

Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Burley Tuggle
Interviewer: Kristyn Scorsone
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Location: Rutgers University-Newark

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay. All right. Today is November 9, 2016. My name is Kristyn Scorsone. I am interviewing Burley Tuggle at Rutgers Newark for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. Hey. How you doing?
(Laughs)

Burley Tuggle: I'm doing, I'm doing okay. (Laughs)

Kristyn Scorsone: So, just to start things off, the first question is, when and where were you born?

Burley Tuggle: I was born in 1972, a long time ago. My birthdate is October 18, and I was born in Atlanta, Georgia.

Kristyn Scorsone: Who raised you in Atlanta? Did you grow up in one place or household or more than one?

Burley Tuggle: I was raised by my mom, single mom, and we moved a lot. So I went to maybe six different elementary schools and three different high schools.

Kristyn Scorsone: No siblings?

Burley Tuggle: I have one older brother.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. What schools have you attended? You went to six different ones?

Burley Tuggle: Well, they're all in Atlanta. Yeah. I'm sure you wouldn't know them, but I graduated from Cross Keys. Or actually, yeah, yeah,

Cross Keys. And if you were from Atlanta, you would know that. If not, it doesn't mean anything.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's a high school?

Burley Tuggle: It's a high school. My elementary school, one of my first ones, is Wadsworth Elementary, and then there were so many others after that.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you recall any events that were transitions or turning points in your early life?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I mean—

—I don't know how to answer that question in the sense that a lot of things happened. I was a stutterer, so I would definitely say that was pivotal, just in terms of having to do speech therapy and feeling like I never wanted anyone to think that I wasn't intelligent. Yeah.

I mean, I really got into books. I was a bookworm. I would definitely say when I was growing up, I mean, I was primarily known for always reading something, having my nose in a book.

Kristyn Scorsone: What were your favorites?

Burley Tuggle: Oh, god. There were so many. I can remember when I was in second grade and my mom gave me this book about cells. I was just so fascinated.

Kristyn Scorsone: Like biology?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah, biology, but I was in second grade. I didn't even know what they were. I can remember reading and I said, "Oh, this book is all about chills." My mom said, "Let me see what you're reading."

She's like, "No, cells." I was like, "Oh." I was just fascinated and pretty much I felt like I wanted to learn everything. I wanted to know everything.

Because I did stutter, speaking publicly was always a big deal for me. I was very active in clubs and cross country and track and quiz bowl team, science team, but I shied away from leadership positions, because I never wanted to be the person who had to speak or give a speech. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was it tough to move around so much?

Burley Tuggle: It was, because my mom worked very hard and every time we moved, it was always to a nicer place. That part was great, but, no, having to go to a different school almost every year, yeah, that was— that was kind of tough for me. I do have an older brother, and he refused to move around, so he actually stayed with my grandmother sometimes just so that he could stay at his elementary school or his high school.

Yeah, I would definitely—but I think I was also pretty adaptable as well, so I just got used to the process—packing, I mean, that just came easily for me. Just like, "Okay. It's time to move again? All right."

Kristyn Scorsone: What did your mom do for a living?

Burley Tuggle: My mom did a lot of stuff, but she worked for a printing company for 16 years doing manual labor. She worked in the bindery, but growing up, I mean, I can remember her doing jobs like construction. She was also a cook, just whatever paid the bills. She was never afraid of hard work.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow. Did you have a good relationship?

Burley Tuggle: Oh, yeah. I love my mom. Oh, god, yeah. We were very close. Yeah. Pretty much growing up she was my mom and my dad. My dad was in my life but not in my home. I would visit him on the weekends or special occasions, but my mom was really everything. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you have a favorite memory?

Burley Tuggle: Of? Of my mom?

Kristyn Scorsone: Of growing up or of your mom or your family?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. My mom is a very humorous person. I can remember her just playing games with us, cooking for us, and just really teaching us to be respectful but just having some fun.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did religion play any role in your life growing up?

Burley Tuggle: A little bit in the sense that my mom, she never really forced us to go to church, which is interesting, because I am from the south. Her mother was the Bible beater. She never really forced anything on us that she was forced to do.

Growing up, I mean, I longed to go to church and stuff, but she never forced us to do that. We always had a Bible in the house. She always taught us to believe in God and pray, but not—she never forced religion on us in any way.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you go to college as well or just high school?

Burley Tuggle: No, I definitely went to college. I went to Vanderbilt University for my undergrad.

Kristyn Scorsone: Is that in Atlanta?

Burley Tuggle: Nope, actually it's in Nashville, Tennessee. I majored in sociology. After that, I moved to New York, and I attended the New School for Social Research, which is no longer called that anymore. I graduated from the Milano School of Urban Policy and Management. I have a Master's in that.

Kristyn Scorsone: What major?

Burley Tuggle: Urban policy, analysis, and management.

Kristyn Scorsone: What made you pursue all of that?

Burley Tuggle: I guess because right out of undergrad, you don't do sociology. Most people would become a social worker, but if you're not a social worker, how do you do sociology? I just decided that in order to really do that, I needed to go to policy school or grad school.

Initially, I wanted to get my PhD in sociology. I applied to some Master's programs and some PhD programs, and the way everything worked out, I chose the Master's. Then after that—(coughs) I'm sorry, excuse me—after that program, I just felt like I wanted to use my degree in a practical way. I changed my mind about (laughs) getting the PhD.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did you enjoy your time at college?

Burley Tuggle: Oh, yeah, definitely. Vanderbilt is a—well, I mean, it's—Nashville is a very interesting place in the sense that it's known for country music and all that. But believe it or not, the music scene there is great if you're into blues, if you're into jazz.

Yeah, it was just a very clean city, and I know that sounds strange, but a beautiful city with the rich musical culture. Vanderbilt pretty much dominated most of Nashville. If you're into biking and

hiking, it was just a beautiful city. I think my first year was difficult just because I was working in addition to being a student full-time.

I had two jobs and it's the type of place where you have a lot of rich kids, so I would definitely say my first semester was a period of transition. Because I felt like, "It's not supposed to be like this." There were lots of rich kids, but once I found my group of friends, everything after that just got so much better.

Kristyn Scorsone: What two jobs? What jobs were you working?

Burley Tuggle: Oh, man. Okay. I worked in the campus pub and I worked in a lab, because at the time I was pre-med. I worked in a cytopathology lab. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Was that cool?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah, it was very interesting. It was weird. Well, I guess I was really weird, because I really wanted to witness autopsies. Now, what I was doing didn't have anything to do with autopsies, but the lab was next door to where they did the autopsies. Pretty much, I begged them, like, "Oh, when you get a body in here, let me know." Yeah, it was very interesting, but I never got to witness a complete autopsy.

Kristyn Scorsone: No? Just part of one?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah, which is very weird. They called me one day and they said, "Oh, get down here. We're in the process of doing an autopsy." By the time I got there, they had already opened up the body. They were literally just combing through the organs looking for cancer, but just imagine this, right?

I go into this operating room, which is really not an operating room, right? Because the person is dead. They had already cut up the body with the buzz saw. Apparently, they have to put the organs in some kind of a solution that looked like slime. It was a greenish-blue slime. Literally, they were going through the organs. Yeah. It was pretty—

Kristyn Scorsone: Were you queasy at all or were you like—disassociate yourself with it?

Burley Tuggle: I had seen some cadavers, because I did another pre-med program when I was in high school. This was weird though, just seeing the organs on a table. I wasn't queasy, but after that I wasn't as gung-ho about witnessing them actually cutting open the body. I'm like, "Okay. I think I'm good." Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: What made you want to go into the medical profession in the first place?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I guess because it was, again, feeling like I wanted to know everything and learn everything and when you're a kid back then, we didn't have all of these reality shows that showed you that you could do so many different things. It was like, "Are you gonna be a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, a teacher?" I always wanted to be a doctor, because I felt like I wanted to help people, right? That cliché. Yeah. I started out on that path.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's awesome. I guess just to pivot a little bit, as far as your LGBTQ identity, how would you describe your sexual orientation and/or your gender identity?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I would definitely say that I'm lesbian. I never got caught up into these roles like I'm butch or I'm femme. I just consider myself to be lesbian and—what was the other part of the question?

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, well, your gender identity.

Burley Tuggle: My gender. Yeah. I mean, basically I definitely identify with being a woman, which is why I never wanted to put myself in any box or sub-category. I love being a woman, but at the same time, I'm not prissy. (Laughs) Whatever that is, that's who I am. As a kid, I was always sensitive and I wasn't girly, but I wasn't a tomboy either. Just always in between.

Kristyn Scorsone: Balanced. How did you first become aware of that aspect of yourself?

Burley Tuggle: Well, when I was nine—I'm sorry, when I was eight, I was kissed by—I was kissed by a girl who was nine years old. (Laughs) She opened my eyes, because literally we were playmates and I was clueless. I wasn't thinking about anything sexual at the age of eight. Yeah.

We had a little sleepover and she kissed me, and I liked it, but initially it was a little confusing in the sense that nobody ever told me anything about being gay or, "This is wrong," but somehow both of us felt like this is wrong, like, "We can't tell anybody." I would definitely say that my feelings were there since I was eight, but I didn't really—I didn't come out until I was out of high school, moved to New York for grad school, and I came out to my mom in a letter.

That was scary, because I'm very close to my mom and I was always terrified of coming out, because I didn't want to lose her love. I just wrote the longest letter ever, covering everything from wanting to have kids one day, HIV and AIDS, and just anything that I could think of that she would be concerned about. I put it in the mail, and I just held my breath. I was terrified.

Maybe two weeks went by, and I'm like, "Oh my god." I was just scared. When she called me, she didn't beat around the bush. She said, "I got your letter." I'm like, "Oh my god. Oh my god." She's like, "And I still love you." That just opened up the door for us to really talk about it and she—initially, she just thought, "Well, maybe it's a phase."

She asked me, "Is that the reason why you moved to New York, so that you can sleep with a guy?" I said, "No, no. I moved to New York so that I can have a girlfriend and a community and a life." At that point in time, I was 22, 23. I felt like I was living a lie, because we would talk on the phone and the only thing that she would ever, ever ask me is, "How's school?" I'm like, "Okay, she must know that I have a life, right?"

It just got to the point where I'm like, "Okay. I mean, I have to say something now, because this is my mom." She was more hurt because I came out to her in a letter, because she's like, "I thought we were closer than that," but once I told my momma, everything else—basically it's like in my family if you tell one person, right, everybody got the word. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Did your brother and father react all right?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I would definitely say that my cousins who were close in age, they already knew. It was more or less like my mom's sisters and my grandmother, they got the information and my grandmother, she said, "You know what?" She just pretty much said, "I love you," and she's like—and these are her words—she said, "Oh, you have your head on straight and you're in school and you're doing all this and that." She's just like, "Hey, just be happy."

When I went to Georgia for Christmas the year that I came out, my family, they just welcomed me with open arms. They were just so loving and they've never tried to tell me what to do. Even if they don't agree with it, they just support me. I mean, I've been really blessed.

Over the years, I've taken girlfriends home. They've met numerous people over the years, and, yeah, they just—they love me so they support me, even if they're not thrilled about who I'm dating. (Laughs)

Kristyn Scorsone: That's really sweet. You mentioned that—I think you said your mom asked you if that's why you moved to New York. Did you find community there that you were looking for?

Burley Tuggle: I did, because at the time that I was in grad school, I did my master's thesis on LGBT parents. Basically, I created this whole survey, because I wanted to assess the needs of LGBT parents. There was a group actually at the New York LGBT Center. I think the group was called Center Kids.

Basically, it was a convoluted process, because initially I was trying to work with a church group. Because I had heard that there was this church that primarily had people of color and LGBT parents. I'm like, "Oh my god." I reached out to that group, and initially they weren't very receptive. I guess because they thought, "Oh, here's this person trying to study us again. She's not in our community."

Basically, it took a long time to connect. Then I think somebody from that church group referred me to Center Kids. Once I got involved with Center Kids, it was even better, because that group targeted LGBT—this was before the Q—parents. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Growing up, when did you first become aware that gay people existed? Because you said this—you were eight and this girl kisses you, and you're like, "I don't know what this is."

Burley Tuggle: Exactly. Well, I would say that this is—it's not necessarily a positive, but when I would visit my dad, I figured out where he kept his porn. (Laughs) Yeah, I was exposed from sneaking and looking at his Playboy magazines or finding that videotape that's always—no label, just a blank-looking generic black tape.

I didn't necessarily know what it meant to be gay, but as far as seeing maybe two women kiss or something—so I guess I started to become aware. I wouldn't say that I had the terminology for it until I was in my teens, but, yeah, I would definitely say I was in the closet from eight until I really understood.

Even in high school, it was a different time. This was 20 years ago. Kids were not out in high school. Even in my high school, right, if I sensed that somebody else might be gay, you just didn't talk about it, right? You didn't make any eye contact. That person would avoid you. Yeah, I was definitely closeted. When I finally did meet another girl who was interested, it was like, "Oh. Okay. Here's my chance now." (Laughs)

Kristyn Scorsone: In high school?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. This was high school and I was 15. I actually had a crush on her best friend, but I ended up hanging out with this one young lady. You know how this story goes, right? We were hanging out and supposedly she's relaying my messages and interest to her friend. Of course, that never really happened. At some point, she finally said, "Oh, I really like you." I'm like, "Oh, man."

At least though it was like, “Okay. This is my opening,” because at that point, it had just been crushes on teachers and not really having any— outlet or way to really act on any of this. (Laughs)

Kristyn Scorsone: Those two girls, they were both gay? Or did the one just get interested in you just because you guys were talking so much?

Burley Tuggle: She was not gay, per se, but she liked me. Her best friend, I don’t even know. I don’t know if she was gay. I don’t know. Somehow it was okay for us to really have the conversation about liking each other, but I don’t know. I don’t know if we—I’m not gonna say we didn’t know what it was to be gay, but we didn’t vocalize it.

When you’re in high school, it just—it was not really a place where we could be out. In fact, we were paranoid. Literally, we didn’t want to be seen together. I mean, it was very (laughs)—it was very closeted. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: After you left college, is that when you came to Newark?

Burley Tuggle: Yes, kind of. Right after undergrad, I moved to New York for grad school. When I graduated, I was introduced to my church by—by an ex-girlfriend. Basically, she said, “Would you like to come to church with me?” I’m like, “Yeah.” The timing of it was perfect, because I had been looking for a church. I didn’t really grow up in the church, but I felt like I wanted to have a community and I wanted to have a spiritual outlet.

She said, “Oh, would you like to come to my church?” I said, “Great.” She said, “By the way, it’s in Newark.” I’m like, “Okay.” At the time, I was living in the West Village. This was right after graduation. I didn’t have to move out right away, but we took the PATH train, and that was a whole, “Oh my god, where’s this train going?” into Newark.

That's how I started coming to Newark and also attending my church. I've been going there since the age of 24. Now I am 44, so 20 years I've been coming to Newark. I actually moved here ten years ago. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Okay. The church is the Unity?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. At the time, we were called Liberation in Truth Unity Fellowship Church.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where was Liberation in Truth located and where is Unity located?

Burley Tuggle: If you know where Trinity and St. Philip's is, right on Broad Street, right across from NJPAC. Yeah. We worshipped there for many years, more than ten years. I would take the PATH train all the way from—oh my god, when I lived in Brooklyn, when I lived in the Bronx. It was literally a two-hour commute each way every Sunday.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Burley Tuggle: I fell in love with it, because I'm like, "Oh my god, I didn't even know there was a church like this out there." The irony is when I was doing my research that is the church that I reached out to and I had no idea that they were even connected. It was always under my nose, but until my ex-girlfriend at the time took me there, I just had no idea how I was gonna get to that community.

Once I got there, I became active in the choir. I started doing grant writing for the church. Over the years, I've done many things. I've been a trustee forever—(laughs) for like 15 years. Building search efforts—yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was it like the first time walking in there?

Burley Tuggle: Now that was very interesting. I got dressed up, because I didn't know. I thought this was gonna be a typical traditional church. It's funny now, because it's like I don't really do the dresses or anything, but I wore stockings and I wore a skirt. I ironed. I was pretty femme, right? Okay. Lipstick and everything.

When I walked in, basically I just noticed, "Wow. Okay. These people look like me," but I was greeted very warmly. That was really my first impression. I also noticed that not everybody came dressed up. People came very casually dressed. I'm like, "Oh, I really like that, because if I don't have to dress like this every Sunday."

Yeah, but it just felt—it was—I felt welcome. I felt like, "Wow. This is a place where I can be myself." That was part of the message, too. Just everything from during the service we do what we call an affirmation. Basically, the gist of that is that God loves you just as you are. That just really resonated with me. I just kept coming back week after week after week, year after year—I'm sorry, month after month, year after year. Now, 20 years later.

Kristyn Scorsone: How long from the commuting did you stay in New York for—before you finally said, "I'm gonna move to Newark?"

Burley Tuggle: I moved to Newark in 2006, but I started going to church in Newark in '97. Pretty much almost ten years later.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Burley Tuggle: Yeah, nine.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where in Newark have you lived?

Burley Tuggle: I live on the north end of Newark. I live on Summer Avenue, maybe about four blocks away from Belleville.

Kristyn Scorsone: Always there?

Burley Tuggle: Always there, because I bought a condo.

Kristyn Scorsone: Nice. What else besides the church do you like or find appealing about living in Newark?

Burley Tuggle: I moved from Harlem. It's like I always joke with people and I say, "I moved from Spanish Harlem to Spanish Newark." Honestly, it's like I thought that I would miss Harlem and living in New York City and having—and just really being close to the Village and any place that I wanted to get to quickly, but literally, I mean, one day I moved and the next day, I was completely fine.

Literally, I just feel like I didn't even skip a beat, but the difference is that when I moved to Newark, I could actually own something. Whereas when I lived in New York City, I had what they were calling a junior one-bedroom. I'm like, "Okay. What does that even mean?" I had a little apartment. It was okay, because I lived on the edge of Central Park, but that area at the time was still developing. Let me put it that way.

Honestly, I'm like, "I don't have anything to lose." When I tried to purchase property in Harlem, there was no way that I could even afford anything. What I really appreciated about Newark is that I was already very comfortable with it, because at that time, I had already been going to church there ten years. My neighborhood, it was similar enough, but at the same time, it's like, "Okay. I actually own this."

Yeah. I just love the fact that it's another developing urban area. It's close enough to New York that I feel like—that I have the best of both worlds. I'm in New York five days a week. It's not like I'm missing out on anything.

Kristyn Scorsone: Speaking to the how you said about the development and stuff like that. I spoke to another woman, I don't know if you know Joyelle Chandler, DJ Just Love.

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Well, she was talking about how the energy of Newark drew her here and just that sense of community, but she felt like something about it felt like it was changing. She seemed to connect it to a little bit of the revitalization of Newark. She's like, "I don't know if it's that or if it's just maybe me, I just am changing," but do you feel like that all?

Burley Tuggle: I do, but for me, I mean, I see it as progress in a sense that I can remember when I bought my condo and it was literally the end of—literally, I was closing at the end of December and by the time everything finished, it was January of 2006. Prior to that, New Year's Eve, right, I can remember riding around with my girlfriend at the time and saying, "What's happening in downtown Newark?"

We didn't know of any clubs. We didn't know of any bars. We didn't even know where to go for New Year's Eve. We would have conversations like, "Wow, it would be great if we had a lesbian bar in Newark so that we don't now have to go all the way back into New York City just to celebrate and have fun."

Since then though, many venues have popped up. On Halsey Street, you have a lot of businesses that have been there now for five years or longer. I have a business on Halsey Street, but restaurants are there now. There are more LGBT venues where you can go out for a drink or dinner. I love that that's here now and it's only the beginning.

My church though, we have really been on the forefront of that building of the community and most of the businesses that you see now that are LGBT, people from our congregation, they're involved in those enterprises or artists. There's also an artist community as well. I love having a museum or two or three or galleries actually now. We have numerous galleries here. I love being able to do stuff in the place where I live.

I want to be a part of that in the sense that, I mean, I do want to open up a wine bar. It's something that I've been talking about for more than five years now. I can see it happening, because other businesses are already doing restaurant concepts. Yeah, I just feel like Newark is fertile as compared to New York City.

When you go to New York, there are so many wine bars, so many wine shops. I mean, literally even on the same block there's so many choices, so much competition. In Newark, technically, there's only one other wine bar. I'm like, "Oh my god, the field is wide open."

With my business, I've been really just trying to cultivate interest and a market and it's all about really educating consumers about enjoying wine. Okay. I'm just like, "Okay." Eventually, when I get the capital, right, there's already a market there that's just waiting for that. Yeah. I mean, I love Newark.

When I would actually tell people, "I want to open this wine bar up in Newark," and I would get reactions like, "Really?" or, "Is it safe?" I think—what I'm seeing now is that the perception of Newark is changing slowly, but I also feel like it's the type of place that if you're not actually living here or going to school here or working here that you may never even come here just because

of old stuff, history, the riots and other things. Yeah. I mean, I love the development of the downtown area.

Kristyn Scorsone: Just to get back for a second. You said you feel like—well, you said that the Unity Church, that whole community has come out of that church to—is the heart of this entrepreneurial spirit, you'd say, like in the LGBT community around here.

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. I mean, when I say that I mean I don't feel like it's any type of exaggeration. Literally, every venue that's associated with the LGBT community, whoever's leading that effort, they have either been a member (laughs)—yeah, let's just say they've all been members of our church or they've passed through or they've volunteered, but we opened one of the first LGBT drop-in centers right on New Street and we still have our offices at 11 Halsey Street.

That has evolved from we used to do HIV prevention and outreach work. We used to serve meals to the HIV and AIDS population. That has developed now actually into an LGBTQ center that's a part of a network of other centers.

Kristyn Scorsone: The 11 Halsey?

Burley Tuggle: 11 Halsey Street. Yeah. Basically, everybody, okay, even people who have gone on to form other churches and non-profits and restaurants and artist—anything, right, LGBT-related has touched—I mean, they've been involved somehow, okay, within our church community.

Kristyn Scorsone: Is it something like the message there or is it just people sought this place out and are doers anyway—you know what I mean?

Burley Tuggle:

I think it's a combination of things. Speaking for myself, initially it was I just wanted to find a place where I could worship. Okay. Because, yes, I'm gay, but I'm not a—I'm not a heathen, right? I believe in God. I wanted to have that spiritual connection. I would definitely say the message of "God loves you just as you are," so many people really, really need to hear that.

Every Sunday, we say it. You would think, right, after 20 years, you're like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know that," but every Sunday, literally, we have guests. They're young people. They're older people. We even have straight people who come and they hear the message like, "Come as you are. God loves you just as you are."

I think that message has really—I would definitely say that that has drawn people to our church. Sometimes they stay. Sometimes people church hop. People have different motivations for going to church. Some people are still conflicted, because they didn't grow up with positive messages associated with their sexuality in religion.

People come, so it's like—I would definitely say that the message has been pivotal just in terms of people recognizing that you can be gay or lesbian, but you can still be a child of God. Now, that doesn't mean you have to be holier than thou and you never curse and you do—so I think it has different meaning for different people. Most of the people in our congregation come from religious backgrounds. Their parents were pastors or they grew up having to go to church, but they know the rituals. They know the traditions. They know the hymns.

We used to say, "We're not a gay church. We're just a church, first and foremost." Yeah. We just want to worship, too. We're not doing anything special. We would hate when people would say,

“Oh, do you go to that gay church?” No, it’s just a church. Yeah, so I would definitely say our church community has been a place of support.

When we did have the drop-in center, it was a place where people could get services and counseling and referrals. Even now with the LGBTQ center, we have programming for youth. We have programming for senior LGBT members. It’s a safe haven. Even in our messaging, like when I started going to the church, in what we believe there was always a message about providing a safe space, that—and then giving back to the community.

We’re a social justice ministry. It’s never been about, “Oh, you just go to church on Sunday and that’s it.” We’ve been about, “Okay, no. You need to serve the community and, right, people need us outside of church.” People need to hear this message in the bars and people need to hear this message in the clubs.

When I first started going to my church, we actually did a lot of active outreach, like passing out flyers in the club. (Laughs) A lot of people would show up. We used to have the services later. Service would be at 1:30. We’re like, “That’s good for us, because that gives people time to get out of the bars and the clubs and they still have time to make it to service.”

Kristyn Scorsone: Which bars and clubs? Were they LGBT?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. I mean, this is probably before your time, but there was a bar called Crazy Nannies that was in the West Village.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, I went there. Yeah.

Burley Tuggle: Oh, okay. Yeah. That was one of the spots back in the day—Hershey Bar, Wild Bar—this is going to sound terrible, but the Clit Club.

Kristyn Scorsone: Oh, I remember that.

Burley Tuggle: Right? Those are just for people in my age range, but if you speak to older lesbians, they have all of these other clubs that I didn't even know about. Yeah, we would go to—we would leave flyers at the center in New York City. Every year, we would march in Pride, just so that people could see us and you would really be surprised.

You really don't realize the impact of being out until you're marching in a parade down Fifth Avenue, right, with the banner, and you're out and you're talking about God. You're talking about church. Just making that eye contact, so many people were like, "Oh my god, I've been looking for something like this," or just the fact that we were proud and we weren't ashamed or in the closet and many of our church members have children.

It's a message that's still needed. What we do, there's always a need for it, because every day somebody needs to hear that message.

Kristyn Scorsone: How did you come to open your store?

Burley Tuggle: Okay. We've been open now almost five years. One of my business partners, she's really the action person in our group. I would definitely say that it started with her just saying, "There's a spot open on Halsey Street. It's been vacant for years. It's gorgeous. All of us are entrepreneurs. Why don't we come together and share this space?"

From there, it took a little bit of prodding, because basically it's a partnership of four artisans and a wine lover. I'm the wine lover, but that adds up to five people. When you have five people trying to make a move and decisions and meet and—so it definitely took a few months, but in April of 2012, we said, “Okay. We're gonna make this official.” We formed our LLC. From there, we signed a lease and we just agreed, like, “Okay. We're going to share everything.” We share the rent, utilities. Yeah, just everything.

Kristyn Scorsone: Whose idea was it to have it be, I guess, like an artisan store?

Burley Tuggle: The Artisan Collective—well, I mean, it just made sense, because four of the partners are artists. They make their crafts. Even when we were trying to come up with a name and everything, two of us automatically said, “Oh, it should be something like, ‘The Artisan Collective,’ or, ‘The Collective.’” One partner said, “Oh, we should call this, ‘The Collective.’” I think I was the person that said, “Oh, what about, ‘The Artisan Collective.’”

Now it's obvious that what I do is a little different. That was always the wrinkle. We're like, “Okay.” I mean, yes, I have my wine business that's a little different, but for me, it's like my art is wine tasting. We just incorporated that into it, but also when you think about it, wine and art, right? Yeah, those things, they can go together. If you've ever been to any art openings or galleries, right? There's always wine.

That was just the feeling, like, “Okay. We want this to be—we want this to be an equal partnership.” Basically, we just all wanted to be on equal footing as far as decision-making and resources. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you share shifts when you work?

Burley Tuggle: We have a day-time crew. Then we have a weekend crew. Three of us, okay, at the time had full-time jobs. Then there were two partners who had some availability during the business day. They pretty much vowed like, “Oh, we’re gonna be there. We really want this.” That’s how we worked it out.

Okay. The people who have the full-time jobs, they are there pretty much on the weekends. Then the ones who have availability during the business week, those people are there during the business day.

Kristyn Scorsone: What made you want to get into doing wine tasting?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I would definitely say that my love affair with wine goes back now at least ten years when I went to visit Napa Valley. I just fell in love with it. It just never went away. I was always into food. I love food, gourmet food. When I would go out to dinner with girlfriends and other people, I would just get so into the flavors and I’d be like, “Oh, I taste this. I smell this. Oh my god.”

It just got to a point where I would have people say, “Well, you should just be a food critic or something.” I’m like, “What? What?” Then, I don’t know how, but one of my friends mentioned the word “sommelier.” I’m like, “Okay. What does that person do?” She’s like, “Oh, there’s really a place for people like you.” (Laughs) I’m like, “Oh, really? Okay.”

I started just going to wine tastings all the time and taking classes. Then seven years ago, in 2009, is when I actually started my business. I said, “Okay. Since I really don’t have the capital, I can at least start with education and just sharing some of the knowledge that I had gotten from courses that I was taking.”

Then it just never went away. Then when this opportunity to open up a storefront opened up, I mean, it was really an opportunity

because pretty much when I was just independent and doing my wine tastings, every single month I would have to find a different venue. I did tastings in New York. I did tastings in New Jersey and coffee shops. I mean, you name it, any kind of venue where they would allow me to utilize the space for free or sometimes I would have to pay.

After doing that for more than a year or two, it got to be like, “Okay. I just wish that I had one location that I could list every single month and people would just show up there.” This is what opening up the store provided, an opportunity to expand my business, but also to really be a part of a partnership where I could share—share the cost.

Kristyn Scorsone: When you were going to school for this, where did you go?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. There are many paths, but initially, I started doing just classes. There’s a wine shop in New York City, it’s called the Chelsea Wine Vault. I love it, love it, love it. It’s inside of Chelsea Market. They always had great comprehensive wine tastings.

I started doing that. Then I just started to look at—just to research courses that I could take. I took the intro sommelier course through the Court of Master Sommeliers. From there, I also completed two levels of certification through WSET, which is the Wine and Spirits Education Trust.

I also took just—oh, man—basically, I have studied wine at all of the culinary schools, basically the top three. Even before I took the intro somm course, I took a couple of classes at the French Culinary Institute. They had a 16-hour comprehensive intro to wine course.

That was really my first official class where I said, “You know what? I’m gonna take some days off.” I mean, it was pretty intense. This was all over three days of tasting and pairing and—yeah, so that was really the beginning.

After I completed that course and I got this certificate, I’m like, “Great. Can I call myself a sommelier?” They’re like, “Well, no. You can’t, because technically you need to do—you need to go through the Court of Master Sommeliers.”

I took some more courses also at the Institute for Culinary Education. They have a wine and cheese pairing course. I took a tapas course at the French Culinary Institute. I also took a career discovery course at the CIA, the Culinary Institute of America. I went all the way out to Napa Valley to their Greystone Campus. This was a week-long course.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Burley Tuggle: I have a lot under my belt. With my business, it was always about sharing the information and the knowledge. Technically, right, to call yourself a sommelier, according the Court of Master Sommeliers, you have to take their certification course and pass it. There’s a tasting part, theory, and then there’s a service part. I took the tasting part. I took the theory, right, no problem, because that’s what I do in my business all the time, right? Aced that.

But then the service part, right, because I don’t work in a restaurant, a bar, or anything, that was the part that I did not—yeah. Basically, I didn’t pass that part, but when you’re a sommelier, you also have to know about spirits. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Burley Tuggle:

Yeah. I got stumped, because I'm really not into liquor. I learned, "Oh my god," so I got questions about cocktails. I'm like, "Oh my god, I have no idea, because I don't really drink cocktails."

Basically, technically, if you go by their standards, you have to complete that to call yourself a somm.

Now, like I said, in addition to that you have other schools where you can get certifications, which is why I moved on to WSET, passed the intermediate class, passed the advanced class that also includes tasting and theory. Passed with merit and distinction in tasting.

I could go on and on, but then, there are people who have been in the industry for 15, 20 years or longer, they've worked in restaurants and bars and hotels, and that's really how you learn. That's really where you get your chops. When I consult them, they're like, "Oh my god. I never took all of these courses that you took." (Laughs) They're like, "Okay."

In that sense, I'm definitely qualified, and maybe overly so, but I started my business because I wanted to go from the world of textbook to reality. I have all of this knowledge, that's beautiful, that's wonderful, but when I talk to people who work in the industry, they don't have all of that. Because you learn on the job.

It's really basically the next level for me is to take a corporate job. It's about sales, or I need to be in a service job where I'm working at a restaurant or bar. That's the quandary with it, because I've been at my career for 16 years. Actually, closer to 20 years now. Now I want to change.

It's like in order to do that, it's like I would really have to start at a very entry-level in the corporate world, or really—I don't even

need any of that because I really want to open up a wine bar and I want to open. There are many paths. That's where I'm going with this.

Technically, I could call myself a sommelier, but I don't really work in a restaurant or a bar. Traditionally, that's really where the role of a sommelier is. Now they've expanded it where it's more like a beverage director or I could be a director of a wine program, but the industry is huge.

There are so many different aspects of marketing, sales, promotion. We're not even talking about the scientific side, winemaker, cellar master. I mean, basically there is no limit. Yeah. I could be a shop owner. I could be a wine bar owner. I mean, there are just so many different paths that you can take in the wine industry.

Kristyn Scorsone: How do you market yourself? How do people find your events?

Burley Tuggle: I have a Meet-Up group. I started that group in 2010. Pretty much it's a tool that allows me to share information on Twitter and Facebook and Instagram. I have a mailing list as well. In addition to that, word of mouth, friends. Yeah. I would definitely say that my Meet-Up group is my primary marketing tool.

Kristyn Scorsone: Would you say you've made friends doing this?

Burley Tuggle: I would definitely say that. I mean, I have my core group of supporters and, yeah, those people are friends. Yeah. When you're drinking (laughs) good wine and you're having conversations, it's very easy to just make new friends.

Kristyn Scorsone: If you were to open a wine bar, would you leave Artisan Collective completely? How would they feel?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I would definitely say that the Artisan Collective, it's—I mean, it's a stepping stone. When we entered into our partnership, that was always the understanding that, “Yes, we're under one roof, but we really have five different business concepts.” As you can see, right, my business is really different. I really have a different model. Yeah.

I think everybody understands that. Since we started our partnership, we've had partners leave. Not for any negative reasons, but basically we're evolving. They got to a point where they wanted to move on and so we have new partners now. It's like we want it to be this thing that evolves.

For me, yeah, I mean, I don't think anyone will be surprised. It's necessary just for the growth of my business, because, yeah, I need to—I mean, I need a different venue if I'm going to have food and wine. Yeah, I do my tasting events, but it's really not the type of—I would say the space is not conducive to having a food business.

Kristyn Scorsone: Mm-hmm. Would you open it in Newark? Would you stay in Newark?

Burley Tuggle: Absolutely. Yes.

Kristyn Scorsone: You called yourself an entrepreneur. You feel comfortable saying, “I'm an entrepreneur.” Was anyone in your family an entrepreneur at all growing up?

Burley Tuggle: Well, okay. I would definitely say that I'm an entrepreneur and I also have another business. I do financial services as well in addition to my full-time job. Yeah. I've always been—

Kristyn Scorsone: Is that to help people with their finances?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. Business plans, life insurance, so I'm a life insurance agent as well.

Kristyn Scorsone: Wow.

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. I know, a lot of stuff. I'm licensed to do investments in addition to that. I actually started that business or joined that business before the wine business. I've been in that business since 2005. Then the wine business started shortly thereafter.

Even my whole involvement in my church—church is a business. When I started to do the grant writing and everything, yeah—so I really feel like my entrepreneurial career really started with my church through fundraising and grant writing and handling the finances for my church as well, and recognizing that churches are business enterprises.

As far as my family, I don't come from a family of entrepreneurs, but I would say that my mom is a very creative person. Growing up, she was always the person who would bake cakes for people or do some things—I mean, she's—oh, god—she's a wonderful cook. I think my passion for food and wine started with my mom.

Then I have an aunt, actually, and—you know what? I take that back. I do have an aunt. This is my mom's sister. Growing up, she always had some kind of food business that she would try to involve the rest of the family in. Sometimes that worked and sometimes it did not work, but, yeah, she did—she had a barbeque truck. She did upholstery, soul food restaurant, and catering. Yeah. When I think about it, yes, and—yeah.

I mean, as far as making it official, I also participated in the Rutgers Business School EPI program, which is the Entrepreneurship Pioneers Initiative. I did that program five years

ago, I think. Yeah. It's a nine-month certification program at the Rutgers Business School. I think now they're into maybe their sixth or seventh year.

Basically, the program is designed to work with first-generation entrepreneurs. The focal point is that group, because these particular entrepreneurs may not come from a background where we do have a lot of support, because we didn't really grow up in families that had businesses.

Kristyn Scorsone: That is really cool.

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. It was intense, too. (Laughs) Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: What would you say are the top skills needed to be a successful entrepreneur?

Burley Tuggle: I would say that you have to think—you have to think outside of the box, because if you just look at your resources in terms of what you have and what you're trying to do, you would just give up. You would say, "Oh my god, there's no way I can open up this wine bar, because I really need \$300,000," but, right, when you're an entrepreneur, you're like, "Okay, I don't have that today, but that doesn't mean I can't get started."

I'm going to form a Meet-Up group. I'm going to form a company. I'm going to have events. I'm going to do private events. I do winery trips. I'm going to try to keep it moving so that at some point I'm getting closer and closer and closer and closer. I'm going to finish my business plan. I'm going to come up with a marketing plan. I'm going to do this. You just keep going, keep going.

I would say if you're not an entrepreneur, it would really be fly-by-night, right? One day you'd be like, "Oh, this is a great idea. It's so

wonderful, so awesome, but it's too hard. You know what? I don't have time. I have a full-time job. I have a paycheck. I don't really need to do this other stuff."

I'd definitely say your attitude is important, like you can't be—well, you have to be optimistic and you also have to be realistic. I know that sounds like a contradiction. I think that optimism is necessary, because, yeah, you're gonna have a lot of disappointments. Either you stop trying, okay, or you realize, "Okay, in order for you to have success, then you're going to have setbacks."

It's not gonna look the way that you planned it to be. I never thought I'd be in a partnership with four other women. When I think about my business, I mean, I'm always thinking, "Oh, my thing is different."

I think you also have to be open to the possibility that it's not going to look the way that you think it is, right? Yes, you can have a business plan, but I think that you have to remain flexible to the possibility that your business concept might change and it might not end up being what you thought it would be.

Kristyn Scorsone: Are there issues as a business owner that you deal with that are specific to your identity in regards to your race or sexuality or gender?

Burley Tuggle: I would say yes, but not in a direct way. I just think when you look at the wine world or you look at the universe of master somms, right? There are only like 300 of those globally. It's a huge thing. Okay, but it's not, because it's just a small group of people and they create these standards.

The universe traditionally has been very male-dominated, and as the wine world is changing and evolving, now you have a lot more women who are also—who are becoming master somms or they're becoming beverage directors and wine directors, but women have always been involved, because we do the PR, we do the marketing, we do the event planning.

I think maybe within the industry, I would definitely say that women might experience some discrimination in the sense that traditionally we have not held those positions. Now, it's completely changing. I think, yeah, so I don't know. I don't feel it directly, but I definitely think being a person of color in the wine world, there are many times where I am the only person of color.

I can't say I'm the only woman, but a lot of times it's mostly men, but recently I went to Italy, and, yeah, that was—yeah, I don't know. When I think about it, I'm just trying to think how many people of color I actually saw in Italy for this festival. Now, yes, it was in Italy, but this is an international festival. Yeah, I didn't see a lot of people who look like me.

I think sometimes maybe the perception within the industry is—I don't know if—yeah, I'm not quite sure how they see me, because they're like, "Okay." There aren't that many women of color in this industry, and if we are, like I said, it might be in a different capacity.

I definitely think that women are completely changing the wine world and also when you really look into the numbers of female wine-makers, we've always been there. We've always been there, but it's just that the—it's kind of like the world now is discovering us, but we've been wine-makers and lab people and cellar masters and definitely throughout the hospitality community. We've

always been there, but I think the culture is changing so that we're more in the forefront.

Kristyn Scorsone: What do you enjoy most about your work?

Burley Tuggle: In my wine business?

Kristyn Scorsone: Sure.

Burley Tuggle: Well, I would definitely say tasting. (Laughs) It's not only the tasting, it's tasting with other people and introducing them to wine in a way that—maybe in a way that they've never had the pleasure of enjoying wine. Sometimes people just drink to—just to get drunk. (Laughs)

What I want to do with my business is I want to teach people how to taste, evaluate, and appreciate wine, so that when you go to that wine shop and you have so many choices, you'll be able to narrow it down. Also you'll be able to say, "I don't have to only drink this or that."

Liquor, I mean—Health-wise, right, every type of alcohol should be consumed in moderation. I'm not going to say that wine is necessarily better than whiskey, but everything needs to be enjoyed in moderation. I also want to teach people how to drink responsibly and give them options, because when you think of wine, most people can only name just a few grapes. There's a whole universe. There are literally thousands of different grapes out there.

You don't have to know that many grapes, but even if you just know 20 different wines, just imagine your possibilities. Yeah, I just really want to make it approachable and fun and provide education without it being like a class. I also teach as well, because

there are some people who they really want to know more. Yeah. I just want to provide that to Newark.

Kristyn Scorsone: When you say you teach, do you mean during the tasting or you also teach other sommelier—I'm not saying that word right, am I?

Burley Tuggle: No, that's fine. They just say now—they just keep it short. They just say "somm."

Kristyn Scorsone: Somm.

Burley Tuggle: Somm. I do both. I mean, I do the informal tasting every month, because I want it to be casual and fun. I do provide information, but there are times when I will teach classes where we taste more wines. I provide maps and tasting notes and it can be as comprehensive or as casual as my audience.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's cool. Does being an entrepreneur give you a sense of control or agency over your life?

Burley Tuggle: I would have to say that for the past five years, being an entrepreneur has really—it's really been a process of growing pains in the sense that when you have a business and you have a partnership, you have to share the gains as well as the losses. When you have a new business and you have a start-up business, you are going to go through that period of getting your business off the ground.

I would definitely say that at this stage that my business has been funded by my day job. (Laughs) I would definitely say within the past two years or so, it has been hard financially to just support multiple businesses in addition to just your normal stuff, like a mortgage and a car payment.

Also, when you have a partnership, sometimes everybody is in a different place in terms of what they can bring to the table financially. I would definitely say I've had to experience tightening my belt and putting money into a business when you're not always going to see—you know you're not going to get it back.

I would say it has been a learning curve as well, because we have really—we didn't have a business model, right? There are all these incubators out here, but with the Artisan Collective, we created our own business model where we said, "You know what? We're going to be five women. We are intergenerational. We have five different concepts, right, but we're going to do all of this together under one roof."

When we share the way we do things with people, they're always like, "Wow. How is that working?" Right? Everybody's name is on everything. Everybody's name is on the bank account. There's no—

Kristyn Scorsone: —boss, I guess.

Burley Tuggle: There's no boss. We didn't pick titles. We just said, "No, we're equal partners." We all have a voice in decision-making. Economically, ideally, right, we all put in the same, but when you have a business, some months you make money, some months you don't.

Some months your expenses are not going to be the same, like your heating bill. We've had crazy bills where we're like, "Uh, this is what was budgeted and this is supposed to be my contribution every month, but it has gradually grown to be bigger and bigger."

Then when we also have transitions in our partnership—when a partner leaves, then you have fewer partners. Obviously, the cost

of operating for the individuals, right, fluctuates. Let me just say that being an entrepreneur has been humbling. I never thought that I would—there were times when I’m like, “Oh my god, I’m literally broke.” I’m like, “This is crazy, because I have a full-time job.” I have a full-time job.

Yeah, really humbling, like, “Wow.” I mean, yeah, so I don’t—I mean, I can’t say it any other way than when you’re in a position where you don’t really have as much—well, you don’t have any extra—You don’t have any extra money. (Laughs) Just to be completely blunt, but you care about your business so much that you’re not willing to throw in the towel. I would say that that’s the trait of an entrepreneur.

Because, yeah, you could just walk away. You could be like, “I don’t need this. I want to eat out. I want to have my drinks. I want to take vacations. I don’t want to have to worry about money. I don’t want to take on additional debt,” but you say, “You know what?” You have an attitude of, “Okay, this is just a temporary thing and if I stick with it, at some point, it’s gonna pay off or not.” Then you have to make another decision, right?

Kristyn Scorsone: Is that how you deal with the stress? Or do you have any—some people will have a mantra that they’ll tell themselves?

Burley Tuggle: (Laughs) I don’t know if I have a mantra, but I would say that I had to adjust, right? I had to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. I had to be creative. I’m like, “Okay, what else am I going to do to generate income?”

I started doing these wine and beer tasting jobs on the side, and I also started doing Airbnb, anything. Whereas—you know what I

mean?—prior to having this business, I never thought I would even consider having a—home-sharing. That’s what it’s called.

Yeah. It really forces you to hustle and be creative and to realize that—I don’t know—you just really take having money for granted. I never thought I would even—yeah, I mean, yes, it was tight, but I never thought I would be broke. That was humbling.

Kristyn Scorsone: Knowing what you know now, if you could do anything different, would you?

Burley Tuggle: (Laughs) No, because I think having a partnership with women who I trust—I don’t want to change. I mean, no, I would never change that, because it really gave me a safety net and support. We have a type of business where no matter what, whether or not you can put in your fair share or not, we support each other. Because we realize that it’s not about the individual. It’s about the business.

One month, you might pay more in. Another one, I’m not going to say you’re going to pay less, but there are times when you may have to contribute more. I think, no, I wouldn’t want to change that aspect.

But I’ve also been involved in other opportunities where I wanted to have that wine bar and I considered a partnership that wasn’t equal in any kind of way in the sense that one person clearly had—he had the space, he had the capital, he had control of the liquor license. That didn’t feel comfortable, because I didn’t feel like I would really have true ownership of that business. Whereas this feels like, “Yes, we’re struggling, but we’re doing it together.”

(Laughs)

There is support there. In addition to that, these are not just business partners. These are friends. These could be my sisters and

my aunts and my mom just in terms of the age ranges. I think that's important. I think it has taught us what it means to have a partnership.

Kristyn Scorsone: How would you define success? Do you feel like you've found success already?

Burley Tuggle: Well, I'm not going to say that I am where I want to be, but I think forming a business gave me the opportunity to get started and to get a taste of what it's really going to be like when really I'm going to really—I'm going to owe more money. I'm going to have more obligations. I'm going to have more complicated business issues to deal with.

I think it's been a training ground, in a sense. Where we've had to learn just like, "Okay. This is how it's done." I think now I'm—I mean, I think I have a better idea of what it will be like when I do have a larger enterprise. I don't know if I would change that, because I think it's necessary.

When I was in the program at Rutgers, they brought in all of these different, basically, experts on everything—marketing and finance and legal issues and just every aspect of operating your business and putting together a plan and a growth plan and all this other stuff. Through that, they taught us that—I'm not sure where I was going with the train of thought. What was the question there? Would I change anything?

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah.

Burley Tuggle: No. I just think it's all part of the process. One of the concepts that they taught us is when you're trying to go for that bigger loan, basically you have to prove that you've had skin in the game.

Without the Artisan Collective, right, I would not be in a position where I can show that I have put skin in the game.

Yes, we're a small business, but when you add up what our financial contribution has been over almost five years, that's a significant amount of money right there. Now, when I am considering financing, right, now I'm not a start-up anymore. I can say, "No, now I'm in the growth phase of my business." No, I would not change that, because I think it's just the steps that you have to go through.

Where I was going with Rutgers is they would also share stories from other entrepreneurs and other people who have had successful businesses. They always said, right, "People think that success is overnight, but on average, when you see these people who are 'overnight successes,' it takes generally seven to ten years for them to get to that point."

If that's really timeline, then I think I'm on (laughs)—I think this is normal. I think it's part of the process of learning to become an entrepreneur.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where do you find inspiration—books, TV, movies? What inspires you? Or other people?

Burley Tuggle: Traveling, because wine is produced everywhere. Every state in America produces some form of wine. Obviously, if you go to Europe—so it's like I've been to Italy, I've been to France, and I've been to some other places. For me, it's all about visiting wine countries. There are so many other places that I would love to go to. I want to go to South Africa. I want to go to Australia.

I mean, I've been to many wineries within the US—Napa Valley, Sonoma Valley, Finger Lakes Region, Long Island, of course.

What inspires me is that wine, it's always—you can never learn every single thing about wine, because every vintage is different. Every producer is different. Every wine-maker is different.

Even within a bottle, when you open up a bottle of wine from numerous places, okay, in the world, to me, it allows you to travel in a sense, right? You get a sense of what the food and the culture is like. I just think it's just trying new wines, to me, is inspirational.

Then when you see women who are very—who are in the forefront now in the wine world, yeah, I just think other people's successes. When you hear about the McBride sisters, basically two sisters—I think they have the same father, but they were raised on two different sides of the world. They didn't even know about each other. Through their passion for wine, they actually got reunited. They formed their own wine business.

One grew up, I think, in California. The other one grew up in some other place in the world. They both learned about wine and wine-making, but they didn't even know that each other existed. Now, they have this big flashy brand and they're beautiful women, so that's involved in the marketing aspect. Yeah, I just think you can create whatever you want within this industry. I just think you just have to find your niche. That's what's exciting.

Even as much as I want a wine bar and all of this brick and this mortar and—that doesn't have to be my business model. I can expand what I'm doing or I could do something completely different and I could still be in that industry.

Kristyn Scorsone: Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like vital to you and your happiness, I guess, is having something where you can constantly learn.

Burley Tuggle: (Laughs) That is true. That is true. Yeah. I love learning. It's like any other industry, right? You need to do continuing education. There are so many wine books that come out every year, and you would think, "Oh." I would say maybe 80 percent of the content is overlap, but every year, there is a new discovery of a new grape or an emerging wine region or—it just never—there's always something new about it, right? Yeah, constantly learning, tasting, retasting. It never gets old.

Kristyn Scorsone: What was your favorite place that you went to?

Burley Tuggle: My first trip that was big, I went to France. I was determined. I'm like, "I'm going. I don't care who I'm with or not with, but I'm going." When I was there, I went to Épernay, which is the heart of the champagne region. It was just awesome, just because you're there, you're in the vines. Literally, I have a picture that I took in the vineyards in Epernay in the heart of champagne country. I'm just like, "Wow. I made it here."

Then, you go to France, you're a tourist. You're American. I can remember going to a wine bar that was right outside of Versailles. It was literally my last night there. I was there. I was enjoying the food and the wine. I met this couple. It was just great, but we lost track of time. I missed the last train heading back to my hotel and everything.

That part of the story's long, but the thing that's interesting though is when they met me, they were like—and I told them what I was doing there, they're like, "Aw. She's in love with wine." It's so

much a part of their culture that they—it's just every day. I just think going there, because obviously France is not the only country that produces fine wine, but a lot of the standards that we have came from France.

When I was there, I went to the museum of wine, all of these little things, right? That if you live there, they don't care about that, but I just really felt like that was part of my journey. Some of my favorite wines are actually from the Rhone region in France.

I didn't get to go to that part, but that's the other thing that I love. I mean, there are so many different regions, okay, to visit. It'll never get old. I will always have a place to travel, but then it's like when you pair the wine with the food—so I just—yeah, I mean, I just love it.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's really cool. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you wish I had asked or that you would like to add?

Burley Tuggle: Wow. No, I can't really think of anything. I mean, obviously, I mean, we could've talked about so many different things, but I love Newark. I just really want other people who are not familiar with it to become familiar with it. As an entrepreneur, I mean, I want to be a part of its development and growth.

I think Rutgers is doing a great job with the business school as far as trying to really train local entrepreneurs and provide mentoring and coaching and financing opportunities and webinars and support in a lot of ways. Because obviously, the big corporations are coming here and Whole Foods and so I think those places are going to definitely change the landscape. Hopefully, a lot of the smaller businesses will be able to survive.

Yeah. I mean, I think Newark is great. I think if other people get to know Newark, I mean, I think there are pros to that and there are cons. The pros are developing communities where we can have jobs, but also with the artists. When I tell people that there is an artist community in Newark, they're shocked. They don't even know. They have no idea.

I mean, I just want us to be trendy and artsy. I don't want to have to run to New York City or Jersey City or Montclair and Maplewood and every other place other than where I reside to do something cool and artsy and fun and cultural. Yeah, I mean, I think we have so much potential. The only thing that I don't want—I don't want the local communities to be displaced or not really included in all of these great things.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you think both can happen?

Burley Tuggle: Yeah. I mean, I see it already. I love it when we do the art crawl or when some of the galleries have their openings and their auctions and I think it really gives local students and business owners and artists just an opportunity to really experience Newark. Yeah, I mean, I think we're a—I mean, I think it's a cool city.

Kristyn Scorsone: Where do you see yourself in five, ten years?

Burley Tuggle: Oh, five or ten years. With my business, I really have a larger vision for my business. When I started my company, I wanted to pretty much—literally, I wrote a note down and I said that I wanted to become the Starbucks of wine bars. (Laughs) In addition to that, I also had another vision for having a line of boutique wine shops.

That also plays into my Meet-Up group, okay, which is called the Sippers Delight Wine Tasting Social Club. Yeah. I'm like, "Okay,

yeah, I can definitely see literally it would be a line of hip-hop wine shops.” (Laughs) Okay. Other things, too, right? If you’re into the wine apparel, right? I think the stuff that I see online is a little corny. They always have the rhinestone shirts for the ladies and everything. I’m like, “I would like to really have a really cool line of unisex wine apparel that you would really want to wear.” That’s a whole other concept.

Of course, the wine bar. I just think it could go so many ways and I’m—my challenge is to not let the struggles and the hard times shut me down where I say, “You know what? I don’t really want to—I don’t want to experience more discomfort.” Because I know in order to get to the next level, I have to do so much more, and I have to be willing to take greater risks. That’s where I see myself—wine shops, apparel—

Kristyn Scorsone: Taking over the world.

Burley Tuggle: —taking over the wine world and making it just accessible to everyone, because in this industry, there is some snobbery. Traditionally, right, it’s been a very elitist thing, but now the wine world is evolving and people have greater access, okay, because now we have mass production, but with technology and traditional wine-making that’s now worldwide. You have so many regions that can really produce quality wine but at lower price points.

I never want people to feel intimidated. I want people to understand that wine is ancient, right? It’s been around for thousands of years, right? Even Jesus drank wine. It can be something that should be a part of your life and not this thing that’s reserved for only the people who can afford it. Because now, right, everybody can afford it.

Kristyn Scorsone: Right. Do you have any advice for someone starting out or a best piece of advice that somebody gave you when you were starting out?

Burley Tuggle: I'm sure so many people have chimed in just support and encouragement for my wine business. I think that was very, very important as far as me feeling like, "Okay. I'm on the right path." Yeah. I mean, I think that's very important. I don't think I had too many people say, "Eh, that's not going to work," or, "How are you going to get that money?" and, "Oh, you're going to open that wine bar up in Newark?" I mean, so I did have some people say that, but most people were like, "Wow. That is interesting. That's cool."

Lots of support, enthusiasm, encouragement. People, if they know about any other wine bars, anything, I am always getting referrals and ideas and people just want to—because they know that I'm into it, they want to—they just want to help. I'm grateful for that.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's awesome. Do you have anything else you want to add?

Burley Tuggle: No. Not really. Unless you have any other questions about the good old days of (laughs) when I was coming to Newark and—

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. Is there something I missed there? Places you would go or—

Burley Tuggle: There were some bars and stuff here back in the day, but like I said, not many. I think over time just the quality of our venues will improve. They're going to get bigger. They're going to be LGBT-owned. I think we just have so many creative people and—so, yeah, I'm just looking forward to seeing that and being able to really sustain our businesses.

Because I think it's important when you have a community to support you, but we have to go beyond our community. Because, as you know, with a business, right, your friends, your family, they can't come and eat at your restaurant every single night even though they love you. Our community has supported our store, okay, for five years, but we need to attract even more people. Newark is huge, right?

We have to continually develop and cultivate our business-savvy. Because, yes, it's great to have community support, but in order to grow, we have to think bigger. We have to think beyond what our friends would like or—so I just think that's always a challenge, too.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. How do you reach that?

Burley Tuggle: How do you reach it? Oh, I think it's—

Kristyn Scorsone: Reach those people. Reach more people, I guess.

Burley Tuggle: You reach more people—we've always had that challenge, because your first instinct is, "We need to have a person who is dedicated and—," but it involves paying somebody. "Oh, we need to have the best website. Oh, we need to pay for this or that marketing. Oh, we need to do this." We need that, but at the end of the day, right, there are basic things.

Word of mouth is definitely powerful and—but I think there are—it's an ongoing process where we have to balance out whether or not we can realistically do that or if we need to pay someone to do it. Since we cannot afford (laughs) to pay somebody to do it, it's always like always this catch-22, right? We could do it ourselves if we had time, but we don't have the time, so we can't afford to pay somebody. Certain things just don't get done.

Being human and having a full-time job and all of these other things, at the end of the day, certain things just don't get done. I think just having a balance between the business and your personal life and your job, I think that is ongoing. Yeah. I mean, I can't say that we've mastered it, because you can't just do it once. Every month, you have to get that newsletter out, that email blast out, the flyers, the this, the that. Yeah. I don't think there is a secret other than you have to keep doing it. You have to be consistent.

Kristyn Scorsone: You said you have to find a balance, too. How do you unwind or when do you unwind?

Burley Tuggle: That's somewhat of a challenge for me that I've gotten into trouble with—with relationships, because I am active in my church and work and my businesses. I think I haven't mastered it, but I just have to—I think it's important for me to be with someone who can understand where I'm trying to go, but at the same time, I have to make time for everything or—you know what it is?—this is my challenge. I have to learn how to prioritize.

That's it. Okay. Sometimes your priority is not someone else's. If you're in a relationship, right, obviously, you have to compromise. I think I am learning that and over the years, it's been a challenge for me to say, "Okay. I'm only going to do this and that." For me, it's not either or, it's and. "I can do this and I can do this and I can do this and I can do this."

I have to learn what the limits are or at least I have to prioritize where I can realize, "Okay. I know you want to go to five different things, but realistically, you can really only do two or be at these only."

Focus on the top two priorities, and I think some of these other things would fall into place more, because then, I'd be able to say, "Okay. Obviously, I don't have time to do this, so I need to delegate it." Okay. Or I need to eliminate it. (Laughs) I forget what the other things are, but so I just think that's always a challenge just in life, but I think as a business owner, that is just ongoing.

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. I would think that would take a while to learn how to do that, especially if you're the one responsible to have all these plates spinning, I would have anxiety over, "What if one drops if I looked away for a second?" Then you might miss out on, say, a good time with someone. It's hard.

Burley Tuggle: No, it is hard. Because, yeah, I mean, we're human. We need outlets. It can't just be business all the time. I would say being involved in your church and your business and other things, sometimes the lines get blurred. I think because we're so community-based, (laughs) I think that's really a challenge sometimes. Where we have to say, "Okay, on the days that I'm in my business, I should only focus on business. It's not really the time to squeeze in church stuff or—"

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. I was gonna say, do you feel pressure to support the community's other businesses and then events, things like that?

Burley Tuggle: I'm not going to say pressure. I think sometimes I try to do too much, because I want to support. I'm like, "Okay, I need to be at my store more." Not pressure, but just a desire to want to be involved in a lot of things. I think sometimes we get isolated in our business as well, where people will say, "Oh, I don't see you anymore. I haven't seen you."

It's like a reciprocal relationship where if you support somebody else's business, then they will support you. But if you're too busy working on your business, then you may not have those opportunities. Because we do have four—well, five partners, I would say the advantage to that is we're in a position to really say, "Okay. If I can't go to this community meeting or this fundraiser that would benefit the business, then somebody else in our partnership should be able to do that."

We haven't mastered that yet, but I definitely think that that's also one of the advantages of having a partnership. Because, yeah, it allows you to be in many places at once, theoretically. I'm not saying we mastered it, but I think that's how it should work.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's awesome. Is your mom proud of you now with all this?

Burley Tuggle: I think so. My mom is proud of me and she tells me that. Yeah, I've done a lot of things. Of course, I'm always striving for the next level. If anything, we just have our little inside thing where she's like—I'm like, "Okay, well, I need to go, Momma, because I need to work on some more shit." (Laughs)

That's just the spirit. She's like, "You're always doing something." She's proud of that. I mean, I have to—she's an active person, too. Honestly, I would say that I get it from her. In fact, when I was growing up, we would always be like, "Oh my god, do you have to do that?" Right? "Do you have to be the person to volunteer to make the cake and cook all the food?"

Yeah, but I would definitely say she's proud of me in the sense that I am following my dreams and, yeah, that I am trying to do something. I'm not just a passive person in my community and that

I'm very—I'm dedicated. I mean, I believe in—once I'm involved (laughs), I want to make sure that I am reliable.

Yeah. I mean, I would definitely say she would say that she raised me right. I'm from the south, so manners and all of that stuff are important. Yeah. I would definitely say that the person I am is because of my mom. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you think you'll ever retire? Will you always have to do something?

Burley Tuggle: I think I'll always be doing something. Yeah. I can't imagine, in fact, it's so bad when I'm not doing something, I feel guilty. That's not good. That's the other side of it. I have to learn to say, "No," and to prioritize and to realize that I don't have to do everything. Yeah, but I don't think I'll ever just be dormant and sitting on a couch, never.

Kristyn Scorsone: It sounds to me like you—even though maybe you haven't achieved whatever your ideal of success is that you've achieved happiness just trying all this stuff, doing all this stuff.

Burley Tuggle: I'm working on it. I would definitely say that I like having the freedom to choose, as opposed to feeling obligated. I would say that I am working towards that. At some point, that will mean that there are some things that I've been doing for 20 years that I need to let go so that I can put more energy into my business, into my relationship, or the other things that are priorities.

Yeah. I'm happy, but that's always—it's continual. I mean, I think I'm in a good place, but I want more. I want to do more. I want to learn more. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: That's cool. Yeah. I guess that's pretty much it, unless you—if you thought of anything else you want to add, feel free.

Burley Tuggle: No. I think I've said plenty. (Laughs)

Kristyn Scorsone: Yeah. That was great. Thank you so much.

Burley Tuggle: No problem.