

Q: Today is May 1st, 2010. This is Kathy Staley. And could you give me your name --

A: Sure.

Q: -- age --

A: Sure. My name is Jonathan Craig Adams. I go by my middle name, Craig, and that's been going on since I was just a kid. I didn't really have anything to do with that. I was born in 1967 in Johnson City -- Johnson City, Memorial Hospital, [Tennessee] which is no longer there. And grew up in Johnson City, then went to school in Virginia and New Jersey and lived in New York. And then moved back here, went to East Tennessee State University and lived in Charlotte for three years before I lived here.

Q: What profession led you to all these different spaces?

A: Well, theater to New Jersey and New York. I'm a theater major -- was a theater major. And I lived in New York for a while. And then decided that wasn't something that I wanted to do and moved back home, not knowing I was going to end up back in college. But that was just something that happened, as I wanted to do something but didn't know what it was, so.

Q: Could you talk about your childhood, having been raised in an Appalachian area? It's sometimes different, sometimes exactly the same as everyone else's experience. But you

came of age during the '80s, that's your teen years. Can you talk about how you first learned or heard about homosexuality, gay culture?

A: Let's see. I guess for me it was probably movies or television. I mean, snippets of that. And I think I knew when I was like, second or third grade that I wasn't quite like anybody else. And then really knew that I was gay probably about fifth or sixth grade.

Q: Did you have the words at that time?

A: Yes, I did. I knew that vocabulary. I'm trying to think of how. I guess it would be television. Maybe, you know, I guess there was -- he wasn't a gay character, but they alluded that he was gay. In *Three's Company*, Jack Tripper. And news items, every now and then you would see on television. So I knew that the word -- yes, I know the word, yeah. So yeah.

Q: If you can remember back when you were a kid and teenager, what was your conception of what gay life was like?

A: Different, you know, different than the norm. And probably something you didn't want to be. I would think as a negative stereotype or a negative class of people, or a negative thing, you know. It wasn't put in any kind of good light whatsoever. So it was either something to be

made fun of or something to dislike. There weren't any positive aspects to it whatsoever.

Q: Besides the media, were you getting that message from family, friends, and classmates?

A: Definitely classmates. I was very androgynous looking as - - junior high especially. You know, people would ask me if I was a boy or a girl. You know, that changed in high school. And then it just became, you know, fag, cocksucker, you know, gay, you know, those kind of terms were used a lot, so.

Q: Were they directed at you and other students or just in general?

A: To me yeah -- to me.

Q: And were there any interventions being used by the teachers to stop the name calling?

A: No, I never took it to anyone and it wasn't something that kids did in front of the teachers. And I was very shy, so I never talked to anybody about the harassment, so. It wasn't -- harassment may be too strong a word, I was never pushed or physically hurt or harmed or even any kind of vandalism or anything like that. Just the verbiage.

And it usually was with people that disliked me and that I didn't hang around with, you know, so.

Q: How did your friends respond?

A: Well, I think they ignored it. They didn't know how to deal with it, so they just ignored it. And I did too, you know? Because I didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't -- there was no one I could go to about it, so just ignore the whole situation.

Q: Did that end up being internalized at any point, the name-calling?

A: Well, I think yeah. I think it really for a long time messed with my probably self-esteem and -- yea, probably did. Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you know anyone who was gay growing up?

A: No, no. Not one person. That I, you know, knew for sure. Yeah. I had an uncle that was gay and actually died of AIDS early '80s, but I didn't know until he was diagnosed that he was. He didn't live -- he lived in a lot of different areas when I was growing up. So he wasn't around. And I never even -- it's not one of those things like where I thought it, but I wasn't sure. I just didn't even know. We didn't have any kind of close relationship or anything.

Q: Right.

A: So you know.

Q: How did your family respond to him coming down with AIDS?

A: Well, my dad comes with a large family. There's eight children all together. And some of them would not visit, you know. He died in my grandmother's home. Some of those brothers and sisters would not visit him, which would be my aunt and uncles. Some of them didn't want to have anything to do with caring for him. My dad surprised me and was there for him, you know. And his second wife at the time and then two other of his brothers and -- well, one brother, one sister and my grandmother were the ones who were actually the primary caregivers. I was away at school at that time. So I didn't even have a lot to do with that whole situation. So I wasn't in town.

Q: Right.

A: Right.

Q: But did you know what was going on?

A: I did know what was going on and my dad would talk to me about it, you know, that he was really declining and those kinds of things. But you know, I was busy in school, doing theater, working, just you know. And on some levels I'm sure I wasn't able to deal with it either, because I was just coming out and finding myself. So -- so.

Q: Could you talk about your coming out process?

A: Well, coming out for me I guess would be -- it was later for me. I was 19 and second semester of college. And I

just -- it helped, theater helped being around people that were either gay and out, or contemplating coming out or saying they were bisexual or whatever. So there was an element of safety there. I also went to a really small liberal arts school, so that helped, you know. I felt supported by teachers and staff and those kinds of things, so. For me it was kind of a -- well, there was -- it was in stages, which I think it is for most people. There was actually being -- or having my first sexual encounter and then being in those first relationships, which for me everybody that I had a sexual relationship with I thought was the person I was supposed to be with for the rest of my life kind of thing. So it was all that, you know. Not having anything to guide how to help me navigate through all that. So that was tough. And then, you know, I didn't come out to my mom until I was in my late 20s, and my dad too. You know, where I actually said the words and talked to them about it and said this is who I am. So.

My mom wasn't surprised. She actually said something to the effect that I thought you were. But she said she didn't want to say anything, because if she wasn't I'd be a devastating blow, to think that your son is gay and he is not.

And then my dad, he doesn't really talk about it so much. He's more stoic in nature. I was in a relationship -- pretty close relationship with someone for three years. And he would say, you know, how's your buddy, how's your friend, you know your friend's invited, you know, if it was family something, you know your buddy's invited. That's about as close as he can get to -- but that's OK, you know? That'll work, so. And my dad and I have never had the type of relationship -- I think if I was straight I wouldn't be talking to him about my relationships with people, you know. So he's just not one of those type guys. He's not a touchy feely guy, so. But yeah, so it was a long process for me. So. Yeah, about 19 to 29, about ten years to come out to everybody, you know, in every situation.

Q: It sounds like the coming out process for yourself started when you were ten and then what do you consider to be the contributions to taking so long.

A: Well, I'm not sure that it was. I don't think it was a planned event, you know? I mean, I think it was just evolution. But you know, I guess just having this safety net, I guess? Being able to be comfortable with myself first and then, you know, just kind of treading the waters a little bit, you know. And then developing a relationship and then telling people I guess was important. Because I'm

an introvert too so I'm not just one that goes, "I'm gay!" you know? But I'm at the point now, you know, I would probably wear a t-shirt that says that. But it took a long time. I'm 43 now, so it took a long time to get there, so.

Q: When you were in high school and you were aware of it to a degree, a lot of teenagers that are LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) will go and date opposite sex to try and fit in. Did you --

A: Oh, sure.

Q: -- do any of that?

A: Yea, yea. Sure did, yea. I had girlfriends through high school and actually had sex with women in high school. And yea, it was all just playing a part. There's nothing -- I'm definitely gay, there's no bisexuality, you know. But I just needed to have that somehow to try to be normal even though I knew that I wasn't. Makes you feel bad to be in that position, but it was a coping --

Q: Did you do any other coping activities?

A: Like just peer pressure stuff? Oh yeah, yeah. I was an early smoker. I smoked from 14 to 21. And as soon as I could, I didn't like high school at all, so as soon as I could -- I don't even know if they still have this, but I was on something called co-op, where I went with the class like three -- I went to 11:00 and then I worked. So I

started hanging out early on with older college kids in high school or, you know, young adults. And that's where the smoking and the drinking and stuff came into play. Nothing more than smoking or drinking. Smoking cigarettes and drinking. But yeah, and I did that to fit in, you know, definitely, definitely.

Q: What about high school made you hate it?

A: Well, I think just the harassment and you know, my happiest was the day I graduated because I was like I don't ever have to do this again. I don't ever have to see these people, I'm done. I've never been to a high school reunion. I don't have any friends from high school that I keep in contact with. So it was like "I'm done." And I just wanted to get through it and get to college and get on with my life, so. And I mean, co-op was what I needed at that time to manage myself and to get through, but I regret that I didn't take some of the advanced college classes. I paid for it later, you know. I mean the prep classes in high school. It would have been much better if I had went to the algebra and the advanced biology and, you know, all that. I would have not had the problems that I had in college, the challenges. So yeah.

Q: Having to take the remedial-type classes.

A: Yea. Right, right, right. Yeah. So yeah.

Q: Were there any havens for you in the high school where you could be more who you are without concerns of these other people?

A: No, there wasn't really. That's another thing. There wasn't anything in high school for me. There wasn't any clubs to belong to, so.

Q: So the school didn't offer any clubs, or there wasn't anything that fit with you?

A: Right. There wasn't anything that really fit with me. There wasn't a huge offering. It was a lot of sports. And if you didn't play sports well, you know, there was just nowhere else to fit in. So there just wasn't a lot, you know.

Q: How did you get into the theater?

A: Totally by accident. My first roommate in college was a theater major and I just started helping out, ushering, building sets, you know, that kind of thing. Again, it wasn't a planned thing. I'm going to be a theater major. I was undecided my first semester. So yeah.

Q: Where did you go to college?

A: First college was Virginia Intermont College, which is in Bristol. It's actually a Baptist college. But I went there because of the arts at the time. It's changed now. It's not as liberal as it was. But it used to be a big,

huge dance school. It used to be a big equestrian school. A lot of people came that could board their horses there and kind of -- those kind of things. Probably about 500 students at the most, I would imagine. Yeah. Small. But it's what I needed. I knew if I went to a big university I would just fail miserably, you know. Because I wasn't quite socially ready. Maybe socially ready's not the word, but I would have been a little fish in a big pond and I wouldn't have been able to deal with college life. I needed that small liberal arts college where I can get a lot of help, you know.

Q: So you connected into the, the theater art scene.

A: Right.

Q: And that helped you find a fit.

A: Right, yeah. Yeah. Definitely. I just, I began to be myself and find who I was, the beginning of that. It doesn't happen overnight, you know. But it was the beginning of finding out who I was. Yeah.

Q: And interestingly you said you stopped smoking after you came out, didn't you?

A: Yea. Well, that was also due to kind of a weird thing happened to me when I was like, 21. I used to smoke and study. This was when you could smoke in your dorm rooms. I'm taking you back. And I used to smoke and study a lot.

So I would smoke a lot in the evenings. And I just woke up one morning and felt like someone was sitting on my chest. Couldn't catch my breath. Scared me. I quit like immediately. I don't think I had the nicotine addiction, I just had the habit. Because I quit cold turkey. And I've not smoked since, so. Yeah.

Q: That's very unusual.

A: I just said, you know, it really scared me to the point where I got to do something, so. Yeha.

Q: So after you finished school at this small Baptist local arts school where did you go from there?

A: Montclair State, which is down -- Montclair University is in Montclair, New Jersey. So it's about 40 miles out of New York City. And I chose that school [because] I have a friend who's from that area. And then I also had two other friends from school in Virginia that transferred up there. So it seemed like I would still have a little bit of the old clique. I'd be close to New York City where I could take acting classes and see theater and those things were important to me at that time. So that's why I chose that school.

Q: So that's where you finished up --

A: I finished up my theater degree there, yeah. Yeah. So that one. And then when finishing that degree then that's

when I moved to New York for a while and then decided I really needed to do something else, not knowing what. So that's when I moved back to Johnson City.

Q: Could you make -- and it may seem very obvious -- observations of the differences and similarities being gay in Johnson City, Bristol and Montclair University and New York City?

A: Well, I think just in general for me it was culture shock. If you even took the gay aspect out of it, I had never been in anywhere but, you know, my hometown and going to school in Virginia and a beach trip every year to Myrtle Beach. I'd never been anywhere else. So it was like another country in a lot of ways. I was just awestruck and fascinated. And it was like being in another country, that's the only way I can describe it. Even though it was the same country. It was just a world of difference from anything I'd ever experienced. And I guess as far as being gay, of course I felt much more open and free to be gay. And so, you know, but if you just took away it still was huge, huge for someone like me, so. Yeah.

Q: Did you start opening up from being shy during this time?

A: Yea. That actually started happening when I was in school in Virginia too. I think that helped. I think theater helped, getting up in front of people and having to do

something helped. And having words to say from a script so you wouldn't have to talk yourself helped. You know, any shy kids that are out there, I recommend theater. Because it does. It's painful at first, but then it really is a good thing, kind of opens you up a little bit and gets you used to being in front of people. Because in high school I was the kid that I may know the answer, but I would never raise my hand. And if the teacher did ask me a question I would turn beet red, you know? Even though I knew the answer it just embarrassed me to just say the answer in class. That's how shy I was, so. And I was really small then. I graduated from high school and I weighed 117 pounds. So you know, I was like, you know, just meek and shy and quiet and didn't want to make waves, and you know, just get through the day, so.

Q: Did you feel a pressure to have a certain type of masculinity?

A: Hm. No, I don't think I did, no. No, I don't really think I had that, you know. It never came into any kind of... can't say that that was ever an issue.

Q: Some people have said that growing up they really did swallow and take to heart what the expected gender norms were and for someone who doesn't quite fit those norms it can be a little frustrating.

A: I think I almost went the other way. I get -- I see where you're getting at now. I think I went the other way where, you know, having just said where I don't want to make waves, I would find myself picking out a loud shirt in the store or, you know, I wanted to be a rebel a little bit, but then I couldn't deal with the consequence of being a rebel. So -- which was the harassment and the, you know, all the name-calling and stuff. But I would still do it, you know, I would still push people's buttons. I wanted to push people's buttons a little bit, but I didn't have the equipment in myself to deal with the outcome of pushing the buttons, I guess is the best way. So I almost went the other way. I didn't try to fit in, I tried to be different. And was ridiculed for that. But still would do it, you know. So.

Q: That was the days of early punk rock.

A: No. Punk rock, I didn't even know what that -- what was that? We were so isolated where we were, you know. The only music we had was what was played on the radio. I mean, MTV was out there, but even that was kind of the same videos all the time playing. So no, I didn't know anything. I think it was just more, you know, for me just outlandish clothes and outlandish haircuts. Nothing -- it wouldn't be outlandish today and it wouldn't be outlandish

anywhere else but Johnson City, Tennessee for that time. But you know, I didn't want to look like everybody else, I didn't want to dress like everybody else. So yeah. Just wanted to be my own -- have my own style and be different. Which in the '80s, that -- there was a lot of that, you know, with everybody trying to, you know, the big hair, the outlandish clothes, the neon stuff. So --

Q: Boy George.

A: There you go.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: All right. That makes sense. And yet you returned to Johnson City. Can you talk about your rationale for moving back to a place that you weren't completely happy with, yet there was probably the familial draw.

A: There definitely was just being a place that was familiar. And I had really grown sick of living in New York and really saw it as a, you know, you know, it's a love/hate relationship. It just was tired of, you know, paying \$1500 a month for an apartment not much bigger than the room we're in now.¹ I had a lot of friends go the way because this was the early '90s, go the way of, you know -- coke was a big thing. I never did coke, but there were plenty

¹ The interview took place in the 50 sq. ft. study room in the Hendersonville Public Library (main branch).

of friends who did and it wasn't unusual to go to a party that had the coke lines out and people offered you coke. And so I saw a lot of people go down financially, physically. Crack was beginning to play into things. You know, the drug scene was big. And even though I didn't take part in it I had a lot of friends that did and fell. And I was, you know, AIDS was huge. Tired of being a waiter, you know, too, -- and I knew that there was more than a future in that for me.

Q: And you wanted to break into Broadway?

A: Right, right. And just not able to make those connections and, you know, working all the time just trying to pay the rent and I was like this is not what I want to do. And I think also seeing a bigger picture for me, people who succeed in theater are -- you have to be, the way the business is, you have to be close -- you just have to have like, shadow vision and you just go for that and nothing else can stop you. And there were so many other things that interest me. I had a friend who got me -- we volunteered in a soup kitchen together and just hearing people's stories. And I was like, you know, there's a lot more to life than theater that interests me. And I'm more interested in humanities and things like that. So -- so I, yeah -- coming home, I didn't know I was going to go back

to school. I knew I would come back and live with Mom, you know. And knew that I had a roof over my head until I could figure out what it is I wanted to do. It was hard. When I came back I couldn't get hired anywhere. I think most people forget, at that time we had a little economic crisis then too. So it was hard getting a job doing anything, and especially in Johnson City. You know, being a waiter, working in retail. You had, you know, hotel, whatever, just trying to get a job was really hard. Finally did so, but you know, you know. And then eventually I started to think about, OK, what do you want to do, you know, and what do you want to go back for and those kinds of things? So.

Q: So what did you decide to do?

A: Well, I just started taking those personality tests and career counseling things and social work just happening and happening and the top of the list all the time, so I went back to work for social work. And that's what I do today, so. Yea.

Q: So you went to social work at ETSU?

A: There you go, yeah.

Q: And then moved to Charlotte?

A: Yeah. After I got my degree in social work at ETSU I moved to Charlotte. And the reason for that was I just -- I had

a cousin there and I moved in with her. And the job market was great in Charlotte -- I think it still is good in Charlotte. But it was just a great place to get a job. I had a job in Kingsport, Tennessee in mental health, but it was like \$14,000 a year. I made more being a waiter than I did and not living extravagantly I wasn't able to pay my bills. So I was like OK, this is not going to get it, you know. I can't even pay my bills. So I talk to my cousin. She's like why don't you come here, you know, I have my place and I think you'll do much better here than there and things will open up for you. And they did, you know, I got a job. Six weeks I had a job, you know. And that wasn't even to do at that time right out of college, kind of like it is now. There just wasn't a lot happening. So the market wasn't great, so. So that worked out for a while, you know. Charlotte was definitely a place to get that first job and get established and those kind of things, yeah.

Q: What type of social work do you do?

A: Now? Now I work for hospice. I'm a hospice social worker. My first job was in mental health.

Q: OK. So you are working in hospice.

A: Hospice social worker. And I've been doing the same job for it'll be nine years in August, so. At the same place.

Q: When you decided to move to southwestern North Carolina, what was your deciding points?

A: OK. Again, it wasn't really like a great manipulative or well thought out thing. I was living in Charlotte, wasn't happy with my roommate at that time, platonic roommate. My grandfather had Alzheimer's and has since died of Alzheimer's. And so my grandmother and mom needed my help on the weekends. So living in Western North Carolina would be, you know, two and a half hours home versus four hours home. I also wanted to get back to where nature was available to me. And mountains. Charlotte, you know, again I'm not going to knock Charlotte too much. I mean, it gave me my first job, blah, blah, blah, but it's not a beautiful place. It's not a place where there's a lot of natural beauty. All the beauty there's manmade. It's very hard to find anywhere in all of Charlotte where you can go and just be alone, like on a nature trail or a hike or sit by the stream. There's just no such thing. So I was like I need to get somewhere back -- move back somewhere where there's some place that sometimes where I could go, especially doing the work I do, social work, where I can just go and not see people and, and just be with myself and in nature, and you know, reflect or whatever I need to do. So that was part of it. My grandfather being ill was part of it.

I thought it would be a cheaper cost of living, being going to a more urban setting to a rural setting, but that's not true. Asheville and Hendersonville's very expensive. My utilities actually are more in Asheville than they ever work in New York City, so. And you know, real estate here is just laughable. So that wasn't true. That was a misconception on my part that it would be cheaper to live here.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: And how have you found living here?

A: I like living here. When I lived in Charlotte I think I got too heavily bogged down in the really gay scene, both on the social level and then on an advocacy level. I was in everything. I wanted to do it all. I wanted to take on the world and I got burned out, you know. I know now there's only so much you can do. And there's plenty of people, you don't have to do it all. But I didn't know that then. So I kind of got really burnt out on just the gay lifestyle in Charlotte. And I was like I need a quieter place. And then I kind of cocooned for about six years here where I just kind of -- I didn't do anything except for occasionally go to the gay bar that was a gay lifestyle, you know. It was just kind of needed to just be

home and watch movies and read and, you know, all those kinds of things. And just in the last three years or so I guess I started doing things. I do the Gay Men's Supper Club, Gay Men's Movie Club. There's a group called Gorgeous that I go to sometimes. So you know, just branching out a little bit. But I really came back -- I came here not knowing, again it wasn't planned, but I just cocooned for a while I think. And kind of built myself up to wanting to go out and do things again, so -- and be with people, so.

Q: Instead of with nature solely.

A: There you go, yea, yea. Because I really -- you know, I just -- there was, like I said there wasn't anywhere in Charlotte where I could just be by myself or, you know, because I am an introvert and I needed that. And I had a roommate who was constantly having people over. So you know, I was burned out and ready to just have some alone time. So.

Q: What do you think are the differences between the different sub-communities within Appalachia? Like Hendersonville versus Asheville --

A: Yeah, yeah. I see what you're saying. Well, I think Asheville and Hendersonville, this area, is, you know, there's a lot of gay retired men here. So there's either a

lot of single gay retire men here or couples that are gay and retired and lived here. So there's not as many working -- like I'm 43, so there's not as many 30, 40, 50-year-olds. And then there's the UNCA (University of North Carolina at Asheville) kids and the Warren Wilson [College] kids that are like in their 20s. So you know, there's not -- I don't see as many people my age in this area as I did in like, Charlotte or Johnson City even. That's a big, big difference. Sometimes at 43 I might be the youngest person at the Gay Men's Supper Club. And that gives you an idea of what the age range is here compared. I have a friend in Charlotte and we share the same birthday. And I went to Charlotte to see her on her birthday this last January and was just amazed at all the young people. Because I haven't seen that many young people in a really long time. I was like look at all the young people that are here! They're like -- I think that's a big difference here. There's a lot of retirees here. So.

Q: Have you found a lot of native-born people coming to activities?

A: No, no. I think most native born people get the heck out of here. I really do. They must move to a bigger city. I think I'm not normal in that sense that I do still want to

be in Appalachia. Yea, I think most people want to get as far away from this area as they can, most gay people.

Q: Because?

A: Well, my generation and, and generations before me probably just feeling the oppression I guess of not being able to be who they are and the religious aspect of things, the bible belt and culture itself is not always kind to gay and lesbians in this area. So I think you find a much more liberal context in bigger cities. And I guess there's more of a chance of meeting other people too, so. But no, I run across very few native gay men that go to the events I mentioned. It's usually people that have moved here. So.

Q: Do people find you to be a little different considering you are an Appalachian person?

A: Not so much here. I mean I used to get that when I lived in New Jersey and New York, you know, the hillbilly jokes and the making fun of my accent and all that. But I don't really get that here very much. No. It's never been pointed out to me I guess, so. I can't say that that's true, yea. Yeah.

Q: OK. Something that we've asked other people who've grown up in Appalachia is how you think being in Appalachia has affected how you behave within your relationships if you're in a partnership and how you express your gender because

there are some pockets of Appalachia that has very distinct ways of expected mores.

A: Hm. Well, I'm not in a relationship so I'm not sure of how I'm different in a relationship or how growing up in Appalachia does that for a relationship. I don't really have an idea of what I should be at this point as far as trying to be something that I'm not. I think the truer thing for me now is just to be who I am. And I guess through affirmations and therapy and all the exploration I've done with who I am, I don't try to fit in anywhere, you know. I am who I am and either I like you and you like me or we don't have to -- and I don't have like everybody and everybody doesn't have to like me. So I'm just myself wherever I am and whatever situation I find myself. So I don't know, does that answer our question?

Q: To a degree. I've talked to a couple of former classmates actually who I've interviewed and when I ask them things like this they're like "well, I firmly believe that men should act like men and women should like women."

A: Oh, OK, OK.

Q: And there shouldn't be, you know -- you've got long hair. You evidently feel very comfortable or it wouldn't be so long.

A: Right, right. OK, I get what you're saying. No, I don't have any idea of what people should be. And I think I've had that from a little kid. And that's only increased for me. I mean, I've never had an idea of what I think someone is. Because I'm not an idea of what most people would think, you know. I don't think I fit in easily anywhere as far as, you know -- even in gay circles I'm always, even though I'm gay, I totally admit I'm gay, there's no denying that, I don't always fit in with what they might be talking about in a conversation -- so and then I don't always totally fit in a straight world either. So I'm just kind of, you know, out there and just trying to be myself and be who I am. And you know, there's just times I listen but I have nothing to add to the conversation at a gay supper club or at lunch with the girls at work, if that makes sense. I'm just kind of taking it all in. I should have been an anthropologist. I'm just, you know, feeling it out, but I don't really have to -- and then again, I don't feel the need to fit into either one of those things or adapt to either one of those things, so.

Q: You in the last three years have started going to these groups. What lead you to start attending the dinner group and the book groups?

A: I think for me it was just that need to get out again. OK, I've done this enough now, you know. I'm comfortable back in my own skin, in my own surroundings, in my job, in my family. It's time to make some connections again and get back out there I think is what it was.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about what the groups do and how many people are coming and where they're from?

A: Oh yeah, sure. Sure. The Gay Men's Supper Club -- it can be huge. It can be anywhere from 20 to 50 people. How it works is each month there's a host and it comes out over the internet who the host is and how to get to their house. It's potluck. Everybody brings just something to eat. It usually lasts -- it starts at 6:30, dinner's at 7. It's usually over by 9, sometimes a little later in the summer when the days are longer. And it's just kind of like fellowship. It's almost like the best way I can describe it on some level is it's like your church potluck thing. You just go and you eat and you talk. And it's not formalized, it's not let's introduce the new people tonight. It's let's talk about ourselves, let's play 21 Questions, you know, it's just, it's very free-flowing and you know, you just kind of chime in. You see a lot of the same people, you know. So it's like again, the fellowship.

The Movie Club is again, it's that kind of concept. You have a host, the host picks the movie once a month. It can be any movie the host wants to show. It doesn't even have to be a gay-themed movie. It's just something that they want to share. They we talk about the movie and, and it's kind of the same thing. Just fellowship, no set agenda.

Q: Is it in Asheville or is it in Hendersonville or --

A: It can be I guess anywhere -- anywhere in the area. Like the Movie Club this Sunday, which is Mother's Day, which I won't be going to because I'll be with my mother, is in Mars Hill. I think that's maybe the furthest there's ever been one. And one time there was a supper club down in I want to say Landrome (sp?) or something, way down 26 in that direction. But again, that was rare. That was the furthest that way we'd ever had one. So I guess it could really be wherever the host is, and then you have to decide if you're going to.

I mentioned the Gorgeous group. That's a Tuesday night group. That's unique in that it's male and female, lesbian, gay, and it can be anywhere in Western North Carolina. I mean, it's been way out. It's been Chimney Rock, Lake Lure, you know. I don't get to that one as much because it's on a Tuesday night and I never know --

sometimes my Tuesday's busier than my Monday. So you know, if it starts at 6:30 and you're not getting home until 6:30, you know, and then you have to think about, so potluck too, what am I going to bring, you know. So that was much rarer for me to go to. As a matter of fact, I've almost stopped going to that one, but I still get the emails on that. Same kind of thing, once a month. But that one's a little harder for me to get to. Supper Club's on Saturday night. Movie Night's on a Sunday. And those are just easier to do. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So.

Q: So these are all social activities. When you were in Charlotte you were doing advocacy work as well?

A: Yea, I was actually on the -- they have the -- they actually have a -- what's the word I want to use? I'm forgetting the lingo. Film festival. Gay and lesbian Film Festival. So it was on that where we chose the films. We selected the films we were going to watch. We had to watch a lot of movies. So I did that. That was fun, that was a lot of fun.

And at that time I was on just the beginnings of the community center in Charlotte. So I was up and getting that together without a lot of people. That sounds like I was doing it, but I was in the very beginning stages of

that to get that up and running. Also, you know, just doing some work with AIDS patients, volunteer stuff.

Q: With MAP [Metrolina AIDS Project]?

A: With MAP, yeah. Yeah. You know, so it just got -- and a lot of other things that I'm forgetting right now, but yea. I just got, got really burned out. And then when I was doing -- there was a club called Amady (sp?), which met on Tuesday nights for coffee at the coffee shop and, you know, same kind of thing, just fellowship and, you know, getting together. So there were some fun things too, but I think I just got overwhelmed, you know, and needed to pull back. Yeah.

Q: Especially with all the other things.

A: Yeah. You know, with the day job and not being comfortable in my living environment with my roommate and so there was a lot of stuff. It was just my time to hit the road. And it all fell into place as it should, you know, because I found the job in Hendersonville, a apartment opened up -- the apartment that I wanted. And it just kind of flowed very easily, you know. I think that's what you got to look for in life. If you're swimming upstream, it's probably not the thing you need to do, you know, you're just hitting that wall on every, every turn and decision is probably -- even though you may think and what you plan to do may not

be what you need to be doing. I think I'm where I need to be. Maybe not forever, but for right now. So. Still very comfortable so I like it here.

Q: Are you out at work?

A: Yeah, yeah, I am. I don't think I'm out -- I think I'm pretty much out. I assume I'm out to everyone. It surprises me sometimes that people don't think that or know that I'm gay, because my thought is how could you not know, you know? How could you not know? But there's people that surprise me. You know?

Q: Could you give an example?

A: Oh, I don't know. Let's see. Just something simple as well, Craig are you ever, you know, I had somebody ask me are you ever going to get married or who you dating these days. And I might mention a guy's name and they're like "oh, I didn't know you were gay," you know? Like well, how could you not know, you know? I don't go around like, shouting it or anything. I don't think it's an appropriate place to do it where I work with hospice, you know, but I think if I was somewhere else it might be a more appropriate thing to do. But I think most people know and most people accept it and it's not a big issue, those kinds of things. So yeah, yeah. Yeah, I'm surprised when people

don't know I'm gay, you know, that they assume I'm straight. But I assume that's their stuff, so.

Q: Well, about you do you think says "Craig is gay?"

A: Yeah, I don't know. I guess it's because I don't censor myself anymore. I am who I am. I just assume that people gather that. I don't know why. I could ask well, why did you think I was straight? Maybe that's what I'll do, start asking people. But I don't know, you know, I don't know why I think that they should know. So and then, you know, if you're 43-years-old and, you know, you're not married and you know, there's kinds of things you could put together, you know, but it's just that some people just can't put it together, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think it's just the heterosexist nature that everyone --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- is supposed to be heterosexual and therefore there's just an assumption unless --

A: Yeah, assumption --

Q: -- you are wearing that nice I Am Gay shirt.

A: There you go. There you go. I think you're right. Good way to sum that up. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And of course

that can work both ways, because I've met some people in my life that I assumed were gay and they weren't. So I guess that can work, you know, that's my stuff too that I'm putting on them. I'm putting a label on them based on their personality, their characteristics. And it's not them at all. So you know, I've definitely done that, so.

Q: All right. Are you out to all your neighbors and things like that?

A: Yeah, I think so. I think everybody knows, so. I can't think of anyone that I feel the need to be closed around or so yeah.

Q: Do you think that there are parts of Appalachia where that wouldn't be the case?

A: Oh, yeah. I mean, I went to a funeral of a patient that I've had for like three years, you know. I felt the need to go to this memorial service. And I'm sure it just -- some of the comments that were made, not directly toward me, but in the sermon of the memorial service, you know. It got a little like, you know, flop sweat time. I was like yleeww. You know. I didn't feel comfortable and I really didn't feel -- well, I can't say I didn't feel safe. I don't think anybody was going to come after me with daggers and stakes and they were going to burn me or anything like that, but I just knew that was an environment

that I would - if I was openly, you know, and said I was gay and wore the shirt and everything that I would not be asked to be here. Yeah, yeah. So. And actually one of the nurses that's a lesbian that I work with got up and left because she couldn't deal with the comments that were being made. So she didn't make a big deal of her leaving, you know. We were sitting in the back anyway. As we should, you know, because we might have to leave; we might have an emergency. So but she just got up and walked out because she just couldn't deal with the well, the energy of the room would be a good way to say it, so.

Q: You brought up something tangential. Do you find the gay men and the lesbians and the transgender people interacting fairly free or is there the segregation that is alluded to at the Supper Club and the Movie Club being men specific?

A: Yeah, yeah. Definitely I think it's different here. Well, it's been different everywhere that I've lived. I mean, it's been the same and it's been different, but there is the segregation. I think the closest thing we have, and that's why I do like to support it and wish I can support it now is the Gorgeous Group, which is both meeting for fellowship. But it's been segregated. And now that you've brought that up, I mean even in New York it's segregated. I mean, there's not a lot of interactions between gay men

and lesbians. In Charlotte there's not a lot of interaction between gay men and lesbians. So in Johnson City there's not a lot of interaction between gay men -- so it's never been anywhere that I've lived, you know. I work with a lot of lesbian coworkers and we get along great, but as far as a social thing or whatever you want to say, and there's not a lot, you know. Even I guess, I guess the film festival in Charlotte it was male and female, lesbian and gay, and so was the community center, we were interacting. But it had to be an advocacy type thing or it wasn't a social thing.

Q: Right.

A: So.

Q: Yeah, so it seems to be the only way to get everyone together is some type of advocacy.

A: Yea. But that's been -- that was New Jersey, New York Virginia. That's everywhere I've ever been. That's the way it's been. Never thought about it until you said that, but yeah. Yeah.

Q: Is there anything -- other stories that you had thought of during this that you would like make sure it gets recorded?

A: I really can't -- I didn't really have a preconceived, you know. I didn't think too much about it, you know. I just wanted to come and answer your questions. So I didn't

really have a story to tell, you know, or anything like that. So.

Q: An actor without a story to tell?

A: That's because I need the script! You know? I need the words! But no, I don't have anything -- I didn't have anything, any set agenda. I didn't have anything that I thought like I'm going to definitely tell everybody about that, so. Yeah.