

Heather Vickery 0:00

Hi, everyone you've tuned in to The Brave Files Podcast. This is your host, Heather Vickery. And I am so happy to have you here with us this week, it is the middle of December already. I honestly have no idea how that happened. But it's time to gather together, even if it's just over zoom or a phone call to connect with our loved ones and to be grateful. And that's why we're doing a New Year's gratitude episode and we need your help. We want you to give us a call and share what you're most grateful for from the past year. Yes, from 2020. There's always something to be grateful for. And what you're looking forward to in 2021. Our gratitude episodes are our favorite episodes of the year, they're the most listened to the most enjoyed, and the one we get far more compliments on than just about anything we do all year long. But they only work if you participate. So that's why we love to have all of you are wonderful and loyal listeners participating in this special episode. All you have to do is call 312-646-0205 and leave a voicemail. It's seriously that simple. So why don't you go ahead and pause this podcast right now. Call 312-646-0205 and leave a voicemail telling us what you're most grateful for from this year, and what you're most looking forward to for next year.

Heather Vickery 1:27

Okay, welcome back. You've made that phone call right? You, you called and shared your gratitude with us. Okay, so let's move on to talking about this week's episode. This week, I had the privilege of talking with a very dear friend of mine, Ellie Dote, about her journey as a transgender woman in an extremely conservative community. Ellie was forced to come out after being closeted for the majority of her life after an undiagnosed illness was revealed to be HIV, realizing that there were other people like her, and that she didn't have to go through this journey alone. And also that she wanted to be a beacon of light and hope for others, has brought LA to the forefront of the fight for equality and transgender rights. Ellie says she blames her HIV status on the inability to talk to others. She was forced to go out and seek answers to her very many questions alone in the shadows. Now, she shares her status because she wants people to realize that this is what happens when we don't make room to talk openly about our identities. These conversations are crucial, so that folks aren't forced to hide in the shadows and endanger their own lives. This conversation is about truly understanding that you're brave step, push other people closer to being brave themselves, that you can be a beacon of light and support for others. You simply never know who's watching, and taking notes on your journey. And we each process our journey on our own in our own way. Your journey is brave, even if it looks and feels messy. Now, here's the show.

Ellie Dote 3:20

identity, humility and growth.

Heather Vickery 3:25

This is Heather Vickery. And you're listening to The Brave Files, stories from people living courageously. When we choose bravely in big and small ways, it powerfully elevates our lives. I hope these stories connect with you and encourage you to embrace bravery in every possible way, day after day. Together, we can build a movement of courageous living that enriches both our lives and our communities. And if you enjoy the show, I ask you to please share it with

others. Maybe think of someone who you want to choose bravely right alongside you. Thanks for tuning in. Now here's the show.

Heather Vickery 4:08

While friends you are in for a treat this time This episode is so special to me. This week's guest is my dear friend Ellie Dote and I have been waiting to share this story with you for a very long time. When I first met Ellie, she was newly out as her authentic self, who happens to be a transgender lesbian, but even among the painful and challenging coming out story she was experiencing she had some other big scary things going on in her life. And she wasn't quite ready to tell that story. And I said you know Ellie, when you're ready to tell the story, I'm ready for it. And we are finally here together. Very few people in the world do I know who you are as brave as you are, Ellie. I am so excited to have you here. Welcome to The Brave Files.

Ellie Dote 4:54

Well, thank you so much, Heather. You know I, it's so funny that you say, that that you think I am one of the previous people that you know, because I've been listening to your podcast and I'm listening like putting balancing myself out with you mean braver than the 911 person that you had on and I'm like was.

Heather Vickery 5:16

Mike was a special case, that's okay, that's a true story.

Ellie Dote 5:19

I don't, I don't see it. But a lot of it is to that, it's that it's out of necessity.

Heather Vickery 5:25

Sure, brave out of necessity is a real thing. But I actually love you say that this is totally not how I planned to start this conversation. But that's kind of the whole point of this show, is that bravery looks different for everybody. It feels different for everybody. But what it has in common for every single one of us is that by stepping into our brave, and by making brave choices, we live better, happier, more authentic lives. And that's to me, that's the whole point is you get to decide what your brave step is gonna be.

Ellie Dote 5:58

Definitely.

Heather Vickery 5:59

Yeah, I mean, yes, I love that you said that. And there's no, you know, one of the things that I do as a coach and as a parent, and as a friend is like, there's no comparison. Like, you get to be brave. And Mike Cortez, our 911, first responder firefighter, was most definitely brave, as is everybody in between. So let's give folks a little bit of a background story. We, we've had a number of transgender folks on the show, it's something that's really, really important to me is making sure we share everybody's stories. And as a member of the LGBTQ community myself, I really want to highlight some stories of people that, we want people to see and hear

themselves or maybe their children to imagine, we have a couple of listeners I know, who potentially have some transgender children, and that they don't have any role models. They don't have anyone to talk to or anyone to connect with. And so my first question for you is, and I kind of know some of this, but the guests don't so we have to go back. When did it feel like something wasn't as you perceived it should be for you in your life?

Ellie Dote 7:06

You know, I, I thought that there was something different from a very early age. So I look back all the way through to my kindergarten years. And like, I didn't think anything that was necessarily wrong about it. But all of my friends were girls. I didn't have many friends that were boys. And on the playground, I was socializing with the girls not with the boys. There was a lot of teasing that happened through that time. And in fact, one instance that I remember clearly was that there, we had career day in kindergarten. And I remember walking in with my best friend, Kim, and we have the room divided into two sections. There is the beauty salon, and there was the barber shop. And of course, where did I end up? I ended up in the beauty salon, getting my you know, I loved sitting under the hairdryer and getting my nails painted with that clear play like lacquer and, you know, just all the fun stuff that happened with that. But I didn't think that there was anything wrong with it until we have a parent teacher conference.

Heather Vickery 8:22

And I just want to chime in and say, of course now we can say there isn't anything wrong with it.

Ellie Dote 8:27

Oh, yes, yes.

Heather Vickery 8:29

But somebody told you, what you are about to share with us that that that was wrong, that you shouldn't be behaving that way.

Ellie Dote 8:34

That there is a concern. There was a there were concerns because I wasn't socializing with the other boys. I wasn't playing on the playground, I wasn't playing ball with the other boys. I wasn't roughhousing or doing whatever boys do. And that was the first time that I thought that, wait, this this is, there's something you'd be concerned about here? And I just kind of internalized that.

Heather Vickery 8:59

Of course you did. Who wouldn't?

Ellie Dote 9:02

And going on through, you know, first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades. I was you know, teased on the playground. Because that trend continued. I was I remember and I reminisce about this with some of my friends because I'm still friends with with those girls today.

Heather Vickery 9:19

I love that.

Ellie Dote 9:19

on Facebook, on Facebook. And you know, we were doing flips on the on the bars and cartwheels and that sort of thing. We're all into gymnastics and Mary Lou Retton had won the gold medal and yes, if that dates myself and and so it was a bit you know, there it was, that was just how my life progressed. And I had to just endure the teasing of Oh, you're gay. And that started this whole mentality out that says, What if I am? And and this was during that time period, mind you that AIDS had just come on the scene, it was a big..

Heather Vickery 9:40

It was pretty scary to be gay to be gay boy.

Ellie Dote 10:05

Yeah.

Heather Vickery 10:05

Which you were born a boy.

Ellie Dote 10:09

Yes

Heather Vickery 10:09

Anatomically that is

Ellie Dote 10:11

Yes.

Heather Vickery 10:12

Right. You weren't. You were born you, you were born Ellie, but your your body told you otherwise at that time, and the doctors and the teachers,

Ellie Dote 10:20

Yes. And so I tried to figure out well, then if I'm not fitting in, in my social circle in the playground, then where am I going to find the place for I'm accepted as me. And that ended up being in music, specifically church music.

Heather Vickery 10:38

Right. So okay, now that's interesting. That's actually something. We've obviously talked about your religious background, and I do want to delve into that in a little bit. But I was always under the impression that your family really drove the evangelical Christian bus. Are you saying that, that you drove that?

Ellie Dote 10:59

Yeah, yeah.

Heather Vickery 11:00

Oh

Ellie Dote 11:01

I actually was raised Catholic. And I got into church music because my uncle was involved in church music, and was heavily involved in the LA archdiocese. And so I found a place there because I played the piano and started playing at our local parish. And it was, you know, that was a place where I was accepted as me.

Heather Vickery 11:19

Sort of.

Ellie Dote 11:29

Yeah, it was. It was basically that I have a talent. And people saw me as that talent. I was the pianist, and I was a musician. And that's how I kind of existed for a good portion of my life,

Heather Vickery 11:45

it became a really core value really core part of your life. I know that, it's funny that you say that. I do believe that in some way we give and I'm gonna, I'm using air quotes. We give people a pass for being eccentric when they are artists, like either musicians or some sort of creative. Oh, that they're just eccentric, and they can somehow write off, or ignore, or excuse any behavior that they deem inappropriate, because you're a musician or an artist, and I had a laugh, I have a good friend who's super, super, super Christian, and happens to be black woman. And she was like, Whoa, you know, being gay in the black community is harder than in a lot of communities. We all know that our music directors, our choir directors are gay. Just nobody talks about it.

Ellie Dote 12:34

Well, yeah. And I, it's really, it ends up being where I fit in. And that's, and as you know, as high school goes, and hormones kick in, and puberty kicks in. A lot of those questions started coming up of Am I gay? No, I don't want to be gay. I can't be gay.

Heather Vickery 13:01

Were you attracted to boys?

Ellie Dote 13:05

No.

Heather Vickery 13:06

Okay, so you didn't feel gay? You just felt different?

Ellie Dote 13:10

I felt different. And I, but I didn't know any gay people.

Heather Vickery 13:13

Yeah, oh I know.

Ellie Dote 13:14

so. So, you know, I never I never thought that it was an attraction thing. I thought it was just something of like, Oh, I fit in and fit into this group. And so I began searching for places where I could fit in, that didn't involve my sexuality. And that, of course, was church. So I got heavily involved with music ministry. And I kept trying to pursue that more and more and more. And it got to a point where church wasn't making it go away. Church wasn't helping me reduce my level of femininity. In fact, it was becoming more and more of a battle. And so my senior year I left an all boys Catholic school.

Heather Vickery 14:08

Wow.

Ellie Dote 14:09

Yes, they had spent three years at and ended up at a public high school where my first friends were evangelical Christians. And they introduced me to this whole idea of, well, it's not about religion, it's about the relationship with God. I thought, well, maybe that's why I'm still struggling with this. And I sat and I would listen to these these stories from the church that I was attending with them. I would go and visit their church from time to time when I wasn't working at my church. And I would hear these stories of drug addicts that have overcome their addiction to drugs because of their relationship with God and you know, men who were abusive towards their wives and God save them and so I thought, well, maybe, maybe, maybe this is this is what I need. And I remember, there is a specific sermon I heard. And this pastor had a glass of a clear glass on the podium, and they put it in the tray, like a dish tray. And he put a scoop of dirt into it. And he said, this glass represents you. And this dirt represents sin. And he started by taking out a couple of pitchers of water, and he started pouring this water into the glass. And he said, and this water represents God. And you see, if you have sin in your life, you just need more of God in your life, to get the sin out. And so, you know, here in Southern California, I don't know how it is in Chicago, but it's in Southern California, there is no shortage of evangelical churches. Some of the biggest church evangelists

Heather Vickery 15:55

Oh they are everywhere.

Ellie Dote 15:56

Some of the biggest evangelical groups have their base here in Southern California. And so of course, you know, more of God in my head equals more of church. And that ended up being well, then there's a church, there's a Bible study, every single night of the week. And so I was going every single night of the week. I was, and that wasn't enough, I started working at a

church. And then I went to Bible College thinking I needed to get into full time ministry. And it kept going and going.

Heather Vickery 16:31

You did go into full time ministry that began your career.

Ellie Dote 16:34

Yeah, it was. And I was a pastor for about a year and a half. I lost that job because we had a falling out with a pastor, the senior pastor, I was an associate there. And I went on to take a full time job as a graphic designer at a church up in the Bay Area. And it was at that point that I just completely burnt out. I said, You know, I can't do this anymore. And so as I began to burn out on my faith, which in essence had been keeping me busy,

Heather Vickery 17:13

Distracted.

Ellie Dote 17:14

Yes. All this question started flooding back. The problem was, is that I was working at this church, and that's, you know, we're away from friends. We were away from family. And I, if I, if I admitted that I was dealing with this struggle, then that could be it.

Heather Vickery 17:37

And you didn't you wouldn't have anyone you wouldn't have a community. You didn't have family. You would have been alone. Now I know that you were married.

Ellie Dote 17:46

Yes.

Heather Vickery 17:47

To a woman and had Have you have children?

Ellie Dote 17:50

Yes.

Heather Vickery 17:51

Where in this, had you met your wife yet?

Ellie Dote 17:55

Yes. I had met her. Oh, goodness, while I was in Bible College.

Heather Vickery 18:02

Okay. So were you already married at this time?

Ellie Dote 18:04

Yes.

Heather Vickery 18:05

Okay. And so you are terrified to ask questions to figure out what's going on, because you don't want to lose the only community that you've got. But you did start to try and explore some things because you couldn't quite live without answers, either.

Ellie Dote 18:24

Very true. I, On the other hand of things, I couldn't turn to the LGBT community to ask those questions to. Now this happened around the same time in California as the prop eight battle where we were voting on the issue of gay marriage.

Heather Vickery 18:45

Yeah.

Ellie Dote 18:46

And during that point in time, I remember specifically that there were people who were involved in non affirming areas, churches or, you know, jobs, that were being outed. They were being fired. They were being blacklisted. They were being publicly humiliated, their families were threatened. And so I felt, well, I can't go into the LGBT community and say, Hey, listen, I think that I might be dealing with this but yeah, I worked for that church down the street that is, you know, are against the fact that

Heather Vickery 19:23

Hypocritical.

Ellie Dote 19:23

Yes.. And so, I put me in this really bad space of saying, well, I need to ask these questions. I need to find answers. Well, where do I go? And of course, I the only place I could go was anonymous strangers.

Heather Vickery 19:43

Yeah, I have heard from a number of particularly from men. That that's a terrifying and very common, I don't know where to go and so there's there's a whole kind of underground journey there where you meet secretly and privately and explore, right? I don't know.

Ellie Dote 20:08

Yeah. And in the Bay Area there, there's no shortage of places to do that. And in fact, I ended up in what's known as a bath house up in the San Jose area, and realized in the middle of that experience that I wasn't attracted to men.

Heather Vickery 20:33

But you were you were having sex with men.

Ellie Dote 20:38

That night. Yes.

Heather Vickery 20:39

Yeah.

Ellie Dote 20:40

And, but I just didn't know what to do with that. And that it actually made me more confused of well, then sure.

Heather Vickery 20:49

Well, what the hell's wrong with me?

Ellie Dote 20:51

Yeah, I remember clearly crying out to God and saying, God, but what the heck are you? Are you, Am I the only gay guy that is not attracted to men? I mean, what the heck?

Heather Vickery 21:01

Oh, Sweetheart.

Ellie Dote 21:03

So it drove me to a deep depression. And I was battling depression, and had to go on the regimen of antidepressants for the next 10 years. And

Heather Vickery 21:16

Oh, my God, it was another 10 years before. So, okay. I didn't mean to cut you off.

Ellie Dote 21:25

No, no,

Heather Vickery 21:26

I, okay. So you have your, you're exploring, you're trying to figure out like, Where can I find happiness? Where can I find what feels like the right thing for me? Sleeping with men, wasn't it. That's not where your attractions were. Did it ever occurred to you? Look, I did you know, did you know any transgender people? Were you, had you? And back then, it really just was so super uncommon, and I completely get it. But was there ever an inkling that you maybe were a woman?

Ellie Dote 21:55

No, not at all.

Heather Vickery 21:57

So, what happened for you to go, Wait, hold up, actually, I'm not gay. I'm straight, I just am not a man.

Ellie Dote 22:08

Well, that 10 years passed. And I had kind of put all of that behind me and said, I just don't know what I am. I don't know what I'm dealing with. But there's something wrong with me. And towards the end of those 10 years, I started developing sores. But we were I was, you know, I was doing work at a waterpark. And, you know, as, as water parks go, I just thought, Oh, well, you know, it must be the chlorine or it must be, you know, too much bacteria in the water, whatever, whatever, you know, happens with with water parks. And so I didn't really think anything of it until it started getting worse and worse. And it got to a point where I had, and I'm sorry for being too graphic here. But I had sores that had formed in the back of my throat, and I couldn't eat. And so by the time, the doctors said, let's do some lab work, I was down to about 95 pounds and basically, fading in and out of consciousness quite often. In fact, it was a running joke around our house of Okay, well, we're gonna all go to so and so's house and Ellie there's a nice couch that you just sleep on over there. Or you know, Darrell, at that point in time, but...

Heather Vickery 23:37

That was super. Thank you. You did not have to share your dead name if you didn't.

Ellie Dote 23:42

I'm not. I'm not ashamed of it at all. It's part of my life.

Heather Vickery 23:46

Thank you for trusting us. Okay. Not funny that you're like nearly passing out and have open leisures. And so the doctors what, what were they doing to try and figure out what was causing your problem?

Ellie Dote 24:00

Well, you know, I that had been 10 years since I had had that experience of the bathhouse and, and so I had, I didn't connect it at all. I just thought it was the waterpark. And so they were treating it with antibiotics and ointments and that sort of thing. And nothing worked. And so they finally had done some lab work. And I remember, I had had to take some time off of work just because I was so sick. And I had finally made it back into the office when I got the call from the doctor. He said, I need you to come in. And I need you to come in now. And I remember arguing with the doctor going, you know, I just made it back into work. I am out of sick time. I don't, you know I can't afford to be gone. Can't you just tell me over the phone and and he said no. I need you to come in. And the seriousness of his tone. I knew something was wrong.

Heather Vickery 24:55

Yeah, terrifying.

Ellie Dote 24:56

But in my head still I didn't register anything other than, Oh goodness, they found cancer, I have cancer, I'm gonna die. And that's not to belittle anybody that has cancer. I really want to make that clear.

Heather Vickery 25:08

That but there was nothing else that occurred to you.

Ellie Dote 25:10

Yeah,

Heather Vickery 25:10

It could have been that tragic.

Ellie Dote 25:12

Definitely. I remember thinking that the entire way to the doctor's office, and the doctor sat me down and said, Well, your lab came back, and you're HIV positive. And, quite honestly, the first, the only thing that I heard right then was, you don't have cancer.

Heather Vickery 25:35

Well, that's good.

Ellie Dote 25:37

And so it didn't really register with me for a while.

Heather Vickery 25:42

I just, you, you are like, the luckiest person I know, to have had HIV for 10 years untreated. And although you sound like you were near your deathbed, you did not die from it.

Ellie Dote 25:57

I should have been.

Heather Vickery 26:00

I mean, it sounds like it.

Ellie Dote 26:01

By the time that they caught it, and I don't know if you know how HIV works, but by the time they called it, my T cell count was down to 26. And my viral load was over 440,000

Heather Vickery 26:17

Oh, my God.

Ellie Dote 26:18

Which is just basically off the charts. The doctor said, Yeah, I don't even know how you how you're alive. And they started me on medication. And it reversed course, very quickly, I was astounded at how you know, how all of that just reversed. And I'm now in the place where it is, with a virus is undetectable in my system.

Heather Vickery 26:43

Incredible

Ellie Dote 26:44

Which means

Heather Vickery 26:45

Science is incredible.

Ellie Dote 26:46

I know. Right? It which means that I can't transmit it. Even if I, yeah, even if I have unprotected sex with somebody else, you know, I can't transmit it. And my T cell count has been steadily rising ever since. But a normal person's T cell count should be around 1500. And so 26 you can you can kind of guess that that's not Yeah,

Heather Vickery 27:15

Yeah. miraculous. So you have to fight to get your physical life back. And you also have to tell your wife, what happened.

Ellie Dote 27:28

Yeah. And when I did, and that wasn't easy. It began the questions of all the, okay, normal straight men is not the same normal. I don't like I shouldn't have said that word. But straight men don't normally go out and have to figure out Am I am I gay or not? So what what's going on? I spent a lot of time really. I, I honestly don't know. But it began, it gave me the permission to start looking and start trying to figure it out. And through the magic of Google, I found the first stories of some people who had trans had transitioned.

Heather Vickery 28:17

I love that Google is what made you realize that you were transgender. It's such a modern day story, isn't it?

Ellie Dote 28:21

It is. And I and I had heard of the trans community by that point in time. I wasn't that I was oblivious to it. I had been away from the church for 10 years. And you know, we were we were kind of involved in all these different spaces, not necessarily the LGBT community, but but we were aware of the Trans community but in our small little town of Fresno, the trans community was not necessarily the visible trans community. We're kind of weird.

Heather Vickery 28:59

For sure, I mean, I think in so many communities, still, trans folks are invisible.

Ellie Dote 29:06

Yeah, the trans community that that were visible, were basically borderline drag. And I didn't relate to that at all. So, I kind of dismissed that, Oh, I know they exist. But that's not me. Until I started reading the stories of people who had transitioned and I began realizing, oh, my goodness, I'm not alone in this, in this experience from you know, my Kindergarten days. And so story after story I started reading and you know, the Google brought up those, those quizzes, you know, kind of like the cosmote ways of am I trans and I kept wanting to wanting it to show up. No, you're not but inevitably it pointed to No, this is this is who I am. This is what this is. Yeah.

Heather Vickery 30:00

What did it feel like when you were finally able to say, I know why, I have an answer to why, what's different about me?

Ellie Dote 30:11

It was a relief.

Heather Vickery 30:12

Yeah

Ellie Dote 30:13

I no longer felt like I was alone in this struggle. I no longer felt like I needed to be, to run from it. And it was a blessing that we weren't in church at the time, because I don't, I think I would have fought against it had I felt like there is anything wrong with it.

Heather Vickery 30:35

Yeah. Well, an interesting side note for folks, in the last couple of years, in the time that I've known you, you have been able to reconnect with a church community that is loving and affirming.

Ellie Dote 30:49

Yes.

Heather Vickery 30:50

And you probably certainly couldn't have done that until you transitioned. And in a lot of churches, you still couldn't do it. So what does it feel like to be back in the church as Ellie?

Ellie Dote 31:02

The church that I'm at, and the church I was a part of in Fresno, it was absolutely wonderful. I never expected to be back in church, to be honest, we have a lot of abuse that happened in our

the positions that I held at church, and it was just so damaging that I just didn't think I'd ever be back in the in a church at all. And it was..

Heather Vickery 31:27

You really sought it, you really wanted it for yourself.

Ellie Dote 31:30

You know, I didn't really want it. But I was working at a co working space one day, a female co working space. My friend started in Fresno, and one of the other woman in the in the space invited me to her women's light at the church. And she assured me Oh, it's you'll be accepted. You'll be with me, and it'll be fine. Don't worry about it. And and so I you know, against everything inside of me that said, No, no, no, you don't understand, this is this is not going to turn out good. Ended up going. And I had what can only be described as a religious experience that night. And I knew that I was supposed to be back in church.

Heather Vickery 32:20

Well, and then you did something that I find incredibly brave. I don't know. If it I think it did feel brave to you. You started going to different women's groups, and lots of churches.

Ellie Dote 32:31

Yes. In fact, that night after the service, I stopped the women's ministry director and said, Listen, I, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. But I know that I'm supposed to be back at church. And I want to know if there's a space for me here. I know that this is who I am. But what do I do with that? And how do I connect with other women who can help me navigate my faith as a woman, and it started these conversations. Now, going back about 12, 13, 14 years, I was working in a very heavily evangelical church, and a lot of what I was doing was, was in the process of evangelism in the, in the sharing of my faith and and pushing people towards making a decision for for God. And so it was kind of like stepping into that role again of going okay, well, this is who I am. And this is how I see myself in view of your theologies. So how, how can I make this work in your community, and it started this process of having this conversations with church leaders in the Fresno area before I moved down to Southern California, to really ask that question of where, where can I belong? How, how can how can the LGBT community be expected to embrace the church if there's not a place for us to belong in the church?

Heather Vickery 34:10

Yeah. Wow. And so you didn't always get a warm welcome. As you were joining these women's groups tell us a little bit about I mean, do you feel like that was just fucking brave man because that I,

Ellie Dote 34:24

You know, at that point, I just knew that I that that's what I was needing to do, because nobody else was doing it . And on top of that, I really did want to find the community.

Heather Vickery 34:41

I love you. You're like I needed to do it because nobody else was doing it. Somebody had to do it.

Ellie Dote 34:45

I had never had anybody come up to me when I was in ministry, and and explained to me why they wanted to be a part of our community.

Heather Vickery 34:59

Wow.

Ellie Dote 34:59

Instead it was there was a lot of combativeness. And that's basically how the church has perceived the LGBT community. That we are there to, And this is one of the things that I heard in my not all the way back to my time in Bible College, that the that the LGBT community's goal is to close down the church. And that's not the case. We're wanting a space to fit in, and we're wanting a space to belong. And it's heartbreaking that we're told that we have to choose one or the other.

Heather Vickery 35:38

Yeah, it is not the case. It's, I mean, it's ridiculous. There's so much diatribe within the Christian Church in particular. Just bullshit stories of the quote unquote, agenda of the LGBTQ community. I just, I get very angry, we won't get into that right now . But you you put yourself continuously in the middle of situations, in the middle of conversations, where you knew there was a good chance of pushback, but I would, and I think you've got some, you also had some really lovely surprises. Can you tell us, share a story with us about maybe where you open somebody's mind or changed their mind or anything?

Ellie Dote 36:28

You know, it's funny is that the first church that I ended up at where I went to that woman's event, little did I, I knew of the church because having been a pastor in the Fresno area, I knew a lot of church leaders and a lot of the bigger churches, and this was one of them. I knew that they were conservative. I, however, did not realize that they were Southern Baptist. And I, I had an opportunity to meet regularly with one of the pastors on staff. And we, we had a good conversation about well, how do I reconcile this? And can you in good faith, hearing my story and hearing where I am, tell me that I'm doomed to hell because of my, because of my identity? And they had to admit that No, no,

Heather Vickery 37:22

That's amazing.

Ellie Dote 37:24

So, you know, while they, they didn't change the Church's stance, and well, the church still holds to a pretty conservative viewpoint, I have faith that it has opened the doors and open their eyes

to the very real reality that how they treat the LGBTQ community matters, and how they approach how they approach us. And you know, it at the end of the day, what really is how it is for me, I know that I'm walking into areas where I might not be welcome. But it's not much different from me being out in the street trying to tell people about Jesus.

Heather Vickery 38:06

There you go. That's a pretty great perspective. Okay, so switching gears just a little. You tried really hard to make it work in your marriage?

Ellie Dote 38:16

Mm hmm.

Heather Vickery 38:17

And it didn't.

Ellie Dote 38:18

No.

Heather Vickery 38:20

Been there, done that. For probably a myriad of reasons, like is the case for me. And with most people. Moving forward, though, like, well, I guess actually, one question I want to have is, how did your family, your parents handle your coming out, and your children?

Ellie Dote 38:44

Um, the kids, that was funny with the kids, and it's kind of evolved over time, but at the beginning, they were involved in theater groups, they're involved in groups that were LGBT friendly. And their peer groups ended up being ones where they would meet at lunch, and they would sit around and talk about their identities and their, the issues and the struggles that they were having, but that they would commiserate over, but but my parents would never understand. And so when I came out, immediately, it was, oh, you have the co parents. So, so it's evolved over time to to be a little bit of it's, it's evolved over time. And my unfortunately, my middle child is not talking to me now.

Heather Vickery 39:46

Oh, Ellie, I'm sorry.

Ellie Dote 39:48

No, it is. We're working through that and trying to and praying and hoping that that, you know, it resolves itself later on as things do happen.

Heather Vickery 40:00

Yeah, And you also have a child who identifies as non binary.

Ellie Dote 40:04

Yes. So my middle child is trans and my, my youngest is non binary. And we've had a lot of good conversation about, you know, what does this mean? And, and I accept you no matter what. And that's really the essence of parenting them.

Heather Vickery 40:25

Yeah, it is. And you, you made a big change, right, you finally move forward with a divorce, which was really painful for you, and move back in with your parents, which is kind of a gutsy thing to do, I think.

Ellie Dote 40:39

Yeah.

Heather Vickery 40:40

But how do you how are your parents with everything?

Ellie Dote 40:44

Um, it's it's been a change. But they they've learned to accept it. I actually came out to them about two years before I moved in. And so they have a little bit of time to adjust to that. And it helped that we have the kids in the balance. Because I know that if they hadn't accepted me that we would probably not keep in contact with my parents.

Heather Vickery 41:15

Yeah.

Ellie Dote 41:16

And so that has, that was a big help. When my sister got married, back in August, this was in May of last year. Yeah, May of last year. I have a lot of relatives, they came up to me and keep up to my parents and address me using she/her pronouns and talking to my parents about their daughters. And I think that really solidified in their mind that Oh, that's right. Ellie's our daughter.

Heather Vickery 41:46

Yeah. You know, that's a magical moment. I haven't had that moment, obviously, because I'm cisgender. But when my family basically said, I don't understand. But I love you. When we came out to them, it gave my own mother such peace of mind, because I think her biggest fear was that I would be persecuted or she would be persecuted because of me. And it's a game changing moment when everybody else helps your own parent realize this is going to be okay.

Ellie Dote 42:15

Yeah, yeah.

Heather Vickery 42:16

Yeah. All right. So I do want to ask you, when we first met several years ago, we had a really lovely conversation, and you shared all of this with me, including your HIV positive status. And

at that time, you to protect your family, you were not ready to share it, which was perfectly fine. Everybody has to share their story, in their own timeframe. What changed in your life, this is not your this is not your coming out of story. This is not your debut moment sharing the story, you have subsequently shared it multiple times. But what shifted for you that you decided you wanted to be open and honest about your HIV status with folks?

Ellie Dote 43:00

You know, at the end of the day, what what I blame for my HIV status is my inability to talk. My, the, the fact of I had to, you know, seek out answers to those questions in the shadows. And it and I share my HIV status, because I want people to realize that this is what happens when we don't make room to talk openly about it. In, in families, in churches, in in modern day society. If we don't provide a safe space, people are going to have these questions wherever they are. And it's important to me that we have those conversations here. So that and make it a safe space so that we're not forced to go into the shadows to endanger our lives. I it scares me now to think of what could have happened.

Heather Vickery 43:56

Absolutely. I think that's so beautiful Ellie, that you want to help people not have to live in the shadows and that your story. I'll give a shout out to a woman I know named Pasha, Hey Pasha, if you listen. She said something earlier today that she said when we tell our stories, we liberate others.

Ellie Dote 44:13

Yes, yes.

Heather Vickery 44:14

And I really loved that. And I know for a fact that your story is a liberating others. And you've written a book about your story.

Ellie Dote 44:24

Yes. And as as luck would have it. I know that when we had talked earlier, I said it's about ready to be published. And I had this whole plan of self publishing and everything. And then of course, as things go, a friend of mine said, Hey, this publisher is looking for submissions, and they're looking for new authors. And I think you should submit something and so I did. And we're in conversation to to look at going through a publisher, which now pushes the book out a year or two more, because of that process. So I'm I'm going back and forth, because I do feel like I do want my story out there. But I also feel like going with a publisher adds to the distribution of it. And so it's

Heather Vickery 45:14

Sure is it a, Is it a small publishing house?

Ellie Dote 45:17

A publishing house, through a church, through a denomination, but then that means that this denomination, which at this point is only 10%, affirming of LGBT.

Heather Vickery 45:29

Wow,

Ellie Dote 45:29

People would find this book in their recommended list.

Heather Vickery 45:35

Holy cow, that could be huge.

Ellie Dote 45:38

Yeah.

Heather Vickery 45:39

That's really exciting. Congratulations.

Ellie Dote 45:41

Thank you. Yeah, I'm really excited about that.

Heather Vickery 45:44

You should be and you should be so proud. Tell us a little bit about your writing journey. What made you decide to write a book? And then how did you actually get it done?

Ellie Dote 45:55

I have been blogging for a while. And that's, and I have been sharing bits and pieces of my journey and the struggles that I had been having with my own theology and fitting in and, and one night, I just said, You know, I want to start documenting my story. And I never intended it for it to become a book. I just started writing and so ya know , and then Google folder and drive. And one thing after another I looked at, I said, Oh, my goodness, I have like 22, 23 entries in here. And it would be a book. Yeah. And so I pieced it all together. And having made and done books for other people, the layout and the cover design and all of that. I knew it was a pretty easy process. And so I started with that. And as you know, as things happen, I I was on Tinder, one day, and I connected with a woman that was that was absolutely wonderful. An absolute delight. And we just were talking and she says, oh, what do you do? And I said, Well, I'm, I work at Disneyland. And she said, Well, I'm an editor. And I go, oh. So here I go with with, I hired her to edit my book. And you know, while things didn't work out, romantically in that realm, that was perfectly fine, because I have an editor. And so I had to go through the editing process. We've went through that twice. So and so here I was okay, now, six months after I had initially thought I would have this book out on Amazon, ready to go and say, Okay, let's so let's Self Publish now. And now here I am back in the spot of going, Oh, well, okay, let's wait a little bit longer. So.

Heather Vickery 47:51

Okay, All right. Well, I can't wait. I might secretly have an advanced reader copy of the book, folks, I might just have one. But I can't wait to get a hardback copy and get it autographed. And have the story out. I love that you've put it out there. I also love for folks who listen, a lot of you are entrepreneurs or business owners, and a lot of you are blogging regularly. And did y'all just hear Ellie said that she pulled all of her blog posts together and had a damn book, you can write the book, folks. You might have already written it. Let's talk about it.

Ellie Dote 48:26

To be fair, these were meant to be small blog posts, but I didn't want to share them just yet on my blog, so these were never made it onto my blog. And so this is all brand new.

Heather Vickery 48:37

Wow. That's so cool. Well, this is a great time then to lead into one of my favorite questions. How do you celebrate and I think my friend, my dear friend, Ellie, that you have so many things to celebrate. I mean, I could list off 10 things that I'm celebrating for you. So what are the ways big and small that you like to celebrate?

Ellie Dote 49:01

Oh, just I having spent the last 17 years in the Central Valley of California. And I don't know if how much you know about California but we have Northern California we have Southern California and then there's the Central Valley which is surrounded by a mountain range. Having lived 17 years there being now 20 minutes from the beach is just heavenly and and so the beach is my happy space, and I will often find myself at down there. And spending time with friends and my girlfriend.

Heather Vickery 49:42

Yeah. Do you take the time, Ellie, every day in some little way to pause and take a deep breath and look around you and express gratitude and celebrate for the fact that you exist. And that you are thriving and just knocking it out of the park at this life thing.

Ellie Dote 50:07

You know it, it's a struggle to, but I try and that's, that happens. I've been dating somebody now for four months, almost four months now. And we send each other a text message that we get first thing in the morning. And that really helps me to center myself. Before I open up my email and whatever else. I see that text message and it really helps me to to center myself and and remember, oh, I'm loved and it's gonna be okay. It's gonna be okay. Because I'm loved.

Heather Vickery 50:50

Yeah. And it's going to be okay. Because you're here, and you're ready to make an impact on the world. But you are loved and not just by your girlfriend. You are loved by so many.

Ellie Dote 51:01

Wow. I appreciate that. And I am I am so thankful to you, Heather too

Heather Vickery 51:07

Oh, well, you I haven't done anything here. I mean, I just I think you're great. And I could just tell

Ellie Dote 51:14

You answer the phone at odd hours of the night.

Heather Vickery 51:17

Yes, I do sometimes answer the phone at odd hours of the night. I'm curious to hear from you, Ellie, looking back on everything. What would you say? Felt like the bravest moment for you?

Ellie Dote 51:32

Probably going stepping through the doors of that church. Two years ago, I knew what I was walking into. Because I had been a conservative evangelical pastor. I it still haunts me to this day that I referred somebody to reparative therapy. Because I thought that being gay was wrong. And listen, here's, here's the funny thing is that I really speak out of of experience. And so for most of my life, I had thought Oh, well, you know, I'm, I must be gay, I must be gay. But look at me. I'm married a woman and I'm fine. I'm not gay. And if I could overcome it, then you can overcome it too. And that and that was my experience. Because I didn't know anything else. And so I spoke out of that, that mentality. I know better now. And I've contacted them to say, Listen, I am so sorry. But it haunts me.

Heather Vickery 52:30

I love you for that. Can you imagine how much healing there would be in the world? If people who did something traumatic, like recommend restorative therapy, you know, conversion therapy, would take the time to go back and say, this was a really big mistake. And I know that it caused you harm. And I'm sorry. What did that person say when you said that to them?

Ellie Dote 52:56

Yeah, they had moved on from it. Unfortunately, that was one of the last moments that they had with the church. And that just absolutely crushes me, because I know that the church can be a good space and to be a healing place for people. And to know that I was a part of that. It just kills me. But they are, they have moved on with their life and they are married happily to their husband. And yeah,

Heather Vickery 53:25

but I love that I'm sure that it really really meant something special to them, that you a felt the remorse and B took the time to tell them that, even if they didn't share that with you, I know that had an impact. When we when we apologize or when we ask for forgiveness, it is such an incredibly impactful thing for everyone, but also for us.

Ellie Dote 53:50

Yeah. So walking through the doors of the church, I knew what the response could very well be. And so it was it was scary. I remember I sat in the parking lot for a good 30 minutes before

walking in wondering, should I just like pull it off and drive away? And making sure, Oh, do I need to do the bathroom? There's a Starbucks across the street because God knows I don't want to go to the bathroom at this church in a moment. And and have that be my first experience back in church. And all of those things that that had to run through my mind. That was the scariest moment and from and it was when I walked into the doors of the church. I just again it was this religious experience. The first song that they saying was talking about. We are no longer slaves to fear, we are children of God. And that mantra that kept going over and over and I just knew that okay, this is where I need to be and I'm going to be okay.

Heather Vickery 54:56

So proud of you as amazing. Okay, So we could keep talking, there's a lot of stuff that I had in my notes that maybe we would talk about. But I really love the way this conversation went. And I really try to keep everything kind of authentic and flowing on the show. So it's time to wrap and I get to ask you what your favorite charitable organization is to support.

Ellie Dote 55:23

You know, that's been one that's been kind of up in the air, to be honest with you, I, there's been a lot of change in the organizations that I had been a part of. And so I really am not necessarily involved with an organization at this point in time, I would see if anything, I love the work that Freed Hearts is doing. And I'm also a big fan of my friend, Rocky Raggio, who is putting together a film called 1946. And I don't know if how many of your listeners would know. But in 1946, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible came out. And that was the first time that anybody had translated the word homosexual into the Bible.

Heather Vickery 56:16

Wow. interpretation is something isn't it?

Ellie Dote 56:20

It is. And in fact, if you go all the way back to the German translation, which is the first time that the Bible had been had gone into layman's hands from, from the Catholic Church, the first original German translation translates that same word with the root word of kendor. And so you can kind of understand where that what the meaning of that word was actually meant.

Heather Vickery 56:45

Child.

Ellie Dote 56:46

Yes. Yeah. In that moment, when, when the authors of the Bible had been writing, they were, they were talking about child molestation, there was nothing homosexuality. But in 1946, you have to understand that this is the time of the lavender scare. And the LGBT community were being outed, and, and persecuted within our own government. And so it was popular culture, it fit with the culture of a time, and it has stuck. From that moment, the RSV Bible became the basis for some of the more popular translations that we have today, the NIV. But more importantly, it became the, the basis for the Living Bible, which is what Billy Graham used in his

crusades to give out. So it became widely distributed with the word homosexual in it. And that was not the intention. And so my friend Rocky has gone back with some incredible scholars and, and is putting together a documentary right now. And so I encourage people to support that because that information needs to be put out there.

Heather Vickery 58:03

So how can we so first of all, how can we support Rocky? Second of all, I would love to have Rocky on the show, if you will introduce us because that is incredible. And I want to be part of that project. Tell folks how they can, how they can get involved, how they can learn more support Rocky in this work.

Ellie Dote 58:19

That movie is has a website, it's 1946TheMovie.com. And it talks about it has a trailer that they put together some information about the backstory and how this has affected the LGBT community at large, because it's really, it asks a question, then if this word had never ended up in the Bible, then would we be facing these issues that are that are such heated debates right now?

Heather Vickery 58:52

Absolutely. Wow, I cannot wait to check it out. Y'all. Everybody else needs to check it out. Ellie, thank you for sharing. So we always have the charity that's mentioned by the guest as our charity of the week and we will connect with Rocky and do our best to support and promote this really important work as our charity of the week when that episode airs.

Ellie Dote 59:15

Sounds good.

Heather Vickery 59:17

Ellie, will you share your three words with us one last time?

Ellie Dote 59:19

Sure. Identity, humility and growth.

Heather Vickery 59:25

They're really really beautiful words. They they fill me with warmth and joy. And I would say, my friend ,you embody them all so so well, I cannot thank you enough for coming here and spending some time with me and sharing your story with my listeners.

Ellie Dote 59:41

Oh, thank you so much. It is, oh my goodness. It's been something that I've been looking forward to you for a long time.

Heather Vickery 59:48

Well, we're glad to have you, listeners I I cannot stress enough to you how much the world needs you to live your true authentic self and to support the authentic-ness of everyone around you, the people that you know and love and the people that you don't know yet. So be open and be affirming and put your your best self out there the most true and honest version of yourself possible because the world is ready to receive you, just like it did for me. And just like it's doing for Ellie, and I am here to remind you today and every day to go out and choose bravely. Okay, friends, I want to share something really exciting with you. We already know you enjoy listening to podcasts because you're listening to this one, but I'm also betting you enjoy audiobooks. And hey, listen, if you don't already enjoy audiobooks, then it's time to check them out. That's why I'm really excited to share libro.fm with you. They are an incredible new platform for listening to audiobooks. And by choosing libro FM over other audio book services, you are supporting a local bookstore of your choice and investing in your local community. libro.fm offers over 150,000 audiobooks via their primary platform, which by the way, they built with love and from scratch because they're a small business also. They even offer bookseller recommendations for great audio book options. You can sign up right now via www.VickeryandCo.com/LibroFM , that's VickeryandCo.com/librofm . And when you do, you'll get one free audiobook of your choice. And the proceeds will go to your favorite local bookstore. Now check what I just said there, you're going to get a free book, and the proceeds are still going to go to your local bookstore, because librofm makes sure that their booksellers get paid even when they give a promo to customers. I've listened to over 20 audio books this year alone. I especially love listening to memoirs read by the author. And it feels great knowing that all of my purchases support my local bookstore, The Book Table in Oak Park, Illinois. Libro.fm, the same audio books, the same price, but a completely different story. Check them out right now at VickeryandCo.com/librofm. Have you ever thought about starting a podcast? Maybe you've had this thought and then quickly shut it down? Because who has the time? Or you don't know how or gosh, it just all seems too hard. If you have something to share with the world, we want to encourage you to get your message out. The world needs to hear it. Did you know that 50% of all homes are podcast fans. If you've ever wondered about having your own podcast or how it can increase your business, or get your message across, then please join me and the other experts from the Podcast Power Academy for our monthly free q&a session. It's called so you want to start a podcast. This casual live conversation will help you understand how podcasting can be a great decision. Why now is the best time to get started, and how to get into action with it. Visit PodcastPowerAcademy.com to learn more. You've been listening to The Brave Files, stories of people living courageously. To learn more about the show, find our show notes and full episode transcripts. Or to get some great bonus content visit TheBraveFilesPodcast.com. And we would love to know what you think of the show. You can give us a call 312-646-0205. Let us know your thoughts on the episode or the show in general. Or maybe share with us how you're out choosing bravely. This episode is brought to you by Vickery and Co Success Coaching. Coaching that helps you maintain a life well lived in a business well run. Learn more at VickeryandCo.com. Our music was created and produced in a custom collaboration with Matt Lewis from ML Creative Consulting, a boutique firm dedicated to helping clients identify their unique sound and amplify their brand with custom delivered soundtracks. We couldn't do any of this without our extraordinary audio engineer Andrew Olsen. Learn more about him and check

out his work at FindAndrewOlsen.com and special thanks to everyone on Team BRAVE from our producers, associate producers, copy editors, writers, and support team. Special thanks to Molly, Mary, Kim, Sabra and Sabrina. I'm your host and executive producer, Heather Vickery. Thanks for tuning in, and we'll talk to you next week.

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