

**Oral History Collection**

**Quinn Kettle**

**Interviewer: Jordan Pingelton      Date: May 6th, 2024**

**Place of Interview: Denton, Texas**

Jordan Pingelton: Hi, this is Jordan Pingelton in Denton, Texas. Doing a little interview with Quinn Kettle. Quinn, would you like to introduce yourself?

Quinn Kettle: Hi, I'm Quinn Kettle in Denton, Texas [laughs].

Jordan Pingelton: Yes, I love that. So now we're just going to be kind of having a talk about food, about your job, about your life, about just kind of getting an oral history of you and food in your life and all those sorts of things.

Quinn Kettle: Purr, so is it going to be about me and food and my life?

Jordan Pingelton: I think that's going to be kind of our main three points for sure, definitely.

Quinn Kettle: [laughs] Okay, work.

Jordan Pingelton: So just kind of like to start out, can you kind of just give me an outline of your experience working in the food industry?

Quinn Kettle: Yeah. That's quite vague.

Jordan Pingelton: It is quite vague.

Kettle: That's quite vague.

Pingelton: So you can do, like, very general and I can source down from there.

Kettle: Okay, work, I started working in restaurants when I was 16. I started as a busser and a host. And then I really started working in restaurants at 18 when I started serving. So I've been serving and bartending since then. I'm about to be 25, so however many years that is.

Pingelton: That's seven years.

Kettle: That's seven years of my life. I've been in restaurants and especially before I started dating my curtain partner, I was working doubles. Every single day. So I was working about 70 hour weeks. Yeah.

Pingelton: I didn't know that. That's insane.

Kettle: Yeah. I used to work crazy. Crazy. I was working doubles Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and sometimes Monday and Tuesday. If they would let me. So I was working a lot. I was making like 1500 + a week.

Pingleton: Wow.

Kettle: Which was dope. But one thing about working in the service industry like that and also what happens to most servers, especially because it's really difficult to get out of food service. You end up doing pretty irreparable damage to your body because you were just working, running, moving and it's not one of those jobs where you really get healthcare. So like I mean Janet, you know our coworker, she's mid 50s. Her body's fucked, so is Paul's, because they've been in food service their entire lives, and it's not. Necessarily a job that, like. Enables care, you know?

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: So my bones are basically like falling apart already and only 25. So yeah, there's not.

Pingelton: There's not. There is that so with that kind of like? How hard the job is, like what drew you to the restaurant industry in general initially?

Kettle: See, that's what's really interesting is that a lot of people, especially poor people, food service is a job that they kind of gravitate towards because one thing about working in food service, if you're

poor and you can't afford groceries? You always have food. There's always food there.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And so I started working restaurants because my family and I grew up very, very poor. And my dad would work the morning shift and my mom would work the night shift so that they were always working and there was always someone home to take care of me. And there was always food for us because we couldn't afford food on our own. So them working in restaurants, plus being able to bring home that money every day because that paycheck is just something that poor -- most poor people can't like live with, like having daily income is really important for someone that is just like drowning financially. And So there was that. And so I went into restaurants because that's what I grew up -- like literally someone would pick me up from school, like one of my dad's friends just drop me off at the restaurant that they worked at. And I would just sit there until my dad got off of work. So I was just comfortable in restaurants already and I'm really good with people. So yeah, my first

job was at On the Border. And especially whenever I left my parents home 18, 19, no 19. It was really important for me to be working in a restaurant because I wouldn't have been able to get groceries, so.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Yeah. And now I just do it because it's the only thing I've ever done.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: So like in this class, we've talked a lot about how like food ways aren't always traditional where -- and like food deserts exist and all that sorts of things. And you kind of touched on that as well. So. Can you talk about how like? Kind of like the back door. Like food industry is like either. Helped or hurt by the different like places that you've worked and like. If different managers were like had specific, do you know what I mean? Like crack down more on it or were more giving or just.

Kettle: With food?

Pingelton: Yes.

Kettle: Yeah. So, honestly, I've never really had a manager that was very strict on people. Like being able to eat. Like as I mean. Cheddar's is -- actually while Cheddar's is very giving like our managers have said word for word "None of our staff is going to go hungry." Like "If you can't afford food, I'm going to buy food for you." They're the most strict in that, whenever like someone rings in an order, wrong or whatever, we throw that food away in every other restaurant ever worked out which has been a lot. The staff eats that food, which is the norm for most restaurants, which is what I find so weird about Cheddar's, is that we have so much food waste. But I guess Cheddar's does make up for that by donating food to the local food banks every week, which I think is really cool. But yeah, no, I think I've never really worked in a restaurant that wasn't giving, because that's just kind of like the nature of it. Like the manager, most managers other than Amy, Amy, some of the only manager I've ever had, that wasn't a server at one point, most managers have been in the server shoes and they know that. A lot of people can't afford to eat food, so they're like, yeah, I can eat it.

You know, it's gonna get thrown away anyway. Or, like, let me buy you this or let me order pizza for everybody or whatever. Like, they make sure that the staff is fed. So yeah.

Pingelton: Yeah, I feel like. Because I -- we talked about in this class actually as well about like how certain fast food places like they're very strict about "No, you cannot eat our food, blah blah blah." And so I wonder like if it's. Like if there's some correlation between us getting paid \$2.00 an hour and being able to like, eat food here and there and getting paid like a livable wage and not being able to eat.

Kettle: Yeah. See, I do think about that a lot because there's a lot that our managers will do or that the company will do for us instead of giving us a livable wage. You know, like they offer, I think it's like four free therapy sessions, a year through Garden, which is like cool. But can I at least get \$7.00 an hour?

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: You know, I'm like, can I pay my rent or like, whatever? And it's not like a real therapist. But, you know, like for anybody that has actual issues,

it's not a therapist that you could go to like, I mean, I have borderline personality disorder can you imagine if I went to the Garden therapist and was like --

Pingelton: Hey, I really need help.

Kettle: I'm having thoughts of suicidal ideation.

Pingelton: Yes and like. Okay. So our next session is going to be in three months, yeah.

Kettle: Yeah, yeah, yeah. For sure. I don't know. That is a really interesting point. I never really thought about it, but there is a lot that they'll do that, I guess kind of like. Makes up for the fact that we don't have a wage.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: But I'm cool with the food. I mean, there's been times where I would have to work every day, because otherwise I wouldn't eat otherwise, like I wouldn't be able to have any kind of access to food unless I was working at my restaurant job, which is something that most poor people will gravitate towards. Which is also why they're able to overwork people.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: So so easily is because they know that they need, like, those, the people that are, they are, they are overworking, wouldn't be able to survive otherwise. So.

Pingelton: With that, there's kind of like with what you just said, it's it kind of there's that saying that like disparities are most obvious in the food and hospitality industries, like hotels and restaurants and so.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: I feel like. It's an interesting like, it's kind of just, the capitalistic machine in general, where you need to work to live --

Kettle: Yeah I mean --

Pingelton: But in food service it's so poignant.

Kettle: In foodservice, it really is. So like abhorrently true like the was it the the blood of the working class greases the wheel of capitalism. You know, like if it weren't for and it it is crazy to me because so many, like rich people or even just like

upper middle class people talk shit on food service workers.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: But they're the people that you're abusing in that restaurant. You know, like they're the people that, I mean, I don't know. How many horrible guest experiences have you--? You've had, but I mean, I've been working since I was skinny, blonde and 18, you know? So I was treated very differently than than I am now. Now people, for the most part respect me because I guess I look mean. I don't know. That's something that I've heard from a lot of our coworkers and also from customers. They're like, "You look scary, but you're nice." But whatever. I was 18, blonde and skinny. It was very different and people treated me like shit. Or very sexually creepy, which is so weird to like, go somewhere with your family to eat food and share a meal. And I feel like sharing a meal is very like. I don't know food has been important in so many cultures and like sharing like --

Pingelton: Engrained in every culture, yeah.

Kettle: Yeah, exactly. And so like going and being waited on by somebody, first of all, not even just like the sexually weirdness or whatever. But like, treating them like they're an animal, almost like you're so far above them when you wouldn't be able to be at this restaurant being waited at if I didn't work here.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: You know, like, whenever -- Like. On holidays, Easter and stuff like that and people are like, "Why are you working here on Easter?" And like girl? Because you're here, you know, because you're here on Easter. That's why I have to work on Easter. People treat waitresses so weird.

Pingelton: So weird.

Kettle: So weird and like just so casually, like, creepy, misogynistic. Demeaning. Like I remember a couple of months ago. I've heard this so many times over my serving career, which is weird. I'm like, do you guys take a class now to be creepy? But, whenever I -- I was like, is your tea sweet enough? In that case, I had to, like, remake it because he said it wasn't sweet he was like "It'd be sweet

enough if you dipped your finger in it, and swirled it around a bit." I was like, that's so bizarre to say to somebody, that's so weird to say. Or, oh my God, whenever I first started working at Cheddar's. It was really late. These two like biker looking dudes came in with one of their sons and it was like this, like 10 year old kid. And he was like really shy and really embarrassed. And his dad kept making jokes that he was shy because he wanted to have sex with me. This child wanted to have sex. With me. And that's why he was so shy. And he was like, "Don't worry, you'll be able to do that one day." And I was. This is a really weird position to put me in, and also you're joking about your 10 year old kid having sex with a 25 year old.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: You know, super weird.

Pingelton: And then there's like that overarching dynamic that makes the behavior 'allowable', in quotation marks of, well, "I'm paying your bills. So I can do whatever I want."

Kettle: Mm-hmm. They can treat you however they wanna because they are paying you. And what's crazy is like they're usually not gonna pay you that much.

Pingelton: [unclear]

Kettle: Like the tables that treat you that way are not even tipping 20%.

Pingelton: No.

Kettle: And it's it's crazy that they they think that because.

Pingelton: I don't know like and a lot of old people also I guess don't really realize that we are only making \$2.13 and that never went up like.

Pingelton: Mmhmm.

Kettle: And so they'll have like \$100 tab that they tip 7 bucks on.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: They're like "What you made 7 bucks?" and I'm like. Yeah, that doesn't pay for literally anything these days.

Pingelton: Anything.

Kettle: That's like, not even the cost of like, two large white Monster cans, [laughs] like.

Pingelton: No, literally.

Kettle: Like, I'm like, hello. Well, that can't buy me anything.

Pingelton: Yeah like you might get lucky with like a sale at 7-11, but that's like you're betting on sales.

Kettle: Yeah, yeah, I remember. God, I was 19. I was working two serving job. No, I was working two restaurant jobs. One was a hosting job, one was a serving job and I was really broke. I was really, really broke. There was some shit going on in the -- Oh, sorry am I allowed to --?

Pingelton: No you're good [laughs].

Kettle: There was, there was there was something going on in the economy at that time. I don't remember but everybody was really poor. And so like, whenever the economy dips, obviously it affects restaurants. People tip less, people tip more in cash, which is interesting. And, I remember I had a car. I wasn't speaking to my parents, this was after I moved out, and so I was really poor. I had no money and I was like sneaking that, oh, that restaurant was really strict about free food. It

was a ma and pop restaurant, which for the most part, ma and pop, mom and pop restaurants treat you very differently than corporations because, like, you're affecting their direct profit and not the profit of, like, a conglomerate.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And so I had no money. They would not help me out with food. I did, like, steal pieces of garlic bread because I didn't have any food. It was horrible. And I remember I was. I had to bus tables because we got really busy. And someone had left a \$10.00 bill on the table, and whenever I had driven to work, I had 0 miles left in gas. I was like, I need to make some kind of. I need to figure out how to get home. Like, I don't have any money. And I remember I think about this everyday. I stole that guy's \$10 tip because I didn't have any other way to get home. And I was like, I hope he never finds out. And then I heard him talking about how upset he was because he was like "That table really liked me. I don't know why they didn't tip." And I felt so bad that it crumbled up the tent and I threw it under his booth and I was hoping that he

would just find it. And he was like, "Hey, I saw you just throw a piece of trash under my table. What did you do that for?" And I was like --

Pingelton: Oh my gosh.

Kettle: "I'm sorry." And so I picked it up and put it in my pocket. And I wasn't able to -- and like, I got gas, and I was able to get home but I think about all the time because that restaurant did not give a fuck about you.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Did not care, and a lot of people think that corporations are the evil ones when it comes to restaurants, but corporations are usually the ones where poor people are working because that's the only way you can really make money is by working for a corporation and that's the only way you get treated like a human being because there's HR and there's all these different things. And I literally think about that. Experience all the time. I had no food and I had to steal this guy's tip. And then I tried to give it back and he was like, "Pick it up!" and I was like, "I'm sorry!" [laughs] I'm a horrible person.

Pingelton: And with that, like he, there's also there's like the very real, like monetary side to serving. And then also there's the part where he didn't get a tip and he was like, oh, I thought they liked me. Like, there's this very real part of serving where. You are like helping people to break bread together like and to use, like biblical terms, or whatever.

Kettle: Yeah absolutely.

Pingelton: And so like, do you still feel after you're like, you're varied experiences in the industry and everything that like there is like. A sort of, not religious, but like very important aspect to your job. Like do you like? Do you know what I'm saying?

Kettle: I mean, I think food service has always been very important and it will continue to be. But I mean it's one of the oldest professions, you know, and.

Pingelton: Hmm.

Kettle: Like. One thing is even if you're really poor, one thing that you're able to do with your family is go out for a meal together. And serving is important because you're able to, you know, facilitate that. And hopefully if you're a good

server, you're able to make them laugh and you're able to. I mean, like, it sounds cheesy to like. Bring them closer together for that moment, you know. And there's there's tables that I've waited on that have made like a permanent impact on my life also. Like I have this couple of regulars. Their names are June and Earl, and they were the first table I ever waited on at Cheddar's and they have been seeing me consistently ever since. They always come in to sit in my section and the older man has cataracts so he can't see me very well, but his wife is very sweet. Um and um, they talk to me about their life and they talk about how neither of them work. All they do is garden all day and they don't cook. They don't have any groceries in the house. All they do is go out to eat at restaurants. That's how they survive because neither-- or his hands don't work very well. So he can't help her cook. And she has to be with him at all times, to take care of him, so they just go out to eat together all the time, literally for every single meal. And like for Christmas, they like wrote me a Christmas card and gave me \$100 tip. Like. And there's tables that like I remember

whatever my. I like went through a breakup or something and I was having really hard day because like, that's, that's another thing that serving serving is no matter what's going on in your life, you have to be there and you have to be a good server. And some tables care enough to ask you how you're doing and want an actual answer. And so like, there's tables that I've like become friends with and they've become like, intricate parts of my life through just waiting on them. Because like it's an experience together, you know and. Yeah, I don't know. Also had really weird experiences where, like I remember I had only been working at Cheddar's for like 3 or 4 months and I was working in the cocktail area and I waited on this couple that I thought was really kind, you know, like they were. We were chilling. You know, they tipped me \$2.00. And then right on the back of the receipt. My old lady thinks you're attractive. Here's her number if you want to go on a date with her.

Pingelton: Oh wow.

Kettle: And so like, a lot of people will like. Either like sexually or romantically or like just vocally give

you a tip and they won't give you money. And they think that that, like, makes up for it, which is really weird. I don't know if you have a weird view of servers.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Sometimes they don't view you as a human they view as an object.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Or like a robot or a slave or something.

Pingelton: Or like you're permanently there, like you're like, soul bonded to the restaurant and you never leave and like stuff like that.

Kettle: Or if something goes wrong, they act like you did it.

Pingelton: Yes, yes.

Kettle: Like if their food came out burnt and you weren't the one that ran their food so you didn't notice. And then they act like you burnt their food because you want them to die, you know.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I don't know.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: I-- you brought up an interesting point, or you made me think of an interesting point. Maybe where that Earl was his name. Right? He goes out to eat a lot because he has, like, difference in ability like, so with, like, food ways and how we eat and like nutrition and stuff like that I feel like, restaurants are very important in that way because we are the restaurants located like kind of down the road from a hospital. And a lot of times you'll see people come in and they have hospital wristbands on a lot, yes.

Kettle: A lot of people, a lot of older people with like literal wounds on their heads and hands. And mothers that just gave birth and like, literally just gave birth, and a bunch of stuff. A lot of people come from that hospital yeah.

Pingelton: So I feel like it's like an interesting thing too, where no matter what. Like, accommodations you need whenever you go to a restaurant, there's the like, and I think tipping culture helps with this in a way, because a lot of people are like, get rid of tipping culture, dadadadadadada.

Kettle: Which is so messed up.

Pingelton: You think?

Kettle: Yeah!

Pingelton: Okay, put a pin in that. Put a pin in that. We'll come back. We'll come back. But. With like specifically people who are differently abled or have a disability and they're like life experience, they like in a certain way. Certain servers who might not want to be accommodating have to be because their tip like relies on that.

Kettle: Yeah your livelihood relies on it.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And but what's what's really interesting about that? Like. There's a lot of servers that are solely money driven, which is understandable. I mean, it's your profession, you know? But I also like, I don't know why you would pick serving of all things if you don't want to make a connection with people you know. Because I think like food and people in the connection there is like the biggest part of the job. And that's also how you make the most

money is by making a connection with people. Like,  
why wouldn't you care about their abilities?

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: And why wouldn't you care about, like, wanting them to be comfortable and have an experience for something that they're splurging for? Or like? Like Earl in June, who come in because his hands do not work enough to help her cook and they, they don't, they, they can't go to the grocery store all the time, you know? Like, like those moments are really special. And I like, like, there's a bunch of people in wheelchairs that come in to Cheddar's. And like kids that can't feed themselves and so their parents have to feed them and. Some servers act really fucked up about it.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: You know? Or they'll, like, make fun of them in the back. And I'm like. Hello? Like this is a universal experience coming to a restaurant and being fed, you know?

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And obviously these people need this moment, and they need this time out of the house, and they need to be able to eat cause they can't cook for themselves and they need all these different. So I don't understand why you would be acting like that.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: But I don't know. Maybe that's just me.

Pingelton: No, it's like it's also this weird thing with the feeling that people are treating you like an object. There's, like, a reciprocity with it, where you're like, "Well, I don't care. I just need to get my check" or "I just need to like get a bigger tip."

Kettle: "I just need to make 50 more dollars." You know?

Pingelton: Yes.

Kettle: And so. Then those people become an object to you. Which is something that we all complain about, as being viewed an object. But then you're just viewing these people as like, a --

Pingelton: A paycheck.

Kettle: A cash cow. You know?

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: When they're just people.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I feel like. It would be much easier to work in the restaurant industry if both parties viewed each other as human beings. You know what I mean?

Pingelton: Yeah, literally. And so a lot of people attribute that like, that relationship, and that strife to tipping culture. But it sounds like you don't view that, like, or do you? What's your view on tipping culture? You said you don't want to get rid of it. Or you do? Or you don't?

Kettle: Hmm. I mean, I think. I mean, well, I think there's several different sides to it in that like, I am providing you a service. You know, if you went, if you did not want to be waited on. Which is an intricate part of working at a restaurant, is like or being at a restaurant as you are being waited on by someone who is getting you everything that you could possibly need. And more, and anticipating your needs. And like you know, and trying to make a connection with you and everything. Like if you

didn't want to, pay them for your experience, then go to a fast food restaurant. You know, like where they are being paid. First of all, a living wage which you know. And also they're just like doing a job. They're not doing a service.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: You know what I mean? I mean like, and, you know, it makes me think about. I was watching this tik tok and this woman had won some contest where she got a free, a wedding planner. And she was talking to the wedding planner and she was talking about how she thinks that wedding planners should be free because everyone needs one and they're like, you know, whatever. And then she was kind of like how waiting, waiters and waitresses are free. And the one she was talking to was like, "What do you mean?" And she was like, "Well, they're free. They're just there to be part of the restaurant." And it's like, what do you mean? I'm just there to be part of the restaurant. I'm doing my job and doing a service, you know? And you should be giving me money for that. And I also think on top of the fact that, like, duh, I'm doing a job and you

should be paying me because that's how it's fucking always worked. On top of that, you should have some care for human beings knowing that. Cause everybody, unless you're a million years old, knows that I'm making \$2.13 an hour. Everybody knows that. And like, if you have the opportunity to make someone's life easier by like paying them for the service that they're doing, and knowing that like. The world does not go around unless we are helping each other. And goods and services, and all of the different things, you know, all those things, and if you do not want to tip someone because you do not see the value in another human being and the services that they're giving you. Then I don't think you should go to a fucking restaurant. I don't think you should go to a coffee shop if you don't feel the need to tip your barista. They're not just there. They're not just a thing to do a thing for you. They are a human being and you are paying them for the goods and services you are receiving, which is how things have worked for the entirety of all time, you know what I mean?

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: So yeah, no, I think tipping culture is important. Whenever it comes to. A corporation that on their self checkout at a grocery store has a tipping option.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Yeah, obviously no. But we all know that that's going to a corporation that is fueled by greed, not from a human being who's like. Who's a single mom and has three kids at home and has to work doubles and pay a babysitter to keep her head and her children's heads above water. You know, why wouldn't you want to tip that woman, you know, like?

Pingelton: Right. And there's this weird thing where it's like, I see so many videos where it's like tipping culture has gone too far, but like. It's no, yeah.

Kettle: It's not. And I think it's gone as far as it should.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I think that more people should care about people being financially stable. And I think more people should, you know, more people should care about their community. More people instead of throwing

away cans of food that you're not going to eat, should be donating that to the food bank more people. That see a homeless person on the side of the street that is asking for money should be giving that person money and not asking where it's coming, where it's going to.

Pingelton: Yes.

Kettle: You know what I mean? Like, that's another like. That's like, a lot of people think that when they see a homeless man on the side of the street that if they go get him food and give it to him that they're doing better than someone giving him money. Which I don't agree with because that food can go bad. What if they just ate? What if blah blah blah. And also you don't have control over what that person does, with the money that you're giving them. I get that people think that by giving them food, they're doing the best service possible. They're not. That food goes bad, the food gets bugs in it. They have no way to store that food, they have blah blah blah blah blah, you know. And like, if I gave you \$10 just as a gift, I wouldn't be

like by the way, don't spend it on this. You know,  
I don't know.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I just think more people should care about the community and I think food service comes into that.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And you know, I mean, it. Food has always been a way of connection. You go to a funeral or like the wake or whatever you bring a dish for the family so that they don't have to worry about cooking and stuff like that, you know? And. I just don't see why someone would come with their family after a celebration and want to share a meal together and then look at me like I'm not a human. And why wouldn't you want to tip me. Like you, tell me why. You know, like I just want to look those people, people in the eyes and just say why do you think tipping culture should not exist?

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: Because you not tipping me isn't going to do anything about what the restaurant thinks about my hourly wage.

Pingelton: Exactly.

Kettle: So who were you helping?

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: You know?

Pingelton: I remember this one lady came in and like, I remembered having her and she like, specifically was like "I need a spoon for my corn." Because she, like, didn't want to eat it with a fork. And I was like, okay, work whatever and I bring her a spoon the second time she comes in because I remember her. And she's like, "Oh, my God. Thank you. Yeah, we've had you before." And I was like, struggling to remember why I remembered her? From like a long time ago, whatever the check comes, they leave, no tip. So, we like formed a human connection and, no tip. So I think that's also an interesting thing.

Kettle: It's dehumanizing.

Pingelton: Yes, exactly. But, whenever there is that connection there, I'm like. I'm just so confused because you can afford it because it's like you're, like, doing math on the menu to like order the perfect amount and like, drain your bank account

to \$0. Like I understand eating cheap or whatever, but it's this weird thing where, like community building goes so far. Because I do think, I agree that, like, food service. And food in general is very community building and like, learning what people like, and like getting regulars is like this whole little micro like, economy and stuff.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: But there's this weird wall. Where. There, there's just some wall. Do you know what I'm saying?

Kettle: Yeah, I do kind of get what you're saying. I think it's really, me and a bunch of people we work with all the time. We always talk about how weird it is that the people that we think are going to tip us really well, are the people that stiff us. And the people that treat us like shit are the people that tip us over 20%. It's so weird. It really is weird, but there is. I don't know, I think. I think you know we have some coworkers that complain about how there's no money in this business, or there's no money in this restaurant and all of this, all this shit. And I'm like, there is, if you do your job right, you know? Like, if you just walk up to

the table and you're like, what can I get you to drink, you know? And you treat these people like they're pieces of shit that are just going to give you money then, like, yeah, you're not going to make any money. You're going to have a bad time. But like for me, I build a connection with everyone of my tables. Because first of all, I love to, I love to yap. And so I'm yappin' with my tables. And half of my regulars are gay couples like, yeah, elderly, gay men are my customer base. Like, I have this one set of regulars that comes in all the fucking time. And sometimes they come with their friends, which is a lesbian couple, and a gay couple, and them. And, but for the most part, most part it's the the older gay couple and one of their moms. And they come in all the time and I see them. And then I just go get them a Coke Zero, a water, and a Diet Coke. And I know they don't want croissants and I know their exact order. And we talk about what their wedding was like, and we talk about what my wedding is going to be like and they just have seen pictures of Beck. They ask how Beck is doing, you know, and it's like. A lot of our coworkers, whenever I talk about these things,

are like bewildered that I have this relationship with these people and I'm like, well, if you just talk to them. You know? And they always tip \$10, you know? And so like, it's nice knowing that I have this connection with them. And that I know for sure they are always going to tip me \$10.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: Because that \$10 can really like push you over.

[laughs] You know, it really can.

Pingelton: Yeah, for sure.

Kettle: And. They, like accidentally. They're not accidentally, they made extra cookies a couple weeks ago, and they, like, brought me a tin of cookies, you know? And it's like little, like, tokens of affection through food that I think are really important. I don't know. I love working in a restaurant.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I talk to you about it all the time, but I --

Pingelton: Of course.

Kettle: Really, I really do love it.

Pingelton: Yeah. And I feel like that you're mentioning this little adorable couple, kind of like segues into another part of the conversation that I think is really interesting in that. You're queer. Talk about that.

Kettle: [laughs]

Pingelton: [laughs] No, just kidding. But really, we kind of talked about this a little bit like individually, but now we're gonna get it recorded, like, down on the record. But just maybe begin with. Kind of identifying yourself in as many words as you want, or as little words as you want. or whatever. Just like set of basis. Because I don't think we've said that yet for the. Recording that like.

Kettle: Okay, I'm a lesbian and I am non binary. Um, so yeah.

Pingelton: So there you go.

Kettle: I'm gender queer and a big old lady loving lesbian, and my tables love that, they eat it up. [laughs]  
They eat it up.

Pingelton: [laughs] And so, with that, there's. And we live in Texas. Well, obviously, we're recording this in Denton, Texas, as we said at the beginning --

Kettle: Denton, Texas! Denton, Texas.

Pingelton: Okay.

Kettle: Work. [laughs]

Pingelton: [laughs] Okay. Yes, yes. And so there's a lot of like. "Ma'am", a lot of like "Sir", those types of things.

Kettle: Mmhm, Yeah.

Pingelton: And you do not identify with those words in your regular life?

Kettle: No.

Pingelton: Only at your job.

Kettle: Yeah, you have to put on a show.

Pingelton: Yes.

Kettle: You know, you have to be what the people are looking for. And with tables like my gay regulars. Like the gay couples or the lesbian couples that come with the baby that I'm able to connect with on that personal level, and I'm able to take that wall down with them, it's different. But with every other table, I can only show them the bits of my queerness that are acceptable.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And that they can, like commodify. Does that make sense?

Pingelton: Absolutely.

Kettle: Like the bits that they can be like. "Ohh yeah, a lesbian waited on me today. How crazy." You know what I mean? But I can't. I can't let them see the stuff that they might not agree with, because that directly affects not only my safety. They know where I work, you know.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: But it also would affect my money.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And so there's with a lot of things with my gender identity, with me being gay, I know there's certain tables that I cannot talk to about that. Like you can see it, you cannot talk to them about that. With our coworkers, with our Hispanic, and with our Black coworkers. There are certain tables that they wait on that they have to change bits of themselves, because they come in in a MAGA hat, you know?

Pingelton: Mmhm, yes.

Kettle: And so they have to know how to act around those tables because not only would it affect your money, but it also would affect your safety. And, so there's only there's bits and pieces, there's things with serving that you have to put up with. Because otherwise it will directly affect your job.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Like or your like I said, your safety. So yeah, it's really exhausting. It feels like whenever I get home, I take a shower and I'm like, washing off this other person --

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: That I have to put on because I'm. I'm also on the spectrum so, it's like there's a there's like an energy that I have to uphold and like a mask that I have to put on with these tables that whenever I'm home, it's like literally taking off the fucking heaviest jacket, you know, and like, just dropping it and being like, "Oh my God, I can be a human person again." And not just like, just like this object. That's like, you know.

Pingelton: Like automaton, with the little, and.

Kettle: Mmhm, mmhm. Yeah, absolutely. Like, I don't know.

Pingelton: Yeah, I like. I think it's really interesting that when I brought up this topic, one of the first words of your mouth is like performance. Like, literally this job requires you to perform your gender that you were assigned at birth.

Kettle: Yeah, I feel like I'm a dancing monkey, you know? Mmhmm.

Pingelton: No. Yes.

Kettle: Mmhm, absolutely.

Pingelton: Like, I feel like even with men, like.

Kettle: Especially.

Pingelton: They are the, like, very masculine men -- do very well at our restaurant.

Kettle: Very well.

Pingelton: And they play it up more than like when they talk to me, obviously.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: And so we're kind of in between that. Because you're not going to, like, put your hair in pigtails and. Like -

Kettle: No, yeah.

Pingelton: Dance about. And I'm not gonna go talk about football at a table, so we have to carve out this weird like niche where we're funny enough, but not too, like, racy.

Kettle: Queer enough, but not too in your face.

Pingelton: Exactly.

Kettle: Yeah. To where you can be something that those people want to look at.

Pingelton: Yes.

Kettle: But not something that is going to make them uncomfortable.

Pingelton: Absolutely.

Kettle: Which is, like, so difficult to make your money off of that, you know, like to make your money off of chipping away parts of yourself, to be easily digested by someone that you don't know, but your money relies on them. You know? It really is

interesting and, there's tables that I make the mistake of letting to see too much of me.

Pingelton: Yes!

Kettle: And then I have to reap that. Like um, tables that start to make lesbian sex jokes. Or I mentioned my partner and then they say, "Do lesbians really scissor?"

Pingelton: Woah.

Kettle: And then I have to be like. [laughs] You know?

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Because if you get upset with them, that's something about working at a corporation. You can't defend yourself in the way that you would like.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Because you can get fired, you know, because that has to go through HR. If if something happens between me and a customer. If I say "You can't make a joke about me being a dyke." You know, "You can't use that word."

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: You can't. Whatever, whatever, whatever. And they bring it to HR. It doesn't matter how much my general manager loves me. It doesn't matter how many connections I've made with these people, and it doesn't matter the experiences that I've given them or shown them different sides of something they've never thought about before. You know, it doesn't matter any of that if this one person, is uncomfortable by me or by the way they acted that I didn't. Whatever, whatever I can lose my job. Yeah. So it's like you. You have to be so fucking careful to only show bits and pieces of yourself, which is really difficult. Like we we used to work with a trans woman named Iris and she did not pass, at all. And she would introduce herself as Iris. And, you know, talk 'womanly' and, you know [unclear] hers was consistently like a 40. Like she was not digested by our clientele at all. And it's so horrible. Because like, it goes all the way back to the end of the conversation where this is where poor people work, because they can always get food, and because it is day by day, money. But if you are not something that is easily digestible

by the public, quote UN quote, which our our clientele is mostly Republicans, you know.

Pingelton: For sure.

Kettle: So if you're not easily digested by a Republican, if you're not a lesbian that they can picture sexually, if you're not a trans person that they can picture sexually in a taboo way to them, then you're not making any money.

Pingelton: No.

Kettle: You know, if I'm waiting on men who were flirting with me and I. Shut it down. I'm not making any money. If I'm whatever, whatever. If I don't laugh at their jokes, if I don't. Whatever. Then, like the whole job, is fucking pointless.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: It's literally fucking performance, and it's an exhausting one.

Pingelton: Right.

Kettle: And and like it can be really emotionally damaging too.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: But you just have to, like, keep doing it because otherwise like. You wouldn't have anything, you know?

Pingelton: Right. Yeah. And so like. With that, they're like, kind of to lighten up a little.

Kettle: [laughs]

Pingelton: What do you --

Kettle: Sorry did I get too --

Pingelton: No, no! But just in like I don't want to just say like, "So what's so hard about your life?" You know what I mean? We don't have to do that. But like, how do you kind of like, you talked about going home and showering and not feeling very transformative like you're literally taking off a mask or like something like that? What else do you do to kind of like, this is a very, like, vogue, what do you do to recharge?

Kettle: Well, honestly, it depends on what the day was like. So like there's days where I will have a very fucking bad day at work where people treated me like a dog, you know? And those days, I kind of just like, I mean, people can see it on me at work,

you know. Like I'm not able to bounce back as easily as some of the other people that we work with because I think most of the other people that we work with don't deal with it in the way that I do. Or I'm sure that you do, you know, as very openly, queer looking people, or sounding people or whatever. So, but like for me, sometimes I just have to go home and sit on the shower floor and I have to just sit there and then I have to just be silent, and have, like, doom scrolling phone time for a while before I feel like, ready to talk to another human being. It's a draining job and all, it's also a job that breeds alcoholism and addiction.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: Um, which is something that I'm happy that I got out of, but it, you know, I am an addict and it. Did. Breed that you know, because like sometimes the only way that you can get through a shift is coke. You know, like a lot of, like, I remember I worked at Chili's is the one over on the loop. And they were all doing it all the time because everybody was. Working doubles every day because it's such

good money. But the only way you can get through the doubles is by having a stimulant, you know? Yeah. So like historically breeds addiction. And so yeah, now that I don't have that, I kind of just take a two-hour long shower and watch a really good movie.

Pingelton: Really good movie.

Kettle: [laughs] Or like binge RuPaul, which is something I've been doing a lot, yeah.

Pingelton: Yeah. I yeah. I do that too, like literally. And it's not like I work so much or anything like that, but like those, those hours that you lose in transit to and from like a draining job? Umm, because other people have jobs and they're very draining, like working at McDonald's is very physically hard. But you're not having to like, be a comedian and like, make sure you look nice, specifically.

Kettle: See things with McDonald's are draining in a different way.

Pingelton: Exactly.

Kettle: Because of the way that people look at you.

Pingelton: Yeah true.

Kettle: You know, because like, I mean, McDonald's pays \$15.00  
an hour.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: You know. But the people that are looking at the  
people that work at McDonald's are not thinking  
about that. That's the same amount that I think  
Target pays.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: You're working at Target. You're going to be treated  
in a very different way than you are working at  
McDonald's, but people aren't gonna stop going to  
McDonald's, but they are going to keep shitting on  
you. You know, that's what. That's what's so weird  
about. It is like these people treat waiters and  
waitresses, and fast food workers, and bartenders  
as like these, like less than things.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: When again, oldest profession is food service other  
than like sex work, you know?

Pingelton: Yeah literally.

Kettle: And so it's like, I don't understand why I would be less than you when I have to be here for you to get what you want.

Pingelton: Exactly.

Kettle: So I don't know.

Pingelton: And I think that's, like an interesting point about how specifically food service is so. Like, subjugated, in our culture because in a lot of ways, like we serve, we serve like Southern comfort food, which is rooted in, like slavery.

Kettle: Yeah, absolutely.

Pingelton: A lot of the things we serve are like were developed by enslaved people.

Kettle: Mmhm.

Pingelton: And so, or even like McDonald's, like the hamburger, like these types of cuisines that aren't seen as, you know, French cuisine or Italian cuisine. These types of industries and these types of restaurants are subjugated like that. And I think it brings in like an interesting conversation about kind of. Who gets to decide what's authentic? Who gets to decide what is 'good food', in

quotation marks? And so I kind of, you're I think you're an expert in your field.

Kettle: [laughs] I would say so, yeah.

Pingelton: I would say so, and so kind of like. What's your like Quinn's guide to the Galaxy for like? Service or like where do you see it happening in the next few years? Cause I feel like COVID really changed the service industry --

Kettle: COVID changed so much.

Pingelton: So if you want to touch on that.

Kettle: I was working in a restaurant on COVID happened. It was horrifying because we didn't know much about it. Whenever the pandemic first hit, and all we knew was I have to touch people's food, you know. I have to touch people's food. And then I have to touch the food, the plates that they ate off of, and the cups that they drink out of. And it was so crazy because. Uh. People were talking about like, how scary COVID is and whatever, but they weren't thinking about the food service workers in that at all.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: But they weren't going to stop going to restaurants.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: You know, and it was crazy because our managers didn't even really think about our safety, they're like "Put on gloves", "I don't know put on a mask if you want, but you need to keep coming to work." And I was like, people are dying. [laughs] Like people are dying. I don't know. I mean, the trick to being a good server is just making yourself swallowable enough. Like making yourself easier to chew on, you know, and giving them a good experience and making sure that they don't have anything to yell at you about. I mean, that's really the only way you get through it, is just by doing just enough. But you also have to think about how the public doesn't really give a fuck about you and your management probably don't either. [laughs] So it's an interesting job.

Pingelton: Yeah, I think. Yeah, I think --

Kettle: [laughs]

Pingelton: Just checking the time we're nearing the end for sure. But I kind of want to go back over my notes

and just let me think of anything that I want to go over again, or maybe think of. Oh, here's one that I wrote down. This is my first question that I had written that I haven't asked yet.

Kettle: Okay.

Pingelton: But kind of in light of everything that we talked about like. And. Just kind of what we're supposed to do with this interview or whatever. What does the restaurant represent to you in American life and life in general, and where do you think like. Because I think we're at kind of a tipping point in history --

Kettle: Mmhm, for sure.

Pingelton: And where do you think that food service is going to go? Where do you see yourself in that? Where does the restaurant settle in kind of this America that's constantly earthquaking and.

Kettle: I mean, we're always going to be here. That's the one thing about working in a restaurant is those jobs are always going to be needed. You can move anywhere and find a job within two days, you know. Like no matter what's going on in the world, even

through like the 2008 fucking financial crisis where no one had any money, restaurants were still there through the pandemic, restaurants were still there, you know. I don't think anything is really going to affect my job personally. I'm always going to have one even if I left Cheddar's, I can go and get another restaurant job that day. I have never left an interview without the job, you know, especially like having experience. So, but I'm not sure if I'm going to keep making the same money. You know.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I used to. I used to work 12 hour shifts. Friday, Saturday, Sunday leave at 1500 bucks, and now I'm lucky if I make four hundred, five hundred maybe it's a really good day. So, honestly with, as long as I've been working in restaurants, I have no idea what's in store for us. I have absolutely no idea. I have no idea what's going to happen. Things change every day, you know, especially with the clientele that we have.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: I don't even know if it's going to be safe for me to be working there for much longer, you know, because, like, especially with. You know, things that are happening across the world with wars and genocides and things. And having any form of opinion on that if they ask you a question and you answer it wrong, they could hurt you, you know?

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: So it's like I never really know what tomorrow is going to look like working in a service job. There are so many horror stories, especially lately, about queer people waiting on someone and then getting, like fucking beaten up in the parking lot after. So it's like you really have no idea.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: A table that you thought you made a really good connection with and supported you could just be getting information to hate crime you. So like you really don't know.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: But I mean. I always have food.

Pingelton: Yeah.

Kettle: And I always have the tables that do appreciate me and do treat me well so I can just like hope that it continues that way.

Pingelton: Yeah, very, very real opinion. Very a realist view of the future from an expert in their field.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: I think. Do you have any more thoughts? We have hit our time limit but. We can go forever.

Kettle: I think I'm pretty thoughtless at this point. [laughs]

Pingelton: [laughs] Me too. Me too, I think. Yeah, thanks for being sharing, generous, sharing your views.

Kettle: Yeah, I'm an expert in my field.

Pingelton: You're an expert in your field and it does show.

Kettle: Yeah.

Pingelton: It absolutely does show. So, yeah, I think that's gonna conclude our interview. Thank you, Quinny.

Kettle: Yeah. You're welcome. [kisses]

[End of Interview]

