

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Tyler Vile

Interviewed by Caroline Cerilli and Sophia Lola

March 6, 2022

Johns Hopkins University
Oral History Collection

Interviewee: Tyler Vile (TV)

Interviewers: Caroline Cerilli (CC) and Sophia Lola (SL)

Subject: Life and activist work of Tyler Vile

Date: March 6, 2022

SL: We are recording.

CC: Recording. *[Laughter]*

SL: Okay. Did we want to start with –

CC: Yeah.

SL: So we wanted to ask like what – could you tell us what Baltimore was like – you told us that you grew up here, could you tell us like what it was like for you as you grew up and what compelled you to stay here as an adult?

TV: Yeah. So to be very fair because there's a sort of "from here-ness" that can feel very important between the city and the county. I was born in Baltimore city. I grew up in Baltimore County. I was born at Sinai Hospital right on the city line. I grew up in Pikesville, which is a very Jewish area. I did not have a good upbringing. Like I wrote a whole book about it. I had a very abusive upbringing. And I have talked about that at length in other interviews and in my writing.

And yeah, I grew up sort of really close to the city line. And except for when I was about nine, my family moved a little further out into the county. And it was sort this undeveloped land that my father who is an architect and a builder sort of bought. We basically lived in my father's portfolio. Like it was a house that we could not afford. I was, what I like to say is "house poor in McMansion hell."

And so that really shaped my understanding of the fact that we went from a middle- to working-class neighborhood to this McMansion development where like Orioles and Ravens players and then like kind of dentists and doctors had houses. And it was

always like very clear that we were ones who couldn't afford to be there and that we were kind of the riffraff of the neighborhood.

And it was it was a weird feeling because I still, like I had a very multiracial friend group always, and this being a majority Black city, and like going to school with a lot of kids from a lot of different races and class backgrounds, people would kind of come over and they'd be like, "Oh wow, you know, you have all this space and all this stuff." And it's like, yeah, but it's all fake. It's all hollow. It doesn't make sense.

So you know, it was when I was, I guess, 14 or 15 that I would make conscious choices to spend more of my time in the city than where I lived because the house that we were living in was not home to me. So I would crash on friend's houses. I would go to punk shows. Like, you know, my first protests were anti-Iraq war protests that I went to, sometimes with my sister. Sometimes – once I think there was like a synagogue trip.

And yeah, I always had a very strong sense of justice and injustice, and I think that part of that comes from growing up disabled and seeing, you know, just the way that people treat me, treated me as a child, and like the way that racism manifests, and like how you can't avoid that. And so I mean like I was a 12-year-old anarchist, and not in the "burn it all down" sense. I was like – even though I've grown and changed a whole lot in my life, like I still hold a lot of the ideals that I did that were formative for me as a young kid.

Like I feel like having a very early political awakening is more a symptom of having to grow up fast than anything. And I had to grow up fast because partially because of the abuse at home, partially because like when you have a disability, and you're in a public school system that doesn't know how to accommodate you, you have to learn to advocate for yourself in the room with all adults and no other kids. So like I did not have a typical childhood by any means. I think – well, what is typical childhood. Right? Is there a standard? I mean kind of. We don't know.

But yeah, for me, racial justice, economic justice, disability justice, and like justice around gender and sexuality were just things that I believed. And they weren't things that necessarily my parents believed or that anyone else around me believed. I do have a sister who is nine years older than me who I do credit with like offering me some of that. But I've realized more and more over the years that like, you know, I did steal a CD from her by a band called

Operation Ivy, a punk rock band from Berkeley, California. And I think that that really informed my sense of justice.

Like, you know, bands like Rage Against the Machine, who were, you know, supporting Zapatistas in *[laughter]* in Mexico. And it's like I wouldn't have known about that in 2003 if I hadn't been exposed to it as like a ten-year-old. So yeah, I mean what's interesting for me when I think about my values is that the ways that I express them have changed, but you know, more or less, I'm still the person I wanted to be when I was like ten. So yeah, that is where I'm from. And I make no bones about like being a county kid, having some degree of privilege, but like not a ton.

Commented [1]: googled it and this is correct!

And I think that you use your privilege where you can, but I think where privilege with politics has its limits is when people start like – I don't like the phrasing of like oppression Olympics, but I think that when people start stacking identities on top of each other and being like, "Oh, well, I can't be abusive in this way because I'm this, this, and this." And it's like, well, no, first of all. Second, like yes, this systemic injustice that you face like has an impact on your mental health, but you still have to treat people right. You know, it's more of a general statement. But yeah, that is where I come from.

CC: Thank you for giving us that background. I think it's really interesting to hear about how you have such a strong sense of self, and always have. I'm curious, who do you consider today to be people who are most important to you, either as an activist or just in your personal life?

TV: Wow. There are a lot of people who I really feel are important to me. My friends are my family, you know. I am a big chosen family person. And I think that comes from not having a strong sense of family at home where, you know, I have friends who I made when I was 13, 14, 15, and like I'm about to turn 29. And so many of those people are still my closest friends. And you know, there are people that because of the pandemic, I used to just like see and hang out with at least once, twice a week that like just the way that things are going now, the way things have been going for the last two years, I go like long stretches of months without seeing a lot of people I love.

And I think that in terms of who's important, you know, my roommates are important and my partner is important. Of course my partner is important. We met during the pandemic right at the beginning in a writing group. And you know, I love them so, so

much. And I think that the sort of circles of people who have been important in my life have shifted, but to understand that I have a really strong core of people who whether I've known them for 15 years, or five years, or just like a year or two, community has always been important to me.

You know, I'm leaving out like specific details of people just to protect their anonymity. But when I think about the people that I love, and what informs my advocacy, it's the fact that I don't just have one community. You know, I have the Baltimore Punks, who are kind of the bedrock of my friend group. I have radical lefty Jews. I have disability folks. I have LGBTQ folks. Like and they all kind of mix and mingle.

And so I mean, it feels almost like I'm about to say everyone in my life is important, but I really do believe in social ecosystems that you can't necessarily "make a life", air quotes, with just one person. That you have to have a whole network of people who sustain you. And like I feel really blessed that I have people that I could either see every week or talk to once every couple months. And it's like no time has passed. That I think is super important.

SL: Would you say that like a lot of those people who you like have a sense of community with, or like friendship, are they mostly based around Baltimore or are they also kind of all over?

TV: A lot of them are based around Baltimore. But in these last couple of years, right, like my partner lives on the West Coast. And even before that, you know, as like a touring writer and poet, I would meet people in different places, and have friendships, and like those are meaningful to me as well. So yeah, I would say like Baltimore is homebase, and then I have people all over who I love. I have people in Philly. I have people in Boston. I have people in Chicago.

I have people just, you know, like sometimes the Baltimore people move. Sometimes they meet great people elsewhere. And yeah, I think that having a strong tie to geography, having a strong sense of place of where you are is important, but also that, just because of the world we live in now., it doesn't have to limit you to that being your only source of care.

CC: Absolutely. I think it's so important having that homebase like you said with Baltimore. I'm curious just if you could start to – you know, shifting a little bit, if you could describe to us a bit about how in the 2015 Uprising, how that community, that bedrock as

you describe it, changed? I think it's hard when something like that is shaken.

TV:

Yeah. It was. I mean living where I still live now in Remington, and seeing firsthand the effects of gentrification, and you know, participating in protests with like a lot of my closest friends. My one close friend would bring a portable grill and he would have a cardboard sign that said, "Free barbecue for the revolution." And you know, my friends who were doing Food Not Bombs, which is sort of an informal network of people who provide mostly vegan meals to folks who are experiencing food insecurity.

And you know, I think just seeing what the Freddie Gray protests and the subsequent lockdown did to the city was incredible. Like it made me fall in love with Baltimore in a very different way. I remember like I was in my wheelchair with some friends, who had, I think, come up from Richmond for that protest. And we hit this police barricade and like there were people on both sides of it. And I got crowd surfed in my wheelchair over the police barricade.

And so it's like I don't want to talk exclusively in glowing terms about that protest and what it led to because a man was killed by the police, a man who may have had a developmental disability. And I think that when we talk about Freddie Gray, and when we talk about 2015, and we talk about Mya Hall, and all of these other brutal killings of Black people who may, like, some may be disabled, some may be trans or queer, or any other identity.

But I just – I think the grief, the palpable sense of grief in the city is just as important as the like defiance of celebration. Like I remember even just watching the news, you would see someone like from their apartment window held out a bedsheet, written on it was, "It's my birthday today." So people were sort of finding joy wherever they could. But there was a sense of, at least initially, camaraderie. And then I think in certain activist circles after that, there was a kind of, again, air quotes "street cred" that came with being there.

And I just – I mean it definitely inspired folks to become street medics. It definitely inspired folks to start getting more serious in activist work, and especially Bryanna Jenkins, who has since become a lawyer, and Monica Stevens founded the Baltimore Transgender Alliance of which I was a part. And those early years of organizing, especially with Bryanna and Monica, were deeply informative, not always easy. You know, I think that there's a tendency to gloss over interpersonal conflicts when we talk about

movement work and what we achieve. Like this was just as heart-wrenching as it was gratifying throughout the whole process.

And you could really feel the aftershocks of all of it. The militarization of police, and like the National Guard in the Inner Harbor, and this really deep sense of foreboding, of like you weren't sure what was gonna happen, you know, if somebody else was gonna get killed. And you know, in COVID times, I like to joke around that, like, a lot of activists already had N95s because an N95 will give you some decent protection from getting teargassed.

Like, you want to take those clothes off. You want to throw them away. But that N95 and some safety goggles will protect you from a lot of the adverse effects of teargas getting in your eyes, nose, and mouth. So it's, you know, you learn things like that out in the field, and you know, it becomes less important about who was at what protest, and who said what. And what becomes more important is mutual aid and lasting political change.

SL: You mentioned the Baltimore Trans Alliance and Bryanna Jenkins, and just a little bit of like sort of what sprung up after the Uprising. Could you tell us more about the work that you were doing and that sort of initial period after, and like what organizations and circles you were in?

TV: Sure. Sure. So I was with the Trans Alliance really from the beginning. I mean it was mainly Bryanna's vision. Like she was the one that came up with, "Bmore Trans Uprising." It was a hashtag. It was a slogan that we used that, you know, Freddie Gray was what sort of galvanized her to say we can have an uprising that centers the needs of trans communities as well. And that like I had definitely also helped out with the Unitarian Church's Trans Day of Remembrance. I had read some poems and done some organizing there.

But I really quickly became disillusioned with the whole concept of Trans Day Remembrance because it, to me, seemed like – and honestly to Monica and to Bryanna in some of the conversations we'd have, it was a bunch of white cis people lighting candles and crying about trans women of color they've never met. And there was a lot of energy around what we were doing, and I didn't necessarily expect it. You know, I think I was in a place in my life where I was still young, I mean, 22-23 maybe, 2015-2016, where I had been involved some with FORCE. I had been involved –

which is still ongoing. It's [FORCE] an organization that works to upend rape culture.

And there's a lot of organizations popping up at the time. And I think from there, you sort of see both the power and limits of like nonprofit 501(c)3 activism. I wasn't paid for any of the work I did in the first couple of years, and I didn't expect to be. When we, the Transgender Alliance, had gotten fiscal(?) sponsorship, I was already sort of on my way out, and there's some very personal details as to why I left BTA. But that original mission that Bryanna and Monica spearheaded is still something I very much believe in.

And at the time, having solidarity with organizations like FORCE, with organizations like the No Boundaries Coalition, and all these different things, it did create a sense of institutional change, institutional power, and a sense that we were doing something important. But as I look back on that, I don't mean to diminish any accomplishments, but I don't want to have a sense of like, oh, I was doing this thing in this time period, and it was so important.

Like, I would rather, in my personal sort of frame of mind, not necessarily consider...(?). [Laughter] But in my personal frame of mind, it is more useful for me to think about what I can do now than to sort of put what we did then on a pedestal because it was hard work. I was writing a lot of copy. I was attending and sometimes facilitating a lot of meetings. When Red Emma's was on North Avenue, I was there all the time. It felt like every day, but it probably wasn't every day.

But people thought I worked at Red Emma's, but like I didn't work at Red Emma's. I did a lot of organizing work at Red Emma's. And in the bigger protest where we marched to City Hall and just kind of stayed there, and rallied for a good long while. Like all these protests, you have to understand, kind of run together. And the change in leadership when Bryanna left felt like a loss of focus. Bryanna left to go to law school. And, you know, I'm so happy for her. I'm so happy that she's a lawyer, and I'm so happy that the world has her in that capacity.

But in the way that this organization went from like an organizing force that it felt like we were getting actual, like, actionable things done to where it sort of gradually felt like I was a glorified party planner. And I can explain that a little more. So in 2016, it was Monica's idea to have a Trans Day of Resilience where it was a sort of big feast and a showcase of trans art in the city, and like a celebration of trans life to sort of more or less counter the narrative

of Transgender Day of Remembrance where it's just this candlelight vigil sob fest.

And we held vigils for a lot of – for pretty much every trans – for every Black transwoman died between 2015 and 2017. BTA was – and I'm only speaking for when I was there, I believe this practice continued, but we would hold vigils in the Ynot Lot on North Avenue, and we would fundraise for the families. Sometimes the families wouldn't want to talk to us, which was understandable. Some people had families who didn't accept their children. And some did. Some were very, very grateful.

So in, I think, the sort of – within the year of Bryanna leaving, and this sort of maybe unintentional shift in focus. I've been avoiding naming this person, but Ava Pipitone, who took over from Bryanna as the executive director of the Trans Alliance, was a really unfair, disorganized, and honestly abusive, emotionally-abusive person. You know, when we would – the rest of us would try to convince her to meet with us on a regular basis, as we had been doing when Bryanna was at the helm.

She would repeatedly deny that we had to do that. Deny that we were doing that before. And she, at one point, when we told her like we need – if we're gonna get anything done, like we need to have regular meetings, and we need to be more organized. She freaked out and called it “a mutiny”. And it was just – it was very – it was a stressful time. And I left because of her. Because I felt like the only things – there was an instance as well that summer of 2017, but I won't get into that here.

But I had already been like thinking about leaving right as we were in negotiations for fiscal sponsorship, and right as this was transitioning into more of a typical job. You know, right as money was about to really become involved, I was already on my way out because I did not trust this woman, you know. And I think that she would always invoke Bryanna and Monica when those two weren't around, but like I know for a fact that she clashed with Monica a lot, and that like her vision, Ava's vision, for what the Transgender Alliance was, was fundamentally different from what Monica's was and what Bryanna's was.

And so when all of our energy went basically to what we were calling “Transgender Day of Resilience Festival.” And like unless somebody died, we were, I wouldn't say inactive, but we were much less active. It made me question, “Oh, are we just sort of in

the beginning riding a wave that crested, or you know, is this about who's steering the ship?" [Laughter] You know.

And I really do believe it was about steering the ship because it was all about Ava's ego at a certain point. And she would take credit for things that I wrote, whether it was copy, or there was a panel we put together at Baltimore Book Festival that she was moderating, and I wrote literally all of her questions because she had no idea what to do.

And I really – honestly, I still hold a lot of resentment for what we could have accomplished had we just been organized a little differently. And I haven't thought about that in a while. But I think that in those early days where we knew what we were doing, that is probably some of the proudest work I have ever done.

CC: I'd just like to clarify. I'm curious, how do you distinguish the main differences between Bryanna and Monica's work from Ava's work? And I guess what was so powerful about the leadership that Bryanna and Monica brought?

TV: Well, Bryanna and Monica brought not only direction, but a sense that, a sense of gravity and connectedness to community, and knowledge that Ava just didn't have. Right? Monica is – and Monica was with us through the entire time even I think a little bit after I left. But you know, she was, and is, a movement elder. She is, I believe, in her seventies now. And she came up in Baltimore like in the sixties and seventies. And she just had a very different perspective on what we were doing and how it should work.

And one thing that she told me because we had, it's been now a couple of years since I've spoken to her just because of COVID, and that's how everything kind of goes. But she told me one thing that I'll always carry with me, and that's, "You don't really know who a person is until you argue with them." And I see that, and I saw that as kind of a fault line in the way that the Transgender Alliance was run.

Bryanna's goal in establishing the Transgender Alliance and moving it forward was to create a political voice for transgender people in Baltimore City because fundamentally, we weren't at the table in any meaningful way. And you know, we were doing voter registration. Like we were of course organizing these protests, and vigils, and we would all sometimes clash on police presence at these events, and just sort of what that police presence meant, and how it meant safety for some people, and not safety for others.

And I feel that those discussions actually did help where with Ava, she was sort of trying to run everything her way, and not really take any input. And I just – Ava lied a lot. *[Laughter]* That’s kind of – that was a really big theme. That if I were, you know, let’s say writing something, or organizing an event, I would say, “Oh hey, do you need me to like write the copy for this thing,” or, “Do you need me to reach out to this person?” And she’d go, “Oh no, no, no, it’s fine. I got it.”

And then like the fucking day before, she’d be like, “Well, why didn’t you write that, why didn’t you reach out to that person?” and I was like, “Because you told me you were gonna handle it.” And so I just – when you organize with people like that, and they sort of use the language of, again, movement work. And she’s, you know, a privileged white lady talking about the oppression of Black trans women. And at a certain point, profiting off of it. She actually stole money from the Trans Alliance when she left. And so I think that like what I learned from that experience is that narcissism in movement work is very real, very present, and very dangerous.

SL: Yeah. Okay. So you left Baltimore Trans Alliance around like 2017, you said?

TV: Yeah. It was June of 2017. So 2015 through 2017 is when I was with the Trans Alliance.

SL: Gotcha. How did you kind of like pick up, after leaving, how did you sort of, I don’t know, continue with the kind of work that you wanted to be doing, and like how did you find those new connections in communities that you felt like were doing the work that aligned with your values?

TV: Well, even before I left, there was a rabbinical student from Philly named Ariana Katz, who is my rabbi now. And there were initial conversations going on among like some leftwing Jews who had just sort of all existed in a lefty movement space. A lot of them I actually met at protests that were either Trans Alliance or in and around like Freddie Gray and police brutality, and jail support, and all that kind of stuff. Like we would have some informal meet-ups, Shabbat dinners sometimes.

And also Palestine solidarity work in the Jewish community had felt really important. And the same tear gas canisters that were used here in Baltimore were used also in Palestine. And there’s a

sort of – there was and continues to be a need on the Jewish left for religious space that doesn't center Zionism. And I think we were all feeling that. And a friend of mine had done some artwork for Ariana's podcast, and we sort of connected and started talking on Twitter.

And these conversations kept happening because Ariana had a dream to start a small synagogue here in Baltimore that was like non-Zionist, and like radically aligned. And here we are in 2022. We actually just had our first indoor, in person service across the way over at Homewood. And I mean since before the pandemic. So that was kind of what got me very quickly out of the sort of distrust and grief that I felt after leaving Trans Alliance because I was and still am doing synagogue organizing with people I actually like. *[Laughter]* You know, very much really. Really, the implied people I don't like, it's really just Ava.

But *[coughing]*—my throat is a little bit dry— but doing organizing with Hinenu, and making Hinenu possible, and watching it grow, and watching other people feel ownership of it makes me really happy to have been on that provisional board, to have instituted a pay-what-you-can-do structure to be always pushing for accessibility. That I felt really good about. And even when you are doing work you believe in, you're still gonna burn out. Like you're still gonna have difficult days. You're still gonna argue with the people that you care about sometimes. But I think the difference fundamentally is to know when you're being exploited, and to know when you just need a breather.

CC: What have you done during those times when you needed a breather to sort of come back and feel whole again?

TV: Well, one of my practices that I like to lean into, is actually on Shabbat, Friday night through Saturday night, is to unplug, to just not be on the computer, not be looking at screens, and not particularly to be doing anything. I think that's really been a way for me to keep stable and also to spend time in nature, to spend time with like friends who aren't connected to the work that I'm doing. And also to just understand that I can come back when I'm ready, and usually when I'm ready is when I know that things, a) need to get done, and can get done in a way that feels sustainable.

SL: Something that you mentioned to us that we talked about in our pre-interview a couple days ago was Wyman Park Dell, which you said you lived nearby, which was just like a very important place for you in terms of, I think, like your personalized history and activist history. Could you tell us more about that?

TV:

Yeah. Yeah, the Dell is my special place. The Dell is-- I think my first experiences with it were what we call Punk's Picnic. When I was like 14-15, it'd be a bunch of punks gathering and just like getting rowdy. And, statute of limitations is up so I can talk about this, but when I was 15, I dropped acid and did shrooms there for the first time, and it was a very eye-opening and beautiful experience.

Like it was something that I come back to that – and I really believe in the potential of psychedelic therapy for things like PTSD because it really did change something in me to be surrounded by friends and trees to just be tripping my little head off, and just like going on the whole roller-coaster from all the highs and lows. And I've always come back to that place, whether it's for a Punk's Picnic, or time to just read, or sometimes it's been a space that we've used for services.

And then also one thing that we had done in the Trans Alliance days was we had Trans Lady Picnic, which was an idea I had gotten from friend in New York and San Francisco that I thought we should start doing here. And that became – didn't initially start as BTA thing, but it became a Transgender Alliance thing. And there was a point that it hit where I was organizing them and not going. You know, it became something that, again, and it wasn't always at the Dell, but the first few were at the Dell, and there – even in the first year, there's just a good sense of place, of even if folks had never been there before, a sense of community. Definitely people who are looking for more community.

And it had just been nice to share that place, that park with them, and every time I'm in that park even just to read or like –. Now one thing that Hinenu is doing as the weather gets nicer is what we're calling "Doughnuts in the Dell," where we just get a bunch of vegan doughnuts, and folks sign up and come eat them. And yeah, to just see my friends' kids just running around in that little playground is incredible.

And whenever I'm, you know, down in the Dell walking, reading a book, doing whatever, there is this one verse from the Torah that can sometimes come to mind, which is in Hebrew, [*speaks Hebrew*]ask emma/sara? Manorama Hamakom Hassem?, which means: "What an incredible place this is." And that word "my calm" place can also be a word for Hashem for the divine. And so when I think about my spiritual life, my political life, and my personal life, it a lot of the time can come back to the Dell.

And I'm grateful for whenever I get a chance to come back to the Dell because I really do believe that places are alive. And I know that might seem like hippy-dippy out of context, but like the plant life around you is alive. The people around you are alive. Like the grass is alive. It's all alive. So yeah, that in short, is what the Dell means to me.

CC: I think that's beautiful

SL: Yeah, thank you for that.

TV: Thank you.

SL: I think we should maybe start wrapping up soon.

TV: Okay. Cool.

SL: It would be nice to end like here-ish, I guess. I'm sorry, we're talking so vaguely. But I know this was maybe a point you wanted to hit on. And boy, do I have questions about your pop punk band. *[Laughter]*

TV: Well, it wasn't a pop punk band. We were –

SL: You said that you like performed or some stuff, like music or no?

TV: Oh yeah, it was a punk band. It wasn't a pop punk band.

SL: Just not pop. Gotcha.

TV: I do like pop punk, but—

SL: —but it's not the one that you were in.

TV: Yeah. No, it was more like hardcore kind of – DB is the, I guess the genre. We were called Anti-Antigen. And we were around from like 2016-ish to 2018-ish. And I had started this band with my friends **Mave**, and June, and Billy, who were also trans women. And the Anti-Antigen comes from the hormones for an electron, ? which is an anti-antigen. And I was like, oh, that'd be a fun name for punk band.

And then I likely jokingly suggested it and we went with it. And that's who we were. So we played a lot with some really fantastic bands. We got to play the festival in Philly on my birthday. We got

to play – oh, shit, we played Comet Ping Pong shortly before Pizzagate. Or maybe not shortly, but like, okay, the Pizzagate conspiracy, right, that traces back to this pizza place where there are still shows in D.C. where a lot of my friends worked at. And so that was really scary to hear that, all of that.

And that like people believed that. Like Comet Ping Pong doesn't even have a basement. Okay? And they were talking about whatever was going on in the basement. There is no basement.

[Laughter] So like I hate to just go straight into QAnon, but the fact that like, you know, I've been there several times. I played a show there. Yeah, I got to play some really wonderful gigs with some really wonderful people. And I think that band, in a sense, belongs to that moment. You know, I'm still good friends with all of them, but I don't think we would ever be a band again. But who knows, you know?

But yeah, I think that singing in a band again because, really, I had done it when I was like 13-14, and then I was like 23-24. So it was definitely an incredible thing. And I think that we broke up just because it was hard to find time to practice. And you know, we were getting offers for a lot of gigs, for out-of-state gigs sometimes. And you know, my bandmates were all in other bands, and I was doing activism stuff. And there was some interpersonal stuff, you know, which has been resolved.

But you know, when people tell me like that the Anti0Antigen EP, or that my book *Never Coming Home* meant something to them, I'm like, oh, cool. You liked the thing I did. [Laughter] Like because to me, it feels like both a long time ago, and pretty recent. Like my friends own that bakery Motzi Bread over there, and that used to be a liquor store right near the house that we practiced at. And so it was like, you know, and our guitar player was straight edge. But you know, they'd be like, "Tyler, liquor store run, you want anything?"

And there's a big – so it was like really funny to me when Maya and Russell? bought that space, they like lived not too far from. So it was, yeah, Motzi is great, and it's also weird because sometimes I miss that liquor store. [Laughter] But I'm not even really a big drinker now. You know, it's funny the way things change is kind of all I'm saying.

SL: Yeah, it definitely is. You could just go for a bread run instead of a liquor run. [Laughter]

TV: Yeah, exactly.

SL: That's funny.

TV: Still get carbs.

SL: Yep. *[Laughter]*

CC: Cool thing how a little piece of history shifts.

TV: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, I think **that** – talking so vaguely.

[Side conversation]

CC: It's been really cool hearing your story. We have just a couple more questions for you if you don't mind. As sort of just **in summation**, which I know is really hard to do, if you can just tell us about how life as a trans woman in Baltimore has changed since the uprising?

TV: Well, it has and it hasn't. I would say that like an organization like Baltimore Safe Haven is doing the kind of work that I wish the Trans Alliance had been doing, you know, providing clothing and shelter to trans women who are dealing with housing insecurity, and food insecurity. And I just, I mean the way that I understand myself has changed to the point where I don't know if I necessarily relate to the term "trans woman" anymore.

Like I'm not even? in a woman of trans experience way. I'm just a woman, and this is my life, and trans is maybe one descriptor. And disabled is another. And intersex is another. And so there's a lot going on in my identity. Like I will say that, I mean I have white skin, you know. There's really only so much that can change in a limited amount of time. But also that maybe things have changed more than I'd experienced them changing. And I think that's for other people and other stories to tell. But you know, the biggest change for me in my personal life is I know who my friends are, and I know where I want to focus my energy.

SL: Well, where I guess where do you want to focus it? Like what work do you think is left for you to be doing?

TV: Well, right now, I'm working with the Value Baltimore Project, which is an extension of the Baltimore State Health Department,

and Morgan State University. And IVAC through John Hopkins. And I'm working on accessibility. I'm making sure that the COVID vaccine and testing campaign is accessible in every way, physically, in a sensory way, and emotionally accessible.

And I'm doing these trainings of different groups of people for community health workers, for a mobile response team, for our different what we call value communities, which are sort of identity-based that do this sort of outreach work. And we are seeing vaccination kind of drop off right now, but I mean pandemic fatigue is pandemic fatigue. And I think that accessibility work, disability justice work, right now, this is where I'm called.

And beyond that, you know, I would eventually like to be a rabbi. I don't know when or how or if a lot of things that need to happen for that to happen will actually happen. But I think that the best I can do is put my effort and my energy where I want it to go and lean on my support network when I'm tired. I think that's it.

SL: More, or do you want to?

CC: I think that's a really nice place.

TV: Okay.

CC: If there's anything else that you would like to share with us during this interview. We covered a lot of ground. Is there anything else that you want to provide for context or just anything else that's relevant?

TV: I can't think of anything necessarily, but I'm really appreciate that you guys brought me into today, and I'm so glad that we could have this conversation.

CC: Us, too, for sure.

SL: Us, too. Oh my gosh. Us too.

TV: Who else are you talking to?

[End of audio]