

**Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project
Oral History Initiative**

**Interview with Liza
February 25, 2022**

Interviewers: Ashley Werner (Isabella Moritz also present)

Interviewee: Liza

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Total: 01:09:25

00:25 = childhood, growing up in Maysville, Kentucky (1990s and 2000s); how Liza came to start their flower farm in Floyd County, Virginia; Liza's graduate and post-graduate education and experiences (mid- to late-2010s)

06:30 = Liza's background in agriculture

09:01 = comparing rural Kentucky to rural Virginia

11:13 = Building community on Liza's farm, and in Floyd County

15:02= debating gay rights in high school (mid-2000s)

17:24 = navigating queer spaces as a bisexual non-binary person; experiences as a cishet ally in college at Virginia Tech (c. 2008-2012); their coming out process in Lynchburg (2018-2019)

24:01 = relationship with the word 'queer'

25:53 = the farm as a queer space

27:54 = Liza's relationship to Roanoke and other cities

30:25 = passing as a straight, cis person

32:36 = exhaustion holding space and repeatedly having to come out; relationship with parents

37:13 = Alok Vaid-Menon and the influence of social media (late 2010s); #queerfarmers community

41:10 = being queer in Trump Country; queer dating in rural areas and assumptions of straightness

44:09 = coming out to neighbors

48:43 = relationship with social media; marketing the farm

52:01 = making the farm a safe space

57:20 = colonialism and Tutelo rights to the land; exploring land-back program

1:01:15 = the importance of communication, especially on the farm

1:06:21 = practicing accountability

[00:01] Ashley: Okay, this is Ashley Werner with Liza in Fintel Library. It is February 25th, 2022. ... And, so yeah, I guess we'll just start with just introducing yourself and start from the beginning of where you grew up, your childhood.

[00:25] Liza: Okay. So, my name's Liza. I don't have a pronoun preference. I grew up in Kentucky, in a small town. My mom is a doctor and my dad ran a horseback riding resort. So, I grew up kinda like in a small town but also out in the mountains where the resort was, and we had thirty horses. So, I grew up like baling hay, and shoveling stalls, and playing in the creek, and all that rural mountain stuff.

My mom is from Virginia, she's from Floyd County, where I live. And she grew up on the property that I live on right now. She left Floyd County when she was seventeen and never moved back. Her parents died when she was in her early twenties, and she inherited some land that she never sold. Held onto it, and so even though she never went back, she held onto it for... forty years, and then about ten years ago I started becoming really interested in this land and really wanted to move there. But... so, anyways, yeah I grew up in a small town in like a middle class, upper-middle class family since my mom was a doctor. And yeah, it was a very interesting mix of financial security and then living out on the farm and having this farm that didn't really make any money. So, it's an interesting blend of things.

But, yeah, so I graduated from high school and came to Virginia Tech, and studied Mathematics and got a minor in Green Engineering. But I became really interested in the food system and really wanted to learn more about food production and specifically how people grew their own food, like sort of subsistence gardening and farming and how that played into food security. Specifically interested in rural areas. So, when I graduated—I graduated high school in 2008, and college in 2012—then I took an AmeriCorps position and I basically abandoned mathematics [*laughter*]. And took an AmeriCorps position in West Virginia doing school gardening projects. So I did that for a while, for a year, and it was really interesting. I learned a lot. And then I got another AmeriCorps job out in Washington State, so I moved out there to Olympia and worked for a year running their home gardening project so that's what we built gardens for people with low incomes for free and gave them everything that they should need to have a successful gardening season, including free classes, and seeds, and starts and stuff, and that was amazing and I loved that job so much that I came back to Virginia Tech [*giggles*].

I really felt like Virginia was home, and [I] went to grad school and studied home gardening and food security in rural Appalachia. And so, I got my Masters [degree] in horticulture, but did kinda more of a sociology project rather than a science project. And then when I graduated, I really wanted to start a farm. Oh, I also did an internship during the summer, the grad school summer, cause grad school is two years. So, in the middle I did an internship with a local farm because I wanted to learn more about larger scale gardening, but still small but

like larger than gardening. So I wanted to learn about small-scale farming, and they just happen to be a flower farm, even though I didn't really care about flowers, so I took that internship and fell in love with flower farming.

And so, when I graduated from grad school I was like, "Oh my god. I really want to start my own farm, but I have no money, and so I got to figure this out." So I took a job with Cooperative Extension doing nutrition programming through the SNAP Ed program. Which I don't know if you've ever heard of SNAP, but SNAP is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs, like food stamps. It's the same thing as food stamps, but it's the new word, new title for it. So, part of the SNAP budget from the USDA Farm Bill is SNAP education. So, I worked for Virginia SNAP Ed doing education programming. So I did that for a couple of years and saved up money and didn't want to continue doing it, so I quit and went back to the flower farm and worked there for a year and then, like, somehow got the resources—like as in community resources that I needed—to finally move to Floyd and start the farm that I'm farming now. But yeah, that was a pretty substantial background chunk of information [*Ashley and Liza laugh*].

[06:19] Ashley: Wow, you've done a lot with your life.

[06:22] Liza: Yeah. Yeah, it's pretty cool [*laughter*].

[06:25] Ashley: I know. I was just wondering about how it was going from being around horses all your childhood to flower farming?

[06:38] Liza: I'm really glad I have a background in agriculture. Like I'm really, really, really thankful for it. I don't really like it when I'm... I mean I was never a big horse person, my mom was a big horse person. I liked horses okay. My dad liked horses okay, but we really started the farm because my mom loved horses. She still has two horses. My parents are separated so my dad is, he's like totally abandoned horses, he hates them now [*laughter*]. Doesn't want to deal with them anymore ever again. He won't even get another dog. He's over it, taking care of animals. But I liked being outside. And that was the biggest thing. We didn't really grow anything. We grew alfalfa fields, which we bailed for the horses, and, you know, it was an agritourism farm, so it was very different, you know people were coming to the place. We were designing the farm so that people would come there. So, it was like a lot of people in and out, and then we did a corn maze one year and then we grew some pumpkins one year. But pretty much the only growing of plants that I did growing up was with my mom; she grew a couple of tomatoes and flowers and stuff.

[08:03] Liza: So going from like—it was like, I grew up being outside, but I never really cultivated plants until my senior year in college when I had my first garden. And then it's just, like, my gardens ended up getting bigger and bigger and bigger and now I cultivate half an acre in flowers. So it's very different, but my background with horses, it's really helpful. Especially

since I do want to get animals someday and I have lived with animals and helped steward animals and slaughter them and stuff for food, so... not when I was a kid, when I was an adult. But, yeah, so it's different but helpful.

[08:52] Ashley: How different has it been coming from rural Kentucky to rural Virginia?

[09:01] Liza: Well, the town I grew up in Kentucky... It's interesting. It's like it's rural but it's still a town. I think there's like ten thousand people, maybe? And I grew up in the county seat. You know, Maysville is this small town, and we had a Walmart [*laughter*] so like we were the biggest town around cause we had a Walmart. And then we get a super Walmart, and so now everybody from all over is coming to Maysville now. Which is really a funny way of thinking about the size of the town. But... rural, where I live now [in Virginia] is so much more rural. It's more like, cause the town I grew up in, in Kentucky, the town with the super Walmart, I lived there. That was where I went to school. That was home base with the hospital that my mom worked at. But the farm where we grew up, the horse farm was like forty minutes away, in the mountains, like deep in the mountains. And so that was more like where I am living now, where you had to drive. Except, maybe I'm living in even more of a rural area [now], because to the nearest [town], Floyd is thirty minutes from where I live. Stewart, Virginia is thirty minutes from where I live. Hillsville is thirty minutes. And the town that I live in [Meadows of Dan] is ten minutes away and we have two gas stations and a restaurant, like a café. We did get a coffee shop though, like just recently. So, it's like... it's different in that, you know, I used to walk to the local YMCA, but then when we were at the farm you didn't go anywhere because there was nothing around, you were just stuck there. And you ate hotdogs and watched whatever VHS TV show was available if you didn't want to play outside.

[11:08] Ashley: Would you say there's a social difference at all?

[11:13] Liza: Yeah, for sure! It's interesting, so like where I live, my current living situation, so I really believe in leveraging privileges. Right, so the privileges I have are my whiteness and financial privileges, land, inheriting land is like the biggest privilege. So, I'm currently leveraging my land privilege by engaging in land sharing, so I share the land with a couple other people, including two other farmers. So... and that was my biggest community. The social life community was like the biggest thing that was making me not move there for ten years, or seven years, or however many years I was interested in moving there. But nobody was going with me because I'm single, I don't have a partner. My mom wasn't going to move there, none of my family was going to move there. There was no house on the property, just some rundown barns and no neighbors.

Since then, somebody's moved into the house my mom grew up in and it's a family there and they're real close. And then there's another woman who built a house up on the hill since I became interested and I'm really close friends with her. So, then I had a friend who was

interested in moving to the farm with me, so we moved there together in 2020, and like we only had each other really and then the one neighbor we were kinda getting to know. And then last year I had a friend move out, because they needed a place to live for the summer. And then I met these two farmers on Instagram, this couple that were looking for a forever home and they were interested in Virginia. And we met. They came to the farm twice and we talked a bunch, and they moved out there in August and they're building a farm out there.

So, there's a community which is really incredible. It felt really easy for me to integrate myself into the... There's a huge community across the county of young farmer people, which is amazing. And so we have gatherings on the farm, and I have a ton of friends up. I have friends in Roanoke and Blacksburg and they come visit me all the time. So, it's interesting. I live in the middle of nowhere, but I actually have to... kinda tell people not to come for a couple of weeks, because I'm tired of talking to people and seeing them, which is pretty odd. Except for in the winter time, nobody wants to come out in the winter. But, growing up in Maysville, I had a ton of friends because of school. I went to school, and then like out at the farm it was just me and my brother, and then any kids who were camping at the campground. Maybe, but even then it's like people were there for two days or something. So it's like community for me growing up was like my brother was my best friend. We always had each other, and then, yeah, probably like a typical community in my hometown. So, yeah.

[14:50] Ashley: One question that now we'll get into the queer stuff.

[14:54] Liza: Sure!

[14:55] Ashley: What was your first introduction to LGBTQ? Just the idea of that.

[15:02] Liza: hmm... Yeah, I don't know, let's see... I remember... I remember using the word 'gay' but not really knowing what it meant, right? It meant like you were making fun of something when you used the word? I'm older, right? So, it was like... people didn't get corrected on it, right? But I remember in... I feel like it was like when I was in high school. Like I'm sure that when you were in high school you did debates? Like in your history class or your political science class or whatever? We did debates, and gay rights was like a political issue that we debated, and I remember that being kind of like the first time that I really thought, that I realized that being gay. that some people thought it was bad. Like really bad, where they didn't want people to have rights. So, I kind of knew about it but it didn't really... it wasn't like an important thing or something that anybody ever really talked about. But then I remember being in class and having people just be so emotional about how bad it was, and being shocked. Because I was like "What are you...? This is not politics, this is just human, this is just people living their life. [It] doesn't affect you at all! I don't understand why is this a political issue that we are debating in class." So that was the first time that I realized that it was bigger than just existing. Yeah.

[17:12] **Ashley:** As you grew up and going into college and everything, how did that...How did that self discovery kind of happen?

[17:24] **Liza:** Well... so I consider myself bi, and that wasn't a thing when I was growing up. Being bi wasn't a thing. It was either one or the other, even though everybody used the LGBT, nobody ever talked about the 'B.' It was just like, it didn't exist, you were either gay or you were straight. And... that's still the case to a degree I think, in like a lot of circles. You know, it's changing but, you know, my dad... I told my dad I was dating a girl and he thought I was gay, you know. Like he was confused when I broke up with her and then started dating a guy and then broke up with him. My brother was like, "Yeah, Liza just broke up with this guy" and my dad was like, "What? I thought she was gay?" He was like, "No, Dad, she's bi." You know, just doesn't understand. So, anyways... so yeah, I didn't know any bi people. And so for a long time I just was straight... and gender queerness was not on my radar until like maybe 2019? 2019, what was that like four years ago?

[18:55] **Ashley:** Yeah, about four years ago.

[18:57] **Liza:** Yeah, that wasn't even on my... maybe 2018, maybe I heard like a little bit about it. But I didn't really like hold it in, like I didn't really let it in as an idea until 2019. I remember because it was like a person, one of my friends I had met, a new friend when I moved to Lynchburg who's trans and was like, "Non-binary people are a thing." And I was like, "what?" And he was also like, "Bi people are a thing, Liza." And I was like, "Uh, really?" He was like, "Yeah." I was like, "Oh." Because we met at the Diversity Center in Lynchburg. So here's the funny thing is that like I thought I was straight and cis for a really long time, but I kept going to queer spaces as an ally, right? So, I would go to the LGBT [center] at Virginia Tech. I was in a drag show, like I was going to all their parties, but all the lesbians were like, "Liza, we know you're straight, so you gotta like tell people you're straight, or all lesbians are gonna like wanna date you or something." So, nobody really allowed that, like even the queer community didn't allow me to explore my sexuality. Which is sad, like I had to pick one. And the fact that there was sort of a patriarchal streak in that, right? Cause like you don't tell these people that you're unavailable then they're gonna not be able to help themselves or whatever, you know. It's like the same shit that happens with men. It's like you need to tell them your intentions. It's like alright, okay. Just trying to like live here, just trying to exist, and figure out who I am as a human being at twenty [*laughter*].

So anyways, like I always sought out queer spaces, and when you go into queer spaces—perhaps you know this or have experience—you go into queer spaces and people like to introduce yourself. You introduce yourself with your identity sometimes [*laughter*]. Maybe that's not like a thing that people do anymore, but you know, I used to go to places and they be like, "introduce yourself! Like what's your name? What's your pronouns?" Well, people didn't

really ask pronouns back then, but it was more like, “What’s your gender and your sexual orientation [*laughter*]?” Which is like such an interesting way to introduce yourself. So, I would always go into spaces and be like, “Hey I’m Liza, I really don’t like saying this but I guess I’m straight, and I guess I’m cis?” And I did that next to my friend in Lynchburg at the Diversity Center, and we like, we had just moved there at the same time. So, and we lived kinda close to each other. So, we were like “let’s be friends.” So then we started hanging out and he was like,

“Yeah I heard like, what do you mean you guess you’re this and you guess you’re that?” and I was like, “Yeah I don’t know. Just always felt so weird.” And he was like, “you know bi people are real?” I was like, “Yeah.” Then I started really reflecting on a lot of my experiences as a kid and realizing that they were gay! Super gay, like so gay! It was like the first person I ever hooked up with was a girl and I didn’t tell anybody about it. It wasn’t in front of people, you know, like in this performative way. It just happened. And I hated being referred to as a girl as a kid. So, yeah. So anyways that was amazing. So, like my big realization that I was queer was four years ago. When my friend who’s like super queer, or like the queerest person maybe I have ever met. It’s true. He just like held space for me while I like had this huge realization about myself.

[23:22] Ashley: You rethought your whole life.

[23:23] Liza: Yeah, I mean just like deep reflection. And I kept being like, “Yeah, I just realized that this thing was a thing.” And he was just like, “What the fuck, Liza! How did you not know that you were gay!” [*laughter*] So anyways, I’m cursing a lot on this recording.

[23:39] Ashley: That’s okay.

[23:40] Liza: Okay. So yeah... did that answer your question? I don’t know if that answered your question?

[23:45] Ashley: No, that’s great. Just not really having that community growing up, not even knowing it was a thing until very recently, and that you kind of like formed it for yourself...

[23:57] Liza: Yeah.

[23:57] Ashley: ...when you were really allowed to.

[24:01] Liza: Yeah. Totally. And I feel like now I have this really interesting group of friends who all identify as queer. Which is an interesting shift, right? Queer, like the word ‘queer,’ wasn’t used in my world until... I think that’s the biggest thing is like this word ‘queer’ is like new as in five years old for me. And because I never identified as gay or a lesbian, I didn’t identify as trans. I know some non-binary people who do identify as trans. I still don’t

necessarily do even though I know it's allowed to be under that umbrella. But yeah, it was like, the word 'queer' is just so beautiful because it's so like... I don't know. It's like an ethereal thing that you just get to swim in and find your identity in these weird floaty pieces, and then it can change and go over here, and it's really beautiful. So, all the people that I hang out with are queer, they're not like... I have like maybe one friend that identifies as gay, but also queer, you know.

[25:36] **Ashley:** Yeah.

[25:37] **Liza:** A close friend I would say. I have a lot of friends floating out there in the world.

[25:41] **Ashley:** Hmm, so you have explored more queer spaces and just formed that community for yourself. Is that including on the flower farm?

[25:53] **Liza:** Yeah, so the two farmers are queer that moved out there that are starting a farm. So, my friend that moved out to the farm with me to help start the farm is queer, identifies as non-binary. And, so we moved out there, and then my friend who moved out there because she needed a place to live. She identifies as gay and went through that transition on the farm too, which is amazing, like realizing that she was gay. It's like, it's amazing. This land in particular is holding space for gayness and queerness in a way. Like, I actually had multiple people start exploring their queerness on this land. Including myself, you know, to a degree. So, this land is queer. Very.

[26:41] **Ashley:** What kind?

[26:42] **Liza:** The farm is gay [*laughter*].

[26:44] **Ashley:** What kind of flowers do you grow on the farm?

[26:46] **Liza:** Gay ones.

[26:47] **Ashley:** Gay ones [*laughter*].

[26:49] **Liza:** I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. I mean, maybe not.

[26:52] **Ashley:** Just very colorful?

[26:53] **Liza:** Yeah. Colorful. All the flowers. I have a planting chart. I could list all the flowers for you if you wanted me too. But I have half an acre. I grow a lot of Dahlias because I love them, and they're amazing, and I grow Zinnias, and Celosias, and Gomphrena, and Amaranth,

and Scabiosa, and Snapdragons, and Stock, and Ranunculus, and Tulips, and Daffodils, and Peony. You know, I grow it all, as much as I can.

[27:34] **Ashley:** All of the colors of the rainbow.

[27:35] **Liza:** All the colors of the rainbow [*laughter*]. All the colors, yeah. Yeah, oh my god. I love it so much [*laughter*].

[27:43] **Ashley:** So, you said before that you come into the city a lot—city of Roanoke. And so what do you do in Roanoke?

[27:54] **Liza:** I don't come to Roanoke a lot actually. I don't know if I said that. But I don't come a lot. I come to Roanoke, and I mostly come to see friends. The pandemic has made it hard to want to go into public spaces, right? And that's like why you come into the city, is to like go to bars, and like go to the art gallery, and go to gatherings, right? Cause I live in the middle of nowhere, and there's nothing to do. Well, like, it's just different.

[28:31] **Ashley:** Different?

[28:32] **Liza:** I'll spend all day petering around my farm, and be perfectly happy, cause I have so much to do. So, it's not like there's nothing to do there. But you know, like, this is the thing. When I was in college, I used to go to The Park all the time. All the time. Like, all the time. We would all jump in a big car, and pregame, and show up to The Park at like midnight, or one, and party for two hours, and then drive home. When I was in college. When I was straight.

[29:07] **Ashley:** When you were straight. Going to The Park.

[29:09] **Liza:** Going to The Park as a straight person. I've been to The Park twice since I graduated college, which is pretty sad. But, and then, weirdly, so my best friend lives here, who is not queer. And then somehow I have built this queer community. I've got another friend that just moved here recently. And I'm starting to slowly meet people, like your professor and some other people in the community, and yeah, it's beautiful, I love this like...I love this community.

[30:03] **Ashley:** This one that you have built yourself, and been able to include everyone, really.

[30:11] **Liza:** What do you mean?

[30:13] **Ashley:** As in... because you weren't included, you weren't allowed to be yourself before.

[30:20] **Liza:** Mhmm.

[30:23] **Ashley:** And now you've maybe created yourself?

[30:25] **Liza:** Yeah! It's really interesting. So like I pass, right? Like that's the thing. I'm like a queer person, but I pass as like a straight cis person. And, so I have all these friends that have known me, and my family who has known me through my whole life, and I've really just started coming out in the last.... Like, I started having realizations about myself like four years ago or three years ago or whatever. And then I really started coming out in the last year, you know, and like two years ago, I guess, almost two years ago, was when I had my first like visibly queer relationship, even though I have had very very queer relationships in the past. Also, very telling, right?

[31:19] **Ashley:** *[laughter]*

[31:20] **Liza:** You know. Yeah, and like the gender...It's like when I dated a girl, nobody batted an eye. But then, when I'm telling people that I am non-binary, and I prefer for them not to refer to me as like a lady or a girl, that is a little bit more jarring for people.

And so, that is context for how, you know, I sought out this queer community, that I didn't have to explain myself to at all. And like, there were no assumptions made, right? So, it was like people were asking me, rather than me having to correct them. And then like also holding space for me to be like, "I guess I don't even know how to talk about who I am as a human being, and like, I feel really weird, and like, this isn't my experience, and like, I'm coming to this as a thirty year old person," and everyone being like "calm down. It's okay." Like, you know, you are who you are and that's beautiful, and it's great. And all you have to do is exist, in whatever truth is comfortable for you in any given context.

[32:36] **Liza:** And so, the queer community that I have now versus the queer community that I had in college that didn't really hold space for that at all, who I love dearly. All those people are really special to me, but it was just... You know, your reality is your reality. And the reality back then was that bi people didn't exist, even though they did. Right? That was more of like a framework of how people see the world. Anyways, yeah, so it's like two very different queer communities, very different communities. So I have this amazing community that's super supportive, and then I have this hella straight community that I'm starting to pull into my truth. So, yeah, like I'm trying to... I'm not 100 percent all truthful with my straight community. Straight cis community. Whereas like the queer community is like "we see you, for exactly who you are." So it's interesting.

[33:51] **Ashley:** Why do you think you can't be who you are with the straight cis community?

[33:55] **Liz:** Energy levels mostly. You know, it's exhausting to have to hold space for people who feel threatened by how you want to be seen. You know, my dad kind of freaked out a little bit when I told him I was bi. He didn't like freak out at me directly, but he had an internal struggle with it and lashed out at me in different ways. And that's just exhausting, you know. And also, to be like over and over again, "okay, please don't call me a woman, please don't call me a woman, please don't call me a girl, or lady." You know what has been really helpful? Social media. Instagram. I started saying these things on Instagram, in my stories. Just being like blanket, just so like I don't have to tell each individual person, just be like, "Alright! I'm non-binary, and I don't have a pronoun preference but please don't call me a girl, and please don't call me a lady. Instead, you can call me 'friend,' or 'love,' or 'human.'" And people are changing! Like that's amazing.

But then some people, like, "I know you've seen my story, and you're still calling me a girl." So, it's like, how many times do you wanna do that? How many times do you want to come out to somebody and correct them? So, I guess, it's not that I'm holding back from people. I feel very open. I've talked to my mom about being non-binary. She loved my ex-girlfriend. You know, very supportive of my sexuality and super supportive of like pronouns and stuff for the most part.

But, you know, she still calls me her daughter. Which is fine, you know? Because I am, in the context of our relationship, and the way that we've related to ourselves for so long, and the way that the world relates to us. It's sort of this interesting, like.... How much do I wanna push? It's not that I'm hiding from my straight community, they know how I feel and who I am, but it's like they don't know the context. They're not queer, so they don't understand the importance of pronouns. And they don't understand the importance of the language that we use and they don't understand that when they call me a lady, it makes me not feel seen. And so, having to explain that and have them understand it, is just so much energy, and I don't wanna do it [*laughter*]. Sometimes. Cause I'm tired.

[37:09] **Ashley:** Do you think that social media has helped educate some people?

[37:13] **Liza:** Oh my god. You know Alok [Vaid-Menon]? Oh my god. You gotta find Alok on... I found them on Facebook. I can't believe I found them on Facebook.

[37:29] **Ashley:** How do you spell that?

[37:30] **Liza:** Alok? A-L-O-K. They're a non-binary person. They're a poet, fashionista. Which, I don't care about fashion at all, but this person was the non-binary... I don't know. They were my non-binary icon. They were the person that made me realize. Listening to their poetry, and reading their posts, and witnessing the way that they move through the world was how I realized I was non-binary. And, we have completely different experiences, cause they are brown, and AMAB [assigned male at birth], and from a city.

[Bella shows Liza a picture of Alok]

[38:22] Liza: Yes, that's them. And [they] are, I think, first-generation US citizen. Even though [they] are interested in fashion and live in New York City. And I'm like this grungy farmer, AFAB [assigned female at birth], white AFAB person with inherited land. Which is like so different, but the things that they say, and the way they talk about being non-binary, and the way that they see themselves. They really helped me realize how constructed gender was. And I found them in 2017, and so they were huge for me. And this was before I even got an Instagram. I didn't even get an Instagram until 2019, I think. So, they had paid advertisements on Facebook, and somehow, this was when paid advertisements first started. That's when they kind of started. And that's when they started really ramping up. So, 2017, through Facebook is where I found out about non-binary-ness, and really learned.

And then when I got Instagram and learned about hashtags. Whoo man, hashtags! Learned about hashtags, and I found queer people. That's how I found my queer farmer friends that now live on the farm. There is a hashtag called "queer farmers." So, I follow that, and now I have an Instagram queer farmer community. Of people that we know each other. [But] we never met, you know. So yeah.

[40:17] Ashley: So that online queer community is also very... I sense it's been very helpful.

[40:23] Liza: So, yeah. The queer farmers is a smaller community. It's very specific. It's a very specific community. Especially in the farming world. Like, oh my god. But, randomly, Floyd has a million queer farmers, it's so weird and amazing. Queer farmers in particular. Cause like queer city people are amazing, love them, but I'm not a city person. And then rural people, you run the gambit, it's like woah. It's a lot of different kinds of rural people. And just like flat rural people, right? Very different!

[41:07] Ashley: What are different kinds of rural people?

[41:10] Liza: Well, I mean there were two Biden signs in... I don't even know how many mile radius. One of them was on our farm during the election, and the other one was someone like a mile from us. And then otherwise, it was just a sea of Trump signs. And there's still quite a few Trump signs still up, a year or two later. I have a neighbor that has a Trump sign that's been in their yard for a really long time, and they put a spotlight [on it], you know, one of those spotlights you use to light up a sign. Like, it's just a little plastic, flimsy one. A little plastic, flimsy Trump sign.

[41:59] Ashley: Yeah.

[42:02] **Liza:** Like maybe that big [*show of hands*], and they put a spotlight on it that lights up at night. I hate to let politics define people because we put a Biden sign up, but I was like, we are only doing this to try to encourage people to vote. It's not like I felt super pumped about putting a Biden sign out front. But, to just show people that there was some other form of thought process besides Trumpiness. So there's like... it's different, and that's another part of being queer in a rural area is that when I was dating... When I was in a very visibly queer relationship, I was a little nervous because we had really just moved there. This was like 2020 when I started dating her, and...

[43:06] **Ashley:** Right at the heat of everything?

[43:07] **Liza:** Yeah, it was 2020. I didn't really know my neighbors. I was not out to them. We didn't have a community of resources, and everybody thought that Kevin, who presents male, was like, we were together. He's the one that moved out with me. My neighbor who I'm friends with now, who knows now that I'm bi, and knows now that I was dating that girl, met her multiple times and she was like, "wow, you must be really good friends." Cause she lived in D.C., so she was coming down from D.C. Queer dating in a rural area. We lived five hours away from each other. So, my neighbor was like, "Oh wow. You must be really good friends if you're traveling." Versus like somebody sees Kevin mowing the lawn and is like "oh, y'all are married, right?" So, the assumption...

[44:08] **Ashley:** Assumptions of straightness?

[44:09] **Liza:** Assumptions of straightness. Which, that's everywhere. It's not necessarily just rural, but I think what makes living in a rural area different is that your community is extremely small. Very limited. I mean I have two neighbors. Neither one of them ever put a political sign out. Neither one of them ever mentioned gay people, trans people, no... Like, Kevin and I were always intensely listening very closely when either one of them talked to see if they would offer any hint of where they stood politically. And it never happened [*laughter*]. Never!

Until, like a year after knowing one of my neighbors, and we were talking about dating, because her husband died, so we were talking about dating and I just sort of had two glasses of wine and casually mentioned that I was bi. And she was like "Oh! Okay, well that means you have like twice as many chances of meeting somebody [*laughter*]." And I was like "whew, alright, great." Also a lot of energy, right? Coming out to people you don't know how they're gonna act. So, it's stressful. I mean, she's like a huge asset to me and my existence out there. We borrow each other's time and tools, and our friends. And like, if she was homophobic or transphobic, that would be fifty percent of my community cut. Boom. Whereas like when you're in a city, somebody doesn't like you because you're gay? Who cares! There's somebody right there, there's like twenty people in line waiting to be your friend. Whereas like in a rural area, you just don't have that.

So I still haven't come out to some of my neighbors because I literally have no idea how they feel. And they kind of have stopped reaching out to us ever since. Because we were trying to figure out how to come out to them eventually. It's sort of one of those things where if I end up with somebody who passes, and we are in a hetero relationship, I don't have to come out to anybody. But, if not, I would come out to people eventually, and present my partner.

But the two that moved out there [to the land], the two farmers that moved out there are very visibly queer. And I was talking with them about how we wanted to approach the subject with our neighbors. I was like, "do you want me to tell them, like how should we do it?" So, we ended up having a gathering of local queer people at the farm, and I invited them to the party because we were kind of inviting each other to parties back and forth. I was like, "yeah, we're having a small party, we are gonna introduce Morgan and Reynaldo to the local gay and trans community in the New River Valley if you wanna come and say hi." And they were like, "Thanks!" And that was pretty much it, and we haven't heard from them since. There are some other issues but... so, I don't know. I don't know. Are they just uncomfortable with us existing there? Or do they not care? Some people I think don't care, but they don't know how to interact with you. So, they just kind of ignore you. You know what I mean?

[47:51] Ashley: Yeah.

[47:52] Liza: They're just confused, they don't have context for you. And so they don't know how to relate to you, so they just don't talk to you. Which, I think, one of the people on the farm is not white, and that has been his experience as well. With certain people they're just like, "I don't know how to relate to you, because you are not a white person. So, I'm just gonna go talk to this white person instead." So I imagine that that's possible. We don't actually know if they are homophobic or transphobic, or if they just don't know how to interact with queer people. I have no idea.

[48:31] Ashley: So you think it's important that with social media and stuff that people could be more open minded to learn more so you don't have to spend...

[48:42] Liza: Yeah.

[48:43] Ashley: ...so much energy time teaching?

[48:43] Liza: Yeah, I do. Yeah, I don't publish... I would delete Facebook if I could because I hate it. But I have to have it for my business. And one friend who refuses to get on Instagram [*sighs*]. And I have a hard time communicating with her otherwise. But, anyways, I don't post anything like that on Facebook. I have too much history, too many friends, family members. I don't even know who my friends are, I don't even know who would see it. I don't even know how public it is. I have completely just stepped away from Facebook. For Instagram, I have a

private account now. I used to have a public account. Private account and got close friends, the rest of them. I am very selective about who follows me. So, I've got my personal account and then I've got my business account. My personal account is very much queer and political, and random thoughts of the day, and then I don't post any of that stuff [on my business account]. I do have on my website, and any time I introduce myself on Instagram, I include that I don't have a pronoun preference. But that is pretty much as far as it goes.

And then I always use preferred pronouns for my friends, when I refer to them. I have a lot of non-binary friends who only use they/them pronouns. So, if I take a picture of them and post it, I'll use their pronouns so it's very subtle and normalized, as far as my business social media goes.

[50:36] Ashley: Do you think it is important to normalize queerness?

[50:38] Liza: Of course! Oh, of course, of course. The first piece of marketing, I had a rack card that's like this big [*making a gesture to card size*] with some pictures, cause I do weddings. I had three pictures on the rack card and one of them was of two women getting married, that I did their flowers a couple years ago. So, I had two hetero couples and then a queer couple on my rack card, so it's very important to me to represent, like really important. My website also, yeah I wish I had more photos to share of like queer couples and queer people in general. Yeah, of course I want to normalize queerness.

[51:52] Ashley: Yeah, and important to make a safe space? Like to project that you and your little community that you've built is a safe space?

[52:01] Liza: That's what I want to do. I had somebody come out to the farm last year in the spring cause she was interested in volunteering on the farm. I was like, ok well, I didn't know her at all. She just emailed me like out of the blue. I was like, "ok, well actually come and we'll walk the farm and we'll talk and see if it seems like something you'd want to come and do every week." And she was like "okay." So, we came, she met a couple of my friends that were there just like having lunch one day. And we walked down to the farm and looked at everything, talked about some tasks, very farmy. And when we were walking back up the hill, and I was like "well, why don't you think about it. If this is something you're interested in. I just want you to know like there's something that's really important if you decide you want to come and work here everyday, and that is that this is a very queer farm. There is a lot of like non-binary and trans people that work here, or live here, or visit here, or volunteer here. This is my identity, you know, so if you're uncomfortable being around queer people and their various pronouns and identities, it's not going to be a good fit for you." And she was like, "Wow, thank you so much for saying that! I have a gay cousin. I'm totally down with gay people." And I was like, "alright, cool, okay." And then she was one of the people that really had this deep reflection about her gender identity after we had a lot of conversations and she was coming back every week. And

I'm hoping at some point to... Cause I don't have a lot of people that I don't know coming to the farm. And if I'm going to have a volunteer, I'm going to have that disclaimer that this space is queer and if you're not down you can't come.

But I have a lot of clients that come and pick up flowers on the farm. A couple people, like this one lesbian couple, married lesbian couple that live in Meadows of Dan. Amazing. I know multiple gay people, older people, in Meadows of Dan that are like grounded there, never going to leave. It's incredible. They come and pick up flowers every week through the CSA, but I'm sure that's just going to keep getting more people. And so, like I want to... I have this vision, cause I'm still building everything. Things are still like a wreck, we just got water ten months ago on the property. We're still building things, but there's like the building where people pick up their flowers if they come for a wedding or whatever. I have this vision of having kind of queerness there in the building, very visible things. Maybe not like a flag, even though I do have a flag on the back of my truck, my farm truck. [It's] the one with the arrow, the trans POC arrow, so that's on the back of my truck. So, if I drive around town there's that, which feels really good. So I want it to be a space where if they pick up flowers and they really look around, they're like "oh okay. I can see where this person stands as far as queerness and historical perspective, colonialism." I'd like to figure out a way to do that that is not performative but feels very honest.

[56:05] Ashley: How do you think you would do that?

[56:08] Liza: Well, there's this one picture of Alok that I'm in love with, one of their first portraits that I think I ever saw and it's a profile of them. They have like flowers all over their head, or maybe it's like a collar? I guess I can't quite envision it in my brain. But it's so pretty that I'd like to get a portrait of that, and frame it, and put it on my wall somewhere. Because that's what people do to their idols, right? I like that. That feels very queer to me. That's pretty much as far as I've gotten [*laughter*]. Maybe like a sign. You know those signs that are like "live, laugh, love," "this kitchen is for dancing." I want a sign that says, "respect people's pronouns" or something like that in that font. No, that font is terrible. Something like that. I've thought about things like that.

[57:18] Ashley: You mentioned colonialism. Can we talk about that?

[57:20] Liza: Yeah, I mean, my land was, is traditional Tutelo land you know? And my ancestors are white and were given stolen land. And I think that's really important to talk about regularly and I do have that acknowledgement on my website. So, my website has some visible stuff, thoughtful things, and it's not all rainbows and sunshine. It's like I very explicitly say on the website that I have access to this land through a violent past, and I want to work toward healing that and make reparations. I don't know if I use the word 'reparations,' actually. I'd have to go back and look at that since I wrote it two years ago. But, yeah, the two farmers... It's really important to me to pull in a land-back element to what we're doing on the land, so the two

farmers that have come to the land agree with that. We had these really big intense talks about land ownership and the eventual goal is to put the land into a trust, so I don't own it, nobody owns it, we're just stewarding the land. And we want to create a land-back tax, which is kind of where we are right now, where you pay a little extra money and it goes toward a local tribe, but not all tribes have an organization around them. So, as far as my research has gone, there is not an organization for the Tutelo people, but there is a language program in North Carolina for the Tutelo language. That is the Tutelo traditions and language is being housed under a bigger tribe organization and recognition. I don't know if it will happen this year, but soon, maybe next year, we're going to make connections with that tribe and let them know that "we're interested in supporting your language program or however it feels appropriate. This is kinda what we're thinking. What do you think? Is this something we can do?" And yeah, go from there. So, we haven't made the connection yet, it's in our brains but there's so much going on—like I said, we just got water—so, we're just existing. We're just day to day existing, trying to build our businesses and keep our farms afloat and stay alive on the land. Who's to say that that priority is appropriate, but that's what we're doing now. We're doing our best, but it's in the eventual goal to do that.

[1:01:04] Ashley: But it's really admirable that you've built this, this community that you have that seems very loving and accepting.

[1:01:15] Liza: Yeah, we're doing our best, you know. It hasn't been easy. Communication is like the hardest thing, right? And we're all human beings, so we all fuck up, and we're working on accountability. We had a challenge last year where somebody said something that they knew was weird but they never addressed it, and then somebody else was like "wow, that was really fucking weird and I did not like it." So then there was this thing where they, the person who was like "Oooh I don't feel safe" came to me and was like "this happened and I didn't feel safe," and I was like "yeah, that was really weird. I'm so sorry I didn't address it in the moment." Then I went to the person who said the thing and was like [to the person who was harmed] "what can I do to support you cause I want you to feel safe here." And they were like "maybe just talk to them about it?" and I was like "okay, I'll do that. Can I mention that you said something blah blah blah." They said "yes please." So, then, I went to the person and I was like "two weeks ago when you said this thing, this person felt really uncomfortable." And they were like, "Oh my god, I'm so glad you said something cause I felt really weird about it, and I should have said something about it in the moment." So, that was the first time we had to have accountability, and it went so well! I was nervous, and I realized that that was my whiteness, cause the person who said the thing was white, and the person who was uncomfortable is Black. And the person said something weird about race, and the person knew it was weird but it wasn't addressed in the moment. So then we—all three of us—had this realization like: okay, we all thought it was weird and none of us said something until later. So, we all know now that we can say something, and we all want to be held accountable, which is really beautiful.

That's the hardest part, you know, communicating. I've lived with a lot of people. I've moved around a lot. I've had a million roommates. I've had amazing roommates. I've had terrible roommates. I've had roommates that had horrible communication skills. Horrible! And so, I feel really strongly about communication, and accountability is something I've really leaned into in the last couple of years as far as holding people accountable when I need to, and I'm making it very clear that I want people to hold me accountable. That even though I may have a gut reaction, I need them to do that for me. I'll do my best to not be a shithead. You know? This community that I have feels the same way. It's amazing. We all want to be held accountable. And I'm witnessing people holding each other accountable, and it's really beautiful. So, this community is very intentional, not in like the intentional community that's squishy and whatever. We're talking about hard stuff. We're talking about colonialism and capitalism and not like... We all believe in the swirling magic of nature, for sure, I one-hundred percent am like a hippie, or whatever. I believe in spirits, and fairies, and all that stuff, but also that's not all there is in the world. So it's beautiful, but it's hard, but it's beautiful.

[1:05:16] Ashley: So, do you think that if people were to open themselves to accountability and communication that would make it more safe for queer people?

[1:05:30- 1:06:20] Interruption

[1:06:21] Ashley: Talking about accountability. So, you think accountability is a very important thing to have not only in queer spaces, but everywhere?

[1:06:32] Liza: Oh, yeah, for sure. I mean, that would change a lot, right? If we normalized accountability, right? I think accountability is very gendered to the way we even think about accountability, and who gets held accountable, and in the ways they get held accountable, and in the ways they're not held accountable. So, yeah, the jails would look very different if people were held accountable. You know? The people that are in there would look very different. A lot of things would change. Not saying that I support jails, but that was one of the first thing that came to my brain as far as racial inequities and class inequities in jail systems, and who gets held accountable and who doesn't...and also like, who's there for no reason.

[1:07:49] Ashley: I do agree that accountability would just... if people just normalized accountability, normalized queerness, the world would be a very different place.

[1:08:00] Liza: Mhm. For sure. God, I know. When my friend was held accountable for what they said, there was no defensiveness at all. There was no feeling of needing to hold onto some sort of righteousness. I think that's how accountability works, right? It's where you are like, "I fucked up, I'm sorry." Normalizing fucking up. Normalizing there is no such thing as a good

person or a bad person. We are all in our own realities, and we're humans. That's a really beautiful thing. I think that's really strong in our community, which is really incredible.

[1:09:01] Ashley: I think that is a lovely note to end on [*laughter*]. I want to thank you for your time, Liza, and thank you for sharing about your community and story.

[1:09:19] Liza: Yeah, thanks for having me! This was nice [*laughter*].

[1:09:25]

END.