# Oral History: Rebecca Clarke

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| Title | Title of Document |  Rebeca\_Salas\_With\_Rebecca\_Clarke\_102816 Complete  |
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| Interviewee | Name of Interviewee (SURNAME, given name(s), middle initial) |  Rebecca Clarke  |
| Interviewer  | Name of Interviewer (Surname, given name(s), middle initial) |  Rebeca Salas  |
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| Summary | Brief summary of the interview session (Copy and paste from Form 13 – Session Summary) |  Rebecca Clarke begins by describing her earliest childhood memories, growing up in Florida, experiences in preschool, her parents’ background, and special memories of her childhood friends. She explains that the main reason she left Florida for British Columbia was to pursue a master’s degree. Rebecca then moves on to discuss her first impressions of Canada and the subtle differences in communication styles she noticed between Canadians and Americans. She reflects on her involvement in Pride UBC and its significance to her as a woman who identifies as a lesbian. Rebecca talks about how she met her wife and how she ended up working at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery. She then moves on to explain why it was so important and meaningful for her to obtain permanent resident status in Canada. Near the end of the interview Rebecca discloses that the legalization of gay marriage was a key factor influencing her and her wife’s decision to stay in Canada. |
| Keywords | Keywords indicating interview subjects (Copy and Paste from “Keyword” section of Form 12 Interview Summary.) |  Pensacola, Florida, Wisconsin, Music, Religion, Teaching, ADHD, New College, Sarasota, University of Florida, Harvard, Howard Gardner, Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Columbia University, PhD, UBC, San Francisco, Pride UBC.  |
| Subject | Subject headings applicable to the Interview. The OHC uses Library of Congress Subject Headings. |  Immigration, Permanent Resident Status, Lesbian, Pride, University, Education, Home, Gulf of Georgia Cannery, Citizenship, Identity, Oxford Learning Center, Culture Shock, Port Moody Museum, Steveston, Central Richmond, Barbecue, Football, 9/11, |
| Duration | Length of Interview Session (if applicable) hh:mm:ss |  01:37:28  |
| Interview # |  Number of the interview (interviewees according to date) |  1  |
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## Transcription Legend:

… = Ellipses used to indicate where an interviewee does not complete a thought.

[?] = Used to indicate indecipherable words or unknown spelling of words.

START OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[00:00:09]

*REBECA*

Alright, so let’s start at the beginning. When were you born? Where were you born? Might get us started [laughs].

*REBECCA*

So I was born on March 22, 1974 in Pensacola, Florida which is basically on the Alabama border, so not what most Canadians picture when they picture Florida, very much part of the south. Um, yeah, so I lived there until I left for university, until I was eighteen. My parents, my father grew up in Florida and my mother was from Wisconsin so we have sort of a little bit of Florida history but his parents were from Kansas so, you know, Midwest is most of my family background. Um, I don’t know, what else would you like to know?

*REBECA*
How was your school experience in Florida as a kid?

*REBECCA*
Well, my parents are both teachers. My father was a music professor, my mom was a French teacher so my sister and I both were in preschool from, basically, day one [laughs]. They’re like “got to go back and teach.” So I went to this preschool across the street from where my father taught college and the routine was my dad sort of had morning duty and he would get us ready and my mom would pick us up after her school from preschool. It was a religious preschool but my family’s not religious so that was sort of interesting. My mom tells this joke about how I would come home and say “yeah, why do we say come in after we eat or before we eat?” They would say a prayer, which my family didn’t pray before they ate, and they would say amen but I didn’t understand. I was like “and come in.” [laughs]. So that was sort of interesting. I mean, Pensacola was a very religious place, I think. When I was growing up in high school it had the highest number of churches per capita in the US. It was very religious, very Baptist, a big African American community so most of the teachers at the preschool that I went to were African American. So this was like a big part of my life growing up. They had awesome food in preschool. That’s one of the things I remember and I was like “Oh, I love lunch in preschool” [laughs].

*REBECA*Really? What kinds of food do you remember?

*REBECCA*Well, it was southern food. I remember coleslaw, cornbread, and that sort of stuff. So that was good, preschool was good [laughs].

*REBECA*Sounds like a lucky experience, at least with the food.

*REBECCA*Yeah, and then I started kindergarten and when I grew up bussing was a big policy so here there’s like neighbourhood schools which took a little bit for me to get used to because nobody here really rides busses. Where I grew up, five years old, you’re waiting at the bus stop to get on the bus in the morning with everybody else and, yeah, so that was the first couple of years and then when I was around six we moved to a new house and started a new school, neighbourhood. It was a bit more, sort of, middle class, white, very waspy kind of thing. My earlier school there was a bit more African American presence and, I don’t know. I remember I had my first teacher who was this African American woman and she insisted that I write my name Rebecca which, at the time, I always went by Becky growing up. I was like “Rebecca is so long, my god [laughs]. It’s like three more letters. Why are you making me write this name? [laughing].” So, I remember that. But yeah, and then I was put in a gifted program pretty early on and from grade four to eight I went to a different school once a week so they bussed. You know, you get on a different bus that day and go to a different school and that was really cool because we got to choose classes that were totally unrelated to the regular curriculum and so that was pretty special. I did a lot of extra biology classes and art classes and so that was . . .

[00:04:57]

It created a really tight network of friends through that experience in particular. Yeah, so what else can I tell you? That was, sort of, elementary school and middle school. So we had middle school where I grew up and that was . . . sort of like as you went up the school chain the schools got bigger and bigger. So then middle school was in a totally different neighbourhood and, again, there were a lot of African American kids in that school as well. So it was like a lot. I wouldn’t necessarily use the word multicultural because it’s basically, like, black and white people [laughs]. And then I ended up going to an Ivy program for high school and the city . . . I decided to put that program in the most inner city school to help get more funding for it because every Ivy student came with a certain amount of money so it helps for that school. So that school was probably, like, seventy percent African American, maybe eighty. So that was more interesting and it was a bit rough. Not that I . . . I mean I never had any issues and, you know, it was like all good but I remember there was race incidents when I was there. It was kind of like, you know, the people . . . because I was the third class to go through that program so it was still a pretty new program and I think there was some feeling in the community that it was like, you know, “why are they parachuting these mostly white people into our neighbourhood and into our school and this is . . .” like, you know, and they get . . . We got treated a little bit differently because we were in a different program so there was a bit of resentment. It worked out but it was a good experience. You know, like in my elementary school everybody was just like me, right? So being in a high school that was different and, you know, people from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds so it was kind of a little bit of a learning experience that way.

*REBECA*

Do you have any memories of any childhood friends or, probably high school friends, but do you have any special memories about your friends growing up? I would be interested to hear.

*REBECCA*

Um, yeah, I mean I had lots of friends. Every year we had a group of friends . . . I had a tight group of friends in high school that was . . . Actually, in middle school, I still am friends with some of them. There’s three or four of us that went to middle school together and then ended up going to the same high school so we stayed pretty tight. I mean, we were for the most part pretty good kids, you know. We studied hard and did our community service hours and that sort of stuff. I played soccer one year, mostly because all my friends were doing it and I’m not the most athletically inclined person but I was like “oh sure, what the hell.” Yeah, when I was younger I was on a swim team. Swimming was always a big part of my life. We had a pool. I brought this picture since I was two so, like, that was what we did all summer was spend the days in the pool. I think most of middle school I was on the swim team until it was like “okay, now you’re so good you’re going to the next level. That means that you have to wake up at five a.m. to be in the pool” and I was like “oh, that sounds really early. I don’t really have an Olympic dream here so maybe it’s time to move on” [laughs]. Um, yeah, so I think I was probably, I was kind of considered the bad one in the crowd. I saw my friend’s mother recently and she’s like “we always kept our eye on you” [laughs].

*REBECA*

Why is that?

*REBECCA*Oh, I don’t know, I think it was mostly in how I dressed. I was always a little bit of a rebel, in high school mainly. I had this uneven haircut, like kind of this funky alternative kind of thing and, you know, I wore torn jeans and all this sort of stuff. I remember in high school I got called into the dean’s office because my jeans were torn and it was against the rules. They made me wait there for quite a while. I got in to see the dean and I’m like “you’re wasting my learning time with this because I don’t think this is really that important” [laughs]. Most of my teachers knew that my parents were teachers and they knew them so they were sort of like “alright, whatever.” I didn’t really get in too much serious trouble.

*REBECA*
Sounds like you were more creative than anything. Not so much a rebel getting into actual trouble.

*REBECCA*
Yeah, I mean, I did my fair share of sneaking out at night and meeting with boys and, you know, the punk scene was big then so I would often sneak out and go to these punk concerts at night. There was a bit of that but, you know, I usually, like, I participated in that stuff but sort of from the periphery so it’s not like I really got into big trouble.

[00:10:55]

*REBECA*

Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

*REBECCA*

Yeah, so I mentioned my parents were teachers and I have one younger sister. They’re pretty big into arts and cultural things. So I said I wasn’t particularly religious but in my family the religion was music and reading. For most of my childhood my parents had season tickets to the symphony concerts and there was like this monthly ritual on Saturday where we would have to dress nicely and mom would curl our hair, which was the most painful thing ever, and then we would go to the symphony concert. Because my dad was in music he sort of knew everyone and so you had to be a good daughter and, like, you know “this is my daughter Rebecca.” If we were really good we went for Krispy Kreme donuts after which was the most exciting part [laughs]. So that was fun, and then going to the library. My mom is a huge reader. I think she’s been in the same book club for like forty years, like, older than I am. I think she started in this book club before I was born. They read a ton of books so we would always be at the library and we did the read-a-thon and one year I really went all gung-ho and read loads of books and I won this Discman camera which was so awesome. So that was a pretty big year. We ended up going to France that summer and I brought my Discman camera. I think I was like ten or something so it was a really big deal.

*REBECA*

What’s your relationship like with your sister?

*REBECCA*
Um, when I was younger it wasn’t so great. She had ADHD and I think she was one of the first generation to really be diagnosed with that and one of the first to be treated with Ritalin for it. She was really hyperactive. It was pretty crazy. There was at least a couple times when social services came to our house because she had lots of bruises from being crazy and people would think she was being beaten. She caught onto that eventually and was like “I’m going to call social services if you’re not nice to me!” [laughs]. Um, but, yeah, it made for, like, bringing home my first boyfriend and stuff and she’s like chasing him around the house. It’s like, oh. Bringing home friends . . . I eventually spent more of my time at my friends’ houses rather than at home because it was just a little bit overwhelming. Eventually . . . She’s three and a half years behind me so when I was a senior in high school she was a freshman. We went to the same university. I was a senior, she was a freshman. By the time we got to university I think we were more on an even playing field and we could start to be friends. Since then things have been good and I’m actually going to see her next week in Philadelphia.

*REBECA*
Nice.

*REBECCA*
Yeah, but when she was little she was a handful.

*REBECA*

How about your parents? Are you quite close with them?

*REBECCA*
Yup, yup. They still live in Pensacola. I talk to them pretty much every week and, yeah. They haven’t changed too much, still doing symphony, book club. They do . . . I’m pretty proud of them, they do a lot of volunteering and my mom’s like, you know, teaches people English and my dad helps with the food bank and stuff like that. They’re pretty good for a couple of people in their seventies.

*REBECA*
So what was the . . . You mentioned you left to go to university. Was that the main reason for leaving Florida or did you go to university in Florida?

[00:15:30]

*REBECCA*

Well, I went to two universities in Florida. I first went to this really small liberal arts college called New College. They kind of called it like the gifted college of Florida. It was part of the state system but they didn’t have grades. It was kind of a pass, fail thing. It was kind of known to be this, like, hippie school. I went to visit and there were all these stories about people experimenting with how long you could go without bathing and stuff like that [laughs]. I was just like “okay, this place is kind of weird” but it was right on the beach. It was in Sarasota, Florida which is about eight hours south of Pensacola. I ended up going there for a couple years and then decided that I was really interested in pursuing education more and because it was a liberal arts school they didn’t have any classes in education. So I transferred to the bigger university which is the University of Florida which is more in central Florida. I ended up doing Sociology with an Education minor. I had these dreams of going on and changing the education system and that sort of thing. New College was really, really good in the sense of they had one month out of each year where you did an independent study. So when I started I was an Archaeology major and so that first January I spent the month doing an archaeology dig which was awesome. I loved it but the archaeologist who was leading our little group was like really not very encouraging about the employment field and I was like “oh, there’s not many jobs here. Maybe this isn’t a good idea.” That and then I took a course and we had to memorize all these bones and all that stuff. It was like “okay this is not very interesting to me.” So then I went and started working on . . . I changed my major to child psychology and the next year I did an independent study. I did an internship at Harvard and I was working with Howard Gardner’s team which is like, he does the theory of multiple intelligences and that. So that was really interesting and, yeah, I was really excited about all of that and that kind of got me more interested in pursuing education and going into that side. I think it’s kind of interesting that I ended up in the museum world because I sort of started from both different angles of my interest. Yeah, so then I finished at the University of Florida with my bachelor’s and I was literally . . . I had this really clear idea of what I wanted to do for my master’s degree and there weren’t a lot of programs out there and I started, I got accepted at Columbia University teachers college in New York and I went out there and went for the orientation and my mom went with me. It was supposed to be the first week of school and I remember you had like all of these things, right? Like, you were going to meet this mentor and he would take you around and then you’re going to talk to the financial people and that sort of stuff and, at the time, I think tuition was $15,000 a year and it was a PhD program so it was a four year program. You weren’t really supposed to work and you had to live in New York City. The most you could take out in loans was $18,000. So I’m like “okay, so I’m going to be taking out $18,000 in loans a year, potentially for four years, to get a PhD in the sociology of education.” It’s like I feel a little nervous about this and then the professor guy, he was like crazy. I’m like “is this really . . . I’m going to pay $15,000 for this guy?” He came in and he had like these glasses that were taped up and he was showing us around the department and he got lost and I’m like “what the hell is this about?” [laughs]. I came back and I told my mom “I don’t know if I really want to do this” [laughs]. So, she’s like “alright.” So I said “I don’t want to do this” and then we left. I went back to Florida. So that was the fall and I lived with my parents for a few more months and saved some money and, I guess, I don’t know exactly the timeline, I came to visit Vancouver because I had been accepted at UBC.

[00:20:50]

I had never heard of Vancouver. I had no idea. My whole world was on the east coast so I was like “oh, I don’t know.” I just sort of assumed it would be on the east coast [laughs] and then I’m like “oh, it’s totally on the west coast.” So I went to visit because last time it was like “maybe I should go check this out before I just jump into a new program.” I came on the most beautiful June day ever. It was gorgeous blue skies and I stayed in one of the dorm rooms at UBC and was like “okay, this sounds good.” Tuition was super cheap because the American dollar was strong and tuition was way cheaper than at the American universities. They gave me a scholarship for being an international student and I’m like “this is awesome! I can get this degree practically for free!” So I was pretty well sold. So I ended up . . . I came in January and so I worked some more, I bought a truck. I bought a pickup truck with a canopy, I put all my stuff in this truck, and we left, my girlfriend at the time, we left Christmas day and drove across America to come here. It was quite the experience because I traveled to Europe before so I’d been in places where, like, from a higher latitude but . . . And I knew it would stay light out later but I’d never really been up north in the winter. I was like “where did the sun go?” So it was, like, you know, middle of December and it’s getting dark at four o’clock and we had this whole trip planned. We were going to . . . We stopped at all these historic sites along the way and it was called ‘Becky’s big adventure’ this whole thing. We stopped into all these friends along the way and stayed with them and all this stuff but I remember we left San Francisco and we were driving up the coastal highway and we were going to see the redwood trees but it took forever. The road is super windy. It took forever to get there so the park was closed because it closed at dusk and we were like “but it’s like, so early!” but there’s no sun. So that was like “okay, so this is how it is up north.” Um, yeah, so I arrived January 2nd at ten o’clock and I got to the border and they’re like “uh, you need to show proof that you can be financially supported.” So I had to call my parents at, which was like midnight their time, and I’m like “they’re not going to let me in Canada unless you send these papers.” My had to go to his office and fax all this stuff to the Canadian border people before they would let me in so that was sort of crazy. We waited there for a while and then we drove in the border. We’re driving down highway 99, it was totally dark, and I had corresponded by email . . . I think I found some sort of roommate thing online. It’s a little fuzzy because this was still somewhat the early days of the internet. So this woman had promised me that she lived close to UBC and she lived in Burnaby and so . . . Anyways, we were driving down the highway and one of the things I distinctly remember was, like, we were baffled by these lights in the sky that didn’t look like buildings. Like, “what is this, it’s so crazy.” These bright lights just . . . Eventually, it took weeks, I had no idea what these lights were for the longest time. It was the ski hill lights [laughs]. It was like this big mystery for the longest time, like, “what are those things?” So, I find this lady’s house. I’m just renting a room from her. She lives like four blocks from SFU and I don’t know if she was lying to me or if she was just totally ignorant of which university she lived next to, um, she clearly needed the money.

[00:25:26]

 She had two kids and everything. Anyway, that only lasted a month and it was crazy. It snowed a lot that month, too. I was like “oh, what’s going on.” The people in my program were super nice and they explained to me what is fleece and what is Gortex and what is a toque. I didn’t know any of this stuff. They’re like, “You’re definitely going to want to do this. You can put fleece in the dryer but don’t put Gortex in the dryer.” So it was pretty funny.

*REBECA*

You became an expert layerer, I’m sure [laughs].

*REBECCA*
Yeah, it took a while. I was not used to the dress for here at all. So I lived in a few places. So I moved . . . and I found another roommate who lived, like, Oak and Twelfth. I lived with her for a few months and then I ended up living at a graduate college on campus for a few months. By that time I had made some friends and I still had my pickup truck. I was just, you know, driving back and forth on campus quite a bit and I remember one night we were leaving campus with my wife, who was my girlfriend at the time, and we were following some other friends and we were driving down, like, the Sixteenth Avenue road that goes into campus and the tire started acting funny. I was, like, “oh, maybe something’s wrong with the tire.” So I was jiggling the wheel a little bit to see what happens and the truck just like skidded off the road into the ditch. We didn’t flip over or wreck or anything like that. My friends were driving behind us. They’re like “oh my god, what happened?” and they’re like “oh, well there’s this thing called black ice” which I had never heard of. I’m like “what? What are you talking about, black ice?” They’re like, “yeah, don’t do that again. That was not the right thing to do if there’s black ice on the road.” I’m like, “oh okay.” So that first year there was a lot of like how to live in Canada kind of experience.

*REBECA*
So I think you’re indirectly touching upon this but I’m curious to hear about what your first impressions of Canada were and you mentioned that June day that you came for the first time but did anything surprise you about when you came to Canada for the first time, especially when you were getting settled in?

*REBECCA*

Um, when I visited or when I arrived?

*REBECA*

Let’s say when you arrived.

*REBECCA*
Uh, well, I kind of lived in . . . Sorry my phone’s buzzing.

*REBECA*
Oh, it’s okay I thought it was mine.

*REBECCA*

I kind of lived in two worlds because there was my school world that was, you know, so all of my classmates and I made friends through that way and then, you know, I identified as lesbian so . . . I guess I knew. This woman I rented a room from was a lesbian and so we would hang out and go clubbing and that sort of thing and then the next woman was also lesbian and then I got involved with Pride UBC and none of those people were in my program. They just were other students at the university. So I had these two very different social groups at the time. The school side, I remember it . . . like I’m pretty extroverted and I think it was the first time like really understanding some subtle cultural differences between Americans and Canadians. Every classroom there was always discussion time. It was like that was what you do in graduate school. You read and then you go to class and you discuss but I just have no problem with that sharing my opinion and talking [laughs]. And everybody else . . . I’m like “why are these people not talking more? Like they’re so quiet.” I think that was the first realization of like, sort of like gregarious, maybe a little too loud American and the polite ‘wait your turn’ kind of, you know, “I’ll say something when I really think it’s important and necessary” kind of Canadian way of being.

[00:30:21]

 So, I don’t know, but I was super lonely too. Yeah, I didn’t know anybody here when I moved here. So I think, you know, probably I was like desperate to talk and like when I finally got to class it was like “I have people to talk to, thank god!” [laughs]. And probably it was like “I need to make friends” so you’ve got to put yourself out there to do that, right? I wouldn’t have survived if I’d had been shy and reticent. I would have just been lonely all the time. So it took a lot of courage especially to get involved with Pride UBC. It was super intimidating. They all knew each other and you kind of go in this room . . . It had nothing to do with coming out. That wasn’t an issue but just like all these scary people who have their own group to try and like become part of that so, yeah. So there was that part of it. I think in the time Clinton was president but . . . I remember the first few years I had lived here . . . Then George Bush got elected, too. There was a fair amount of anti-Americanism which, I mean, you know, Americans were all totally egocentric and we never think about what other people think of us. So to come out and be like . . . And no one would . . . Most people when you meet me you don’t know that I’m American, right? So I would hear it a lot and be like “god, people really hate the US. Like, oh my gosh.” Yeah, I know, sometimes it was super awkward. I’d be like “uh, yeah” and then later on in the conversation “oh, where are you from?” “well, actually, I’m American.” You remember like ten minutes ago when you were bashing Americans, yeah, that was me. So there was definitely some of that that made it a little bit hard to, you know, and then the idea like having to explain that I’m not from the part of Florida that every Canadian knows. That there are not really palm trees where I’m from. There are no snow birds, like that sort of thing. I’m like “think about Alabama” and then it would totally shut people up [laughs] because that’s . . . I mean, we would cross the border in Alabama all the time and like I went to school with people from Alabama like that’s how close Pensacola is and Canadians really, I think, really don’t know much about Alabama and don’t really have, in their mind, an image of what Alabama looks like except to assume that they’re mostly kind of poor and uneducated and, to some extent, a little bit redneck. So it was sort of interesting coming . . . You know, it really . . . Like you take for granted so much of your cultural identity when you live in your country. When you live in your area, like . . . I’m sure if I had moved to the west coast of the US I would have come up against some of that stuff as well but, you know, taking even that next step was like crossing a national border. So it was interesting. I’m super thankful that I got involved with Pride UBC because those are still the people that are my friends today. I met them that first year I was here and we’re still friends, the whole group of us so it was, yeah, it was like a bonding kind of time.

*REBECA*
What kinds of activities would you do as a group or is it more of a social group, events, and that kind of thing? Maybe you can tell me a little bit more about it.

*REBECCA*

That Pride UBC did?

*REBECA*
Yeah, yeah.

*REBECCA*
It was mostly a social group. They had the little office. Did you go to UBC?

*REBECA*
SFU

*REBECCA*

Yeah, well every university’s the same right? They have all these little clubs and they all have these little offices tucked in some basement corner [laughs]. Like every little minority group or whatever, activist group gets their little cubby hole. Yeah, so we had a little cubby hole but it was nice. In between classes or whatever you had a few hours to kill that’s where people would go and you’d hang out. So a lot of it was just about having that support group.

[00:35:11]

I mean, I think for me, when I came out to my family it was never an issue for me but for some people they really need that and, you know, when you can’t go home and be who you feel like you are and be honest about that stuff, having that sort of space where everybody is okay with it is super important. So a lot of it was just about that. Some of it was, there was a little bit more sort of activist outreach kind of side to things so . . . I mean we did some, you know, like writing articles in the paper or every year I think we marched in the pride parade so I did that once or twice. You know, that sort of stuff. We had beer gardens and, yeah. It was mostly fun stuff. I remember the movie library was super important, like, having the latest gay and lesbian film was a big thing. There was a lot of hanging out and watching gay and lesbian movies [laughs]. Yeah, my one friend, she was the outreach person so I think she went and talked to groups about sex and different things like that. It wasn’t sex education so much but it was like sexuality awareness kind of stuff. I didn’t do that part of it so I don’t know too much about it but, yeah.

*REBECA*

I’m just remembering some of the photos you brought and you showed me. So, when about did you meet your wife? You’ve got some cool wedding photos here.

*REBECCA*

Yeah, so this Burnaby woman I stayed with, that didn’t work out, and then I moved in with this other woman who lived on Twelfth Avenue and she was a police officer for Vancouver PD. She is about ten years older than me. So I hung out with her a little bit. She, being a police officer, she had kind of a crazy schedule and she was a little bit like . . . I mean, it’s kind of weird when somebody new just comes and lives in your house. I rented, literally, a bedroom from her right? So I think that takes a lot of guts to do. It’s not like we ever became super tight friends but we were friendly and hung out enough that, you know, I met some of her friends and this and that. Her friends, she was somehow talking with her friends and they’re like “hey, we know a lesbian who’s, like, ten years younger than us, too! We should get them together!” [laughs].

*REBECA*

Purely by age.

*REBECCA*
Yeah, so there was like, I think, three people. There was my roommate, her friend, and then her girlfriend and her girlfriend is Sara, my wife. There was like this totally ridiculous game of telephone. That’s the one where you pass along a message. So we did get our contact information but what I heard was, I think it was mostly accurate, the only thing that was kind of odd is, like, she worked in forestry and I had this impression that she was like a forester, plaid shirt, like this sort of outdoorsy kind of, I don’t know, I don’t know what image I had. I was like “oh, forestry.” I didn’t know anybody in forestry. She heard that I was blonde and from Texas and was in women’s studies which none of them are true which I’m surprised, knowing her, she went on a date with someone like that. We emailed back and forth for a while and sorted all that out and things went well in email and then went for a date and we met at Fourth and Maple. We went to Las Margaritas and it was the super weirdest first blind date ever. I love Mexican food, of course, being an American. At the time, she was like “I don’t like Mexican food.” I’m like “um, okay, this is awkward because we’re at a Mexican restaurant” [laughs]. We were at this restaurant and a couple of weird things happened. I found out later she was really uncomfortable because some ex-boyfriend of hers was in the restaurant when she . . . I didn’t even know. It was a super awkward date, anyways, which was weird because we had email exchanges that went really well. So, I don’t know. At one point, she went up and she went to the washroom and so we’re at this table and there’s this other table here and the guy leans over to me and he’s like “hey, um, is the girl you’re with, is she with anyone?” [laughs] and I’m like . . . I don’t know what to say to that like we’re on this first date, like, she’s not really with me other than right now she’s with me and I guess I looked so awkward that he’s like “oh, oh, is she with you?” and I’m like “uh, yeah. Yeah, sure” [laughs]. It was the weirdest moment ever like I’m like to this day never seen anything like this happen in a restaurant in my life [laughs].

[00:41:03]

So anyway, that date ended and we’re both kind of like “okay that was awkward.” We didn’t talk for a little while and then eventually she called me up and I was like “well, what the hell” you know, like, I’m not doing anything else. Why don’t we go on another date? Her friend, who I now know very well, she had this three date rule and she’s like “you can’t just rule somebody out after one date.” So we have to go on three dates so we went on a second date and it went much better. It was all history after that.

*REBECA*
Good [laughs].

*REBECCA*
Yeah, I know [laughs]. Yeah, it’s very, sort of, of the time, that sort of story because there’s no . . . this is like pre-internet dating, only email. I think I was in this technology education course at the time. Part of one of the things we had to do was go in a chat room. Chat rooms were like new. I’d never gone into a chat room before so I met her in a chat room and that was, like, a really kind of different thing. I don’t know, I never intended to stay in Canada.

*REBECA*
Really?

*REBECCA*
Yeah. I was like, “oh, I’ll come here, I’ll go to school and get my degree.” So meeting her kind of threw a curve into that [laughs]. Yeah, I mean, we moved in together, I don’t know, maybe six months later and then I graduated in 2000 and I think around that time I went for my permanent residency which was a big deal. That was, to me, kind of a bigger decision than later on getting married or becoming a citizen [laughs]. So, I mean there is a few steps along the way like when I went to get my car registered in BC and they’re like “we need your Florida plates and your Florida license” and I’m like “what?” I almost was like “sorry, I’ll have to go. Never mind. You can’t take my Florida stuff” [laughs]. So there was like this steps along the way, this process where you slowly, like, my Florida identity was slowly taken and this Canadian identity slowly replaced it but the permanent residency part was big. It’s such a process when you have to go and ask all these people in your life to write letters and I didn’t quite have enough points to just do it on my own so the application was based on a relationship so we had to have all these letters about our relationship and then we had to fly down to LA and interview together. Yeah, it was pretty intimidating. There’s so much paperwork and it was very, I guess it was stressful. It was intense, I guess, maybe, is a better word for it.

*REBECA*

I think something so intense, and tell me if I’m wrong, but does make you . . . What feels like a big deal makes you consider your American versus Canadian identity quite a bit. Like you say, when you have to face all of these questions about yourself I think it would be kind of a . . .

*REBECCA*
Yeah, well it was . . . I mean, this is where being gay is a big part of it because it was never an option for Sara to move to the States so it’s like if we wanted to be together I had to move here. Which, in some ways, made it easier because, I mean, that would have been a hard discussion to have like “oh, why don’t you come to America with me?” We never had that discussion. She’s very Canadian. She grew up on the north shore and she loves it here and I think people who grow up in Vancouver have such a limited temperature range of where they’re comfortable, like, Florida was not an option [laughs]. It’s way too hot! So, yeah, so that was a big thing and I think probably right after that or right around the time when the process finally finished and I got my residency I proposed and we ended up getting married in 2001. It’s funny because I know a number of my friends are international couples as well. It’s funny how that changes marriage because I already made this huge commitment to her, like changing my country so it was like, well, of course, we’re going to be together forever. I just left my country for you. So, yeah. We got married in August 2001. I started working at Oxford Learning Center here in Richmond in May and it’s a franchise and it was brand new at the time and this East Indian couple from Mumbai, I think it was still called Bombay at the time, had bought it. They lived in London in between and they had a young daughter.

[00:47:02]

They were also new to Canada so this was . . . They immigrated here as new business owners and they had committed to starting this business. So that was kind of an adventure. I started with them and the building was, there was no furniture, they were still painting the walls, and all that stuff; a brand new business. So it was interesting to do that in terms of the business perspective and also to work with this couple from East India. I went to high school with a couple of, I guess, Indian Americans but they were very American. They ate Indian food at home but you didn’t really notice any difference really. So, you know, it was really interesting getting to know that cultural side of that, too and then to work in Richmond and to meet so many different people it was amazing. When I grew up there was some Vietnamese families who immigrated during the Vietnam era and I guess there were a few Chinese kids in my class. I didn’t really know them. I don’t know how . . . They didn’t really stand out so much but it was culture shock when I came here. I was like “there’s no African Americans anywhere.” Now you see the occasional black person but twenty years ago, no. I’m like “where are all the black people? It’s so quiet here and really not very colourful.” I mean in my high school, in between classes, it was a roar and screams down the hallway. Just the culture is very loud and colourful and in your face and not rude but not polite, you know like tell it like it is, right? I went through a bit of cultural shock that way and then I’m pretty sure I had never met anyone from Japan until I moved here. So getting to know all these people from all these different Asian countries was like “wow, okay. I didn’t know any of this stuff. This is all new to me.” So that was super interesting and really, I really liked working at Oxford Learning Center doing that because you . . . I met the families, right. I worked with their kids and it’s so easy to have . . . We were both there for the common good of the kids. That’s so easy to connect over and to learn “oh, we need to change our schedule because of Ramadan and fasting and we’re going back to China or we’re going back to India.” I mean, there was just so many cultural things that come into play when you’re working with someone’s kids.

*REBECA*

Let’s see, I’m just going to pull this picture of you at Oxford Learning Center.

*REBECCA*

That’s this one.

*REBECA*

Okay, I’m trying to . . . Can you tell me a little bit about this picture while we’re talking about the subject?

*REBECCA*

Well, I don’t necessarily remember this specific, sort of, the only photo I had. It’s not really the kind of thing where we took a lot of pictures but there was . . . The learning center had a preschool and afterschool tutoring so I worked with kids of all ages. We even had a few two year olds so those pictures are from the preschool and most of it revolved around learning. It was a little phonics class and so they would learn letters and sounds and things like that but this was, obviously, Christmas time so we would do some holiday stuff. It wasn’t like your community center preschool work where we did a bunch of crafts and that kind of thing normally. I think for that reason it did attract a lot of Asian families. So most of the kids that were in preschool . . . I mean, not only being in Richmond, but also being academically oriented, most of the kids were from some sort of Asian background.

*REBECA*
Right.

*REBECCA*

So that was fun. Yeah.

*REBECA*
So when did you transition to working at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery?

*REBECCA*
Well, I worked at Oxford for a while. Maybe four and a half years or so and I got a little burned out on it. I was working evenings, it was open Saturdays, so my schedule is super irregular and it got to a point . . . It was my first real job after my master’s degree and I kind of got to a point where I’m like “okay, well, what’s next?” because it wasn’t like a big organization it was like there was the owners, me, and then a lot of teachers. So I went to a career coach and I was like “okay, so now what do I do? I’m not sure what to do” and I think around that time I met this woman at a party from AldrichPears, an exhibit design company.

[00:52:54]

I think working with the coach and looking at some of the things I’ve been interested in the past, like, museums sort of came up as an option. I went and had lunch with this woman at AldrichPears and I really, I don’t know, it sort of like tweaked something for me. It sounded like “this is something that I should really pursue.” So I left Oxford and I started volunteering at the Vancouver museum and doing their school programs and just, really quickly, got paid work from that and within a year or so I was program assistant there and worked mildly up to program coordinator, overseeing all the programming there. That was . . . It was fun. I really enjoyed doing that. Again, I got to work with all different ages of kids, you know, not necessarily like curriculum ABC 123 kind of stuff. It was really fun like mummies and, you know, like it was really cool stuff, and history which I loved. I did all the overnights and so I would like spend the night at the museum with the kids and I did this animation program and we would make little animated films of history events. It was really cool. I ended up leaving there and I went to Port Moody Museum and I got hired there to do . . . I redid their whole school program and then worked my way up there and ended up doing events and then being manager there and then I ended up taking the job as executive director at Gulf of Georgia. Something about the . . . I really like the industrial history side. Port Moody Museum is all about trains. I don’t know, I just like that time period and this, sort of, work ethic and there are so many stories to tell there and the history of the province and how that ties in with everything.

*REBECA*
What have been some of the more memorable projects or events that have happened in the cannery that you’ve been involved in?

*REBECCA*

That’s a good question. It’s been interesting working at the cannery. It’s a national historic site and it’s owned by Parks Canada and I work for the non-profit who operates things there. So getting to understand that relationship and then the relationship of the site to the community. Having worked in Port Moody, that museum is very much a community museum and it’s there for the community, it’s a history of the community, and the stories of the community. Gulf of Georgia is different. Its mandate is bigger. It’s bigger geographically but more narrow topic-wise. So, like a community museum, anything that happens in the community, it can be a huge number of things whereas the Gulf of Georgia is about fishing. So it’s been interesting understanding that relationship and how does a site like this that’s a federal site, so it’s not even legally part of the city, and how does this, not necessarily community driven mandate, how does it work with the community. That’s been an interesting process. We have a very community-minded board so doing things like starting our own indoor farmers market in the winter, that’s been a big thing. So how do you do that, you know, connect with the community and still get people to experience fishing history and experience the site. I think that’s been a common theme of a lot of what we do is how do you connect to the local community while still trying to tell this bigger story.

[00:57:39]

I think, traditionally, like when I started there the site had just started being open year-round. So most of the first part of its history was very much sort of a tourist attraction kind of thing. The relationship with the local community wasn’t that essential. It’s not who they were looking for visitation to come from. They didn’t really care about having a volunteer program going because they were only open five months of the year. By opening all year the focus really changed quite a bit in terms of the ability and I think the desire to work with local community and make those connections stronger. It’s interesting in a place like Richmond where you have . . . like fishing in Steveston is like really an integral part of the history. People are super proud of it but that’s like one little neighbourhood in Richmond so when you’re trying to reach out to the whole community and get people involved, like, how do you relate to those people? And how do you help them understand that this was an important part of the history especially in a community where so many people are not from here so it’s not really their history? So why is that important to them and trying to get that across. When I was doing my master’s degree one of the other students in the program was doing her own thing but her topic was on the study of place. That just always rung true to me and being an immigrant and being a person who travels a lot, like, understanding place has always been so important to me and being curious about other people’s places and also for me to feel at home in a new place, understanding the geography, the culture, its history, like all those things to understand the place that you’re in. So that’s always been kind of an underlying thing for me in terms of why I think museums are important and why I think cultural sites are important and what we do for the community. I think there’s a lot more we can do there. It’s sort of a long-term dream. You know, how you get new people involved in a national historic site is sort of an interesting thing.

*REBECA*

Well, it’s been quite a while since you’ve been working with the Richmond community but if you were able to talk about the benefits and maybe even the challenges of working in Richmond, what comes to your mind about being involved in the community where you work I think would be interesting to hear.

*REBECCA*

Yeah, um, when I was at Oxford, I think working with a community of families who were quite passionate about achieving academically, you know, whether that was students who were doing well who were looking to get into really great private schools or gifted programs or whether it was students who were struggling who they wanted to do better . . . But that’s always been important to me as well with my parents being teachers. That’s not always something that I might have found where I come from that there was that, you know, that sort of intrinsic value to education. There’s a lot of, I think, a lot of people who are sort of like “it’s okay to be average. Cs are fine. We care more about sports” or whatever it is and I think there’s some of that in Canada as well “he’s a hockey player and he does great in hockey and that’s where his future is going to be” or whatever. I mean I really appreciated working with those families who really cared about that. Yeah, I think the acceptance of diversity . . Like I don’t know the politics of most of these Asian, Middle Eastern countries but I know the number of different places that people came from, the families in our center.

[01:02:40]

I’m sure there were families in our center from countries that do not get along at the same time but that was never an issue. We had Jewish families and we had Palestinian families and we had, you know, Pakistani and Indian and all kinds of . . . Families from everywhere and nobody cared. It was just like . . . I think it’s because we’re in Canada you leave all that behind. People don’t seem to bring that here. It’s like “I came here. I left that stuff behind. Whatever the chip was that I had on my shoulder in my own country is gone when I come to Canada.” I think that’s kind of nice.

*REBECA*
That’s pretty cool.

*REBECCA*
Yeah. Working in Steveston is a lot different than working in central Richmond.

*REBECA*
Oh yeah? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

*REBECCA*

Yeah, like, well I mean the Steveston community isn’t diverse like the rest of Richmond and there’s a lot more people who’ve lived there for a long time and they have long time community roots. They’re very passionate about their history and their community, the way it looks and what happens to it. I think more backward thinking. I don’t mean that in a bad way. I think they’re the people who have real passion for the history and heritage. They’re the people who worked hard to preserve the cannery and the reason why there’s so many groups doing heritage work in Steveston which I think is great. You look at other parts of Richmond and there are newcomers looking forward. “What is my new life going to be like? How do we make life really great here for my kids?” So it’s very different feelings. Not to say things are good or bad it’s just sort of really interesting that they’re all part of the same city because I think they’re quite different. I enjoy working in Steveston. It’s a very tight community. Everybody knows everybody in that little neighbourhood. It’s a little crazy sometimes [laughs].

*REBECA*

Interesting to think about the differences between them.

*REBECCA*
Yeah.

*REBECA*
Thinking about your story, coming from Florida moving to Canada, I was wondering if there’s anything that you maybe miss about home in Florida that’s different that you don’t find as much in Canada. I think there are always feelings about where you grew up but is there anything that you really miss about Florida?

*REBECCA*

There’s lots of things I miss. You can’t get decent barbecue anywhere in the lower mainland that I know of. I used to . . . If I was having a bad day I’d go get barbecue, like, my whole life that’s what you did. That’s definitely, like, as soon as we go home, even if I’m not in Florida I’m like “where’s the nearest barbecue restaurant? I’ve got to get some barbecue food.” I definitely miss that. It took me a long time, and I don’t know if I’m still quite acclimatised but I was like . . . Three years later, like, is summer ever coming here? I haven’t been really warm once. So I’m a little bit more acclimatised now but for many years, just having that hot heat, I just miss it. I spent a lot of time at the beach. I remember going to the beach here and I’m like “That’s not a beach.” I’m totally spoiled. You can see this picture. Pensacola has beautiful white sand beaches. They’re some of the best beaches in the world and, yeah, rocks and wet sand just aren’t the same. The Gulf of Mexico the water is beautiful, warm, and, you know, here the water is like freezing cold.

[01:07:18]

*REBECA*
The sand is so white. Here it’s like a gravel beach type situation [laughs].

*REBECCA*
Yeah, it’s like this coarse sand. Sara, the first Christmas I took her there and we went out to the beach she’s like “it looks like snow.” She had to go and pick it up. I’m like “yeah.” She’s like “it looks like snow!” So I miss that. I miss football. University of Florida, I went there for two years, they had one of the biggest football teams. College football is huge, it’s like . . . You know, when you meet people for the first time it’s going to be in the conversation. Like, “what university did you go to?” and then some sort of judgement on their football team [laughs]. I still follow Gator Football and try and watch the games when I can but if they’re not playing well they don’t broadcast them up here. I figured now I have internet radio so I could listen to them through the internet so I still keep in touch that way. I don’t know, I mean, I think it becomes more acute when something happens like when the hurricanes hit the south, like Hurricane Katrina, and there were some other ones at that time too that hit closer to my home. That was hard to be away and not there. I ended up, after I left the Vancouver Museum, I took a month off and I went and worked for Habitat for Humanity in Mississippi and helped build houses for people who lost them in the hurricane. I find that hard. I was going to tell you this story of 9/11. I started at Oxford in May and we got married in August and then September 11th I woke up and my alarm radio went off and it was talking about what happened in New York. Sara had already left for work so I watched the TV for a while and then I was like “okay, well . . .” and by that time both the buildings had fallen and it was like . . . And my sister lived in Brooklyn at the time and worked in New York. It was like . . . It was shock. “Oh my god, I can’t believe this is happening.” Anyway, I drove to work and we got there and, of course, [Ingard Sima?] who owned the center had the radio on and the preschool teacher at the time, her name was Penny, she was Chinese Canadian, her grandparents were in Manhattan. I’m not sure if she knew it that morning, but maybe the next day she’s like “I just found out my grandparents were traveling there.” So it was really this sort of strange experience to be like . . . to not be at home and sort of feeling that with other Americans but to be in this place where it’s like . . . with these other people from different parts of the world who were like as equally appalled at what was happening and equally concerned. We were all just kind of riveted to this thing. “What’s going on? What’s going to happen here?” Eventually I found out my sister was fine. I didn’t think she worked near there so I wasn’t that concerned about her but [clears throat] it was hard because everybody . . . I think she had just gotten to work and then they’re like “okay, everybody leave” and you couldn’t take any . . . The transit and stuff was all shut down so she basically had to walk home over the Brooklyn Bridge which took her most of the day with all these crowds of people. So, yeah, times like that were like . . . It’s hard not to be in your country and dealing with that with your fellow countrymen. It’s interesting being in Canada because it’s like sometimes Canada is America’s best friend and then . . . There’s this love-hate relationship. In moments like that it’s like “you’re going through it. We’re going through it. We’re right there with you. We’re on your side” but then there’s stuff like if I hear someone else ask me about Donald Trump or make some comment I’m like “Jesus, I cannot explain to you everything that’s happening in the US and why.

[01:12:12]

Even if I could you will never understand because you’re Canadian” [laughs]. Just because we sound similar and look similar we think very differently on things. So don’t try and understand [laughs]. I can’t understand some Canadian things. I will never understand why people are passionate about hockey. I feel nothing about hockey. I literally crossed my fingers. It was really hard for me to swear an oath to the Queen when I took my citizenship. I went to the citizenship ceremony and with the oath I was like “oh, god. I’ve got to swear to the Queen?” That was just really hard.

*REBECA*

It’s like this distant thing, I guess?

*REBECCA*
Yeah, I guess it’s not really a big part of most Canadians because they were like “what? You have to swear an oath?” I’m like “yeah, you guys, you’re like common law. That’s part of the Queen’s territory.” I’ve done a fair amount of research in my genealogy and background. I’ve got fifteen generations going back were American to the beginning with a number of different people who were relating to the American Revolution and I’m just like disappointing. Now I’m part of the common law. I swore allegiance to the queen. I take solace in the fact that it doesn’t seem like most Canadians have really paid much attention to that, so, I figure I’m okay [laughs]. She’s not going to call upon me anytime soon.

*REBECA*
So you’re very much, like, still . . . You have a very strong American identity, still? Though, you have given so much in Canada.

*REBECCA*

Yeah. Yeah, it’s kind of funny so not like . . . I think I had been here, I guess it will be nineteen years in January. So pretty soon it will be half my life. It’s certainly most of my adult life. I don’t know at what point, you know, I sort of feel Canadian. I’m not sure if I would know if . . . Sometimes I go home and I’m like “I don’t feel like these people anymore.” So maybe I already feel Canadian a lot of times but when you start to really identify as Canadian . . . I mean, I remember at some point I used to, when I first moved here, I used to go home regularly like at least every year, maybe twice, or three times and then sort of less and less. At some point it became, when I would go back to Pensacola, it was like it didn’t feel so much like home and then when I had come back to Vancouver I would be like “good, I’m home now.” There’s that local version of home and then there’s that national version of home. I haven’t quite got to the “I am Canadian” yet. I think I’m close. We’ll see.

*REBECA*

Really?

*REBECCA*

Yeah, I don’t know how long it takes. That should be part of your study, like, “how long does it take before you actually can feel Canadian?”

*REBECA*

Possibly, I wonder. I think it would depend on where you came from, too.

*REBECCA*
Yeah.

*REBECA*
Thinking about Canada and becoming very attached to Canada, I was curious about your future hopes and dreams and does that involve . . . I guess just your plans are to stay in Canada and what sorts of thoughts do you have for yourself and your wife in the future?

*REBECCA*
I don’t know. She’s very tied to Canada. Her mom recently passed away. Her mom was ill for a long time. I feel like going through that process has made her less open to leaving. It seems more important now to stay here and have some of that attachment. Whether that’s part of the grieving process and, you know, somebody else might be different but I think we’re staying for a while. It will probably depend on the outcome of this recent election, too. It’s hard, you know, when all you hear about the US is what’s on the news. I think a lot of Canadians have a lot of fear around the US. I know when I first started dating Sara we went down to Oregon and we stopped, you know, we didn’t really know where we were going and we stopped at this roadside restaurant which was sort of a pub. She had a leather bag and I had a leather jacket and we were in this truck and we just left them in the back of the truck which had a locked canopy but you could see everything. Well, it all got stolen while we were eating dinner. So that fed into the storyline of “America’s not safe.” I think it’d take a lot for her to move to the states because she has some anxiety about “people have guns there” and there is more crime because there’s more people and there’s more people with weapons and, I don’t know. It’s not as safe but it doesn’t bother me.

[01:18:16]

I don’t necessarily worry about that stuff but I think it severely reduces our chances of ever living in the states. Yeah, I mean we go to visit my sister in Philadelphia. Philadelphia is a bit gritty. I like Philly. It’s got some definite plus sides but it’s a pretty gritty city. I think the first time we went to see my sister and we took the cab from the airport and we were walking through her neighbourhood to get to her house and there were cop helicopters with search lights and stuff. We were like “what is going on around here?” [laughs]. So there’s all these things that happened that reinforce her story about this. It makes it really hard, you know, and there’s not . . . Once you have that story I don’t know how you kind of change it because certainly everything you hear in the media just reinforces it. I went back for my twentieth reunion a few years ago and I was like “you know, I went to school with intelligent people. These people cannot . . . Most of them do not own guns. I just don’t believe that this is true.” These were people that were my friends in high school and they were sitting around the dinner table and I’m like “do you guys all have guns?” And, seriously, almost all of them had guns. I’m like “are you kidding me? Why?” They have kids and it’s like why do you guys have guns? Like, oh my god. Pensacola is a big navy town so a lot of people come from navy families. Their dads would have guns from their service or that sort of thing. Not these guys at this table but it’s like “oh, so it is kind of true.” I was so disappointed. We had this party after and this one girl, who was not really my friend in high school, had gone on to become a sheriff or something. She had this insane story about some guy breaking into her house on drugs and she ended up shooting him and it was insane. I was like “stop telling my Canadian friends.” Because that was all . . . Like Sara was with me and a couple of my friends came too and that was all they remembered about that trip was this girl’s crazy story about how she had to shoot this guy that tried to break into her house and tried to rape her or something like that. I was like “oh, god. This is exactly what Canadians think that Americans are going to talk about and here you are.”

*REBECA*
Despite all of the, I guess the differences that maybe don’t define the United States and the fact that most likely your wife is wanting to stay in Canada, if you had the chance, and you were talking about the things you miss about home, would you ever move back to the states?

*REBECCA*

Um, yeah I would for sure. Yeah. It’s hard to say where. Like, I don’t know if I’d move back to Pensacola. It’s not the most progressive city. Florida is hard, too. I love Florida. I love the beaches and the people but it’s a super conservative state for the most part. Unless you’re in the big cities which is . . . I don’t know that I would go live there but there’s a lot of old people who move there to not pay property taxes and so they’re super hard on crime because they’re trying to protect everything they’ve built their life up to own. There’s a lot of Cubans who escaped Castro’s communism so they’ve brought all of their capitalistic ideas with them. So, I don’t know. It’s not a . . . I wouldn’t say Florida’s values are very well aligned with my values but I could see, you know, my sister being in Philadelphia I could see moving there or something like that; a bit more liberal.

*REBECA*
To be seen as [indecipherable]. I just want . . . Sorry I interrupted you . . .

*REBECCA*
Well, I was going to say . . . I mean, the only thing we didn’t talk about too much but I mean the fact, you know, me being in a gay relationship was a big factor of why we stayed here. Not just Sara . . . Like, we couldn’t move. Sara couldn’t emigrate to the US. We got married in 2001 and then in 2003 they changed the laws here in Canada so we got married again, legally, in 2003. It was still not legal in the US so at least that was a big thing. I think that was a moment where I was like “maybe I am Canadian. Maybe this is where I’m supposed to be.” I am really proud to be living in a place that took that step before others took it and really led the way. So that was, I think for me, a big moment. If Canada hadn’t been a place that allowed gay marriage, it would be like “this country’s not really that accepting. Why would I stay here?”

[01:24:00]

 That’s part of the reason why I was like, you know, here I am in a country like Canada that is accepting and the US has been a lot slower to come along that way so I mean it’s only finally in the last couple years that they’ve approved gay marriage and it’s still . . . It’s not like here; certainly not like Vancouver. I mean, Vancouver is very progressive. We don’t have any issues with being who we are wherever we are and that wouldn’t be true if we went to a lot of places in the states. Even though some of the laws have changed it wouldn’t be the case. I think that’s the only thing I would say about . . . That would make it hard to move back. That’s why I would probably choose pretty carefully which city or state or whatever I move to. Like maybe California or something like that.

*REBECA*

It’s hard to think about too, you know, when the laws change does that mean that peoples’ minds change at the same time? Does that go hand in hand? Is the law catching up with what people have already decided and, you know, accepted? So there’s a lot to think about, I can imagine.

*REBECCA*

Yeah, I mean, it’s interesting that . . . I would almost think it’s not . . . I think when the laws change it changes more like for queer people. It just makes it okay. It’s not that the other people changed, right? When we first started dating it would sort of be like holding hands, we’re walking downtown, that sort of stuff. We weren’t totally comfortable doing that. Now we wouldn’t even think twice about it. Partly Sara’s parents, particularly her mother, wasn’t super comfortable. She was actually quite uncomfortable with it but I think for someone like her when the law changed it made a big difference. It’s like “oh, well, it’s legal now. The government says it’s okay so I guess I’ve got to get okay with it.” I think for people like us it’s like “hey, it’s legal now. I don’t have to be afraid to hold my partners hand here.” Not to say that anything different happened. Like I probably like, two years before, could have done the same thing and nobody was going to react but it was just like “I’m fully okay with this now.” In the time that I’ve been here I think, even in Vancouver, I think things have changed a lot.

*REBECA*

How so?

*REBECCA*
Well, just that level of comfort. I remember like when we would hold hands or kiss or something in public we would get occasional like cat calls or whistles or comments or that sort of stuff fifteen years ago. I don’t go out downtown as much as I used to fifteen years ago so there’s always going to be those guys that do that kind of stuff but most of the time . . . I don’t know. I’m pretty sure we went to Metrotown not that long ago, which I hate, but I think it’s a great gateway of Canadian culture. You’re in a place like Metrotown which is full of all kinds of people, you don’t look twice, like, whatever and you’re doing your own thing. They don’t care. Whereas I do remember, not that long ago, being in Pensacola and going in the mall and holding hands and getting stared at and that was, you know, a couple of years ago, too. I think that it’s a big part of my story and why I’m here.

*REBECA*
I love your wedding photos. Let me see here. Are they from two different . . .

*REBECCA*

No they’re all the same.

*REBECA*
Yup. Where did you get married?

*REBECCA*
We got married on a boat.

*REBECA*
Oh, okay.

*REBECCA*

Yeah, so a lot of my friends from Pride UBC were there and they were all undergrad when I was doing my grad so they were all younger so I was the first one to get married and it was like a huge deal. It was the first gay marriage of like, anybody. So it was like “oh my god! Sara and Rebecca are getting married.” It was a pretty big deal that way. I didn’t know a ton of people and Sara’s family isn’t that big so it wasn’t a huge wedding but I thought it was really nice. The water has always been kind of a big thing for me so having the ceremony on a boat was pretty special and I think we left from False Creek and then said our vows under the Burrard Bridge and then we went out to Lighthouse Park and back. So it was fun. The guy who did the ceremony, he was a friend of mine from Pride. His name was Neil and he was recently, at this time, ordained as an Anglican priest so because it was on a boat we were like “well, whoever does the ceremony is going to be on this boat with us for the whole time. So we’re like, let’s ask Neil because at least we know him and he’s a friend.”

[01:29:41]

Not only was it not legal, it wasn’t approved by the Anglican Church so he officiated the ceremony or he had to start the whole thing with this little spiel like he’s not here in his official capacity and this is not, like, you know, basically blessing this for the church which I didn’t care about anyways but it was just kind of this, I don’t know. It’s definitely one of those, like, historical kind of markers right? I don’t think that would happen today. So we did this, my friend went to Emily Carr and we made this certificate I think like in the Quaker tradition where everybody at the wedding signed it as sort of witnessing this thing. So that was a kind of document that was created from the ceremony.

*REBECA*

Hm, that’s cool. That’s really cool. Your family came out?

*REBECCA*
Yeah, yeah. My parents were there and my sister came and some of my, one of my cousins and uncles and stuff came, too. So, yeah. It was good. It was probably one of the best days of my life. It was super fun just to have like all of your friends together. A bunch of my friends from the states came, too. It was good.

*REBECA*
Special memories.

*REBECCA*

Yeah.

*REBECA*
I think the only other special memories or photos that we haven’t fully talked about, we talked a little bit about it but, um, the two next to the water.

*REBECCA*

Yeah.

*REBECA*

This one you talked about a little bit but I see you’re fishing in this picture.

*REBECCA*
Yeah. I don’t know. I just thought . . . brought some pictures that sort of represent Florida. I got my Gators shirt on. Yeah, I mean Gainesville, which is where the University of Florida is, is in the middle of the state and so there’s a lot of swampland around. The thing I loved about going to school in Florida, um, we were like three hours driving distance from a major city in every direction so we were always going on weekend trips and day trips and outings and a lot of them were just, you know, going canoeing, going out in the woods, or something like that. Yeah, being in the swamp.

*REBECA*
Is this your childhood home?

*REBECCA*

Yeah, this is our first house. Yeah. I remember my parents, well, they put that pool in when I was two. It was a big deal. Yeah, we used to like race our little big wheels around the pool and the house backed onto a cemetery which never bothered me but a lot of people think that’s really weird but it was really quiet and nice in the back.

*REBECA*

Yeah, in a way, peaceful, too. Neat.

*REBECCA*

Mhm.

*REBECA*
Alright, well, I mean I think you covered quite a bit and you shared a lot about your journey here but is there anything that you’d like to add that, maybe, I haven’t asked about that’s been important to your journey not only to Canada but also your journey to finding your work in Richmond? Take as much time as you need to think about that, too.

*REBECCA*

Yeah. I don’t know. It’s funny because when I worked at the Vancouver Museum there’s this thing called the tourism challenge. So, if you’re part of Tourism Vancouver you get a pass and you can go visit all these sites and I remember, this was years ago, that was the first time I had been to the Gulf of Georgia Cannery. I was like “this site is awesome. I really hope . . . I’d love to work here someday.” It’s kind of cool that I did end up doing that because there’s not that many places I go where I say that, right? Like, very few. So I’m really happy to work there and it’s been a good experience. It’s been interesting like fish, salmon, I didn’t know anything about that stuff when I started there so it’s been really interesting to kind of get connected with that, the fishing history and, you know, the industry that’s around today. I don’t think I’d ever eat salmon until I came here so I’ve learned to like salmon, largely as part of this job, and how to eat canned salmon.

[01:34:43]

So, yeah. I don’t know, I don’t know if there’s anything in particular about Richmond. I love working in Steveston, like, there’s so many days when I come from Vancouver and drive over the Knight Street Bridge and there’s like rain, kind of foggy, or rainy and then you start driving down Steveston Highway and the skies just sort of open up and it’s just like “oh, I love working out here.” It’s nice because it reminds me of home a little bit because it’s not mountainous with these giant trees. Sara grew up on the north shore and she was like “I want to move back to the north shore.” And her dad’s like always trying to . . . “there’s this place down the road, you guys should go look at it” and I’m like “No, I don’t want to live on the north shore it’s so dark.” So even if it’s not raining there’s like these oppressive trees [laughs].

*REBECA*
That’s so interesting because for you comfort is a little bit more open space but for a lot of Canadians, especially probably Sara, it’s comfort in the trees surrounding you. So I guess it’s different for everybody.

*REBECCA*

Yeah, well and I like to . . . I think one of the other things about this job is there’s a number of times I’ve been on boats and been on the water in relation to my work which also is very much like being at home, right? So, just being out on the water. Even though there’s not a lot of similarities but there’s something like inside it’s like “oh, this feels right to me.”

*REBECA*

I think in traveling and even settling somewhere new most people unintentionally sort of find a way to make it feel like home or at least little bits of home just to have that sense and it’s kind of nice that you’ve been able to marry, you know, somewhere that’s very different, like west coast, forested, but to marry a little bit of the things that make you feel good about Florida, the things that you miss about Florida, that’s really neat.

*REBECCA*
Yeah.

*REBECA*

Alright, you good?

*REBECCA*
Yeah.

*REBECA*

Alright, well thank you so much for sharing everything. It was really awesome and if for some reason you do remember something like “oh, I wish I would have shared this” you’re always welcome to get back in touch and we can always add it on but, yeah, really, really awesome story of your journey here. I want to thank you very much. I’m going to shut this off.

*REBECCA*
You’re welcome. Yeah.

END OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[01:37:28]

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)