

Project Title: **COUNTRY QUEERS**

Interviewee: **Robyn Thirkill**

Location: **Robyn's living room in Prospect, VA**

Date: **September 3, 2016**

Interviewer: **Rae Garringer**

Transcription: **Rev.com**

Rae: [\(00:01\)](#):

All right, so it's September 3rd, 2016. I'm in Prospect, Virginia interviewing Robyn: Thirkill for Country Queers. The first question is just for you to introduce, your name, your age, where you live.

Robyn: [\(00:17\)](#):

Okay. My name is Robyn: Thirkill. I'm 41. I live in Prospect, Virginia, which is between Richmond and Lynchburg, just outside of Farmville, Virginia.

Rae:: [\(00:30\)](#):

Great. I guess if you were going to describe it here to somebody who has never been here, doesn't know anything about what it's like here, how would you describe this?

Robyn:: [\(00:41\)](#):

It's rural, but it's not the desert. It's not the most rural it could be, but it's pretty rural. It's a lot of one-horse towns. The town of Prospect does not even have one stoplight. There's probably 15 churches, but no stoplights, so it's one of those kind of towns. There's a post office and two stores here. That's it. It's pretty small. It's pretty small.

Rae: [\(01:14\)](#):

I like that, no stoplight, but 15 churches.

Robyn: [\(01:14\)](#):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's a lot of farmland. Farming is not as big as it was once, but there's a lot of farmland here, and there are a lot of people that still farm here for their livelihood.

Rae: [\(01:29\)](#):

What kind of farming, mostly?

Robyn: [\(01:32\)](#):

A lot of people are growing hay right now, just growing grass. This used to be a very big tobacco area. Now soybeans are the thing, because they're the most profitable. A lot of people grow soybeans. There's very many cattle farmers. A lot of people are still doing tobacco. Corn, the field corn for biodiesel I guess is pretty big now, so that's ... Wheat. People grow wheat.

Rae: [\(02:13\)](#):

Cool.

Robyn: [\(02:13\)](#):

That's what's here.

Rae: [\(02:14\)](#):

All right. How do you identify?

Robyn: [\(02:25\)](#):

I pondered this question a lot. I think I'm just not really a label person. I would just say that I'm gay, generally, but it's hard to put myself in a box, I think. I don't date men, but then I don't really date. If I've got to pick something, I would just say that I'm gay. That's how I identify.

Rae: [\(02:45\)](#):

Okay. Cool. Do you feel like there aren't words that fit it, or you just don't like to spend a lot of time thinking about it?

Robyn: [\(02:54\)](#):

That's it. I don't really spend a lot of time thinking about it. I have spent a lot of time thinking about it, and I can't ... Nothing I pick seems to roll off my tongue with ease, so I would just say that I'm gay. Lesbian and homosexual sound really clinical. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Rae: [\(03:14\)](#):

Okay. I'll probably use the word queer when I ask questions. Is that okay?

Robyn: [\(03:19\)](#):

That's fine. Yes.

Rae: [\(03:19\)](#):

Some people have-

Robyn: [\(03:21\)](#):

To me, queer is a New Age word. I do fit that definition, but it just doesn't roll off the tongue as easily.

Yeah, you can use the word queer. That's fine.

Rae: [\(03:30\)](#):

Okay. Okay. Where were you born, and where did you grow up? Anything about your childhood...

Robyn: [\(03:38\)](#):

I was born actually in the United Kingdom, because my dad was in the military. That's where they were stationed, in London. I came here when I was two, so I don't really remember it. I grew up in northern Virginia. Dale City, it's about 30 miles south of Washington, DC. Very suburban. I never liked it since I was old enough to have an opinion about it. It's just a very busy, strip mall, commuters. That's what that area is like. When I left high school, I came to Richmond and lived there for about 10 years, and then I spent some time on the west coast.

I think my whole journey was leading me here. This is my grandmother's property. When my mom retired, we came here together.

Rae: [\(04:28\)](#):

How long have you been here?

Robyn: [\(04:30\)](#):

Almost 10 years.

Rae: [\(04:31\)](#):

Okay.

Robyn: [\(04:32\)](#):

Yeah, yeah. Growing up, it was fine. My parents were good. I have a sister. It wasn't traumatic or whatever. It just was what it was. I'm sure it felt traumatic at times, but that's what adolescence is like.

Rae: [\(04:53\)](#):

Yeah, that's very true. Just working at a middle school.

Robyn: [\(04:57\)](#):

Yeah, yeah.

Rae: [\(04:58\)](#):

It's high drama all the time.

Robyn: [\(04:59\)](#):

Exactly, exactly, yeah.

Rae: [\(05:06\)](#):

I guess when did you first know you were gay?

Robyn: [\(05:09\)](#):

I came out to my family and friends when I was about 15. I think as cliché as it sounds ... I knew there was something different about me before I knew what it was. Then, once I figured out what it was, I was like, "Oh, yeah, that's what it is." It was pretty comfortable.

Rae: [\(05:35\)](#):

Coming out to people felt relatively smooth?

Robyn: [\(05:39\)](#):

Coming out to people is kind of crappy. No, it went well. My mom is a very devout Southern Baptist, but she loves her kids more than anything in the world, so she prayed about it, she read the Bible about it, and she still loved me when she was done. Yeah, it was fine. My dad was fine. He found out somehow, and he was just disappointed that I didn't feel like I could tell him. Love everywhere. It was a good experience.

Rae: [\(06:17\)](#):

That's good.

Robyn: [\(06:27\)](#):

Yeah.

Rae: [\(06:27\)](#):

You lived in Richmond.

Robyn: [\(06:29\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rae: [\(06:31\)](#):

DC suburbs and Richmond, and then on the west coast.

Robyn: [\(06:32\)](#):

Yeah, I lived in Tucson, Arizona for a couple years, and I lived in San Diego, California for a couple years.

Rae: [\(06:39\)](#):

Pretty much all cities before you moved here.

Robyn: [\(06:41\)](#):

Correct.

Rae: [\(06:42\)](#):

That's interesting. You were in your 30s when you moved here?

Robyn: [\(06:47\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. I what 32, 33 I guess. Something like that. I guess, yeah, I was early 30s. I moved here. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rae: [\(06:57\)](#):

What made you -if you'd spent that many years in cities, did you have experiences in the country growing up? Coming down here?

Robyn: [\(07:05\)](#):

Yeah, we used to come down to visit my grandmother when I was little. My sister and I used to spend the summers down here. Once when I was living in Richmond, I decided I was gonna come move down here and raise ostriches. I had no money, I had no knowledge of ostriches. I just decided I was going to do it.

Rae: [\(07:25\)](#):

That's amazing.

Robyn: [\(07:25\)](#):

Yeah. Yeah. Everybody remembers it, too. Every time something happens, people remember the ostriches. I'm like, "Do we really have to keep talking about the ostriches?" Yeah. Like I said, I think my whole journey led me here. After all that I've done, right now I feel like I live in paradise, and I hardly even leave to go on vacation. It's perfect. When I was little, I definitely wanted to be down here because I wanted to raise animals. That's how little kids think, I guess. I enjoyed all my other experiences, but now that I'm here, I don't ... This is where I belong.

Rae: [\(08:05\)](#):

Did you actually raise ostriches?

Robyn: [\(08:07\)](#):

No.

I did not. I did not raise ostriches. I toured an ostrich farm. I know everything there is to know about ostriches, but I never raised any ostriches. It was just a dream.

Rae: [\(08:23\)](#):

Has it died? Are you over it?

Robyn: [\(08:28\)](#):

No, I'm not really over it. I could have an ostrich. There are more practical things right now. My next thing that I'm going to get is probably pigs or something. Yeah, I should probably get an ostrich one day, just so I can be like, "I got it. I got an ostrich." Yeah, yeah.

Rae: [\(08:47\)](#):

You can have an egg that big in your life.

Robyn: [\(08:50\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Exactly, yeah.

Rae: [\(08:52\)](#):

Do people eat them, the eggs?

Robyn: [\(08:53\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Rae: [\(08:53\)](#):

And ostriches, right?

Robyn: [\(08:56\)](#):



Yes. It's red meat. It's really good. It's very lean.

Rae: [\(08:59\)](#):

Really?

Robyn: [\(08:59\)](#):

Mm- hmm (affirmative). I did. I knew.

Rae: [\(09:06\)](#):

That's funny. I guess, I'm curious, because when you were living in cities, were you always wishing you were in the country, or were you pretty content in those?

Robyn: [\(09:20\)](#):

When I lived in cities, I thought I'd never not want to live in the city. I thought I'd live in a city forever unless I was independently wealthy, in which case I'd have a city home and a country home. I don't know if I matured or what happened, but when I was living in San Diego, suddenly after 14 years of being away from my family, I was like, "I really want to be by my family." I came home, and I really hadn't been home. Just Thanksgiving and Christmas for 12 years. I came home for Christmas one time, and I just decided, "I'm coming home. Mom, I'm bringing the dog. We're moving in."

Ended up with my sister, her partner, her daughter, and my mom. I was like, "This is really overwhelming." We're all living in a townhouse, but then my mom retired, and we decided this is her home place. Don't get me wrong, it was a huge, huge adjustment, a huge culture shock. Pay is different. Things are very different here, but now I like to visit the city, but I don't want to stay there. I want to be here. I feel a very strong heritage to this property that's been in my family for over 100 years.

I want to respect my heritage, and I want to preserve this land. That became more important to me than living in a city.

Rae: ([11:09](#)):

That's interesting. I don't know. When you're saying it was culture shock and it was so different, the adjustment, what was the most surprising or the hardest to get used to?

Robyn: ([11:19](#)):

The pay was a lot different. It's just a different pace. It's much slower here. Even at the grocery store, people move slower, people talk slower. People aren't in as big a rush, and it's difficult to get used to when you're used to the hustle and bustle, and then you come here. You can't even get out of Kroger in five minutes, but then you get used to it, and you're at Kroger talking to the cashier like, "Today is the first day of school. How's it going?" It was a big adjustment. It was difficult at times when I first got here.

It was like, "Here I am. Here I am, living the dream. What am I going to do?" I've really adjusted very well. I'm very invested in the community through my work. Yeah, I wouldn't leave.

Rae: ([12:16](#)):

What is your work here?

Robyn: ([12:18](#)):

I'm a hospice nurse. Yeah. I've been doing it for six and a half years. I could not have picked a better job for myself. I'm out in the community, which I wouldn't have done if not for this job. We do really good work.

Rae: ([12:46](#)):

Are you working at a place people come to, or are you going to homes?

Robyn: ([12:49](#)):

I go into people's houses, which is very interesting in a rural area. Yeah, but it's good.

Rae: ([12:58](#)):

That makes sense that you really get to know the place in a really different way, because I think in rural places a lot of times, unless it's your neighbors or friends, you don't see people's houses ever.

Robyn: ([13:09](#)):

That's right, yeah. That's right. I'm glad that it worked out this way. I do keep to myself. I'm introverted. A lot of times I'll even say my social life is at work, so that gives me more excuse to come home and pet furry things and not talk to people. It does give me an opportunity to go out in the community and talk to people.

Rae: ([13:39](#)):

Let's see. Sometimes I follow my list, and other times I get distracted. I don't even remember what I want to ask. Are there things you miss about living in the city?

Robyn: ([13:51](#)):

I miss having food delivered to my house and being able to walk to the bar, but other than that, not really.

Like I said, I like to go to the city, but even then, sometimes it gets a little overwhelming. Yeah.

Rae: ([14:13](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). How do you feel like ... I don't know. Do you think people in the town, when you're doing your work, do people know that you're gay? Do people around town know that, and how does the town interact with you around that?

Robyn: ([14:34](#)):

Sometimes I think people know, and sometimes I don't. If it comes up in conversation, I'm not going to ...

We can conversate about it, and I've had people speak to me like they know. "Well, blah, blah, blah." It's fine. Most of the people I talk to, it's just not even on their radar, but my colleagues at work are fine. It's

not really a big deal. It's not a big deal to me, either. I guess if ... I don't know. Haters don't bother me. It doesn't scare me. It doesn't intimidate me to be out, because there's just so many other things about me.

I try to focus on what I have in common with people and not what's different about us. That seems to work pretty well.

Rae: ([15:43](#)):

That's interesting.

Robyn: ([15:44](#)):

Yeah.

Rae: ([15:45](#)):

Did you have any, I guess living in cities, experiences with people in cities who were like, "You can't go there?" I think sometimes in cities, there's that unspoken thing that people are like, "You can't go back to a rural place, or you can't live in the country."

Robyn: ([16:05](#)):

Yeah, I think people ... A very good friend of mine was just like, "I don't think that's going to be okay for you. I don't think that's going to work out for you." My sister, it's hard for me to call my sister gay, for some reason, but she is dating a woman. They've been dating for 15 years. Also, they raised her daughter, and she was in suburbia. She was more in Girl Scouts, you know what I mean? As someone that lives in a partnership with a woman, and I think the way we carry ourselves both is similar in that ... I don't know. I'm just living. I'm just living. If you don't want to hang out with me, that's fine, but if we have to interact, then we can do that in a professional, respectful manner. I don't think I've ever had anybody disrespect me for being gay, so I don't know what that feels like. I'm not scared of it. There were probably more than one person concerned about me being out here, but it's okay. It's working out fine. Yeah.

Rae: ([17:32](#)):

Yeah. That's interesting. Have those people come to visit?

Robyn: ([17:37](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Rae: ([17:39](#)):

Yeah. That's great. Let's see. I guess I'm curious about, who do you feel like your community is here?

Robyn: ([17:57](#)):

My colleagues. My team at work is my community here. I have some people over time that I don't work with anymore. One is a neighbor. She lives pretty close, and we're pretty close. She has a 16 year old daughter. I gave her some work around here for the summer, that sort of thing. I have some other people that are just my good friends. I was dating someone for probably five years while I was here, and she lived here for a while, and I have residual friends from that relationship that are in town. Pretty much that. I have family here, also. There's people that I guess I would consider my people.

Rae: ([18:48](#)):

Yeah. You said earlier...and if there's any questions you don't want to answer, you don't have to.

Robyn: ([18:57](#)):

Okay.

Rae: ([18:58](#)):

You said earlier that you don't date. Do you think that's about being here? Also I guess the question is really more like, I'm almost curious how people find people to date or be friends with who are gay?

Robyn: ([19:12](#)):

Yeah, no, that's tough. A friend of mine and I were joking. In my life, I've probably been single more than I've been coupled, and I'm comfortable that way. I've done the dating site thing. I've dated a couple people

that I've met on dating sites, but it's really just laziness. Unless Ms. Right comes and walks up to my door, I'm not going to meet her. I'm not going anywhere or doing anything to try to meet people, because it's just not high on my list. Yeah, it really probably comes down to laziness, unfortunately. I think it also comes down to need. I don't mean any offense to people that date a lot, but I think a lot of times, people date out of a need. A need for something. A need for a partnership, or even just a want for it, and that's not on my list. When I have tried to date, it's usually been through social media or dating sites. I do go into the city sometimes. I go into Richmond sometimes and hang out, so potentially I guess I could try to meet someone that way.

Rae: [\(20:38\)](#):

Yeah. It's not why you go to town.

Robyn: [\(20:40\)](#):

That's not why I go to town.

Rae: [\(20:46\)](#):

It's interesting to me, because I think sometimes in cities, queer people hang out with only queer people, and go to queer-owned businesses and queer bars, and only do that. A lot of times in the country, I would say 99% of the time in the country, that's completely impossible.

Robyn: [\(21:03\)](#):

That's not possible, right, yeah.

Rae: [\(21:05\)](#):

Some people I think are totally fine with that, and other people I think are sometimes...miss having some access to a queer community. Do you feel like you ever want that in any way, or miss that? I don't know if that was your world in cities.

Robyn: [\(21:22\)](#):

I don't really miss it. When I first left home and went to college, I was really queer, but then it just didn't become as important to me to be a part of a community like that. Sometimes I feel bad about that, but mostly I feel okay with that. That's just how I am.

Rae: [\(21:45\)](#):

Bad like you should want to be?

Robyn: [\(21:46\)](#):

Yeah, like I should be for the cause and visibility and blah, blah, blah, but that's just not my style.

Rae: [\(21:55\)](#):

I think that's actually really interesting, and also way more common with people I talk to who live in the country.

Robyn: [\(22:04\)](#):

Yeah.

Rae: [\(22:05\)](#):

That's not the most important thing.

Robyn: [\(22:08\)](#):

It's not, yeah. It's not. Yeah.

A good friend of mine that used to be my colleague when we were getting to know each other on a closer friend level, I asked her. I had to come out to her. It was all awkward, and I'm like, "Did you know I was

gay?" She said, "I thought so, but I don't want to assume that anybody is." I said, "Yeah, I really don't want people to assume that I'm not." You know what you know. She asked me something, and I said, "It's just not the most interesting thing about me. That's why I'm not a flag waver. I think there's more interesting things about me, so that's how it is." Yeah, I do feel guilty about that a little bit.

Rae: ([22:54](#)):

That's interesting. Where do you think that comes from? Do you think there's pressure to be that way?

Robyn: ([23:03](#)):

Just the cause. Just from an activism standpoint, there are definitely people in the world that are doing really wonderful things for the community, and I'm not one of them.

Rae: ([23:17](#)):

I don't know. I think there's a lot of power in people just living their lives in small towns [crosstalk 00:23:19].

Robyn: ([23:19](#)):

I agree with that, also. Yeah. That is what I try to do. I'm your neighbor. I'm your neighbor. You found out I was queer? Okay, fine.

Rae: ([23:31](#)):

Right.

Robyn: ([23:32](#)):

Sorry, you already love me.

Rae: ([23:33](#)):

Right. It's too late.

Robyn: ([23:36](#)):

It's too late. Yeah.



Rae: [\(23:38\)](#):

Totally. I think sometimes in rural places, that's how it happens, too. At least the place I grew up, it wouldn't work if you came in and were waving flags and demanding all this stuff because people would be like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa." You know?

Robyn: [\(23:53\)](#):

Yeah, yeah.

Rae: [\(23:55\)](#):

It's more about people already know you, have a relationship, or know your family, or know that you are a hard worker. Then it's like-

Robyn: [\(24:01\)](#):

Yeah, then it's too late. You already love me. Exactly.

Rae: [\(24:05\)](#):

Totally. That's interesting. I guess I'll ask this question, which is not you make feel guilty for not being a part of the cause. You just said that.

Robyn: [\(24:21\)](#):

That's okay.

Rae: [\(24:21\)](#):

One of my questions is what do you think are the largest issues for LGBTQ people right now in the US generally, and then what do you think it is for rural-based queer people?

Robyn: [\(24:35\)](#):

Generally, I really feel like in my lifetime, things have changed immensely for the better. Really. I can't see a huge problem. I know there's pockets of places where it's definitely frowned upon, but for the most part, I feel like visibility is great. I feel like marriage equality is fantastic. There's more trans visibility.

Things are super great. Rurally, and anywhere, but more here, people are just very set in their ways, and there isn't as much visibility. It's there. There's queer people there. I don't know if it's a problem. It's not a problem for me. I'm not out to change anyone's opinion, but the opinions are definitely out there.

Sometimes I got a couple [I work with]. They're 99 and 102. I don't care. I don't care what you think. I don't hate you, so it's fine. We're just going to do what we need to do nicely and move on. I don't know if there's a big problem. I think right now, I think adoption is coming along, so that would be something that might be an issue. It would certainly be more of an issue in a rural place because it would be difficult to go into an agency, more difficult to go into an agency in a rural place than it would be to go to an agency in the city.

Rae: [\(26:28\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's another question on my list, which is do you ever want to have kids, raise kids? What do you think about gay families raising kids here? Would it be challenging? Would it be fine?

Robyn: [\(26:44\)](#):

Honestly, I think it would be fine. That might be my rose-colored glasses because that's never going to be my situation, but I think it would be okay because anything is okay if you throw enough love at it. I know people that have children in this area that are raising them to be fine, upstanding individuals. I'm not really sure. I don't know. I don't know how it would go. I think it would go well, but maybe I'm just optimistic. Yeah.

Rae: [\(27:20\)](#):

Yeah. Nothing wrong with being optimistic.

Robyn: [\(27:21\)](#):

Yeah, yeah. If not, there's always home schooling. I don't know.

Rae: [\(27:34\)](#):

Totally. I guess I feel like you talked about this, but I guess do you feel like really any connection to mainstream gay communities in big cities, or do you feel like it's a different reality than where you live?

Robyn: [\(27:55\)](#):

What do you mean?

Rae: [\(27:59\)](#):

I guess do you have friends who are in city gay scenes, and do you feel like you can relate well with them, or that your lives are just really different?

Robyn: [\(28:06\)](#):

No, I don't really feel like I can relate, no. It's pretty different than my life, I guess. I actually have a lot of friends. Not a lot, a few. I don't think it's because they're gay. I think it's just because our lives are different. I know it seems like a million couples with children that are gay, and that's where their lives are right now. That's just not my life. I think I don't feel connected for more reasons than the fact that they're queer. It's just not ...

Rae: [\(28:55\)](#):

Do you feel like there's any city/country life divides, too, that it's harder to relate, or is it more about families?

Robyn: [\(29:07\)](#):

I'm sure it is, but I don't feel affected by it, I guess.

Rae: [\(29:15\)](#):

Doesn't necessarily ...

Robyn: [\(29:16\)](#):

Yeah. I guess there's more things accessible in the city. I know people that go to the gym and don't see anyone they know. Here it's like I'm always professional because I'm always in the community seeing

people. In the city, you're more anonymous. I definitely miss that. Yeah, that's I guess the difference that I see.

Rae: [\(29:48\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That makes sense. I guess I'm curious just about your family history on this land, or what you know about it. Your grandparents, did they farm?

Robyn: [\(30:03\)](#):

Yeah. My great-grandparents moved here from West Virginia and bought 40 acres of land.

Rae: [\(30:09\)](#):

Where in West Virginia? Do you know?

Robyn: [\(30:11\)](#):

No, I don't. I can probably look it up, but I'm not sure.

Rae: [\(30:16\)](#):

When was that?

Robyn: [\(30:18\)](#):

It was in the turn of the century. Actually, if you think about it, my great-grandfather would have then been a black man traveling from West Virginia. Just wrap your head around that. He came here, and him and my great-grandmother bought the land on credit. There was some back and forth. I think he came here first, then he had to work, and then he went back to get her. Out of the original 40 acres, 35 are still here. My grandmother and her, I don't know, 14 brothers and sisters were born here. My mom and her five brothers and sisters were born here.

That wooden structure up there, the porch is the porch to the original farmhouse. Yeah. It's important to me. There's a lot of history here. My mom ... This is Prince Edward County, Virginia. When they passed a

law, Brown versus Board of Education to integrate the school systems, Prince Edward County closed all the public schools.

Rae: [\(31:50\)](#):

Whoa.

Robyn: [\(31:50\)](#):

Yeah, because they didn't want to integrate. At the time, my mom was in grade school, probably. Her and her brothers had to go to Baltimore to go to school, and they went to stay with family, if you can imagine that as an elementary schooler. Plus the fact that they farmed here. Sending your children away is sending your laborers away, you know what I mean?

Rae: [\(32:21\)](#):

Right.

Robyn: [\(32:22\)](#):

That's a big piece of history for Prince Edward county. My mom was at the march on Washington, the civil rights movement, stuff like that. That was a big part of her upbringing. Yeah. Then over there, my grandmother's house was there, and then my aunt lived over there, and our property goes back to that tree line back there, and then out to this road over there.

Rae: [\(33:00\)](#):

Do you know what your great-grandparents or your grandparents, did they just grow enough for the family, or did they sell things?

Robyn: [\(33:08\)](#):

It was just a family farm. My great-grandfather worked outside the home. I don't know what he did, but he worked outside the home, and then they farmed, just to live on. My grandmother did the same.

Rae: [\(33:27\)](#):

Your mom lived in DC most of her life?

Robyn: [\(33:30\)](#):

No. She grew up here. After they opened the schools back, they came back home, and then when she graduated high school, she went to some kind of school in DC. Typing school or something. She was up there, and she met my dad, and whatever. She worked for the federal government for 35 years. Then she retired, and then she went back to school after she retired. Then we came here. She complains about being down here sometimes. She likes it. It's fine. She'll always say that she moved down here for me, which is not really true. Yeah, it's okay.

Rae: [\(34:22\)](#):

That's funny. Did she want to come back, do you think, or did she have complicated feelings about it because of that history?

Robyn: [\(34:27\)](#):

I don't even remember. I thought she wanted to come back, but now she says that's not true. No, it's fine, it's fine. I don't think it was over complicated feelings about that. I think it was more or less if there were any complicated feelings, it's just the fact that her mom passed away and stuff like that is a little bit tough. Her family is here. Her church that she grew up in is here. I really think here is where her home is, plus we joked around. When I was out running around doing my thing, my sister was with my mom. My mom was only ever with my dad, and they broke up, and then my dad died.

When I came home, and me and my mom were deciding to move down here, my sister was like, "It's your turn." I'm like, "I got it. It's cool. I'm happy to do it. I'm happy to take this half." Yeah, we just decided my mom wasn't going to be alone, so one of us is going to be with her all the time.

Rae: [\(35:35\)](#):

What did she go back to school for?

Robyn: [\(35:41\)](#):

This is good information. This is good history that you should include.

Rae: [\(35:45\)](#):

Okay.

Robyn: [\(35:47\)](#):

You don't have to.

Rae: [\(35:49\)](#):

Yeah.

Robyn: [\(35:51\)](#):

There was a philanthropist who created a scholarship for people that were affected by the school closings. It was a Brown versus Board of Education scholarship. They gave her a scholarship to go back to school, so she went back to school just because she had the scholarship, she had the opportunity. She got a bachelor's degree in business administration, just because, after retiring from 35 years with the federal government. She never worked after. She just did it just to do it. Yeah, she went **to Mary, Washington,** maybe. Then when we moved down here, she finished up at St. Paul's.

Rae: [\(36:39\)](#):

That's awesome. That's really interesting. Just for in this county, students from this county?

Robyn: [\(36:44\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), Prince Edward County, yeah. There was a county in North Carolina I believe that closed their schools, also. I'm sure I should know where it is. I don't know that the schools were closed for as long.

Rae: [\(37:00\)](#):

You know how long they were closed here?

Robyn: [\(37:01\)](#):

Five years.

Rae: [\(37:02\)](#):

Whoa!

Robyn: [\(37:03\)](#):

They opened some private schools for white students, and some churches got together to make scholarships for white students that couldn't afford to go to private schools, but yeah, the public schools were closed for five years.

Rae: [\(37:19\)](#):

That's insane.

Robyn: [\(37:20\)](#):

Yep.

Rae: [\(37:21\)](#):

Wow.

Robyn: [\(37:23\)](#):

Because they didn't want to integrate the schools. They refused.

Rae: [\(37:28\)](#):

That's really wild.

Robyn: [\(37:30\)](#):

Yeah.



Rae: [\(37:32\)](#):

Wow. The scholarship is for-

Robyn: [\(37:36\)](#):

People that were affected by the school-

Rae: [\(37:36\)](#):

People who were affected by the school closings like in this county and maybe one county in North Carolina.

Robyn: [\(37:42\)](#):

I think that was just this county, because I think whoever it was was from here.

Rae: [\(37:45\)](#):

Okay. Cool. That's really interesting. Do you know who that person was?

Robyn: [\(37:49\)](#):

No.

Rae: [\(37:53\)](#):

No. I'm a history nerd. Sorry.

Robyn: [\(37:55\)](#):

You should look it up.

Rae: [\(37:56\)](#):

I will.

Robyn: [\(37:56\)](#):

It's very interesting. Yeah. I think the experience of leaving when she was so young was pretty traumatic for her, so she never really discussed it until she was about to retire, and now she talks about it all the time.

Yeah. When she was in school, she did a lot of projects on it just so that people know. She thinks people should know that this happened, that we have this history in our country.

Rae: [\(38:30\)](#):

Yeah. They were gone for five years, her and her sibling.

Robyn: [\(38:35\)](#):

I think so, yeah. She said it was some crazy aunt or something. It wasn't a fun situation. She said that her mom and her aunts were taking in laundry and cleaning people's houses to try to send money for the people that were taking care of the kids. No, they weren't gone for five years because at one point, somebody in the family rented a house in Appomattox so the kids would have an Appomattox address, so they could go to school in Appomattox. Then there was a million kids at that address.

They tried. They tried. My grandmother, they were not educated people. They did the best they could.

Rae: [\(39:34\)](#):

That's really interesting. Do you ... You could answer that.

Robyn: [\(39:43\)](#):

No, that's my work phone. I'm not going to answer that. That's not even going to be on.

Rae: [\(39:52\)](#):

I guess I'm curious about, do you know of any gay couples that lived around here before, back in the day?

Robyn: [\(40:01\)](#):

Back in the day?

Rae: [\(40:01\)](#):

Yeah.

Robyn: [\(40:01\)](#):

No. No.

Rae: [\(40:02\)](#):

Sometimes people, you hear a story about people who lived in a house.

Robyn: [\(40:16\)](#):

You hear a story about aunt so and so. No, no, I can't think of any, no.

Rae: [\(40:25\)](#):

I guess I'm going to abandon my list now.

Robyn: [\(40:27\)](#):

That's okay.

Rae: [\(40:29\)](#):

You have some goats.

Robyn: [\(40:30\)](#):

I have some goats. Yep, I have six goats.

Rae: [\(40:33\)](#):

Cool. What kind are they?

Robyn: [\(40:34\)](#):

They're Nigerian dwarf goats.

Rae: [\(40:35\)](#):

Okay. Do you milk them?

Robyn: [\(40:37\)](#):

I'm going to milk them when they're old enough. They're my starter goats. I just got them. They're only about maybe five months old.

Rae: [\(40:43\)](#):

They look little, yeah.

Robyn: [\(40:47\)](#):

I'm going to breed them, I guess, because otherwise they won't give me any milk. Then I'm going to have some milk and try to make some cheese and soap and stuff.

Rae: [\(40:58\)](#):

Cool. To sell?

Robyn: [\(41:00\)](#):

Yeah.

I'm excited about it, and they're fun. They're adorable as can be.

Rae: [\(41:08\)](#):

They have so much personality. I had this whole fantasy about having a goat dairy for a long time until I realized how expensive it is to set that up. Unless you really have to have all this stainless steel, everything, they have really strict rules. Then you were saying you might get pigs?

Robyn: [\(41:26\)](#):

I would like to get pigs for food.

Rae::

Yeah. Do you hope to have a bunch of food here?

Robyn: [\(41:37\)](#):

I figure if I get a couple feeder pigs a year, that's enough. I can milk the goats. I do want to get some meat goats, too. I have chickens for eggs, but I don't know if I'm going to get meat chickens. It's just a lot to process. It's not a big yield in the processing. You go through all that. Anyway, I'm going to invite people over, or I don't know. I considered that. I may get a few ducks for meat, maybe turkeys or something. I'm moving my chickens down into the pen. They're going to be enclosed. The dogs aren't anything. You forget they're just babies.

Once I get them down there, then the old place where the chickens are, I may put some ducks over there or something. Something else.

Rae: [\(42:34\)](#):

Cool. Do you have bees, still?

Robyn: [\(42:37\)](#):

No. I had bees.

Rae: [\(42:40\)](#):

Sorry. I should stop talking.

Robyn: [\(42:41\)](#):

It's okay. I had a bear. I had a bear.

Rae: [\(42:44\)](#):

Oh, no.

Robyn: [\(42:46\)](#):

Yes.

Rae: [\(42:47\)](#):

That's so upsetting.

Robyn: ([42:49](#)):

Yes, it was very upsetting, and I'm actually on the fence about having bees again. My public wants me to have bees again, and I really enjoyed the bees, but it's a lot of work, and it's risky financially. It was my fourth or fifth year of beekeeping, and I was about to have my best year ever. It's an investment.

Yeah, I don't know what I'm going to do yet. I got pictures of the bear on the game camera. I guess the dog scared him. You could see him literally pick at two boxes and carry them back in the woods.

Rae: ([43:34](#)):

He just took them?

Robyn: ([43:35](#)):

Yeah, he just took them.

Rae: Garringe ([43:36](#)):

Man. That's a bummer.

Robyn: ([43:43](#)):

Yeah, it was pretty depressing. I went out the next day to clean up, and I teared up, and had to come back in the house. I was like, "I can't even do it. I can't even look at this right now." It was horrible, but it's fine. I want to do it again, but I may ... I want to do it for the bees, but now there was a big bee kill, I want to say in South Carolina, because they're spraying for the Zika Birus or something like that, and just decimated tons and tons of bees. Bees are having trouble anyway, so it's just like, "Am I just going to be throwing my money away to try to do it?" We'll see. We'll see what happens.

Rae: ([44:26](#)):

Were you selling honey?

Robyn: [\(44:28\)](#):

I sold some honey.

Rae: [\(44:31\)](#):

When you said your public wants you to have them ...

Robyn: [\(44:35\)](#):

I told everybody that I was doing bees, and everyone's like, "Yeah, there's great. That's so wonderful."

Yeah, I did sell some honey, and those people definitely want more. We'll see what happens.

Rae: [\(44:51\)](#):

Did you just teach yourself? In summer when you'd come as a kid, did you help with farming stuff, or did you teach yourself once you moved here how to do it?

Robyn: [\(44:58\)](#):

I pretty much taught myself once I moved here. When I used to come down in the summers, we did feed the chickens, and slop the hogs, and stuff like that, and go out in the garden. But, when I moved down here, I pretty much taught myself everything. I studied bees for a year before I even had bees. I studied goats for a while before I had them. Of course I still have questions, but I have reference books, and I have references. Chickens are easy. Goats are pretty easy, too, actually. I just read and YouTube a lot. That's one of the joys of this century.

I actually learned a lot. I work on my car now just reading stuff on the Internet. I skinned a deer from a YouTube video. Yeah, it's pretty fun.

Rae: [\(46:00\)](#):

Interesting. Do you go hunting?

Robyn: [\(46:01\)](#):

I have hunted. I hunted quite a bit one year because I think I was just working weekends or something. I had a buddy and we did a bit of hunting. I've never actually shot a deer. I shot at a deer one time. It was pretty exhilarating, but yeah, my goal is pretty much to shoot a deer off the bedroom window. Again with the laziness. I'm really not lazy. I do a lot of stuff, but that's just not that important to me. If I could shoot one or two deer a year again, because of the food, that would be okay. It would really have to be in the yard.

Rae: [\(46:42\)](#):

Maybe I'll just do a couple more. Then we can walk around. How are you doing?

Robyn: [\(46:47\)](#):

I'm doing okay.

Rae: [\(46:48\)](#):

Okay. Great. Sometimes I feel like I'm holding people hostage asking them all these questions. I guess when are you happiest in your life here?

Robyn: [\(47:07\)](#):

Lately, it's just when I get to be home all day, and putter around. And at the end of the day, I'm hot and sweaty. I get my shoes off. I've done lots of stuff. I'm training the puppies right now to be nice to the goats. I love that. Yeah. Just that. I'll show you if you want. I love looking out my bedroom window every day. I love my landscape. I do. The oak trees which came through next to those trees right there, I'm going to do a photo essay, I think, with the different seasons.

If you stand up in the gazebo there, because I said that was the porch to the original house, that's the same view that every ... Those two trees, that's the same view that every person in my family that's lived here



over the years has had. When we first moved here, it was raining and I went up and sat in the gazebo, and I was like, "Yeah, this is it. This is the ticket here." Yeah. I'm happiest just being right here.

Rae: [\(48:27\)](#):

I guess what else seems important that I didn't ask you? There's more questions on my list, but I guess are there important parts of your life that we didn't get to or things you think that ... ?

Robyn: [\(48:36\)](#):

I can't really think of anything. Not really.

Rae: [\(48:45\)](#):

Okay. Are there questions you think I should ask other people? There's more on this list. I didn't ask all of them because-I skipped some. But, are there questions that you'd be really curious to know from other people?

Robyn: [\(49:04\)](#):

I guess I wonder, you were asking about needing queer community. I don't know if you asked that. I think you might have. I'm curious to know if that makes people not thrive in the country, because they feel like they need the community, like they need to be in the city because of the culture and community? I guess I wonder about that.

Rae: [\(49:31\)](#):

Because it's something that's hard for you, or you're just curious if that's hard for other people?

Robyn: [\(49:35\)](#):

I'm just curious if it's hard for other people. I'm fine. No one could ever go near, and I would be a-okay. Actually, that's not true, but yeah, I'm okay. I'm curious if that makes people not want to ... It sounds a little, I don't know, arrogant or whatever, but I think I live in paradise. I don't know why everybody doesn't want to do this. I really don't understand why everyone wouldn't want to live this way. I'm curious

if ... I was talking about people being in relationships because there's a need. I wonder if there's queers out there that need to be in the city.

I'm not judging them or anything. I'm just curious if that's what makes people stay, is that there's a need.

Rae: [\(50:25\)](#):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, no, I think it's a good question. I wonder, too, how much of it is that ... I think some people do need that more than others. It seems like just from me and people that I know, and friends, and whatever. I also think at least for me, there was so much... I just had no idea that people lived in the country who were gay. You know what I mean? Really.

Robyn: [\(50:50\)](#):

Yeah, I do know what you mean. I do know.

Rae: [\(50:53\)](#):

Growing up in West Virginia, I never met anybody, and then went to school in the place where everybody was gay, and I was like, "Oh, I guess people don't live there."

Robyn: [\(51:01\)](#):

When I went to college, yeah. "We found all the gay people. Here they are." Yeah.

Yeah, I was like, "Here's all the gay people." I didn't even stay in college because I was so busy being gay. I was like, "I don't have time to go to class. I have gay to be." Yeah. It was novel. It was just coming of age, and then I realized there was more ... I don't want to say more important things to be, but there was just more stuff going on than being gay.

Rae: [\(51:35\)](#):

Yeah, yeah. It's interesting, too. It does really seem like some people need that gay community more than other people seem to need it. I wonder. I don't know. It's interesting.

Robyn: [\(51:51\)](#):

It is. It's interesting.

Rae: ([51:53](#)):

I guess that makes sense that people are different. All sorts of people are different in all sorts of ways.

Yeah. It's a good question. How do you feel about walking around? We could do some pictures.

Robyn: ([52:04](#)):

Sure.

Rae: ([52:05](#)):

Maybe inside and outside. We could try some.

Robyn: ([52:07](#)):

Sure. That's fine.

Rae: ([52:07](#)):

Cool. It's good to meet you. Thanks for the interview!

Robyn: ([52:09](#)):

No problem.