

Abby Griffith

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SPEAKERS

Evan Hurst, Abby Griffith

- E** Evan Hurst 00:07
Hello, my name is Evan Hurst and I will be having a conversation with Abby Griffith for the LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa, a project of Grinnell College. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of LGBT-identified people in Iowa. It is March 13, 2019. And this is being recorded in Mears 115. Hi, how are you, Abby?
- A** Abby Griffith 00:26
I'm good, good.
- E** Evan Hurst 00:28
Good! Um, so just to start, could you briefly introduce yourself, you know, who are you? What do you do? And how do you identify?
- A** Abby Griffith 00:34
Sure. So I'm Abby Griffith. I am 33 years old. I live here in Grinnell, Iowa. I am a registered nurse. I work at the hospital here in town. And I am partnered to a woman and I identify as queer. And as kind of sometimes as bi and sometimes as lesbian depending [chuckles] on the moment, but yeah, so that's kind of how I, and I identify as female and I go by she and her.



Evan Hurst 01:15

Awesome, awesome. So just to start, tell me a little bit about where you grew up.



Abby Griffith 01:20

Sure. I grew up in Rockford, Illinois, which is like a midsize city. And I grew up with my parents and my two younger siblings. I was raised Catholic. We went to like Catholic grade school and high school and attended church most Sundays. And we also were swimmers, all three of us, competitively.



Abby Griffith 01:53

I was a pretty like high achieving student. And yeah, grew up in a lower-to-middle class household. A lot of my extended family was like nearby, but what else?



Abby Griffith 02:20

Yeah, my, my family was like kind of somewhat conservative Catholic, I guess. Depending on who you talk to. And it was a little bit of a rough time for me growing up. My parents were not always the happiest people, especially with me. So I guess as an adult, I've realized that I was really like a scapegoat for them and that, that had a big impact on my, on how I felt about myself and like, my feeling of, how I felt about, if I had worth or not or like, feelings of self loathing or inadequacy. So, that was a little bit of a hard thing for me. And still affects my relationship with my family now. So.



Evan Hurst 03:20

Do you have any siblings?



Abby Griffith 03:21

I do. I have a younger sister who just turned 30. And then I have a younger brother who I think is seven years younger than me. And yeah, like we got we all got along okay. I am especially close to my brother. But yeah, like we were all expected to go to college, and we did. And yeah, we all did like swimming together. And we all went to the same schools and into college. And we also live in the Midwest. So we all are still pretty much close in touch. Yeah.



Evan Hurst 04:07

How was, you know, elementary school or grade school? How was all that?



Abby Griffith 04:11

Um, it was, it was all right. I think that being smart and having, like an interest in academics helped me a lot. Like I was very engaged with school and I was a big reader. So I really, yeah, I didn't have a lot of problems there.



Abby Griffith 04:38

I think that when I got into high school, like it was more intense and more like, more of like, stressful academic situation just because I put myself in those situations and, and pushed myself a lot. But yeah, I think things were mostly I mean, it was like a very Catholic environment. So a lot of like, weekly all-school Masses. And [laughs], but I was just used to that. So that was just the way that it was. And yeah, so I feel like I was in like, a very specific subset of my hometown socially, because of that. Yeah, and I didn't identify as queer or gay or not straight as a kid. I, I didn't think a lot about it that I can recall. But I do know that, like, when I was in high school, I had gay friends and just didn't connect those dots for myself, I guess.



Abby Griffith 05:47

But it wasn't very often talked about, like, I remember when I was in elementary school, there was a music minister at our church who was a gay woman and, that was like, kind of something that was known but yet not talked about and not like, brought a lot of attention to on purpose. So that, so that was just something that like was in my awareness a little bit, but not like something that was part of the conversation. Yeah, I do know that there was this teacher I had who I've really liked and looked up to and like, felt a connection to I don't know why. And I think that she was a queer person, but I, that would have never been knowledge that we would have had been privy to, especially at a Catholic school. And I'm guessing that like, she would not have been out and even amongst her colleagues, but I think that that was a moment of like, I'm different, and she's different. And it's the same reason but I didn't, I couldn't have put that into words for anybody at that time. And I, and I think also like I had crushes on older women [chuckles], like teachers and things, not her but others. And I just didn't realize it was a crush or something, I don't know, it was something where like, I had those feelings and didn't, and didn't verbalize them or didn't like, look at them too closely. Yeah, in a way that I didn't necessarily the same way for guys, but I also kind of thought all my, a lot of my classmates were stupid. So [laughs].

E

Evan Hurst 07:24

Do you have any like, favorite memories with this particular teacher?

A

Abby Griffith 07:28

Um, yeah. She was a, she taught like computer - computers whatever that was, in like the 90s [laughs]. And so there was this program that was called accelerated reader where if you read a book that was in the program, then you took this like computer quiz, and about comprehension. And if you went, if you got all the answers right, or whatever, then you get points. And even though that was more of like a reading thing, for some reason, because I guess because she was like the person with the computers, she kind of ran that program. And I had the, I had like the record for the most accelerated reader points [chuckles] at our school. And so whenever you would get certain like, to certain thresholds of points or whatever she would give you these different prizes, like, they're these little things that she would crochet, or like little, I don't know, cats or something [chuckles] and, or she would give you a gift certificate or something like that. Like they're these different prizes. And so it was really, that was really part of, the part of my identity was just like being a reader and being really good at reading and comprehension. And I would read a lot of books that were above my grade level. And that made me feel really good. And so she was just like this really great social support there, like this person who was rewarding me and like, seeing me for something that mattered to me. And that really meant a lot to me. So yeah.

E

Evan Hurst 09:01

At this point, like, you know, in your Catholic school, how did you feel about religion? Like did you think about it that much?

A

Abby Griffith 09:06

Um, I don't, I guess I definitely identified as Catholic for, all throughout my Catholic school education. And I, I had a lot of questions about Catholicism and doctrine and things that were beliefs that I was supposed to hold that I didn't. It didn't occur to me to ask them out loud or like, there was nobody that I thought, "Oh, this person can help me with this". Or that I should voice it out loud. And so I had a lot of doubts about if it was okay, like I didn't feel like it was okay, that people, that women weren't supposed to, that people aren't supposed to get divorced or just like discrimination [chuckles] policies and things like that. I didn't understand that and I didn't like it. I remember I was really critical of this teaching about this disciple who questioned, the apostles like questioning Jesus and wanting proof of something and, and that there was this lesson that like, you shouldn't ask for proof you

should just have belief. And I was like but that's what I'm doing in school, like I'm getting proof and facts, and I don't understand that. I don't like it and, and it just was something that I had no feeling of "I have room to question this or I can like be open about this". So I just kind of held it in and went to church I guess.

A

Abby Griffith 10:37

And, and I just really didn't know many people who weren't Catholic except for people on my swim team. Most of them are also Christian. When one of my swimming, when my teammates died young, suddenly, I went to the funeral and it was non-religious. And that was like the biggest shock [chuckles]. To see people like having a funeral for somebody that wasn't religious. But otherwise I was really surrounded by religion, especially Catholicism. And yeah, and then when I was in high school, I actually was like a Eucharistic minister, and a reader. And I was in some kind of pro-life group [chuckles]. So I was like, pretty, active in the church, not as much as some people. Like I hated youth groups. Like I thought youth groups were so obnoxious. Like I just [chuckles], it just made my skin crawl. I was very much traditionalist in terms of like liturgy and things but, but I was still pretty involved until I left for college. So.

E

Evan Hurst 11:41

What did you do in like your minister position?

A

Abby Griffith 11:44

Oh, it's when you're like, about the communion. Yeah, so you're, like you go [chuckles], I don't really know how you become a Eucharistic minister. I don't remember that. But you go up and like, you are one of the people who passes out the, the host or like the yeah, the community wafer and the wine. So a pretty, not like a, not like a huge time commitment because you're already at Mass anyway so. But it was a pretty visible thing for me to do. And certainly not something that I had to do by any means. Like I chose to do that because, I don't know, I was a good Catholic kid or whatever [both laugh].

E

Evan Hurst 12:21

And in terms of the pro life group, like what was that all, what were those activities like?

A

Abby Griffith 12:26

Honestly, I don't remember. I don't remember doing anything with it. I just remember that

it existed and that it was just kind of like, "Oh, well this is what we believe so like be in this club". Like it kind of felt like one of those high school things that you just do, because it's another extracurricular. It was very matter of fact. It wasn't, it didn't feel extreme or, I mean, like the way I would feel about that group now [chuckles]. But the way I felt then was just kind of like this is, you know, there's Key Club, and there's honor roll or honor, you know, the Honor Society and there's this pro life group and an environmental group, you know, like it was just one of the many things that you did. And that people around you believed and that was it.

E Evan Hurst 13:08
How was like mental health and stuff in high school?

A Abby Griffith 13:11
Um, I was very stressed. I really over-committed to like activity, I feel like I committed to a lot of activities and classes that were a lot of homework. I was an athlete, so I was doing that. So that was stressful. I definitely was an anxious person. When I was a kid, and in high school too, like, my, all throughout my childhood, I would be in these big fights with my dad. Like he would scream at me and it would end with me like laying on my bed hitting myself in the head and telling myself that I was worthless, and really self hating. And that was something that was [chuckles] never like really examined by anyone in my household and there was just a very like, need - using mental health services or getting health, or being diagnosed with a mental illness was very stigmatized. But it wasn't something that was even talked about. It was just like, like one time I asked my mom, I was like I think I'm sick. I think there's something wrong with me. Like I think I need to see a counselor. And she was like, "There's nothing wrong with you, you just need to act better". So there's just this very, this very strong like, cover it up or like don't admit some things. Or don't be vocal [chuckles] about things. So yeah, like it would have never been something that anyone in my family would have said like, "you're anxious" or "you need to go see a doctor or a counselor or something". Like it was just something that I lived with and was surrounded by I think too, with other family members. So.

E Evan Hurst 14:51
What influenced the fights with your dad?

A Abby Griffith 14:54
Um, I think that my dad was a very frustrated, angry person who, or still is I guess, who just

was not - didn't know how to handle his anger. And he and my mom parented very differently. And so, to me, I think that led to a lot of clashes in terms of expectations for us. A lot of it was just like, you know, well I want you to do this and you didn't do, like clean this or something like that. And then some of the things were things like a lot of arguments about tone. Or like I can tell that you meant this or like you were insulting me or you're insulting your mother or, and it was just a lot of like [chuckles], just trivial shit that became this huge controversy quickly. And things that were not ever a problem with my siblings, but were for me. So I think it was partially just like, where I fell in the higher, like where I fell in the order of children and the fact that I [chuckles] usually didn't, like just take criticism. I would get pissed and like take, and like dish it back, and that was not okay in our household. So it will, always led to just anger and conversation. Like my dad would never admit that he was wrong. So if like, we had a disagreement, and I knew or thought he was wrong, like it was always going to lead to screaming and me like sobbing and hitting myself so it was just inevitable.

E

Evan Hurst 16:40

[coughs]. Excuse me. Yeah. Do you have any other significant memories of your high school or even just like your preteen years?

A

Abby Griffith 16:53

Yeah, I, I [laughs] had this friend all through elementary school. She was my best friend. And we were both really shy at that time, and like very not good at socializing [chuckles]. And so for a long time, it was just the two of us. And then later on in middle school, we made friends with a group of girls and, but we were still really close. And her mother like hated that she spent so much time individually with me. And she would tell her, like, if you don't spend time with other kids, then you can't spend time with Abby. And when [laughs], when we got to high school, our freshman year we all lived like a half an hour drive or so away from our high school. And so this group of girls' parents would take turns carpooling us just to high school. And, and somehow in the midst of all of that this mother got really - my friend's mother got really upset with me and like, left me at school one time or something. I don't know, there was just a lot of anger and it wasn't clear why and, and I was making new friends.

A

Abby Griffith 18:15

And maybe that was upsetting to her that I made additional friends or something, but [chuckles] she called my mother to like, vent or complain about me and admits, and my mom told me about the conversation later. And amongst that whole conversation, was

her telling my mom that like, "Abby doesn't even like any of the boy bands and she never talks about crushes she has on boys, and she's a lesbian". And then she was like, "have a good day" and they hung up [laughs]. And so I don't know it's funny because like, at that time, I wasn't like, it didn't make me scared or it didn't feel like - I didn't feel vulnerable about that I guess. I just felt like that's so bizarre. And like, I don't know, it's so, it definitely didn't touch on me like maybe it could have I guess. But it was definitely an interesting, like now an interesting moment of just somebody maybe seeing me in a way [laughs] that I didn't see myself. And yeah so that was an interesting social situation. And then when I was in high school, like I had a lot of other friends, like I had a lot of, I was pretty comfortable socially. I did have this like period when, my sophomore year of high school, when I had another close friend where it was just the two of us, did a lot of things just one on one, and which never seem to end well with me, but [laughs] this friend, she was mad at me for something.

A

Abby Griffith 19:44

I think I like, I told another friend something that we had done over the weekend. Like something stupid, and apparently it was supposed to be private. And she was really angry with me, and so she sent me this long email about, listing all of the many ways that I had wronged her and like the thing that she was mad at me for, that I had to - didn't even remember half of them. And I was just like, and this is pretty early, like we didn't really, there wasn't, you know email was new to us. It was my AOL account [chuckles]. But I got this email and I was just really hurt and really just like, just devastated. And my mom was like, "You should call her and like, talk to her". And so I called her. And she was at work. And I said, "can we talk". And she's like, "well, I'm at work". And I was like, "well, if you have a break, can we maybe go for a walk or something". And she's like, "you want to go for a walk with me", and like, kind of made fun of me with her class, with her or with her coworkers. And it was this weird moment of like, this insinuation that I wanted something that was weird or abnormal and, and that wasn't something that I would have - I don't know. It was it was a funny moment of like, oh, you're accusing me of something more than just wanting to talk to my friend. And though I didn't want that with her, it was like, it was another kind of moment of, I don't know, an interesting, I don't know, accusation to make to me, I guess. But yeah, it's interesting. Like I was very content socially for the most part though with my friends. My dad would say to me things like, "if you're the way you are with your, if you're the way you are with us with your friends", and I don't know, like "you must be different with them because otherwise I don't know how you'd have any friends" [laughs]. But I did. So yeah, I think things are a lot happier for me socially, like in school and swimming than they were at home.



Evan Hurst 21:38

You mentioned a little bit about AOL coming in [laughs]. How did you handle all of the new technologies that were coming out?



Abby Griffith 21:45

Um, I think fine. We didn't have like Facebook or anything. You know, I had an AOL account [chuckles]. And so it was like, you know, email and like, AIM or aim or whatever. And yeah, I feel like I didn't do a whole lot with it, I, it was just like, AIM with my friends and it wasn't, I didn't have too much drama. I think the most, the most unique or different thing for me that came of having that technology it was, I remember when I was in high school and I went on this, I came to Grinnell for this overnight visit as a prospective student. And I made this friend and, who was, kind of flirting with him, I don't know. And we [chuckles] exchanged information and then like, would chat there, and I always kind of felt this like thrill of like, I don't know this guy very well, my parents don't know about it, but nothing, nothing like controversial came up but it was kind of this like, sort of fun different thing to do and yeah.



Evan Hurst 23:00

Ah, I had a question and it flew away. So yeah, from high school you got into Grinnell.



Abby Griffith 23:13

Yeah.



Evan Hurst 23:14

And how was your general Grinnell experience?



Abby Griffith 23:16

It was good. Yeah, it was, it was good. I think it's really easy to look back on college and wish that you had done certain things differently or that you know, like you had, I don't know, been more involved in this or less involved in that or whatever. But I don't know, I didn't dislike, I didn't have a problem really at Grinnell. I, I started dating, which I had not done before. And I dated, I dated men. I dated one guy for like two weeks or something and then I started this relationship that lasted for a long time. For the rest of college, like mostly on, a little bit off, so yeah. And I was a sociology major, and then later I added the

neuroscience concentration. And I spent a lot of time in the science building, I worked a lot. I, my folks didn't really have money to give me for college. So I had a certain amount that kind of grew every year that I had to raise with my student work funds to, to, you know, to go, to get registered for the next year. So that kept me pretty busy. I had a lot of different campus jobs and a few non-campus jobs.

A

Abby Griffith 24:55

I don't know college was a good time for me because it, it helped me to get away from my parents and a lot of the negative things that were happening at home. And I, I think maybe I went to church at the Catholic Church [chuckles] here like once or maybe twice. I had a, my roommate was also Catholic. And both of us kind of went to a Mass together. And then we were just like, meh [chuckles], and I don't know for sure, but I don't think she went back either. But I know I didn't. And so, yeah, so it was interesting to be in a non-Catholic environment, because it, it allowed me to kind of actually ask questions or, or like, think about things outside of that kind of pressure cooker of like, these are, this is what we all believe. And this is what you know, is right. And yeah, so that was really helpful for me. I, the guy that I was dating for most of college was an atheist who had never belonged to a church. And that was just really great. Like I was just really happy to be around, to be with somebody who didn't have those religious convictions.

A

Abby Griffith 26:09

Yeah, and I did like some extracurricular stuff, but I mean work and classes kept me pretty busy. I thought I would swim in college. And my sophomore year, I tried to join the swim team and I was just like, oh, if I do this, I'll have to either sacrifice friends, school or sleep. And I like all of those things. So [chuckles] I just like, I just was like, "nope, not gonna work". But that was fine because I had enough going on. Yeah, so that, I don't know, I had a lot of, a lot of people that I lived around or got to know early on were international students. So I made a lot of friends in that community. And I also spent a lot of breaks here, partially because I didn't want to go home [chuckles]. And partially because going home meant I could have, I would have irregular hours at the job that I had back home from high school. And I knew if I stayed on campus, I would have more regular work and income, and so I spent a lot of time, even breaks that most people left here. So it just meant that a lot of international folks who couldn't go home were here as well. So that was nice, because those were really great people that I still am close to. And yeah, socially, like things were pretty good here. I would say like, I spent time that I regret a lot of time in like, coupled environments with my boyfriend. So that was a little bit of a like, sometimes I think I would have had different experiences if I'd been single for more of college. So.



Evan Hurst 27:40

What sort of experiences would you had wished had you not?



Abby Griffith 27:43

Um, I mean, maybe I would have been a part of the queer community here [chuckles] and like, that would have been good. If I had kind of, I think, I think when I was in college, or like at the end of college, I started to, like more identify to myself and to a few people as bi, but I still wasn't a part of any queer communities I guess. Or I wasn't really out. So, yeah, that would have been, I think a good thing or a nice environment in which to explore my sexuality. And yeah, I don't know. Just like there's a lot of events and things on campus that I feel like I didn't do or could have done more of, like, go do more readings or things like that just because, and maybe I would have done the same, but just because I was too busy being with this person and we both like kind of were like, oh, "we'll just do these things together all the time". And yeah.



Evan Hurst 28:44

How was, you mentioned you had some mental health problems in high school. Did those continue on into college?



Abby Griffith 28:50

Um, I think I kind of remained my anxious self. I, I think that when I would have any kind of like problems or things, I would internalize them, which, which meant that it took me longer [chuckles] to figure things out, because I would just blame myself for something that was wrong. So like, when I was taking history classes, I would struggle because I would, it would be really hard for me to get the reading done. And I was like, "God, just get it all together, like do more reading, like, read faster". And it was when I was taking the Civil War history class that I realized I am doing the best I can, but I have really slow, like slow reading speed [laughs]. Like that's why I can't do it not because I have something wrong with me. And so I actually like, I took a W for that and just decided to, every day I would, every time I should have gone to that class, I would go to the reading lab instead to work on my reading speed. And so there are things like that where like, if I had just, like I could have probably figured that out in high school, but I was a good enough student that if I was slow at reading something, I would just kind of intuit the answer, like, figure it out, even if I hadn't done the reading that I wanted to. But I did a lot of that, kind of just internalizing that myself, that I was just a failure or bad at something. So when I was a junior, my boyfriend was trying to figure out like, what to do with himself after he

graduated.

A

Abby Griffith 30:22

And he had a lot of anxiety and a lot of just, was just having a hard time like, figuring things out or having motivation to figure things out. And, and that was really stressful for me to be around that, and just like, it felt like it was our problem and I felt like you know, I couldn't do a lot about it. And so I started getting really anxious and finally realized, like there was something I could do about that. And so I started seeing, I started going to the walk-in therapy on campus. And then I went, I found a therapist, Jeff, who I really liked. And so I would go only when I knew he was going to be the one who was there. And then eventually, I started seeing him outside of the college and just became his patient. So that was really crucial for me to have. Finally, to work on the, you know, my anxiety. And for a long time, when I would go to therapy, it would be like, I would either wait too long to go and be a huge ball of anxiety before I went, or even if I didn't, I would just go there and I would just start talking about what's going on and just burst into tears. And that was like, every time it was just an acute thing that was really hard for me, and I would just burst into tears and then talk and then come you know two weeks later and do the same thing over and over again. So it wasn't even dealing with like larger issues. It was just management of my, kind of immediate, superficial anxiety. So yeah.

A

Abby Griffith 32:00

Also when I was in college, I told my parents that I wasn't going to church anymore. My mother was really upset. And she said, like, well, my dad, actually, my dad told me that I needed to talk to a priest. And I said, that's fine. I can do that if you want. And then my mom was like, "no, the priests can't know". Because we don't want him to think that we did this. And I was like [chuckles], that doesn't make any sense. Like, you go to church, and I don't so what, but whatever. So I never did talk to a priest. But, but that was really interesting. And like, eye-opening to me the difference between the two, they're two reactions. My, another thing that happened in college was, I really wanted to study abroad in South Africa. And my mother, when I told her that, she, her reaction was extreme, but she was screaming. She was like, if you go you will die. And if you go, it means you don't love us and she was like, hysterical, so I didn't go abroad because I was tired [chuckles] of dealing with her. So that was, that sucked. The other thing that happened with my parents when I was in college was my mom expected me to text her or call, no to call her I guess every night before I went to bed. That was like her expectation of me to know that I was okay. Because she was very anxious and paranoid and stressed and so. So for a long time, I did that, but I would just, like I had a cell phone so I could just call her from anywhere and be like, "yep, in bed, okay, bye". Like and, didn't matter where I

was, or, you know, I just would do that just to appease her. And then I got to a point, at some time in college, when I was just like, I don't have time for this, and I don't have the mental energy for this, like, I'm not gonna do it.

A

Abby Griffith 33:44

And I told her that, and it was a [chuckles] really hard thing for her and really hard thing for me, just like, all of the back and forth about, "you need to do this for your mother and you know, why can't you do this for me and why don't you love me and blah, blah, blah". So I think that was important. And some version of that and some degree of that is something that like I've always struggled with her about just like boundaries.

A

Abby Griffith 34:10

And yeah, I stopped going to church. I, I still wasn't out to my family, or really like to most people, like I was kind of out to myself, I guess. I do remember when I was in college, a classmate of mine from high school died and they suspected it was a suicide. And my mom [chuckles] read the article about it, and it said that he was active in theater and so she decided that he was gay because he was in theater. And he, she decided that he killed himself because he was gay. So there are a lot of assumptions there. And I remember her being really anxious about that and overwhelmed and telling me that, you know, "if you are gay, or if you like, if you need to tell us anything you, you can and we will always love you and, don't feel like you can't tell us things". And she was like, "I mean I think it's gross but" [chuckles], and I was like, "Oh, like you just destroyed that, like what you said just completely undid the, the moment we were having". But yeah so that was a little bit of a revealing moment as well, so yeah.

E

Evan Hurst 35:18

What did you do for fun in college?

A

Abby Griffith 35:21

Um, what did I do for fun in college. I mean, I don't know. I went to Harris parties. I went to movies. I don't know, we played games, like card games and board games and stuff. Yeah, I didn't drink a lot, actually. But, and the people I hung out with didn't drink much either, so I think that was kind of just our speed I guess. But yeah. I don't know we went to a campus events, like concerts and things, plays. We were like, you know, when it was nice we would go to Dari Barn. So yeah, just like pretty typical. I don't know, well I don't know, it's difficult but you know we did a lot of just hanging out and mostly stayed around here. Sometimes

you know we'd go into town, like go to a Chong Garden or there was a pizza place. It's not here anymore. We would go to Jumbos Pizza. Later we would go to Des Moines and go to Jordan Creek and get like, go to movies and overpriced dinner and stuff like that [chuckles], but yeah.

E

Evan Hurst 36:55

And you know, in all your little escapades, like how did you feel about being in like overall Iowa setting?

A

Abby Griffith 37:01

Um, I didn't mind it, I guess. I, you know, my first year here I was very much just on campus. A lot of the time I spent in Grinnell. I was, I was really on campus only and, and didn't do a ton off campus. So the setting didn't really make a huge difference. But I kind of liked that it wasn't, I mean, where I grew up, it was like five minute drive to the mall and anything you needed was right there, and I kind of liked that it wasn't just like, you could just go and spend money, you know, so easily.

A

Abby Griffith 37:42

And then I didn't drive or have a car so like, being in a smaller place was nice for just getting around. I got a bike and I would just like ride around places. When I, like after my freshman year I spent every summer and some of my other breaks too on campus or in, I guess in the summer I was in a, I was in town. But I spent, I spent them in Grinnell instead of back home. And so it was nice to be able to just kind of you know, bounce around town on my bike and, and kind of live cheaply and have all my friends nearby and stuff. So yeah, I kind of enjoyed that. Especially as they got to know the town a little bit more. I really didn't get to know the town super well until after I graduated. But I did have apartments I would live in over the summer, with, it was always like, more of us than there were bedrooms, you know. Like just to be, to live really cheaply and easily so. And for several of the summers my boyfriend was here too, so that was kind of nice.

A

Abby Griffith 38:50

Oh, that was the other thing [chuckles]. Another thing that happened in college was my boyfriend, I would, like I was in the dorms and then he was, he had a single on campus. And then he was like, he had an apartment off campus, after he graduated. He's a year older than me in school. And he, I would stay at his place. And my mother, I knew she would not want to know that or like, would not want that. And so, but she always wanted

to know where I was or what I was doing. So if I called her to be like, "I'm going to go to bed" or whatever. I remember [chuckles], I would, I'd be like, she could tell if I was walking somewhere, right? And I'm like, "I'm walking home" or whatever. And it was just like, I was always lying about where I was, just to make her feel more comfortable. Including, I'd be like, "I'm walking to the library right now". Even though I was walking to my boyfriend's, and so it was just this weird, like, I remember my senior year, right after my senior year, I guess he moved in with me. And she was just so appalled. And I was just like, seriously, this is, you didn't think anything else was going on? Like you just thought that this was the first time we were alone in a room together? Like seriously. So yeah, it was just a little bit of like, I mean, she got over it. But it was definitely something that I knew she would be angry about or upset about. So I just hid that from her and she didn't ask questions.

E

Evan Hurst 40:19

Cool, cool, cool. And then in terms of when you graduated, you know, how was post-grad? What did you end up doing?

A

Abby Griffith 40:26

Um, when I was a senior at Grinnell, I applied to a shit-ton of jobs that I mostly didn't hear back from at all. And at some point, in my spring semester, my professor who, her name is Nancy Rempel-Clower - she was my, she wasn't my advisor, but she was kind of an informal advisor to me in college. I went to her a lot for academic questions or like, whatever support and stuff. And she taught some of the neuroscience classes I took and psychology as well. And she asked me if I was interested, oh, I had worked for her. I'd taken care of the lab rats as a student. And she asked me if I was interested in this job that they were creating for the neuroscience department. It was a lab technician job, but it was, it was mostly curricular design and lab-setup for this new component of the neuroscience 250 class. It was like, they wanted to add a lab. So they needed to develop the curriculum, and come up with all this, what we're going to do and how we're going to do it and all this stuff. So. And collaborate with these three different professors, who were the core of that department at the time and, and I was like, "yeah that'd be great, I would love to do that". I thought maybe I wanted to go to grad school and be a neuroscientist. And so I was like, that would be perfect. You know, I could do that for a little while, and then, and it was a term position. So I, she told me you know, that they were interested in hiring me for this. And then I didn't hear anything for a while and I just kept applying for jobs. And then maybe sometime in that summer, I was living here and working still on campus and off campus. And she was like, she sent me the job description and the offer and I'm like, "okay, cool". So I did that.

A

Abby Griffith 42:22

And I realized that like, I don't really like to work with undergraduates, and I [chuckles] don't want to sit in a lab, mostly by myself, or with a few other people. And like, the science takes forever to get results, or to move forward. And that's super annoying and boring for me. And I just [chuckles] was like, "oh, I don't want to do this. I don't want to be an academic. I don't want to be a scientist". And so yeah, I just like, pretty early on I think in that job, I got kind of, I was like, "I'm gonna stay at this job for now, but I also", and it was only two years, but I was also like, "oh, I don't want to pursue this". So it really taught me what I didn't want, which was good to know. So yeah, I did that for about two years. And when the term ended, I started applying for jobs again. And by that time, I had a lot of people around here who I was really close to, like I went, especially when my my boyfriend and I broke up in 2010. And that was a little bit before the job ended. And I started making some really good friends around here and I just like, oh I'm just gonna look for more jobs locally. I like living here. I have good friends here. And so I took this job as an optometric assistant at an eye doctors office. Kind of fun. You know, you'd dilate people's eyes and whatever. Do little tests. Really shitty pay, was like \$10 an hour. I could barely, I couldn't really afford to pay my student loans and eat and live, like it was always very close. Right after I got that job, I realized this is stupid, I can't afford this. And I was getting really stressed about it. And just was so anxious, like I had a short period where I didn't eat very much at all because I was so anxious. And yeah, so that was bad [chuckles]. I left there, because I was just like, this is not gonna work. I thought about moving elsewhere. And then my therapist actually knew this guy who was looking for a receptionist, who could pay \$15 an hour and I was like, okay, that's about what I was, what I was making in my college job, I know I can afford that. And so I, I did that.

A

Abby Griffith 44:44

I did that for about 15 months. And that was, it was good. There were a lot of problematic things about that job and about that position, who I worked for. But it was a good experience for me and that, I was more exposed to medical stuff and working with patients, but it was mostly on the phone and making appointments and just doing pretty like yeah, reception work. And I realized that like I, one that I couldn't keep doing that for forever, like, I wasn't gonna make any more money doing it pretty much than I was. And I didn't want to stay in that job for much longer. And I wanted to work with patients, but not at that level. I wanted to do more. So that's when I left for nursing school. So actually, before I went to nursing school, I had to do some prereqs for college, like for classes that they didn't have at Grinnell or I didn't take at Grinnell. And so [chuckles] I ended up going, like I couldn't afford to take classes part time, which they had to be all consecutive, and to pay rent and work and stuff. So I ended up going back home for a little while. And I worked in a psychiatric unit as a technician, as a mental health tech, as a CNA basically.

And took part time community college classes until I could get to nursing school.



Evan Hurst 46:21

And where'd you go to nursing school?



Abby Griffith 46:23

I went to Creighton University, in Nebraska. So I went to, not their main campus but a satellite campus, also kind of a rural area in Nebraska. And it was an accelerated program so I could do it in 12 months. If, as long, I mean I had to get the prereqs first, but it was kind of a bachelor to bachelor kind of thing. So that was really nice to just get it done. And it was kind of, I was a little bit apprehensive about re-entering a Catholic environment, but also Creighton is a different kind of Catholic environment in some ways than the ones I was raised in. And it was such a quick thing that there wasn't much time [chuckles] for there to be Catholic indoctrination or whatever. I mean, we I think there was one thing in the beginning where we were supposed to go to church for some kind of symbolic thing. And then we had these little values that we had to reflect on in our weekly journal, like clinical journal. And they were Ignatian, which was the religious bent of the school, but that was fine. I could pull my, bullshit my way through that. And not everybody, most of the people who I went to school with were not Catholic. The professors were mostly Catholic, I think, but not the students. So yeah, that was a very intense period, but I also I went into it a lot more mentally healthy than in my first time around in college. And kind of approached it more like a job than a, whatever [chuckles] I said the first time. Which is just the stressful all inclusive, all-encompassing life experience. And that helped a lot. And I just like, you know, ate, slept, and breathed nursing curriculum [chuckles] until I was done. So yeah, and in the last six weeks with the program, you're supposed to do a preceptorship at a hospital and it's one-on-one with a nurse. And I was able to do it here at Grinnell, at the hospital here with a nurse who had her BSN. So it allowed me to kind of get to know the hospital here and for them to get to know me so that it was easier for me to apply and get a job after I was done.



Evan Hurst 49:04

So you moved around a lot in this period it seems.



Abby Griffith 49:07

Yeah, a little bit, yeah.

E Evan Hurst 49:08
How did that, you know, make you feel?

A Abby Griffith 49:11
Um, I think I felt very, well, do you mean physically moving or? Or both I guess.

E Evan Hurst 49:17
Yeah.

A Abby Griffith 49:17
Yeah, I did. I felt a little unsettled and just kind of scattered. And it just kind of like I didn't have a, it was hard to see what was coming next or hard to understand, hard to think - imagine what would be the next thing on the road for me.

A Abby Griffith 49:35
I mean, I think by the time I left here, by the time I left to go take my nursing prereqs, I had a lot of really close friends. Or I had a couple of different social groups that I was very close to that was kind of my emotional support and felt like family to me. And I think that was helpful. Because even when I was living in Illinois and living in Nebraska, I would come back and visit or I would keep in touch with those people. And that made me feel a little bit more grounded. So, yeah, I think that I kind of felt like, when I was not here, I didn't want to make new connections [chuckles]. Which I mean kind of failed. But of course, I did make friends in different places, because that's a thing that people do. But I didn't want to have any reason to be stuck or to feel like, to feel like I wanted to stay in either Rockford or in Hastings. Because I was like, this is not part of my game, large plan. Like my big plan is get this done and then go back to Grinnell. So that helped me to kind of feel like "okay, this is just time you just have to get through the time", which I don't know. It was something I talked to my [chuckles] therapist about, about the health, whether or not it was healthy to kind of feel like "put your life on hold, like don't live life right now just do the things you needed to do". So, eh. But yeah, that was the other thing I think, is that my therapist who I've had since my sophomore year, or my junior year of college, that relationship persisted through all of it. Like I, if I wasn't living in Grinnell, we did phone appointments, and it made a huge difference. It was a very important thing for me to just kind of ground me and keep me sane and keep me from just kind of spiraling out with anxiety about this or that, so, and just kind of helped me keep working on myself. So.



Evan Hurst 51:39

And what role did like sexuality and queerness play in all this shuffling?



Abby Griffith 51:44

Um, well. Um, I think that after I, after that breakup. So I was with this guy Chad for six years, and so I, you know, it was a heart, it was a little bit of time to recover from that. It was a long relationship. And I wasn't super eager to date immediately after that. And I also was not making myself super available anyway. So that was a big part of me not wanting to be stuck in another location or feel pulled to another location, was just like, I'm not gonna date. I'm not going to be with anybody. And I was more like, honest to myself I think at that time. Like, I'm attracted to men and women. But just was like, but I'm not gonna do anything about it. Like, I'm not gonna [chuckles], I'm not gonna even like go on any dates or anything. And so, and I hadn't had like, a ton of dating experience. So that wasn't super hard for me [chuckles]. So then, yeah, I mean, when I was in college, at nursing school, I think that like, I wasn't really out to people there. But I think that some of them could maybe tell that I was queer, I don't know. And so I mean, that was just something that was just I think, I started thinking more about my sexual, sexuality and my sexual orientation. And that started more coming to the front of my consciousness. When I, then when I came here and was working, I was so focused on my career, and I was so focused on just getting through each shift and feeling like I can do this. And just, there's a lot of like, really a steep learning curve in terms of just feeling comfortable in your own role. And you know, just like "oh my god, these people's lives are in my hands", you know. And do I know what I'm doing? And like, do I know how to do this or that.



Abby Griffith 53:43

And so there was a period when I was just really focused on my job and my work, and then I just kind of realized that I was missing something and that I wanted to date again. There was someone in my life who I was friends with, who I was, I had a crush on. And I [chuckles] had a feeling that it wasn't mutual, but I kind of confessed that to her in an attempt to, I don't know, I think that part of me and my, like, I knew that it wasn't gonna go anywhere, but that I needed to get that out of my head to move on to more realistic options. So she was, she was I think flattered, but annoyed. So. So yeah.



Abby Griffith 54:34

I kind of started thinking about dating and I had this kind of friend who I didn't know very well, but I thought was cute and I asked out to a movie. And I didn't even really know if I

was asking her out on a date or not, or if it was just a friend thing, but I was like, but I'd be okay if it was a date. And I think she was in the same boat, kind of. So I asked her to this movie [chuckles]. And it was horrible movie, it was so bad. It was, so I used to go to movies all the time with my one, my friend Emily. And we would always go to movies at the Strand, which only has, you know, three screens and always plays horrible movies. And there'd be these movies that were just, they looked so horrible and so cheesy or so just over the top awful plots. And we would go and we would just make fun of them. And one time there was no else in the theater. So we could just yell at the screen. And it was just really fun and just, you know, cheap entertainment in a town with fewer movie screens. And so I thought this movie was gonna be so ridiculous. I was like, this movie looks stupid. And I told her up front I, you know, I sometimes I go to these movies with a friend and we laugh at them. Well, we went and it was horrible. But she like, was really like, there was this really sad part and she was really devastated by it and she was crying, which is bad for a date, you know. Like preferably no [both laugh]. And so [chuckles], so I was like, "Oh fuck, this is not good". And I realized I was really like, that I cared. Like it affected me. Like I was, I felt bad and I wanted to change that. And so [chuckles] I, I had her, like I said, "well can we do another movie but this time [chuckles] I'll, it'll be a movie I've seen before so like, I know it won't have this horrible sad ending" [chuckles]. And so I had her come over to my place and we did a movie night.

A

Abby Griffith 56:35

And I showed her this queer romantic comedy that I love called Big Eden. Yeah, it's excellent. And it's not at all sad. It's really sweet and it's like a world free of homophobia, which somehow is very enchanting to me. And so yeah, so we watched that and we had fun and yeah. We started dating, and she didn't like the word dating though. She is very allergic to commitment, it seems. So she was like, at some point, she was like, "we're seeing each other with intention". And I'm like, okay. And so, so yeah, that was really fun. It meant that I was like, more out to more people in a way that was very not just very casual. Like, I didn't make a point of going to people and being like, "I just want to talk to you". You know [chuckles], just like, "oh, yeah, I'm dating this woman". And I have really great friends here who are very liberal and progressive and LGBT-friendly. So here, it wasn't really a thing at all. Well, I should say socially, it wasn't.

A

Abby Griffith 57:50

At work, it was different. Like I, when I first went out with her, I was really excited because I was like, I think this is a date. It's gonna be great. And I told people at work. I was like, I just switched my night shift to day shift. And so I was talking to my co-workers on the day shift. And they were, I was like, I'm going on a date tonight, I think. And they were like,

"wow, who is he?" And I said, "oh, it's a woman". And my co-workers were like, "oh, okay". Like, didn't know what to say, didn't want to be rude, I guess. And so didn't really say much. And later, I think they were all like, asking the other shift, you know, "did you know that she was gay? Did she tell you guys? We didn't even know this about her". And it was just this big, like, "oh, my God!" And that was, so that was kind of an interesting thing to be a part of. And yeah, I have a co-worker who later I, after I'd worked with the day shift for a while, I asked her once, I was like, "how do you feel about working with me? Do you feel like I'm a good nurse, like a good co-worker?" And she was like, "yeah why would you ask that, you're great". She's like, "the only time I ever had a problem with you is the day that you told me that you date women". I was like [chuckles], "oh, okay". So, or the other thing is that when I would talk about, like dating women to her or in her, in her company she will, she'll just be like, she would talk about her husband a lot, like, remind me that he existed. And I'm like, I don't, I'm not, I wanted to be like, "no, I am not interested in homophobes. I'm not, you're not my type". But, um [both chuckle], but yeah, so she [chuckles] was like kind of a piece of work but, still is, but yeah.

A

Abby Griffith 59:25

So that was an interesting - yeah. I just kind of enjoyed watching people squirm, I guess. I think what was interesting about that, as opposed to if I had started working there and was out from the beginning, was that they knew me and so they trusted me as a nurse. They knew me, they had an opinion about me already, and most of them I think, was pretty positive. And then they had to deal with this new information about me and decide if it changed their opinion of me or how they felt about me. I think that was really hard for a lot of people. So I had one friend, I was friends with this woman at work for a while, and this other woman would tell her like, "be careful, I think Abby has a crush on you. I just want to warn you". And she was like [chuckles], "no, Abby doesn't have a crush on me. I know who she has a crush on. And it's not me". And so that was an interesting, there was this threat, you know, like suddenly I'm gonna you know, hit on all the women at work. So yeah, that was that was kinda interesting, but. But yeah, I was dating this woman, or not dating, I was "seeing with intention" [both chuckle]. And it was not a very healthy situation in some way. It wasn't, it was very casual. There wasn't a lot of dating or a lot of seeing each other happening. She worked a lot and made a lot of excuses. I just kind of was like, well, this is happening, like it will happen now and then we kind of broke it off. And then we started back up after a little while.

A

Abby Griffith 61:10

It was a weird way to, this is like the first woman that I'd ever dated. So there was a whole new world of you know, like being with, being physically with a woman. But yet she was

pretty hesitant in some ways. So that was like, and she, it wasn't her first time dating women, but I think it was more about our levels of commitment and the relationship. But, so it was a little bit confusing. There [chuckles] was this one corner, my friend and I would walk downtown talking, and I would rant about things and I, there was this one corner I remember multiple times of scanning it and me being like, "I'm sexually frustrated! [laughs]" Because [chuckles] it was not going how I wanted it to go. There's not a lot of things happening unfortunately. So yeah, so that happened for a while. At some point, she told me that she wanted to be able to sleep with other people. And I was like, "I don't know if I want that". And she was like, "well, I need, I can't be monogamous". And then she left for a really long work trip. And yeah, she had left it like, previous to her leaving for this trip, she had been like, you know, basically what I want is if one of us sleeps with somebody else, then the next time we see each other, we'll tell the other like, "oh, hey, but by the way, you know, I slept with somebody else. Hey, let's have dinner". And so [chuckles] I was not super comfortable with that. But I also was just kind of like, I don't know what to do with this. And I didn't, I just kind of, I don't know, I kind of just decided to be there for the time being. And then yeah, she left, she went out of town. We really weren't in close contact, she was very distant to me.

A

Abby Griffith 63:08

And I, one day at work, I had this patient who, you know, it was listed on the contact information like that her wife was her, her contact person. I was like, that's cool. I like queer people. I like to, I like working with people who are, who I know are accepting of me at work. And so I came up to them and I was like, "oh, I'm gay too". And they really liked me. I was, I worked with them for a week or something. She was there for a while. And so [chuckles] so one day, they came in with this friend, they brought their, this friend of theirs in to visit. Well I just thought that she was visiting, and you know, visiting her sick friend. And [chuckles] she brought a friend as well. And so the woman that they brought in, I knew her, she's, I knew her from town. Like I knew who she was, but we didn't really know each other, I guess we just knew who each other was. And unbeknownst to me, they were trying to hook me up with this woman. It was very subtle. It was like, not on my radar. I had no idea. And this friend who was visiting was, had just gotten a job at a hotel here in town, Hotel Grinnell. And she was really, I was talking to her and I was kind of like, "oh, what about you? Like, do you work at the college?" And she's like, "no". And so yeah, so they left and [chuckles] the other woman Facebook friended me and I was like, "oh okay", and I still did not know they were trying to hook me up.

A

Abby Griffith 64:42

And at some point in that, I think that day, I mentioned to, when they were all present,

that I had a girlfriend. Or I probably just said I'm dating somebody or whatever. And so yeah, maybe a month or two months later, I was at the coffee shop in town. And visiting a friend, Cally [chuckles] was there. She walked by me. I was sitting reading a book, and she walked by me, and I saw her and I thought "she looks familiar". And I thought "she's cute". And then I just put my head down and thought, "yeah, everybody who looks familiar is usually a student in this coffee shop, and they're babies, just move on" [chuckles]. And so she sat down near me, I didn't even realize it. And turns a few minutes later and says, "Are you nurse Abby?" And I was like, "yeah", and she's like [chuckles], she's like, "I visited, you know, so-and-so in the hospital". And you know, "I'm here, we're here at the hotel". And I said, "oh, yeah", I was like, "I remember you". And we started talking, and I don't know, I just asked for her number. I was really interested in her and feeling very distant from my other person, such as she was, and just like, you know what, let's see where this goes. Like I can be, I can be not monogamous as much as, you know [both chuckle]. And so yeah. So that, so we started seeing each other, and it was great. I really liked her a lot. People who were mutual friends or saw us in public and reported back to the girl who I was seeing, so when she got back I told her what was going on and nothing really had happened. Nothing like physical had happened, we were just talking and spending a lot of time together. And she was pretty pissed, which I thought was pretty hypocritical. But so shortly after that, I broke things off with her, just because I didn't want to be with two people. And I really liked Cally. And yeah, so I, I started dating Cally, except kept dating Cally, and I am still with her and I live, she lives with me. We live together in a house, and we have dogs and cats together.

A

Abby Griffith 67:14

Um [chuckles], and yeah, that worked out really well. And yeah, I think, you know, it's interesting. So my first relationship with a woman was this kind of confusing and stressful thing. But in a way, it was nice to have this beginning with somebody, and then be kind of more sure of myself and my sexuality with this person I really cared for and really wanted to be with. And that was a really good experience. Yeah, sorry. I've been talking nonstop for a long time.

E

Evan Hurst 67:58

No worries, no worries. Great content. Yeah, so in terms of you and Cally, like how do you two find other queer people in Iowa?

A

Abby Griffith 68:10

Yeah, that's a good question. Um, we know some people in town I guess. Actually

[chuckles], the person that was there, that this patient was trying to set me up with, the reason they were together that day was because they're friends and Cally actually ended up staying with her friend for a while. And which was kind of awkward. Because I knew she was interested in me, but um, or later found it out. But yeah, so she's a queer woman.

A

Abby Griffith 68:45

And, yeah, we have some other, a few other queer friends in town, not a ton, but Cally's really good best friend from college lives in Des Moines with his partner. And I really enjoy our friendship with them. I really like them individually as people, and then I feel like, just being with other queer folks like that, those two coupled together just feels really comfortable. And just it feels kind of homey and I really enjoyed that a lot. We go up to their place or they come, and they call our house the vacation house or something [chuckles]. And we call their guestroom their room. So the guest room is, they stay in our guest room a lot. And um, so yeah, so that's really nice. It's not super easy to find queer people here. So we were looking at dogs at this dog shelter out of town, and we were talking to this woman about dogs online and I Facebook stalked her and I was like, she kind of looks like a queer person [both laugh]. And so we got to know her and indeed, she is a queer person. She's great. We really enjoy spending time with her. And she was very helpful with the dogs and stuff. And then she was like, did you know about this Facebook group Lesbians of Iowa? And we were like, no [chuckles]. So now I'm in that group. And I think Cally is too. Yeah, Cally is too. But I mean, I don't really interact with people in it that much, but it's, it makes me happy. Like it's nice to have that. Yeah, and there's a few of us at the hospital. There's a surgeon, Dr. Coster, an out queer person, who is in a relationship with another guy and now is married to his partner. And um, and yeah, I'm not really friends with them, but I know them and there's a few other people I know of and I, I joke with them that we should start our social group at the hospital called, 'cause the hospital is called GRMC, that we should try to start GayRMC.

A

Abby Griffith 71:04

And [chuckles] they're all like, whatever. So yeah, actually Dr. Coster was like, another thing that, when I first started working at the hospital, I heard some really inappropriate, homophobic comments made about him. And that was a really illuminating thing for me to hear and to know about my social environment there. And it kind of makes my work environment my social standing in my work environment kind of feel tenuous at times. Because I, now I'm one of the veterans in my shift in my department. And I think that brings me like, certain level of respect and deference. And I think people trust me, people know that I'm good at what I do. But at the same time, I think there's another piece of things which is, I feel like I won't belong there. Or I'm not, it's not a place that's meant for

me because of, just views of people who work there. Including people that I have at various times considered friends. So that's kind of an interesting, and I think that's probably different for people like Dr. Coster. Because it's a different social circle than a physician circle and stuff. So, but so that's, I don't know, that's just something I'm always aware of, is just the homophobia of people in town. And it's something that I encounter there and don't encounter in other social circles I'm in, in town, like the college affiliated people. So it's just kind of two different worlds to kind of straddle. But yeah, I don't know, I, you asked me about how I meet queer people. But yeah, I hope to meet more queer people. I think that it's really hard because if you make a choice to live in Grinnell, then you're kind of knowing going in that you're going to be somewhat isolated in terms of other LGBT people, but yet yeah, I don't know. So that's, I think that's complicated and hard and I think there's a good reason why people move away [chuckles]. Like, don't stay put because there's limited, you know, it's limiting for dating and things. So.

E

Evan Hurst 73:26

And then, in terms of, are you and Cally like, outwardly romantic in public, within town?

A

Abby Griffith 73:34

Um, yeah, I guess I would say generally, yes. I mean, I think it depends on the moment and depends on, I don't know, there's, it's variable. But I do think we're not into a super amount of PDA, but sometimes we hold hands, or do other things that would probably connect for people. I think that, in general, I would say the way that we dress and the way that we look like, is like, could be a giveaway for some folks. But I guess it depends on like, who you are and what you know [both chuckle], or what do you think. So, yeah, I think that we are more or less comfortable here being outwardly gay, but it depends. I mean, I think there's moments when you kind of worry or like, you know that you should be careful. So I know that there's definitely people who are very homophobic or you know, there's hate crimes and things that happen. So I think that there's, there's reason to be cautious. I also think there's a lot of people who are not very aware and it would take a lot for them to connect the dots. And that kind of makes me laugh. Because we live together [chuckles]. And there's just people who will make comments or just always assume that we're friends, so. That we're gal pals, as we call it. So yeah, so that's kind of sometimes a blessing [chuckles]. It would be nice to be able to feel a little bit more comfortable about being seen in public, for sure, but I don't know. I think it's a mixed bag for me because I've lived here for so long that I feel mostly comfortable. Like, "oh, I know this place and these people", but then you just don't know who is around you all the time.

E Evan Hurst 75:53
Well, just a couple little like wrap-up questions.

A Abby Griffith 75:56
Sure.

E Evan Hurst 75:57
Where are you right now, and like how do you feel in terms of your general life?

A Abby Griffith 76:02
Um, I feel pretty good. I am really happy with my little family, with Cally and our pets [chuckles] and our home. It's really nice to have your own house and and yeah. It's, it's a good situation. I'm really in love, and I don't know. We have a lot of, a lot of good times.

A Abby Griffith 76:37
And I feel like we work well together. Like even when things are hard or bad, we can figure them out, which is really nice. I feel like we communicate really well. So I think [chuckles] I've tested on things that didn't work in other relationships that work in this one, which is good. Yeah, it's the end of winter, and winter is a really hard time and I feel like maybe my seasonal affective whatever is lifting a little, which is nice. I think I've been a little bit disconnected from friends recently. And so I'm hoping that will change as the weather improves and I want to leave my house more. So yeah, and I'm trying to figure things out at work. I, there's some stressful social things at work, dealing with like a bully. Not bullying me, but it's still a thing. And dealing with some, like just wanting to grow, and trying to figure out how to grow in my workplace. While like staying at the same place. So that's just something to kind of keep working on.

A Abby Griffith 77:44
Yeah. I don't know. I, I feel like there's always things I want to do more of, like, be more involved in town. Or, I was more involved politically for a while after the election, and then I think that, I get really burnt out and feel despair a lot and hopeless about things. And that makes it hard for me to stay engaged. Or I get anxious. But yeah, I don't know. I still have my therapist. I still have anti-anxiety meds and a lot of coping skills that helps. And yeah, I still have a lot of really good friends here. Things are really strange with my family.

And that's normal [chuckles]. It's like, it's more normal than not, I guess. So.

E

Evan Hurst 78:36

How does your family feel about you and Cally?

A

Abby Griffith 78:39

Yeah, that's a good question. Um, when I first came out to my mom, so when I was dating this other woman first, I came out to her then. And she, I came out to her as bi and she was like, fine with it. She was kind of quiet and too fine with it. And I was like, okay, you're usually having a reaction right now like, this is suspicious to me. But great, whatever. And my dad doesn't really say anything one way or the other, I guess about it. But he seems fine.

A

Abby Griffith 79:14

And I think the more time passes, the less I am interested in dating men, even if I were not with Cally. Because I think men, especially, well, I should say, straight men and white men, and mostly the overlap there, is not my thing in general. I mean, I know individuals who I like, you know, but they're horrible sometimes. A lot of times. And so [chuckles] I'm not, that's not really my, yeah, if I was dating a man, and he was a straight man, then I'd be like, eh no. So [chuckles] I, because of that, I've started identifying more, I've been, started to call myself a lesbian, even though my past relationships with men exists in the world. But going forward, I feel more like a lesbian or like a queer person, than as a bisexual person. And I've voiced that in much more casual ways to my mother, like, I'll just jokingly call myself a lesbian. Not jokingly, but in passing, I'll just reference it. Or like, I made myself this t-shirt. Last time I was at my parents house and it said, "lez dog mom". And my mom gets really upset and or kind of quiet. And one time I said something on the phone about being a lesbian, and she was like, "well, but I thought you were bi like, you're not a lesbian, you're bi". And I was like, "okay. Uh huh". And just kind of didn't know how to react to that. So I think that I have a feeling that she has this hope that someday, I will end up with a guy. Like she doesn't necessarily dislike Cally, but she doesn't want me to be with a woman. And so if, if she thinks that I'm bi then it's gonna happen, and then I'll give her grandbabies in a natural, to her, way.

A

Abby Griffith 81:07

And so [chuckles] that is my impression of her feelings about it. Yeah, and so that kind of sucks. Especially thinking about my future with Cally. I really love Cally and like, see

myself with her and we'd like to someday get married. And I would prefer because they are in my life, my family be more on board and be happy for us genuinely. And my relationship with mom is very difficult and complicated. And I just don't know if there's a way to like, make that happen. Or to like, get through to her in any productive way. I've kind of voiced some of that to my dad recently, actually. And then when, the next time he saw Cally, he was like, really warm to her and gave her a hug. And really surprised her. And I think that he was, compensating [chuckles] for the things that I said about my mom. So I'm actually really happy about that, because it made me feel like okay, you're, you get it and you see me and you want me to feel good about this. So that was really surprising and nice. But yeah, I think that my parents used to be a lot more nervous and upset about like, you know, sex before marriage and things like that. And then, since I left the church, everyone in my immediate family has left the Catholic Church as well, for various reasons. And so I think that they don't care as much about that. And so that's good. But we don't talk about like, queer life or like, gay sex or anything [laughs]. Like it's not something that's discussed with anyone in my family. So.



Evan Hurst 82:56

We've talked about a lot of maybe a little heavy topics.



Abby Griffith 82:59

Uh huh.



Evan Hurst 82:59

So just end on a nice little, you know, happy note, what are you most proud of that you've done? It's a loaded question.



Abby Griffith 83:06

Yeah. I am most proud of. I think one thing that I'm really proud about is just being honest and open about my mental health struggle, illness struggles and what I have done about that. That's something that doesn't come intuitively to me, because of just the way that those things were viewed growing up. But then now, when I started seeing a therapist, I started to, or I eventually, I started to tell other people that I was seeing a therapist and why. And one of the very best things that came out of that was that my brother started talking to me about that and asked me questions about what was it like to see a therapist and asking for information about that. And that led to him, like getting more help with his mental illnesses. And I'm so grateful that he felt comfortable coming to me. And that that

resulted in him getting help. And especially at the time, like he was in his late teens, early 20s. And, I just think like, you know, he was at a really crucial age in terms of just like, you know, struggling with mental illness, especially as a guy.

A

Abby Griffith 84:31

And I just am so grateful that I was open for that reason alone, and I've had a lot of friends and acquaintances approach me about like, their own mental illness and like, "oh, I saw you're taking, or I heard you talking about therapy, so I decided that I should go back to therapy" or like, "I should start therapy" and "that really helped me". And I think that yeah, like it's something that serves me so well personally, and socially, and it's helped me with my work as a nurse too, to help folks with mental health struggles. So yeah, I'm really happy about that. And I feel like it has made my own struggles and my own journey more meaningful to like, share that with other people and to be open about how I've gotten help. And to like, I hope that my words and things destigmatize therapy and medication in some ways for some people. I think because I'm like, relatively privileged, right, like, I have a job and I have social support and I'm able to, you know, I'm like cisgendered. And I like, there's a lot of ways that I'm able to have social privileges that other people don't, and it to be able to be vulnerable in the way that other people can't. And so I like to use that as much as I can to try to raise that awareness I guess. So yeah. That's something I'm really proud of myself for.

E

Evan Hurst 86:04

Great, great. Well, awesome. Thank you so much for participating.

A

Abby Griffith 86:06

Yeah.

E

Evan Hurst 86:06

in LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa. And yeah, so go ahead and wrap it up now.

A

Abby Griffith 86:12

Okay, great.