

## Douglas

Q: We should be OK. This is Michael Howell from Appalachian State University. It's May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, and I'm in the home of Douglas, is it Arbigast (sp?)?

A: Mmm hmm.

Q: OK, if you wouldn't mind just sort of introducing yourself, telling us where you're from, if you've been from other places, how you ended up here, just go from there.

A: OK, my name's Doug Arbigast, I was born, what I tell people, when they ask where I'm from, I say I'm from the southernmost part of New York, which is Palm Beach, Florida. I went to boarding school in Asheville, which is kind of how I ended up in this area, and my family has property in Brevard, which is near here. How I ended up in Tryon, I lived in a number of places. I lived in south Florida. Went to school in Asheville. Lived in Atlanta, lived in Dallas, Texas. Lived in Jacksonville, Florida. Lived in Asheville, lived in Brevard. Background, most recently before moving to Tryon was working construction business land development and home building, residential home building. I was going to build three spec houses in Lake Lure (sp?) and I didn't want to drive down the mountain everyday to do that. So I started, I was going to

live on Lake Lure. Well, my mother, whose health is not good, was living in [Landrum?], which is only six miles from where we are now. I used to drive down here and surprise on Sundays once in a while, just show up in church four, six weeks, whatever. About four years ago in April, I went down to surprise her and she wasn't in church, so I had to sit with her little 80-year-old friends in the front row.

Q: (laughs)

A: Basically reintroduce myself to the priest as we were leaving the church, and I said, "I got the surprise today, but you're going to be seeing more of me because I'm going to be moving closer." And he said, "Well, that's a good thing, because your mother's health is deteriorating." Well, turned out she was on a trip with his wife, so he was hearing daily about everything. And I said, "Well, I have to rent for the first two years anyway, so if you know of anything for rent in this area, I can just as easily live here, let me know." Literally pulled me five feet, pointed out the window at the church rectory and said, "In two weeks, it's available." I said, "Fine, in two weeks I'll take it." That's how I moved to Tryon.

Q: This place?

A: No.

Q: No, not this place.

A: I bought this house two years ago. But that's how I ended up in Tryon. When I was in Brevard, which is, I lived in Asheville a couple years, maybe two or three years, but then I lived in Brevard for several years before I moved over to Asheville. And I got very involved in a lot of the community stuff in Brevard. And I kind of have a knack for jumping into stuff if there's nothing to do. And with the building doing what it did and me waiting on these projects to start, I didn't really have anything to do. So I got very involved in the community in Tryon. I think I missed the first meeting of the downtown development association, so I was immediately made president.

Q: (laughs)

A: Which in turn made me chairman of some small-town main street program. Then became Chairman of the Tourism Development Association for the town. And there was a reason I went ahead and let that happen. That was to kind of bring three different groups that had very similar ideas but a whole bunch of different people doing a whole bunch of different work all towards the same goal, without really knowing what everybody else was doing. I thought it'd just be an easy way to do that. And it was. It worked out very well. So but then we ran into a shortcoming, and that was,

we'd had all these great volunteer situations. And when it gets time to follow through, get somebody to do something about them, that's kind of where you fall short.

Everybody'll volunteer to do things, but when it comes down to it, they've run out of time, they're not getting paid, whatever. There's every reason to not be able to do it.

So I looked at these three groups and I was like, you know, each one of us has a budget. So let's just carve some money out and we'll hire somebody, and all three groups will contribute. We'll get somebody to do all these great ideas and follow through, because the town is struggling. This little town is sitting up here on this precipice, and at this very moment even today, it could be a great arts getaway town, antiques getaway town, like it was in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, just a place you went and hid but had a great time.

Q: Is that Tryon's history?

A: Yeah, Tryon, ask me about the history in a little while and I'll bring you back around that way, but it has a long line of very well-known individuals who would literally just be strolling the streets in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Lady Astor, William Gillette who played Sherlock Holmes, David Niven. Just, it was a great retreat for a lot of people. Actually people

came from the State of Washington and California for weekends in Tryon. And of course the horse, it's internationally famous horse community, so people came, they were in the horse crowd anyway, for many, many years, continued. I think Tryon will be the only place in the country by the end of this year that has major courses in all classes anywhere in the world. The facilities are in this community. But you have to ride around to find all those. But actually, one of them's right up here, right across the street. So yeah, Tryon's a very famous hideaway spot, getaway spot. And we're trying to recreate that. The road runs right through town, used to be the only way to get from Greenville or Spartanburg to Asheville. Well, when they built the interstate four miles over, that really kind of changed all that for the town. The town liked that it changed all that for the town. But for our merchant standpoint, that really hit the town hard. So we get back to where we were trying to figure out we're going to recreate this downtown, and we're going to hire somebody to follow through with all these different ideas. Well, the town council got involved with it. And there was a member on every one of the boards I was on, this one member of the town council was actually on each one of those boards. He just happened to have the same interests. And we didn't

agree on everything, but I had suggested that we hire someone on an interim period for six months, to just kind of start these ideas while we interviewed for a permanent person. And the person that I wanted to hire for that first six months, this particular fella didn't, had a personal dislike for. So I said, if we did not have somebody in an office filing through on everything on January 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2009 I'm pretty sure it was, that I would resign from all the boards, because I was tired of having all these great ideas but no follow through. So January 2<sup>nd</sup> came around, this guy blocked my ability to do that, because the town needed to be involved, because the town said, oh, we'll match. Well, that gave them a good stick to carry. So they blocked that. He spoke for the entire council, which it really wasn't his purview to do, but he did it. So I was fine, so for seven months, nothing happened. Absolutely nothing happened. Had a new town manager in that period of time. So they went ahead and hired the guy I wanted to do that, and things did start to happen. And that was the best thing, because the new town manager actually had somebody there who knew everything going on was kind of turned out to be an assistant for him, so that worked very well. Well, election time starts to come around. And I don't remember what the period of time

was, but it seems like it was in the spring or early summer last year, that you had a one-week period to sign up. And by Thursday of that week, no one had signed up. I had said that maybe I just needed to jump the fence and, you know since the council blocked me before, maybe I just needed to go on that side and try and work towards the better of the town that way. Everybody on the council is retiring. Nobody has a business in town. I've got several businesses in town. And so it's very important to me that they be able to go forward. And we figure out how to make the town prosper, or I might as well close them up, lock the doors, and move somewhere else. And Thursday of the week to sign up came along. Nobody'd signed up. So I went down and signed up, because I'd been asked by several people to consider it. So I did. I went over there and signed up. At the time, there was a very negative situation in this town about annexation. And the council before had passed an annexation situation that had the town literally torn in half. The mayor and two, three incumbents were very pro-annexation, and there was one guy who campaigned and got on the last election that was against it. So even though I guess a couple people get off every two years. But so, must've been four years ago when they did this, because one of the guys must've rotated off. But the guy that had just

gotten on two years ago, he ran for one thing: anti-annexation. Well, so this election, I signed up, nobody knew my position on annexation at that point, because I didn't have one. And nobody wanted to believe I didn't have one, but this was such a contentious and divisive issue, why go delve into something like that if you don't need to. And so I sign up, it's a Thursday. By Thursday afternoon, this other guy went and signed up. He had one issue, anti-annexation. Well, the two incumbents who had said they were not going to run, thought that they better run, because now this anti-annexation guy was going to run, and I wasn't going to be able to beat him. So now there's four in the race. And then somebody else joined on Friday. So OK, now we got five people. I was fine with the previous two incumbents, so I didn't really do much campaigning or anything. When I have to back up, because I have a funny story of after I moved here to Tryon, which was May of four years ago, I was moving my furniture in. And I fell moving a large statue. And I cracked a tooth. So my sister has this perfect idea of the dentist, which you have to go to twice a year, she has a way that you look forward to this. You pick a town that you enjoy visiting every six months, and you go find a dentist there. And you make a three-day or four-day weekend out of it, and you



include the dentist appointment. Well, I didn't have a dentist here and I'd broken this tooth. So I called her. Her dentist was in Charleston. So this was perfect. I call, I get an appointment. Appointment's two weeks later, I thought OK, I'm going to get a date. So I go online and start looking at the online dating things. Guy in this picture, somebody I was very attracted to, so I wrote him a note, but it also tells you the last time that person checked their thing. And he hadn't checked it in like a month. But anyway, I wrote it anyway. So the next day, I turned it back on and it showed that he was online. So we started writing back and forth. Literally, by that evening we started talking on the phone. I had talked him into coming up here before I went to Charleston the next day. So he did, he came up here, and he never left.

Q: Is that right.

A: We went to Charleston. We sold his house. We got his stuff.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: But literally, he never left. He was a fireman. He'd been in Iraq for a year, and had just come back. Hadn't decided, did he want to go back into the fire service or what, he wasn't sure on that. So just the timing was right. So that's how I ended up having a partner here.

Everybody in town, you know, oh it's Doug and Josh. That's just the way it is. Everybody knows, this is a very friendly, open-minded town. First day I actually moved into the house over there, had a gate down at the end of the sidewalk. This is your little typical white picket fence, white picket house, for the rectory, OK. And there's this guy standing down there waving with his dog, so I go down there. He came in, introduced himself, you know. Somehow, I guess everybody knew, I didn't arrive with heels or anything, but everybody knew somehow. And we had a dinner party probably within the first, before Josh had even come up, I must've lived in the house maybe a week or so. I already had a dinner party for like ten people that the guy at the end of the gate had introduced me for, before I had, make this appointment, do all the rest of the stuff, and then suddenly was no longer single. So that's kind of how I got into the town society. You know, then I just jumped into these different groups. There's never been first negative situation at all.

Q: That's really amazing.

A: That's I'm really aware of. Or if there was one, people have made sure that I didn't know about it. So now then, after the building market kind of tanked and the development market kind of tanked, but before it completely

tanked, and I was still building those spec houses, we were looking at the town going, what would we most like to do here. And having a wine and piano bar was something I always wanted to do, so we built one. We got some other people involved in it, kind of became one of those, let's all get together and go to the garage and put on a show kind of thing. That's kind of how we build the wine bar. Then we bought the café, expanded to the café next to it, which we're de-expanding now and (laughs) getting rid of the café, because yeah, the wine bar is great, but I'm not a restaurant person, and I never intended to be. Tell people when they come to the wine bar the first time, I don't know anything about wine. I don't know anything about food. I just know we didn't have a place like this. And the entertainment that literally showed up knocking on the door, wanting to play, was world class. The first guy that comes in wanted to be a partner in it. His name is Jim Peterman. He was the organist, wrote music for a short time for the Steve Miller band. You Google him, he's played with everybody, Boz Scaggs, the list is just amazing of who he's played for. He brings a drummer and a guitarist and a vocalist once a week, and plays at the wine bar and it's packed, and it's loud. Then another night a week we'll have a lady named Darryl Rice. She used to

perform very large venues, probably more up north, but she's very well-known in Charlotte. And she doesn't like the big venues anymore, so now she comes over here and -- turn that off for a second, let me check my phone --

**END OF FILE 1**

A: Darryl Rice would perform these larger venues and she got blown out, tired of it. So she just showed up, and now people come from Charlotte to the wine bar to listen to her. She's kind of a cross between Roberta Flack and Tracy Chapman.

Q: Oh wow.

A: So she's kind of amazing.

Q: So now how far out of Charlotte is Tryon?

A: It's an hour-and-a-half to the airport.

Q: OK, all right. So you're sort of smack in the middle of Asheville and Charlotte.

A: Well, I tell people that Tryon's on the way to everywhere. You can be in Asheville or Hendersonville in no time. You can be in Greenville or Spartanburg in no time. You can be at the Charlotte airport in an hour-and-a-half, and you can be in downtown Atlanta in three hours. Or you can be over here, four miles off the interstate, where no one can find you unless you want them to. Two miles that way is this

great lake for boating, small sailboats, ski. Right up the top of this mountain over here is a view unrivaled by airplane windows. And in the middle, we have this 55-acre park across the street that has stables and ball fields and tennis courts and everything in the whole wide world in this charming little downtown. And then all of civilization is right there on the interstate. So it's kind of like an ideal situation. I don't know really why the downtown is struggling, because it so perfect. But nobody right now wants to invest a dime in much of anything. Because there's a lot of businesses that would be great on the main street and very affordable buildings and rent and everything else. So we really been promoting it. Anyway, we get to the end of the election situation, and we get to the first thing where we actually all had to participate in something, and that was a forum. I've never done a forum. And alphabetically, I'm first. So this forum is actually hosted by the anti-annexation people. Again, nobody knows what my position on this annexation is, but a lot of people made assumptions. And so you know, we sit up on the stage, and I had 11 points of things I'd like to see happen in the downtown. Those were the important things to me. So I mentioned those things. I introduced myself, mentioned those things, and we'd go over, you have

three minutes, two minutes, whatever. Then on down the line, the other four people gave biographies of themselves. Hi, my name is, I've lived here this year. I have two daughters. I'm in Rotary, blah, blah, blah. I'm like, we're in Tryon. We know where your dog lifts his leg every day. We know you have daughters. We know you're in -- we all know, that was a waste of three minutes apiece. So then they started asking questions. And of course I was getting all these annexation questions. And I said, frankly, unless I'm elected, I'm not going to get into this. And if I am elected, I'll have to make a decision, and I'll look into it at that point, but otherwise it's a waste of time as far as I'm concerned. Here are things I'd like to see happen, and these are things I would work on. That was all I ever said. So then the only other advertising I did was in the paper, I just had a picture, it said, serving Tryon. Kind of did it on a platter, and I had the town of Tryon sitting on a platter. But what had happened earlier in the year, do you remember the letter that someone wrote to Dr. Laura about the biblical nature of homosexuality and all the, in Leviticus where it's like man should not lie with man. But then on the other thing, everything else that went along that letter was, you know,

you can sell your daughter into slavery and all these other things. But do you know anything about that?

Q: I don't remember that. I can remember a big controversy.

A: If you Google it, if you Google it, you'll find this letter. OK, well then somebody recreated that letter for George Bush later. Well, someone wrote here locally about the Lutheran split in the church, and the person that wrote was a local Lutheran minister. He was on the conservative side. And he wrote a letter about what an abomination this lifestyle was. So I recreated that letter and enhanced it with some things. I didn't submit it to the paper. I sent it to the editor of the paper, because a friend of mine had said, you might consider some of these points. Well, he simply just published it. And he didn't credit directly. But it got a lot of attention. And it went along for a couple pages. I went through every biblical thing, like you know what would my sister be worth at slave auction on these days. One of the things in this particular biblical section, if you have any hindrance of your vision, you cannot approach the altar of God. The minister out there has to wear glasses. Well, he's supposed to be put to death, based on the Old Testament there. So we just made some observations like that. It went on very long. It was very sarcastic. And I got a lot of responses in the paper.

On election day, there was a full-page letter in the paper, hate letter directed at me, right next to my ad (laughs). So I really could've thought, you know, at that point, I really had not pushed this at all, because the two incumbents were running again. I could approach them. I was fine talking to them, and I wasn't all that enthralled. Well, election day comes and the guy who was anti-annexation got the most votes. Six more than I did. And everybody else was in the dust. Now, I know why they elected him. He had one issue. That was pretty easy to figure out. They elected me for several reasons, name recognition, I have businesses in town. They don't know who the hell I was. They don't know, whatever. But I thought it was kind of ironic that here's this hate letter on election day with my picture next to it running for, and I still won and did pretty well. So obviously, there's no sentiment, with the exception of a handful of people in this community. And it was from a biblical standpoint, not from a personal standpoint. Because even though all the letters that were written, even they were directed to me, they really weren't directed at me. So you know, here I am an elected official.

Q: Now, what's your elected position?

A: I'm a Commissioner.



Q: OK, county?

A: Town commissioner.

Q: Town commissioner, yes, OK.

A: So that was a big surprise to me. I really did not anticipate that happening, especially with five people running, especially with people who knew a whole lot more about politics than I do. And anybody who's been on any of these committees in town knows that I have, that my best sense is a sense of humor. So I kind of bring that to the table and take away all the staunchness of everything. That's also now happening in the (laughs) political situation too. Because I don't take too many things seriously. That's just not my nature. So it's kind of changed the... not outlook, but just the overall perspective of the council, because I'm the one that's constantly quoted, because I'll say, not off-the-wall things, but if they call me or need me to write something, I'll write. And I'll say what I think. And I'll apologize if somebody has a better way of putting it, or I'll apologize if I said the wrong thing or if I got misquoted. Or, and I invite people to give me their ideas all the time. And if somebody has a better idea that's 180 degrees the other direction, I'll buy into it. Whatever's best, but until you have an idea, let's throw some ideas, these

are some of mine, pick them apart. We'll go to that. So it's been really interesting, because our first meeting was in December.

Q: Of 2009.

A: Mmm hmm. Yeah, so we've had, what, five meetings now, haven't had the May. And I feel like we've actually, in five meetings, we've started to accomplish some major things that in the past when I've attended some of these meetings just as a spectator, nothing happens. And we've got assets in town. We've got buildings that can be used. I wanted a youth center right across the street here, this park, which is already full of kids all the time. There are a lot of kids that don't play sports, but want to be around their friends and don't really have a place. So we have an empty building over there that the town owned. I did have to get involved in the annexation issue, and we did promise, on the day after I was elected, I got a question from the paper, OK now you're going to have to do this, look into it. So I said, all right, my approach is going to be this. I'd like to know what everybody thinks about it, so write me and tell me. Here's the email address. And boy, did they start coming. And I think of all the emails, phone calls, and personal confrontations I got, seven people were for annexation. Everyone else was

overwhelmingly against it, and the people that were most against it were the people who were of the 800 homes that would've been annexed into this community, their taxes would've been doubled. The interesting issue is they didn't have any way to vote on that issue, because they were outside the town. Until they're annexed into the town, they couldn't vote. I'm not in the town in this house, I had to voluntarily annex this piece of property to be able to run, and to be able to vote. And then I'm against annexation in the end. I didn't know I was at the time, but now I am. So I looked at the plan. I wrote in the paper that I would have a deadline of December 15<sup>th</sup> and I would make a decision at that December board meeting, council meeting. They didn't print the article in time, and about the 10<sup>th</sup> of December (laughs) the 12<sup>th</sup> is when the article goes out. So they said, could we extend it, so I said December 31<sup>st</sup>. Well, I'd gotten such an overwhelming response, and I looked into a few things, that by that 15<sup>th</sup>, December 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, whatever the third Tuesday of December was, I had made up my mind. I looked at the construction aspect of the plan, and it didn't make sense to me. I didn't see how it could possibly be done in the budget that had been proposed, and I didn't really think the engineers had done some consideration. Part of the

plan was we would have to deliver services to those homes, including sewer and water. In a specific amount of time. And if you've ever dug in the dirt in western North Carolina, there's granite. Well, the engineers had allowed a 3% margin for running the rock, and we would've used that 3% up in the first house, so. And a lot of these houses sat below the road. We're going to have to put in pumps, generators in case the power went out, two-day holding tanks, and these people already have a perfectly good septic in the backyard that doesn't leak (inaudible) you know but we're forcing these people to switch to these services for tax revenue. So anyway, I just voted against it, and I was the one, because the guy who'd gotten in whose one issue was no annexation, the guy was already there from two years ago. The mayor was for it. And a sitting council member was for it. So here I came with no one knowing what I was thinking, including myself. And so I wrote the mayor and said, this is my feeling on this situation. This is why. And he used to come into my business every day, until he got that letter. He's never darkened the door since. But it was my vote that changed it. That got a lot of attention. The editor of the paper was for annexation. And the mayor was for it. And so there was a lot of negativity about it. And that was

strictly from a political standpoint, not, oh, because you must wear pink somewhere, you can't think right or something. There was nothing directed at me personally, but just my ideas. But we got past that when the county announced that they were going to cancel the barbecue festival this year (laughs). And that took the headlines away, and ever since then, subsequently we're having the barbecue festival, but geez, that took all the heat off my back after, I don't know, maybe 60 days of just nasty articles of why we should or shouldn't have annexation, or what's going to become of the town because we do or don't have it, all those sorts of things. So kind of how I got into politics of everything. And again, the only reason I did that is because I have businesses on the main street, and nobody else really, on the council, thinks about businesses from owning one. I'm sure they try and think about them, but it would be a different perspective when you're there every day, knowing what can or can't go wrong, and what is or isn't going wrong, and why people aren't in town. So that's kind of how, A, I ended up in Tryon, how I got into a relationship, and you know I mean when we do anything in town, we go together as a couple. There's no, nobody makes any assumptions that I have a girlfriend in hiding or something. They all know what the deal is.

Q: I'm sorry we didn't get to meet.

A: He'll probably, he's at work now. This county has some amazing things. One of them is this, it's a healing farm, for people with, I don't want to be misquoted, but I think mental disorders might be the best description, but they have a website you can get their description. It's called Cooper-Riis. C-O-O-P-E-R-hyphen-R-I-I-S. It's for people who have addiction problems or bipolar syndrome or just different things. It's a place for them to go recover or be reintegrated into society in different ways if they've had substance abuse problems or whatever. And it's the most amazing place. A beautiful facility, it's quite expensive to be there. And there are two of those types of facilities in this county that people from all over the world come to. This is mainly the younger ones, where he works. It's quite a place. He really likes it. He works intensely on Friday, Saturdays, and Sundays, like ten, 12 hours a day. But he should be home by six or so. So I don't know, you can ask me whatever questions you want. But that's kind of how I got here, and how I got into politics.

Q: I guess I do have a question around the politics, because it sounds like from what you're saying, you're in the

rather unusual situation where it doesn't that you're  
gaying out as a politician.

A: Yeah, that doesn't --

Q: That doesn't seem to be the case for many people who try to  
enter politics or actually make it into politics, so.

A: I think maybe that's because they make an issue out of  
being gay. I went to an all-boys boarding school when I  
was 12 years old. Everybody, I must've been very obvious  
and I didn't know it, but my nickname was Faggot. I didn't  
know that was a bad thing. And that frustrated them even  
more. I was an athlete. And I made very good grades. And  
I was the teacher's pet. So I was hated because I was the  
teacher's pet, misunderstood because I was gay, but I was  
an athlete, which was very important in the '70s (laughs).  
And we had a very small school and we were very good in  
soccer. From the ninth grade on, I played on the varsity  
team. So they didn't know how to deal with that. I was a  
good team member. Didn't like me for other reasons. But  
that didn't stop them from crawling through my windows in  
the middle of the night (laughs) because I had quite, there  
were quite a few people there, we had a very nice time for  
the five years I was in boarding school. I mean to this  
day, I look on Facebook now and I've started to look up

some of those old people and they're all married with kids and whatever.

Q: They don't want to reminisce about old times so much, do they (laughs).

A: Well no, I would never even do that. But it's just interesting that you know, they're all pot-bellied, bald, and it's just interesting to kind of look at them and remember what they looked like in boarding school (laughs) and that sort of thing, and how many of them used to like, we'd sneak off together or they'd sneak in my room late at night. They were not the ones that would pick on me, but they wouldn't come to my aid if somebody else did. So that was kind of an interesting thing. But I was pretty independent at age 12.

Q: So did you know about being gay or did you feel gay or --

A: It wasn't an issue to me. That was just me being me. I'd had boy goings on before, before I went away to boarding school when I was ten and 11. This older guy, he used to come over, and when I say older, he was like 14 and I was ten. But he had pubic hair. I was amazed. That was a big mystery for me (laughs). And we fooled around all the time. And when I went to boarding school, so it was not an unnatural thing. I didn't think twice about it. I didn't think I was any different than anybody else. I didn't



really care. I never thought about it in that perspective. So I have a real interesting time trying to understand people who come out, because I didn't do that. It was just always the way I was, and I just assume everybody was always the way they were. I never really understood trying to hide things about yourself. And then I realized later, as I was get older, how people would pick on other people, because they were other gay people there. But they didn't want to really be friends with me, because then they would've thought to have been gay. But the people that were my friends didn't care what people thought, and they weren't gay. So it was kind of interesting. But I never had the coming out experience, I never had to. I never saw the need to. I had a little brother that's gay, and we have the same father. But we had a real interesting situation because, my mother's on her husband x-to-the-Nth-power at this point, OK, so there's lots of siblings, and my mother and father were divorced when I was a baby. So I really didn't spend much time with my dad, but it was very obvious my little brother was gay. And that was of no concern to me one way or the other, but his mother, my step-mother was so close I guess that she didn't see it, and friends of hers would point it out to her, and that was a major problem for her. And that I was so open about

whoever, oh this is my boyfriend or this is my girlfriend or whatever, didn't really put any, how serious a girlfriend or boyfriend was, just being me, my step-mother was very uncomfortable with that. And basically tried to always, for many years, protect my little brother from her friends pointing out that he was obviously going to be gay, come on. I mean, you know he was the nelliest thing in the world. And he still is. And my stepmother had a very hard time with that. She would deny it. She did not like me to come visit, because she thought I would influence him. I visited one day a year and that was around Christmas. And so there's some really difficult stories of relationship that we had at that particular time. And something changed her, and I don't know what it was, but I had a relationship probably in 1982 when I lived in Atlanta, before I left Florida State. Got into a relationship. We ended up moving to Atlanta. But my little brother ended up coming to Florida State at the same time I was there. They, my little brother has a full sister who was also at Florida State at the same time, and my mother had a daughter with another husband who lived in Tallahassee. So even though she was no relations, we had four siblings that really kind of were interactive but not really related. And we all had a very nice time. And my mother lived there and watched

out for all of them. And my step-mother and dad would come up. I had a boyfriend, and my step-mother really liked him. She just thought the world of him, and from that, I don't know what started her to be open-minded about it. I don't know who turned her around. But you know, from that point on, we would go visit. And then I got into another relationship that lasted eight or nine years, and we would always go visit. To this day, my ex, we've been apart since 1996, he still goes and visits them. So she became this completely different person. Absolutely completely different person. And it became quite a joy to be around her. And they're now extremely supportive of anything and everything, including my little brother. But her parents used to give my little brother and I for Christmas these Playboy calendars.

Q: (laughs)

A: And so real interesting conversation happened one time not too long before they both died. The last five or six years I think. But they relayed this conversation later after they were both dead. They said, you know, your grandmother and grandfather just asked us one time, was Dad gay. And my dad kind of sheepishly said yes. And then they said, well, is Chip gay. And Dad said, yes, I guess I'm the contributor, being the dad of both of us. They said, well,

that didn't really matter. They were embarrassed that they'd given us Playboy calendars all those years, because if they would've known, they would've given us Playgirl calendars. That was the only issue. They felt bad because they weren't in the loop. And would've been fine with it, much more so than their daughter. So that also tells me, it wasn't my step-mother's upbringing, because they were very open-minded. And I don't think there's anybody in my family that's close-minded, including any of my mother's husbands, and they come from the extremely far right to where they're off the scale, to the extremely far left. And she's on five husbands we know about, I know there's a few in between. So, but every family member I've ever met, never even been an issue. So that's why there was no coming out. Just like oh, that's Doug. I had cousins, when I got out of boarding school -- when I was in boarding school, I would get once a week a letter from a great aunt I didn't know. It would be a book, a mystery book. And in it would be a card with an addressed envelope to my grandmother, my dad's mother, who was much more ill at the time than I know. At 12 years old, I didn't know she was sick. And so I would sign it, send it on. So every week, she would get a card. And so this great-aunt that I'd never met, my grandmother died my first year at boarding

school. And my grandfather died the next year. I didn't know these great aunts and uncles. But when I got out of boarding school and I think a couple years had gone by, so was at my third or fourth college by then, I had met this guy and we decided we were going to take the summer off. So I thought, well, let's connect with relatives and things. And we didn't have internet and all this kind of stuff at that point. So I called this great aunt, through information. And found out, I guess they had some sort of way when I found their number, fortunately not enough time had gone by, but I called the number and it gave me a forwarding number. They had moved to Maryland and moved in with their daughter and son-in-law, because they'd gotten old. And it gave me that number. So I called. This lady answers the phone, Holly, she's my dad's first cousin. And I introduced myself and said, we're going to be in the Washington area. We're just going to go do the East coast. And she's like, "Well that's great. Can you come this week and we'll have a big family reunion. You've got cousins you've never met, two older, two younger," blah, blah, blah. All well and good, we make time. So she calls the first daughter, who's closest to my age, and says, "Your cousin Doug is coming to visit whom you've never met, and his friend Doug." And the first thing out of that cousin's

mouth that's my age is, "Are they gay?" And the mother says, "Oh, I don't know, what should we do?" And she said, "Well, when they get there, tell them how many people are coming and tell them they've got to share a room and give them their choice of the rooms, one with one bed and one with two." That's what they did. We took the one with one bed. That's just the way it was. Every family member, it was like, which one are you more comfortable in. OK, that's fine. It was never like any kind of reaction or anything. So I guess I'm very fortunate in that respect, hearing many stories of different groups I got involved in, when I lived in Asheville, different gay support groups and things that I got involved in from a leadership standpoint. And hearing really horrible stories. And meeting 18-year-old kids that would show up at this meeting with a suitcase because their family, they turned 18 and here, get out. So you know I just didn't experience any of that. I don't think Josh experienced any of that. But I do hear a lot of it. So I guess I'm fortunate we didn't have to do that. I don't know if you've got other --

Q: Yeah, thinking where I wanted to go. (pause) You've talked a little bit about it being a great place to live, a wonderful place. How is it, do you think, is it a place where gay people can have a good life, enjoy themselves --

A: Absolutely, I am actually trying --

Q: -- or is it remote enough --

A: -- to recruit people, well I think it's not too far remote given our geographical location to all those places. Lot of people would go to Asheville because you know it's densely populated with same-sex couples. And they'll get there and realize they like the area, but they don't quite want to live in or on top of it. So they will kind of start to fan out a little bit. I don't think that's why we have a large gay population here. I think we have a large gay population here because of the wealth that has been in this area. And I think regardless of the era of this country, if you're wealthy, you could do a lot and you could get away with it. So a lot of people probably hung out here. There's a huge Charlestonian connection here, a huge Florida connection. So we're literally halfway between Manhattan and Palm Beach. And in the old days, when you're traveling by coach or by train or whatever, it'd be a good place to stop. That's certainly why the Vanderbilts ended up in Asheville. Good logical spot. And when they got out here, it was like wow, this place is amazing. Some of the oldest vineyards in the United States are right here. You can look out the window and I can

point them out to you. So there was a lot of appeal, what goes on.

Q: Sure (inaudible).

A: Just the area in general.

(long pause)

A: (on phone) Yeah, Briar's yeah, Briar's or Blue Bell's fine, OK. That was important to know which ice cream brand.

Q: Hey, that is important. Don't want to get the wrong thing. (inaudible) I think that's still recording. Let me just double-check.

**END OF FILE 2**

Q: OK.

A: I'm trying to recruit gay people to move here and open businesses. I think it's a great retreat area. It's a very safe area. Just recently, having nothing to do with the gay issue, I got threatened by somebody in another way. I mean, somebody else, the town manager heard about it, and there were the two biggest police officers we have in area were on the front door. So I mean (laughs) they're very (phone rings) attentive. Hello. (pause) This is Doug. Oh, hey Boo. I thought I recognized the number. That's OK. All right, bye. (beep) Yeah, I've been actually, am currently involved in a project to try and build a gay



retirement neighborhood in Asheville. Although I've been trying to get the partner who's most interested in it, into doing it closer to this area. Because I think this is an ideal area for it. I want to call it a gayted community, G-A-Y-T-E-D.

Q: That's nice. You know, we have a gay gated community outside of Boone.

A: I didn't know that. Oh, I have seen it. I saw that online.

Q: [Caring Cove?].

A: We searched that and there's one in Arizona.

Q: Carefree Cove, yeah.

A: Yeah. We did look into those. But I think we could just as easily have one here. I think this is the perfect place for it. You don't need a gate, but trying to get somebody from New Jersey to move here and feel safer, it's just the to present it. So yeah, I think this is an ideal place to live. Several reasons. The real-estate's still very affordable here. There are some incredible houses in this area.

Q: I saw a few coming through.

A: And they're the ones that you don't see that are absolutely amazing. Absolutely amazing. Very affordable, very welcoming. We need flower shops. We need [nurse?], I mean

we need all the perfectly things that people immediately associate with (laughs) kind of a gay business. We need those. And there are so many artists and musicians here, that it's just a natural place to be. One thing I didn't tell you, and it goes back to 1979, '80, and '81. When I left, I was at Florida State. I went to Dallas, Texas for a two-week vacation. And I'm coming home two years later. I ended up through a long series of situations being recruited by the FBI to go into service. I was trained at the Dallas Police Department, in 1979, '80, and Dallas Police Department was not very open-minded. Again, my FBI file, background information, I'm sure it had to be in that file, because it's very detailed. I even lived in a gay neighborhood in a gay high-rise. But I went into the Dallas Police Academy, and had very bad experience. There were rumors that I was gay, and of course I didn't deny it. I went to the gay bar. I never even thought about it. It just didn't occur to me. And so but they started making life very difficult. I started getting threats from police officers as well as other people. And it made the news. And I got called into the sergeant's office. There was only one thing worse than being gay apparently in Dallas and being a police officer, and that was to be a White person married to a Black person. That was really the only

thing that was any worse. And I had a friend I went to the Academy with who was on the mounted police. He was married to an African-American woman. He was basically tortured to the point where they split. And he asked me did I have a place that he could stay, because they couldn't afford two houses until they figured everything out. I had this wonderful high-rise, five bedroom kind of penthouse apartment in a very nice section of Dallas, because I'd had a very good job there. And I said yeah, but this is the deal. I'm gay, you know, whatever. He's like, don't really care. So he moved in. And one day we both got called into a lieutenant's office, and I could hear everything they asked him. And one of the questions was, is he a homosexual. But I couldn't hear what this fella answered. But I also knew that, if he walked out, if he looked at me straight in the eye, I knew that he hadn't said anything that was intentionally mean. And they ended the interview with him, which was probably 15 or 20 minutes, and he came out and he looked right at me, right in the face. And I walked in very confident, and they did not ask me the same questions. But what they said was, that if people think you're gay, next time you call for backup, it's just not going to be there. And, because that's kind of threatening. You're talking about people

with guns and stuff chasing other people around with guns and stuff. So that could be a little bit of a situation. And I was being groomed towards more undercover type things. And so then as I'm leaving, they tell me they had made an appointment at the police psychiatrist. This is a psychiatrist who was employed by the police department. So I went down to see him, at the appointed time. I'm sitting across from him at his desk. I have my one hour set aside. He made it very clear when I got there that, I must be able to imagine having come through the academy, seeing all the different things, how busy one psychiatrist would be for the entire department of Dallas, which was one of the largest forces in the country. And so it was a matter that you got an hour, we need to like really get through this hour and hit whatever hot points we need to. He said, "I've reviewed your file. I know why they sent you here. Is there anything you want to talk about, because this is of no importance to me." And I was like, I was just kind of like, so you don't care. He was like, "This is not an issue at all." I said, "Well, they told me when I radioed for backup, I'm not going to get it." His whole demeanor changed. He explored that a little bit more. He was the one who made it obvious to me that that was a threat on my life, frankly. And he got very concerned and very

interested in it and pursued it at that point and gave me some guidance. And without picking up the phone and dialing an attorney, basically got me to the ACLU. And the ACLU took it very seriously. Unfortunately, and I'm not embarrassed about this, because to the extent I'm also not -- I was at times embarrassed to be around my little brother. That's how effeminate he is. And I've been in situations where you're going to get beat up if you're not careful. And I don't like to throw things in people's faces. That's just not me. That's not my style. That is my little brother's style to go way over the top. And... this attorney that the ACLU assigned me was over the top. And that embarrassed me to the extent that that didn't represent me. Because that's what a jury or a judge or whoever is going to see, is this really nelly guy. That's not me. So I decided to go back to Florida and fight it from Florida. And we did fight it. And it never made it to trial. But what happened was the Chief of Police went on television, offered me my job back, which was the only way he could gracefully get out of it, and I was being groomed towards undercover, so that just blew the cover. So that made it impossible for me to go back to work, but it also made it possible for them to get on with the life of the police department. At the same time, probably I

think within a couple months of when I was doing this, there was a guy in Los Angeles that was undergoing something very similar. So between the notoriety of my case and his case, major metropolitan police departments after that point had to openly recruit gay police officers. They realized it was becoming, there were gay neighborhoods. There were gay areas that we kind of have to police. So going to the police academy did several things for me. I had a great deal of confidence, because I was athletic at boarding school. I played college athletics. But the self-defense training and the weaponry training and the driving training that they put you through made me feel like, I could face anybody no matter what the case, unless they could hit me from out of my range, kind of thing. So that gave me a confidence I had never had before, in myself. And I think that probably, even though I never went into law enforcement beyond moving out to Florida, went back to college, I think that did a lot. And it made me more aware of, I can't say I know how a Black person feels, because you can see a Black person and get to pick on them. Some gay people you can't figure out. And so I did get to feel like people, did get to feel discrimination. I actually got to feel that based on people. So I got to feel a side I never wished I had to

feel or anyone else would have to at that point. And I never saw myself going into politics, 30 years later. But now I want to be Mayor (laughs). Running for mayor.

Q: You can cut that out if you want to.

A: Yeah, do cut that out, but I actually do intend to, if, there's a fella on the council that I like very much, and if he were to run for Mayor, I would support him wholeheartedly. If he's not going to, because the Mayor ran unopposed last time, I will run for Mayor next time, provided everything still is going forward in business and everything seems to be good. I think he may have to run every two years, I'd have to give up my seat to run. But if it's four years, I'll run instead of for council I'll run for Mayor. Because I think, I'm an idea person. The Mayor doesn't get a vote. He's a tie-breaker. I'm dangerous with that vote (laughs).

Q: I think they've realized that haven't they?

A: Yeah. I'm dangerous with that vote, because I have these forward-thinking ideas and I kind of push them. They're very good at following through on the ideas and telling me why they will or won't work. So I'd be much better sitting one seat over going, here's some ideas, pick them apart and let's go forward. Because I'm not the detail person. And to be a council member, you pretty much have to go through

these budgets and all this stuff I don't like. So I rely heavily on the other people, and I think of new things that we can create, which is what the Mayor in my opinion should be doing. Not that he's not doing that, but he and I have different ideas. So I would go that direction if next time the opportunity avails itself.

Q: Well, saying that, you have this idea about the gated community and making this sort of a retirement spot. How do you think the rest of the town would feel about that? Do you think the rest of the town wants to encourage that being their dimension of growth?

A: If it isn't thrown in their face quite that way. If you put billboards out on the interstate that said, if you're gay, come on over here and live, no one's going to go for that. If we advertise in the Atlanta and Charlotte areas in the gay pages that we've got a great community here and we've got some houses for sale. I think it would be discriminatory to have a gay community. I think we just need to have an open-minded community and just market in the gay arena. And I think it would probably fill up. And obviously everybody else that moved in would figure it out. If they didn't like it, they wouldn't live there. So I don't think I really want a gay retirement neighborhood. But I like the gated thing, the G-A-Y-T-E-D. I'd like an



open-minded community and simply market in the gay community. I don't think anybody'd have a problem with that. I threw that out to the tourism board. And the guy that owns this historic Pine Crest Inn goes, "I market in the gay community all the time." And another fella on the tourism, who's a local... don't want it to sound derogatory, but he's a local, more country person, he's like, "Bring'em on. I want their tax dollars. If they'll shop in my, whatever," I think that's pretty much the overall feeling of everyone in this community. Now, go back to the horse community, which we have a great deal of, can't put this in there either, but hell, a lot of the women are gay.

Q: I want to scratch this out when it comes back.

A: I mean, I'd hate to let them think I'm accusing all these women horse-riders of being lesbians or something. But the reality is, I know a lot of them. And you know, the gay people here are pretty well off. The retired ones, the working ones, they're all pretty well off. They're all very comfortable here. And nobody worries about, hell, the café and wine bar some nights will be a total gay bar, because that's just the crowd that ends up there. And we know a good old time. So I don't think, like I say, I think it would be not approved of if we went after a gay

market and did it in such a way that was over the top. But I think simply marketing in gay areas to bring people to this area, everybody would be in favor of. Or they wouldn't be against it, let's put it that way.

Q: People are practical it sounds like --

A: Right, and economic (inaudible).

Q: That makes sense. I know our time is running a bit short. You have until about 5:00, right?

A: No, we're good. I can probably even do till 6:00.

Q: So how do you think it is for the rest of this sort of Appalachian region? Is Tryon and Asheville just sort of both oases?

A: I think so. I don't know that Hendersonville area that well. I know a few gay people at Logan Hendersonville, but I don't know that they congregate in Hendersonville. Asheville's just a destination, just because historically it is. And I don't really know about Boone and that area. Being a college town I'd think it has to be pretty open-minded. I do know that during the last presidential election, this was the only blue county. And interestingly enough, I'm a registered Republican. So --

Q: That is interesting.

A: Well, and that's because when my mother was married to husband number three, who adopted me, and I registered to

vote, we were just Republicans. And we were friends and associates of the people in the White House at that time. It was just a natural thing to do, and I just never changed it. Again, I don't think, I'm not into labels that much, I just never bothered to change it. It's a joke around here that I'm a Republican. But it was the only blue county in the last election. That kind of tells you some of the area. Brevard is very open-minded. But again has a college. It also has the music center. And so there's a lot of arts there. Probably Highlands is very open-minded. Again you have very wealthy gay people there. So I mean, there's no controversy around that. There's no, they don't bring issues. There's no needs. Like in Asheville, I can see, you need a place to meet for the different groups and that sort of thing. So I can see in a town that wasn't open-minded, where some of those things might cause problems. But you know, around here, I don't see it. You know, maybe going towards Forest City or Rutherfordton I don't really know those towns. I would get the impression not knowing them that they might be a little more close-minded, but I might be 100% wrong. A friend of mine who just graduated from the high school here used to work for us. I asked him last year, before I graduated if there were gay people at the high school that he was aware of.

He said yes. I said, "Well, do they get picked on?" He said, "No." I said, "That's good, because I hope as open-minded as you are being around us, that you would bring a different perspective to people who might be narrow-minded." He said, "No, there's gay couples at school. They're just like the boyfriend-girlfriend. There'll be boyfriend-boyfriend and girlfriend-girlfriend. Nobody gives anybody any crap about it." So I was amazed about that.

Q: That's pretty amazing.

A: So for this county, that's pretty open-minded. And Tryon, of the major towns that are in this county, [Saluda?] and Columbus, Tryon being the biggest, and the oldest, one that has the most name recognition. The other ones I think probably built up around the area. I would've thought might've been a little more narrow-minded, but apparently no.

Q: Wow. You mentioned being involved in several things up in Asheville. What have you been involved with there?

A: When I lived there, there was a group called Closer.

Q: I've heard of this.

A: Yeah, that's an old group there. The gay men's chorus, I was on their board. We had this group called the Asheville Supper Club, it still exists. When I lived there, I'm kind

of a social guy. When I lived there, I went to a couple of these covered dish suppers and they're about 20 people, 25 people that would constantly go. And the guy that was in charge of it kind of got tired of being in charge of it. And the internet was just coming along. And so I volunteered with a group of three other people, that we would further the group somehow. One of the members, it was coming on an election, and he wanted this particular person to be elected, and he was trying to kind of use the group in that direction a little bit, which I wasn't for. One of the other people was getting ready to move to California so he dropped out. And then there was another person who dropped out for some other reason. But anyway, I ended up holding the bag in this group of people. But in a very short period of time, got a Yahoo group together. When I left, after two years, I had it up to 500-plus people. When I left, it was more than that. And I still get all their stuff. I haven't really been involved in it, although I wrote the guy and said, if you need a place to host, because I would bring him down here, even after I moved here, Christmas and July. And we'd get 40, 50 people show up. And so the group was large, had a lot of clout. If you needed something, you could go to that Yahoo group and say, OK, I've got a kid here who needs whatever. He

got kicked out, whatever it is. And I mean, the outpouring would be tremendous. When I moved away from there, it wasn't logical for me to continue to try and coordinate. But that group, you could, if anything came along politically, needs-wise, whatever, you could put it out to that group and you'd get a myriad of opinions. So that was probably, and that developed through Closer. That was a group that I just kind of merged the Closer group into, ended up being President of Closer for a while. I got involved, I get involved, I go to attend something, and then I open my big mouth. And by the time you open your mouth, you're in charge. You know, so that's how I get involved in different things. Because I'm not very good, goes back to the council situation. I'm not a very good committee person. I'll come up with an idea and give some ways to make the idea work, put the energy in it to start the idea. But then I want to go create something else. Other people who with those skills are how to develop the ideas kind of fill in and do that. That's kind of what I like to do. So, and I'm sure there's a couple other groups in Asheville, I just don't remember what they are right now. I've been here four years and it's gotten kind of busy.

Q: OK. I think the last thing I particularly want to know, although actually I guess before I ask that, what else would you like to talk about?

A: I think, community-mindedness from the perspective of Tryon is what I'm concentrating on right now. And I think that if a group of people moved here, this could be a Key West, this could be a Saugatuck Michigan. This could be a gay Mecca in the mountains. Not that Asheville isn't, but this could be, Key West is so much smaller. Saugatuck, Michigan is just a quaint little village. I would like to see this develop into something like that, have businesses on the main street that satisfied that base. Dress shops, flower shops, just lots of restaurants, gift shops. We have some great musical venues here that we don't take advantage of. We have a fine arts center that seats 300-plus people. We have an outdoor arena that seats 220 for music. And we're a community of 1,700 people. And we have this 55-acre park that is probably unsurpassed by any community that's ten times the size of this. I'd like to see this be a little area that people either came as second homes or primary homes, and developed it into a very classy, very cool little getaway spot. And I think it could very easily be that, cleverly marketed, without coming out and saying, y'all come on over here, you know. Bring the flags and

let's go to town! I just think we could have a very subtle approach to making this a great place. And then, it could develop the wilder side a little bit more once the base was here. That would be a goal of mine, to make this an area that people would really consider retiring, if they were gay and in a relationship or not. The hardest thing is to be single and gay and young in this area, because there's not a lot of young people here. Let me feed them, because that is why they're really being obnoxious.

Q: And I've got one last question for you anyway. That gives me a chance to eat a chip.

A: (walking away) Yeah, because it does sound loud and crunchy.

Q: (laughs)

(very long pause)

Q: I've got a new puppy waiting for me to get home.

A: Know the feeling.

Q: So I guess my last question, what made you decide you wanted to participate in this?

A: I get a gazillion emails, and someone suggested it. OK, that's a good idea. Pretty much it (laughs).  
Disappointing answer but --

Q: No, not at all. People do for different reasons, just wondering.



A: Yeah, some people wrote and said, you might consider this.

Q: Well, I'm glad you did. Hi there. Hi there.

A: That is Inspector [Fowler?].

Q: Interesting, oh really, well hello, cute.

A: See, he's already inspecting.

Q: You just want to know what's going on everywhere. How many dogs do you have?

A: Two.

Q: Two.

A: Two basset hounds and four cats.

Q: That's a houseful. Nice to meet you buddy. Awesome.

Well, to this great. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

A: I'm sure I'll think of lots of things I should've said.

Q: Well, if you do, let us know. You can always add to them or we'll put them in, so.

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