

Ceyenne Doroshow (CD) in conversation with Tobias Peper (TP)

- TP Do you want to introduce yourself? Who you are and what you do?
- CD OK, so, I'm Ceyenne Doroshow. I'm a 50-something year old transgender woman and founder of [glitsinc.org](http://glitsinc.org). That's *Gays and Lesbians Living in a Transgender Society*, and I help people on many levels—globally, nationally, in ways that I think make sense when it comes to our community; trying to make sure that people are safe, that they're OK.
- TP When did you found GLITS?
- CD In 2016. And the reason why I founded GLITS was because I got a call from Africa, from a young woman saying that she needed help and that changed my life and her life. I took it real serious. I called the consulate; I did everything I would have to do, and I got her here to the US. And that started everything.
- TP Why did she have to leave her country?
- CD She had been beat up a lot. And it was put in the newspaper—the Red Pepper newspaper in Uganda—along with 50 other community members, basically saying it was OK to kill them. And she was one of the people.
- TP That's horrible.
- CD Yeah, well, I guess in Africa the government has a lot to do with religion and it's barbaric and just terrible to think that's where we are at.
- TP So, is that the kind of help you offer at GLITS? Worldwide, do people who are in trouble or in danger and need to be saved reach out to you?
- CD Yes, yes, that's sad but true. They find out about me usually through social media or a lot of the conferences that I go to. Because of the political whirlwind that we are in now, it's hard for people to get in the country. And that's bad. If someone is trying to take your life you should be able to leave. There's some countries where they kill you and in some countries they put you in jail for life.
- TP Can you tell me how many requests a month you'd have?
- CD In the beginning I would get a request like three, four times a month and that was before they put all the restraints on the government. I've got them from the people from Venezuela, Argentina, Africa—different parts of Africa: Kenya, Nairobi. I have re-located people from New York to the South, from Alabama to Florida—wherever they needed to get out of because they weren't able to sustain. A girl from Berlin, who's a fabulous woman, I just met her, I went to Berghain. She was in shock that she had actually seen me. She was originally from Brazil and they smashed her head on the curb edge. She had to learn how to do everything in her life all over again. She became a refugee and now there's a verdict. And she's striving. I hoped to get her papers changed. In Brazil she could never change her gender marker, which is her ID that says "from male to female". I was able to get to back her up and she now has the correct ID and a passport corrected so she can leave the country when she wants to.
- TP That's so important.
- CD Yeah, we don't think about what we have a lot. But for somebody that has nothing it's hard to even think about.
- TP And in the end it's just basic human rights.
- CD And it's basic humanity. To step in and help somebody is like stepping in and helping your child. You would do anything to protect your child. So why not think, in society, why not make that way your everyday thinking? You know, here in New York it's easy to walk by a homeless person and pay them no money and not think about what got to them and why were they in that position. Before I started doing all of this a couple of my jobs were working with homeless people, working in the shelters and doing things I never thought I would do to make sure that they were able to live.
- TP The ones that you are calling your children, are they people you saved in the past? Who came to you and asked for help?
- CD They are people that were: "You're my mom." They basically requested it, which is very, very beautiful. I have said not once that I want you to be my child. They have all come to me and said: "You're my mom." And that changed my life. I mean, they're all over. And it's a sense—to know what I want to see in their futures. And building community is parenting. It's the essence of what we lost because our families did not understand either our gender identity or our lives.
- TP Do you still remember the first time someone asked you whether you would want to be their mother?
- CD Yeah, it was my daughter Teri who passed away. It was amazing. She was amazing. That was over twenty-something years ago.
- TP By that time, did you ever imagine yourself to be a mother?
- CD No! No, I didn't imagine myself living past 25, no less mentoring and taking such responsibility, and the responsibility to care. I really, really push and push my children to strive for the best, to live in a certain way, to overcome what society is putting in their way.
- TP How would you define a mother? What does it take to be a mother?
- CD A nurturing quality. Anybody can be a parent, not every mother can be a mom. And I say that to state that a lot of parents, a lot of mothers lose sight because they get overwhelmed with their position and with their responsibilities as a mom. I think the number one responsibility is to nurture their child into success, to get them to a place of not only transparency but visibility and strength and those things will guide—especially a sense of advocacy that you can only learn from other lessons in life—what you won't allow and won't tolerate. A lot of that I've learned to see in the women in my life. So, when I transitioned, I transitioned with the thought of what I wanna replicate, the stuff I learned from my mom, my grandmother and my aunt.
- TP So, you found in the beginning your role models in your mother, your grandmother, and your aunt?
- CD Yeah, and just building content and collecting thoughts and memories and they were some of the sweetest things and some of the moments were the hardest things in both of our lives.
- TP When you say both, you mean you and your mother?
- CD Yeah, my mom's and my life. Gender identity wasn't even thought of back then. They were calling transitioning "gender identity dysphoria". I was kinda helping since I was a teenager. I was getting in trouble because I was helping people and maybe I shouldn't have. Well, now here it is, 47 years later I'm still helping people.
- TP And among your children, was it common for them to lose their parents over transitioning?
- CD Some of them have relationships with their parents. Some of them have very jaded relationships with their parents because their parents don't understand the work that we're doing, the self-care that it takes for changing their identity to where they feel comfortable. And most parents again thought the child was doing it to pay them back, which is a terrible thought. Most people transition because they wanna save their lives. They do not feel comfortable in the shoes they're in. It's generally self-preservation, being able to live your own truth.
- TP Over the years, did you see something change for the better? Is it easier today to transition than it was at the time of your youth?

CD I see so many young people transitioning. It’s all these baby trans people that are trending. Now we have that whole umbrella of gender identities, which is amazing and scary. I couldn’t even be transgender. There were no words for it. Now we have gender non-conforming, a whole entire alphabet and a lot of pronouns people don’t understand. But when society—or basically, when white people change certain things that have been going on in society... It took me almost 30 years to get the title of transgender. But who created that word, *transgender*? Oh, probably a white person. Who created all those other genders that we now have to abide by? Certainly not a person of color, but we’re supposed to acclimate to these new ways of being the same way people had to acclimate to stop calling transgender “transvestite” and stuff like that, and “cross dressers”, because that’s what we were called. But now it’s OK to be in a ray of identities. This is how much society has changed. What does it look like for a parent to now have a child that goes by a pronoun they don’t understand?

TP Have you actually ever met a parent of one of your children?

CD Yes! When I first wrote my book *Cooking in Heels* one of the nicest things that happened was a mom reached out to me through social media saying that the book helped her to understand her child better. That some of the lessons I taught about my childhood helped her to see the mistakes she made in her parenting and her and her child now have a relationship that is open.

TP Was she aware that her child also called you a mother?

CD They knew that they were having problems. Her mom just didn’t identify the way a parent would want to. It’s very hard, I guess being a mom and seeing that your child is different. Usually it’s not about the child, it’s about the parent. It’s about the parent’s embarrassment and the parent’s view—not really about the child’s view or how they even feel about their identity. It’s always easy to make a child feel that you feel there’s something wrong.

TP Did you ever have a parent-to-parent conversation?

CD I had many of those.

TP And how do they usually go?

CD Well, it’s a train wreck. [Laughter] So, my godchild, she had a girlfriend—she had a boyfriend and a girlfriend. And I helped her mom accept that and she was able to love her child and support her child no matter where she was at in her identity. And it was really amazing to see that relationship be so open. And that’s kind of the ability, an openness that you want in a relationship.

TP But probably also the hardest to achieve.

CD Yeah, it’s very hard, when you’re a parent, to see that this is not about you, this is about them. And I went through it and suffered it in my own childhood, the insecurities about my gender identity. And if I didn’t believe in myself no matter what, no matter how society treated me, it was other parents that stepped in to help, because my parent did not understand it, and I met some fabulous mentors throughout my life that took the mother role while me and my mom were getting it together.

TP Who was the first person you met as a mentor that you called a mother?

CD The first person I met was Flawless Sabrina. And that shifted and changed and built my life, the basis of the work that I do. My first job that I got, my first real job, was because of that advice that I got from Flawless. At that time I was homeless, I was living in a shelter, and the ability to be able to get out of the shelter—I was attacked many times in the shelter, even by my own community, because I wasn’t the norm. I wasn’t loud and abrasive, I wasn’t tacky. So that must’ve been looking like oh, I think I’m better than them. No, it was the way I was raised. It wasn’t being better than anybody. It was knowing what I was worth even in those bad situations. I was still worth dignity and believing in myself.

TP And in that time you met Flawless Sabrina?

CD Yeah, I met Flawless, I was a teenager. I met Flawless while I was going through some homelessness. I was with my girlfriend named Ronnie Persadally. And Ronnie lived on 53rd Street and

3rd Avenue. She took me out. She wanted me to go dancing with her. It was either I go dancing with her or I’d be in the streets. And, yeah, I chose dancing. I was tired and cold, it was in the winter. And there was this old person in a football jersey and a blond bob. Not a blond bob, a silver bob, completely silver, just dancing their little heart out. So, that intrigued me to see them dance half the night. And they kept looking at me, keeping an eye on me and finally, it was like last call and I went to the bar with my girlfriend to get our last drink and Flawless actually walked to me and asked us what were we doing when we left the bar. And I thought that was peculiar. We’ll see, this old lady still wants to go. We ended up going to Ronnie’s house until about six in the morning and then Flawless said, “I need you to come over to my house. We can still continue to party but come to my house because I have a very important phone call.” And I thought she was calling friends. I had no idea who she was, no idea that she was famous and I really didn’t care. I was happy to meet somebody that wasn’t trying to hurt me. Within hours we realized that this was not just an ordinary person. She had respect and responsibility in New York City. Well, it turned out during the conversation she was having on her very important phone call that her brothers were Godfrey Diamond and Gregg Diamond of RCA Records. She never said anything to us. She just started talking on this phone call, we were over-listening. And it was a beautiful conversation about changing the laws and rights for people in France. You know, she was a part of that conversation. And then I looked down on the floor and I thought she had a cat, must’ve been a huge cat—there’s hair all over the carpet. Well it turned out that beautiful bob that she had on her head was a wig that she glued to her head.

TP Ouch!

CD Yeah, it was cement glue, imagine. We also watched her taking this wig off her head. And, oh my God, she transformed before our eyes, or de-transformed before our eyes. We hung out for a little while longer and then it was time for us to go and she said: “You call me no matter what. I want to know everything that you’re doing.” One night I called her, I was not having a good time, it was kind of awful, and I needed that, I needed that... A couple of weeks later, because I knew it was close to her and I knew it was safe, I was in Central Park because once again I was homeless and she was walking through, walking her dog—I think her mom’s dog—and she sees me and is like, “What are you doing?” And I said, “I’m about to go to sleep”, and she was like, “No, you come to my house.” She took me to her house and took me to upstate New York where I slept like I hadn’t slept in a very long time, comfortably, in her mom’s house. It taught me a lot. I got rest. I was suffering with some problems of addiction and she just guided me. Guided me and tried to take me back home to my mom. That’s a parent! That’s a parent, she could’ve gotten shot, anything could have happened, taking a black, young, definitely identifying as something else obviously, home to their house to explain gender identity.

TP So, she did go to your mom’s house with you?

CD Yeah, took me all the way back to Brooklyn in her beat-up station wagon. It was priceless. But, you know, she did her best efforts to make sure that I was OK and it didn’t work out. Once I had gotten out of my mom’s house the rules looked different. And going home was different because now I had a sense of sustainability within myself and a sense of independence that didn’t come with the rules of gender identity that were holding me in. When I could feel proud of myself and walk in my skin in the gender I felt comfortable in then I started to leave and live. Any time before that I borderlined on the thoughts of suicide. I borderlined on the thoughts of what it would be like to not have to live in such shame.

TP So Flawless Sabrina was basically like a guardian angel?

CD Yes, she was kind of put on my path for a reason. There was definitely content there that spoke to maturing and nurturing a child into success—always being a person that wasn’t judgmental

about my addiction, wasn’t judgmental about my choices, just wanted me to make better choices or to sit down and figure out how to build a relationship with my mom no matter what obstacles I had to go through to speak my truth about it and own it. Because if I could own it then it would shift the relationship with me and my mother’s life.

TP Did your mother and Flawless Sabrina only meet this one time?

CD No, I took my mom and we had lunch at Flawless’s. I took my mom up to Flawless’s on a Mother’s Day and we did stuff like that. Flawless had become a major part of my life for a good 30 years, maybe over 30 years.

TP Let’s not go into details with the years.

CD [Laughs] Yeah, alright.

TP And was it hard for your mom to accept that there is another person who you also call your mom?

CD No, no, there is a clear understanding of mentorship and I think for my mom to know that this person wasn’t crazy and had some kind of standing when it came to what they thought was good for me and content that I needed to sustain... I think it was visible that this person was able to shift my narrative and helped me tone down in the years I needed to and helped me figure out some of what I was going through wasn’t just society issues but my own self-worth was in question, my own self-identity was in question.

TP And your last name, Doroshow, it’s Sabrina’s birth name, right?

CD Yes, when I was a coordinator in New Jersey in a place called Jersey City Connection everything took a shift. I started mentoring and coordinating for a LGBT organization and I named the organization. I went to Flawless to name the organization. It was safer protecting myself by coming up with a name that did not tie to my family and I thought of what to change my name to and Flawless gave me the name Ceyenne. It was so funny, we had a ritual, I would come to her with two rolled joints, perfectly rolled joints with a filter, and we would eat and have conversation. And one of those conversations led to me asking her what name I should have and she helped me pick Ceyenne. She said, “You’re always so spicy,” and I loved my name and then I said, “Mom, would it be possible if I can use your last name?” And she jumped up and she came around her desk and she hugged me and she told me in the all the years she had been a parent for other children worldwide nobody ever asked her to use the name Doroshow. And, you know, with open arms I met her mom, I met Godfrey and Gregg, they literally traditionally became my uncles. That’s priceless, that they didn’t see color because Flawless brought me in. I mean, if there’s a legacy that I’m gonna have, my legacy is gonna be rich because of these moments, because of the moments when I was a complete shitty mess and this lady took me in and repurposed my life. There’s nothing like that in the world when you feel like you have no purpose.

TP Actually, I cannot imagine that.

CD It’s hard. It’s even harder because society says you’re not part of us, you’re not good enough, you’re not real enough, you’re not this, you’re not that, you’re not normal. That’s a terrible trap.

TP Your years with Flawless and the mentoring she did for you, was that also the time you decided that community work and being a mentor to help other people was what you wanted to do in your life?

CD Yes, I mean I needed to know that I would actually try to live and sustain, because honestly I didn’t think I would live to see 25. I didn’t think I’d live through it. How horrible is that? That a child has to actually think that they’re not gonna make it...they just may not make it.

TP It’s devastating.

CD Or having those thoughts of suicide, having those thoughts of insecurity that were equally matched by thoughts of not existing just to fit a norm, because if I don’t exist then I don’t bring the shame that I thought I was bringing. My past clearly was murky and some of the things I experienced...even being in the

shelter system, I wasn’t the norm for a lot of people, so my life was gonna be looked at very different. And I looked at my life very different. By being in the shelter I really noticed the type of woman I want to be.

TP What kind of women were there?

CD Some of the girls were horrible. Some of the girls were those girls I never wanted to be—loud, obtrusive, disrespectful, disrespecting their selves. And I knew there was something different in my carbon copy. I knew that I would have to make choices that would set me aside from the rest.

TP When I think about what Flawless did for you, that she took your fear or your idea of being not normal and she was just accepting you as yourself, this is probably what a mother really needs to do for their children.

CD Yeah, to have the support without asking and begging for it. It speaks volumes, to have someone throughout all the confusion about transgender and about my identity to tell me constantly, “Your mother is trying to figure it out. I need you to have patience.” That’s a mentor, that’s somebody that really wants the best for you because she could’ve said, “Well, I’m here now and you don’t have to worry about it.” No, Flawless said, “You have to fix this. *You* have to find a way to fix the relationship between you and your mother.” And I was very angry as a child, but not in a way where I was breaking and throwing stuff and having a tantrum, angry in a way where I was self-medicating, destroying myself.

TP How did you overcome that anger?

CD I grew up, basically. I did a lot of soul searching. I spent a couple of years in and out of what I thought was rehab, it was awful. Addiction played a major part in my life. The few relationships that I had developed were with people that looked past my addiction. They knew I was in a place of unwanting. They knew I was in a place of trying to figure it out.

TP And you did in the end?

CD Oooh, in the end I am very proud of the children that I have been blessed to have come to me and say that they’re doing their best. My children—one is in the hospital right now—and we don’t know what’s happening. I’m very concerned. And my other children are isolating and safe and they’re such powerful people. I’m actually on a board with two of my children, on a board of directors. My other children are in colleges, Ivy League colleges, learning and they’re trans, learning and they’re gay, getting this education and living their best lives, and making me proud every step of the way. My birthday is in December and last year, that was the first year ever in my life that my kids didn’t allow me to do anything. They actually bought me rings and married me, they bought engagement rings and a veil and they gave speeches, letting me know that I come before anybody.

TP That’s really powerful.

CD Oh, I cried like a baby. It was heart-wrenching, it was beautiful. And this felt like a really crucial time. My friend from around the corner has lost her husband. I had helped to facilitate the whole entire funeral. I had her and her kids here in my house.







I had my kids helping me, guide me through this whole thing of burying my girlfriend's husband. And they were actually planning to live my name and do something that nobody had done and the speeches and everything let me know that I'm doing something right. That these people I met from all over the world, that are part of my life, love me in a way as if I gave birth to them. There's no greater feeling. And in these times of COVID-19 I worry about them all, not being able to hug them, kiss them. And just to be able to talk to them through video, it's heartbreaking, and to hear them suffering with sort of depression. And what is the world gonna be like and when is this over? I'm glad I can be that parent that they can go to, and that they can say they're not feeling well today.

TP And there's also a third person you call your mother, Miss Major, correct?

CD Miss Major Griffin-Gracy.

TP Can you tell me more about her, her role in your life and how you met?

CD I was at the 2016 sex worker conference in Las Vegas. Every conference I go to I am a preference. I have a certain way, so a lot of people like to see me come through. They like to hear me speak because I tell the truth. I'm unapologetically black, unapologetically trans and unapologetically truthful. My mouth is horrible, I know that, but there's content in what I say. They asked me at six-something in the morning, I was having breakfast, would I introduce Miss Major Griffin-Gracy. And I had heard about her for years and I'm like, "Oh crap, I look like hell!" I ran to my room with a couple of people and I got completely dressed, hair, makeup and everything. 15 minutes before that I looked horrible, I had just woken up. I said yes, and I would open the conference introducing Miss Major 'cause she was the keynote speaker. And I did the Q&As and walked around and gave people a mic and while Miss Major was telling her life story I was in awe of the whole thing because this lady has done so much for us and so much to change trans women's lives. I was honored that they asked me to do this. While she was doing her talk they had a slide going on and one of the people that was in her life that helped her was Frank B.B. Smith. Frank B.B. Smith was also someone that was in my life because my mother was dating him and here it is years later, his face pops up on a screen and I held it in, I was in shock, I held it in. I waited for a break and called my mom and I said, "Mom, Frank..." Because he was a negotiator in the Attica riot and he helped politicize Miss Major in jail he very much had content and history with this woman as a mentor, as the person that politicized her, but also in my life. And needless to say, I asked her if I could talk to her. "I actually know Frank," and from that day on she became my mom. That was in 2016. We're now here in 2020 and she's still my mom and she's still here. And other than Flawless, Miss Major is this kind of in-your-face, gonna-tell-you-the-truth-whether-you-like-it-or-not type, and the combination of both of these women that were around in the Stonewall days, that were around when black women and trans women could not socialize in places. I've heard so many stories of the clothing and how you'd have to have certain articles of clothing and all of that was history for somebody like me. And now I had this rich history passed down to me in stories through these phenomenal women who both had two different views of what this looked like. An old Jewish woman and an old black woman share the same stories with a different perspective. So, it kind of made me feel like the golden child. I had the mentoring of a lifetime.

TP And did both of them also meet your children?

CD Yes, I have nieces through Flawless. My son Chris, that's on the board with me, loves Mama Major. Most of my children know Miss Major or heard of her and some of them can't wait to meet her. Some of them grew up like I did, being matured by Flawless. People often get confused when I say my nieces and my children and they see that my children are white. It's loving someone not for their race or gender. It's loving them for them.

TP I was actually wondering about that, because it comes so naturally to you to speak about your family, your children, your nieces, your moms. Do people outside of the community even understand it?

CD I think it's confusing to them, because they don't know it. Some people get it and appreciate it and say, "Wow, this is breathtaking that you've affected people in this way." And I think it resonates highly when I can't get it together myself, when I'm having a bad day. This is when people are like, "Wow, they called to check on you." Yes, they do that. They immediately check in on me to see if I'm alright. And we need that in our normal lives. Imagine somebody that's queer or identifying as and you can't really call home to share the stories of what your concerns have been for that day. I think it's really important to be that ear to that person that needs it the most and to have my children or my nieces run stuff by me because they're confused or might have thoughts about it. That's priceless to me. Whether I agree with it or not, to be the person that they can call, that means the most. I think what hurts me right now in this present state that we're in is that my children are not with me so we can't isolate together.

TP Did you live together?

CD Some of them have lived with me. I am that mom. They can always come to me as long as they act right. Yes, I have high standards for what I think my child should be and what they should be doing and it definitely starts with education. Flawless pushed me over and over and over and over again to get back to school, to learn how to drive, to go get my permit, to use my love for community and start working for people, helping people. And that led me 20 or 30 years ago and it has developed into something that has changed my life on a major level. And my kids have fabulous educations and are born into a society that understands them a little better, so why not ask something great of the people that can help me do the work I do?

TP And they are also your legacy.

CD Yes, yes, yes! It has validation because when I walk, I think of them, when I talk, I think of them. When I'm talking to somebody new that's gotta get through this stuff, I'm able to think of the lessons I have been taught. We're living in such a cold world now and even though we have all this progression, so they think, we have all this acceptance, so they think. At the end of the day, why are there so many queer people still unsupported, still homeless, still jobless?

TP Still dying.

CD Still dying, because discrimination and poverty has a lot to do with it. There's always a point in life when you think, "Have I done enough?" I'm not there now, 'cause as long as we're dying I'm still not where I'm supposed to be. These have been the hardest two months in my life, because I've had to see the numbers of people I know dying. It's like looking at the AIDS epidemic all over again, but this is something we can't even see and my community is the most vulnerable. So, parenting for me right now is on a monumental level, because it's those people I worry about, it's those people that have been cast out by society that need the most help right now.

TP How is the home office working out for you?

CD It's driving me crazy. [Laughter] It's doable because I'm doing it. This week I handed out \$200 to four people for eight weeks, people that I think are doing the work, that are not only taking care of themselves but taking care of community. And I wish that I could give more. I'm also facilitating something that's never been done here in New York. Me and my coordinator, we are housing people that are getting out of jail. Queer community and trans women coming home from jail are re-purposing their selves because they're able to sustain, they are in safety, they're isolating with care. This is how you show society there's purpose in life, and this is what parenting is. I think society has such a horrible way of saying, "they were a prisoner," and "they were put in jail and they deserve it," and not really realizing what it would take to stop that cycle. All it would take is care. All you



- have to do is stand up and show care. Yes, I am picky. I pick my community to help but why not?
- TP Someone needs to pick them.
- CD Yeah, yeah, and the help out here for us is scarce. Most agencies are giving you nothing but a meal and a MetroCard. Where's the agency there? I want people to have more. I want scholarships so people can try to go to college. I will stand with anybody that wants to stand for themselves. But I clearly want people to be able to live better and the only way to do that is have someone guide you into that. When you have fallen it's hard to get up and you don't have a way to get up unless you have someone that helps you get there.
- TP That hand that reaches out to you and helps you get up, that is so important.
- CD I've seen so many things over the years when it comes to, you know, people are criminalized for sex work. And I spoke to sex workers because I am a sex worker, once you're a sex worker you're a sex worker for life. Being able to tell people there is a safer way, being able to guide them into politics. And it's not only doing sex work for me, it's learning the politics behind it because then you become a better sex worker. We're living in a world now where so many people are clearly standing on the backs of sex workers to get jobs in politics when it comes to transgender lives. And a lot of them are not even transgender, so that's the biggest slap in the face, that the people telling our stories are not us. And this is why I encourage my kids to go to college to apply for all the boards and board of directors they can get on, because that will shift their narratives. That will put them at the table of making choices for the future.
- TP It will be interesting to see what your legacy will turn this world into.
- CD I worry about that, I worry especially now. Now we don't know what's gonna happen. We don't know with our present idiot in office [laughter] what's gonna happen to the community. What's gonna happen to the laws and bills that have given us so much—and also not given us enough? I mean, as it looks now, we don't know if people will be able to get into this country or to get out of this country. It all looks different. What does it look like for somebody that's already marginalized? It's definitely heart-breaking and scary for a lot of the community. They're literally gonna be homeless when this is over. They're literally gonna be in dire straits. My own children, I want them all to get therapy when this is over. I think they're gonna need to express how they maneuvered in COVID-19, when they've done so much to stay in school, have good grades, be good. And will they really do school online with all that is going on in the world? Will they concentrate? Will they pass their classes? Will they be able to pay rent? Because as we know, society is willing to give help to people, but my people seem to have a problem getting the same help that's offered to everybody.
- TP It feels a little bit like the world is turning backwards or maybe just revealing itself. For you it's probably no surprise.
- CD It's no surprise, it's sad, because what's gonna happen affects us in so many ways. And what is happening looks different for my community. Right now there are people being abused, sitting in abuse. There are people at home isolating with their families that don't understand their gender identity and it's making their lives a living hell. They are isolating in their trauma. And we're not even talking about the rural places like down south and what that looks like when there is still very much racism. You mix racism and gender identity together, that's a recipe for disaster. Or places where the government says they don't have to respect your gender identity, places where you can go and use the bathroom and go to jail if you use the wrong one.
- TP Whatever the wrong one is.
- CD Sweetie, I use any one and I'm at an age where if there was a line on either one I go to the other one. And if I have to go to the men's bathroom I say, "Boys, heads up, I gotta go." And I'm not gonna ask permission. With everything we're going through with society, that's the bill that we fight about the most? A bathroom takes precedence over a life? Then we have a problem. That is just disgusting and really not the face of importance when it comes to equity, when it comes to longevity, when it comes to owning our own—a bathroom? That is sad.
- TP And you would wonder if the world doesn't have bigger problems than a bathroom.
- CD The world does have bigger problems. We criminalize and arrest people and turn their lives upside down based on their gender identity, based on the hardships that life has given them. I mean, when I got into trouble and went to jail I didn't blame the world, because I got into trouble and went to jail. It happened and unfortunately I had to be locked up and I learned that lesson. I had the opportunity to go outside and turn it all around. And that's because the people that came into my life and the pride that I have for myself. When I got arrested I was on three boards of directors by that time and on a planning counsel and I was being underpaid for a job that I worked almost 70-something hours a week at because I didn't imagine a black person doing that kind of work. And I was coordinator for a LGBT program and doing that kind of work and not having a vacation in seven years—I couldn't take a vacation because I couldn't afford it—and it took a toll. And because I could not afford the way that I thought I deserved to live I turned to sex work. I was very smart about how I marketed myself, how I mentored other people while doing all of this. I had this whole private life of being someone who was able to meet people's needs and get paid for it and enjoy myself and not get murdered. That was because I turned to fetish work. I wanted to market myself in a way where I could make the choices. Being a coordinator, I can't tell you how many girls have died, not only of the virus, but of murder, and I was the call. I was the person they called to either go and verify the body or to take care of the funerals, the stuff that really hits home, the stuff that you really don't wanna do.
- TP Have you ever thought about quitting because it's too much and too heavy?
- CD I never thought about quitting. I do think about retiring when there is a trans woman that I trust that is ready to stand in my shoes. There are days, I just recently had one, where it's just overwhelming and it takes me back, and that's because I've been collecting over the years all these feelings of being overwhelmed and being cast out and just acting on that. In society, we fail so many times because we see people need help and we don't give. We walk by. We're too good.
- TP How can people help you with your work?
- CD Go to my website [glitsinc.org](http://glitsinc.org) and if they want to donate and care, definitely go to [freethemall4publichealth.org](http://freethemall4publichealth.org) and they can actually donate to a wishlist that goes directly to the consumer to meet their needs while they're incarcerated.