

JB

Q: And start this one. And we're good. This is Michael Howell at the Hendersonville Public Library. It is May 1st, 2010 and I'm here interviewing JB. And she has her foster son. So JB, if you'll introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about where you come from. And then we'll sort of go from there.

A: OK. OK, my name is JB. And I'm -- I actually grew up in Eugene, Oregon.

Q: Wow.

A: Long ways from here. Had a unique family situation. I was one of four kids. And my folks brought us up in suburbia basically. And I lived in Oregon and went to college in Oregon. And then after that decided I wanted to sort a spread my wings a bit? And spend a couple years in Alabama serving as a missionary. So I got a call to ministry when I was in high school. And my missionary work was building homes for folks who were impoverished. And I ran an emergency food pantry unit and taught folks how to garden and can, that sort of thing.

Q: Wow.

A: So it was a big ministry center basically. And then ended up in Chicago, just north of Chicago for seminary. And

that was where I met my partner, AB. And we have been together for nine years this month. So it's been a wonderful thing.

Q: Wow. And when did you add this little fellow to the family?

A: Just ten and a half months ago.

Q: Is that right?

A: We got him four weeks old.

Q: Wow.

A: And he'll be a year old in two and a half weeks.

Q: Isn't that something. Gosh.

A: It's been really good.

Q: And I think you said you were hoping to adopt or planning to adopt.

A: We're in the process.

Q: Well, that's great. Wow. Well, thank you. So let me ask you -- excuse me -- and you live not in Hendersonville. Is that right?

A: Right. We live in Arden, it's --

Q: Arden.

A: -- just sort of a -- the in-between point between Asheville and Henderson.

Q: Oh, OK. What county is that?

A: It's actually in Buncombe County.

Q: Buncombe County.

A: Yeah.

Q: OK. So how did you come to recognize --

A: North Carolina?

Q: Well, North Carolina, yeah. Yeah, do tell me that first, yes.

A: AB has a brother who has a precancerous condition. And so when we finished seminary up there and I finished my residency to become a chaplain I -- or we both decided we wanted to be closer to one of our families. And we decided that since her brother was sick we would come this direction. So we looked for the closest gay-friendly city to where they live. And so Asheville was it.

Q: Wow.

A: And we came here and everything worked out wonderfully.

Q: That's great. Are you in the ministry here?

A: I am. I got ordained with the United Church of Christ --

Q: OK.

A: -- in '06, '07, something like that. I had been with the United Methodist Church and that was very, very difficult and ended up leaving.

Q: Wow.

A: AB lost her orders. Her orders were taken away as a United Methodist minister.

Q: Gosh. Because of being gay?

A: Yeah, because of being gay.

Q: Wow. And so you have a church here?

A: I don't have a church. I'm a hospice chaplain.

Q: Oh, OK. All right.

A: So I actually was recently was promoted on a spiritual care coordinator for the organization now.

Q: Wow.

A: There are six of us chaplains total.

Q: Wow.

A: It's a very good organization.

Q: That's great. That's awesome.

A: Much more affirming than some local churches are of gays because of I think the (inaudible).

Q: That makes sense. Well, while you're on that topic how -- what is your perception of that here? Having lived in other places and -- I guess when you met your partner AB in the seminary, so you sort of had, had recognized this about your sexuality --

A: I did.

Q: At some point --

A: When I was in Alabama.

Q: When you were in Alabama, OK.

A: It was a bad place to come out.

Q: Is that right?

A: Really bad place.

Q: Oh, how was that -- oh.

A: It was really horrible.

Q: Wow.

A: I told a total of two people and one said oh, there just aren't enough good guys around here.

Q: God.

A: You got to branch out. And the other one said, "You need to be in therapy because that's a disease."

Q: Wow.

A: So I didn't talk to anybody else for a while about it.

Q: Gosh. Wow.

A: But ended up finding my way out of the closet. And I'm just not a person who can live in a closet, at all. I'm, I'm somebody who is frequently center stage for things. So just not being able to be who I am wasn't really an option.

Q: So how long ago was that?

A: 2000.

Q: 2000, OK.

A: It was the summer of 2000 that I really came out. And I entered seminary that fall.

Q: OK.

A: So for like the first two or three weeks in the seminary I was sort of testing the waters trying to be closeted, and it's just not who I am.

Q: Wow. So did you sort of come to the realization at that time --

A: No.

Q: -- or did you just sort of --

A: I came out to myself.

Q: -- come to the point where you needed to?

A: Well, I came out to myself in Alabama and did a lot of therapy that summer. And really came to understand who I am. And I actually went to a conference, Witness Our Welcome. It was about 2,000 people. It was in Illinois, I want to say Decatur, Illinois. It was folks from 20-plus different faith groups that came together that it was about ministry and faith and sexual orientation and gender identity. And all these things don't necessarily have to be complete opposites, and how we can be people of faith and people who have a different orientation than others. And it really was an empowering three or four days. I came home from that and told my folks the next day.

Q: Wow.

A: And said, you know, I don't know how you guys are going to respond to this, but this is where I am and this is who I am.

Q: Were you a pretty religious family growing up?

A: Not really. We went to church. But from a very, very young age I -- my faith was really important to me.

Q: So how did they react?

A: They cried.

Q: Is that right?

A: And eventually they said yeah, we aren't surprised. So. They had just seen in me a lack of ability to relate emotionally, intimately with men. But felt like there were other ways that I was relating that were maybe not real healthy.

Q: Right.

A: So encouraged me to do otherwise.

Q: Wow. Well, that's good --

A: Best way to put it.

Q: So they've been supportive then or --

A: Very supportive.

Q: It worked out.

A: That was in 2000 and I think the summer of 2002 my dad went to a three-day transgender conference.

Q: Wow.

A: He was, I mean complete full circle from where he had been. You know, what exactly what does this mean for you and, and does this mean you're going to gain a lot of weight because all the lesbians I know are, are larger women, and, and does this mean that you're not going to have kids, and does this mean that this dream's not going to have for you and this dream's not going to come true that I have for you? So you know, just a lot of difficult -- what does this change? How do I now reconcile the image I had of you of what I am learning?

Q: Wow.

A: And of course, you know, I went through a lot of that myself. So I walked with them through that. And actually, my cousin is trans and has recently come out being trans about a year ago and had top surgery in December.

Q: Wow.

A: But at the time she was identifying as female lesbian.

Q: OK.

A: And has gone through a lot more since then obviously. But so my aunt and my dad, sister and brother, had a lot to talk about.

Q: Wow.

A: And that was really helpful for both of them.

Q: Has it been easier for the family to go through one or the other?

A: It's hard. **** came out being trans to our extended family the week before my dad died, a year and two months ago. So that's been too close together to be able to really say.

Q: OK. I understand that.

A: Yeah.

Q: And so how did it turn out in seminary?

A: There were --

Q: Being out in seminary.

A: There were some folks with whom it was a major problem. But who I am made it OK with most people. I -- at our seminary we had worship three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. As of the second year when I was there I was leading the worship one day a week every week. So I'm, you know, I'm out there.

Q: Yes.

A: So it was -- and I'm not afraid to speak my mind in class. And I have strong feelings about, you know, this is who I am and it doesn't make me a bad person and it doesn't mean that God loves me less and it doesn't mean, you know, that -- that I should be ashamed. This is who I am. So most people didn't try to butt their head up against that. Most

people would -- if they had something to say that was against that or something would do it much more in a way where it was, you know, open communication, which of course I welcome.

Q: That's good. So it wasn't just you're just interpreting the Scripture a certain way because --

A: We had some of that, but it was, you know, a much smaller proportion than what I expected when I came in.

Q: Wow. That's great. Gosh.

A: Yeah.

Q: OK. And so you finished seminary, you met your partner in seminary. Is she from North Carolina?

A: No, she's from Virginia.

Q: Virginia? OK, all right. And ended up here in Asheville. What do you think about this area? What's it like to be LGBT here in your --

A: I love --

Q: -- experience?

A: -- Asheville. Love it. Our church is wonderful. And actually because I was still in the ordination process when we moved here we had to come and interview our church before we could move here.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: Because I did not have my orders yet. So we needed a congregation that would be willing to continue with that -- with me in that process.

Q: OK.

A: So we came and interviewed the pastor who is still our pastor now. And needed to go through a lot of, you know, this is what my process will be. Do you feel like this congregation will be supportive of that? And it was a hands-down yes.

Q: Wow.

A: But -- hang on. You want to crawl around? There you go. It's OK. But so -- I don't remember where I was going with that.

Q: Oh, you had come and you were interviewing a church --

A: Oh right, right. So Asheville, the heart of Asheville is wonderful. It's very diverse and welcomes people who are, you know, from diverse backgrounds. That's in the city. We initially moved into not quite the city, but almost. And the only chaplain position available was in Black Mountain, which is 20 minutes or so east of Asheville. Much smaller town, much less diversity, much smaller minds, much less exposure to differences in people. So I was very closeted there for a couple of years.

Q: OK.

A: With the exception of like, three or four people.

Q: But you took a position.

A: I did, yes.

Q: Oh, OK. So did your congregation understand your relationship --

A: Oh, not a congregation.

Q: Not a congregation.

A: They're just residential facilities.

Q: Oh, I see. OK.

A: I had 160 residents and about 450 staff members I worked with. And of the 450 staff members I worked with over the four and a half years I was there maybe eventually -- excuse you. Maybe eventually 50 of them ended up knowing about my sexuality. Other people certainly made assumptions. AB and I would go to events together that we would have for the residents that were off hours. Never touch while we're there, you know, not holding hands or anything like that.

Q: No PDA.

A: Right. None.

Q: OK.

A: It would have been an easy conclusion to come to. But at the same time, you know, some folks just don't want to go there so they didn't need to.

Q: Well, when you were thinking about relocating, and you picked the place closest to family, did you have any concerns about moving to North Carolina or just the state in general or this area of the state?

A: Not so much this area of the state, but I -- you know, just growing up I had this image of what living in the south would be, living in North Carolina. And it has not proven to be at all accurate.

Q: Is that right. What were you concerned about?

A: Well, it was a lot that it -- the formality that I expect with what I've actually found in South Carolina, where it's much deeper south, much more ladies will be ladies, expectation, the men folk will do this, you know. That sort of understanding about an expectation of people and their roles that you play. AB and I are very fluid in the roles that we play. It's not a certain expectation, because I do this I always will do this. Since we got him I started doing a whole lot more cooking, you know. I just wasn't enjoying it before. And since we have added him to our lives we've changed some things up. And that's OK, you know. And it -- it's a part of who we are as a couple. And I think the role expectations that I expected in the south in North Carolina, in the mountains, you know, were

much more specific than they've proven to be. But at the same time on Black Mountain where I was working --

Q: Closer to what you had anticipated.

A: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Ah.

A: And the theology that folks came with, the -- what's the word I'm looking for? The expectations that they had of me as a chaplain. It was not at all unusual, for a year I was there -- we had folks with different abilities. I don't think I can use the name of the place --

Q: I think I -- I probably know, is that the juvenile facility?

A: No, OK, but it's another state run facility --

Q: OK, gotcha.

A: And I don't think I can identify it.

Q: I'm -- that's just --

A: Yeah.

Q: If you worked there.

A: I did.

Q: But you might choose not to, and that's fine.

A: Yeah, I think I --

Q: OK, that's fine.

A: But anyway, we would have events where we would have a band coming in. And I wasn't afraid at all to go out there and

dance with the residents. I thought that that was fun. And people for the whole first like, year that I was there, which probably meant eight or ten different dances, they were like (*gasp*) the chaplain's dancing!

Q: Oh, yes.

A: I was just going, uh-huh. The residents are enjoying themselves. Let's have them enjoy themselves.

Q: Is it still odd for people even in this area to accept a woman as sort of the spiritual leader?

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It tends to be with older population, most often with the men, but I've had more than one 80-plus year old woman say you can't be a minister, you're a female. And actually new staff members a couple weeks ago said something about (*inaudible*) chaplain on it. You can't be a minister, you're not male. And I was like I am, I am ordained.

Q: Wow.

A: Yes, I actually coordinate the spiritual care of our patients here.

Q: Wow. Is there any of that kind of bias in the seminary?

A: Sure. And there are lots of different seminaries out there that teach that. There are also seminaries out there that teach that people are created equal and are not necessarily

destined for one role or another, but are gifted individually by God.

Q: Wow. So now that you've ended up here, what have you -- what's it like to live here as a lesbian? What's it like to be in this area?

A: It's good. Yeah, it really is. We wish that we were closer to Downtown Asheville, but we couldn't afford it. It's very expensive to buy.

Q: I can imagine.

A: In this area, you know. Minimum 350 for a house. And we just don't have kind of cash. But we spend all the time that we can with our son. And family is just really important to us right now. So we're not doing a whole lot in my (inaudible) sort of thing. We do more going on weekends and that sort of thing. Both working fulltime and he's in daycare fulltime. So one of the things that we looked for was a daycare that would be appropriate for him where he wasn't the only one with two moms or two dads.

Q: Right, right.

A: And it's kind of funny. He's one of two Caucasian kids in his class. Everybody else is Native American, African American, mixed race, Latina. And he had never seen blonde hair until about six weeks ago that was long on a child. And he happened to be playing with another kid at our

nursery at church one day and this baby has four-inch long bangs --

Q: Wow.

A: Blonde. And so he kept on -- it was just fascinating.

Q: That was something, huh?

A: Because it was blonde hair, he had never seen it before.

Q: Wow.

A: And you know, we don't have blonde hair, so that's not surprising. But everybody else that he'd seen with a lot of hair was African American or Latino.

Q: Wow.

A: So you know, he's not the only of anything.

Q: Oh OK, wow.

A: He's being exposed to the greater world.

Q: And so in your encounters with daycares, pediatricians, all these things, have they been pretty welcoming --

A: Very welcoming.

Q: -- pretty accepting of two mommies?

A: They have been very welcoming and some, you know, to a different extent. Being a foster parent brings different things also. And so the first two foster kids that we had were toddlers. And they were already established in a daycare, so we couldn't change that. They were already established with a pediatrician, and we couldn't change

that. So that was much more difficult. But both of those organizations, pediatrician and the daycare were really happy that they had been placed in custody and that we were doing what needed to be done for them. But with him since he was so little when we got him, we got to choose both those things.

Q: Wow.

A: And it's just been a wonderful reception by the community and the organizations we've been working with.

Q: That's great. I'd like to talk about that for a minute. I worked in (inaudible) here and CPS and another -- another area of the state in an urban -- in a big urban DSS. And we had some flexibility in our foster parents and -- but it was also sort of an unspoken in some things. There are tension with our judges and things like that. So what was it like for you all to pursue being licensed and what's it like for you to pursue adoption here? I'm very curious about that.

A: When does this go to print?

Q: You can name the date, after the adoption.

A: Yeah, yeah. That would be preferable.

Q: And that's fine, mostly.

A: AB is a social worker with Buncombe County.

Q: OK.

A: So Asheville area -- so we were not able to be licensed through Asheville.

Q: OK. That makes -- that makes a difference.

A: It's much harder, much, much harder. We were told that we were going to be the first gay couple in Henderson County -
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Q: OK, wow.

A: -- to go through the process. And we were told that others had started and ended up deciding not to before they finished the process. And we're not surprised. We, after we had those girls, said never again.

Q: Is that again. How --

A: And three weeks later --

Q: How was it with the workers? How was it with [mat?] training with your fellow --

A: The mat training we did in Buncombe County.

Q: OK, because you can go to different places for that.

A: Right. So that ended up being great. We really enjoyed it, made some good connections with others foster parents that way.

Q: Does Buncombe pretty typically license gay families --

A: Oh, yes. They were --

Q: So it's more common there in the first place.

A: -- three gay couples in our class. Which -- oh, you dropped your truck. Hey. Hey, do you want this? Yeah, I thought so. We're just not going to bang it on things, OK? No, but so mat training was great. The licensing workers that did it for us were great. And actually **** (sp?), one of the licensing workers from Buncombe ended up being one of our references for the adoption process.

Q: Right.

A: Just a really great guy. And we've continued to do stuff with the Buncombe County Foster Parents Association because Henderson Family Foster Parents Association isn't real welcoming to us. Which is fine --

Q: Right.

A: -- because we do have another connection. But to the average folks out there wouldn't necessarily. But Henderson County is just -- some folks are wonderful and are so welcoming and so open-minded. And our current foster care social worker is the one who was supposed to get the case when we had the girls. But for some reason they decided to take it out of that team and move it to another worker. And she's just somebody who really doesn't care to do her job.

Q: OK.

A: And it's now been a year since the girls left us and so it's 19 months that one of the girls is in custody now straight, and they don't have a plan.

Q: OK. Well, federal policy is -- yeah. What's been the reaction, say with permanency hearings and plans for adoption? Have the judges --

A: Really good?

Q: Have the attorneys and everyone have been --

A: We've heard stuff that attorneys have grumbled. We've not had any kind of visual backlash or anything. Judges' interactions so far, we don't know, frankly. DSS lawyers have acted as though they didn't want to bring it up. When we had the girls, one of them has a lot of disabilities. And so it was a very complicated situation. And the initial GAL that we were assigned --

Q: I was just wondering about that actually.

A: Yeah. He, three weeks after we got the girls, four weeks, went to a four-year-old's birthday party with her entire family and watched them, you know, be together. And said to the worker after the birthday party, how soon can we stop this nonsense of getting her back with her family? This is so not appropriate. They're not going to be able to do anything for her and they're not appropriate as parents. Went to court two weeks later, something like

that, found out that we were a lesbian couple, that she and her sister (inaudible) and just immediately started contacting her family, the parents, saying this is nonsense, these girls need to be back with you, there's no reason why they can't be with their parents.

Q: Wow.

A: So complete turnaround. Never after that point communicated with us, and we had them for another six months.

Q: Wow.

A: Never went to the daycare once to see them, never attended a visit at JSS, never did, you know, any of a lot of things he was supposed to do.

Q: Now is your little boy here free for adoption yet?

A: Not quite. He was supposed to be free for adoption a couple weeks ago.

Q: Is this the type where the parent will have knowledge of the adoption?

A: No. At this point, no.

Q: OK.

A: Mom has relinquished, Dad we're trying to figure out.

Q: Gotcha, gotcha. Wow. How do you anticipate it going?

A: The social worker changed the plan to adoption in court in January.

Q: Great.

A: So we're impressed.

Q: That's fantastic.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's fantastic.

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow. Yeah, I'm not as familiar up here. The county we worked in, we certainly had our own judges --

A: Sure.

Q: Is this a situation where the county has a judge or the same judges or are they sort of rotating?

A: Excuse me. You're not going to drink Pepsi, hun. You can play with the bottle. You can drink some water. Here's your water, sweetie. Each week -- it's really strange -- Henderson County does court for juvenile hearings on Thursdays. The first Thursday of this month it's this judge, the second Thursday of the month is this judge --

Q: Oh, OK.

A: The second Thursday of the month it's this judge. So the teams are assigned -- you always have your cases on the first Thursday of the month.

Q: OK, so they know the judge --

A: So you know what to expect --

Q: OK, that's good.

A: And it's very rare that it gets switched down. And the judge that we have for the first Thursday of the month for this team is what they said, very dependable and very predictable.

Q: Oh, good. So do you think that your backgrounds as ministers has, has an influence --

A: Could be.

Q: -- on how things have gone with this?

A: Could be. And as a social worker, folks have really --

Q: That's right, yes.

A: -- I think treated us a little bit with kid gloves because AB knows the mandates.

Q: Right.

A: She can call 'em on it.

Q: Yes. Be hard to --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- lead someone astray knowing that.

A: Yeah.

Q: So that's a plus.

A: It's been helpful to us.

Q: OK.

A: Yeah.

Q: All right.

A: I think they talk to us more than they might have otherwise.

Q: Wow. What do you think or have heard the problems were for other parents who tried and gave up?

A: We don't know. We never heard. And there is another lesbian couple now in Henderson County that is licensed and does have children --

Q: Wow.

A: -- but we don't know anything about their experience. They've not been at all involved in different gatherings or anything. So.

Q: Wow, wow. Well, so now how about the general community? What's the reaction from people who see a little baby out with two women? Is that unusual or --

A: We still get some looks.

Q: Do you?

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, we still get looks. And we get, you know, people, you know, saying something as we walk by or something.

Q: Is that right?

A: But I guess it seems like more than half of the folks that we encounter, if we're holding hands walking down the sidewalk or something with him in Asheville are fine, really are fine. And often even smile.

Q: Wow.

A: You know. But there are certainly protestors on Pack (sp?) Square with signs, downtown in front of the courthouse --

Q: Peck Square?

A: Pack Square.

Q: Pack Square. Oh, OK.

A: Protestors for various different things, saying fags burn in hell, that kind of thing. For any opportunity. It's generally folks from Buncombe County, not from Asheville City. There is a very strong delineation between the two, which is always interested in elections and such.

Q: Really? How so?

A: Because Asheville City, you've got folks who are much more informed, much more -- excuse me -- much more exposed to different things. And then the county folks tend to be more, more farmers, more agricultural, more we've lived here, all of our extended family is here, more rural mentation -- mindset, and experience of their area that they live in. Don't necessarily welcome the diversity that's gone on, because there has been a huge change in the past 20 or 25 years from what I understand.

Q: In that becoming more open --

A: Much more diverse.

Q: OK.

A: From the history that I've read, up until about 1985 Downtown Asheville was basically dead. There was no influx of population, there was no influx of business. The factories had gone out of business and it was just kind of is this town going to survive or not. And I don't know how it is that made the decision, but people started coming into town. And it has become a hoppin' place, lots of restaurants, lots of sidewalk vendors, lots of places to be, people to see. I don't know what that is, but you're not going to eat it. Every Friday night at 7:00 there's a drumming circle --

Q: OK.

A: -- at Jackson Park. No, not Jackson Park. AB would know the name of it, little triangle park in the city.

Q: OK.

A: And people come and bring drums, anything from this kind of size to this kind of size, and there are folks out there that are dancing, obviously on all kinds of drugs and having a great time. And families that have kids from his size and younger that are just out there bouncing along with their music --

Q: Wow.

A: -- and it just is an amazing experience. And it's just part of Asheville. It's part of who we are as a community that we have this event.

Q: Wow.

A: There are Saturdays that in the summer have Saturday music. They'll have a band come in and they'll set up a whole bunch of little booths like a festival with food. There are also Friday events like that during the summer. Saturday market or farmers market is over 24/7, 12 months a year.

Q: Wow.

A: Or not 24/7, but seven days a week, 12 months a year. Just a lot of stuff that brings people together that has people exposed to a lot of different people. And it's just great.

Q: So how much -- how would you characterize the gay community in the area?

A: I think -- what we've experienced is that there are a lot more lesbians here than gay men. Uh-huh? Yeah. I do. Yes. And there is quite a large transgender population here. Our church probably has out of -- if we worship 200 on Sunday we might have 60 folks there that would identify being LGBTQ. And it just because of who we are and who our pastors are and -- there you go -- and what we want to be as a community downtown.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Blowing raspberries is a favorite pastime.

Q: Well, he's very good at it.

A: Yes, he is.

Q: He's very cute.

A: But yeah, I'd say it's much heavier lesbian population than gay men. And bi folks I never quite know, you know, where to identify them. Harder to identify.

Q: OK, right. And I know that you've sort of gone into a parenting role and things like that. Were you connected to the family in any ways particularly before your foster kids came into the picture? Did you do things organized with lesbian groups or gay groups or anything like that?

A: We went to one gathering of an organization called Rainbow Families. And it was primarily or exclusively lesbian couples who have kids, and just didn't feel a real connection there. But our church has a lot of lesbian couples who have kids. And our associate pastor and her partner have a kid who's six months older than ****. So you know, we've got other connections, not through necessarily smaller organizations. But parenting, yeah, it's a good connection to be making. We started him in swimming lessons about --

Q: Wow!

A: -- six weeks ago or something like that.

Q: My goodness!

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Wow.

A: And we actually only got to go to two of them --

Q: That's amazing.

A: But they offer them free at the daycare if you're a member of the daycare.

Q: OK, wow.

A: But made some good connections with other parents there who had kids in a similar age range.

Q: Wow. So is there much pressure on gays and lesbians to sort of have the kind of family where you're moving towards kids and settle down and sort of more like heterosexual families? Or is it just sort of more it's OK to be whatever kind of family you are or -- someone I talked to just recently was sort of talking about that and --

A: Yeah, I think that there is --

Q: To think about that.

A: There is certainly some pressure to have kind of the, you know, modern American family: two parents, two children, modern being the '50s tradition of modern. But I personally have always wanted children. And so I didn't

feel that that was a lot of pressure in a negative way.

And we tried to get me pregnant for almost two years --

Q: OK.

A: -- and that was not successful. And the church community was very much a part of that and was very aware of OK, we're starting another insemination this week, that sort of thing, and praying for us. And it never worked and that was very hard. So I always felt like that was helpful, you know, not pressure, but support. But yeah, there certainly is some pressure. I think AB was not as committed -- as sure that she wanted children, where I've always -- I have to have kids. I'm a mom at heart. But we have come to a great place with him. And we're both madly in love with him.

Q: I can believe it. I can understand why too.

A: Yeah. So that's not a problem at all. But there, I think there is some sort of expectation. You know, you get married, you have a -- you buy a house, you have children, the children grow up, you know, that kind of expectation still.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow. Do you think that something about either how you developed, how your identity's developed or how you're

living your life, is that -- oh, he's fine, he's fine -- has that changed in any way because of coming here? Or do you think that would be different in any way if you were actually living somewhere else, one of the other places that you've lived?

A: Well, I would not be able to be out at all if I still lived in Alabama. If we still lived in Chicago where we were we would be completely out; everybody would be fine with it. There was never a bad eyelash when we would walk Downtown Chicago holding hands or something. Never any question there. Or at least that I experienced. But here it's sort of -- I mean, it's in the spectrum of one to five and Chicago was the five and where I lived in Alabama in the mountains, very, very rural area, was one, then maybe Asheville's a four and Hendersonville's a three.

Q: OK.

A: Something like that. So it's, you know, it's -- it's in the middle. It depends on the day.

Q: Wow. And what do you think its draw is to so many people?

A: I'm really not sure, but everybody loves it here.

Q: They seem to. They really do.

A: It's really been a population boom for the last like, 15 years. I'm going to be interested in seeing what the new census tells us. Because when we moved here the number we

heard was about 69.9, something, 70,000. And it's got to be closer to 100 now.

Q: Wow. It'll definitely be interesting -- well, I guess they didn't really ask that. They didn't ask about families by sexuality, did they?

A: No, they asked about age and that sort of gender and stuff of folks in the house. And from what I understand -- really? From what I understand last time around in 2001 they did the census, they kept and used the data for -- this is the number of families with two people of the same gender in the house. Which I thought was nice that they were able to say, you know, there are a lot of folks out there that are two people of the same gender living in the same house together. OK? Please don't strangle me. Thank you.

Q: I guess I was just thinking, have you run into people having ideas about how your son will turn out growing up with two mommies?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you run into with that?

A: Who's going to teach him how to be a man? You know, that kind of question. And we're working on that question. We

don't know yet. Especially since my dad has died. But AB's dad is still around and we see him once a month or so. And we've got some friends, a gay couple from our church that has three, three and a half-year-old little boy, also have been foster parents. They adopted him and are planning to foster again and hope to adopt again. And they're a really neat gay couple where the roles are not clear and divided and I'm a man so I will do this. And that's kind of what we're looking for on our -- so we talked to some about trying to build that relationship more so he'll have men around who are strong and unique and invite him, as we will, to be who he is.

Q: Wow. That's great.

A: Because that's important.

Q: Wow.

A: We've done some looking also for children's books for introducing different families. And had a wonderful one called, *And Tango Makes Three*.

Q: Yes, I read that.

A: Love that book. Love it so much, it's wonderful. And I've used a number of other books, *Families Like Mine*. That sort of thing. So he'll be exposed to lots of different kind of families.

Q: Wow.

A: Yes. Yeah.

Q: Well, that's awesome.

A: Yeah.

Q: So now that you've lived here, do you have a different sense of what you think North Carolina's like or is there - - is it still different, just Asheville to the rest?

A: No, we have friends that moved to Raleigh and friends that moved to Winston-Salem. He's getting a cold. Yeah.

Raleigh is much more -- what can I compare it to?

Portland, Oregon.

Q: OK.

A: A place where there's enough people that there's a lot of diversity. It's still the south, still has really neat architecture and that sort of thing, great restaurants. But it has enough people and enough diversity that there is less of a chance that you're going to walk into somebody that's going to be like (*gasp*) when you're walking down the street holding hands.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. But Winston, we haven't been out there much.

Charlotte, we've been in some. Greenville, South Carolina.

Charlotte and Greenville, less open. So I guess in some ways Asheville and Raleigh our kind of our two sort of experiences in North Carolina that have been very

welcoming, very open, not as stereotyped of what to expect when you see a lesbian couple and that it would be negative.

Q: And living here this long, have you found any negatives to the area or things that aren't what you would want them to be, even with the risk being so great?

A: The cost. It's expensive to live here. What is it? What is it? Are you trying to pay attention to Mommy? Do you want some Cheerios instead of my necklace? No, the primary stuff -- oh, you want your teddy bear. And we -- we love the mountains. That's, that's a wonderful blessing. Just right there. I love to go camping and there are tons of waterfalls in Transylvania County, which is just 15 minutes from here. So if you love nature at all, that's also huge here. The only downside I think that we've found other than, you know, the culture at times not being as welcoming as we'd like, is that the ocean is six hours away. And we don't have Lake Michigan in our back yard. Ohh.

Q: Ohh.

A: You are tired.

Q: Ohh.

A: Shhh. Shhh.

Q: Ohh.

A: Sleepy. Got a wet diaper too.

Q: Well, I've asked you a lot of questions. So is there anything that you'd want to talk about that we haven't talked about or? I'm also really curious what made you choose to want to participate in this.

A: We have seen a lot of different sort of results from things like this that we have really enjoyed.

Q: Oh, good!

A: I don't know what the end result is going to be of y'all's project, but one display came to our church that included a couple, **** and **** (sp?) -- **** had died two years ago now. They had been together for 38 years. She was in her 80s.

Q: Gosh.

A: And it told about, you know, their experience of being lesbians in the south and being together for 38 years. And just being a part of something like that that shows that there is life for folks who are LGBTQ --

Q: Wow.

A: -- that can be wonderful. I think it's important for folks to know because -- I mean, my dad -- when we -- when I first talked about going to Alabama back in '98 he was like why would you want to go there? And that was before I even came out. And he was just like, "Honey, you know, you grew up here where we have all of these different things that

you're so used to and, and what would be the pull to go there where it seems like those things aren't as assumed and maybe not as welcomed?" My two siblings are adopted from Korea.

Q: OK.

A: And my sibling that's biological, my sibling, married a man who's Muslim. And from Myanmar, you know, near Burma. One Thanksgiving I remember we had people from five different nations at our table.

Q: Wow, that's amazing.

A: So it's just very much an international diverse family.

Q: Wow.

A: So the sort of assumption in our family is that we are, you know, just one of many. And so to go to a place where it seems like it's much more homogenous seems strange to my family. But it turns out Asheville isn't.

Q: Well, that's great. Well, that's great. Well, I know you have a diaper to change.

A: I do.

Q: And I'll be happy -- I can tell you about the outcome while you're changing the diaper if you want. I'll start downloading this.

A: OK.

Q: Thank you so much for taking time and taking time out of busy mommy time to come and do this. We appreciate it. I know it's going to be a great addition to our collection.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

A: Yeah. It's exciting.

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