

Oral History Interview: Lucia Chappelle

Interviewee: Lucia Chappelle

Interviewer: Tarchithaa Sekharan

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Tarchithaa: [00:00:00] My name is Tarchithaa. Today is December 6th, 2024. I'm here with Pastor Lucia Chappelle for an interview for the LGBTQ-RAN oral history project. Pastor Chappelle, whose longstanding activism and work in the realm of LGBTQ plus scholarship and conversations as well as faith based leadership has been inspiring and transformative. She is a producer at This Way Out Radio and International Gay and Lesbian Radio Magazine and Minister of Social Justice at the Founders Metropolitan Community in Los Angeles, as well as a journalist, a progressive activist, a writer, and a musician. So, thank you for being with me here today. I really appreciate it. Is there anything I missed in the introduction that you would like to include before we, you know, jump into

Lucia: My name is Lucia. I pronounce it Lucia, not Lucia. So just, and you can just call me Lucia.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. [00:01:00] Yeah. Thank you. So what can you tell me about your early life?

Lucia: I was born in Washington, DC. My parents had come up there from South Carolina, both of them. My father was a doctor. We moved when I was just a toddler, we moved to Paterson, New Jersey. So I really grew up in New Jersey, but I have a lot of, I had a lot of old fashioned Southern ways from my parents. Who were also, they were older...like they were the age of grandparents. So that also had an impact on how I grew up. And we did not, we didn't move at all. We, well, we moved to, like I said when I was a toddler, we moved to Patterson. And just as I was starting high school, we moved to Teaneck, which was in the [00:02:00] suburbs. And we actually had to file a lawsuit because the bill, my mother, you see, was very, very light skinned as one used to say, "passing light." And we had been looking for a house. She went and looked at this house and just fell in love with it. And everybody was happy...after school she picked me up and took me to see the house. And the you-know-what hit the fan because they suddenly realized who we were. And she had already put a deposit down and, you know, it was the funniest thing a couple of days later, after school, I was looking out the living room window and I saw the woman from the real estate company across the street from my house.

And it was like [00:03:00] it was after school time and the place I lived right across the street from my elementary school. So the whole neighborhood was teeming with little tiny black kids screaming and yelling and running up and down. And here's this poor woman walking through the middle of it. And I said, Mama. Isn't that Mrs. Howes? Her name was Mrs. Howes. I wonder

what she's doing here. Well, we figured out what she was doing. She wanted to see where we lived and where we were moving from. Because she was, they were wondering what was, they were clearly, they were wondering what was going to happen. Little did they know that my parents were very well connected in the Republican Party.

Very, very well regarded. I mean, Republican Party [00:04:00] activists. Yeah. So they filed a lawsuit and a prominent New Jersey politician. was their attorney. And I think probably the builder and the real estate people just kind of said, Oh no...so we, we got the house. I mean, we, we literally, we literally had to sue and go through a settlement and all that kind of stuff. And the builder would say he had two other houses on the same street and he was afraid he wouldn't be able to sell them if he sold the first one to a black family.

Tarchithaa: Wow.

Lucia: Yeah, In New Jersey.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And when, after we moved in or we were in the process of moving in, we found out [00:05:00] that you probably wouldn't remember the name Elston Howard. Elston Howard was, a famous Black baseball player, he had moved in to the same town just a few weeks earlier, and someone had burned a cross on his lawn...

Tarchithaa: Oh, my God.

Lucia: ...in New Jersey. So it was, it was an interesting time, let's put it that way. It was an interesting time.

Tarchithaa: Yeah, that's insane. What year was this? Like, so what was the year you guys bought the house?

Lucia: That was '65. It was 1965. No, I well it was '65 we moved in in '66 because we moved in the summer after my freshman year of high school, but it was we, the lawsuit started in '65. [00:06:00] ,,and people don't realize that that was going on then. People don't realize it. Meanwhile, I was...my parents did not want me to stay in public school after grammar school. You know, we had a riot or two. And so they got me into a Catholic school that was, at the time it was the, like the premier New Catholic high school in the diocese.

Tarchithaa: Yeah,

Lucia: The bishop had made it known that he would like to have it integrated. So they sent this priest who did work in the inner city, knew a friend of my mother's. [00:07:00] And he came to visit us and, you know, I had all A's on my report card and that kind of stuff. So he thought I was just great. So that year they, they had 250 freshmen and two nice little Black girls.

Tarchithaa: Wow. What was the name? What was the name of the school?

Lucia: The high school was DePaul Diocesan High School. It was in Wayne, New Jersey. And we, yeah, we were the first they had there. And like I said, the bishop made it known that they should find a couple and they advertised, you know, oh, we were very strict standards and we admit 250 freshmen every year and only 250. And when I heard them say they had admitted 252. I knew who the two were. [00:08:00] I was only 12, but I knew who the two were.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. This was, so this was entering high school.

Lucia: Yeah. Yeah.

Tarchithaa: How old were you when you started high school?

Lucia: I was 12 when I started high school. I had been [advanced] a couple of times..not because I was smart, but because of the school was overcrowded. PS-6 in Paterson was like the, the ghetto grammar school. And it was really overcrowded. So they were, we had graduation twice a year. They were kind of shuffling us through as quick as they could. And so I ended up just kind of getting pushed up a couple of times.

Tarchithaa: Wow. Okay. Wow. I had no idea [00:09:00] that...yeah...I guess I just didn't know that schools did this, like, like students who went through grades a lot faster because of overcrowding. It's really interesting.

Lucia: You know, I mean, they wouldn't have said that, but it's like, we only had six months of kindergarten instead of a whole year, so that they could have two classes. And then they had graduation...they had..let's say you would have like half a year of first grade, and then it was summer and then you'd have the second half of first grade in the fall. And then they built another school and were able to spread more people out so we could stay a full year in one grade. And I got pushed into the third grade after only a half a year of second grade. And they just they were shuffling us through like I said as fast as they could.

I went to Catholic high school [00:10:00] and they would, you know, like the first week or so they would say, well now they would have us go around and say where did everybody go to grammar school and was like Saint this and Saint that and Saint this and Saint that and then I would say PS-6. [laughs] Everybody would look at me. I was also the only Protestant in the

school. So that kind of also was a thing in my religious education because I suddenly had to figure out what it was, what it meant to be a Protestant and not a Catholic and be able to speak up,

Tarchithaa: Navigate that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So how was I guess religious and faith, sort of like, what were you raised in? And how was the transition trying to... I mean, like take what you already know and what you grew up with, and then realizing in school, it's like a different [00:11:00] experience.

Lucia: Well, my, my parents were Baptist. But they weren't that into going to church or anything. From a very young age, I was really interested in going to church. Like I threw a temper tantrum when I was about six, because I wanted to go to Sunday school. So they had a friend who actually was the superintendent of the Sunday school at a nearby Presbyterian church. So she would come by our house on Sunday morning and take me to Sunday school with her, to the Presbyterian church. And I didn't even know that there was that...I didn't know there was that much difference between Baptist and Presbyterian. What did I know? I just wanted to go to Sunday school...and be in the choir and, you [00:12:00] know, like a little cherub and all that kind of stuff.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: Then I went to Girl Scouts at an Episcopalian church. So then I went to, when I was going to go to this Catholic high school, I had no idea. I had no idea. I'd never met a nun before...

Tarchithaa: Before you went to the school?

Lucia: You know, at all. I was like completely...and they were just, it was just after Vatican II, where they had so many changes. That's what we learned a lot about. And I actually had Irish priests. We had this one..and these guys were like right off the boat.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: Right off the boat. Yeah. And we had one who would say, you know, things like...[mimics Irish accent] These rules of morality go for you boys and girls, whether you be Catholic or pagan. [00:13:00] [laughs] And I'd be sitting there.

Tarchithaa: You're like, that's, those are the two options.

Lucia: Okay. You know, and the nice ones. would just call us "the separated brethren." I was blown away. I didn't know what to make of it. Then the other side of it was...I'd never met a nun before, but a lot of the nuns had never met anybody Black before either. So I had to explain

Protestantism and being Black to adults. And I was 12. And I didn't really understand how much it was until later, you know, and looking back on it, I thought...dang, that was a lot. But it taught me a lot. And as I said, at my high school reunion, you know, later in my ministry, when I had the, you know, I would be dealing [00:14:00] with former Catholics who had been thrown out of the church. Many of them long before Vatican II, and suddenly I was able to explain to them what had happened in the Catholic Church since they've been gone so that they could be more comfortable making the transition into being MCCers.

Tarchithaa: Wow. That's a lot. Were you the only Protestant at that school?

Lucia: I was the only Protestant in the school. At first I had to sit in the classroom by myself when everybody else went to mass...but I, that was, I, no, I didn't like that. That was not cool. I couldn't have communion because I wasn't baptized Catholic. So they thought I shouldn't come to mass, but then they find, you know, it kind of worked out. And I talked to the Sister Francis and I could go to mass with everybody else, but just like stay in my seat when everybody else went to your [00:15:00] communion...I still had to have a chapel veil though.

Tarchithaa: It's really crazy to hear that. That's not, that's what, 50 years ago?

Lucia: We just had our 55th reunion, yeah. And no, it's not that long ago. It's long ago, but it's not that long ago. I really think a lot of the...from the time I was in high school from '65 to '69, things were breaking down. Within a couple of years after I graduated from high school, almost all the nuns had left the convent. A few years ago, they only had one nun left. They didn't even have priests on the faculty. They had lay faculty and like maybe half as many students.

Tarchithaa: So did you continue going to the church? I guess with your parents and stuff like that while you were attending school?

Lucia: I went by myself. They didn't, they didn't come [00:16:00] really. After we moved to Teaneck...another Presbyterian church nearby and I went there. And the only times...my mother came when I got, I did my confirmation and had my first communion. And when we were like the kids that were graduating seniors, they had like a youth Sunday. And I did a, like half of the sermon in the youth Sunday, they had like two people. And so she came for that to see us do our youth thing. But otherwise I just, you know, I just went by myself. And after I started college, I chapel choir every Sunday, I was there until I started going to [00:17:00] MCC.

Tarchithaa: Thank you. First of all, just for, just for sharing that, that's a lot of change. Like just a lot of moving pieces to navigate when you're that young. So that means you graduated high school at 16. Okay. How, what, how was school after that? Like where did you go for college if you did?

Lucia: Well, I, desperately needed to get away from home, like desperately, desperately, desperately. So I went from New Jersey and came out here to LA to Occidental College. And that was a long, how I managed to talk my parents into doing that...it was a whole 'nother story but it, I managed to do it. And thank goodness I did because I never would have survived otherwise. Ever, [00:18:00] ever, ever. So I came out here, it's 1969. It's, it's Vietnam and post-Woodstock and post-Chicago, and, you know, all that kind of campus activity and freaks and hippies. I'll admit it. I arrived on campus. And saw a fellow friend, became a friend of mine, who is now a serious activist in LA, but he was standing out there with a little pork pie hat and granny glasses and long blonde hair and a vest.

And I just, oh, that's why I came here. I suddenly, like I hadn't like figured out [00:19:00] why I was coming to California. That's why I came to California. And so I, you know, immediately got involved in campus politics, student moratorium, just all that kind of down deep activist stuff from the very beginning. 'Cause I was always political...that was another thing. I just looked back at the questions while we were gone and about faith in my early life. And I'd have to say that one of the biggest influences was the Civil Rights Movement...you know... 'cause I'm certainly when I went to church, that's what our pastor was preaching about and any [00:20:00] other, I went to certain, all sorts of different functions with my parents that were at churches. And they were all about everything was all about civil rights. That was what that's what you talked about. That's what you did. That's what, that was life.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: ...that was life. So that to me was what...that's what you did. You were involved in politics. It was Republican politics, but my parents were absolutely involved in politics. I was a Nixon girl. I actually became a Nixon girl with a little straw hat and the whole thing. 'Cause I wanted to, I saw, I saw my people getting beaten in Chicago and I wanted to do something that would end the war. And Nixon said he was going to end the war. My parents were [00:21:00] Republicans, so I thought Nixon was going to end the war, but it didn't take me very long to figure out that he wasn't going to end the war and that we were in a much worse mess than I ever thought. So I started marching and canvassing and all that stuff that you did.

Tarchithaa: How young were you when you were doing that, when you started, I guess.

Lucia: 16.

Tarchithaa: Okay, so it's like you left for college and that's around the time where...

Lucia: Yeah well and I will also will...gosh, I guess I was probably 14 or 15 during the Nixon campaign. I'm singing, singing and dancing for Tricky Dick. And he I mean he was another one. He saw..we were...he was doing an [00:22:00] event in New Jersey, not a very big event. And I

was with the Nixon girls and we were doing our little thing. And I saw the look in his eye. He saw that they had a little chocolate chip, and he was so excited he didn't know what to do. And like invited "Oh! You know you have to bring them to the Madison Square Garden.. ou know, big event because it," and I, I, like I said, I saw it in his eye when he spotted me...

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia:...and I just like laughed cause that's how they are, that's how those guys are. But like I said, it didn't take me very long. I mean, it's like, I went to, I went to school and I went to my first. radical student caucus meeting and immediately started to [00:23:00] figure everything out.

Tarchithaa: Going to California as an intentional decision that you mentioned, would you say it's what sort of propelled you like into furthering... even the work that you do now like that was the first step of independence and being able to figure it out on your own that lets you where you are now.

Lucia: Yes, absolutely, absolutely. And the kind of, and the surrounding, you know, the people at Oxy, Oxy, Occidental is a very interesting school. It's a small liberal arts college. I met somebody. You know, after I graduated and was working somewhere, I was talking to a guy who's editor of a magazine and he said, "Oh, you went to Occidental." And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "You know, I know a lot of people who went to Occidental. They're all very different, but you're all twisted the [00:24:00] same way." [laughs] That makes sense. You know,

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia ...kind of twisted the same way. And we, we had remarkable teachers and a very open academic atmosphere so that you could do a lot of very creative things, that you could create your own major. You could, my freshman year was Kent State.

Tarchithaa: Okay.

Lucia: Jackson State.

Tarchithaa: Okay.

Lucia: Okay. So we had students to my, my spring term of my freshman year was the national student strike.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. Wow. What a time to be in college. Truly.

Lucia: For real. Oh, it was nuts. And we thought, I mean, we thought we were probably all going to get shot because you had Kent State. [00:25:00] And then, you know, like within a few days we were having, we had a rally over near UCLA and kids from UCLA were saying, God, they walked out of the student union and there were guys with long rifles pointing at them and they didn't even know what was going on.

And then there was Jackson State, then just a couple of days after that, it was Jackson State. And we figured we, and you could go to demonstrations and you could see the guys on the roofs. You know, pointing guns or, you know, the, and the guys in the crowd that are taken down, you know, all the, your names and your everything. We figured we were all, if not shot, we're at least going to all end up in jail. A lot of us ended up in jail anyway...

Tarchithaa: ...National Guard and like police department. [00:26:00] Campus security, those sort of folks.

Lucia: FBI. Oh, listen, campus security at Oxy was, we had two old guys who like, they had two squad cars, they had two old guys, one was Virgil. Virgil was on night watch, bless his heart, uh, and Ben the Fuzz. who called himself Ben the Fuzz. Ben would walk into the student lounge ringing a bell saying, "Here come the fuzz." You know, that was, that was our campus security. So we didn't worry much about them. But LAPD was vicious.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: LAPD was frigging vicious. I got stopped just walking across the street from campus. I was at a [00:27:00] friend's house across the street and I got stopped trying to get back to my dorm and the cops wouldn't.. LAPD...1970...I was Black. The cops wouldn't believe that I was a student. I'm like saying, um, here's my ID. I go to school here, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. And they're giving me all kinds of lip. And I'm like saying, Do you want to give me a ride to my dorm and ask my head resident if I live here? People would call it ivory tower but it was kind of dangerous to be a student then.

Almost, almost anything could happen. And it didn't, but it could. Every time we went, every time you go to a demonstration, every time you did anything, you didn't know what could happen. That just made us [00:28:00] stronger and smarter and those funny little skills that you don't know you're going to need later like, you know, during the campaign against Proposition 8 here in California, somebody asked me if I'd ever done any phone banking. [laughs] Well, yeah. Oh, well, when was your first...actually, Vietnam?

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: Who would have thought that that would be one of the skills that you get with your degree is how to phone bank. During the Vietnam time, it was also the psychedelic time. And that definitely has the hook, I think between the politics and psychedelics, that's...and theater. [00:29:00] That was really the, the things that shaped my spirituality in that time.

Tarchithaa: Theater?

Lucia: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I ended up, I'd started, I thought I was going to be a music major, and that didn't work out. So I kind of fell downstairs into the drama department. And that was remarkable and at that was at a time of experimental theater, *Hair* was on Broadway. But even more I mean, our acting exercises were meditation. They were like yoga. [00:30:00] They're Alexandrian reflexation and the kinds of, of improv things that you maybe read about now where you improvise being bacon. You know or different animals or, you know, so it was that kind of deep psychological work that you did to learn how to act.

Tarchithaa: Like, I'm thinking about it. I'm like, that totally makes sense. You know, in every sort of art industry, there's a shift happening because of what's happening politically. Yeah.

Lucia: Cause the culture and politics all, it all hooks together.

Tarchithaa: All intertwined. Yeah. Yeah. So you started off in music then and [00:31:00] then continued in theater. Did you end up graduating with, with your bachelor's in theater?

Lucia: Yes. Yes, um, speech-drama as they called it then is and as it ended up I turned into a playwright. And that, that was where I kind of, yeah, I was working on being an actor and being an actor wasn't working, but then like my senior year I started writing for the theater and ended up like winning prizes and whatnot that for, for plays. It was, like I said, the theater and the politics all worked together...and the music, 'cause it was also the time of, of folk music and protest songs and [00:32:00] So you know there was so many different trains and weavings together that all were so—me.

Tarchithaa: What other things were you involved in, in college? So you mentioned, I mean, obviously you were an organizer, you know, at the time and also an artist, you know, a performer, what else was there during this time, and what sort of stayed with you?

Lucia: Well, it's also because, well, of course, when you were involved in psychedelics at the time, that's when you started, we started getting interested in alternate spiritualities. Everybody was reading Carlos Castaneda. Before he got debunked. But it was just [00:33:00] that and Aldous Huxley and Tim Leary and Ram Dass...bringing all those things together. And, you know, I was trying to explain to somebody not long ago who would say, Oh, you know, all those drugs and blah, blah, blah, blah. And I said, you know, it's actually been fairly recent in history

that intoxication has been considered in conflict with spirituality. For thousands of years before that, it was the other way around.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. Yeah.

Lucia: This is like a really Western European patriarchal thing that, that, you know, Oh, you know, you must never be high.

Tarchithaa: So many different like faith and spiritualities around the world have had that like even for years, decades, like centuries, and it's sort of been washed away. [00:34:00] I mean, it's colonial really is what it is.

Lucia: Yes, it really is. It really, it's definitely colonial. So again, all that wove together to make just what I consider to be a really rich college experience, really rich educational experience.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. So you graduated from Occidental in...

Lucia: '73.

Tarchithaa: At 20. Okay.

Lucia: Yeah. Yeah. I was just 20. I couldn't even get drunk for graduation. No, that's terrible. But yeah. Well also...but it was my junior year, spring of my junior year that I found MCC.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And...

Tarchithaa: oh, so you've been involved for a really long time with them?

Lucia: A really long time. A really, really, really long time. I was only 19.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. How did you find them? Like what was it a friend, [00:35:00] like, were you looking for something?

Lucia: Well I had several, you know, I had been hanging around, and I wasn't like, it would be wrong to say that I wasn't out because I didn't, I just didn't understand myself. But I had a number of friends who were gay men. And I was--like I said—I was still going to chapel every Sunday, was singing in the chapel choir. And I was bored to tears. I was so bored I didn't know what to do. A very nice chaplain. I mean, I can't say, oh, he was, he was a very nice guy, but he

was just seriously boring, seriously boring. And I came back to the dorm one afternoon and I was talking about the chapel service and I was just like pounding my [00:36:00] head on the walls and I'm so bored. I'm so bored. And one of the guys said, I'll bet you'd like going to that gay church. And I said, naah, you know, I just totally I just totally wrote it off.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And it wasn't but about two or three weeks later that we were all we were bar hopping one night...not legally...but we were bar hopping one night, and we ran into these two guys, Artie and Marty McDonald, they were twins, and they were the people who did the sign language interpretation for the church. And they said, "Oh, you know, why don't you guys come on over to our house and crash on in our house and we'll take you to church in the morning." So we all just went to their house and went to church in the morning and [00:37:00] I loved it. I loved it. Oh, it was certainly was not boring. It was absolutely not boring. And I was, I was hooked immediately, immediately. And we just had to keep finding ways to get there every Sunday. It just, it, it filled that gap. And it was because it was the spiritual part and the cultural, just like family togetherness part, and activism...because it was, you know, MCC started before Stonewall.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. [00:38:00]

Lucia: So activism was in the, in the very grain of it. Absolutely. I found home. After I graduated, went through the summer, went, you know, trying to find a job, trying to find a job and wasn't having really very much luck. I grew up on In Pacifica. KPFK was a station here in Los Angeles. There were stations in, Berkeley, New York, LA, Houston, Texas, and Washington, DC. And so they were talking, they were having a Christmas fair coming up and we're looking for volunteers for the Christmas fair. And said, and you might even get a job afterwards. Little did I know. So, so I went and volunteered [00:39:00] at KPFK. Actually, the day after my 21st birthday. I volunteered at KPF...to be a Christmas fair volunteer.

The Christmas fair was such an ultimate disaster that I ended up getting hired on afterward to help clean it up. Because I was one of the people I had worked in the office and knew like who the crafts people were in the entertainers were and, and I just had all this stuff in my head that was a mess that they, we had to try and straighten that and figure out, you know who owed money to who and what was going on and so I got hired on to help. And then I got hired on to work part time on the switchboard. And you, when you worked on staff at KPFK and in Pacifica, or [00:40:00] if you started volunteering, you ended up doing something on the radio.

Tarchithaa: Yeah,

Lucia: ...ended up producing something for the radio. You ended up being on the radio... somehow you're gonna...that it just happened. You would end up on the air somehow. How I ended up on the air at KPFK...I've been on staff for a while and I was, we were doing a fund drive. And I was working behind the scenes on the fund drive, you know, making sure they had the numbers and the pledges and the, you know, the, of the phone room is working, right. And all that kind of stuff. We're on the air or like in the six to seven am slot one morning. Phone rings in the master control room. Board operator asked me to pick up the phone.[00:41:00] So I picked up the phone and it was the news director from the station in Berkeley. Who was like freaking out. I didn't know what he's freaking out. I mean, he's just freaking out. Who's there? Who's in the building? Who's there? I said, well, I'm here and the board op's here and Mike Hodel is here. Mike's there. Okay, put Mike on the phone. I got to talk to Mike. Mike was on the air.

So I go in and I pass him a note. It says--Paul Fisher is on the phone. He's got to talk to you right away. It's urgent. Mike looks at the note. Mind you, the red light is on. The mic is hot. He's on there. He looks at the note. He gets up and walks out and leaves me standing there. And so the board op looks at me and I, and I sat down and started giving the phone number and doing [00:42:00] the pitch like you would do the pitch. And then somebody else who'd never been on the air before saw me through the window and came in to help me. You want to know what the emergency was? This is going to blow your mind. The emergency was that the people in Berkeley had just gotten the note and the tape from Patty Hearst with her credit card, half her credit card in it, saying that she had been kidnapped by the SLA.

Tarchithaa: Oh, my God.

Lucia: And these were their demands. And I'm telling you, we sat down in the studio. We took the air live to Berkeley and he's reading the manifesto of the Symbionese Liberation Army live on the air. And we're sitting there and it's a part of it is an Esperanto and part of it is in Spanish and part of it is [00:43:00] in English. And we're sitting there saying, holy shit, we didn't even know. Yeah, that was my first morning on the air.

Tarchithaa: What a day! What a day!

Lucia: What a day! But it certainly got, I mean, I wasn't scared of the red light anymore. Here you are. Let's go. And so I started, after that, I started producing stuff and working on the, the women's show, the feminist show, the gay and lesbian show at that time. I was the first lesbian on the gay and lesbian show, which was called IMRU, which is still on the air and from IMRU grew This Way [00:44:00] Out.

Tarchithaa: Wow. It's amazing. I saw this article that said that it's going to the Library of Congress, like the archives, which is, I mean, congratulations. I know I'm like two years late in

the congratulations, but congratulations on that. And I saw that it was, it's been going on for more than 30 years. So how did that come about?

Lucia: We were doing IMRU and there were, you know, gay and lesbian shows. This is all through the Pacifica network. These are the, the stations in Pacifica and it was. 1979, first gay and lesbian March on Washington.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: A whole bunch of us to set, you know, Bill Bogan, God bless his heart, may he rest in power...was doing the gay and lesbian show out of the Washington station. And he also worked for [00:45:00] NPR. So he managed to get NPR to go in with Pacifica to broadcast the March live. So some of us from the LA station, some of us from Berkeley, some of us, from some of the folks from Houston all showed up, slept on the floor in Bill Bogan's house and broadcast the March on Washington live.

Tarchithaa: Wow.

Lucia: It was quite a feat. It was quite a feat and it was quite an event. I mean, nobody had ever...nobody thought this march was going to work. You must understand this. People thought it was a pipe dream. I had one prominent [00:46:00] gay activist, just like scream at me about how it was all being run by communists and it didn't represent him and, and just blah. But it was a success because people needed it. I'll turn you on to a link where you can listen to the doc. We did an hour long documentary.

Tarchithaa: Thank you. Thank you.

Lucia: And it's, it's one of the best things I ever did. I know that. So we, then when it came time for the second March, Greg, Greg Gordon, who was working with me on IMRU here, we put together the kind of the skeleton to [00:47:00] broadcast the second march on Washington, which was in '81 question mark. And that's where we brought together a bunch of people in a hotel room and said, "Hey, If we can get this many people to do a March on Washington, we could do a weekly show." Just think if, if everybody contributed pieces and we put them all together. This was the early days of the NPR satellite. This is, you know, so we could raise money and get on the satellite and, and send our show all around. And we invited people then to be contributors for a syndicated show that we would try and put on. And we, like, oh gosh, I can't even remember all the hassles we went through trying to find a grant but we finally found some grant funding that [00:48:00] would at least cover paying for the satellite time.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: ...not for any of our time but the satellite time.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And we went on the air with This Way Out, April 1st of 1988.

Tarchithaa: Wow. I mean, it was a passion project, like did not pay any bills and you guys sort of took it on because you saw the significance of it really like of having...

Lucia: Yes, we had other jobs. Greg, I think Greg was still working for Metro Media at the time, and I had gone back to working at KPFK. By '88, I think I was already program director at KPFK. I did some pastoral work. And then I worked for an advertising [00:49:00] agency for about 10 minutes. That didn't last very long at all. This Way Out was not part of my job.

Tarchithaa: Continue working at KPFK, while also producing This Way Out Radio. Also being involved with the church with MCC. And so how did you navigate that? And at one point, like, how did you also rise, you know, in leadership in the church, you know, because you are at a point now where, like, you're out there.

Lucia: Well, that's another kind of complicated story. I, let's see. I was in the church. I pastored the West Hollywood Church All Saints for a short time until well, I was on staff and then I was the interim pastor. And then the board decided that, they being in West [00:50:00] Hollywood, they really needed to have a white man. So that was that. I later, I was pastoring a feminist all-women's church in MCC called DeColores MCC, which was the first of several all-women churches who really worked toward a feminist theology and a feminist proclamation of the gospel.

I was the dean of Samaritan, Samaritan Theological Institute. That's what it was. The name changed a few times, but it was MCC's seminary. I was the dean of the seminary for a little while. And [00:51:00] then I was not in the church for a little while, or I was only on the fringes. And I don't want to go into all of that, it was messy, weird, but I stayed on the fringes, never, you know, I didn't venture out into any other churches. It's not like I, you know, left MCC to go somewhere else. There was no place else for me. Never can be. Because this is the church we built. And so then in the early 2000s, probably 2001, 2000-2001, I came back into the church and started doing justice work, archive work. I do a lot of that as well. [00:52:00] And always working with the deaf ministry. The...it was the interpreters who brought me to the church, it was deaf people at the church who were my first little, you know, my first sub-family.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: So I've always been faithful to that...the People of African Descent, the women's spirituality group, you know, all sorts of stuff like that since the early 2000s. So that's been another 20, 25 years. My gosh.

Tarchithaa: You've been busy.

Lucia: I've been busy. Because the work, the work absolutely goes on. The work never stops. We need to record these and I was just always a sponge. That's the kind of kid I was.

Tarchithaa: Yeah,

Lucia: I loved...the time I was a KPFK. I [00:53:00] loved like listening to, I met, like I met people who have been blacklisted in the '50s.

Tarchithaa: Wow.

Lucia: The Hollywood blacklist, and I would just sit off in the corner when they were all around chatting and just absorb, just absorb, you know. There was this woman, Dorothy Healy, who was the secretary of the Communist Party USA. Her mother used to sit in the lobby when I was on the switchboard and tell me stories about the old days of organizing, you know

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: ...the early days of the Communist Party right after the Russian Revolution, I mean, it was just amazing. So I was always just that kind of kid who wanted to hear all the stories and remember them and, you know, just keep them alive. So, and I don't think I ever was...[00:54:00] well, maybe I was...because, you know, when I was really I remember walking down the street with my father. When I was really little, and I had my hand around his finger. And I remember thinking what a cute story it would be when I could say that my whole hand went around his finger.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: So I was already at like, you know, that kind of tiny age thinking about telling stories in the future.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: So maybe I just always was that way. And just always wanted to drink it in and remember.

Tarchithaa: Thank you for sort of, for like sharing that, that story with me. I mean, all these stories so far, but also that's such a specific moment too, like as a kid that like, when you're a child, there are more memories that [00:55:00] inform you and your entire being. And that definitely seems like something that's, that stayed with you. So. Thank you for sharing that. Yeah. feel like I'm gonna like go in a different direction a little bit, but when would you sort of say you begin to realize your queer identity? Like how did that come about for you?

Lucia: Well, I got my friends in college. I said, I, you know, hung around with these guys and, okay, wait, wait, wait, let me start. Let me, let me rhyme, wind back a little bit. I guess it was probably my sophomore year. A good friend of mine was, he was organizing the gay students union on campus. I don't know if [00:56:00] anybody else was out, but I met him. I had originally met him at a sit-in in the administration building. And I just thought he was, it was really cool to have somebody who was a gay activist and part of the peace movement and drawing those threads together. I thought, hey, that's pretty cool. So we got to be friends and he. One evening he invited Morris Kite, who is the well known gay activist, he invited Morris to campus. So I said, okay, I'm gonna go to this thing and, and support Brian and sit right up front and try and ask good questions and you know, yeah, so thing is over and Brian comes up to me afterward and says, "Morris wants you to have coffee with us." [00:57:00]

And I said, and he said, to be specific, this is so Morris Kite. This is so Morris. He said, to be specific, he said, bring me that one. So we went to, you know, to the cooler, which was student lounge thing—for coffee--and Morris is asking me, he's They had just started a collective of people who were living in a house over on Wilshire Boulevard and going to create a gay community services center. And he wanted me to come and live in the collective house with them and help them do this. And I'm like, I'm not even 18 [00:58:00] yet. I can't, I can't move off campus. [laughs] No, I can't do that. But somehow he just like pegged me out of a crowd. And, you know, I had asked some questions, some questions about bisexuality.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: He said, he said, I'm so sorry you asked me that. I was really liking you. [laughs] But he learned to like me anyway. So, and, but I still wasn't like really...I still wasn't really catching on until it was Valentine's Day and I was with my friends we were doing, you know, making valentines and I'm making this really frilly, frilly valentine for this [00:59:00] woman and somebody finally said, "Lucia, do you realize that you have a crush on her?" Do I? You're like, no...

Tarchithaa: everyone.

Lucia: Yes, dear. Oh, that was kind of it. You know, I guess I just hadn't really put, I hadn't put it together. I just hadn't put it together. Somebody had to tell me.

Tarchithaa: That's really funny, but also really cool that you have that support. Just like, you know, people around you who are also queer and like you, you were in that place already. Yeah, especially at that age, I think [01:00:00] it's not a common experience from what I, in my generation at least.

Lucia: No, it absolutely was not. I couldn't have been luckier. I could not have been luckier because I never had to go through the guilt and shame phase at all. In the church, you know, we will always remember there was, you know, one pastor in particular who would, you know, was always make sure to talk to each of the teenagers and make sure you know that they had some kind of family supporter. You know, weren't just out there by themselves and, you know, just knew where everybody's head was at.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: So that everybody could be well taken care of and somebody was looking out for you.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: It's, and this is at a time where other people were saying the church shouldn't have a youth group [01:01:00] because everybody would be busted for pedophilia. And, but Troy said, no, we are going to have a youth group. Because these kids need it. In a way, I guess I just grew up with a chip on my shoulder. You know, in Pacifica radio, big leftist revolutionary Pacifica radio stuff that people would say was just, I actually had, now these are some allegedly Afro-centrist activists who made the argument that I should not be counted as an affirmative action hire because I was more lesbian than I was African American.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's insane. [01:02:00]

Lucia: Which half of me, Oh, is this, is this part of me, that part of me is African, but this part of me is lesbian. What are you talking about? That's crazy stuff.

Tarchithaa: I also feel like that comes from like, the lack of understanding, literally just understanding intersectionality.

Lucia: I'm, I'm really getting into free speech TV and also I just went to a conference, what your NLG, NLGJA, the National Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association. They had a conference here in September and I went to a workshop that some folks from *Mother Jones* were putting on. And they were talking about their, their online and social media outreach now. And it's fascinating because it's totally, it's trying to put out the same [01:03:00] Quality and type of information that *Mother Jones* does, but it's in a completely different form. And I think that's where, that's where we need to go, is because legacy media in making it.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: ...the newspapers. I love newspapers, but it's not making, I love radio, but it's not doing it. I get terrified about the stuff we lose. Cause I think that Magnus Hirschfield, who did the German activist, all of his stuff was lost. Nazis destroyed all of it, you know. That's what Jim Kepner was one of our, you know, outstanding archivist told me, keep everything, keep everything, keep [01:04:00] your laundry list, keep everything. Because you don't know that might have a copy of it and ten other copies of it have been destroyed. Keep everything because and keep everything in different places that's another thing that we've been trying to do with the archives at MCCLA. We have different hard drives with stuff on them in with stored with different people. So if I get hit by a truck tomorrow. Somebody else has got it all.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. It's, it's really survival. Like it's, we need these things. Yeah.

Lucia: Somebody always needs to know that we were here. No matter what else happens. Somebody needs to know that we were here.

Tarchithaa: Yeah, yeah, it's definitely, [01:05:00] yeah, I like don't, I don't really know I guess what else to add but I definitely am seeing that shift happen. Yeah, I mean, I guess, I guess before I go to the last, last, last question, like how would you describe yourself now? You know, like, how would you consider the kind of work you do now? Like where, where are you most involved now?

Lucia: Well, the shift is happening and I'm...it's going to be interesting to see where it all goes next. I'll go, I'll always go where the fight is. I'm, you know, because I'm looking for different things. I'm looking for news. And I'm also looking for opportunities; opportunities to involve and engage. See, this is something that we really learned very well. They tell you you can't do it. [01:06:00] But when we were first starting as queer reporters out in the street, there was no such thing as, well, we have to maintain our journalistic, you know, objectivity. You go out to a demonstration. You record it for a while. You put away your, your microphone. And then you start demonstrating with the rest of the people. That's what you do. We didn't have any problem knowing how to separate our organizing work from our journalistic work. It came naturally out of necessity.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. Yeah.

Lucia: So we need to draw on the, those same kinds of skills again, and let that open us up to this whole new idea of where do you get, where do you get news? Do you get it from the *New York Times*? Or do you get it from the [01:07:00] XYZ organization? And then how do you bring that voice? How do you bring that voice forward? And then how do you participate? And then I'm not only participating as, as an activist, but I'm also trying to participate as a minister who

brings healing and hope into the situation and gospel truth as well as journalistic truth. And, you know, I'm trying to do all of that. And where it goes...when 2024 ends and 2025 begins, I'm open to see how it happens. Because we're in for some, [01:08:00] we're in for some difficult times.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. Definitely. Could you explain the timeline of becoming a pastor and a minister?

Lucia: Okay. I experienced a call to the ministry. And it was, it was at the LA church, before the church burned down.

Okay.

Lucia: Like, shortly before the church burned down, or was burned down. Let me be very specific-- before the church was burned down by someone. I was praying at the altar rail and I received a call to ministry. And my [01:09:00] friends told me, well, you know, 'cause think I had not, I had not graduated yet because we're talking about early '73. So that would be like a few months before my graduation.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: My friends, you know, calm down, you know, you're really excited. You need to get finished school. Get a job. Little did they know that I'd get a job at a place that was as driven as religiously in its way. Because Pacifica Radio is a, it was a religion in itself.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: ...and a struggle in itself to keep independent noncommercial radio alive. There were times we went without paychecks. We, [01:10:00] you had to really believe in it. So that was as bad as being in church. *[laughs]* But then a few months later I did actually start school and became a student clergy. I'm going to the MCC seminary.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And I graduated in '77 and got my license as a, as clergy in '77. And then I was on staff with the church in West Hollywood, and also the church in Santa Monica.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: I was, you know, did several things on the district level, like the racism task force and on the Fellowship level as well, had those [01:11:00] jobs. So I kind of, you know, was rising through the ranks that way.

Tarchithaa: Okay.

Lucia: I think, I guess the biggest thing was DeColores, the women's church because that was, that's where we all got to be heretics. That was fun. I loved being a heretic.

Tarchithaa: It seemed really cool and I, I'm surprised I haven't, I feel like when I looked up stuff like I didn't see much about that online. So I was really, I'm surprised maybe I might have to just like Google the name of the church maybe and like see, see if I can get anything.

Lucia: You won't find a lot of that stuff. That's why I'm writing a book. Because...

Tarchithaa: Yeah. That's really cool. Are you actively writing a book now? Like to?

Lucia: Yeah, yeah.

Tarchithaa: Yeah?

Lucia: I'm actually writing a book.

Tarchithaa: Oh my god. Wow. Congratulations. That's huge.

Lucia: I'm working on it. I'm, I'm with a wonderful little writing group called [01:12:00] Lezerati, a few lesbians who get, we are writing and I'm doing a book, it's kind of part memoir, but really its point is to be a collection of the lesbian feminist liturgies and songs and, you know, things that we did in DeColores. 'Cause really that whole lesbian feminist church thing was To seriously, and I mean seriously, reimagine Christianity in a whole different way. Because speaking of spirituality, we're all these young women involved in the women's music scene. Going to the women's music festivals out in Yosemite. You know, 5,000 naked lesbians running in the woods. [laughs] [01:13:00] And we, we experienced that spirituality, the spirituality of women being together, the spiritual and the writing that was going on...Mary Daly and Sally Gearhart and all those amazing writers who are opening up our minds. And we knew that our Christian spirituality felt the same as the women's spirituality, but the words were wrong.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: It was the same spirit, but the words were just all wrong and the focus was just all wrong. So we started tearing that apart, reimagining the focus and rewriting all the words. And one of the key access points was to take old hymns and twist the [01:14:00] words around to a new way.

Tarchithaa: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. Oh my God, that's really cool. Yeah.

Lucia: And then again, we were heretics. The gay boys all thought we were heretics. A lot of them did, I mean. Okay, let me tell you one more story. We were having this, there was a, no, it was the board, the Board of Home Missions on the district. It was all of the ordained clergy living within a district.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: This part of the country in Southwest, this, we had, they were like 30 or 40, maybe.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: It was huge. compared to other places. I had just written an article about DeColores that was published in a new Los Angeles women's magazine [01:15:00] and the title of it was Christomorphosis. I was saying, you know, women are changing the church.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: On Tuesday, I was at a meeting with the people on the board that published the magazine where they were, they went nuts about how no feminist publication should ever have an article about religion. And then, you know, this was a horrible thing and how dare they put Christianity in the feminist magazine and oh...that's Tuesday. On Saturday we go, I go to the Board of Home Missions and the guys are [mimics] "Christomorphosis, please explain." And they were like, [laughs] so we were like, you know, the fascists hated us, and the [01:16:00] Christians, the gay Christians hated us, and we're, so we must have been doing something right, right? Oh my gosh, they were just ripping us...and Troy Perry walked in. And I knew it. I saw him coming because he had that look on his face like he wasn't going to take any nonsense.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And he just, he told them, said that he had just come from the National Council of Churches meeting where the National Council of Churches had refused MCC membership because they said that being queer wasn't a good enough reason to start a church, so we weren't a good, that wasn't a good enough rationale.

Tarchithaa: Yeah, yeah.

Lucia: You're saying to these women the exact same thing. You're saying to these women that being women isn't a good enough [01:17:00] rationale.

Tarchithaa: That's insane because I'm also like, definitely correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm assuming that there was a queer woman who were involved in this, you know, I mean, including you. So at that point, it's just like, and I've witnessed this, it's just like, misogyny within the queer community, you know what I mean? It's like, oh, here we are for gay liberation and like, gay spirituality, but if you are a woman in any capacity or any sort of femininity, it's sort of immediately shut down. So it's, it's, I mean, it's just sad to hear that, like that was how it was taken when this is work that could have, that did, you know, like in light and bring together a lot of people. Yeah, this is, this is fascinating.

Lucia: You wouldn't believe some of the stuff. You wouldn't believe some of the stuff. I mean, like, holy moly, really? [01:18:00] So yeah, I mean, I just, I wanted to tell that story to say, you know, what we were doing was huge.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: Nobody knew about it.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. I'm really glad you're writing this book with your, with your peers. I think it's, it's gonna be huge. I'm really excited to to read it when it's out. So, yeah.

Lucia: I should live so long. And yeah, and God, again, who knows what's gonna happen in 2025 if we'll still be here. Or if we'll be underground, you know, writing our books in, in prison cells while, you know, in the margins of newspapers like Martin Luther King and the letter from a Birmingham jail.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: But that's why we have to do it now.

Tarchithaa: Yeah. No, I thank you for like taking that risk. [01:19] And like doing the work that you do, cause you know, it definitely has an impact on the younger people like who are coming up like I just hearing you talk about this is very sort of just affirming and I'm sure a lot of people let you know, but I'm letting you know that. Yeah, this is this is really crucial work that people look up to and like base their foundations on. So thank you.

Lucia: Well, listen, if, if I can give you what people have given me, I mean, another friend of mine and I said, yeah, we were like, you know, little kids running around the feet of giants and just soaking up everything we could.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: If I can, if I can be that for somebody else, then it's all worth it.

Tarchithaa: Thank you. That's beautiful. Really profound. Um, what advice would you have for young, BIPOC queer youth as an elder?[01:20:00]

Lucia: Trust yourself. Trust yourself. Trust yourself. Trust yourself. You know better than anybody else. And while those of us who are older and have gone through a lot of stuff may be able to, you know, give you some tips and like--oh, you know, we tried it this way. You've got to figure it out, you've got to figure it out. So trust yourself. If we're going to save this world, if we're going to save this planet, it's on you.

Tarchithaa: Yeah.

Lucia: And you know how, you know how, if you get like stuck and go, oh my gosh, I can't figure it out, come and ask us, you know, for a little help or, you know, a little, oh, you know, brainstorming or soundboard or [01:21:00] whatever, but it's in you.

Tarchithaa: Thank you. Thank you for meeting with me today. It's genuinely been a joy. Yeah, thank you for all the work that you do.

End of interview.