Tuck: [Popwink](https://www.popwink.co/products/trans-healthcare-saves-lives) is a trans-owned sticker club and art shop. Sticker club members get to vote on the theme every single month. Recent sticker club themes have included: unhinged Barbie summer, cryptids and aggressive affection. Sticker club plans start at just $5 per month and shipped for free worldwide. Use the code GENDER20 for 20% off your first order or your first six months of sticker club at popwink.co.

[Intro music]

Tuck: Welcome to Gender reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I'm your host, and Resident Gender Detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Intro ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone, hope you've all been hanging in there. This week on the show I'm very excited to share my conversation with writer Lucy Sante. Lucy has recently been on a whirlwind press tour for her latest book which is a transition memoir called [*I Heard Her Call My Name*](https://bookshop.org/p/books/i-heard-her-call-my-name-a-memoir-of-transition-lucy-sante/20082883?ean=9780593493762). In the last few days she has been profiled, reviewed, and or deadnamed in seemingly every major US publication, including Vogue, Vulture, Slate, Elle, The Boston Globe, The Washington Post, the New Republic, the LA Times and of course, the New York Times, but we don't subscribe to the New York Times here. We only subscribe to Grindr’s fifth favorite podcast of 2022! So here we are. In this week's episode Lucy tells us how she finally allowed herself to transition after avoiding it for nearly 60 years. She also talks about working at the Strand, reading trans news in the Village Voice in the 1970s, and experiencing this spoooookkkyy encouunterrr!

Lucy: That was like you know the ghost of Christmas past or whatever, it was terrifying.

Tuck: Who's it gonna be? Guess you’re gonna have to listen and find out! But before we get to that, it's time for This Week In Gender.

[This Week In Gender intro chimes]

Just a heads up, this segment is once again about Cecilia Gentili and the service that took place last Wednesday. In the spirit of Cecilia’s ability to create humor out of darkness, I would actually describe the segment's tone as uplifting, playfully fun, but if you think that this will give you big feelings and you're not in a space to have big feelings right now, jump ahead seven minutes.

Close your eyes, and imagine this. You are at St. Patrick's Cathedral in midtown Manhattan. If you are not familiar with St. Patrick's, it is the largest Gothic Revival Catholic Cathedral in North America. It is the seat of the Archbishop of New York and hosted memorials for Babe Ruth and Andy Warhol. Five million people visit it every year. Basically, it's a big important fancy historic cathedral. Got it? Okay, the doors open, and in walk maybe 1200 people, maybe more than that. These are people of all ages, genders, races, cultural backgrounds. Many of them are people you might recognize. But mostly, it's important to know that the overwhelming majority of these people are transgender. And these transgender people are serving absolute cunt. By which I mean, the dress code was literally ‘Fabulous and Cunt’. We're talking veils, keffiyehs, keffiyeh veils. We’re talking tops that say things like ‘God Is Trans’, and ruffles made out of fake $100 bills. We're talking harnesses, we're talking red silk, we're talking lavender sequins. We're talking black funereal mesh. There are 1,000 mourning transsexuals in St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the titties. Are. Out. But wait, who else is here? Is it the pastoral staff of the St. Patrick's Cathedral, who were rightfully not informed in advance about the transgenderism of it all? Absolutely. So imagine this. The priest welcomes everyone in his fancy purple robes. He makes a joke like ‘Hey, other than Easter Sunday, we normally don't have this good of a turnout!’ and the crowd laughs, and then the crowd cheers, and then they all stand up and start chanting:

[Clip: An amplified voice calls out, ‘Cecilia!’, and one thousand voices answer back: ‘Cecilia!’ The call and response continues, increasing in volume and emotion]

Tuck: And thus begins what I have to assume is one of the most surreal, historic, chaotic, beautiful hours in the history of St. Patrick's Cathedral, possibly Catholicism at large. Imagine a priest trying to do basic call and response stuff during prayer and people just… not doing it. Imagine a different priest singing Ave Maria, and someone in the audience decides actually, I'm just going to make this a duet. And I'm going to sing it ‘Ave Cecilia’, and I'm going to sing so so so beautifully and totally upstage this priest, and then I will dance beautifully down the aisles as everyone cheers for me. Imagine the sound reverberating off the stained glass and the stone arches and the big gold spires as 1,000 grieving transexuals shout ‘Cecilia, Cecilia, Cecilia’. There's one part I'm not going to ask you to imagine. I'm just gonna play it for you. You may have seen it on Instagram already. We're gonna listen to it again. This is Liaam Winslet and Oscar Diaz, and every time you hear cheering, please remember that the standing ovation was actually much longer and we just cut it down for time.

[Clip of an amplified voice speaking Spanish]

Esta puta…esta *gran* puta [Cheering and applause] Esta puta, gran puta, esta Santa Cecilia, la madre de todas las putas, hoy te decimos ‘Hasta pronto’. Danos fuerza y coraje para continuar tu legado, hacer frente a los retos, seguir firme por lo que sabemos que merecemos amor, igualidad, y lo mismo derechos de una vida digna. [Cheering and applause]

[Another amplified voice speaks, translating the previous speaker’s words]

This whore... [Cheering and applause] This GREAT WHORE…Saint Cecilia….Mother of All Whores…. [Cheering] Today we say, ‘We see you soon’, and that you will give us the strength, the courage, to continue your legacy, to continue to the challenges ahead, to remain steadfast because we know what we deserve. Love, equity, the same rights, and a life of dignity! [Cheering and applause]

[End clip]

Tuck: When you hear mainstream cis reporters and other cis people talking about this event, you'll probably hear them discuss whether this is a good and important step forward for the Catholic Church, especially at a time when transgender rights are under attack by the religious right. And here's the thing: it doesn't matter. It's not about them! It's great that we were welcomed. They didn't kick us out in the middle of the service. But we weren't *invited*. The priests didn't say ‘Hey, all you glamorous fruits! Why don't you step right up to the pulpit in your funereal mesh and talk about Esta Gran Puta?’ Trans people did that. Specifically, trans women and femmes of color did that. They organized the event, they brought water, they brought masks, they brought red flowers. Trans people were not afraid, and trans people were not ashamed, trans people made the space safe and comfortable for each other, trans people showed up for each other. It is *nice* that the priests did not go off script to misgender anybody, but queer and trans people were the ones who celebrated Cecilia as the person she actually was. Trans people went into the seat of the Archbishop of New York and shouted praises for our St Cecilia, Mother of All Whores. I cannot adequately describe the feelings that I felt at that moment, but I know that I will hold on to it in my heart for the rest of my life. And I'm very glad that I got this chance to try to share it with you, so. Thank you for listening and for holding that moment with me. Cecilia, Cecilia, Cecilia.

[Clip of the call and response from earlier fades in]

Cecilia! [Crowd responds] Cecilia! Cecilia! [Crowd responds] Cecilia!

[Clip fades out]

Tuck: This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week In Gender outro chimes]

Tuck: By the way, I didn't want to ruin the vibe of the segment by talking about links all of a sudden, but just so you know, there is a full video of Cecilia’s service available on YouTube. You can also donate to the Cecilia Gentili legacy fund at bit.ly/CeciliasLegacyFund. And speaking of her legacy, the church did put out a statement on Saturday about the scandalous behavior at the service. And I'll link to it in the show notes if you want to look at it… or you can just mind your business and not worry about them.

Anyway, we've got a TheyMail for you today. TheyMails are little messages from listeners, there is a link in the show notes for you to submit your own. This week's message is from Helen Robertson and it says: Navigating life transitions and developing systems to meet your unique goals, gender related or otherwise, can be frustrating and lonely. That's why Helen, a trained and certified coach, created Tiny Parade Coaching. They provide client centered online coaching with a Pay What You Can fee structure.Contact Helen via tinyparadecoaching.com and mention Gender Reveal for a free session.

Tuck: Okay, one more quick ad and then we’ll get to the interview. Here we go.

[ad music plays]

Tuck: Believe it or not, I'm a pretty private person. I don't like to share intimate details with people I just met, I certainly don't want strangers to be able to look up my home address, or my family members names, or any other personal info really. And that's why I continue to use DeleteMe. DeleteMe routinely scans hundreds of data broker websites to make sure that my personal information is not easily available online. DeleteMe can also scrub info like deadnames and other aliases. You can join today at joindeleteme.com/GenderReveal and use the code Tuck20 to get 20% off your entire order that is Tuck20 for 20% off to joindeleteme.com/GenderReveal.

[Gender Reveal main segment intro music plays]

Tuck: Lucy Sante is a Belgian born writer. She is the author of books on cities such as *Lowlife* and *The Other Paris*, books on photography like *Evidence* and *Folk Photography*, and books on youth, music, and Bohemia, including *Kill All Your Darlings* and *Maybe The People Would Be The Times.*

[music ends]

Tuck: The way we always start the show is by asking in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Lucy: I’m a transgender female, trans woman.

Tuck: Perfect.

Lucy: I don't care much about labels.

Tuck: Yeah. In your newest book, you write near the beginning that you identify as a Bohemian, and I wanted to ask what that meant to you?

Lucy: You know, it's a mode of living that existed probably started the beginning of the 19th century, and lasted until… as a viable thing. it lasted until the end of the 20th century. So two centuries of people who kind of lived by their whits in the midst of an urban setting, usually without holding down 40 hour jobs and in general not conforming to the sociological standards of their time. You know, so it allowed for a great deal of variety among human beings. It was mostly artists, maybe 95% artists. Basically this lasted as long as there were cheap sections of town to live in. And that ended, well, began ending, in the 80s. But it was really at the end of the 90s struck the decisive blow. It's no longer possible to find a place where you can be cool paying cheap rent in exchange for, you know, cockroaches or whatever. And that just killed it. So basically Bohemians then, you know, became bourgeois or became job holders, or, you know, became homeless.

Tuck: Yeah, so much of your work is about your time in the city decades ago, and I just moved to New York City in the last few years. And so obviously, nothing you're describing is how it is anymore. If people want to learn more about New York in the past many decades, they can obviously read your work, they can read *Lowlife*, but I was curious what you think that the current wave of young people in the city, particularly queer artists, and writers alike should know about the history of the city and has it was when you experienced it?

Lucy: Well, you know, when I started thinking about writing *Lowlife*, it was about the mid 80s. And the stuff was already starting to be destroyed. And I felt a deep connection to these buildings and half of which were ruins. But they were the past and they seen all these people come through. In my building, this tenement on the Lower East Side, built 1902, one of the victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire lived in my building. So it had seen all these lives, all these different kinds of people, immigrants and artists, junkies, you know, and it felt important for me to preserve that and felt like, you know, I came from the same soil because I lived in the same place and it's hard to have that kind of feeling exactly when you're living in a high rise that was built in 1994. But nevertheless, there are a whole sections of the city where that's still true. I mean, the place where, you know, I stay when I'm in the city is in West Harlem, and Hamilton Heights is really good housing 19th century, late 19th, early 20th. And it seems important there, you know, they're you're like connected to all the centuries of history. I don't know, to me this is essential knowledge, but that's the way I experienced place.

Tuck: You said in another interview, that sometimes you worry that you live too much in the past because that's where you're from, but you know the present is harder to reckon with. I'm curious if that changed in any way since you transitioned.

Lucy: Well, that's an interesting question. It has and it hasn't. See the thing is I'm pretty isolated. I really only have a handful of trans friends. And there's there are few who are my age, but I've known a number of young trans people in their mid 20s. Partly because until recently, I was teaching at Bard College. And my guide, my Virgil through the experience was my friend Lior who's now I think, 26 and despite the fact that she's 43 years younger than me, she was my guide, and she was great. And she understood my references and, you know, she explained hers and really, I understand a lot more about at least young trans people than I did before. You know, there's a lot of stuff like there's a lot of the use of phones, for example, I’m just never gonna go there. I mean, I use my phone, but I don't use it the way young people do it. It's just never gonna happen. I still do a lot of stuff on paper, my calendar, and I'm gonna stay there comfortable with it. I'm not an early adapter. I never have. I'm a late adapter.

Tuck: Yeah, I believe you said that your friend, your guide as you called her, gave you a trans lit reading list. Yeah, I was wondering what you read and what you thought of it.

Lucy:Oh, boy, I you know, I read a lot and there's, well, there's still things I haven't read. I’ll just talk about the ones I really liked. I really liked *Nevada* by Imogen Binnie. That's, with my tongue partly in my cheek but not really, I called it the *On the Road* of trans literature. And I love the writings of Andrea Long Chu. I think she's really badass. And I love the fact she's so deliberately perverse. It's really great. And Paul Preciado of course, his *Report to an Academy* or whatever its actual title is, that is a killer. That's like the best thing. And then among classic trans literature, I talked in my book about this 1966 novel called *I Want What I Want* by Jeff Brown, which really really hit me on all the emotional places, in part because there's certain similarities and background between the subject and me, partly because it's so beautifully written. And that's all it was crucial for me, something has to be well written. And then my favorite trans celebrity autobiography is April Ashley's *Odyssey*. She died just a couple of years ago. She started transitioning in her teens, I think, and immediately went to France, she's British, she went to France and played on the circuit, and Le Carousel and Madame Rosa. And she went so far. She then she went back to England and she married a barronet in a church ceremony, and she was outed at the divorce trial, but she lived to tell the tale. She lived very well and her book is hilarious. And you know, she's like throwing shade, but in a nice way. You know, you can tell she's a nice person with a wicked wit. You know, I really appreciate April actually, she was a role model for sure.

Tuck: You said you read *Nevada.* What was it like to learn that one of the most famous trans girl novels is also about working at the Strand?

Lucy: [Laughs] Well, it did not surprise me because over the years I've noticed several obviously trans employees there. I still go to the Strand like once a month at least even.

Tuck: Do you feel like the vibe has changed dramatically the way the vibe of the city has changed?

Lucy: Oh my god. Definitely. I'm sorry, but the owner is a terrible person.

Tuck: No, you're right.

Lucy: I don't want to be sued for libel or anything like that. But I worked with her father and her grandfather, neither of whom I liked very much, but they cared about books. She does not care about books. She does not care about employees. She does not care about New York City. She really doesn't care about books. I mean, it's and now they sell new books, which is never the case in my day except review copies and sometimes British imports. And that de-emphasizes the old books. I got some of the best books I've ever gotten, they use to have a table of like, new acquisitions from libraries right up there by the cash registers. And there's no trace of anything like that. It's like you're not supposed to notice that they deal in old books because it's all about the young, who will buy a tote bag and and a copy of… I don't want to go there. [Laughs] It's like this mass thing. It reminds me of going, the summer I was in Portugal, I was in Porto, and there's this old 19th century bookstore there that I really wanted to go to. Unfortunately, it was used in some Harry Potter movie, and now they charge admission and there's a line around the block. So Americans like get rid of bookstores but fetishize them, which is usually the way Americans deal with things, right?

Tuck: Well, I really wanted to ask you about memoir because I read a lot of memoirs for work as you can guess, including a lot of memoirs by really young trans people who are already writing memoirs, I have so many thoughts about them, and I really enjoyed running into your thoughts on memoir while I was researching, can you talk about how those opinions on memoir influence the way you approached your own memoirs, and what you were trying to avoid, ir try to do differently?

Lucy: Okay, two things that just come to mind right away. One of them is this course I described in my book, this course that I was in with my girlfriend, her ex boyfriend, and my ex girlfriend and her new boyfriend. Right and we were all in this class, it was called “Autobiography in the 19th century,” which predates the 19th century because it starts with Augustine, and then Rousseau, and then all these British people, all British men, wtih like really anguished pasts. All of them were shouldering this burden of becoming eminent Victorians. And you know, my working title for my book was *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, an apology for my life, but which is the title of John Henry Cardinal Newman's autobiography. So I inherited a certain kind of sense of decorum from those people, I think, and also, the laying bare. I mean, if you’ve never read Rousseau’s *Confessions*, it's shocking. It's body conscious, and power conscious and obsessive. I mean, it seems very modern in certain ways.

And so there's that, and then the other thing was that I just retired recently after about 27 years in total. And I was always teaching you know, like creative nonfiction. And what does that mean? Much of it involves memoir it wasn't always straight memoir. Sometimes it was writing the memoir of one's mother, or of one's hometown or whatever. But really, it was variations on memoir. And I never called a course that, although I did my second year at Bard, I thought I try teaching a class on alternative autobiography or something like that. I was trying to promote literary approaches to autobiography, you know, like there's this book by a Swiss Fluxus artist from the early 60s named Daniel Spoerri, It's called *An Anecdoted Topography Of Chance* and he's a Paris bohemian in the early 60s. All he does in this book is draw a schematic of his breakfast table, and label every single object on it and tell the story of that object. And usually there's a whole story connected to every single thing. This is my friend, and so and so who came from Greece bearing this, you know, on and on. And *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* by Peter Handke, his memoir after his mother's death, which is just one of the great books period.

And it's interesting, I tried writing memoir when I was a teenager. In my first two years of college, I had all these stories to tell, and just didn't do it very well. It was something that just did not satisfy me. I didn't do anything with them, except then I wrote them like 20 or 30 years later, and then I had a handle on them. I'm not saying that's going to be true with all young people. I'm a late bloomer in every conceivable way as evidenced by who I am. So that's another way, I mean, I think I'm slow at gestating or something. But in any case, I'm not saying that you can't wait write memoir when you're young. I'm just saying I was not able to do it very well. I just didn't have the remove. But maybe that's the wrong approach. Maybe you just need to be punk rock about it and, you know, hit it straight on. Don't wait for the reflection. Just hit it. You know, I couldn't be persuaded by that argument.

Tuck: Maybe! I mean, I've seen you say something about how sometimes memoirs come across as a little bit of therapeutic exercises, and I can't say that I terribly disagree, but yeah, maybe everyone's publishing their therapy now. [Laughs] I don't know.

Lucy: Yeah. I mean, the thing is, you know, intrinsically, I mean, it can be shallow, and it doesn't bother me. What does bother me, and this pervades the industry from top to bottom, and that's the use of pre-cooked language, which to me is the grossest thing available in the supermarket, which is pre-cooked bacon, I still can't believe that exists. It's like that. It's like everybody consults the manual, and how to describe themselves, how to characterize relationships, how to – No! Find your own goddamn language. Can't you do that? The words that are actually you know, exist in the back of your throat. And it's fear, you know, it's fear and also signaling because people are lonely, and they're the only one in their little town and wherever. So there's that but even so, you've got to use your own language. You’ve got to use your words, as your mother told you once, you know?

Tuck: Absolutely. Speaking of being the only trans person, you said that early on you thought that you were the only trans person in the world at some point, although you wound’t have known the word ‘trans’. Do you remember the first instances where you realized that that wasn't the case? Like you saw other trans people?

Lucy: Well, it happened by degrees because I remember, sooner or later in American culture, post war period, you're going to encountered Christine Jorgensen. And that probably happened to me when I was 11, or something like that. So I had intimations of my transness by that point for at least a year, year and a half, or two years. And that was really something that kind of shook me. And then I filtered like a thread of things coming in to my cultural purview. Like for example, there would be the occasional story in the local newspaper, which in those days was the Newark Evening News out of Newark, New Jersey. And I remember, you know, a story about this distressed wife whose husband had just vanished one day, and she put out an APB on him and he was – *she* was found working the ticket booth of a porn theater in Florida wearing a pink shift and ribbons in her hair. I remember this almost verbatim, you know, how old was I when I read that like 12, 13? And I understood it, but I didn't understand it. And it was real in the sense of it was in the newspaper, but also unreal in the sense that it was in the newspaper. You know what I mean?

And then I well, I started going to high school in New York City when I was 14, and I started buying the Village Voice. It's funny. I've been doing research for a book about the 60s and I'm reading Village Voices from 1968 right now. And there's almost nothing gay in those pages. I saw a small ad for a homophile discussion group. But it's really true that Stonewall changed everything. And from there on in, I was reading in the Voice, as I was commuting to my Jesuit High School in Manhattan, about you know, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, the Street Transvestites Action Resistance. And what the hell was this all about? I mean, this is another planet I’m suddenly glimpsing through my porthole window, you know, blew my mind. Then I started seeing trans people on the street. Oh my god. This was the vision I had when I was living on the Upper West Side after college, and so it's like ‘77 or something like that. There was the Whitehall hotel on 100th Street and Broadway, which is one of the biggest SROs in New York City. I remember going by there one day and seeing four trans women in bouffants and big hoop earrings and mini dresses, doing perfect four-part doo-wop harmony. And that *totally* blew my mind. As far as personal connections, I was close friends with Nan Goldin. I knew her before Greer Lankton became her roommate. And I’d see Greer around, and I’d see Teri Toye around. But I was terrified of them. Because I constantly found myself on the precipice, and the precipice was transition. I couldn't do it because I liked girls, and I wanted to be a writer. I didn't want to be a professional trans woman, if you know what I mean.

Tuck: I absolutely do. I have a lot of thoughts on how the medical system mandated that every trans person pretend to be heterosexual and how it set everyone back a long time, but I’ll save those, but instead.... You said that you transitioned more than 50 years after you had an inkling of your gender and I know that in the memoir, you cited the inciting incident being like gender swapping photos, but I feel like there has to be something that allowed you to switch from the mentality of like, I want this but I'm terrified of it and I can't have it, to I want this and I am going to do it, and I am going to give myself the space to transition. I was wondering where you feel like that ability to allow yourself to want that and and have it came from?

Lucy: Well, this was a revelation a week or two ago. It’s not in the book, because the book was written over a year ago, but I figured out the mechanics of it anyway. So I passed some pictures through FaceApp and it gave me this picture of a looking woman who was unmistakably me and it freaked me out. Then I thought, let me see what I might have looked like in the past when I was younger and more beautiful. And it was like a massive treasure trove, like hauling out every single picture of me. There aren't a lot because I was always camera shy, but they're scattered, you know, basement to attic and shopping bags and boxes and biscuit tins of photos. And what that did, it turned it into a project and I'm just very susceptible to projects. And furthermore, I didn't realize this until as I say very recently. What it did was it broke something. And that something was I always have a time limit on my fantasizing. If it went for much more than an hour at the time, I would kill it. And that's how I kept the repression in place. And because it became this project, it took days, and that worked through the time limit. So that's the mechanical aspect of it anyway, you know, I think that it happened when it did… well, my ex suggested it was because I finally felt comfortable enough to do it. And I finally think yeah, she had a point. That's exactly what it was. I felt comfortable. You know, we just gone through the lockdown year and come through it very happily. We had a great year, it was cozy. We weren't having sex, but we were like, partners, you know, and I knew, I did know in advance that transitioning would cost me this wonderful relationship. It was agonizing, but I had to recognize that it was the stronger thing.

Tuck: Yeah, and I think that's really good for people to hear because we do get a lot of advice questions and so many advice questions boil down to ‘should I never transition to make my partner happy’ or ‘should I transition only this much to make my partner happy’ and I think it's always helpful for people to hear like, you can't live your entire life to save a relationship even if it is so good, unfortunately. So you just mentioned the photos. Can you talk about the approach you took to photos in this new memoir because there's such a strong trope of trans people having to provide before photos for writing and for a second when I first opened the book I was like ‘oh, we're doing that,’ and then I was like, ‘Wait, we're not doing that at all’. So can you talk about what you did?

Lucy: Okay, so there are 11 FaceApp photos in the book. I started with pictures of myself as a toddler, little kid, and then when I'm 11, and it actually started at least a year year or two before that, but that's the first picture that is the first transgendered photo. Then they're all you know, FaceApp photos. Until the last like couple of which are straight pictures of me. And there is a before and after one in there, because it's a really super ugly picture of the previous me and where it comes from was my first summer transitioning, 2021, I was watching the Andy Warhol diaries, and then suddenly, bang, there I am. Angry you know, bald me the summer of 2020. I’d completely forgotten I've been interviewed for that. And there I am whose that was like, you know, the ghosts of Christmas past or whatever. It was terrifying. So I had to, you know, to acknowledge this.

Tuck: You know, we ask so many people on this podcast what it's like to have an archive of their work online, you know, whether that's writing memoir, and it's an archive about their life or just, you know, other work that they've done. And you're I think one of the most prolific people we've ever had on the show, so this is especially true for you, but what is it like for you to have this archive of your work over various parts of your life as a writer and as a person out there, especially as someone who like transitioned after you wrote so much?

Lucy: Well, I mean, I’m glad I wrote that stuff. Would I have written it the same way if I transitioned early? I mean, every time I started thinking about what my life would have been like if I transitioned when I was 16, and quickly the path diverges from life so quickly that then becomes pure fiction. I can't like, do a parallel track. So yeah, I mean, I wrote that stuff. I don't deny any of it. I think some of it is better than others of it, but I stand by it. I mean, there probably are a few things that I wish weren't there, but not too many generally. And I was really vicious when I was younger, because in my 20s I mostly purged the work of my teen years. I kept very few things. And then when I was in my 30s I did the same thing with work from my 20s But since then, you know, I've learned a thing or two. I've certainly done boring work, but I don't think I've done anything really bad. So yeah, that's cool. My line early on used to be ‘my deadname will never die’ and I sure hope it doesn't because you know, you need to move the back stock.

Tuck: I mean, people have been really good about updating it though. I was looking at your name at various libraries to get books and they were all updated. So that was nice.

Lucy: When I came out on Instagram, somebody had changed my Wikipedia entry within like, five minutes.

Tuck: My friend Sabrina Imbler is one of the first people to introduce me to your work. They're also a Gender Reveal guest, and I asked them if they had any questions for you, and I think this goes perfectly with what you just were talking about. They were asking, if you feel like transition changed the way you write about yourself and if you feel like you're more able to be a character in the worlds that you're writing about?

Lucy: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean, one thing, you know, it's hard to find a line between the effects of transitioning and the effects of… there's a certain amount number of changes that have occurred, simply because of the release of the secret that had crippled me for 60 years. You know, that it’s not exactly like gender related, it's just I've had this hanging around my neck for all this time, and it's finally loose, and I want to run. What it's done is made me absolutely frank about absolutely everything else. I have nothing to hide. I mean, what am I afraid of? Well, you know, I'm afraid of a bunch of real world scenarios. But as a writer, I'm not afraid of anything. And this is new, and I wasn't even really aware of just how repressed I was when I was repressed. You know, as is often the case. And now, well, I'm a lot less shy. I'm still a loner. You know, I will still hover in the background and stuff. I'm still very minimal about my emotional expression, which I think is an ethnic trait, it’s just the Walloon in me, but it kind of amazes me how I get down to brass tacks so much faster, because I'm not apologizing. Because I felt like you know, my male life was all me apologizing for myself. In fact, I had people tell me this, ‘Quit saying I’m sorry!’

Tuck: This is just a craft question. Your memoir, your new memoir, doesn't have chapters, it just goes. How did you choose that format for this?

Lucy: Well, this was something that happened very soon when I started seriously thinking about this book I knew that I wasn't going to write a straight chronological narrative of my transitioning, I mean, I could kind of do that. But it wasn't a very good narrative. It was just, you know, a series of things that happen. But I had this other narrative, which was the previous 60 years of my life. I didn't want to get into great detail there, but I had to account for the backdrop to account for where I came from, and how I came through it and what the times were like, who my friends were, all that kind of stuff. So then it was a natural next step: two timelines constantly interrupting one another. It's an old technique used by suspense novelists, it's the artificial cliffhanger. It doesn't have to end on a cliffhanger but you're stopped and you wait for this other narrative to pull into the station and you ride that one for a while until you go, etc. So that was a stylistic decision that arrived almost immediately. And I decided to do it in units of, they're not all like this because I certainly didn't start that way, but after a while I decided on seven pagesypeScript pages. And we didn't want to give them titles, and I didn't want to give them numbers. So they just became sections rather than chapters.

Tuck: They kept me going! They did exactly what you said! [Laughs] Many memoirs, probably most memoirs, are so full of these minute details, full dialogue, and I'm always reading those and being like, how do you possibly remember any of this, is this made up, what's going on? And you don't do that, and you also are seemingly pretty honest when you don't know or remember something? You'll just like, say that in the text. How do you approach the subjectivity of memory in your writing? And has anyone ever tried to pressure you to like, put in more dialogue or more of a scene as if you should know?

Lucy: Well, first of all, a lot of people who do that kind of stuff, it's because they're working from journals, from diaries, and I know people have kept diaries since they were preteens. And some of those people are deliberately writing a literary account of their lives. Other people actually never go back and read it at all, because it's just purging. I never did that for a variety of reasons. Among them, though, is the fact that if I wrote down a memory, and this danger, maybe one of the reasons I'm only doing and at the end of my life, if I write down a memory, it becomes the thing that I've written down. It kills it, essentially. Whereas if it's like still a live memory in my head, it's got all these tendrils connected to it. And I could fix on that and I can travel in all these directions, right? It's still a living breathing part of my memory. And also I mean, I want to keep it short. I did not want this to be a long book. And I wanted it to balance against the those other sections which are about the process of my first six months or so transitioning so had to pare it down. And that is a skill that I acquired under my, my old editor and teacher and friend, Barbara Epstein, who I talked about in the book. I wrote the afterword to the 10th anniversary edition of *Lowlife*. And she said, ‘We’ll publish it in the magazine if you cut it by two thirds’. And that was one of the great liberating exercises in my life, and ever since I've given everything subject to that rigor, no excess language, no excess baggy thought or anything like that. Just trim it to the bone. And that's what I do here.

Tuck: I'm so happy to hear you say that. I worked in magazines for seven years, and even when we wrote digital pieces, there was still a word limit. And I have a complaint that there's no word limits these days and everyone just writes way too long because they can! Anyway, speaking of magazines, actually, I loved your bio on your website includes the line ‘magazine work galore back when there were magazines’. And then you also say ‘worked as proof writer at Sports Illustrated until the profession and the corporate gravy train both came to a halt more or less simultaneously at the dawn of the present age, parentheses early 90s’. I was in magazines way past their glory days. They were like collapsing as I left, fully collapsing, but as someone who was there for the heyday and then has freelanced for decades, what do you think will happen next for media in our field because I talk about this a lot with people and yeah, it's bad. [Laughs]

Lucy: I'm not equipped to answer that. I mean, the digital media I barely understand. I don't even know what to read much of the time, there's such a profusion of sites and so much repetition among them and I don’t want to go there.I’m a paper person you know, I always have been, that’s something I'm not going to get rid of. My other horse is I do these collages which are based on printed matter of the last century or so mostly. And that's another link I have. And in 2023, I retired from teaching, and I say this a little provisionally, but I pretty much retired from freelancing. Remains to be seen whether I can afford tokeep not doing that, but I kind of had enough after 42 years of freelancing, partly because I used to be, you know, this is something that happens when you age, you get much less spry and that includes mentally, and this ability I had to rapidly switch from one topic to something completely different on a dime. I'm slowing down there. I'm not able to do that as rapidly. I also got tired of fighting with editors, which never used to be the case. It's really amazing how young editors, not all of them, there are big exceptions, but many young editors of magazines will try to normalize my writing to make it sound more like everything else. That's so weird and counterproductive and police-like of them.

Tuck: I mean, the first couple of years that I was editing, that is what I was doing, because that's what I was taught to do. And it was a very important moment to be like ‘just let people write in their own voice. That's why they're writing it, that’s why you’re not writing it’.

Lucy: That’s why you're reading it, as opposed to reading that other stuff that sounds like it’s generated by AI or something.

Tuck: Yeah. I mean, in my defense, I will say, I was editing sort of baby's first article and not, you know, an incredible writer of many decades, but you know, who knows what I would have done. But speaking of switching to different topics, what are you writing about these days now that your transition memoir has done?

Lucy: Well, the other book in my two book contract, which is, well, it's got a long backstory, but it begins with the fact that I did start out with a big fat contract to write a biography of Lou Reed, which I really didn't want to do at all. So I swapped it for the trans memoir, and then book two which is the Velvet Underground in their 1960s context. So for me, it's about the Velvet Underground, but it's for me even more a chance to write a book about New York City in the 60s. You know, the arts, the demimonde, showbiz, nightlife, the Lower East Side community, which was like 300 people and they all knew each other. I mean, there's so much to write about there. So that's what I'm doing right now. And then after that, I've got one book that's planned out in my head and another one's like, nebulous and surrounded by barbed wire.

Tuck: Is that how you ended up with the title of your memoir, is you were already thinking about the Velvet Underground?

Lucy: That was actually suggested by my friend Mike DeCapite. He was one of my first readers, and I asked all four of my first readers if they could come up with a title and usually that has no results, but Mike fired right back ‘I heard her call my name’, which is perfect.

Tuck: This one is just for me really but, in an interview a few years ago, you said, I'm going to quote you, ‘youth today seems balkanized, splitting themselves into smaller and smaller units and feuding with others over the narcissism of minor differences. This is true with regard to identity politics, but it even extends to music and culture’. Can you talk more about that and specifically, how it extends to music and culture?

Lucy: Well, you know, it's, again, my perspective of somebody who came, came of age in the 60s and 70s when there weren't as many rock bands you know, or not that many recording contracts, you knew all of them. And I could generally become familiar with literature and art and music and movies and what was going on and all those things with a certain slant. You know, which was a left of center, avant garde ish, but not really avant garde, you know, and like urban, nonreligious, and nowadays, it's like the population of any one sub genre seems like it's 20 times bigger than the entire world was when I was young. And even among people my age, there are people who are in, you know, musical subcultures that just seem very distant to me. I don't know it's first of all, I'm a generalist. Big time. I'm a dilettante. You know, I'm proud of it. I don't have any specialty. Any specialization. I've never wanted that. And the thing is that, it gets harder and harder to maintain a certain way. I mean, I can do it because I'm old and eminent, but a young person would find it very difficult. Because, you know, everything in the culture is pointing to narrower and narrower specialization. That's partly because the population I mean, there's so many more of you all than there were of my people, you know, just in terms of demographic, and also ever more this has been the American story from the beginning, but it's reached a crisis, It's not possible to live unless you're making money for the big boys. So, specialization comes into that too. You know, we know where to peg you. As the worker unit in your slot, if you have any economic value, will be determined by your place on the grid. And all of that is just inimical to the way I think, you know. And so I'm, you know, with young people, I'm distressed they have been forced into these defensive crouches, but it's just not a time for expansion. It just doesn't seem like it's, it's a time for duck and cover. I don't know what you know, it's crazy. Sorry not to be more reassuring.

Tuck: But no, you're absolutely right. It's true. And that's why when you said you wanted to be a writer and not a professional trans person, I just nodded really vigorously. You know, that's where trans people are finding themselves especially, I mean, always, but especially when everyone is you know, shunted into a tiny specialty. It's like okay, so my beat is media criticism about trans writing, like tha’s how specific it has to be, it’s very wild. [Laughs] Anyway, you have written so many different books and so many so many articles. If people read *I Heard Her Call My Name*, they're excited to dig into more of your work and they are overwhelmed by the sheer volume, is there a place that you suggest they start, or just like whatever sparks their interest?

Lucy: Well, *Low Life* was my first book and it's still my best seller and I still get mail about it from people and you know, that seems to have struck a chord with a lot of people. So there's that. And then, you know, there's my, it's not my most recent child, but the one just before that, which is a collection of essays, poetry and fiction. They're all in there. Called *Maybe The People Would Be The Times*. A lot of stuff about music, a lot of stuff about youth culture. And particularly, you know, if you want to understand the past, you have to understand its economics. So one of my favorite pieces I've ever written is called “Commerce*”*. And all it is is a series of anecdotes and vignettes about New York, mostly late 70s, and the point they all turn on is financial or the equivalent transactions. So it’s my reduction of Balzac to twelve pages. [Tuck laughs]

Tuck: That actually reminded me, for a split second that I was thinking about your book, you said you thought that *19 Reservoirs* got so much attention because you had transitioned right before, and you were photographed more for that press tour and this press tour than any previous tour in your entire life, and I was wondering if you were able to enjoy it more, because you said you’ve always been camera shy? Or has it been like ‘Oh no, please stop’?[Laughs]

Lucy: I mostly enjoy it, except for later when the pictures come out, they mostly distress me. [Laughs]

Tuck: Fair enough, I understand completely. All right, well, the way we always end the show is by asking: In your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Lucy: Oh, well, it would be like the future of race. Multiple, ever-changing, every little point on that vast spectrum of gender would be represented on your city streets and behind your counters, and on your TV sets and all that. When will that happen? Well, if the human race survives the next fifty years, I think it could happen. [Tuck laughs]

[Outro music begins to play]

Tuck: That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time, or learned anything, please share this episode with folks in your community. You can find Lucy at LucySante.com, and you can of course check out any of her many, many books like *I Heard Her Call My Name* at your local library or bookstore. A list of all the books that Lucy recommends or mentions in this episode will be made available in the show notes. If you would like more Gender Reveal in your life, you can sign up for our bonus podcast Gender Conceal as well as our weekly behind-the-scenes newsletter on Patreon.com/Gender. We are also on Instagram, and at GenderPodcast.com, where we’ve got transcripts of every episode including our Gender Conceal episodes. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman, and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh, our theme song is by BreakMaster Cylinder. Additional music by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feeling about gender. Free Palestine.