

Avery Kimberlin Transcript August 2026

AK: Sounds good to me.

JH: Okay, all right, so I am here with Avery Kimberlin. It has been a decade since we talked, and it's been quite a while since I've seen you. The last time I saw you, you were quite young. How old are you now?

AK: I am 19.

JH: You're 19, and are you in college?

AK: Yes, I am.

JH: What year are you?

AK: I'm a rising sophomore. I just finished my freshman year in the spring.

JH: Okay, and, tell us where you're going to college.

AK: I go to a small liberal arts college about 30 minutes outside, or 30 miles outside of Times Square, called Manhattanville.

JH: Okay, yeah, so you're up in New York. So, it's hard to ask someone to sum up 10 years, but can you tell me a little bit about the last 10 years? And then we'll sort of get to college and talk a little bit about what it's like. Can you tell us about, sort of where you grew up in Denton, what was that like, and just anything that you would like to... that you think kind of helps tell your story over the last few years.

AK: Yeah, I mean, the past 10 years have definitely been something I... I feel like the last time we talked, I was at, you know, a very young age, 10 years has passed, and I feel like since I was in... I'm still in adolescence to an extent. I went through middle school, I went through high school, I went through the pandemic, I went through just a bunch of changes anybody would face along those lines. I... I, learned a lot of my interests, you know, I learned primarily what I want to do with my life. I became really involved and passionate about, like, human rights advocacy and things along that, and decided that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, and that's how I wanted to... that's why I'm going to college, and that's why I chose the state I'm in.

JH: So, how did you... how did you decide that this was what you were interested and wanted to pursue? How were you first exposed to human rights advocacy?

AK: So, for sure, one of, I wouldn't say an internship, I would say an extracurricular I did at high school was I got to write these articles, and I had to do a bunch of research upon just various things. I mean, we did one about juvenile delinquency, we did one about, you know, the border crisis, just things around that, since we did a lot of AI stuff, and part of it, being a writer for this

organization called Spring, I just had to write and sometimes it would end up with me meeting different kinds of people. And the more I looked into... it was a paper about child advocacy and the protection, and how we should, like, extend, the protection laws that child actors have to, like, influencers who use their kids' content. And that's where I really started to get into the human rights and advocacy pull because I just realized, on a personal... coming from a personal level, that... Just give me one second.

JH: Sure.

AK: From just a personal level of all of that work, my parents had never really used me to be an income of social media, and I had never been a dependent on my parents providing for me. I was thankful and fortunate enough for that. So, it just kind of get me into researching, and I would learn about all these tragic cases about, you know, these children being mistreated and things like that. So that's really what got me into it, and then I started to learn more about, you know, the Border crisis going on. I had always been into politics, but I think I had just been not to an extent, a lack of exposure.

JH: So, so it sounds like the first kind of question that really got you was this idea that children were being kind of used. Let me make sure I understand that... that... is it that, like, influencer parents were sort of using and monetizing their family lives, and that children really can't consent to that?

AK: Yeah, and it kind of... to tie this into, my adoption, you know, my parents have been so gracious, they've been very open, they've always been, you know, Avery, whatever you want to do, we'll help you. Whatever information we have, you will know. And my parents have always been really great in that area, and I just couldn't imagine, you know, having a child, and using them for things like that, and not protecting your own child.

JH: That's really interesting. So, you must have really strong feelings about parents, like, just sharing their pictures of their minor children online. I'll see, like, I'll see these videos on Instagram, and it's... it'll be like a little kid having a tantrum, who's, like, 3 or 4 years old. The parent has posted the video, and people are commenting about, you know, disciplining the kid, or... and I always think, when I see these videos, wow, I mean, that person cannot consent to this, this child. All this judgment is coming down, and you know, what is the parent thinking? Maybe they found this amusing when it happened, but don't they have a sense that they're in a sense, exploiting their child.

AK: Yeah, absolutely.

JH: So that, and you said, the border. How did you become interested in the border, and, I mean, it's a big topic right now. There's a lot going on, and sort of, in terms of advocacy work, how do you think about it?

AK: Well, I mean, I grew up in Texas, I did grow... I did grow up, as you know, pretty far from the border, especially staying in the state. But something that really changed my perspective, and I had never had a lot of feelings about the border, just because my parents had never been into talking about things like that, you know what I mean? It just wasn't their field of expertise, they had their own feelings about it, but my junior year, I had... I started making friends of a different culture, and a lot of them were Hispanic, and their parents were illegal, and to just learn about things like that, it's something I had just never been surrounded by, so I had the privilege to not think about it as deeply. And when I got to know these people, and they, you know, they'd be like, oh, we can't do this, like, my mom's undocumented, you know, like, and especially, you know, when the second administration term that Trump's on, everybody, even my roommate in college, my future roommate, who was my friend all freshman year, and she's going to be my roommate in the fall, she was even talking about things like that with her family, like, I've had to take her, you know, to her home, because she's here, because she has three younger brothers under the age of 9.

JH: So, you're... you became aware that maybe some of the assumptions about, you know, sort of the biggest assumption right now that you'll hear is, 'Oh, if they just did it the right way, they wouldn't be in this bind.' It sounds like you were learning that the stories of undocumented people are just more nuanced and complicated than that.

AK: Yeah, exactly. I mean, my whole life, my parents... I mean, my parents have been very much of an advocate of... they definitely have their own thoughts, but my mom especially has been like, Avery, I want you to form your... you know what I mean, your own opinions. But don't get me wrong, she does have her own, and my father has... and my dad has their own, too, and they don't lean the same way. They don't feel the same way I do about these things, but I'm very fortunate they've encouraged me to explore how I feel, you know, as long as I'm not harming anybody and things like that.

JH: So that's interesting. So, you may sometimes, you know, about political issues like immigration. You may not be... you may not be in agreement with your parents, but you guys are able to still communicate and work through that.

AK: Absolutely, we're able to facilitate a conversation, and I think, at least in my mom... I don't really know about my dad, we haven't really touched it, but I know in my mom's experience, like, you know, she's never really thought about things like that, because it just hasn't affected her, and I've been talking to her, and I'm like, Mom, like, I got an easy path... easier path to

citizenship, like, I'm...we've just... I think because of me being adopted a foreign adoption, it's broadened her horizon a lot more, you know what I mean? Having to think about things I might have not traditionally thought of.

JH: Yeah, yeah, and well, that leads me to a question I've been basically asking everybody I've been talking to in these re-interviews, updated interviews, and that is, when you... when you kind of look at what's happening right now with the... with the administration's policies and, pretty aggressive, deportation policies, I've been asking how you see yourself in this, or if you see yourself in it, do you think of yourself as an immigrant, and in the context of what's happening now, do you feel part of the sort of immigrant community, or does it feel like it's so distant in a way because, as you say, you were adopted internationally after the Child Citizenship Act became law, so you guys were all naturalized as part of the adoption process. We didn't even have to go through naturalization proceedings after you came home. That had all happened. I wonder how you sort of see yourself in the context of immigration, given the current climate.

AK: I would say for immigration, I don't know, that's something I've always... I don't know if I'll ever have a definitive definition, because I feel like I would fall right in the middle, because yes, I did immigrate, but when I think about an immigrant, somebody who came to this country, they came with basically essentially nothing, and they've had to work hard, and you know what I mean? And I've definitely had to work, but I don't know if I'll ever align truly with the immigrant identity, because my family especially, they've always treated me as if, you know, I was... obviously, as they should as... I was their own, you know, stuff like that, and I grew up and had a very normal, nice childhood. So, I don't know if I'll ever classify myself as an immigrant in that way.

JH: It sounds like, though, you feel sympathy toward, tell me if I'm wrong, toward assumptions about undocumented people. It sounds like, from what you were saying about your interactions with friends and even your roommate, that your feelings about this are that undocumented people have a lot of different stories, and I don't know, I mean, how do you feel about, you know, ICE roundups and things?

AK: How do I feel about, like, the ICE rounding up?

JH: Yeah, that's... yeah.

AK: What's happening?

JH: to... that's happening to largely, largely, not entirely, but largely Hispanic and Latino people.

AK: I think it definitely we've learned about it, we've talked about it a lot in my human rights classes, and just in general, I've tried to educate myself on it, but I would say it's very scary, I mean, to think that something... ICE isn't really... isn't really bound by a lot of laws. I think we should create more laws for transparency, like we do, like, officers and things like that. But I think it's really scary, and I've talked to my mom a lot about this, and I don't think she understands my fears. Because she's like, well, you know, it's not affecting you, and I'm like, well, that's the thing, like, what did they say in World War II? Like there's some saying, I can't remember, but essentially it is, like, if they came for me, they'll come for you, who's left to protect me? It's things like that. That's what I think about that situation.

JH: Okay, yeah, yeah, that's a very famous poem about, you know, I said, first they came for the teachers, I'm not a teacher, first they came for the, you know, poets, I'm not a poet, and then eventually, then they came for me. So that... that mindset of, it doesn't affect you, so you don't have to worry about it. What you're saying is, hey, you know, I'm worrying about it, because it affects other people, and I think it's wrong. That's what I'm hearing you say.

AK: Yeah, exactly. Just because it's not happening to me doesn't mean I shouldn't care about it.

JH: What's it like to have these... I think it's really great, honestly, and really interesting that you can have these conversations with your mother openly. It's not easy. There's a lot of discussion now about, families being kind of really damaged and torn apart by strong political differences, and it sounds like that's just not the case for you at all. It sounds like you and your mom are really able to talk about things.

AK: Yeah, we definitely are. She's always been a facilitator of, like we might have different, varying opinions, but I mean, you're your own person at the end of the day. I can... as long as I'm learning and I'm not harming anybody, I can have my own opinions. I mean, it's the first... it's literally a god... or not a god, it's a First Amendment right.

JH: So, tell me about, what college has been like. Tell me about the... the sort of transition to college, because, you know, going to Manhattanville, and I'm from New York, so I know exactly where you're in school, and it's so different from where you grew up. Was it an adjustment? What was that like?

AK: Oh, yeah, it was definitely a very huge adjustment. I had grown up in a very rural area of the South, you know growing up in a very conservative area, even though I didn't... I do not identify as conservative or aligned with the values that much, but, you know, I had always grown up with that. You know, the small town, everybody knows you, everybody knows my mom, you know, she's a talker and stuff like that. But... and then to move so far from home and be just so far from home, I had never been far from my parents. We... I lived in the same house I've lived in since I came home from China. I'd never moved, so that was an adjustment. And then, to just be

on your own, I know I can call my mom at any time. But it's just such a difference of being able to come in her room just upset about something than to be like, 'Hey mom, can you call?' You know what I mean?

JH: Yeah.

AK: People are just so different, too, and I wouldn't say this in a bad way, I've made some very great friends in New York, but I will say that people are really different, and it made me... I had never been introduced to people of all kinds of backgrounds. We're talking geography, ethnicity, beliefs, race, and stuff like that, and so that was really interesting, so...you know, kind of learn and get around, and I learned a lot, and I was exposed to a lot of new things that I never would have been exposed to if I had never left.

JH: How are the, how are the New Yorkers? Are they... do you get a lot of, kind of, dumb, judgy questions about Texas?

AK: Oh, absolutely, they think I'm, like, some freaking southern hick from Texas.

JH: Mmm, that's... yeah, that's no fun. Have you had to correct some of the stereotypes?

AK: I mean, I try at the end of the day, but, you know, if people want to have those stereotypes about me, they can. That's not going to lessen. And no one's ever been outright, like, rude, or they've never given me any rude stereotypes, but say, you know, it's the common questions, do you have a horse? Do you ride a horse? And me, coming from a really rural southern area, didn't really help those stereotypes, in all honesty.

JH: My husband is from, San Antonio, and he said, you know, like, if he had a dollar for every time he'd been asked if he has boots, and he's like, no, I don't wear... you know, it's like cowboy, but it... it...there's... I know there's definitely, the stereotyping goes both ways, and so, I know it can be not a great time when you feel like you're being judged before anybody even gets to know who you are.

AK: I mean, yeah, absolutely, it has its cons, but I don't know, I mean, I'm trying to find the silver lining and I guess if people are making assumptions, I could always... if you have your mind made up about me, just wait until you get to know me, things like that. I think you can work assumptions in your favor sometimes.

JH: Oh, that's interesting. What do you mean by that?

AK: Well, I mean, if people think I'm some... unintelligent, not well-spoken, you know, like, from the South, then, you know, I'll use that to my advantage. They might not...you know, think I know what I'm talking about, or they might not think I'm up-to-date on the coursework, but normally, typically, I am.

JH: You can surprise them. Sometimes being underestimated can be a little bit of a stealth power.

AK: Exactly.

JH: So, what do you... tell me a bit about, you know, your classes. What have you taken that you've really liked? And also, you know, just... have there been professors who've been particularly, influential for you? Or not.

AK: Oh, absolutely. College has been such an eye-opener. In the past, I had never really, I... I wouldn't say I had bad teachers, but I definitely...they were... the teachers I had that were strong in their subjects were the ones I just didn't primarily care about, like, math or science. Nothing's wrong with it. It just, personally, has not been as interesting to me as, like, English and History. But moving to college, I have one of my favorite professors, his name is Professor Daryl Mundis, and he used to be a UN war prosecutor for Yugoslavia, I believe, in the 90s, prosecuting war criminals. And to just hear about him, and he's taught my human rights class, and that'll be one of my favorite classes I think I'll ever end up taking. And I was just learning about all of that stuff, and to just learn it from a different perspective of a man who has so much background in it.

JH: That's so cool. Have you been to the UN? Like, do you do that?

AK: I have, I've been a few times.

JH: Wow.

AK: The UN is wonderful.

JH: You could do an internship there, I think. I think they have an internship program.

AK: Oh yeah, they do.

JH: Do you ever think about, like, law school?

AK: Yeah, I do. I'm pretty sure I'll end up going to law school after undergraduate.

JH: Very cool. So, is it okay that I bring up that you were... you were asking me about transferring?

AK: Yeah, that's fine, you can bring that up.

JH: Okay, tell me about that. What is it that you're, why? Why do you want to transfer?

AK: Well, a few of the reasons I want to transfer are...at my particular school, my major is facing some funding and professor issues. That's a big one. And they're just running out of courses for me to take. And another reason is I... I do enjoy my school, and I do love New York. But... I just...

I think it was a great experience, but I think I... I think going to another university would be another great experience, if that makes any sense.

JH: Yeah, it does, it does. It just, somehow, you feel like it's been good, but it's not a total fit. That's sort of what I'm hearing.

AK: Exactly.

JH: Okay.

AK: I tried it, I like it, but I think there are better fits out there.

JH: So, and you're looking at... you sound like you're... you like the idea of Massachusetts.

AK: I do. I really like the idea of Massachusetts. I was looking at a university, you told me about Simmons, and I really am liking what I'm finding on that.

JH: Oh, good, yeah, that's a cool place.

AK: Yeah.

JH: Yeah, well, that's... that's great, that's awesome. So, if you transfer, you have to... you've got to let me know what... what that's like. It's usually... I have students who've transferred, we have a number of transfer students here, it's usually pretty seamless, and if you wound up at Simmons, Boston is so cool. It would be a really neat city to be in the middle of, that's for sure.

AK: It really would.

JH: Can we talk a little bit about, adoption for a minute?

AK: Yes, we can.

JH: Okay, so... How... how do you... how do you think about it now that you're 19? Do you think much about China? Do you think much about your birth family? Or is this stuff that just is part of your identity that you know, that you don't... that doesn't feel immediate.

AK: So, I mean, I used to struggle in my own ways. I feel like every adoptee has struggled in their own ways about, you know, how we deal with it. But again, I'm going to throw it back to my parents. I know I mention them a lot, but I mean, they obviously do have a lot to do with that. Again, my mom and my dad, I really... I really do applaud the way that they've handled it. It's always been, you know, when we will give you all what we have, and if you want to do something, if you want to try to find your birth family, they've always been, we are your number one supporters in whatever you do. And that's been in every area, but extending...to my adoption.

JH: So, if you wanted to, you could. Have you ever wanted to?

AK: Not particularly. I mean, I know a lot of girls, or I know a lot of adoptees who have want to or have tried to find their parents, and I think for that, there's not a right or wrong answer. I feel like it's just more what suits you and what's tailored to you personally, and I just...even when I was younger. I had never... I just never had the inclination or even want to find my adoptive parents.

JH: Did you... I know...my birth parents. My bad.

JH: I, I, that's okay. I knew what you meant. We... the adoption group, our, our group of people who we were all in China together with, we used to have reunions and stuff quite a bit, actually, and we had the last one just before the pandemic. Do you remember much about those? Did they... were they, did you enjoy those? Did you... I think our feeling as parents was that we wanted to sort of foster some kind of rapport among you in case you all wanted to keep in touch, but I always wonder what it... what it felt like to you.

AK: I don't really remember a lot of them. The only one I have the biggest memory of is when we were all in Tennessee just because it was such a large jump in the pandemic, and I don't really remember a lot of the ones we had when we were younger. But I've really enjoyed, I'm really glad, because I've known other people who were adopted. Maybe, you know, we have some family friends that were adopted from China as well, she's a few years younger than me. And this whole time, until, honestly, I was in high school. I thought it was very normalized to have an adoption group, but it's not really that normalized, but I'm really thankful that you all took that initiative, and I still do, I talk to [friend from group] all the freaking times.

JH: Oh, you do? Oh, that's awesome.

AK: So, we're really, we're really close. I might even visit her at UMass.

JH: Oh, that would be great! You could explore the whole Five College area that way, too.

AK: Yes, I could.

JH: That would be great. You could get on their bus, and when I was at Smith, I had a friend who was at Amherst, and he took his French classes at Smith, and he used to go to his French class, and then he would come and have lunch with me at my house. So...

AK: Oh, wow.

JH: Yeah, so it's cool that you and [friend from group] are in touch, is she liking UMass?

AK: She's liking it a lot.

JH: Good. Well, do you have any questions for me about the project, or anything else? Or is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about?

AK: I would just like to say one thing. I... this has just been the opinion of my adoption group, just when we all had that, you know, the last reunion, we were all around sophomore, juniors in high school. I think that it's... it was really interesting to talk to all the girls, and I don't want to expose, you know, information, because I don't have their permission or anything. I would never want to tell somebody else's story, but I think it's interesting to see when we were all a bit older in high school, to see how we all dealt with it versus how our parents have dealt with it and came to talk to us about it, because I know, like, again, I don't want to name any of the girls for privacy reasons, but...I mean, some of us have dealt with it in ways of, like, they refuse to really acknowledge it, some of us have embraced it, and then other girls are like, what would my life have been like? Not to say they were ungrateful for the adoption, but just to, you know, have a wondering thought. I think that was really interesting to see how we've all dealt with it.

JH: So, you mean you were... you were able to discuss with one another when we were in Tennessee just before the pandemic, you guys were able to kind of go off on your own and talk about how you felt about adoption.

AK: I mean, yeah, because at the end of the day, I mean, yes, obviously we had our own ties, we enjoyed each other's company, but that was one of our first ties.

JH: Right, yeah, where you... especially where you were old enough to kind of give this... you know, when you were younger and we'd have these reunions, you kind of were running around and playing, but with that gap of a handful of years, and then Tennessee, really, as you say, you were in high school, you were old enough to reflect. Do you feel like, and I'm not asking you to say anything specific about any of the girls, but I'm wondering if it...did you... did everyone pretty much feel like they could talk to their parents about conflicting feelings about adoption, or was that not always the case?

AK: No.

JH: No. Hmm.

AK: I wouldn't... again, I don't want to expose anybody's information 'cause it has been a few years, something could have changed, but I just remember I was talking to the majority of the girls. We were all talking together as a collective, and some girls, you know, felt that, you know, to come to their parents about adoption would almost be to a slap in the face, to be like, I'm ungrateful. And I can tell from what those girls were telling me, that was not the intention behind it at all, but they were afraid it might come off to our adoptive parents, as we're ungrateful for that, which couldn't be farther from the truth.

JH: Yeah, that is really interesting, and I think it's a... it's a fear and a concern that adoptees often have. And it's a shame, because, you know, and for me to hear this as an adoptive parent, it's really important, I think, for adoptive parents to hear this, that whatever they can say very

affirmatively, very... don't just assume your child understands, but say affirmatively, I will talk about this with you and I'm open to all your questions, and I'm open to whatever exploration you want to have, and it's not a question of me not understanding that you don't love us, and you... you know, like, to remove that loyalty worry from the adoptee, I think, is very important for the adoptive parent to do.

AK: Yeah, absolutely. But, I mean, I've even talked to groups, to girls outside of our adoption group, and in my experience, and what I've seen, obviously this is just a general assumption of just my experience, nobody else's but... the more that the parents are open, not necessarily forcing a conversation, but letting their child... letting their child know they're open and receptive to talking about it. I mean, I think the healthier that feeling. So, I have seen fellow adoptees that were, you know, almost ashamed to talk about their adoption, and they just didn't want to acknowledge it. And I think it's something we should acknowledge.

JH: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I think it's, well, I think, you know, I agree with you. I think anytime people have about anything. You know, to have... to have shame or worry about yourself, your identity is just... it's a burden, and figuring out how to open up the conversation to remove that burden. And for the adoptive parent also to understand that, it's not their child rejecting them, it's their child wanting to understand more about... about who they are. And sometimes I think the hardest part of being a parent is really, fully, whether you're an adoptive parent or not, fully internalizing the reality that your child is their own person. They're a separate person. Whether you gave birth to them or you adopted them, your job is to help them become who they are. And that's a... there's a kind of separation acknowledgement there that I think can be harder for some parents than others.

AK: Exactly. And I feel like that also, you know, is dependent on their upbringing and things like that. Like, I used to be uncomfortable, not with my adoption, but I think the whole identity crisis has a big role to play in our adoption, because at the end of the day, yes, my family adopted me, they're absolutely my parents 100%, but at the end of the day, you know, I don't look like them, and I grew up in an area where everybody was majority the same race of being, like, white. And that played a big role, and I used to really not talk about my adoption either, or process the feelings of it, because I was afraid that no... I mean, I knew that nobody would relate, but I was afraid of not only not being related to or being judged.

JH: If you brought... if you... if you did bring it up, that you would be judged just by people in your life.

AK: Just, yeah, I mean, the people... I mean, you know when you're a little kid. I mean, people's others' opinions matter. It doesn't really... it doesn't affect me anymore, and it hasn't in years,

but, you know, when I was young, I was susceptible to letting people dictate how I thought about myself.

JH: Yeah, you want to fit in. That's what you're desperately trying to do, and if you feel like you stick out in any way, you're just trying not to stick out, you know?

AK: Exactly. I didn't want it to be... I already didn't look like everybody else. I didn't want another thing to be [inaudible].

JH: Has that been, part of being... has that been part of what you've liked about being in the Northeast and being around a big city, that you're just in a more diverse area?

AK: I mean, yeah, diversity has played a very large role in it, it would just... it's not even that... I would say, like... I think diversity is important, but it was more in my line. The thing, I was surrounded by people who had experienced diversity, so... I was just a person to them at the end of the day, like, you know what I mean? Not something... I wasn't, like, Asian or this girl who was adopted by, like, these people when she was a baby from China. I was just, you know... me and they were used to things like that. I think that's a... that's been a big help of coming to terms with everything.

JH: That's really interesting. So, it's really... it's that other people who had lived lives where they're around broader range of people just didn't even... don't even register. They're not saying to themselves on some level, oh, she's different, and you... you just feel like one of the gang, it sounds like.

AK: Yeah, exactly.

JH: Well, I... I just want to thank you for... for talking to me, because this has been so interesting, and it's... it's just fabulous to me to... to hear you as a... as a grown woman, talking about your interests and, you know, it's great, and I want to say thank you for participating in Our China Stories over the course of this decade, and I'm asking everyone, like, can I check in with you, like, five years from now? And maybe you'd update us again.

AK: Absolutely. I would love to hear... I would love to do an updated interview.

JH: Okay, awesome. Maybe you'll have done graduate school, you'll be headed to graduate school by then, or just finished.

AK: Oh, gosh.

JH: or law school, I know, I know. Okay, I'm going to stop recording.

AK: Alright.

