INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

YANA CALOU

Interviewer: Michelle Esther O'Brien

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Michelle Esther O'Brien: Hello, my name is Michelle O'Brien and I will be having a conversation with Yana Calou for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is March 1st, 2017 and this is being recorded at the NYU [New York University] Department of Sociology. Hello.

Yana Calou: Hi.

O'Brien: Uh, so tell me, uh, about your growing up.

Calou: Sure. So, um, I grew up kind of all over the place. My dad, um, is, um, from a small town in Louisiana, New Iberia, um, and is white and my mother is from Brazil, um, from Minas Gerais and, um, my mother came to the U.S. [United States of America] on a scholarship to study psychology and my parents both met in graduate school, uh, in Michigan, uh, in the psychology department and then, uh, got married and so I grew up—I was born, uh, in New Hampshire. They lived in a little, uh, farm in rural Maine and then we ended up, um, moving all over up and down the East Coast as they sort of figured out where they wanted to be and then we—we moved to Brazil when I was four, so between the years of like, four and almost eight, I lived in Brazil, um, where my mother's family is from. She's the only person who came to the U.S. and then as it was time for me to start going to school, I was homeschooled for the first couple of years, then we moved back to the U.S. and the rest of the time—um, but I've lived—I've lived here, um, and most places that I have [laughter]—most places that I have lived, um, have been Utah and, um—Utah and—yeah, I can give you my list. It's pretty—it's pretty erratic [laughter].

O'Brien: What led them to move around?

Calou: When we—um, we wanted to go back to Brazil—my dad wanted to write a book and my mother wanted us to be around our family and wanted to have us growing up speaking both languages and knowing both—um, both of the places that we were from, um, and then to move back, I think it was—it was really about schooling and wanting us to go to school in the U.S., um, but then, my parents were really looking for, um, intentional communities and kind of their own utopia in which to raise, um, their kids: it's myself and I have a—a sister who's four years younger, uh, in a sort of—they were really frustrated with, um, conservatism, capitalism and were really kind of off the beaten path. They had both, kind of, since issued behavioral psychology in which they were trained and were really looking for more spiritual, intentional communities and so we ended up, like, living in a car for a little while and living with my dad's relatives and hopping around from like—like, strange cult to like, totally lovely little community to totally—and so we were all over the place, um, until we finally settled for a little while in—in, uh, Chapel Hill, North Carolina and then another year in Pueblo, Colorado and then—and then—and finally in, um—in southern Utah when my dad got a job working for the federal government for Indian Health Services as a psychologist to, um—to several Ute and Paiute reservations that were kind of in the Four Corners area.
O'Brien: Do you remember any of these intentional communities or know much about them that your parents encountered?

Calou: You know, I've done a little bit of research about—about a few of them. We were in, um—in South Carolina for a while at the Meher Baba Center that I've read a small amount about. We were in, um, a couple of different, um, Quaker communities, Friends communities then in Asheville, um, North Carolina. Um, there were a couple in Ohio that I know we spent short amounts of time at that I know nothing about, um, and, uh—but they were all—they were all a little bit short lived, you know, we were pretty, like, nomadic [laughter]. I think my—my dad was really—both of my parents and my dad especially were really having a lot of—kind of, their own sort of, like, spiritual awakenings and understandings and looking for a community that was already formed but also really, I think actually he wanted to, like, lead his own and have his own so like, nothing was quite right and so we would leave. So that's my under—that's my, you know, adult understand of—of why—why those didn't work out at this point, but we ended up, um, you know not—we ended up totally not spending, uh, you know—quite—maybe two or three years of searching in these spaces and then when my folks like, finally, settled down it was not in an intentional community, so that sort of didn't pan out for—for them.

O'Brien: So tell me about Utah.

Calou: Um, so I arrived in Utah, um, I believe I was maybe in 6th—6th grade at the time, um—5th or 6th grade and it was interesting, we, um—we didn't know what—what—my—my folks and—and I, um, didn't know, um, what Mormons were. We knew nothing about the—the LDS [Latter Day Saints] faith when we moved there and my mother—my mother, um, took care of us and didn't work outside of the home and my dad, um, was working on—on a couple of reservations and so they sort of didn't have much interaction with, um, the very predominant—you know, something like 80% Mormon in the small southern Utah town that we lived right outside of. The town was called St. George. We lived in a little, tiny community maybe 30 minutes outside of that called Kayenta and so my sister and I both kind of interfaced with this pretty intensely in public school and, you know, I remember saying something like—there we were making gingerbread houses for Christmas and some kid brought in a huge bag of candy and I was like, “Oh my god,” you know and—and then most of the students wouldn't speak with me after this because I—and we had to have a meeting with like my mom and—and the teacher at the time to explain that I had said something so religiously offensive by taking the lord's name in vain and so, you know, a couple of the kids were like, “you said 'oh my god' backwards I can't talk to you. My parents—like, that's not—” so I had, like, sworn, you know, worse than anything at all, and so that was like the rest of that year when I came in in the middle and then I, you know, sort of like, understood, like, that was kind of the cultural, like, acclimation that happened, um, but, I was, um—you know, it was a—after living in Brazil and after living, um, all up and down the East coast and with parents that were like, you know, on the, you know, bordering radical, it was a pretty—um, it was pretty shocking and so, um, I ended up really not having a whole lot of Mormon friends, but certainly as I grew up, um, came out and a lot of these things ended up having a lot of, um, friends who had grown up Mormon
and had left the church for being queer, for various reasons, and so, uh, I ended up having a lot of contact. I ended up having a girlfriend in my twenties whose dad was a Mormon bishop and, um, so I feel like I learned—I ended up learning a lot about the Church, but was certainly—went through a lot of processes of friends trying to invite me to church or, um, you know they were very active in—in terms of, like, proselytizing and converting and so there was a lot of resistance I th—on my part and also on my parents' part where they were just like, "you can totally hang out with this person, but there is no way that you are going to church with them," but that definitely took a social toll at the—you know, at the—right when we arrived.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Calou: So—but I think very quickly, you know, entering junior high, I very much defined myself with like, the other, like, bad kids that were, like, you know...So, the counter culture, I think is also one that's very much, like, in reaction to and I wasn't resisting as much as, like, as if I had grown up, but I was like—I made it I think really clear, just like, even like visually, like, through, like, what I would, like, decide to say and wear that I was, like, "no, that's—you know, this is not—this is not my culture or faith tradition."

O'Brien: What was your relationship with your parents like and your family?

Calou: Um, at this—around this time, 12 or so, it ended up being—being really difficult, um, hmm. I'm wondering how much I feel like sharing because it was pretty rocky, but, um, my parents were pretty, like—there were—it was a pretty, like, volatile household and um, I think there were a lot of tensions with, um, my mother's not a citizen, but could live here legally because she was married to my dad but also had—had not—did her degree in the U.S. but had never worked and so there was a lot of, like, if we're going to break up this family, which was always a question, like, how that is going to work, um, and—and, um, my father and my sister are both Type 1 Diabetics and so they were getting—finally had health insurance through this federal government position that my dad held and, um, things were quite rocky and there was some, you know, questions about like, you know, if—if like—if we are really—about things that are happening in the house, like, is this person—is my dad going to lose his job and like, will my sister and he have healthcare and so there were a lot of, like, um—there were—I definitely had, like, teachers and neighbors that were concerned about what was happening in my home growing up and um, a couple of times, you know, police called to my school, um, and so it was quite—it was quite challenging at this—at this point, but I—I think, you know, my mom and I have always maintained some closeness and my father and I have done so as well, so it was just a—a pretty intense combination of forces, I think with, like, two psychologists and, you know, people who maybe, you know, are not getting along and then also just not, yeah—not really, uh, knowing what to do with a kid who's like, not, uh—not really accepting of—of some of the stuff that was being put on me, so...yeah.

O'Brien: Is there more you'd like to share about that dynamic or yourself as a teenager?
Calou: Um, I suppose I will say—I—you know, I ended up being kicked out of a few high schools in southern Utah. Um, really, really simple things: from skipping school, which was the only time that my par—that I could really get away from my parents or have social time. They were really, really strict and so I would, you know—skipping school and then when school would say, you know, “Yana hasn’t come enough,” and so I would get in trouble then and then I would go to the next school. One school they found, um, some weed and a pipe in my locker so I was kicked out of that school. I ended up going to the alternative high school in the area, um, which I really loved, um, it was like, I could, like, smoke cigarettes and like, go to weaving class and take pottery class and it was like, really, you know, it was like reading Beat poets in English class and like, having a really, really great time, but I think my parents were concerned about me and the things were escalating in the home, just in terms of, um—in terms of, um, emotional and physical, um, abuse and so they ended up being in the financial position to send me to a—a boarding school, um, when I was—I think I had just turned 15, um, in central Utah which was about four hours—four or five hours away from them, um, and then I actually never—I had like, different teachers or friends’ parents that I would, like, go to for like, summers—like a summer job. So I lived with two friends’ parents my junior and senior year. I never went home for, like, Christmas. I had a spring break where a teacher let me go camping and backpacking with his family, so just other—other friends’ families and teachers kind of took care of me and I don’t think I went—I graduated when I was 16—I had skipped a couple of grades through being homeschooled in Brazil and so I ended up, um, graduating young and, um, I moved to, um—I was still—could only afford in-state tuition and I was, you know, estranged-ish—my folks were paying for my tuition at this boarding school but we were not communicating well and so the only place that I was like, “I can afford in-state tuition” was to move to Salt Lake City, Utah, which was like, three hours away from this central Utah boarding school that I had been living in. It was like a town of like—it was like 800 people—it was like sheep, turkeys—it was like, this, like, hyper-rural, kind of bad kid but also, like, rigorously academic school where, like, we were like, locked in at 7 pm and we were drug tested, but we also like, went to class. So it was this pretty, like, you know, intense environment around like, turkey processing plants and sheep—it was like that was, like, the industry of this tiny town and then—and then I moved to, um—when I graduated I moved to Salt Lake City, Utah to go to the state school, the University of Utah, where I could afford in-state tuition, so I very much wanted to leave Utah at this point, um, but Salt Lake City was also like, totally the big city after the places that I had been and I wanted to be there and that’s where I could afford, so I—I went there, um, for my undergrad and—and I, um, started taking gender studies and—and history courses and sort of decided that this is—this is what I wanted to do, um, but at the time, it was, you know—it was because I was like, paying for this—it was totally a—a mess in terms of—I was like, going part time and then I worked like, graveyard shifts at the hospital, the university hospital food service, like, checking all of the trays, um, and doing dishes and then, I would, like, get up and you know, I would take a bus or like, walk home at 4:30 in the morning, like, super far and then, like, try to go to school, um, and that was really not—not working out super well, um, in terms of—in terms of like, my schooling and in terms of like, wanting to leave Utah, but I—it was where I started, I think, finding queer people for the first time and then also this kind of like, story of my life that a lot of these, like—you know, in high school and then in college having a couple
of professors that really took an interest in—in me and I was—after I had no longer been able
to do these graveyard shifts at the—at the hospital, I was working as a cashier at the—at a
grocery store, which was in a neighborhood near the University and so, a couple of my
professors lived in that area and they would, like, see me and like, come through my checkout
line at the grocery store and, um, I had this—this, uh, professor who I’d actually—I think I’d
only taken one of her classes and she was like—she was like, “you’re doing really well in my
class, like, what’s your plan?” and I said, “well I just take one or two classes at a time because I
work full time here,” and she was like, “you need to be in school. This is unacceptable.
Absolutely not. There’s a scholarship that’s—no one’s applied for. It’s up in three days.
Who—who are other teachers you’ve taken from? Great, I’m going to get a letter from them.
I’m writing you a letter. The application’s going to be on your desk the next time you see me.
This is what you need to write for it. You need to turn it in and you have a full—” so she ended
up actually getting me this—a full ride for the next few years, um, and that's like, how I was
able to kind of—but it took me seven years to do—to do my undergrad, but that was kind of
how I was able to stay there and also find—she was, um—she was a professor—she was a
history professor who studied, um, queer history and U.S. women's history and she was, um,
openly lesbian and had come out to our class and I think this was like, the first time that I was
like, “oh I have this like, little, queer home and bubble in—in both like, the history and gender
studies departments for like, you know, the first time in my life” so that was like, very helpful
in terms of me just knowing that, like, maybe I could be queer and maybe I could, um, be a
student or be, like—have a different job than at the grocery store eventually, some day.

O'Brien: So tell me about, uh, some of your developing relationships and connections with
queer community during—during these years.

Calou: Um, yeah so I guess a lot of these years, right? When I moved to Salt Lake City, um, I
had known a couple of friends and I ended up dating this, um, non-queer identified,
cis—cisman, who—we were together for about four years and lived together and this
was at the same time that I’m like, taking these, like, gender studies classes and I’m meeting
this—this professor, um, Elizabeth Clement, who—who I just spoke to you about and really
realizing that, um, there was, you know—that like, I was, like, dreaming every night about
having sex with women. It was like all I could think about, um, very much—really didn’t
question my gender in terms of necessarily like—like my body or my embodiment but very
much in terms of like, prescribed gender roles and those not fitting and—but then I kind of
thought about it as, like, it's super unfair that, like, you know, women have to dress this way or
act this way. Um, I don't have to do that as a woman. Um, and also, like—also it's okay for me
to be like—realize that, like, I'm—I'm queer even though I'm dating this like, cis guy, but I think
there were still tensions between us and I was like, “I have to be able to, um, sleep with women,
I need to be able to make out with women. I want to be with you” and we didn't have any sort
of, like, ideas about, like—there was nobody around us or anything that I was even reading or
speaking with anybody about like, non-monogamy, but we were sort of—I mean basically, I was
like, “you're not allowed to do anything, I do whatever I want and you're not invited,” you know?
Which was like, not a very nice way of, um, handling my relationship, but I was [laughter] so, at
this point, understanding this very, very clearly that that was really not okay, um, but I was really kind of desperate for, um—to figure this out, um, and so I think that it was really—I think it was really kind of like, in—in the academy—it was like, going on dates with, like, the person who was, like, the admin assistant [administrative assistant] for the Gender Studies department who was super queer. This, you know, was like, way before online dating. This was like, 199—like, I don't know, 99, 2000, um, and uh, so, yeah I think that that was kind of my first—my first time—the time I was—I identified as—as bisexual. I had told my younger sister who I didn’t have a lot of contact with. I—I left home to go to that boarding school when she was quite young, so she was um—she was 10–11 when I left and so, we didn’t have a lot of contact or a great relationship because my folks were really trying to be like, “you stay away from Yana. Yana's bad. They, like, smoke pot and they’re terrible, getting kicked out of schools,” and—and so they didn’t want me to be this bad influence, so we didn’t have a close relationship but I do remember having a phone conversation with her at some point when I was like, probably around, like, 19 or so and I lived in Salt Lake City and she still lived with my folks and being like, “I'm bisexual. Could you kind of float that by mom and dad and see how they react? so—I—you know—because I—I want them to know but I’m—” I was like a little too scared and I was like, “maybe just like—you know, be like—drop it in there casually and then just gauge their reaction and call me and tell me,” so she totally did this and that, like, was very nice to have that distance around it and it was—it was a little while later—it wasn’t until I think I had like, my first girlfriend when I was maybe like, 21 or 22 that they—that I was like—like, “you have to deal with this!” you know and [laughter] and uh, so—that was the—that was maybe like the first time in terms of like, you know acknowledging it to like, my partner, to my parents and—and very much was like, active in—in, um, some kind of queer stuff on campus that was—that was happening. I was like, the bi. The bi on campus. [laughter] yeah.

O’Brien: What was queer activism like in Salt Lake City in the late ’90s?

Calou: Um, you know there was a lot happening in the state legislature in like, the kind of early 2000s around um—I think there were big fights about like, non-abstinence only education at the time, both like, federally from the [George W.] Bush Administration and then how like, you’d say there was a lot of like—a lot of like, the LGBT student groups and how I was like the Chair that—for two years of the Gender Studies Student Advisory Committee, so that was like, my main sort of role, so there was like—there were a lot of conversations about how we kind of—you know, it was like, in this way that it was like, a lot of like—like, the queer people really taking up a lot of like, the repro[ductive] rights and the—the sex education stuff that maybe wasn’t always explicitly queer but those were some of the bigger campaigns. I think the local Planned Parenthood affiliate that was like—there were some like—some partnerships happening there and so I think people were just like, you know, feeding into working on these issues and obviously they’re totally queer issues, but it was interesting that the way—that we weren’t always being like, “AND queer sex ed[ucation] needs to be taught,” like it wasn’t that—you know, it wasn’t like—we weren't like, “as queer people, like, we need this to be happening,” but it was like, “we need to talk about, like, condoms and sex and STIs [Sexually Transmitted Infections] and um—and the fact that, like, not everyone is straight.” Like, that’s
kind of as far as I think I remember going, not like, “and it needs to, like, talk about, like, gender identity and expression and like—like non—non-straight sexualities,” like, that was kind of not what I—but I remember a lot of, um—but certainly, like, academically I felt, like, that you know the—the courses that I was in and the conversations that were being had around, um—you know that they were—they were kind of like—I think, the courses that I—I felt very much like, I got a background in like, you know why marriage might not be like, the best for—for queer people and the ways that it’s like, constructed and like, co-constructed, like, heterosexism and racism and all of these things and then at the same time a lot of the like, activism was like, “we need to have like, some protections for queer faculty and domestic partnerships,” and so there was that—you know, that thing that I was—that I think happens where you—the—maybe like, the conversations, um, in the gender Studies Departments and the classes and a lot of the faculty that I was introduced to and the ideas around, um, kind of like—like less—like around—essentially like, you know marriage—marriage politics being totally different from—then I’m seeing the same people at the rally that’s like, you know, “we need—we need a domestic partnership, um, for just to be at the city level in Utah, which was, like, something that I ended up like, later working on, so there was like, this big disconnect with like, “okay well this is like, what we’re studying and now I’m like, graduating and I’m like—done—decided this is what I’m dedicating my life to both like, academically as an—and as an activist” and then I’m like—you’re kind of like, spit out into like, the only sort of existing institutions where you can get internships or jobs and they’re all kind of like, funneled into, um, marriage movement stuff at that time and so, that was—that—that felt like this, like weird disconnect, but I was also able to be like, “okay well, practically speaking..."whatever, you know [laughter] yeah.

O'Brien: So, uh, you stayed in Salt Lake City for a time after you got out of college?

Calou: I did, um—I did, I worked at, um—I had this—I had a job, which I was completely not qualified to do, but I worked—I like, led a—a unit on a residential, like, lockdown treatment center for—they had a wing of um, juvenile, female sex offenders and, because I had the gender studies degree, they were like, “cool, like, you can like, run these, like, mental health groups and—and under the direction of the therapist who’s like, never around” and like I didn’t do a—so that was a—kind of an intense job and I did that for a little while and then, you know, there was part of me that sort of felt, at that point, my life was there. Um, I sort of—I—then I got a job working for Planned Parenthood in Utah, um, which was—which was interesting and then I got a job working—I became the communications director for the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender]—The Utah Pride Center, which was like the LGBT community center for the entire state even though it’s in Salt Lake City and so at that time there was a bill—we worked a lot on a bill that was around anti-bullying that explicitly said “sexual orientation” and I don’t remember if it said gender identity in K-12 schools in Utah that was having a really hard time being pushed through and then this domestic—this domestic partnership registry that, um—that, um, after the—after the whole—Utah was one of the—the places that passed a—a anti-marriage amendment as well, so there was a lot of fighting around, you know—a lot of work around that, so I ended up feeling like I wanted to do this work in a place where I—yeah,
where I felt like it was, like—I was like, you know where I—where I...I had dreams of like—a lot of friends who had gone to San Francisco or gone to Portland because that was like, the closer queer places to Salt Lake City and I was like, “I should just—there’s part of me that, like, really wants to do that and there’s a part of me that feels like, I’m like, whatever that like, lucky to have a job, um lucky to be—you know, there’s like four queer jobs in Utah and I have one of them” um, you know and um, that this is like, a place that really needs that work and so there was a lot of work about, um, ex-gay—um, I’m sorry, not ex-gay—ex-Mormon—ex-Mormon gay folks or—or Mormon-identified still, like, so groups like Affirmations, who are for, um—for queer Mormons who still identified as Mormon, but were like, maybe not excommunicated from the church and also folks who had left the Mormon Church and needed support around that because they were queer, a lot of—we didn’t have an overnight bed, but we had like, a youth drop in center that provided a ton of services for a lot of Mormon, um, teens who had been kicked out for coming out, um, and, um put on a bunch of stuff, like, we put on like, this really, really huge, like, queer prom event every year, because folks weren’t allowed to take, um, like same—same-gender-ish partners to—to their proms and so like, this—like, I think the year that I was there, maybe like 2006 or something, it was like 7—800 people coming to these things and so there was like, this massive—this massive community and—and so I kind of—I felt like I had my little queer bubble there and um—but it felt—you know it always felt like, you know—like Utah never felt like, super, um—like totally nourishing for me either I don’t think.

O’Brien: So you worked a series of these non-profit, social justice jobs in reproductive health and, uh, social services and LGBT issues—

Calou: Mhm, and like none of them paid so I was still—even way after I graduated, I was still working to get my union benefits at the—part-time at the grocery store, because I was lucky enough that I could work—I think the contract there was—was like a UFCW [United Food and Commercial Workers International Union] contract and I wasn’t part of like, the—the contract had happened way before I got there, but it was like, we could work 22 hours a week and still have union benefits and so, I really needed this at this point, especially not being on, you know—on my folks’, um, and so, most of the time that I had these two jobs at the Planned Parenthood and at the Utah Pride Center, I was at the—cashiering as well, so it was this really weird thing where I was like, this—I was the—became the—I got this internship, like PR [public relations]/communications there, three weeks later maybe—it was super short into it, the executive director was like, “I really hate doing press, I really don’t want to do it. Media—if you’re writing a press release and it’s, like, coming from our communications intern, like, they’re not going to respond to you, so you just put—you just put, ‘Communications Director' and your name on it and like, you’re smart, you can handle this” and I was like—it was, you know—it helped me in terms of like, being able to say, like, “I was the communications director and led some kind of big things,” but like I had no idea what I was doing and I was like an intern, right? So, but anyway, I ended up—like, because of this, my boss—she didn’t want to do as much TV [television] and so she was like, “you do it, like, you’re young, you’re like, the face of the—you, like say the thing, when they come over and they’re like, ‘what do you think about
they were calling it the Mutual Commitment Registry because the amendment in Utah said you couldn't have any marriage-like benefits for—so they couldn't say, “domestic partnership registry” when the state said that they wouldn't, you know—so—so then they were calling it the—the mayor of Utah at the time—the mayor of Salt Lake City at the time who was—who was, um, not Republican. It was, you know, sort of this little island of blue in a sea of red as—as with a lot of the country, I think—you know, they're like "great, then we'll just call it the Mutual Commitment Registry," so they'd be like, "yeah now what do you—" so I was like, the gay person on TV for the state, so I was like, always on like, local news there and ended up breaking one story nationally, but then I would like, go to the like—my job that I'd had for like, a million years—I think I was at that grocery store—it was the longest job I've still ever had—it was like, I worked there for like, almost eight years and they would be like...like, you know—like the customers like super knew me because I'd been there for like, you know—like, a lifetime at that point in my like, early-mid-twenties and they would just be like, “oh we just like, saw you—you're like the director of the gay center?” you know? And I'm like, “no no” and they're like “we just saw you” and they're like well—they'd be like "oh. Well good job!" or—or “I had no—I had no idea. You should really get an education, you're good" and I'm like—you know, just like weird shit like that, you know, so, it was like...but, yeah it was uh—but it was interesting. I think there, there's so much resistance certainly to like the—both like the sort of like, um, to abortion, which was, you know, something that—that was always being fought and at the Planned Parenthood I worked at and also the also the LGBT rights stuff that I was working on at the Pride Center, but the way that I feel like other, like maybe Planned Parenthood affiliates in the South and other LGBT, like, organizations in other areas—like the way that I think the religious extremism is—I kind of experienced a lot of the—the LDS policies around this, there are super anti—but they're not, um—it's not like a “we're going to protest in front of the Planned Parenthood with signs of fetuses or even—or block entrances or—” it's very much like, “we're not funding this, we're completely against this, we are going to put a crisis pregnancy center right next door,” which happened, um, “we are going to, you know, fund—later, you know, we're going to fund like,” Mormon—Mormon, um, you know stakes and wards across the country, like, ended up funding so much of the—um, of Prop 8 [Proposition 8] in California but it's—it's sort of done quietly and through dollars so I never had—I remember having—coming to work and having some voicemails that were like, “y'all are disgusting, you're terrible,” but in general, like, there weren't people protesting outside the center—the LGBT Center, there weren't people protesting outside the Planned Parenthood, it was this more like, done quietly and through dollars and through like—just like, cultural understandings of this not being okay, but I never felt—I think, you know, my parents were like, “oh my god, this—my kid's like the—you know, aren't you scared to be, like, so visible" um, but I ended up having more scary things just with like, people being—you know, being—when you work in retail or you are—and—and like a job that's like open to—anyone can walk in and like—super unwell people, um, can walk in that were way more—way more scary things in terms of people knowing where I worked and like, I walked home and like, felt—like I felt way more unsafe actually working [laughter]—working in retail than I did at either of those places.
O’Brien: What kind of work did most of your friends and—uh, do?

Calou: A lot of like, restaurant, um...yeah mostly restaurants. It was like, a lot of like, food service, um, hotels, like bellhops. The partner that I had for four years was the, uh—was like, valet, bellhop, so yeah, mostly like, service—service industry work.

O’Brien: Do you think there was any sort of queer community within service industries at the time? Like did people know each other through the work?

Calou: Yeah in my—I think my work—it was like, this like—we would like—all of us would like put in for like Pride—it was sort of like if the gay—if like, Salt Lake City has a gayborhood, the—the neighborhood called, um, the Avenues in which my grocery store was in, was—was definitely it and so a lot of the—there were a lot of queer people that worked at this grocery store—I think, like, my first girlfriend I met, she worked in the bakery department and like—we’d like make out in the employee bathroom and like, all these things that we would—like, there were so many—my boss—my direct supervisor was—was a queer woman, um, yeah—the—and I think that—yeah we would have to put in for like—like Utah—like, the Utah Pride festival which, like, we were all very excited about going to, um, like you know, months in advance, I remember like, being in December, just because so many people wanted to go they had to, like, find staffing and so we would like fight about this, but I also remember some like, just weird things, like I remember the—the bakery manager was this lesbian woman who I had made out with at one point years before while I worked there and, uh—and—but I also had—had this—this, um, cis guy partner, um, at the time and I remember, like, requesting Pride off one year and then like, her going to tell my—my boss who was gay who did my schedule, being like, “Yana’s like, not really gay. Like, Yana's just like, wanting to be cool and like saying that—that Yana's bi and so, like, you shouldn’t give them Pride off,” you know? There was like, always, like, you know, “who's, like, really—who's really gay?” and I think that, like, happens and like—well you know, just like policing of other people in like, a place that is kind of repressed in some ways, you know? So...

O’Brien: How did you end up in New York?

Calou: Um, so I was working at the Utah Pride Center and there was a trans student who had contacted us, who went to, uh, Southern Utah University about five hours south of where we were in Salt Lake City, who, um—who had transitioned over a summer and had been housed in the women’s dorms his first year—this is a public university—and that—and was applying to live in the—the men's dorms the—the second year and the school was denying him housing in both the women's and the men’s dorms, so he came to us and decided to be—was like, “I—I”, you know, before, like, figuring out lawsuit stuff, he was like, “I actually really want to work with the school to figure out their dorm policy” um, but—and he was an undergrad [undergraduate] student, probably early 20s, but I think I just like, wanted to like use—like what can we do in order to like, leverage media pressure around this and like, make them look
terrible for—you know, this is like, a state school and they're denying a student housing, um, and so, we ended up—like, the story kind of broke nationally after it broke locally and he and I ended up—I think like, Star Jones had her own show? So like, he and I ended up, like, being on the Star Jones Show, which was like totally weird. It was also weird to—I feel like, in New York and a lot—most places, I think I move through the world with a lot of—like, I think I'm read as white and move through with a lot of white privilege and you know, my—but I, um—I think there, like, people—I did get that like, “what are you?” I'm like half Brazilian and part of my family in Brazil is Portuguese and German, so white and then my grandfather's side of the family is from, uh, a tribe in the north called Kariri (37:47) and so I have like, um, some indigenous blood from South America and I'm like, I have you know, dark—dark hair and dark eyes, but I—there you know, I certainly—so, I remember like, for this—for like, a lot of the time—like anytime I would do a show that wasn't like local news, where they would like, give me hair and makeup, it's like they would always like—they would, like—my hair was like, short, but like super curly and big and they would always like, straighten it, so I like, look at this video and I have all this, like, makeup that like, kind of makes me a little lighter and then like, super, like, flatiron my hair and um—which, I feel like, maybe I feel like I'm a person who—here I'm just assumed—I move through the world with white privilege, I'm assumed white, um, but there it was kind of a little—it was a little different, but, um, we—anyway that's a different tangent. I broke the story nationally and then GLAAD [Gays & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] (38:15, not sure if GLAAD counts as a primary name now) , who I'd already kind of been working with a little bit at the time, who had helped me secure this internship at the Utah Pride Center—they—they'd funded that internship and then they had kind of given me some—you know, I was like, “I don't know what I'm doing” and my boss was like, “well you talk to GLAAD they do media—gay media stuff, so you're going to be the director and—you know and, they'll tell you what to do” [laughter] you know. So then, I was in contact with them because of this and once I broke that story nationally, they were like, “this person's doing a good job. We have a position where they—that would be in charge of monitoring media, um, and providing training for activists in a 12-state region, so we think Yana needs to like, join the national movement,” so I didn't actually even apply for this job, but I was recruited and at the—I really needed to leave Utah at the time and so they were just like, “we want you to apply for this job. We want to offer you this job. It's like a media field strategist for the Southern U.S. and you've worked in like, a conservative—you've done, like, LGBT media work in conservative areas, so—” even though it did feel really different in Utah than the South, and so they—they recruited me, I came out here and that was like, um—I had been here for maybe like, eight months and then that was like the end—the end of that was like the end of 2008, when like, the economy super collapsed non-profit world and so I had only been here for—I didn't know a single person, like really not one—it feels weird now, but I did not know—I did not know one [laughter]—one human in New York and then I just—they were like—they actually—they didn't pay for me to like, relocate or anything, I was like, super, you know—super poor and I came out here—I think I made $38,000 a year and then a few months later, they were just like, “we're really sorry,” and they laid off like, eight people between—on the same day, like, between, like the New York and the L.A. [Los Angeles, California] office and I was—I was one
of them, so then I was just like, “I'm not going back to Utah, I'm—I'm here,” and then just like, you know, hung out on—on unemployment in this warehouse in Williamsburg that didn't have heat for the winter and freaked out until I got a new job [laughter], so...

O'Brien: Tell me about the impact of the 2008 financial crisis on non-profit employment and your life and the people around you.

Calou: Yeah, I mean I think it was a—you know, a few of my friends there got laid off the same day and, um, I think there just wasn't a—um, there wasn't a lot—you know, for that particular organization there was—they were like, “you've done a great job! Like, we'll—we'll be references for you” but there wasn't really a lot of like, support in terms of like—um, going forward I think I could like keep my benefits for like, two more weeks or something like this and while I know that I did use one of the folks at GLAAD for—as a reference, um, it didn't—yeah, it really felt like the opportunity—because everyone was going through this, the places where I was applying really weren't in a place to hire either and so it was like, maybe—it was like four or five months, I think, and it was very much, like, um—I also felt, like, at a weird place too, because my—my resume was all—it was like, “University of Utah, Uni—” you know, like, “Utah Pride Center” and then I would, you know—the couple places where I did get interviews, the would be like—I felt like they were just like, what—like, you know, it's like, “wow...Utah...” like I would have no idea how to operate in New York or wouldn't be, like, competent or like, somehow, like, we didn't have like, the same Internet or like, lightbulbs in Utah [laughter] you know? And so—and I also, you know—It just was like, sort of my first time—I had, you know, lived in like, Philly [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] for four years as a kid and, you know, like was—but, it was my first time as an adult on the East Coast again in this way that was like, you—you know, you don't have like, the Ivy Leage or the whatever here, so um—but yeah, I—I think that it—I mean personally, I just—yeah, I went through, like, a pretty difficult, like, depression period. I did—I ended up not having—ended up renting this totally illegal apartment and not having heat and not knowing what to do about it, begging my parents to help me, which, you know, like, lucky that they were, uh, financially able to, but the relationship also was not one that always was like—they were just like, “well then you just, like, come back here. You lost your job, like, we'll buy you a plane ticket back and that's that,” you know? Um, and I was like, “no, I'm—I'm staying here,” um—and um, yeah, it was—I didn't feel like I—I probably—I would say in those few months, like, I probably applied to like—I would say I probably put in like 30 or 40 applications a week. Like I was just being like, really—I—I was desperate to stay here and I had like, no money. Didn't know how I was going to like, pay my power bill, you know, that was like, going through the roof because—that I had this like, little plug-in heater and like, I could—had slept with like, a—like, hat on and like, could see my breath in my apartment, didn't—you know, it was just—and it was just like, I'm going to—you know, going to like, cafés to like, send out all of these applications and not knowing a bunch of people so, it felt—it felt pretty—um, but I had a couple of friends from GLAAD at this point and they were really sweet and helpful. I remember going to a lot of—there was this like, weird website that was like, called, “myopenbar.com,” which like, was like, a listing of like, all of the
like, art gallery events or whatever that had like, free wine at them—it would like—this aggregate, and so I was like, I couldn't go out with like, you know, the couple of, like, queer friends I had at GLAAD or like, go to, you know—I wouldn't go to queer bars as much, so I had like one friend that, like, brought me—bought me a flask and was like, “you can come out with us. You just like do this,” and, like, another friend that was like, “here's like, the—” you know, “we want to go somewhere queer, but like, we're just going to go to this straight thing together because, like, you don't have any money and this is like the free—” so we'd go to all these like, weird straight people myopenbar.com events so we could get drunk [laughter] and like, it was just this, you know, time that was like, really, really challenging to stay here without a big network, but those couple of folks, like, really made it—made it possible.

O’Brien: Um, let me know if you need a break at any point.

Calou: Yeah.

O’Brien: Why were you so invested to stay in New York?

Calou: You know, I didn’t—I didn’t really love it at this point and I guess I should also say, I came here one time while I was in undergrad as a research assistant for that professor in the history department at the University of Utah. She was working on a book on, um, queer family in the 40s, 50s, and 60s up until the AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] era and how AIDS sort of shifted queer conceptions of—of family, um, and so she wanted to teach me how to use archives and she needed to access the archives of the New York Public Library and so she was like, “I'm going to write a grant. You can stay with like, me and my dyke friends in Park Slope [Park Slope, Brooklyn], I'm going to teach you how to use the archives,” and, um, one summer, wrote a grant for me, so we spent like, a couple of months here together, so I had been in New York when I was maybe, like, 20-21? So I had been here before to do that work. I didn’t really know—but I—I had, you know—I was like, “oh, I've been to New York. I don't love New York. I'm going to take this GLAAD job because I need to get out of here,” but once I got here...yeah, I think I still didn't love it, but I knew that—I—I knew that like, the people that I met that were like, doing really cool work—like, that it was just, yeah, a place where people were thinking of things and doing things at this really rapid pace that I had never experienced and that I would like, grow a lot and that I would, like, maybe finally get to date more of the people who I wanted to date and I was like, having a really hard time, kind of like, breaking into queer community and like—just like, you know, trying to figure out how to write like, Craigslist ads that like, the cool queer people would answer, you know? And like, now it's like, a lot of that was like, my queer—my queer dating life, um, you know, dating coworkers from—from you know, the one gay job that I had here, but also like, you know, meeting the friends that I met at GLAAD were also the ones that we were like really resisting—we're like, “I shouldn't be working on like, marriage politics because my region is in the South and there's like a ton of—there's like three trans women killed this week in Tennessee and like, you're trying to make me do like, Prop 8 calls and like, this is, A: not my—you know, there's a California region person and supposedly I work on the southern region and B: like, I’m trying to work with reporters to like,
not misgender everyone in their—" you know and so, there was—I think there were some of us within, you know—I think, certainly, which is the case with a lot of these institutions, where like, the staff is a lot—the on the ground staff is like, a lot more radical than the leadership or the board and so we were kind of, you know, meeting folks that were like, “we need to make a like, trans guide for like, reporting about like, crime,” and like, a lot of crime stories that would come out that were like, you know, “he was dressed as a woman to rob the 7/11,” um, and like—you’re like, “this person is trans and needs food” you know, like—and—and so, you know, I think I was—I was being kind of introduced to people who were like—kind of knew how to do...like in Utah, I was like—we were already the most radical thing, like the Mutual Commitment Registry and—and I was feeling frustrated that like, that was still really, sort of in conflict with a lot of the, kind of, queer theory ideas that I had been introduced to in—in my undergrad and then coming to New York, it felt like, “Okay these are like, the more Gay Inc. things and there's like, all these like, disgusting ways that I'm really not agreeing with what's happening," but there's also—and like—and I always—and before, I thought they were so far ahead of where the Utah Pride Center was, but then also meeting people within those organizations that really knew how to be like—call them on their stuff and really help them be, um—like, look at the intersections of like, racial justice and queer justice and economic justice and queer justice and you know, I think a lot of us were really critical of like—oh we’re like—at the time, GLAAD had this like, Republican president and, you know, we would be super critical of like, “oh where like, his like, $300 car that like, he got to go to like, some like, Hamptons [Hamptons, New York] fundraising event that just like, sat there for three hours and like, billed, and like, took him back to the city,” and we're like, “what the fuck? Like, why aren't we, um—why aren't we like, dumping this money into, um—” and you know, at the time, there was a—they had fellows, not even staff working on—on trans inclusivity, but the fellows like, were not even paid like, the little tiny bit that we were paid and the—none of the pol—um, there was—I guess there was another—there was another trans staff person, who—she worked on, um, API [Asian, Pacific Islander] media and communities, but the health insurance policies there also were not trans inclusive and I mean, this was like, very like, I think standard of the time, but it also felt really—so we were sort of doing stuff like, internally to like, criticize and like, call attention to the fact that like, you’re like, not paying trans people. You’re making trans people work on trans things and then you're not giving them trans healthcare, like, so, I—I felt really like, energized by—by that and I just knew that I needed to keep meeting people like those coworkers—that we could like work together on—on these kinds of things and I was very lucky that my direct supervisor at GLAAD had mostly worked for Living Leech (50:12 not sure what this is) campaigns and for unions before this and so, um, I also was like, really thinking about, um, you know, economic justice and queerness at that time, even though he was like, really—I think his hands were tied and he was super frustrated about the way that like, economic justice was not being addressed within GLAAD and in a meaningful way at that time in a programmatic way and a, even like, individual way, like, it was just—that was like, not the—it was like, “we need to like, fundraise for—with all of these like, rich donors and have these like, super fancy like, GLAAD Media Awards events because like, we just are losing all of our foundation funding because of the crisis."
O'Brien: And where were you at with you're, um, [coughing] gender at this time?

Calou: Um, so at this time, I was, um, still very much, like, female-identified and not really, um... I don't know, I think I just always felt that like, straight women knew this thing or had this thing that was like, really different from me that I could never figure out and I was like, never able to like, really be good at that or even enjoy that when—as much as I desperately wanted to when I was younger and then in like, queer circles I always felt like I wasn't like, maybe like—like, whatever that—you know, that message was like, “Yana's not really a dyke,” you know, that my—this old coworker at the grocery store had said—that there was also something about like—like lesbian culture that, “I wasn't really that or I wasn’t really, um, doing that right or doing that well or even seen by—like seen by others,” and I feel like I experimented with like—you know there was like—like, there were like, some like, super femme years. It was always like hairy armpits, hairy legs, like, long hair, dresses, lipstick, that like—that sort of look, that I was like—and not—I don't feel like I was like, not legible as que—like I don't feel—like, queer people weren't like, “you're not queer” and I felt like I could—I feel like I knew what to do with my outfits and body hair to be read, um, as queer, but I didn't feel—I just didn't—I don't know, whatever it was and it's very hard to sort of like, pinpoint, like, what piece doesn't feel totally right and I didn't feel like, um, you know I guess like, dating at—you know, at this time I was like, dating cis women, I was, um, I was not dating, but sleeping with cis men, um, and—and sleeping with and dating trans men and just like—like, that feeling, like, it was like, working better than anything that like, I had really experienced in Utah, but then having a lot of, um—really understanding, maybe, for the first time in my like, late 20's like, that—when I was like 20 or 21, I went to three different gynecologists in Utah to try to get a hysterectomy, um, just because I didn't want to—I didn't—I've never felt like I—it's like, I don't feel male, but I feel—in the sense that I just don't even have those internal parts. I've always had extreme dysphoria about like, just internal repro stuff and like, that’s—like, my body—it's not even possible for my body to carry a baby, um, but, that's not true because I had a regular cycle for many years, but I just really need—and, you know, in Utah, they were like—I think they were like, “there's no doctor that's going to do this for you. There's nothing wrong there,” and then I started developing some—some physical issues, which I kind of now sort of understand as like, so many people like, develop, I feel like, cysts and endometriosis and all of these things when you like, really have a hard time even identifying with that part, so like, starting to realize like, some of that as like, gender dysphoria, uh, a little bit later and then, you know, trying to figure out, um, that like, because this had been such a like—like, trying to figure out hormones that would work that were not just, like you know—my early like, 19, 20, 21—trying to take birth control pills and being like, “most of the sex I have isn't even the kind of sex that I need it for contraception and that also, these like, hormones make me—make my body feel more feminine,” which I never really liked, but I didn't think that it was like, because of anything else, I was just like, “I don't want bigger chest—I don't want” and so yeah, it took—it took me a while, I think, to fit—to kind of read—to understand some of that like, under the rubric of like, um—and then to be like, “oh, like, I've always been like, a: like really attracted to like, small chests or like, flat chests and like, I would actually really—really like this for myself,” and it took me a while to be like, “oh I don't necessarily need more—more like, secondary, masculine sex
characteristics, but I need less—less female ones” and so, um—so I ended up, you know, working with a—um, a physician, uh, an NP [nurse practitioner], um, who is—who's also trans, who's—she's done, you know, more work than anybody I know on like—on nonbinary HRT [Hormone Replacement Therapy], um, and working with her to do a—a pretty, like, non—sort of like, off-label use of uh—um, of a hormone called Danocrine, um, or Danazol, to, um—that is a—that is testosterone, but has a—a steroid that it's synthesized with that suppresses secondary sex characteristics, so it's an androgen that will stop your cycle, not using like, progesterone or estrogen, but also, um, won't cause, um—so I was—you know, that—that's only FDA [Food and Drug Administration] approved for a certain amount of months and it's like used for something else. It's not like they're—you know, pharmaceutical companies or doctors being like, “how can we, like, figure out how, like, assigned-female-at-birth, genderqueer people can like, not have periods but, like, through—you know [laughter], like not use, like, estrogen or progesterone so it's like—you know, that's not—”, but ended up being on this for a couple of years, but unfortunately that's really bad for bone density, so this physician was like, really great about, you know, being like, “you need to get bone scans,” and it turns out that after two years on this hormone I developed, um, osteopenia—it's like pre-osteoporosis, and so I needed to change that so now I'm doing this other, like, weirdo like—I've been on like, a T-shot [testosterone shot] with a really low dose of progesterone mix for the last year, um, so trying to figure out, you know, how I can, um—you know, how I can do what I need to do, but that's—that's also this temporary thing that I—at some point, like, no matter how little T you're on, um—you know, there are some things that I want from T that I really enjoy and some things that I don't and so, like, you know, I figure I can—if—if my gender stays feeling kind of the same, that I won't want like—that I won't want to have like, a—you know, a total beard in a couple—that I probably have like, maybe one more year on this low dose of T, then I have to figure something else out again, um, so, yeah it's been kind of a—you know dealing with the—dealing with that medically and dealing with that, um, has been really, really nice to be able to like, have like, a kind of a trans framework to be able to—to do that in and to—to also understand—like, understand and also be able to advocate for myself to have like, my Medicaid cover—cover the—the hormones that I need um, and—um, when I was able to—this—this last May, um, which was—was not covered, um, but I ended up—and caused a huge rift in my family—was able to get—was able to get top surgery as well, um, which I'm willing to share a bit about, if that's...

O'Brien: Sure yeah, absolutely.

Calou: Um, so I finally realized I wanted top surgery when I kind of—kind of had this understanding of like, the dysphoria that I was feeling not necessarily being out of necessarily—of wanting to present male or move through the world as a man, but also like, really, really excited that I like, even—that it took so long to even just be like, “this is something you can have and do and like, give yourself permission to do,” so I—I tried to get surgery the first time from a—I contacted an acquaintance who I knew that worked at Callen-Lorde who had had success, um, getting, uh, a like, quote, unquote, breast reduction covered for—for back
pain through insurance and—but they’re also a genderqueer—like, assigned-female-at-birth, genderqueer person who went to a person in New York, because there's not like, really anyone great in New York doing—doing top surgery for trans folks, um, for—for folks who are—um, who are getting mastectomies and so, um, I was like, “oh well if this person, who's like, also genderqueer found this person to like, work with their gender and figure out how to bill their insurance for this, I will take that wreck and go to that person.” Um, worked with my therapist to get a letter saying that, um—and then they refused to bill my insurance company, even though I was working for the RWDSU [Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union] at this point, um, and the policy there, um, says that it includes—um, says it includes care for—um, for Gender Identity Disorder, but they won’t give you—they will not provide you the criteria for the diagnosis or the—or the procedure codes that are covered under that diagnosis. They just make the doctor bill and then they will determine—you know, they’ll preapprove or not preapprove, but they won’t share that criteria—they wouldn’t share that criteria with me at that point and so I said, “well my policy says that they cover this, so I’m asking you to bill them.” I didn’t qualify—the, like, ratio of, like, what your breasts need to be to the rest of your body is like determined for a—to qualify for back pain for, um—for a reduction. I didn't qualify for that and it’s this really, kind of, fat phobic, awful rubric that they—that they do, um, for that. So I didn't qualify for that, so I was like, “well, I’d like you to bill my insurance under gender, you know—you’re making me get a letter from my therapist saying I’m trans, you're making me be trans, then bill my insurance for me being trans,” um, and they refused to bill my insurance. Um, my surgery date was actually two days before the directive came down from the New York state governor, [Andrew] Cuomo, about insurance companies needing to cover this, so I said, “well actually, now it’s the law, you actually—my insurance actually has to cover, um, some procedures and so I’m requesting that you bill them,” and they refused, um—it was a doctor at NYU [New York University], so I called, um—I called a lawyer who works on trans health issues and they were like, “actually, it's not illegal for a—for a physician to refuse to bill an insurance. It would be—could be, maybe illegal for your insurance, but if they're not even—they're like, “you're not to work with a physician who won’t—to work with a surgeon who won't refuse to bill insurance for a procedure that they're calling cosmetic and they're doing it”—he was doing it at NYU's—they were like, “also your OR [operating room] is a cosmetic OR, so procedures, by definition, can't be billed as medical if they're done in a cosmetic OR. There's like an, even separate, like, facility.” So that was—that was their reason for refusing to bill my insurance and so I ended up having—even though that directive came down two days before my surgery date, my family and I were no longer speaking because of this, I couldn't go home for Thanksgiving because of this, they were like, “you’re—you’re sick. This is—you’re being influenced by your trans friends. You're much more a follower than a leader” was like, what my dad wrote, um, and so [laughter] I, um—but I—so I ended up—I was like, “I'm actually—if my insurance covers this, I'm going to make them do it, like I'm not”—so I canceled my surgery date, like, one or two days before, like, thankfully got—you know, didn’t have to like, financially suffer because of this, um, and—and, um, started again on—on figuring—on figuring this out and then in the interim, um, my dad died very, um—without—it was like, he was diagnosed with cancer everywhere and two weeks later, he died, so it was like, really abruptly in terms of like, time,
but in this, my dad ended up leaving me a little bit of money and an IRA [Individual Retirement Account] and so, then I was like, “I’m going to, you know—” there was a part of me that was like, “you were so terrible about this to me and like, now—now you get to pay for—now you get to actually pay for this,” and I was like—and now I sort of think of it a little different, I’m like, “it’s really cool that, like, my dad is no longer here—like got to be a part of like, giving me this present, whether or not he would have been okay with it,” but like, I think at first it was just like, “my daddy paid for my titty job” [laughter] you know? And I was like, “okay, like, actually that’s not—not exactly how I want to be thinking about this,” but I ended up being able to use, um—use that—the—that money that he gave me for it out of pocket with a—a person—a surgeon in Colorado, who specializes in, kind of like, non—non-binary top surgery, in which he has a procedure where he retains, I think—the only reason it’s whatever, like, non—non-binary is that, um, for people who are like, really invested in retaining, um, their nipple sensation and so, um—his name is, uh, Dr. Paul Steinwald and he—his procedure retains, like, the—keeps the pedicle, I believe is what it’s called, attached, which was like all of the—the pieces where all the nerves, like, run through your nipple, and so is able to do the like—con—the like, whatever—like, male—whatever they’re calling—male contouring with—while retaining—with retaining, um—leaving that part attached so it retains nipple sensation, so that was super important to me and also that he—you know, he’s one of those folks that isn’t like, “you need to be, like, presenting male and moving—” but it was very weird: I like, always said my pronouns there and like, I really don’t identify—like very—I was like, “I really don’t identify as a woman,” um, you know, for a few years at that point, was like clear about this, but like—you know, I just—the way that my—I read physically is, people always assume, um, “she” and so—but it just felt weird in this like, clinic that was like, very much trans—said, you know, all of the—all of the staff are like, “she, she,” you know, it was just like, “I’m—I’m—” you know, I’m like, “yeah, y’all need to pull this together for—for folks who might be more—more upset about this,” you know, and like, understandably so, um, but, I was like, “you’re here to like, cut these things off and that’s what’s happening so...” [laughter]

O’Brien: So, you’ve shared, uh, about your, uh, non-binary, physical changes, uh, did this go along with changes in your language or identity or how you talked about yourself?

Calou: Mhm, yeah, I think that I—think that I, um—before I had surgery and probably right around the time that I was like, doing, like, HRT stuff was like, using—um, asking people to use like, they/their pronouns for me. I haven’t changed my name at all, um, but I was really kind of like, thinking about—I was like—I guess I just—before, I just sort of thought that like, I was not trans and not genderqueer, but that I just like, didn’t want to have like, female repro stuff and I didn’t want to have, uh, chest and I didn’t want to be read as, um—as lesbian, um, even though, you know, many of the people who, uh, I’ve dated identify as women, but many of the people I’ve dated don’t, so I just—I think—I don’t know what exactly clicked. I mean, think it was just very much like, having other people around me whose—whose—hearing about them talk about their experience, you know, it was like, just that super basic—like, when there are other people around you that have like, language for this, that you see some of your feelings
about your body and the way that other people understand you move, being like, “oh. Like, this is totally a thing that like, we've made up because it's useful and that all of this is made up, right? Like—like trans is like, made up and it's totally real and it's totally a thing that we've made and built and like, what it means and what it means for us and so, realizing that like, this could be a—like shifting from this like, thing where it's like, “I'm like—really want to like, sup—like, have trans people's backs because like, they're my friends and my partners and I like, see how like, awful it is for them at the doctor and at the bathroom and at school and blah blah blah like to, oh...” so I think there was this—when you're—at least for me, when I was just always in this like, “I want to like, support these people in my life,” to like, “oh I—I am this person in my life,” it took—it really took—and I think maybe, as a person who's done a bunch of like, labor organizing work and LGBT organizing work that it's like—there's this weird thing where it's like, “I'm like, doing this for everybody else,” or something, like, that weird—like, it's like, I don't want to see myself in some ways as like, people who are like, oppressed or like, when I was like, taking like, feminist theory classes in college, it was like, “you know, sexism is this like, terrible thing that is happening to all these other women but not me,” you know and like, “I get it and I'm like, liberated because I'm going to this class and like, I work for Planned Parenthood and like, this”—instead of being like—and it—I think it's maybe just the like, unwillingness to identify with like, the ways that this stuff really hurts us and so I think I—it's been many times in my life that I've like, “oh like, sexism is a thing that happens to me too and like—like being denied the ability to get—have my surgery covered or being denied the ability to have like, hormones covered and like, the—oh, the Danazol situation was like, a hot mess too because I wasn't able to get it covered after my—my, um, physician who's like, this like, amazing like, trans woman NP, who's like—knows how to do every appeal in the book and every off-label use and every like, other diagnosis code and is like, very willing to do those for people as like, an activist for—for trans healthcare is like, “I'm just not getting”—so then I'm like, going to Brazil and like, buying them there because it's—you know, the Danazol is like—is like $530 a month for me, um, and every insurance that I've had from the insurance at um—it has not covered it, so then I've—was like, going to Brazil—you know, I was like—spent a summer there with, you know, like, my mom's the only person who came here, so the rest of my family is there, um, and, you know, buying like, a year's worth of hormones that are still super—you know, it's like a thousand bucks for a year's worth, but that's way cheaper than—a thousand bucks gets me two months here, flying them back, going through customs without a prescription, you know, because I'm buying it without a prescription there, which is like, also not legal, but you're able to do it and like, you know—and then like, calling family members there and being like, “I need you to send me more,” you know, and so like, that was like, how I was getting my hormones until I switched to this testosterone/progesterone combo, so, um, yeah...but—I—I think I—going through a lot of that stuff being like, “okay, I am like, importing hormones from like, the other country, of which I am a citizen. I'm like flying shit back and forth through customs. I'm like being denied to—a surgeon to even bill my fucking insurance, who's supposed to cover it—like, okay I guess I'm kind of trans.” Like this is what trans people go through and then it—but it—then it's like—I was—in as much as I was like, super in this community, both like, academically and socially and like, professionally, it really took me like,
a while to be like, “oh...okay...like, I guess I'm like, nonbinary, genderqueer, trans-spectrum human.” [laughter]

O'Brien: How did you end up at RWDSU?

Calou: Um, the—my boss at—who worked at GLAAD at the time, um, knew that I was job hunting again and had been the communications director there. He was on his way out, um, but let me know that one of the—the new alt-labor projects that was like, under this union, uh, was looking for a communications person and let me know that the person running that was queer and at the same time, the president of the RWDSU, Stuart Appelbaum also had just come out as gay himself, um, and I think—so there was like, some sort of like, renewed investment, not only in figuring out, you know, “how do we organize and base-build in an industry that has like, 4% union density, but also how do we like, really include queer people?” because there were like, people with like—that understood the ways that like, queerness and—and um, unemployment were—were intersecting, so...

O'Brien: Tell me, uh, broadly what RWDSU is about, um, for folks who haven’t heard of it.

Calou: Sure, so RWDSU stands for the Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union, um, that's actually under the—the UFCW, um, umbrella now, which is, um, coincidentally the union that had the awesome contract at the grocery store in Utah that I worked at, which, you know, made it possible for me to work these other jobs and go to school and have health insurance, um, so—um, but essentially they represent—um, they represent workers in—mostly in the retail sector, but, um, other sectors—um, and—and work for, um—so a lot of the—yeah, I guess like the really bigger, older department stores here in New York City, so the Macy's on 34th street, the—the Bloomingdale's on 3rd avenue, um, and—um, and then the Retail Action Project is kind of an alt-labor project that stems from this union and um, it is—basically you know now the concept was: there's so little union density, getting contracts is super hard, organizing—uh, in an industry, you know with—with 4% density and also in an industry that, um, a lot of the workers like, don't identify necessarily as like, this is like, their career or like, long term job even though there are definitely like, careers in retail, so I think, thinking about like, how we make those jobs, like jobs that people can live off of and they can be careers, um, and how do we also reach out when we know that this is an industry where there's like, some really rampant wage theft happening, um, specifically making undocumented workers really, um, really susceptible to this and figuring out how we can, at least like, get, you know, wages back for folks who have—um, been stolen. So there's like, overtime violations and then [1:14:02 inaudible] violations and all of these things that—that, I think they were seen across the board and ways that we could reach out to some of those workers experiencing that, um, and really it was kind of formed as like, a—like, a services to organizing model, where we're providing some of these services, um—not only some of the—like, the wage reclamation stuff, but also, um, training in order to move up industry tiers and having memberships who are—members who are like, “oh, like, I worked at like, Tiffany's doing like, visual merch [merchandise] and so like, I'm going to like, teach a class on this to the other members who are maybe doing stock at like, a dollar store in
the Bronx and like, help—help members move up industry tiers into the more—more, um, well-paying retail jobs,” and so there was like—sort of training and—and services around helping folks file for—when, you know, big stores close, like, getting the word out to those employees, help them file for, um, unemployment and help them appeal those claims and then—and then through a lot of those services really figure out, um, how we can—where there are members who will organize some stores that they’re in and whenever there has been a chance or the ability for—or uh, interest for workers to get a contract, then working with them to connect them with organizers from the RWDSU to, um—to see if we can actually get contracts in place that protect those workers, but RAP [Retail Action Project] has been also quite successful in media campaigns and that’s what I was, the communications director there, so running a lot of, um—you know, essentially sort of like, public—organizing workers to be able to share their stories. Oftentimes, you know, like, workers who are, you know, working full time, but still live in a shelter because they can’t afford rent elsewhere and are still like, willing to like, go on the cover of like, AM New York and be like, “this is like, what’s happening at my job and it’s like, totally not okay,” um, and—um, so really training—a lot of what I did was training—training workers to be able to share those stories, letting them know how to do it, connecting them with reporters and really using this as like, larger—larger media campaigns, where, you know, maybe—maybe we’re not going to get a contract because there’s not enough—there—there isn’t going to be the kind of like, electoral, um—there’s not going to be a base to actually win an—an election, but we are going to at least, um, scare the employers into like, stopping—stopping the racial discrimination or stopping the, um—you know, the no raises for however many years and, um, so—so those are some things that—that we were able to do through like, some direct—some direct action, some—through—through a lot of media campaigns, um, and—and also some wage theft claims and I think in terms of, you know, there were—in terms of the queer piece, both at RWDSU and RAP, um, there were—within retail and fashion worlds, there were already like—there’s—the membership base was already really, really queer. We were hearing how members who had like, transitioned on the job, or members who were, um, openly queer and like, not doing gender in normative ways, um, were being either harassed by managers or by other employees and so, one of the big, kind of, wage theft campaigns that RAP took on at a store called Yellow Rat Bastard, that actually—ended up, um—ended up where—where, um—ended up in a union contract where workers got a contract ended up including, because a couple of the—the members, the workers, the organizers were queer and were experiencing some of this harassment from customers that managers did nothing about, or from coworkers the managers did nothing about, or from managers themselves—ended up writing a, um, sexual orientation and then the gender identity and expression, um, harassment and non-discrimination into the contract that they won, despite the fact that New York state hadn’t—still hasn’t passed GENDA [Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act]—um, these protections on a statewide level and so, that was like, one way, which like, the contract was able to do something that the—legislatively hasn’t happened yet that was specific to the goals of the actual workers, who were—when we were like, “what—what is hard for you at your job? What is making this impossible?” and then those were—those were, you know, first and foremost a lot of the—the concerns.
O’Brien: So, just, uh, to map it out a little for listeners: so, the UFCW was a union you were a part of in Utah and, uh, the RWDSU is a part of it—part of the UFCW now.

Calou: Mhm.

O’Brien: And then the RWDSU had a, what you called an alt-labor project that was the Retail Action Project.

Calou: Mhm.

O’Brien: Uh, and then you were hired by the Retail Action Project to do media and communications work with members.

Calou: Right. Right. And you know, the—the Retail Action Project functions like a workers center in the sense that it is a membership-based organization, so even the workers who work in retail who don’t have a contract with RWDSU, so they’re not members of the RWDSU, they are still, by saying, “I want to be a member of RAP,” and coming to membership meetings—are—are members of RAP and then certainly there are workers who are members of the RWDSU—like, are local—are members of—the locals in the union who also are really excited about the direct action that—so they’ll come along too and support workers who are doing a direct action at Victoria’s Secret or something like this and so there’s some overlap in terms of membership, but the distinction is that, you know they—they don’t have to be, um, employees of retailers who have a contract at the—with the RW to be a RAP member.

O’Brien: Right, just how labor unions worked in the 19th century—

Calou: Yeah.

O’Brien: —early 20th century—

Calou: Yeah.

O’Brien: —so, and you described this campaign at Yellow Rat Bastard that included in the contract, “no discrimination based on gender identity?”

Calou: Gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation. Mhm.

O’Brien: So that is on the books for New York City law. Do you have a sense of why, uh, including it in the contract was helpful for people?

Calou: That—the—that they could then use the union reps in order to, um, to help them file EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] claims if that’s what they wanted to do, because the enforcement at the city level is just, the piece that isn't happening and so
Despite—um, despite the lobbying on the books, the areas for recourse were just really, really not sufficient and showing—showing that there—that all of the union members who just voted for this union, you know, have the—have the queer workers' backs and are going to actually report it now and are going to report it to the union as a—as a secondary, and in this case almost sort of like, primary enforcement—enforcement method was—was really, really useful.

O'Brien: Uh, tell me a little bit more about this enforcement question. So, what—what are some challenges for workers without unions around enforcement of the trans civil rights law on the book in New York City?

Calou: You know, one of the things, I think, that we saw often was when we were—you know, we would, uh—one time, when I worked there were explicitly partnering with an organization that was, um—their membership was like—were mostly trans women of color who were um—who were wanting to enter the retail industry and we were helping—helping folks, like, develop resumes and—and develop some of these trainings that folks could go to. We partnered with, um, a community college through CUNY [The City University of New York] to get certificate of customer service trainings and like, build—build up resumes, build up—um, and work with workers to figure out where they wanted to work and oftentimes we'd be like, "Oh, like, you know, we have members who are queer who work in these stores, so we can like—we're going to connect you there," you know, and this was always informal. We never had this like, really fleshed out pipeline that we always really wanted to do, but, um—that we would just end up kind of, hitting the same barrier, where then—you know, we've—we've got amazing members, people who are trained, people who are like, totally qualified to do retail jobs, um, and then, um, just not getting the calls back, and, um, you know, oftentimes these are huge group interview settings for mass hires at places like J. Crew or Uniqlo, um, and so they're—you know, they're not hearing back and they're not told explicitly like, "we're not hiring you because like, we're—gender is like, making us uncomfortable," but that's essentially what was happening, so we were just like, hitting back, even just the—like, the non-discrimination and hiring piece, like, that was a barrier that we're going to like, keep hitting because it's a cultural one and not one that is like—really like, legislated—like, legislated easily. So, we also partnered with, um—we partnered with, um, Make The Road New York's project at the time, when they were doing matched pair testing with resumes of trans folks, um, and cis folks going into—they did a bunch of different industries, but we helped them a little bit with the, um—with the retail piece in terms of—and you know, looking—looking at the kinds of discrimination that—that is happening that way, but I would say—and you know, we also experimented for a time—there were a lot of, um—we hired usually from within so a lot of the RAP organizers had been RAP members before and had been like, leaders on campaigns in their store, so they were a couple of—this—this was not, um, my case, but this was the case for a few of the organizers there, who when I came were members and then—and then became organizers paid by RAP and the RW, who were queer and who were, um, starting putting together actually like, a queer member caucus to address issues specific to queer people at work, but, um a lot of the, you know, media piece we did would be about like—talking about—would be, like, partnering with Queers for
Economic Justice at the time to talk about being queer in the service industry and those sorts of, um—those sorts of particular challenges folks are facing, um, you know whether that's around like, being trans and then also policing what dressing rooms that customers who are trans come in and use and you know, everything from—from that to not covering—um, not covering—um, you know, healthcare not covering, um, trans care or like, what to do when like, your paycheck with HR [Human Resources] says your legal name on it and you haven't been able to change it to the name that you use and so, um, we try to work with—work with members also on the individual level for all of these types of things as well.

O'Brien: Do you have a sense of, uh, what the factors were that led Retail Action Project to take on trans and queer issues in the workplace, perhaps moreso than many other labor organizations?

Calou: Um, you know, I think—I think part of it was having a union president who—who was invested in looking at the intersection of like, sexuality and gender and labor. I think part of it was also having a—the—the, um—Carrie Gleason, who's—who's, um, really conceptualized of the need for a membership-based organization for retail workers who don't have a union contract, since that's the—by far a large majority of retail workers in New York City, um, and—and nationally, um, and so—so all of these, um—I think it was—it was both from the top and then also from just the members who are working in that industry, um, coming and having meetings and because I think they were—they were able to see that a lot of the—a lot of the folks running the meetings were queer, that they were able to feel comfortable talking about the queer issues that they were facing as like, queer and trans people, um, in retail and then—and knowing that like, there's like, already the willingness to address some of that—and I—I do think that we could—like, while I was there, we still had like, two separate single cell bathrooms that had like, gendered signs on it, which we totally changed while I was there, but, you know, we were—we were also in the—still, you know, I think in the process of growing and I think that the, um—that there was a lot more that's—that very much could be—could be done and I think that's, you know, part of the—like, figuring out like, kind of like, hiring—hiring pipeline stuff might be one of the only ways that we're—I think we can really fix and that, you know, is never like, formal at all, um, but that might one of the like, ways to fix some of the discrimination at hiring and also discrimination in like—you know, if somebody's like, maybe also getting fired or just feeling super uncomfortable, like, transitioning while they're at a job and like, being like, "oh, like, here's like, a couple other places that we know that are hiring that have hired trans people and that are—like, their hiring manager is queer, so like, we're going to send you there," but it's these like, informal, like, queer/trans networks that really are—are in play.

O'Brien: I—I have the impression that a lot more queer and trans people are working in New York City service and retail industries than some other industries in the city. Do you—did you all ever observe that or have any sort of a take on that?
**Calou:** I mean, sort of—I mean, we would—we would talk a lot about the way that like, the fashion industry and the retail industry, especially in New York, that like, hosts fashion week—that it is an industry that really, uh—that attracts a lot of queer people and in a lot of ways like, celebrates—uses queer models, uses like, um—but there's, I think, a lot of the—you know, the frustration that we would run into is like, in an industry that—where a lot of like, the imagery and a lot of the advertising, um, is really, um—it's like, you know—they're using like, um, gender nonconformity or using androgyny or um, using transition or using, um—using people's sexualities that are like, legibly non-straight to sell products but then at the very—you know, at the level of like, the stock-worker or the cashier or, um, the salesperson are—like, that's not actually like, reflected there in a way that is always—and sometimes it's like, "yeah we're super happy to like, hire the like, cute gay boy who's going to be like, you know, 'I know all about all this makeup and like, you can like—well, you know, help you buy it, um—" that—that's unfortunately—the discrimination is—is still really, really rampant, especially for people whose—whose gender is just like, really not—not normative appearing. So that was sort of—maybe kind of, as far as like—you know I think that there was a—there was a time, um, that—I think there was one—there was like one summer that there was like, JC Penny ran a Mother's Day ad featuring lesbian couples as moms and Ellen [DeGeneres] was like, their spokesperson and then—then for Father's Day, like, the month after had gay, male couples like, in their catalogue, in their campaign, whatever—their ad campaign for the season and um—and GLAAD at the time was like, "we like, celebrate—" and you know, JC Penny was under target from the like, Christian Right for being, um, accepting of—um, representing queer people in this positive way and so GLAAD came up with this statement that was like, "we like, super support JC Penny for doing this." Like, they're like, under attack from like—whatever, one million Christian moms [One Million Moms] and um, this was like, really the same month that JC Penny laid off every single worker who—I'm sorry—I'm sorry, changed every single worker who was not management to part-time and so there were no more guaranteed hours for anyone part-time. They were defining it as like, 20 hours, so you weren't even—you could have five hours and still—you could have three hours a week and still be a JC Penny Employee that's part-time, so we're like, "this actually hurts like, queer and trans people way more than you paying a couple of like, queer models or doing this representation," so like, then RAP had to like, come out with a statement and be like, you know, "while JC Penny supports queer families, um—gay and lesbian families, um, they're actually hurting all of their gay, lesbian, and trans workers who are at more risk of like, employment discrimination and like—and you're not guaranteeing them ways to support their queer families that you support, supposedly." So—so we had to sort of—you know, that was sort of like, the—you know, when like—when like, economic justice and like—sort of like, large-scale queer—you know, LGBT like, rights/politics, you know, clash a little bit, so, um, I think that similar time, the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce gave a—their award they give to employers—um, a—an award at their Creating Change conference for having inclusive trans—um, for—for including, um trans care in the benefits that they give part time employees. It's the—this was OfficeMax at the time. They were like, one of—the third or fourth like, lowest paid retailer in the company and, um, most of the workers are part-time, so if you're part time, you don't even—and you're trans,
you don't even actually get those trans benefits, so like, I wonder actually like, how many like, trans managers, which are like mostly—the only people that are full-time who qualify for health insurance this is actually—this is actually covering and so we had to be like, “hey we'd like to work with you to like, make sure that like, um, we're celebrating folks who actually like, are paying their workers and giving them guaranteed hours and are making it so folks have enough hours to actually get—” because when—when ACA [Affordable Care Act]—when the Employer Responsibility portion of the Affordable Healthcare Act rolled out, we also just saw this massive decline in—you know, people were having their—retailers were capping part-time workers' hours at 29, because 30 hours a week was where the Employer Responsibility portion kicked in and so, um—for—for queer and trans people who obviously have like, harder time accessing healthcare in the first place, it's like leaving that many more people, um, uninsured, so not that that was like, bad, but that that was like, you know, really being strategic about—you know, knowing how retailers are strategic about working around these ways of like, giving, so it's like, “cool, you can say you have like, trans-inclusive healthcare, but like, if you're cutting everybody's hours to keep them under what they get, then actually like, no thanks.” You know?

O'Brien: Do you remember any particular conversations, uh, with LGBT groups that were less clued in around these class and employment issues?

Calou: You know, I remember reaching out—you know, Carrie and I would see this stuff and we would reach out and like, sometimes I would have like, people who I knew there just from like, having—you know, having worked in the LGBT movement for years before I started working at RAP and—and being like, “hey like, we would like, super love to meet with you about the ways that we can make sure that economic justice is included in the work that you do,” and I—I don't want to like, just be like, “and no one ever wrote us back and we were so awesome and they were terrible,” you know, but that—we were, you know—it did feel like we weren't—we weren't actually able to sit down and have like, um, dedicated—yeah, we were never able to like, actually like, formalize partnerships or even kind of like, informalize them so we were like, informing each other about each other's work, so we would like reach out and like, explain what was happening and like, offer to meet and um—so, yeah thats—but I think that, you know, I'm a—we were able to work with Queers for Economic Justice. Often like, our members would like—our members spoke at many of their events, our members marched with their members, um, for Pride, our members, um, who were really queer—were so excited to be able to do—we a lot of the times, you know, the queer—the queer members would be like, you know, “we want to do stuff like this,” and we'd be like, “they're awesome, go hang out with them, they're doing stuff like this,” and so there was like, some—there was like, some sharing of like, resources and memberships and you know—that was like, kind of one of the only explicitly queer groups that, um, yeah...but our—our members were—you know, I guess we—we did also work a little bit with, um—with the Stop and Frisk—on the Stop and Frisk campaign a little bit, um, which was like, I guess another place where like—you know, partnership around racial justice issues was, you know, formalized a bit and so, there were—there were some pieces where this happened, but it was really—it was challenging to do the, um—the explicitly economic justice piece.
**O’Brien:** Did you all have, uh, connections with other LGBT, uh, people in the labor movement?

**Calou:** Yeah, yeah, so—so we had connections with, um, the Pride at Work folks and, um, were, um, definitely the—definitely there were—there are also a couple of like, locals that had queer—like, queer chapters that—that worked, but that was more within the RWDSU and—and less with RAP, but certainly, you know, the initiatives that like—that were coming, like, top-down from the UFCW around, um, sexual orientation and gender identity, we would, you know, distribute, but, um, you know, I think that this was a—when you don’t have locals and you just have—you know, our RAP meetings were like, you know, this person who, you know, worked for like, you know, ten years at Saks [Saks 5th Avenue] and then a person who is working like, um—you know, a like, one shoe store, um, and it’s like all undocumented workers, who are working like—you know, like 50, 60 hours a week and then like, paid like, a flat fee all week and then just being told, like, “this is what you get because you’re like, undocumented and like, we’ll turn you in if you don’t do this,” um, and so, it was very much like, you know, base-building when you’ve got, um, folks that have really different concerns and are in really different, sort of, industry tiers and in different shop—different physical locations, but even workers that were in the same physical location—the way that the part-timing has like, broken everybody up was really hard, so it’s hard for queer people to meet other queer people and it’s—it makes organiz—and it makes—like, so it would be like, “okay, like, who are all your coworkers?” they’re like, “well I don’t know 90% of them” so like, you know, Uniqlo will come to New York instead of offering like, 500 full-time jobs, it’s like, “we’re going to get a tax-break for creating 2,000 jobs, but they’re all going to be super part time, your schedules are all over the place, you work ten hours a week and you never meet everybody,” so how do you get everybody together to be like—like, “hey friend, I know you’re pissed too. Like, let’s, you know—let’s have a meeting.” So I think the—the fractioning of all of this makes it really hard for not only queer and trans people to come together, but for everyone to like—to organize, so, uh, it’s different than in the—like, the way the locals are really able to feed, like, LGB—even to, you know—any sort of like, issue or identity-based organizing a lot—a lot easier.

**O’Brien:** So I know you, uh, need to head out. Are there any closing words or comments that you’d like to include?

**Calou:** If there’s anything you want to ask me specifically about...I don’t...yeah...

**O’Brien:** There’s so much I want to ask you about, but [laughter]—

**Calou:** [laughter]

**O’Brien:** —I want to give you a chance to close, uh, in whatever way you’d like.

**Calou:** Um. Yeah, I think I’m just—I’m hap—I'm grateful that, um, this work is being done in order to capture stories of people who are trans and working and in New York City: from here,
coming from here, from Utah, all of the places and, um—yeah, I feel—um, I feel really excited about, um, the potentials for this—for this project.

O'Brien: Thank you so much.

Calou: Yeah.

O'Brien: It's been a pleasure talking with you.

Calou: You too.