gina Weekley 18:15

So it was very difficult. Extremely difficult actually. Even thinking back, I could think of days where I would literally just sit in my room and like, cry, and it was scary, sad times. Because you always think about the people that you will let down rather than think about yourself, right? So like, we always process "if I do that, how will that make my grandmother feel? Or if I do that, how would that make the pastor feel?" Never considering "how much better will I feel if I do, do that or act on it?"



Gina Weekley 19:00

I don't even remember the initial question.



Rylee Dolezal 19:03

It was, no it's okay! It was: Have you talked to family and friends?



Gina Weekley 19:12

Oh, actually?



Rylee Dolezal 19:13

Yep.



Gina Weekley 19:14

So being in that state, I absolutely was not going to talk to my family. I continued to go to church and continued to hear the messages about homosexuality, and how it was not of God. I remember being in the presence of people being ridiculed. I can remember blatantly a time where there was a girl in our basketball team who came out and the way that she was treated. And when you don't stand up for somebody, you also are a part of it, right? So I was a part of how she was treated and in that moment, I knew "Oh, I definitely can't come out right now". Like, no, there's no way I'm gonna become like her like, and she was happy until that moment, right?



Gina Weekley 20:11

Like so I continue to suppress it. A lot of dark days ahead of me, but I was able to maintain my grades. I was able to, like maintain friendships, but a part of me never felt

true to anything. Like, because, what, I wasn't being my true self.

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Gina Weekley 20:39

Um I gave just enough of myself to keep people happy, if that makes sense. All while not not being happy.

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Gina Weekley 20:53

Um, I graduated, I went to college. Still never had those conversations. Um, never was a thought in my mind to have those conversations with my family. I went to college locally at the University of Northern Iowa on an academic scholarship with an opportunity to walk on for basketball.

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Gina Weekley 21:17

And I-I fell into what I realize now as depression, like I moved into my dorm room. My friends were living that normal college life, right? Going out all the time, not me. I literally was in my room the bulk of the time. If I wasn't on campus, I was at church.

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Gina Weekley 21:46

And that's when it really hit me. Like, I stopped going to class because I really realized "I am not the same as these other college girls", right? Like, I wear baggy clothes, I wear polos. I wear Timberlands, I wear sneakers, they're all becoming young women and like I did not fit in. Guys would try to talk to me, and it was like, "why do you want to talk to me?" Like, "leave me alone".

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Gina Weekley 22:18

Being in my dorm, of course I didn't really fit in. But I was—I'm somewhat still I'm like a chameleon. So like where I am, I know how to fit in. I know how to spark conversations so people felt comfortable around me. They would come to my room. So I still maintained connections. But I still like, Saturday all day would lock myself in my dorm room. Dark in a room, I can remember super vividly, um and eventually it became so heavy I would start missing classes. Um, my grades began fall. I started my undergrad program with a 4.0 because through upper bound—a program out of UNI Q—we were able to take college classes in high school. Quickly that GPA fell down. I was on academic probation risk with the risk of losing my scholarship.

- G** Gina Weekley 23:26
And I can't say that I cared, you know, like it was... But I didn't understand why. Like, I didn't understand why I was falling apart. Like these were all things that I thought I wanted to do, but I wasn't happy.
- G** Gina Weekley 23:47
And then I began to do like dip-in, dabble in like social media. Remember this back when, you may not even remember, but like I think it was, it wasn't MySpace...maybe MySpace... and we had a platform called "Black Planet". Um, where I met a few people online, and I began to talk to girls online. And I would set up my profile very private, so that my local friends or kids at college would not find me.
- G** Gina Weekley 24:25
And I began to talk to girls, and then I felt free, so to speak, like, I felt a tinge of happiness. Um, and it was like, "Whoa, this kind of feels good".
- G** Gina Weekley 24:41
But I had to live like double lives. Um, so I began to close myself off, of course, because I wanted to be on the computer more. So I definitely didn't spend time with my friends. I was that friend like if they got super drunk at night and it was at a party, I was the friend who came, picked them up, brought them home, nursed them back to life. I was never the friend that hung out. My "hanging out" was in the computer lab 'til two/three o'clock in the morning, literally. Um and after a while, of course, my grades still begin to suffer, not began, continued to suffer.
- G** Gina Weekley 25:22
And I eventually, my junior year of college, dropped out of school, I lost my scholarship.
And
- G** Gina Weekley 25:33
I moved back home which was super odd. Because I was then like full-fledged like online-dating and stuff.

G

Gina Weekley 25:46

And my mom and my brothers like had this conversation one time. And they were talking about a friend that I had that was feminine, and he was a guy, and they were like, "Is he?" Never mind, never mind. But like, the way that they were asking was like, Is he gay, like you? And so at that moment, I knew I could not ever come out. At least I thought.

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Gina Weekley 26:14

So, kept that in the back of my mind. And I continued to do online dating. And I met this girl who lived across the country, in Virginia, actually. And then we started dating, and I would go and visit her.

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Gina Weekley 26:30

And then, after a while, I decided, I'm moving to Virginia. Like, I would go out there, I would visit, I could be myself, I could go out, like my friends were at home. I seen what it was like, like I knew why they enjoyed it so much. It was so much freedom, and there was so much life to be lived. I was like, I'm moving. I'm moving somewhere where I could just be myself. So I thought, alright.

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Gina Weekley 26:58

So um, when I was like 19/20, again, I had dropped out of school. I moved away. I moved to Virginia. I told my family I was like, Look, I'm moving. I have a friend out there. I've visited. Of course, they all have questions like, "what the hell do you mean your moving?"

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Gina Weekley 27:20

I was like, "it's fine. I'm young. I'll find a job. Like, I was like, maybe I'll join the police academy". Never had any intention on joining the police academy. Um, but I ended up moving.

G

Gina Weekley 27:36

But that wasn't true freedom either. Because, of course, your family wants to know, how's it going? How are you doing? Where are you living, we want to come visit. And I was living with a girl at the time. And I can remember the first time my family came to visit me and we had to rearrange the house like we were friends. Mind you I'm grown as hell, paying my own bills, but I was still super afraid to come out.

G

Gina Weekley 28:08

By that time I was like 20/21 maybe still living my life for everybody else, right, I thought I moved away to be free. But that wasn't the case. Um, which led to, again, like that depression, like I was there I thought I was free. And the realization of it was you're just living a double life. Like these people back home don't have a clue who you really are. Yet these are the people who know you and love you. So, it still took me, I was in Virginia, probably three years, before I decided to even have that conversation. I actually was dating a person who-who was like, "Listen, I can't continue to be, you know, like, your friend to your family."

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Gina Weekley 29:09

And I one night was out at a bar. And I was like, "You know what, forget this. I'm gonna call my sister. And I'm gonna tell her". And I called her, and she was in the mountains somewhere. And I was talking to her. "I was like, I have to tell you something". And she was like, "What?" And her phone was cutting out but I wasn't paying attention to that, I was like, "I'm gay".

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Gina Weekley 29:33

And she hung up on me.

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Gina Weekley 29:35

At least I thought. So I was freaking devastated. Like, oh my god, my my, you know, the worst dream has come true. Like now I won't have my sister. I won't have my family. But she ended up calling back and was like "Finally, like, we've been waiting for you to come out. Like we've been waiting so long for you to come out". And I was like, "What?" And she was like, "Yes. Like, I've known since you were like, nine". And I was like, "What?". So immediately I felt like ass because I've wasted, what, a decade of my life hiding. And she's like, "you need to tell your mom, our mom, and your siblings", and I was like, "no way". I still was afraid to have those conversations. I was like, "Nope, you'll have to do it". And she was like, "I'm not doing it. Like, you're gonna have to do it". Eventually she probably told 'em, and we never really had the conversation. The only person I ever really had the conversation with was my sister initially.

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Gina Weekley 30:44

And eventually, I just slowly came out more online.

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Gina Weekley 30:50

And then one day, one of my best friends—the two girls 2-3-2 girls called me and she was like, "gee, we need to have a talk". I was like, "About what?" I was still afraid to have those conversations with people who are close to me. "You need to tell me something". And I was like, "I'm gay". And she was like, "Why the fuck wouldn't you tell me? Like, I've been defending you for years, like almost physically gotten into a fight with a person". And I was like, "You don't understand though, like, the fear of losing the people that you love the most is it's hard".

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Gina Weekley 31:31

Like, it's hard, like fear will hold you back like no other. But thank God I had people, and family, and friends who loved me. And were accepting. But I was almost 25/26 before I even came out.

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Gina Weekley 31:53

But that wasn't the case with everybody, right? Because again, I was a Christian. And when it came out, it wasn't the case for with everybody to continue to love me and accept who I was. And of course that—that is what rooted that fear and that the scariness of coming out. And it was confirmed when I was asked not to contact or basically bring that lifestyle around a certain person who was very important to me. Um a huge part of my upbringing, you know, a huge part of my childhood and my young adulthood, a huge part of how I was raised. So it was again, like a slap in the face, right? Like, you finally come out. You finally feel a cinch of happiness. And it's like—it's all like sucked, right?

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Gina Weekley 33:03

And it was like, but you win some you lose some. Eventually I had that mindset like, Yes, that one person or those few people don't accept it. But I mean, eventually if they don't come around and realize that I'm the same person, it's their loss. I have so many other people who do love and value who I am just the way I am. And it was a hard, hard pill to swallow. But eventually I kind of got over it and eventually

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Gina Weekley 33:43

You know what, I never really had those conversations with people. Um, it wasn't until I was asked to be a keynote speaker at One Iowa for their Cedar Valley workplace conference. This year, in 2020, was the first time that I ever openly and publicly gave like

my story. I came out, but it wasn't like a "guys, I'm gay", you know, like it just, I began to just openly be me. But that was the first time that I allowed my mom to hear my story. It was the first time my, even my wife heard my story, you know, in a public arena, the folks that I worked with the people who were around me daily knew like some of the things that I had gone through. A lot of them didn't know that I went through a time when I was depressed. Of course, they probably saw the signs because I dropped out of college and I moved away. But when a person tells that story, it's it's different, right? Like, so a lot of them were like, "Oh my God. I never knew, but you like, held it together". I was like, "yeah, I hold it together for people like you" like

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Gina Weekley 35:10

And those were the hardest fuckin' times in my life.

G

Gina Weekley 35:13

Sorry, for family. But and they were like, "Oh my god", some people still even still will be like, "why did you wait so long?" And it was like, because like and being in Virginia would see so many kids who were disowned by their families. I was a part of a, in Virginia they have these things called families, gay families and gay houses. And it literally were like social clubs and groups, social families, for kids who were like me, that didn't know or ran away from home, so to speak, to just be themselves. A place where we could have that human connection, that love and that support. But a lot of those kids weren't for-as fortunate as I and they-their parents had disowned them. were put out on the street like, I mean, horrible, horrible situations. And then there was me who was just super afraid to, to come out, because I learned so much about other people's experiences.

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Gina Weekley 36:31

So, yeah, my first time really having that conversation openly was actually this year. I just kind of expected people to accept me for who I was. And that was it. You know, we change our our status on online these days. And we just expect people to catch the hint right like I am who I am yeah.

R

Rylee Dolezal 37:01

How did that feel?

- G** Gina Weekley 37:05
Liberating. And once I made that that decision, there was there was no turning back for me. It was extremely liberating. I decided then that I matter most, right?
- G** Gina Weekley 37:26
Like all my life, I had lived 25/26 years for everyone else. It was finally time to live for me and to be happy for me. Like there was not a time that I could say that I was truly happy because in the back of my mind, I knew that I was hiding something. There was something that I was being dishonest about.
- G** Gina Weekley 37:55
And true freedom comes in-in being free. Being open, being honest and operating out of love, right? Like if I truly valued that principle of love, we don't truly love people when we don't tell them the full truth, right?
- G** Gina Weekley 38:14
And it was a hard pill to swallow for me, because for so many years, I was living like that-that double life that I became comfortable, would become stagnant. And I didn't want to be that person anymore, right? Like I didn't want to like hide my tracks or cover my tracks in relationships, even, like it spilled over into relationships. Because the same way that we can hide us being homosexual, right with our families. it spills over it makes it easy to lie about any and everything. So we're never truly true to ourself, or anybody else, and I was tired. I was so tired. Tired of like, living like that.
- G** Gina Weekley 39:04
And finally, like in Virginia, the true like, breaking point for me, um, a moment when I was like, "Oh, this isn't what life is about, right?" Like I was I was working for the YWCA in Norfolk, Virginia. And we just have recently got a new executive director. And her story, I wouldn't say it was very similar to mine, but she was coming back home from DC to take on her the job as executive director in Norfolk, Virginia. And when she told her story, and she came and she interviewed, I was extremely, like intrigued. I was like, dang, like, she's coming back to her hometown. A place that was like, a dark place for her in her childhood, a place that she had escaped from. And I was like, Why does she want to come back here? Right? And I was like, I wanted to know more. So like, I researched her before she even came. And like, just learned a little bit more about what she had done. And

immediately I was bought into her leadership. Um, her ability to, to connect with humans was like, amazing to me.

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Gina Weekley 40:33

And when she first joined the YW, in Norfolk, she set up interviews with like her team, and we all had one-on-one's and she asked us very specific questions. You know, where do you see yourself in five years? What do you see yourself doing? So on and so forth. And I explained to her like I was able to-to dig deep.

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Gina Weekley 41:00

And maybe that was the part that I was missing too, like, I never even allowed people an opportunity to come in, you know, to ask me like, what do you want to do? What do you want to do with yourself? What do you see yourself doing? I never had anybody challenge me, or challenge my thinking.

G

Gina Weekley 41:18

And I was like, you know, like, since I was a kid I always wanted to have youth programs, develop youth programs open like a youth center for at risk, quote, unquote, kids. I want to, I want to provide services for the kids who are like me, or like, were like me when I was growing up. And she was like, why don't we do it? Now I was like, Huh, okay. And she was like, No, why can't we do that? She was like, I see you. I see you work ethic, like I see. I see it in you.

G

Gina Weekley 42:05

And in that moment, I was like, she sees more in me than I ever have in myself. And in that moment, I was like, we can do that. And she was like, but you're gonna have to work for it. We're not just going to do this, like, you're going to have to put in work as well. You're going to go back to school, you're going to finish your degree. And she was like, you're going to get into leadership courses. You're going to do those things for yourself, for your development.

G

Gina Weekley 42:41

And as we got closer, she she always stuck true to her word. She put me out in front of the agency, made me comfortable with who I was. Again, I was really shy and timid she she had me like out doing speaking engagements. And she was like, and I want you to be you.

The whole you. Gina, you, like, dress how you dress. I want people to see you for who you are fully. And I was like, Whoa, um, because I had never been given those opportunities, right?

G

Gina Weekley 43:23

So it was just like, Man, this is really happening and people accepted me for who was. I would wear bow ties. I would put on my little blazers, and I would be out there telling my story. And it felt good. Like people weren't judging me. So in that moment, I was so I was like, I could do this. I went back to school. I got myself together. We did a lot of like leadership courses. She did a lot of coaching. And then one day, she pulled me in again, and had a very real conversation with me.

G

Gina Weekley 44:00

She was like, you know, I see you. I see what you're doing. She was like, but let's talk about where you're going. Again, let's talk about those goals. And she just had a really real conversation with me. I always wear my hat backwards and my saggy, you know, pants and shorts and T-shirts. And she was like, if where you want to go, you know, you want to be deemed a professional, right? I was like, absolutely. She was like well then let's take it, you know, a step further. And I caught on quickly. I knew what she was saying, right.

G

Gina Weekley 44:44

And I did, and the magnitude of the blessings that came in, and the opportunity was just like it was like what in hell like I-I agree to work on me. And I took that step forward to serve myself for a change. And like the way that my life changed, was just like, there's no way I'm going back to that old person. Like at all. If people don't accept me for who I am, and what I stand for, they don't love me. Like, at that time, like I received a promotion. I was excelling in school, like great things were happening. We were receiving, like awards for the programming that we were doing in youth services. It just felt so great. Um, and I can remember that year.

G

Gina Weekley 45:42

I think it was. 2000-and I don't even remember the year I can't remember the year. But I came home, all I remember it was like Fourth of July weekend, and I came home to visit. I came back home to Waterloo. To visit. And it was the first time that I came home that I was completely myself, like, I didn't pack perfume or I didn't pack tight fitting clothes.

G

Gina Weekley 46:17

And we went to like a couple community events. And I was like, man, something's missing, like home is not the same. I was like, there were like very few people at this community event. And just riding around the city, like seeing old buildings in my neighborhood was kind of run down. I was like, I need to come home.

G

Gina Weekley 46:45

Like I need to come home and do the work that I'm doing in Virginia at home. And it just was deep seated like, I had never ever felt like that anytime I came back to Iowa. Matter of fact, I told people all the time. I'll never come back to Iowa, like, mhm, not happening ever. Um, but it was something about that trip that was like, you got to go home, like, be around your family. You've never even given your family an opportunity to experience the real you, right? You've never given your community an opportunity to experience the real you. And I was like, damn. And I really battled within again. But again, one thing I promised myself was that I was going to serve me like I was going to do what was always best for me at heart.

G

Gina Weekley 47:46

So when I got back to Virginia, I had a conversation with my boss at the time. And she was like, you know what, I'm proud of you. And she was like, but um, Not gonna let you go, like in 30 days, I need at least two months. And I'll help you do whatever you need to to make that happen. And she actually put me up in her condo for the month after my lease was up at no cost so that I could save money to be prepared to come home and do it right.

G

Gina Weekley 48:25

And for that, like I'll forever be indebted to her. Because not only did she professionally and like, personally, like she showed me love, right and love is the greatest gift that we could give to anybody. And I can remember it was like the week, the week before I was getting ready to depart home and she was like I want to come up to the condo so that we could just have one last one-on-one. And I was like one last like it hit me like. Oh shit, this person who's helped groom me, wants to have a one last one-on-one right? Now I was like, Damn, am I gonna be right after her after, you know, I'm not around her pushing me. And she was like, let's talk about this. You're transitioning. What's your greatest fear?

G Gina Weekley 49:24
I was like, Damn, I hadn't thought about it. I was like, honestly, my greatest fear is like, people accepting me. Or like, going back to church because church was a part of me. I was like, will my community really accept me for who I am? Like here? Yes, I'm open. I'm out. I was like, that's my greatest fear.

G Gina Weekley 49:58
And she was like—One question that she always asked us was "what would you do if fear was not a factor?" And I was like, Ah, here we go again. And she was like, No, I'm For Real. Like, what would you do if fear was not a factor in going back home? I was like, I'm gonna go back home. I'm gonna finish my degree. I'm gonna—I'm gonna do what I said I was gonna do like, I'm going to develop programs. I'm going to give back to my community.

G Gina Weekley 50:34
And then I thought about I was like, I'm gonna. And she was like, you're gonna what? I was like, I'm gonna go back to church. And she was like, Why do you look so sad? I was like, well, cuz my pastor don't believe in, you know, homosexuality. And she was like, You know what, if anybody can reach her, I know that you can.

G Gina Weekley 50:58
And I was like, What do you mean? She was like, you know, sometimes people don't know that the way that they feel, or that the beliefs that they carry are more hurtful and harmful to other people than healthy. And she was like, you know, she's a woman, you know, of the faith. The greatest gift that we can give to people is love, and unconditional love. Love doesn't come with conditions. And she was like, you'll be fine. She was like, You have it in you to not just help change people, but you are going to be a person to change the world. And I was like, Okay.

G Gina Weekley 51:41
Well, she always had that way to kinda, you know, hit deep down.

G Gina Weekley 51:46
And I was like you right. I just need to have a conversation where eventually, at that time, my current wife—my current wife—My only wife. My wife, we were dating during that

time. We had hooked up on Facebook. And she's from Waterloo. So some people will be like you moved home to be with her. And I was like, No, actually no, because she was planning to move to Virginia. And she was not happy about me deciding to move back home. So I knew for a fact that I moved back home for myself.

G

Gina Weekley 52:24

And I, when we had that conversation, even I had to make that clear to her like, this is something that I need to do for me. And I was like, I understand if you know, you don't agree, or if that you still feel you need to move away. I was like, that's something I would totally support you with, and maybe it means we wouldn't be together. But this is something that I have to do for myself. So she was super supportive. And actually when I got back home, we ended up just dating. But back to the story.

G

Gina Weekley 53:03

I returned home after those two months of staying in my boss's condo, and immediately when I got home, like the school district reached out, and at the time it was Dr. Smith, who was the Associate Superintendent of human resources. And she offered me a job. And I was like, What? And she was like, Yeah, come to my office this week. So as soon as I got home, like two weeks after I was home, I was working with kids.

G

Gina Weekley 53:39

So things were like, falling in place. For me, I got back in school. But I still hadn't yet returned to church. So there was still that that one thing and like I'm, I've never been in Waterloo and not been a part of my church community, right. Like they had become a part of my family. And one Saturday they had like an event in the parking lot. And I went, and I seen my pastor at the time. And we embraced and I asked her, I was like, you know, can we have a one-on-one? Like, can we have a conversation? And she agreed, so we met one day, probably the next week.

G

Gina Weekley 54:24

And I was able to tell her those things. And in that moment, that was like, I'm really free. Like, because I'm free from that hurt. I'm free from that feeling of disappointment. I was able to share with her how much it hurt me, but she was also able to share with me the things that I couldn't see that I did that also hurt her. So in that moment, we agreed that like setting our differences aside for the best, and that we will walk in love and unconditional love. So just as my, my former boss that told me like, you have to show

people like how you want to be loved.

G

Gina Weekley 55:17

It was true. Like, when we're going through those coming out phases, we have to show people how we want to be loved. Like oftentimes we just, we think and we-we assume that people are gonna love us how we are or people are just gonna love us or they're not. And sometimes that's not always true, especially when it comes to our elders like we have to open our eyes open their minds as well.

G

Gina Weekley 55:46

So just showing her and telling her and teaching her how to love me along with many others. Showing them that on the same kid, like I'm that same person. There's not any anything different within me, you know, like, it's still my same soul within me, a soul that loves God, a soul that loves people. I'm a human being with feelings and emotions and you crush them. Right? Like because you were one of the most influential people in my life. Um, and that was hard to come back from. And she apologized. And that was like, so freeing. And she explained to me that she, she also looked at me as a as her kid, you know. And her stance in religion is different than mine. And we agreed to disagree. But one thing that we had in common, and that was mutual, for us was the love that we share, right?

G

Gina Weekley 56:54

Um, so, from that moment, it just was kind of, I got your back and you got mine.

G

Gina Weekley 57:02

And that kind of was always how I've been raised. Like, you always give back and give thanks and respect to those who have given it to you. So from that viewpoint, I felt that I not owed her, um, but I wanted to give back. I wanted to be a person who gave back because she did instill so much within me, um, as a kid, morals and values, you know, that, that I still abide by.

G

Gina Weekley 57:39

And I went back to church and I'm became the treasurer. I've helped develop systems and things within our church that help, you know, build her up, so to speak. I don't want to I don't want to sound like I came in and made these major changes that wasn't it. But out of

love, like I came in, I saw that, like she didn't have a retirement plan, and who works for over 25 years and doesn't have a retirement plan? I put systems in place that so that if she ever decided to retire, she would have a pension, you know, those things that that are important for any working person. I wanted to make sure that she had those things in place for her. Um, we also got her back in school, she obtained her doctorate and we went on a journey together.

G

Gina Weekley 58:40

Our families merged again, somewhat, to a certain extent, right, because we still have those differences. But knowing that I had that, that sense of love again, was-it was super freeing for me again, a sense of, you know, liberation, because I did what I said I was going to do when I came home. Um, I'm still on my journey. Not perfect by any means, but I'm still doing those things.

G

Gina Weekley 59:12

I graduated. I ended up going back to UNI, the place that I dropped out from. And I obtained my bachelor's. I also went back once I finished my bachelor's. and got my master's in nonprofit development and philanthropy.

G

Gina Weekley 59:32

I'm working in a position where I'm doing exactly what I said I wanted to within those five years or whatever, when I talked to my boss.

G

Gina Weekley 59:43

But most importantly, I'm living free. Right like, me and my wife were dating at the time when I returned to Waterloo. And it was the first relationship that I've ever experienced where I just felt at peace. When I was with her, it was like I was at home, right? Like, it was never like this sense of, oh my gosh, I gotta I got to hide this or I got to do this or I got to be this person. It was never that. Like it was just always like a sense of comfortability-comfortable, right?

G

Gina Weekley 60:31

And I was like Dang, this is what it feels like, like to be in love. We would date and to be at home. Like around my family, we were able to go to family functions. And I was able to introduce her as my girlfriend at the time. We were able to go to community events and

became known as a couple you know, like Aish and Gina um, it was like, Oh my god, this is what life is about. Life is about living, right? Like living without fear.

G

Gina Weekley 61:10

And we live without fear. Like it's so good. And then you add love into it. It's like life is great. Life is freakin great. We have a kid. We have a 13 year old. So at the time we started dating, she was like seven.

G

Gina Weekley 61:26

So I've watched her grow up, I've enjoyed being a part of her life, taking on the role of also being a parent. And when I took on that role, I also realized that I can't, I can't be a person that shows her how to live in fear, right? Like I have to be a parent who shows her that the world is literally her's. And if she works for whatever she wants, she can obtain it. I wanted to be that model of a parent for her, and I wanted to be a parent who showed her love. And we can't show other people love if we're not being true to ourselves. And so I felt like being a part of the relationship with my wife was like the icing on the cake. It was like everything that I desired in life, and in love. Like I finally had-had a life partner, right, a person who would not only love me, but challenge me, who would encourage me, a person who would support me and whatever I wanted to do, even if it was some craziness, like, Okay, babe I'm going to be right here with you.

G

Gina Weekley 62:59

It was so exciting to finally feel and be in love. And it was like, man, I wasn't afraid. I was no longer afraid of what people said or how people looked at us. I didn't give a care, right. This is love for us. And eventually, um the more and more that I realized that I was like, I'm gonna marry her. Like, I could get married. I never imagined like that I will get married. Because I didn't date a man, right. And it would just wasn't the thing to do for gay people.

G

Gina Weekley 63:46

But um, I was back in Iowa, where it was legal for us to get married. We got married. We've been married for a year and a half, almost now. More than a half, we're coming up on our second year anniversary. And when I tell you literally the greatest gift in life is love. And I'm just so fortunate that I realized that before it was too late, and that I stepped out and overcame my fears.

R Rylee Dolezal 64:25
Um, how did you meet your wife?

G Gina Weekley 64:28
Um, so me and my wife, actually, we, uh, we grew up in the same neighborhood. She grew up maybe two blocks over from us, actually, she's younger than me. And her and my baby brother were best friends growing up. We weren't close back then by any means, but my family knew her, right? But we never. Like I said, we're super close.

G Gina Weekley 64:54
But when I took a job locally, I was a family support worker before I moved to Virginia. And she was one of my clients. I know it sounds so crazy right now. It was when she had her baby. And so yeah, seven years prior, so right before I moved to Virginia, Aisha was one of my, my clients when I was a family support worker, where I did like home visits and just provided resources to her because she was a young parent.

G Gina Weekley 65:27
Um, and I actually didn't really remember that a lot. She brought that to my memory. Um, we, I don't know if you remember or recall, but on Facebook, there used to be this game that was played it was called The Numbers Game where you give somebody a number and then they would put a message in your inbox of like, their most memorable, whatever of you. And I sent her a message. And was like, you know, she gave me a number So I sent her a message. And I was like, You are an amazing mom. Um, and you know, you've always been just super cute to me. Just like the way she carried herself. She always had like this style and persona about her. And she sent a message back, and she was like, Oh my god, I would have never thought that you would say something like that. But we ended up just carrying on conversation via Facebook. I mean, just for hours and hours, we would converse and talk and chat. And then we exchanged phone numbers, and we would talk on the phone for hours at a time and it was just so good.

G Gina Weekley 66:45
Like, it was just easy to talk to her about any and everything. And I was still in Virginia at the time. And then like, I felt love, like. It was like I think I love this girl. And I ended up telling her that. She tells me that I told her first, whatever, it doesn't even matter, right? Because it was love. But, um, and I asked her, I was like, will you be my lady? And she

agreed. So we were dating still, and she came to Virginia a few times. And it was just easy. Even being long distance. It was super easy like, loving her and being with her and having her as my partner. It was fun. It was exciting. And it was new, you know, because I was, for the first time being true to myself. So we reconnected via Facebook, and then got together after that.

R Rylee Dolezal 67:57
And then you proposed to her, right?

G Gina Weekley 67:59
Yeah, I proposed to her.

G Gina Weekley 68:02
Um, so I proposed to her, like a year, almost a full year before we got married. So we got married September 22, 2020. I mean, 18 it is 2022. 2018. So I proposed to her in 2017. I believe it was September 28 2017.

G Gina Weekley 68:25
Um, one thing that I'll always... Aisha is like, she's very easy to love, but um, she loves for things to be different. Like, if you're gonna, if we're going to date, like, we're going to have picnics, or things that people wouldn't normally do in this day and age. So I was like, my proposal to her is gonna be like epic, something that she'll never forget. All she ever asked me was just to make it extremely memorable for her. If I proposed.

G Gina Weekley 68:59
So I bought a ring. And I had the ring actually for months before I got up the courage to propose to her. But we planned a trip to LA for like a sister's trip because we both have big sisters. And we were all going to go to LA and it was her older sister's birthday as well. So everything just kind of came together. And we went to LA and we spent like five days in LA and hung out. And I was like, You know what, that's what I'm gonna do while we're in LA. You know how they have on like Groupon where you can get, like, helicopter rides over like the Hollywood sign. You could do candlelight dinners and stuff.



Gina Weekley 69:42

I ended up purchasing like a helicopter ride. I was like, I'm gonna propose to Aisha in the helicopter over Hollywood. Because if you know my wife like she is, I don't want to say flashy but like when she gets dressed up and like we go out, she is like that person that's like, wow, because she's tall and beautiful. So like when I think of her like, I think of Hollywood, so I um, I got it. I planned it all. And like, brought our sisters in on it. So they knew like what was gonna happen. And that day we were driving to the little airport where they did the helicopter rides, and she was like, Where are we going? And what are we doing? Everybody was nervous, not just me. Like both of our sisters were nervous. So she knew something was up. But like I videoed the entire experience, was just doing like bits and pieces of our ride there. And then like when we were in the helicopter, we were like halfway, and we were literally overtop of the Hollywood sign. And I whipped out the ring and I was like the [inaudible] can't hear in the helicopter. And she's looking at me and didn't respond immediately. So I'm like What the hell? I've done done all of this, and I think she just was so shocked.



Gina Weekley 71:15

And visually she said, Yes, yes.



Gina Weekley 71:17

So like we gave her the ring. And we flew back in. And our sisters were out there like. I was like "She said yes!". Because we still had like the gear. And it just was an amazing time. And like After that we went to a Lakers game, which is my favorite NBA team. And I just don't know, like, I'm engaged to get married to like, the person of my dreams like—in not necessarily the fact that Yes, she's gorgeous. Yes, she's a beautiful person. But like the person of my dreams, meaning she loves me. She supports me. She values me and our relationship, like that was—those were the most important factors to me. So, yeah.



Rylee Dolezal 72:09

What was the wedding like?



Gina Weekley 72:13

The wedding was so much fun. Um, it we-we started planning for

G Gina Weekley 72:21
a very small wedding.

G Gina Weekley 72:24
And then it just continued to grow.

G Gina Weekley 72:28
We actually had people like, hey, are we getting an invite to your wedding? And we were like, We weren't planning on it, like it was just gonna be a small ceremony. So we ended up planning for like 400 people. We had it at University of Northern Iowa in the Walker Union. So went back to my stomping grounds, a place where I want, you know, it's extremely afraid to be myself and I got to marry my best friend in that place. So that was kind of really cool for me.

G Gina Weekley 73:03
But um, it was just amazing. Like because we had so much love in that room. I had my best friends who absolutely have always supported me even, you know, after I'd never told them for years, but they've always been like my biggest cheerleaders. We had a mutual friend, facilitate the wedding.

G Gina Weekley 73:32
And then just surrounded by—the most important part of that wedding to me was like, the love that we received that day. Um, it was so much fun, like from our our nieces and nephews and some of my students from the school came. Like the mayor from the city, state reps, local community leaders came to support our love.

G Gina Weekley 74:03
And that was big for us like, no, like, we're getting married. But, you know, just to know that people love us and support us was just amazing and like, greater than we even imagined, right? Like, it was just a party after we exchanged our vows but like, just fun, and clean, and just love, like it was—it was amazing. It was greater than I ever imagined.

G Gina Weekley 74:33

Like I was never that little girl who dreamed of walking down the aisle in a white dress like that was never me. But like, I've always been like, No, I just want to feel love, like one day like, you know, like, and it was greater than I ever imagined. It was just an extremely memorable day like. We-we had a photo booth where people could go in and write us notes. And they would get a copy of the picture that they took. But also they wrote us a note. And the photographer put the picture in the book for us, for us to read later. And just some of the messages and the photos, seeing people's smiles, like on those pictures and the love that they expressed for us. And it just, it was overwhelming, kind of. And to have our families come together. It was it was one of the best days of my life.

R

Rylee Dolezal 75:43

Um, so this is kind of another shift, but do you remember what your first exposure to like gay-ness was?

G

Gina Weekley 75:57

Yeah, um. Let's see. Let me think on this. So you mean just in general, like, Oh, that's what being gay is?

R

Rylee Dolezal 76:12

Yeah.

G

Gina Weekley 76:13

Um, shoot. I'm trying to think back. Because like I stated earlier, I knew as a kid. Like I would be super attracted to women. But I can't say that I ever had something or like a model that I'd seen or that I witnessed that was like, Oooh, two women like each other, you know?

R

Rylee Dolezal 76:43

Mm hmm.

G

Gina Weekley 76:44

But I'm trying to even think of. So when I was in middle school. There was-there was a lady who was an employee at our building. And she-I knew just from, you know how people say it's your gaydar. Right. Um, I just kind of assumed she was gay. And she had this best

friend, right? That she was very close to, and I would spend time with her outside of school.

G

Gina Weekley 77:26

She actually took me under her wing would like, help get me ready for school at the beginning of the school year and things like that. But when I would hang out with her, we would always be around her friend, right. But I think that was my first like, oh, people can be, you know, professional and have a relationship. But it was like a secretive thing. So maybe that was probably one of the reasons I thought everything had to be secret. Because-because not long after that, she eventually was let go from our district. And the rumor locally was that she was let go because she was in a homosexual relationship.

G

Gina Weekley 78:13

So another one of those things that kind of confirmed, like, no way I'd ever come out, right. But I think that was my first experience, like in the flesh, seeing it. Because back then it wasn't on TV a lot. Um, and I don't think that there was something that happened or triggered me as a kid to be like, Oh, you like girls, you know?

R

Rylee Dolezal 78:46

And then is the girl that you were dating when you moved to Virginia? Was that the first relationship that you had?

G

Gina Weekley 78:56

Um, so yes and no. Um, When I was at high school, like, there was this girl who-it was a weird dynamic of our friendship, but like, she told me that she was in love with me. But we never pursued anything. Right? Like, we were never physical, but like she would do things and—

G

Gina Weekley 79:21

My wife is walking by.

R

Rylee Dolezal 79:27

[chuckles]

G Gina Weekley 79:27
—but like, it was just different. You know, it wasn't like, my best friends. It wasn't a friendship like that. We had like a different kind of friendship. That was clearly not a normal friendship.

G Gina Weekley 79:41
Um, and then I also had, I had a girlfriend so like my first official girlfriend, um, I met via social media. And we dated she was—we had very similar situations. Where she was very Christian. I was very Christian. But we fell in love and like. It was secretive. And it was okay for both of us to be secretive. She lived actually in Alabama. And I lived in Iowa, and it was okay that way. Um, and we had that common denominator of church. But, um, eventually, like after a year, (I think was a year) she broke it off with me because she didn't know how to continue that lifestyle. Being a part of church.

G Gina Weekley 80:40
Yeah, so that was my first like, little heartbreak. Because I was like, you just lied to me. And it was like, one of those It was like, I was probably like, 19 and it was my real first like breakup and I was like, but it was easy because like there wasn't any intertwining you know, because it was all secret. We were friends. So yeah, we would visit each other. And eventually we kind of just, we remained friends for a while and sometimes here and there will still connect. But yeah.

R Rylee Dolezal 81:35
Where do you find a sense of community?

G Gina Weekley 81:43
So I find a sense of community...that's a different question. Um, so I think differently about this question, now more than ever, because I realize that oftentimes we, we seek that sense of belonging, and that sense of community. But now I realized that we have to develop and be a part of bringing that community together, if that makes sense. So I feel like I find my sense of community in the work that I do. I find a sense of community, in the love that I share with folks, whether it's professional or personal.

G Gina Weekley 82:46

When we are able to put any differences aside and come together in unity, to do things that are right to push forward. Community in unity is where I find my sense of community.

G Gina Weekley 83:03

I can't say that I feel like I belong to any one community, because I feel like community is wherever you join to—to move forward, the greater good, if that makes sense.

R Rylee Dolezal 83:16

To you, do you feel like the LGBT community in Iowa is white-dominated?

G Gina Weekley 83:27

Um...that's um...Yes. So, yes, Um actually when I first—when Aisha and I first like, got married, and we were out—every year, we would volunteer, like for the Cedar Valley Pride Fest and things like that. And then eventually, we wanted to get more involved. And what we realized quickly, was that it was very much like you stated it. Um, dominated by white professionals, not even just. No, I wouldn't even say white professionals like just white people in general.

G Gina Weekley 84:13

Um, even the clubs locally, everything pretty much was geared towards white males. Right. So like becoming or getting involved was just it was kind of difficult. So we stopped attempting. We would go out though, we go we still go out and we support it. It just is hard to be a part of that community so to speak.

G Gina Weekley 84:49

Um, it wasn't until recently when we were approached by One Iowa to be a part of their committee. And it was actually the first time that Aisha or I got involved with the LGBTQ organization or agency. And it was actually—I made the decision to allow—not to allow—but to give Aisha that opportunity to be a part of something without me. So I'm not as involved in, or serving in a capacity like she is, but that was like the first time where we felt a part of something here that was LGBTQ related.

G Gina Weekley 85:42

It's kind of sad when you think about it, hmm.

R Rylee Dolezal 85:47
And how does Iowa in that sense compared to Virginia?

G Gina Weekley 85:55
Um, very different. Um like I stated earlier, in Virginia, there were—there were like several different things and ways that you could get involved. There was like that party lifestyle, there were those houses and families that you could become a part of. It was a greater sense of community as we use in that theme amongst like the LGBTQ folks. There were so many different things that you could be a part of, that

G Gina Weekley 86:36
like almost everybody would have an opportunity to be a part of something, like even down to like the, the bars and establishments, they would hold events, like the balls that we hear about on like Pose, those sorts of things. They would also have like pool leaks, and they would have, like benefits and awareness events for everybody, you know. Like they served everybody. It wasn't for male, it wasn't for female. The events were geared towards pretty much everyone. It was a lot freer out there. Whereas here, it kind of is like, either you're in the drag lane, or you're not. You know? And like if you're not in the drag, like you kind of don't fit in. I don't know. It's just weird. So like going out here even it's a little more different than out there.

R Rylee Dolezal 87:49
Do you have any other experiences that you think are kind of specific to Iowa, or the Midwes? Like with being gay

G Gina Weekley 88:08
Experiences as in like what I did in Virginia? Like the family, having like that support system?

R Rylee Dolezal 88:21
Yeah.

G

Gina Weekley 88:23

No, not really. Um. No. Um, when I came back home, a lot of my focus and those people that I surrounded myself with were family and like my close friends. And it wasn't until One Iowa, so shout out to One Iowa for kind of pulling, pulling us out and making us feel welcome and within our community, you know? The work that they do is important. And it was the first that I was made aware of outside of like Cedar Valley Pride Fest. And the extent of that was just volunteering, like being at the gate, and then you know, taking part of the day event. So with One Iowa you really get into the nitty-gritty of like moving forward marriage equality. The equalities and workplace and like it really challenges your thinking around those things. So extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of like, the learning that they provide and the events that they put on. So prior to that, no.

R

Rylee Dolezal 90:11

And would you say that you had any specific times where there was like a feeling of unwelcomeness like in the gay community in Iowa?

G

Gina Weekley 90:28

Um, not necessarily. Um not necessarily. It just wasn't comfortable. And it wasn't what I was used to, you know. I was in a city, so it was a lot different. Here it's very—and I hate to say that because I don't want anybody to feel like I'm like, trying to slight—but it just was different, like going out was different. The shows were different.

G

Gina Weekley 91:01

But not that they weren't, you know, open, they they would do like drag queens would do like flirt with the girls that look like boys and my wife. So it was fun. It was never like we were made uncomfortable. It just it was a different different experience for, for me. It was Aisha one of her first experiences, so she didn't have anything to really compare it to. But for me, it was just really different because there weren't a lot of black people.

G

Gina Weekley 91:35

It's different here being being gay, like, um, the girls who who consider themselves dominant here, it was different because like they didn't dress the way that we dressed on the East Coast or. There just was a different vibe to it. Um, not that there was anything wrong with it by any means. It just wasn't what I was used to, if that makes sense.



Gina Weekley 92:03

I feel like, I'm getting in a in a judgy seat so-and I don't, I don't want to buy enemies. It just was different. Midwest is way different from anywhere else in the world, right? Like the Midwest, is the Midwest, it's very relaxed. It's very, you know, just Midwest kind of country. And when I was in Virginia, everything like going out was like going to an event where people really like go buy new outfits and stuff like that. So like, it was like the highlight of the week to go out. Whereas here, like people went out just to celebrate the week, and they would come out in like, in whatever they had on that day, so that was different for me.



Gina Weekley 92:53

Because going out in Virginia was like a Yeah, like a freakin movie. Every time.



Rylee Dolezal 93:06

Um, and then you mentioned differences with, um, like more dominant women. Um, so how do you view those roles within the community?



Gina Weekley 93:26

Yeah, so



Rylee Dolezal 93:29

um,



Gina Weekley 93:30

so as we know, there are like several layers to like being, quote unquote gay or lesbian, homosexual, whether male or female. And now we know that there are several different identities. When I first came out, or you know, my coming out process, it wasn't really I came out, but when I moved to Virginia, I was able to be out. There weren't all those different identities, right? Like, there were gay girls, or gay boys, girl-on-girl, there was normally just a stud. So like the dominant person in the relationship, and the fem—the feminine person in the relationship. And then in the gay boys, there was the top and the bottom, like the feminine and the dominant. And then later, as you know, times change, there was like, stud-on-stud like dominant-dominant girls. And so it's kind of it has evolved and transformed and like, there's a lot more to it. But for me, um, my view is like,

you are who you are and you love who you love, right?

G Gina Weekley 94:52

I used to be super into like, I'm a—I'm a dominant I'm stud like. And in the Family I was considered like a, a son of like our house-mother. Um, which was way different for me because I'm a daughter at home, right? So like, I well, I'm a daughter, um, but I never—I've never desired to be a man like I've never had that desire to be a boy. So I'm by no means like, have a desire to be transgender or identify as anything other than she/her/hers.

G Gina Weekley 95:34

But I have always had a preference for a female—a feminine woman. Um, yeah. Um, and, and in Iowa, um, I think it's very, it's very... I don't think they're, I mean, now that I'm a part of One Iowa and you get to see people that identify differently. But like, openly within the community that I live in, there aren't many folks that identify differently. Like if you see a person that identifies as LGBTQ, either is very open, that they're transgender, or is very open that they're a lesbian female that's dominant. Otherwise you don't really know. Right? So like, here, it's a little different. It's kind of closed off unless you go to the gay bar. And then you see, like different folks. Hmm.

G Gina Weekley 96:47

Does that make sense? Yeah. Okay.

G Gina Weekley 96:52

Cuz in Virginia, like, I worked with a lot of people that identified differently. It was a lot more open. And here I feel like it's becoming. But in my workplace even—in my specific building—I'm probably the only openly gay woman in my district. There are other-other folks that identify. But I mean, I wouldn't know that unless I had gotten involved in One Iowa and seen them there.

G Gina Weekley 97:32

So, yeah.

R Rylee Dolezal 97:38

And then you talked about, like the-the gay houses in Virginia.

G Gina Weekley 97:49
Uh huh.

R Rylee Dolezal 97:50
Um I guess I just don't know much about that. So it was—

G Gina Weekley 97:57
Um, it was really cool, like, so when I first got there, um, the girl that I was dating at the time was a part of a house. Um, and there were like several different houses and like they all came together, and they would put on shows and like, they would have performers from their houses, but not just that, like the house literally was like a family. So like, we would have family meetings like a couple times a month where we would come together and talk about things. We would do like fundraisers for like food banks, different stuff like that. So it was not only like a family where you felt safe, you felt love you felt connected, but you also had that that feeling of, of giving back, feeling worthy, so to speak, like because you're doing something for other people as well. So in those families, you would have like a gay mom mean a gay father sometimes. Whereas it wouldn't necessarily be a male and female. Your gay mom could be a transgender woman. And your father could be a woman who identifies as a dominant figure.

G Gina Weekley 99:23
Um but you respected them as such, right. And then you would have your siblings who are also members of that house. And it literally was like a big family. And then you have other branches so to speak, that were like your, your, your cousin houses kind of like your aunt and your uncles and you have like your-those connections that way to other houses.

G Gina Weekley 99:56
But the sole purpose of having that family was to have that sense of community and connection for people who didn't have that within their own families, but it was a really big thing in Virginia. Back during that time.

G Gina Weekley 100:18
Um very similar. Have you seen the show Pose? How they had like the house? No. So like they have these houses, but a lot of it stemmed from like ballroom days, which were really

big in like the 80s, mid 80s, where the gays would come together and do ballroom shows where they would Vogue and things of that nature. So that still existed. It just kind of evolved into more like common music and things, but they would still put on those shows and come together and hang out and party, but was more deeper meaning to it. Like that sense of unity and family. It's kind of cool.

G

Gina Weekley 101:11

And I'm still connected with-with several of them including my house mom. She checks in on me all the time. Um, my brothers and sisters, like we're still connected. And yeah, like still some of my really great friends from out in Virginia that have become like family. So like, some of them came for my wedding, were in my wedding, things of that nature.

R

Rylee Dolezal 101:48

Just in general. What are you proud of?

G

Gina Weekley 101:56

I am probably the most proud of my family. And when I say my family, I mean, the family that I've built with my wife. My wife, my kids, our-our puppy son, our godchildren.

G

Gina Weekley 102:19

I'm most proud of the fact that we both overcame our fears of what society would think, to, to be in love, and to have love and spread and show people that, that love isn't a certain gender-to-gender, but love is just, it's love like. And that's what I take the most pride in these days. And if you would have asked me that, a few years ago, it probably would have been way different. I probably would have said something like I'm most proud of like obtaining my degrees and doing this and doing that, but No, like, most important thing, to me now is having that opportunity to love and love freely and show others what what love is.

R

Rylee Dolezal 103:21

Um, what do you want people to know about you?

G

Gina Weekley 103:26

Um, I probably, most importantly, will want people to know that I I'm a person that they

could come to, no matter who they are, if they just needed someone to be a safe, um, but on a broader spectrum um, I'm a person guided by loving light. I'm a person that-that strongly believes that everybody deserves a chance, right and a chance at whatever their, their heart and mind and spirit desires for themselves. I believe that everyone has the ability to, to be whatever they want to be. We all just need somebody to help us and push us into those beliefs or realize our beliefs.

G

Gina Weekley 104:41

I'm a person that believes that love and light are the only ways that we can overcome the hate that fills our world. It's the only way that we defeat hate, and bring back peace and love.

R

Rylee Dolezal 105:13

So, where do you see yourself in five years?

G

Gina Weekley 105:18

Oh, where I see myself in five years. So given that my wife and I have planned out at least four years from now, after our child graduates from high school, we plan to relocate to a coastal state where she will go to like an HBCU which is a historically black college university.

G

Gina Weekley 105:44

But in that, in the meantime, I plan to do all that I can do to build community within my-hometown. Develop programs and services for the most underserved and marginalized populations, develop-to develop programs and services that really provide the support that our young people and those people who sometimes don't even realize it need those social emotional and mental health services. Making sure that they have access and making sure that it is-oftentimes, it's-it seen as like this taboo, right?

G

Gina Weekley 106:35

Like it's not always accepted, especially in the black community, to-to receive therapy or to get help with our mental health, especially after this pandemic. This is something that nobody's ever experienced in our day and age, right? Not even our parents. They may have heard of certain pandemics. From before their time, but after this sort of thing has hit our country, we definitely have to build up the social, emotional and mental health

services to our underserved and marginalized populations, and I foresee myself be a part of that was within my community.

G

Gina Weekley 107:28

Eventually I may go back to obtain my PhD in some level of education and community services, and just pushing forward for, like I said, Those the underserved populations, making sure that people's voices are heard, and that they have a voice, you know, making sure that we continue to uncover those inequalities and giving people a fair chance no matter how they identify, whether it's LGBTQ, or even just you know, brown black, young people who haven't been given a fair shot just because of, you know, circumstance they were born into, but just making sure that everybody has a fighting chance.

R

Rylee Dolezal 108:33

All right, so is there anything else you would like to add?

G

Gina Weekley 108:37

Um, I think that one thing that I know that we talked about previously, but-but I may not have mentioned it as much today was the fact of the role that my grandmother played in my upbringing and I never want to negate that. She was a extremely big part of me. And losing her was like probably one of the hardest things I ever experienced.

G

Gina Weekley 109:09

But, um, but also the love and support of my family and closest friends. I wouldn't be who I am without them, right? Like, even though I didn't know that they would-would not leave me to know that they stuck by me through all the hell I put them through and like not letting them in. And being a part of my life for shit almost eight years. I appreciate them, you know, for sticking it out with me and loving me unconditionally. So my best friends, my mom, my siblings and my family and friends that are still there.

G

Gina Weekley 109:59

So Yeah, that's that's probably one of the biggest reasons I am who I am today.

R

Rylee Dolezal 110:08

All right. Thank you.



Gina Weekley 110:10
Yeah. Thank you!