Battle Creek Queer Oral History Project: Kim Langridge Interview

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Narrator: Kim Langridge (**KL**)

Interviewer: Lucy Blair (**LB**)

00:00
Lucy Blair: I'm here with Kim Langridge. We are chatting on March 15, 2022 in the Marshall Library. It's just the two of us here. Thank you so much for sharing your story with the Battle Creek Queer Oral History Project.

00:19
Kim Langridge: I hope it's my pleasure!

00:21
LB: [*laughing*] Me too!

00:21
KL: Good!

00:24
LB: Tell me first, for identifying information, tell me where you were born.

00:30
KL: I was born here in Marshall, February 16, 1955. Oaklawn Hospital.

00:36
LB: Great! Thank you. I'm going to jump right into the questions that we have. Tell me first about your experience growing up and your life up until recently. What joys have you had, and what obstacles have you had to overcome?

00:52
KL: Well, that's kind of a three-pronged question. Let me start with growing up. I had a really good childhood. I would describe it, almost, as idyllic. We were poor, but I never knew we were poor. I grew up on a farm. I had brothers and sisters, lots of room to move around, a mom and dad that were terrific. So, my early formative years were really positive, with the exception of the big question in my life, which was, how come I'm different than everybody else? I knew I was. I didn't know exactly, for a long time, what it was, and then quite early in life, I realized what I was, and then it was dealing with it, or not dealing with it.

My early life, and my life up until when I started to deal with being transgender was—it wasn't a bad life at all. I could have played out the string, which is what my plan was. I can plow through this, put my head down and get to the end, but I realized, and looking back, especially, that I was living a life of quiet desperation, as Thoreau said, and that's no way to live. Especially when you realize it, then it's harder to live with that. That's when I started to deal with it.

02:11
LB: How would you say that you realized it? What were some examples of how you felt like you were aware that you were experiencing something else?

02:26
KL: If you mean, when I experienced that I was transgender?

02:29
LB: Yeah. I mean, I know you didn't necessarily have the words for it. So, what was that tension like where you knew that something was up, and different, that you didn't have the words and the technical—?

02:45
KL: This was a quote from a movie, The Matrix, "like a splinter in your brain." You know how a splinter feels, it irritates, and you can't get rid of it until you dig it out. You forget about it, but you always come back to it. Well, that's what it felt like mentally and emotionally. It was always present with me. It was, I felt, a cross I had to bear. It was a constant companion, knowing that I was not who I was supposed to be. As far as how that translated in my everyday life – I think it, as I mentioned earlier, it colored and influenced every decision, almost, that I made, as far as socially.

In every way—The job that I ended up choosing and going into journalism, I wanted to write so I didn't have to talk. I can remember very early, I think I was probably in maybe third or fourth grade, one of my fantasies was that I would get hit in the throat by a baseball, or I would contract some weird disease and be struck mute, where I never had to talk again, and I would have to communicate by writing on a piece of paper or a pad that I carry around. That was one of my fantasies because I was so in to myself and so self-conscious about myself. I didn't like looking at myself in a mirror. I learned to be a photographer because I wanted to be on the backside of the camera and never in front of it. If you look at our family photo albums, people will say, "Well, where are you?" And I'll say, "I'm taking the picture," because I didn't want to be in the front.

It was a constant feeling of being self-conscious. Although nobody knew I was feeling this, it felt like they did. Like I was carrying a monkey around on my back. Nobody knew it, but I did. That was probably the most difficult part of my life was knowing, and not knowing anything I could do about it.

04:58

LB: Right. Is there anything else that you want to add about life before we get into the first steps of thinking about transitioning? Anything else you want to share about what life was like for you growing up?

05:18
KL: Well, I was a loner, a little bit by choice, a little bit by chance, in that there was some separation in our family as far as age. I'm the youngest in the family. I remember doing a lot of things by myself. That was maybe for the best because I never felt like I belonged to a group. I never felt like I fit in anywhere. I think that can be traced back to the fact that I was trans and didn't know it. I didn't fit into myself, how was I going to fit in with anybody else? I was, kind of, I don't want to say a loner, but I spent a lot of time alone, doing solitary activities.

Let's see, what else should I say? I had a good family, you know, they were very understanding. I always had the sense that being trans was never anything I would discuss. It's not something we talked about. Although it was never explicitly said in our family, there were just certain vibes that you picked up on as a kid, that this isn't one of them that we talk about, we keep these things to ourselves. And I did.

06:38
LB: Do you think that they had a sense that you were feeling this way and struggling?

06:43
KL: You know, I think my mom and dad knew that I was different from my brothers and sisters. I was the fifth in the family, and I think they probably told themselves privately, “This one didn't turn out so good. What happened here?” I think they were very protective of me because maybe they felt like they were the cause of me being the way I was. Not a bad kid, I did okay in school, but they knew that I just was never really on solid ground ever. Not like my brothers and my sisters, who did well at school and at sports and like that, and then here's me, who stood out in different ways.

They were very, very understanding, but my whole family is that way. I made this comment that if I would have told everybody, “Hey, I'm going to be a bank robber,” somebody in my family would have volunteered to drive the getaway car, because that's just how close we were. We always had each other's backs. That's the way we were raised. It never felt like I was in danger of being an outcast, except that I did feel that way, internally.

08:00
LB: Right. So, we've talked about how maybe the first step you took in terms of doing something, going out into the world and making a decision about this, was using a therapist. Tell me about what led up to that decision about seeing a therapist, and then what that experience was like.

08:22
KL: Yeah. It was my 60th birthday. I can remember, I was laying in bed the night of my 60th birthday. 60 is a milestone for a lot of people, you start to think about the next – you're going to start to circle the drain, and you’re gone. [*laughing*] I was thinking about that, and I said, You know what, I don't want to

be laying on my deathbed one day, filled with regret that I never tried to deal with this. I never took a chance, and explored this, got to the bottom of it. The next day, I started looking on the internet to find out what this was. It took me a little bit, but I stumbled across the word ‘transgender.’ I wasn't really familiar with it, and the more I read about it, the more it seemed to fit me. That prompted me to say, I can't do this alone. I can't figure this out on my own. I've read self-help books and all this stuff, but this was something I was going to need professional help with. So, I made the decision, I need to find a therapist.

It took me two solid years to work up the courage to send the email to a therapist and make an appointment. I kept putting it off. I would play these games with myself where I would say, All right, if I'm in the backyard and hitting golf balls, if I hit five golf balls within 10 feet of my target, today's the day. I would hit four and then I’d shank the next two, and I think I was just deliberately sabotaging myself because I wasn't ready. Finally, one day, I wrote the email. I picked out a therapist online, I wrote the email to her asking if I could make an appointment, and then I left the room. I'd left it on my screen. I went upstairs and did something, and then I came back. I knew this was probably the only way I was going to do it—I just hit send and got it over with. Rip the Band-Aid off that way. To my surprise, she wrote me back the same night and asked me if I was in crisis and what my situation was. We made an appointment, and I was off.

10:34
LB: Yeah, absolutely. What was that experience like, once you started seeing the therapist and really diving into this new possibility?

10:46
KL: I did not have grand plans for my therapy sessions. I went there with the intention of getting a diagnosis, I thought I would be there for one appointment and that would be it. I just wanted to know, am I transgender or is this something else? Is this a fetish? Is this—what is it? I went there wanting to know that, and then I was going to be done. She was such a good therapist that she kept me coming back because one of the things she told me in our first session was that she's seen cases similar to mine over and over, where people are here, and I'm holding my hand horizontally, and once they transition, they just take off. My trajectory was pretty darn flat in life, and I wanted that takeoff. I kept waiting for it and waiting for it. I didn't realize, until recently, that I really did. When I compare where I am now to where I was, I did experience that trajectory.

To begin with, it was always, I kept telling myself, No, this isn’t going to happen. No, I'm not going to do more than one session. No, I'm not going to come out to my family, no one. Every step of the way I said no, but then I ended up doing it anyway. I've thought a lot about that process, and I'm not sure if it can be classified as bravery or courage or anything like that. To me, it's more of a biological imperative. It's like a salmon that has to swim upstream. It doesn't know why. It just knows it has to go back to that original spawning place.

Another meme that I thought about that could describe me, and we’ve seen this on the internet, I think I'm like a parking lot flower. You’ve seen those flowers grow up through a crack in the cement? Well, that's kind of what I felt like. I was buried underground, kept this a secret, a dark secret for so long. I

was full of anxiety about it, and embarrassment and shame, but something kept pulling me up, and wouldn't stop. It would never let go of me that I had to explore this, I had to settle this. You think about that flower and how hard it had to work to push its way out of the packed down dirt and the cement and find a way to the sun. That's kind of what my journey is like, and I think that's true for not just me, but for a lot of transgender people and a lot of LGBTQ people in general. It is a difficult process, but maybe a lot of people like me feel like they have no choice. The alternative is not good at all. So, to me, it wasn't so much courageous, it was just necessity.

13:43
LB: That makes sense. So, tell me about some milestones that you experienced along the way. Moments that changed your perspective or helped you get where you are now.

13:54
KL: The first one was going to my therapist, that was a huge milestone. I remember the day I went, I had to be there early, and I had to go to Kalamazoo, which meant I had to be on the road before the sun came up. I was a nervous driver anyway and it was pouring rain. I thought, Oh, Jesus. Just seems like nature doesn't want this to happen, but I did it anyway. I got myself ready, I got in the car, and the closer I got to Kalamazoo the rain stopped, the clouds part, seriously, the clouds actually parted. The sun came out and I drove into that parking lot, and just as I drove in, there was my therapist. I was her very first patient. She got out of her car and she walked in front of my car and I said, that's her. I waited another three or four minutes for her to get settled, and then I walked in and everything worked. That was a huge milestone for me.

Another big one is December 26, 2017. That's the day I started hormone therapy. Again, it seemed like nature was trying to tell me, Nope, not going to do this. Because I had a hard time finding a doctor. I was told by an endocrinologist here in Marshall that she wouldn't see me. She didn't want to deal with a trans person, even though my MD referred me. No, I couldn't find one. I called probably a half dozen doctors in Kalamazoo and Battle Creek and couldn't get in. They were full, they were booked, whatever. Finally found one. He saw me in in November. I was so excited for that appointment. We talked, I had a letter from my therapist. And then he said, "Well, I'm not going to prescribe hormones for you today. My policy is to wait a month to make sure that you're positive." I didn't really like that. I was 60-some years old, this wasn't a lark for me. I left there thinking, God, I've got to wait another month? It was on December 26, coincidentally.

So, I'm ready for this. December 25, we got a foot and a half of snow, and we were scheduled for another six inches overnight. That meant that I had to be out there on December 25 plowing the driveway to make sure I could get out of the driveway. The wind was blowing in my face, there were little tornadoes of snow out in the field, and I just felt so alone on that driveway. But I got it done because I had to do it. This was something that nothing was going to stop me from getting to that appointment. Schools were closed and roads were icy and slippery and filled with snow. The day before they'd been fine. I thought, Why now? But, I made it there, I got the prescription. I was coming back from Kalamazoo to Battle Creek to fill my prescription at Walmart, at that time, and they closed 94. I couldn't even get to Walmart. I thought, How is this happening? Why are all these literal roadblocks in my way? So, I took a detour and I got there. I got my prescription. I got that little white bag. I walked out

of that store on a cloud. I put that white bag on the seat next to me and drove home, just as excited as I've ever been in my life. Then I got home, I went downstairs and I opened that bottle, and I put the two little blueish green pills in front of me and I just stared at them for like five minutes. That was a big milestone, too.

17:53
LB: I have a question. December 26, that was the month, then, after the initial appointment?

17:59
KL: Correct. That is my hormone-iversary. That's a date that I celebrate. I don't really celebrate my birthday or Christmas or very many holidays. For me, that's the biggest day of my life. Every day on December 26, I try to do something just for me. On my first anniversary, I got my ears pierced. That was a huge deal because I wasn't even fully out to everybody, and now I've got two pierced ears that I have to explain. They can't come out for a month, they told me. I wasn't ready for that. I thought, Well, I'll just take them out. No, you leave them in. I had to deal with that, and that was kind of a permanent thing. Nobody knew I was taking hormones, but everybody knew I got my ears pierced at age 62. That was something, that was another milestone. The next year on my hormone-iversary, I got my gender marker changed on my driver's license. So, every December 26, I'd celebrate that day. That's a milestone for me.

19:00
LB: Absolutely, great. Any others that you want to tell?

19:04
KL: Oh, there are a lot of them. I remember the first day I got "ma'am"ed. Yes, and I'm not talking breasts, although, they are little, and they are a little joy for me. But, this little joy was waiting in line at Meijer, or Meijer's as we say in Michigan. A lady behind me—I was waiting in the self-help line, and it was full house that day, and the lady behind me said, "Ma'am, you can go over to that one over there." My heart just leapt. I said, She called me ma'am! She thinks I'm a girl! I said, wait a minute, I am! That first 'ma'am' was pretty special to me. There's been other little joys. I've had people, women, who, in supermarket lines will talk to me, just strike up a conversation, about the weather or the price of lettuce or whatever it is. Women don't usually do that with strange men, but they will do it with strange women, because we're part of the same club, we're on the same side. That unintentional affirmation is priceless to me, that I'm in the club now.

20:24
LB: That makes sense. You've described how, while you were going through transitioning, you felt like you were in two different worlds?

20:38
KL: Absolutely, yeah.

20:39
LB: Can you describe that more? And how do you navigate that?

20:43

KL: It is a difficult process, but that's what transition is, it's moving from one to the next. It was probably the most uncomfortable feeling, for me because at the time, I don't know if this is true for all trans people, but I was presenting, sometimes as male, sometimes as female, depending on my situation, my audience. I knew I had to force myself to find situations that I could present as female. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't bring myself to do it in my hometown, because then there's things to explain. I wasn't ready to make those explanations. I wasn't fully out, but I needed, for lack of a better word, practice at being a girl. I would prepare myself and I would go to Meijer to do some shopping, or I would walk into Kohl's and act like I belonged there, when I'm not sure if I did or not. I would shop in the women's section. It was liberating and terrifying at the same time. Because this is what I always wanted to do, I always wanted to be in this section, and now I could be, but I kept looking over my shoulder waiting for somebody to kick me out. To say, “You don't belong here.” Never happened, but it felt like it could. That feeling of having two identities was difficult.

I had friends who did not know and I did not let them know, and so I presented male, just like always. When I finally came out to my family, that made a difference, because now I can spend most of my time, well, all of my time at home, dressed the way I wanted to, acting the way I wanted to, being who I really was. Slowly, the transition happened from moving entirely from male, to being at both worlds and straddling that fence, to finally stepping over that fence with both feet in the world that wanted to be in. It was hard and it took a long time. There were little victories along the way that I’d tell my therapist about. We would both nod and laugh about, “Okay, that wasn't a big deal, but it sure felt like it. didn't it?” When I could walk into a store, or whatever I did. The process is unnerving, it's uncomfortable, but it's probably necessary for what a trans person goes through. That's a transition, moving from one to another, and at some point in that transition, you're in between, you’re right in the middle. Nothing you can really do about it – well there is, but that wasn't my approach.

23:40

LB: You've talked about some of the happy moments along your journey, or what are some memories that you would cherish. Is there anything in particular you want to add here?

23:50

KL: Well, one of the big hallmarks for me was, I left my therapist and I came back six or eight months later, because I wasn't really making any progress. I was out at home, but I wasn't really doing much publicly. I wasn't presenting. I wasn't looking for opportunities anymore, either. I was concerned that there were all kinds of things that were going wrong here. She assured me that no, this is a process and you've just plateaued. And she said, you need to push yourself a little bit more. She suggested to me, one of the best pieces of advice I got, was to volunteer, to do something for Battle Creek Pride. *[Carrie Underwood’s ‘Jesus Take the Wheel’ plays*] I hear music.

24:40

LB: Is that you? [*music stops*]

24:41

KL: No. Musical interlude! Anyway, so she – I didn't say anyhoo, I hate that. Anyhoo, she said that what you ought to do is volunteer for Battle Creek Pride. I had gone to a couple of transgender support meetings, and I was going there, it's a very small group. I would go there and come straight home and all that. One day, I got out of a trans support meeting at the same time Battle Creek Pride was holding, in the next room over, a planning meeting for Pride Week. I knew that Deana Spencer was the president, that was her sitting in that room, and they had just broken up. Some people were still chatting while everybody was leaving. I saw that opportunity and I took it. I walked in, and I introduced myself. I told her who my therapist was, that she was familiar with Davison. She said, "Okay, I know." I told her that, on her advice, I should probably do something for you guys, just to be more social. She said, "Well, what can you do?" I said, "Well, I'm a writer, I can write." She said, "Great. Would you write something about Stonewall?" I said, "Sure." I didn't know what Stonewall was. I thought it was a literal stone wall, like a monument. I had to look it up on Wikipedia, and I found out that Stonewall is not a stone wall, it is a bar in New York.

I did some research on it, and I didn't know what to write. I swear to God, I channeled this, it was as though I was just taking dictation, and it poured out of me, this poem sort of. It took me probably two and a half hours to write this thing, and it was three pages long. I sent it to Deana and I said, "I don't know if this is what you're looking for." She said, "Oh my god, I love this." It became a Thursday event for Pride Week, we ended up performing it and I was one of the performers. I wasn't even fully out at the time. I didn't know who was going to show up to this and be out in that audience looking at me in a skirt. I have pretty good legs, but come on, it was still a big deal for me.

27:03
LB: I bet!

27:05
KL: That was really something for me, to not only volunteer, do something they liked, but then it became one of the days of Pride Week and I helped perform it. So, I guess that would fall under the milestones and also one of the joys because after I got involved in Battle Creek Pride, everything changed for me, for the better.

27:29
LB: Could we include the poem in some of this?

27:32
KL: Of course we could.

27:33
LB: I would like that. I think that would be a fun thing to add.

27:37
KL: I don't have it memorized, but I could send it to you. [*laughing*]

27:41

LB: Yeah, as a document. [*laughing*]

27:43
KL: Sure, of course.

27:46
LB: Now you're Co-President of Battle Creek Pride. Tell me how you got involved, you've mentioned this a little bit, getting involved with Battle Creek Pride and what the experience has been like.

27:56
KL: After that Thursday event, Deana asked me if I wanted to come to some of the events that Battle Creek Pride put on. I said, “Yeah,” so I went to a couple of board meetings and just sat there as an interested observer. I started participating in bringing ideas to them. They were harebrained ideas at the time, but they still appreciated the effort. One of the people on the board said, “We're close to the end of the year and we're looking for new candidates to come on to the board, would you be interested? Because we've never had a transgender member on the Board of Directors.”

Technically, I was the first trans person on the Battle Creek Pride Board of Directors, because they realized they wanted that perspective that I brought. I thought to myself, first of all, I'm not a joiner. I go back to Groucho Marx; I don't want to belong to any organization that would have somebody like me as a member, and that rang true to me. So, I never belonged to anything. This was my first experience belonging to a group, an organized group. It was—It just changed my whole world. Now I was part of a group, and I was being productive, and I was helping people. It was good for me, and I hope it was good for everybody else too.

29:37
LB: What has Battle Creek Pride – I want to know more about what it's added to your life. Can you tell me more about even your philosophy, about why you like participating in it? Specific memories that you think of? Just more about Battle Creek Pride.

30:02
KL: Yeah, I have two families. I have my biological family and I have my Pride family. They really have been like a family to me. I can't even describe how gratifying and fulfilling it is to be included in, not just organizational events, but some of the women there invite me to parties, and they welcome me into their conversations. They tell me things about their personal life that they would never tell some strange guy that walked up to them, but I'm included in that clan now. That's a little part of Battle Creek Pride.

It's also exposed me to so many people; I've met so many people that I never would have met before. Because I was a wallflower, I was a shut in before. This brought me out into the world. It wasn't always comfortable. It was a big adjustment for me, a big challenge for me to be public because I was such a private person. The more I did, the easier it got and the better it felt. Since I joined Battle Creek Pride, I have gone more places, I've done more things, I've made more friends, and I've been happier than at any point in my entire life over the last three plus years. Everything that I did the last three years eclipses the first 64, for me.

31:37
LB: That's a big deal.

31:38
KL: It's a big deal. That's what Pride means to me. And then, I'm Co-President. I'll just state for the record that I don't belong as Co-President because I don't have the wherewithal to do these things. I'm just a support person. I was asked, more or less by default, to be Deana's Co-President, and I agreed. It felt like that cartoon where there's a big sucker behind *[laughing*], but yeah, I fell for it, they got me. But again, this has been good for me, too. This is my second year as Co-President, and it has given me an avenue to present ideas that maybe they hadn't considered before. A lot of my stuff is off the wall and it doesn't work, but at least I try. Being a co-president, it has a little cachet to it. I have a title. Not just board member, but co-president, there's some weight behind that that I don't feel like I deserve, but I'm still going to run with it. I have a business card that says co-president on it, and I obnoxiously give those out whenever I can. It's meant a lot to my ego.

Also, being in Battle Creek Pride and being on the Board of Directors led me to learning what my purpose in life is. I didn't know that before. I told my therapist over and over that— you know, she kept saying, "Well, you're still going to be the same person when you transition," and I said, "I don't want to be. I wasn't happy with that person. I don't want to live a life without purpose." I found my purpose in life with Battle Creek Pride. It was a quote I stumbled on from Emerson, and I'm paraphrasing because the quote is much longer, but Emerson said that the purpose in life is not to be happy; the purpose in life is to be useful, and your happiness will come from that. That certainly resonated with me, and it's been true. Every time that I can help somebody, I can be useful in whatever capacity, that's what brings me joy.

33:53
LB: I would argue, also, that that's what makes you a tremendous co-president. For the record.

34:01
KL: You know, there's another thing that you just brought up. Before I transitioned, I could never accept a compliment. If you told me, "Hey, your hair looks good today!" I would say, "Yeah, what's left of it." It was always followed by some self-effacing comment that, I couldn't accept a compliment. I noticed that that changed in me once I transitioned. Now, I would generally just say, "Well, thank you." I don't know what that's about, but thank you for saying that.

34:28
LB: I love it. So, in what ways has the city of Battle Creek and this area contributed to your experience with BC Pride?

34:42
KL: Sure. I've lived in Marshall my whole life. I was born here, and this is where I want to die here. Some days more than others. [*laughing*] I've never lived more than five miles from where I was born. I don't care about travel, I don't care about seeing new places or going places. So, living in Marshall,

Battle Creek was always the big city to me. When I started to transition, places like Battle Creek and Kalamazoo became escapes where I didn't feel like I was under the potential scrutiny of walking down the street in Marshall presenting as a woman and somebody sees me. In Battle Creek I could be just a little bit more anonymous and fit in with a crowd of faceless people and walk down the street and not draw a second look. Battle Creek, the city, being more of a metropolis than Marshall, was very helpful for me.

The other thing that I can say about Battle Creek and Marshall is, I know I'm an exception, but I've never had a negative experience. I've never had anybody confront me or insult me or, you know, discriminate against me. I've had some side eyes, but I attribute that to people just being curious because they don't see trans people every day. If I saw a unicorn walking down the street, I would stare too. If I'm their unicorn, I can live with that. If they want to stare, have a good look.

36:26
LB: You've talked about this a little bit, even just with your most recent comment, but I'm interested in what it's like having to transition in Marshall and in this area of Michigan, especially because you did grow up in Marshall forever. You know Marshall a lot. I would bring up your anecdote about the bank. Can you tell us that?

36:54
KL: Of course.

36:55
LB: And then, any thoughts you have about the process of transitioning here?

37:00
KL: Yeah. Well, for me personally, I was born in Marshall, my dad was born in Marshall, my grandfather was born in Marshall. People know the name Langridge, not that we're famous or anything, but we've just been here forever. We won't go away. When I walk into someplace, like a bank or a restaurant, chances are there's going to be somebody there who recognizes me, knows me from my dad, or from playing a softball game that I used to play or whatever reason. I used to work for the Marshall Chronicle as a reporter, so a lot of people knew me from there, my byline, and sometimes I maybe have interviewed them. I'm not saying I was famous at all, but I was known in Marshall.

One of the first times that I presented in public was—I can remember the day. It was ten o'clock in the morning and it was a misty fall day. I had to go into the bank, to the credit union. When I walked in there, everybody knew me, quite often they would say ‘hi’ to me, everything was a first name basis because I'd been there for 12, 15 years, and I was a regular customer. Today, I had to walk in wearing a skirt and makeup. I didn't know if I could do it, but the logical part of me said, Well, you can't do all your banking by phone forever. You’re going to have to go in there one day. But I sat in the parking lot in my car for 10 full minutes, trying to work up the courage to open the car door. I couldn't do it, I put it off. I thought, Well, maybe today's not today. Maybe I should just drive home. Maybe it'll be better tomorrow. But I remembered an anecdote that I heard a week before, when I was listening to NPR. They were interviewing a soldier who came back from Iraq, and he had won the Medal of Valor. What

he had done was, he crawled across a battlefield and he made two separate trips under heavy enemy fire to drag back his wounded comrades, back to a foxhole. The interviewer said, “How could you possibly be so brave during that time?” And he said, “The whole thing probably only took 12 or 15 minutes, but,” he said, “you don't have to be brave for the entire 12 to 15 minutes. I found out that all it takes is about five seconds of insane courage. Once I got out of that foxhole and started moving, I was okay. You don't think about it after that.”

I thought about that anecdote sitting in my car, and it worked for me. I said, I don't have to be brave for this entire thing. All I have to do is be brave enough to open the car door and put my feet on the blacktop and walk across the parking lot and open that door. That'll take me about five or six seconds. Sure enough, when I opened that door, I put my chin up and I put my shoulders back and I faked it to make it, I acted like I owned the place. I was confident, I walked up to the teller and the teller didn't know what to do, because he'd never seen me before. He asked for ID, and I gave him my driver's license, and it did not match the way I looked. He looked at me and I looked at my driver's license, and he looked at me again and he looked at my driver's license again. Then he said, “Would you excuse me?” He had to go get a manager. The manager came over and looked at my driver's license, and looked at me, and looked at my driver's license again, and then pulled him aside. I imagine she said, “Just do it. Do it.” So, he gave me my deposit. “Anything else?” “Nope. Thank you,” and I walked out.

I'm not sure, but I think they probably had a conversation among all the bank employees, “Okay, we have a trans customer, how are we going to handle her?” Or maybe they already had a policy, I don't know. I like to think that because I did that, ever since then, people have been so nice to me. It's, “Hi, hello, how are you? How's your day going?” You know, like I'm an old friend again. So yeah. Kim Langridge, Financial Trailblazer, is what I like to think, because maybe I changed things for some other people, that they had to institute a policy because of me. I don't know, maybe I'm just fantasizing that.

41:36

LB: I think that could be true. So, we've discussed before this interview that you are comfortable mentioning your dead name. Tell me about your name and your feelings toward it. Also, maybe more importantly, how you chose Kim for who you are now and owning Kim.

41:53

KL: Sure. I used to write comedy material for stand-up comedians. One of the first jokes that I ever wrote, that got a laugh on stage that I witnessed, was about my name. It was art imitating life. It was a true story. The joke went like this: When I was born, I was named after the doctor who delivered me. His name was Kenneth Way, so my name was Kenneth. I always hated my name, but at least I wasn't delivered by a midwife, like my brother, Betty. [*laughing*] That always got a laugh, and it was true. I was named after the doctor who delivered me, his name is Kenneth Way, and my name became Kenneth. I hated it. Kenny, Ken, any iteration of that, I didn't like. I couldn't say it. What am I going to do? Change my name at age four or five? No. So, it never fit me, it never suited me.

One of the things that trans people, almost all trans people I think, go through, is a name change. It's a big deal. You think about it – and, I did all the things that people do. I would grab a piece of notebook paper and a pen and write it out on paper. How does that look? How does that feel to write that name? I

tried out lots of different names, and there were names that I liked. I would go from one to another, but I knew one day I had to decide. I always liked the name Kim, and I didn't know really anybody personally named Kim. There were actresses, Kim Novak and like that, Kim Basinger, but I didn't know very many Kim's personally. I thought, okay, that's a safe name, but I hadn't really settled on it yet. When I went to my electrologist for the very first time, she was very nice, and we became friends. She said, "Well, so, what's your name going to be?" I didn't have an answer, so I blurted out, "Kim," and she said, "Okay, Kim, we're going to set you up for an appointment next week." At that point, I was Kim. I said, Well, I'm okay with that. As it turns out, like, every fourth woman in the world is named Kim it seems like, because that is such a common name, and I didn't know it. But that's okay, I just get confused with all the other Kim's in Battle Creek and in my world.

So, I became Kim Langridge. I still struggle. After writing my name in cursive, after 65 years of writing an 'n' at the end, to write an 'm' I still stutter over it a little bit. If you look at my signature, it's, what happened there? Well, it's supposed to be an 'm' but it was an 'n' and then I had to add a little hump on the end. I'm used to it now. It now feels weird when I have to use my legal name, because I haven't changed my name legally, but I'm in the process, a very slow process. I hope sometime this year, in the year 2022, that legally I'll be Kimberly Leigh Langridge. That's my goal for 2022.

45:20
LB: I love it. That sounds lovely, because to me, you very much feel like a Kim, definitely.

45:26
KL: Well, thanks. See, I accepted that compliment. [*laughing*]

45:34
LB: This is a question that I really like, and you can tell by even the compliments in this one. Tell us about your career. How did you become such a proficient writer with an uncommon knack for being succinct and expressive? In what ways did your personality lend itself to being great at this path?

45:57
KL: Wow. Can I just absorb that question for a little bit? I might ask you to ask it again. [*laughing*] Well writing, for me, was my preferred means of expression. I never liked to talk out loud. I hated my voice, I still do. It's my biggest tell. When I was little, one of my fantasies, and I told you this earlier, was that one day, I would get hit in the throat with a baseball, or I would contract some weird jungle fever disease, and I would be struck mute so I would never have to talk again, and I would have to write things down on a notepad to communicate with people. I thought that would be so much easier than having to talk out loud. I think I became a writer, a little bit, because of my trans issues. I didn't like to communicate verbally because I felt self-conscious about everything. That was part of it, communicating with people. I developed an appreciation for words and vocabulary. It's common in my family, they're really pros at Wheel of Fortune and all that stuff, and word games. I'm not, but I do have a decent vocabulary. I like to write; I especially like to rewrite. I like how I can write something and think it's good, but I know if I give it some shelf time and I come back to it I say, There's such a much better way to present that, and to form that sentence.

Writing is calming to me, because there's a flow and there's an order. Sometimes I will write things out of order and realize it and go back and put them in the right order. That's a good feeling for me, that when you get sentences and ideas that connect. A lot of people don't recognize that in writing. I do, and I think it's important, I think it's a sign of being a good writer, when your sentences and ideas flow and connect. That's always been gratifying to me.

As far as my being succinct, I'm not sure how far back that goes, but what I do professionally now is – well, it does go back aways. I remember back when we had to do reports in geography class and like that. When I had to pick a country, I would pick the most obscure country ever. My reasoning was, Well, there's probably not a lot of research that can be done, so I won't have to do it, and whatever I come up with, they'll be impressed with. So, people would want to do something about Brazil or that, I picked the Lesser Antilles, because it sounded, what, lesser? Couldn't be much about that. They're an exporter of bauxite, if you're interested.

49:12
LB: Interesting.

49:13
KL: Yeah. I'll tell you all about it later.

49:15
LB: Great.

49:16
KL: Yeah. I don't know if it was laziness, or whether it was just my way of getting by. But it led me, strangely, to the career that I have now, which is writing radio and TV commercials. My writing is done in 30-second and 60-second chunks. You have to have a solid idea; you don't have time to play around. It's not literature, but I enjoy it and I'm good at it. It does really boil things down for you. You have to be precise in your language and your ideas. It's maybe a bit of an art form that I've developed over the years, and I think I'm good at, and I like it. And there's a paycheck in it, too.

50:11
LB: Great.

50:12
KL: Yeah!

50:14
LB: This is the last question that we have. In addition to the private, or personal, milestones that you've had and that we talked about a little bit, you've also had some public ones, like the interview with Mac McCullough's Stories at Sundown, and Alyssa Keown did an article in The Battle Creek Enquirer. What impact did those more public moments have on your journey?

50:37

KL: They had a big impact on me. Alyssa did a story, I think it was two years ago, to celebrate Coming Out Day, I think that was the premise of her article. She asked me, among other people, I think there were four or five other people in Battle Creek that she interviewed, about coming out. At that time, I was not fully out, two years ago, to a lot of people, especially the people in Marshall. Relatives that I hadn't seen, friends that I lost contact with, people that you just don't bump into for a while. I wasn't out to them. I never put an ad in the Marshall Chronicle saying, “Hey, I'm trans by the way,” so that didn't happen. A lot of people… I took for granted, I took the easy way out and just said, They'll find out. So, a lot of people didn't, and I never knew for certain who knew and who didn't know in Marshall. So, when Alyssa asked me if I would participate in Coming Out Day and this article, it took me a while to say yes, but she was so nice and I wanted to cooperate and I wanted to represent Battle Creek Pride, so I said yes. She did a terrific job, she was very kind. She was a good writer, and she wrote this charming article, and she put me in the lead paragraph. She related the story that I told you about, waiting in the parking lot and how unnerving that experience was at the credit union.

From that article, I knew that my story was out there now, publicly. That was my first huge step to coming out, was that Coming Out Day article. There are still people that I'm not fully out to, some of the people that I work with in Detroit, they don't know me as Kim. That article was a big step for me.

The other one was an interview that Mac McCullough did, his Stories at Sundown. I knew Mac, I knew him from his days at the Enquirer. When he asked me, at first my immediate response to myself was no, but that's common for me. I talked to some other people that had been interviewed, and they said, “Oh, you really ought to do it.” I knew Mac was a good interviewer, but I didn't know he was that good. He treated me so nicely. He guided me through the whole process. We had a pre-interview, and that went like nothing. I mean, it was 60 minutes, and it felt like 10 minutes, it just slipped by. He said, “See, this wasn't hard.” At that time, he had to do Zoom interviews because of COVID, and that Zoom interview went so well. Again, it flew by for me. Again, he's so skilled at what he does, he made it easy for me. I think I must have come off pretty well because I got compliments from that.

To this day, just two weeks ago—that was months and months ago—I just got a note from a relative who hadn't seen me in years and years and years, she saw that interview. She wrote me the nicest note saying how proud she was of me and how she was so happy for me, and I looked happy. It was such an uplifting thing to get out of the blue, and it was all because of that interview. That's the power that things like that can have. They have ripples that go on and on and on. I'm thinking one of the reasons why I agreed to do this [oral history] interview was, maybe I can do the same thing with this, that somebody 20, 30, 40 years from now will be listening to this, and they'll gain a little bit of insight into what it was like to be transgender in Marshall and in Battle Creek back in the early 2000’s and in 2022. That’s what I'm hoping is, I can make some more ripples for people.

54:46
LB: I imagine you will. Anything else you want to add?

54:51
KL: There are lots of things, we could do two hours, but I don't think either of us really want to. [*laughing*]

54:58
LB: I would. [*laughing*] Anything that you feel like you really want to make sure is on the record?

55:07
KL: There are actually two things. I don't want to take up too much time, but I think it's something that helped me. It's a story that I read, I didn't invent this story, but I found out that it was true, especially for me, but other people too, who are transgender. The story goes like this: When you're transgender, when you fully accept, come to understand that you're trans, you've come to a crossroads, a fork in the road for you. One of those roads leads to transition. It's difficult, it's steep, it's rocky, it's dangerous, it's not an easy road to travel. The other road leads away from transition. That road is easy, because you've done it, you've been on that road. It's flat, it's featureless, but at least you know it's safe. You can take either road, but a lot of us take the easy road that leads away from transition. I did over and over, and you can travel that road as many times as you like. But what you find out is, that's not a road that leads you where you need to go. It's a loop. As many times as you take that road, it's going to bring you right back, sooner or later, to that crossroads, and you have to make the decision: Which way do I go?

I traveled that road, that looping road for 60 some years before I finally found the courage to take the other road, the road less traveled, to transition. When I did, yes, it was tough, it was a tough track, but what I found, and what I think everybody will find is, there are people along the way that will help you, they'll reach out, they're waiting for you. It's really something that we need to understand, that we all come to that crossroad, and we need to take the road that leads us where we need to go. I did and, as Frost said, it made all the difference. That's the story that I hope people, especially trans people, can understand and take to heart. That's a good place to end, unless you want me to go on.

57:24
LB: You had one more, you said you had two things.

57:26
KL: Oh, okay. Damn, you're good. You're good.

57:28
LB: I'm going to bring it back!

57:30
KL: Well, it was a story of how I discovered what it meant to be transgender. It happened, for me, when I was four years old. I know I was four years old because I can historically document it. I was born in '55, and in 1959, one of my little chores that I could do was go out and get the evening paper, the Battle Creek Enquirer. I would have to go across the road, I had to look both ways, but my mom and dad would let me do that. We lived on a dirt road in the country and cars did not travel that road very often, so they weren't taking a chance with my life but, they let me do this. So one day— you know, I would always look at the paper on my way back to the house, which seemed like a mile, but it was more like forty yards. I would look at the front page and pretend that I knew how to read.

One day, there was a picture of a woman on the front page, and I looked at that woman, and she did not look like any woman that I'd seen before. There was something about her, and I didn't know what it was. I didn't pay close attention after that until, that evening, that woman's picture appeared on the evening news that my Dad—the CBS Evening News. The story about this woman was that she lived in New York and she applied for a marriage license in New York, but they would not give her a marriage license. She felt that it was because they would not allow a man to marry a man. Then they went on to tell that this woman was named Christine Jorgensen, and Christine Jorgensen was originally born as George Jorgensen, went into the military, decided that she needed to do something because she was – back then, they called it transsexual. So she went to Denmark, she got, what they called, a sex change operation, and she came back as Christine. That was the story, and when I heard that story on the news, I remember sitting on our linoleum floor at home, watching this as a four-year-old, and my little four-year-old mind was blown because, there's somebody like me out there. I'm not the only one who feels this way, and you could actually do something about this.

I remember going outside, sitting in the tire swing we had under the maple tree, and my mind was just filled with questions. I remember thinking to myself, Okay, how am I going to get to Denmark? Is it cold there? Is mom going to come with me? How long do I have to stay in Denmark? Where am I going to get the money? I guess it's going to cost a lot of money to get there. I'll have to fly in an airplane. All these questions, I didn't have any answers, but I knew at four years old, I've got to get to Denmark, because that's when I knew I was like Christine Jorgensen. I should have been, not a boy, but a girl. And I tell people, I'm 67 years old, but I've been transgender for 67 years and nine months, because I was born this way, I was conceived this way. Knowing that has helped me. Being transgender is not a choice, it's not a lifestyle, you're born this way. You have to choose to deal with it or not. There's no blame to be assigned, there's no fault, there's nothing like that. It's just deal with it. That knowledge colored every decision that I made in life. Now I'm at a point in my life where I can say that I'm happily trans. My life is so much better now. Yeah, I have doubts, I have doubts about everything in my life. I have questions about what would have happened if I would have done this earlier in life, all the things I missed out on, but I don't do that very often. I look forward, and I have a lot to look forward to.

1:01:41
LB: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

1:01:44
KL: Thank you.

1:01:45
LB: I think we'll end the recording now.

1:01:47
KL: Let's!

1:01:48
LB: Okay!

1:01:49
KL: All right.