

G Lippincott

Q: Hello, this is Mike Howell from Appalachian State University. It's May -- excuse me, it's March 10th, 2010, and we are conducting an oral history interview, and Mr. Lippincott, if you would introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about yourself.

A: I'm George Lippincott. I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, and I lived there all of my childhood life, and I then moved from New Jersey to Pennsylvania, and I lived there the greatest part of my life, and from Pennsylvania I moved to Virginia, and from Virginia I moved to the state of Washington, and from the state of Washington a year and a half ago I came here to Asheville, North Carolina. By and large I was educated totally in New Jersey, both in the public schools and in Rutgers University. I was drafted into the Army. I -- thanks to the U.S. government, I went to the Preventive Medicine School in San Antonio, Fort Sam Houston, and finished. Then I had duty at the Army Clinic Center in Maryland, Bel Air, Maryland, and actually I was working in New Jersey at the time I was drafted so I went back to my haunts. Loved it. Retired after 43 years working for the same company, and was married. We had an adoptive daughter, and she was the light of my life because

it was not a good marriage, and probably the reason basically was that I really knew from the time I was 12 years old that I was very different. I didn't understand why I was attracted to men and not women, but that was definitely the case. I did everything that I was supposed to do. I was a good boy, and went to church, didn't drink, didn't do drugs, didn't smoke, and back then -- and I'm talking about in the early '50s, late '40s, something like that -- the thing that I was expected to do was to fall in love with a woman, get married, provide a home, have children, and live happily ever after. And I conformed in every way, but I was unhappy, and so the amazing thing is I attracted the same kind of person that I had dealt with all my life in my mother and my father, and my mother was always dying, and it was up to me to be there for her, and it didn't matter what time of the night it was, if she felt she was dying I was called upon to take care of her, and that started at a very young age. So I was attracted, really, if I had to marry I married a very good looking girl from a very good family who was very intelligent, and I married well, but she had problems that I thought I could deal with, and she was bipolar, untreated. And so... But things went well for the first few years, and the amazing

thing was I really thought that I could overcome being attracted to a man, to men.

Q: How old were you when you married?

A: I was 26.

Q: 26. And how old are you today?

A: I am 77.

Q: OK, and so when you decided to marry, if I'm understanding you right, you knew that you had feelings for other men --

A: Oh, of course.

Q: -- but had you identified yourself with having a...?

A: No.

Q: OK.

A: Because I had a friend that I grew up with -- and I laugh when I think back, because he was the son of a minister, and we lived across the street from each other, and in a sense he grew up as a brother because he had no siblings, and... Am I speaking loud enough?

Q: I think you are. I thought maybe I needed to move that just a little. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

A: So I was as naïve as they come. Every summer I spent at my grandfather's farm, and I loved my grandmother. My grandfather was an old German man who was not at all soft or comforting or anything. My grandmother was just the opposite. And I was, as I look back on things today, as I

had a tendency to be gay, and I had a softer, more sympathetic sweetness, really, about me growing up, and my grandmother nurtured that. We would go out on hikes and we would pick flowers, and I can remember my grandfather and grandmother had one cow named Star, and every year she had a calf, and I loved that calf. So I guess maybe I was like ten or eleven, and I said to my grandmother, "Where does Star get her baby?" I had no idea about the facts of life. I didn't know about sex. I didn't want to know. It didn't really necessarily impact on me. So anyway, my grandmother said, "Well, Star goes into the swale and she finds her baby." Now, I don't know if you know what a swale is, but a swale was the low part of a woods. A little stream went through, beautiful, and I grew up as total nerd and I used to read fairy tales and mythology, so I was at home with the elves and all these creatures that lived in the forest. So I thought, "Well, I am going to go into the swale and I am going to get my own calf." So I went behind trees, I looked under rocks. I figured, wow, if Star could go into this swale and get a baby calf, why can't I?

Q: (laughter) Right!

A: And it never worked! But truthfully, it worked for me in that, so that when I came home that fall and I went to school and we were walking to school, and you know how all

the kids know, they knew less then than they do today, because I think you had to catch a kid when they're six years old to have them as innocent as I was, so something came up -- "Oh George, you don't even know where babies come from," and I said, "Of course I do!" So I recited my tale of the cow went into the swale to get her baby.

Q: It's a swale tale! (laughter)

A: And I became more of a nerd, you know, because I didn't know anything about that. Well, I've deviated in that. This friend of mine --

Q: Yes, right.

A: -- who lived across the street was two years younger, but he was 20 years older, and he knew --

Q: He was more sophisticated.

A: Absolutely.

Q: OK.

A: (clears throat) And he knew all there was to know about sex, and this, that, and the other thing. He knew about gay sex, and I had no idea about being attracted to a man. And so as it were, he was my first sexual encounter, and I knew it was wrong but it felt so good, and how could something, you know... So it worked to the point where I would say to myself, "It'll never happen again, it'll never happen again." And --

Q: And this was before your marriage?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: OK.

A: This was when I was probably 12.

Q: OK, all right, much younger.

A: Mm-hmm. And so I won't go into all the intricacies of how it happened or whatnot, but we stayed friends, and he never married, he never had a real partner at all, but as we became late teens, early twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, we would on occasion have sex, and we used to go to car -- I shouldn't say that -- we went to antique car --

Q: Shows.

A: -- shows, and I'll never forget because he'd say, "I don't understand you, because it's like not being with you when you go to this show. You're always perusing, you're looking at other men." And I was married at the time, and he said to me, "You know, you are gay." And I said -- by that time I knew what gay and bisexual -- and I said, "No, I'm really not gay. If anything, I'm bisexual, because I am attracted to men." But I really... I had... When I was in the service I had one gay experience, and it was better than the experience I had had with this friend when I was... And so actually I didn't want to be associated with being gay, but the interesting thing is when I met my wife

and I felt I -- because I met her when I came out of the service, and I probably at that time was 22, 23, something like that, and she was in college, and I figured, "Well, you know what? The only way that you are going to get over this..." Because I was a very sexual person, whether I acted on it or not, and I've often said my sexual feelings were gratified over the years through video and magazines, and... But I thought, well, if I marry and I have a taste of sex with a woman, I mean, that's going to get me over my hump and I'm going to like it. Well, the funny thing was - - and I think now as I look back, I think she was a lesbian, and so she never wanted sex. So here I'm even more frustrated because I've married a woman who doesn't want sex. I never had sex with her.

Q: Wow. How long were you married?

A: Forty years.

Q: Wow.

A: And I thought the first year, the second year, the third year I will finally, you know... And it's so funny because I guess after we had been married for eight years or so she said she wanted a child, and I said, "You know, you know how babies are... You have to have sex!"

Q: You can't go to the swale! (laughter)

A: No, and you're not an immaculate, you know, Virgin Mary! It can't happen! And so... And I said, "The only way that you're going to be able to have a child is through artificial insemination." Well, it's so funny because I just thought -- she insisted that I go to a doctor, a urologist, to be tested to see if I was, if my sperm was good, if I was fertile. Am I deviating in some way?

Q: I don't think so. Go ahead. I'll ask you a couple things, but go ahead.

A: Yeah. So anyway, I went to this urologist, and he suggested that I go home and collect my sperm, put it in this test tube, put it under my arm, come in and he would check it out. Well, he checked it out and he said, "I'm going to need a couple more samples, and I'm going to have to collect the samples." And I thought, "This doesn't sound right to me," but I was still relatively naïve, and I thought, "Well, if it has to be done it has to be done." Well, after two of his collections -- and he actually masturbated --

Q: Wow, I think the AMA would probably frown on that these days.

A: I think so, even then! But it was uncomfortable, but enjoyable, even though I thought it was bizarre, and actually after the second collections I thought, "I can't

go back to him." And it was always arranged so that I was the last patient and so forth and so on. But my sperm tested fine, but, like I say... So anyway, she wanted a child and the only way conceivable was through adoption, so we applied to several organizations, and we each had out psychological tests, and she flunked each test, and finally the one agency that consented to consider us as parents -- and I'll never forget, the gal said to me, "You know, Mr. Lippincott, the only reason you will be getting a child from us is because of you. If it was based on your wife, she would not qualify to be a mother." Well, as it turned out -- and I knew this by that time, but I thought it would be nice to have a child. And at the time my mother was dying, and I can remember the day that she was in the hospital, I went to tell her that we were getting this little girl. She cried and I cried, and she said, "Oh, George, I always worried that you in your old age would have no one to care for you the way you've cared for me," and I said, "Well, Mother, that really isn't the reason. Actually, I will get more out of this than the little girl." But, you know, we're talking generations, and so forth and so on. So anyway, this little girl turned out to be my whole reason for living, and... However, I reached the point where I decided that I couldn't deal with living

two lives, because at my job I was really well respected and loved, and I got none of that when I went home. I was treated as garbage, except for my little girl, and that was wonderful, except that I didn't think it was doing her any good. Well, actually God played such a wonderful role in this, because when she was nine years old my wife decided that she didn't want to have anything to do with either one of us. We lived together, but, you know, I took care of my daughter, did the meals, did the cleaning, did the washing, did this, so forth and so on, so that by all intents and purposes... And truthfully, my wife wasn't really capable of dealing with any of that, and so... She was violent, could be violent, and I was a very light sleeper, and we didn't have -- we had separate bedrooms, and I many a time would wake up and see her standing over me with a knife.

Q: Wow.

A: But I figured I can deal with this, and I had a really good friend -- and it wasn't a sexual... It wasn't sexual. It was a sexual attraction but never acted on, you know, but I loved him. And he said to me, "You know, George, if you don't leave her, I'm going to read in the paper that she has killed you both." And I thought to myself, wow, this is a revelation. And I always listened to things that -- and so forth and so on. So I put Dutch doors on our

bedrooms, and I said to my daughter, "Make sure that your door is always locked, preferably at night, and when you..." Because she had a -- she would read Wendy's diaries all the time, so... And that was a good -- of course, my daughter knew that she was doing it, so she was great at writing fiction, and so actually my wife reading her novel said, "She's a slut and a whore and a this and a that," so it was... So anyway, we grew up from the time that she was nine doing everything together. We took vacations together, we played games together, and I knew that I had to motivate her because she had this weird home life. We couldn't have anybody over to the house, and so I... She was very, very into challenges, and so I would make up games, like an A was a dollar, a B was so much and so much, and if a whole year of straight As... So she would be waiting for me with a... She from that point on never got anything but straight As.

Q: Wow.

A: She was an excellent student, and so much so that she got five full scholarships --

Q: Wow, that's wonderful.

A: -- at (overlapping dialogue; inaudible), Stanford, Cal Poly, University -- no one knows -- she went to the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, it doesn't matter.

But anyway, it was in 1985 that I said to my friend, "You know, I am going to ask a favor of you. If I shouldn't be around, will you look in on Wendy and see that she's OK?" And he said, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "You're not considering taking your life," and I said, "Well, of course I am." I said, "This... I don't want any more life like this." And I used to think to myself -- I had a nickname at work as Smiley, and I used to think, "Oh, if you only knew. There I am. I'm crying on the inside and laughing on the outside." And I used to think, "Are you going to be surprised when you read of the demise of George?" So anyway, he said, "You're just working into her hands." He said, "Either leave her or change your lifestyle. Learn to love yourself, like yourself." I never did. And so I... He said, "The first thing we're going to do is buy a new car, get you new clothes, and get, try to get some of the... Try to get you to see yourself the way everybody else does, and little by little love for yourself." It worked. Here I am. And...

Q: So now how did, how then did you go from being married and sort of living in the closet to not being married and I guess eventually having a partner?

A: At seventy years old, I said to my wife, "Look, this is not really working for either one of us," and actually when my

daughter went away to college I made sure that she never came home again, because my friend said to me, "You know, George, if you're not careful she's going to turn out just like her mother," and I thought, "Of course she will." So it was so easy because when she went away to college, that was it. She never came home again. And the good thing was that I loved Virginia and I would be once or twice a month, weekends, you know, with my daughter, and I eventually built, bought land, built a house down in Virginia, in Charlottesville. And so I always... It was... It saved my life, truthfully, because I had something to look forward to. I built it. I -- Wendy and I designed it. I built it, I decorated it. It was totally mine. And when my energies flopped and I needed to recharge, I would recharge in Virginia and come back again. And so... But I said, when I turned 70 I said to my wife, "Look, I'm going to offer you -- I'm going to stop giving you 200% of George. I'm willing to give you 50%, and I'm going to take the other half, and you can either live your life with me or live your life without me." And I said, "It'll be very easy for me, because I get in the car and I drive to Virginia, and here you are." And she said, "Why would I change?"

Q: Meaning herself?

A: Herself. She said, "I love my life the way it is." And she was a very religious person, and her being a very religious person convinced me that I did not want to be a religious person. So anyway, I said, "OK, my life, nor is yours, is not getting longer at this stage of the game," and my friends in Virginia were worried about me because they thought I was going to die, and in a sense it was a slow death. And so I said, "OK, I'm going to Virginia." So I packed my car up with everything that I could take and I said goodbye. And I had a house furnished, and it was semi, you know, it was (inaudible) -- all I needed to do was take more clothes down, by and large. And the funny thing is now I was trained in preventive medicine, and part of our training was in venereal disease, and the reason I never acted on my desire to be with a man... I didn't, at my age I didn't want a disease, and of course now we have AIDS to deal with. So I thought, that doesn't seem right. I'm not going to... You know, I didn't smoke because I didn't want to, you know, bring that -- and I was too cheap, anyway. I didn't want to spend my money and, you know, smoke, so I started... And I had some really good friends in Virginia, couples, and so I went to Virginia, and it's so funny because this neighbor across the street really are wonderful people, and Doris said to me, "You

know what, George? I am so afraid that we're going to lose you because something's going to happen that your wife is going to be involved." And you know -- and they knew her, she had been down several times. She really didn't like it, but she is... And she would over time alienate my friends so that I, you know, couldn't -- so forth and so on. And so I said, "That's not going to happen." And so anyway, here I am, going to functions, going to plays, ushering at the college for their performances and everything, enjoying life as I never had before. Still, I figured that somehow I would have a man come into my life and life would be happy forever after. Hasn't happened, until Roger.

Q: So let me just... Just to clarify, are you still technically married?

A: Actually, we're legally separated.

Q: OK, all right.

A: But I have a good lawyer, and the only reason we're not divorced is that she would not get my benefits, medical benefits.

Q: I see.

A: So allowing her -- and she, you know --

Q: So living separate lives, but just legally married.

A: -- she got the place in Pennsylvania, I got the place in Virginia, and so I still support her, but... And that was probably the reason I didn't leave her sooner was that I didn't want to share, but you reach the point where material things are not much if you don't have happiness and love. So I met this great guy at a meeting. I don't know if you've ever heard of a meeting, it's for gay men over 40.

Q: Primetime or something?

A: Primetime.

Q: Yes, yes, I do know that organization.

A: And Primetimers -- I had gone to Primetimers in Philadelphia and hated it, and I went probably to two or three, but there was a Primetimers in Richmond, and I went to Primetimers in Richmond and it was totally different. Actually, the president at the time was super nice, the meetings were fabulous, and the group of men was the best group of men I had ever known, and...

Q: It's a large group. I lived in Richmond and visited there for some community group I was doing --

A: Really? Oh, OK.

Q: -- and it was a very large group several years ago.

A: And they did a lot of good things. They had... Yeah. And so anyway, I am, well, you know, strange already, but I

would get up in the morning, and if I had a meeting in New York that I had looked forward to going to, the day of the meeting I would think to myself, "Oh, do I have to go?" So the morning -- it was a Sunday morning that I got up, beautiful day, I had breakfast on the deck, and I thought, "Eh, do I really want to go?" And I thought to myself, "You've planned it for so long, and if you don't like it there's a wonderful nursery that you go by, so just consider it an outing, leave the meeting, and go to the nursery." So I had my day OK, and I think that was the second time I had gone to Primetimers. But anyway, after the meeting I went up to the president and I said, "This is... The meeting was so wonderful and I got so much out of it. Thank you very much," and blah, blah, blah. And this guy comes up behind me and joins so that we have a three-way conversation. And so the president leaves, and Roger and I stay and talk, and he was, you know, much younger. And I thought, "I don't understand this," and I never, until him, understood that men could be attracted to older men, you know. It just didn't... And I always thought I would end up, if anything, with a man my age, or close to. So he said, "By the way, here's my card and my name and my address and phone number." And so I thought to myself, "Is he expecting me to do the same thing, give him my

information?" And I thought, "Yeah, I guess he is," so I said, "Do you want my address and phone number?" And he said, "Yes, I do." So we exchanged, and as it turned out, a horrific storm came up and I don't -- do you know how far it is from Richmond --

Q: I do.

A: -- to Charlottesville? Lake Monticello is where.

Q: OK.

A: And so that wasn't bad, but he had a trip to Amosville, which is much -- practically you're in Washington, much farther. And so I'm headed -- was it 60, 60 that goes directly between...? Well, whatever. And I'm driving along, and it is buckets coming down, and I would pull under an overpass, and I thought to myself, "Wow, I should have asked him if he wanted to come home and spend the night with me and then go back, and I didn't." So anyway, I get home the next morning. I figure, "Oh, I'll have to call him and see if he got home OK," and as I'm having breakfast on the deck the phone rings and he's calling, and he said, "What did you think of the storm?" And I said that I was thinking that it would have been smarter for you to come home with me, and then made the -- because it wasn't that far away. So anyway, he said, "I'd like to see you. Can we get together for lunch on Wednesday?" And

this is Monday. And I said, "No, because I'm leaving Thursday morning for Pennsylvania, because I promised to do some things with my daughter's stepson." And so I said, "And it's going to take me all day Wednesday to close the house down, because I never know, I might be there a week, I might be there two weeks, whatnot." And he said, "Well then, can we get together tomorrow?" And I said, "Yeah, I guess so." And I said, "Would it help if we met halfway?" And he said, "Yeah, that'll be fine," so we met halfway, had lunch, and spent the whole afternoon in this sweet little park eating our pimento cheese sandwiches and drinking lemonade. And so (clears throat) I sang with the Coast Guard Chorus and we were having our meeting that night, otherwise I probably would have stayed all night. But anyway, we had connected strongly, strongly, and I have visions, and I realized that we had had past lives together and that's why it was so easy to know him. And so anyway, that's a side part of it. Anyway, he said, we said goodbye, not knowing when we were going to see each other again. And so he calls me (pause) I guess that night, and he said, "You know, I was just thinking, you practically go by my doorstep on the way back to Philadelphia," and he said, "Is there any way that you can come, I'll fix dinner for us, and then you leave Thursday morning? Then you'll

be on target," and so forth and so on. Well, it didn't take much encouraging. (laughter) So I said, "Sure, you know, I can get my house ready and close it down and get up to your place for dinner." Well, needless to say, that's ancient history, and actually I stayed two weeks in Philadelphia and came back, and did not go back at all.

Q: Wow.

A: So... And life, really my life... I began living. And how, I said oh my God, you know, how can you realize that so much good -- every day is an adventure, a new adventure, and life is so good, and life is so fulfilling, and the funny thing is the relationship that we have just gets better over time. And I think part of it is that in the beginning of a relationship I would tend to relive a lot of the past relationships that I could recall. Roger has his own recall. And then I didn't want to live in the past, so I tucked those memories away so that now I have to really coax any memory of a past life out from the deep recesses of my mind.

Q: Now, how long have the two of you been together then?

A: (pause) Six, seven. Six or seven years.

Q: OK, six or seven years, all right. Let me ask you -- so you were in Virginia when you met, and did you live together in Virginia?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: OK. So at some point you made a decision together to move to North Carolina --

A: Exactly.

Q: -- to move into the Appalachian area.

A: Well, we first were drawn to the Northwest, so we sold Roger's place in Virginia -- and the interesting this is -- and I was trying to think, "How am I going to play out this relationship?" as I'm driving from Philadelphia to Roger's home, and I figured that we would spend time at his place and I would time, and he would spend time at my place. Never happened. I stopped and never left.

Q: In Richmond?

A: Well, actually in Amosville where he lived.

Q: Oh, right. Oh, OK. I'm sorry, I for some reason thought that --

A: Yeah, well sure. But I figured that isn't the way it was going to be, but that is the way it had to be, so it was wonderful. And then, of course, we went down together and moved everything that I wanted up to his place, and then when we moved to Washington we took everything, you know, everything, by and large. There's still stuff in Virginia. But anyway, we were absolutely drawn to the state of Washington, Northwest -- we thought it was going to be

Oregon -- and we were seduced by Mount Rainier, because it's... And it's a very, very high energy, very spiritual, and we relate to spiritualism. And so then the way we got here -- we were going to go to Eugene, and we were down there looking for real estate, and Roger got very sick, and we had been back and forth for years into Maryland because his father was not well and dying, and so I didn't know what was wrong with him, nor did he. I didn't even know where the hospital was in Eugene. And so got him to the hospital, they admitted him, and found that he had blood clots on both legs.

Q: Wow.

A: And I thought he was going to die. And I -- when he was released he had... We stayed at a motel until he was able to move to Washington, and I, of course, was a pro at giving shots, so I gave him the shots that he was needing, and so forth and so on. And the funny thing is I thought, "We have got to go back to the East Coast," because I had to wait for the time difference that I could call friends back here, and when I would call friends I would be incoherent because I would be crying, and these friends didn't even know what I was attempting. They certainly knew it was bad. So anyway, I got a map and I said -- and Roger had clients who had talked of Asheville, wonderful,

and so I said OK, pulled out a map, here's Asheville, and pretty much we could get wherever we wanted to, to friends, or I could do Philly in a day if I had to. But on the farm in Virginia there was a Civil War cemetery, so -- and we maintained it. It was a sweet little cemetery. By and large it was a black cemetery. And I'm thinking the worse thought: "Well, I'm going to have to call Mary, who bought the place, and ask if I can bury Roger." And so... But obviously it didn't turn out that way, but so we then came... Well, we -- Roger's father died in the meantime. We had to settle that, and then we flew into Charlotte, got a rental car, drove down 40, and we cried, because we knew. And actually, one -- not one, but we had no community to speak of in Washington, and we're easy to develop community, and I would say probably there were two couples that we were relatively friendly with. Other than that, nothing. And so we came here, and it's like living in another world, because the friends and the community that we have here -- and I should mention the four seasons... I mean, we like to garden, and in Washington there were two seasons: nine months of rain and no sun, and the other glorious, beautiful summer. But everything was perfect here. We found a spot that we love, we've really turned it into something that is an oasis, and I often say I know

there's a world out there but I don't have to be part of it.

Q: Let me ask you -- I want to hear more specifically about the community that you found, but when you decided to move here -- and it sounds like you had heard some good things about Asheville, the area -- neither of you, I take it, have lived in North Carolina before or were from North Carolina.

A: Correct.

Q: Did you have any ideas about North Carolina and its views on gays and lesbians or what you might be in for? Did you have any stereotype ideas?

A: We knew that Asheville was a very loving community. We knew it was high energy, and we knew the history of the spiritualism, especially in Black Mountain. We knew that we would be coming to gay friendly area.

Q: So it had a reputation that you were aware of.

A: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

Q: OK.

A: Even though we didn't know anybody firsthand until we came here.

Q: And how long ago was that?

A: A year and a half.

Q: Oh, OK, all right. So what have you found, then? Tell me, what is that community like for you?

A: Actually, I guess the first thing we got involved in was a book club -- not a gay book club. In fact, Roger was -- that he has left one gay man, everybody else was straight, in couples or singles and so forth and so on. But then we, you know, picked up on all the local newspapers, on all the na-na-na-na, and we said, "What is there gay here?" Now, we don't define ourselves necessarily as gay. I mean, we are gay and will admit to it any time that you, you know, it's brought up, but we have many straight friends who accept us for whom we are, you know, and the funny thing is that I don't know that gayness enters into how the straight folks think of us, you know. They know that Roger and Marvin live here, we entertain here, we attempt to be fun to be around, and so forth and so on, but we met a group -- in fact, I went to the meeting last night -- [Gorge Us?], based on -- it's in Lake Lure, [In Gorge Us?], and it started in the gorge up there of Lake Lure, and I think there are upwards of 200 members.

Q: And what kind of group is that?

A: It's a lesbian... It's gay. It's --

Q: Like a social group?

A: -- men and women. Mm-hmm.

Q: OK, together.

A: Covered dish.

Q: Oh, OK, interacting together and... Oh, that's nice, OK.

A: And we entertain at each other's places. Last night it was at a guy's, two guys' home in Lake Lure. There were 25 people there. Our neighbors, who are lesbians, took me because Roger couldn't go -- he had a class here -- and so I wasn't going to bother going, and Roger, unbeknownst to me, calls and he says, "You know, Marvin isn't going because I'm not going. Why don't you -- would you want to stop and pick him up?" "Yeah!" So they picked me up last night. We had a nice time. It's a purely social. It's purely social. There's another group that meets on Saturday nights, the second Saturday of every month. I'm not as fond of that group because that's all gay men, and this group that I went to last night, some of the gay men criticize it because they are not comfortable being around lesbians, and one guy who said the women have taken over that group, I said, "Thank God!" I love it because I like diversity. The women, the lesbians are really lovely, and I relate to and we can be friendly with, and I don't know why...

Q: So there's that group where they're sort of interconnected. Would you say that's the case with the community in

general? Do the men and the women interact pretty regularly, or is it...?

A: Well, let's say this: we do.

Q: OK, mm-hmm.

A: And there are venues for everybody, everybody. Now, (clears throat) I -- Roger has been an AA member for 28 years, a recovering alcoholic. I, believe it or not, all my life looked for a group like that. I didn't know of AA before I knew Roger, to speak of, and as soon as I became a partner with Roger I would go to every open AA meeting there was because it turned out to be my church, and it's saving lives, by and large. And God, how I wished that I had known of AA or Al-Anon when I was having such a tough time of it in dealing with my wife's mental sickness, because nobody wanted to be around. In fact, I said to her father when Wendy was young, "I'm going to ask a favor of you. Would you take Ray out on a Saturday or a Sunday? Go to dinner, go to lunch, keep her out, so I can have some quality time with Wendy every weekend." And he said to me -- and this is by and large -- I mean, this is her father -- he said, "I don't want to get involved." And I said, "You are, you are involved! You're the father of this person." And so if you can't get a father or a father-in-law to help, who is there? Nobody, absolutely nobody. And

I went to the minister that, you know, and I said there again, "Isn't there a group here that can help me?"

Because... And there wasn't, I was told. And I said to the minister -- and I was a member at that time -- I said, "You know what? Everything here is lip service. You don't know how to service the community the way it needs to be serviced." And I was very involved with local things. I was a director for tech school for 100 years, and actually that was my way of getting away. I either went back to work at night and took my daughter with me, or I had organizations that I participated in, but I... I just loved, I love AA, and we go to a gay AA group, meets twice a week, and they're my family. They are my... You know, when I hear that -- I never witnessed... I don't speak, because I don't feel that I'm entitled to, but I listen, and it is so enriching, and it fills my very soul, really. But so that's a real, a real strong place to meet gay people.

Q: What is it that you would say that it is about Asheville that sort of makes it so gay positive, or that I guess makes it the place you found it to be?

A: Well, you know what? I think for the most part it's a very artsy area, and actually most gay people are very artsy, into the arts. In Pennsylvania I had -- in our community

there were so many gay people, and it was so funny because I was straight. My neighbors were two gay men, and I used to say, "Will you guys stop it? You guys make it very difficult for me to live here, because you have such a wonderful showplace, and I have to really work hard! And I'm the only person working." I used to look at my gay friends in the community -- and, of course, they didn't know, but believe it or not, they did. After the fact, when I left and word got out that Marvin, you know, my neighbors said, "We always knew he was gay," you know. But I think that the arts seem to draw out those people, male and female, who are gay, just -- and this being such an art spiritual community, it attracts and supports gay people.

Q: How about in your experience here have you found it to be a fairly inclusive community?

A: Totally.

Q: Totally inclusive, in terms of race, gender, age?

A: You know, the funny thing is I have always been open to everybody and anybody, race, by and large because I always, I felt that black people really had a struggle, and I never knew how much of a struggle it was until we had one black woman in our book club. And she has since moved away, and I appreciate her so because she shared over the time that we knew her here as a member of the book club the problems

that she faced as a black woman. Now, here was a black woman -- she's not gay -- who came from -- her father was a black doctor in Washington, D.C., and she used to tell stories about him, about her as a little girl not being... And they used to shop, she and her father used to shop in Washington on Sundays. They would go in town and window shop, because they weren't allowed in. And you would think that I was talking about the Dark Ages, but I'm not talking about that many years ago at all. She's 60, and she's talking about when she was a little girl, 50 years ago. Pathetic! So actually, for me being around people who are very diverse in color, in culture, and so forth and so on, has a real potential to learn, and I'm like a sponge. (laughter) And it's funny because over the years when I was in business, I was in charge of purchasing for a very large insurance company, and I had to deal with a lot of people that I didn't like, and I hate to admit it but if there was somebody that I didn't like and they knew more than I knew, I would soak up everything that I could from them. Then I didn't care if I ever saw them again. (laughter) So... But yeah, I think -- and here people are willing to share everything with you, you know, and we were talking about how, how can we get through another winter like this winter has been? Because it's depressing. And I said, "I don't

know if I can go through another... I've gone through 77 winters, and I've hated February every winter! How am I going to get...?" And then, you know what? My life is so good here, I love it so here, that if I have to go through a bad 1/12th, I can do it. But we decided that the solution is you just get together with people. You have dinner together -- in our homes, because we're both good cooks, and I hate to go out to eat when I can eat better at home -- and we play games together, and Roger through the years -- we have retreats, and we have one day retreats, two days retreats, three days retreats where, say, at 10:00 a bell's rung, you enter silence, you can do anything you want. You can sleep if you want, you can write, you can read, but that time is yours. We put out a lunch, and you can pick up what you want, and then we have dinner together. The bell is rung at 5:00, or whatever predetermined time, and we can talk again. I thought I'd never be able to deal with not talking for... (laughter)

Q: (laughter) That would be hard for me, hard for me!

A: God, what am I...? How am I going to live through this day of silence? But, you know, over... I can remember the first day of silence retreat that we, that I ever went on, and I decided that I would start writing a recollection of

all the people that I have known in my life who have made a difference. I'm not finished yet.

Q: Wow.

A: You know? And I... Because I get sidetracked, because then I do little anecdotes and so forth and so on. Are we OK?

Q: We're good. I'm a little paranoid about the recorder, but just in case...

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: So Asheville then is a good fit for you all, and it sounds like you found a very vibrant, very thriving and welcoming community. Do you get the impression that that's pretty much the norm for this Appalachian region, or would you say that that...? Do you have any impression about whether you think that's different in other places?

A: I don't know. You know, I'm a strong believer in life being what you make of it, and if you want it to be dull and dreary, uneventful, that's your life, but this is a group of people who live in this area who choose to sometimes live on the edge and do very daring things, like how many towns can you go into and walk downtown and see men dressed in skirts?

Q: (laughter) Not so many. Is that characteristic of Asheville?

A: It happens.

Q: OK, all right.

A: How many towns can you go into and see a man wearing a flower in his hair?

Q: What about public display of affection? Is this a pretty safe place for...?

A: Well, you know, it's so funny -- I've really never been comfortable with either sex. I don't like to see public areas used to grandstand, whether that affection is between a man and a woman, a woman and a woman, and a man and a man, but you can easily go down the street holding hands, and I would say that's pretty remarkable, you know? I guess -- I can't say that I've never seen affection shown between two men, but the interesting thing is there there's always been double standards. Women, two women can show affection and two men cannot, and it's very, very nice to be greeted by man or woman with a hug. I love hugging, you know, and so that's pretty much the norm when you get together and it's a hug. I'm not comfortable with a man kissing me, a strange man, you know, but it happens. Last night, you know -- I know of men who kiss, and I know that when you greet this particular man he's going to kiss you. It's OK, you know. I know that when you greet particular women, and I'm thinking like a friend last night, I know that she's going to kiss me full lips, not on the cheek but

full lips. She loves me, she loves Roger, and that's OK, that's OK. But I wasn't brought up as a kissy-kissy person. However, I taught my daughter it's OK to kissy-kissy and cry-cry, doesn't diminish anything of who you are.

Q: I want to ask you something in just a minute about your daughter, but before I do that I'll lose this question. So you mentioned that your community tends to connect through people's houses, different things like that. Are there -- not knowing, really, anything about Asheville, are there public places where people congregate? Are there places that are either explicitly sort of gay oriented or just frequented or...?

A: Mm-hmm, but because we don't drink, they're usually bars.

Q: OK, so there are a number of bars in the area?

A: Mm-hmm. There are gay friendly churches, and when there's a gay friendly church you will find gay people, because why not? That's the way it should be. There are gay priests in town. There are gay ministers in town. Every walk of life there's gayness, which is refreshing, you know. And I don't think any of them feel the need to be closeted here in Asheville. I don't think any of them... Well, I shouldn't say that. There are people who would not want to be, you know, too friendly with a gay person if they're

straight. Usually they're... I like to think that they're less intelligent, you know, because I -- we've come such a long way! Recently I was very disappointed with our mayor because equal benefits to partners in this city came up and by and large the council is for it because they've already determined it will only be a small percentage of increase in the budget, you know? And that's a huge step to allow partners, because partners are really, on a whole, not treated fairly, and believe it or not -- and she's a black lady -- and she came out and she's not for it.

Q: The mayor?

A: The mayor. And I couldn't believe it, because when you talk of groups -- and as we did -- black people have been so -- (pause) I can't think of the word, but you know what I mean -- that you would think black people, particularly black people would feel for gay rights, because they've struggled for their rights, black people, and the gay people have worked hard to give the black people their rights.

(interruption, not transcribed)

Q: That's interesting, though. So it sounds like they philosophically would go along with the idea of extending the benefits if it was fiscally sound, so it's not just do it because it's the right thing to do, but...

A: Yeah, that's a part of it, but think of California. The black people did not vote for the gay rights.

Q: Right.

A: And it's double standards. And here the black people call on the gay people to support them in their rights, and we have, because I'm colorblind. I had a good friend who was superintendent of our public school back in Pennsylvania. I loved the man. He was so progressive. He was so intelligent. He was so "non-black," I guess maybe. And I used to invite him for lunch, and many of the things that we would discuss relating to the school and the tech school and so forth -- I always liked to do it over lunch or coffee or something like that -- and I cannot tell you the numbers of times that he would be sitting as you and I are and I would think, "How could anybody not love you? Because you're colorless. You're not a black person, you're not a white person, you're just a good person, full of love." And do you know, he had to leave because -- and this has always been my take on public school education -- they elect a Board of Education popularly, not quality, not your... And you can have no credentials, not qualify for a member of the Board of Education, but you can be elected through popularity and now you're sitting in judgment of all the teachers, the superintendent, and all those -- and

I hate to say this -- that you don't begin to compare to. You should... I used to always think, especially superintendents of schools should not be allowed to be judged by a school board but should be judged by their own peers, you know, other superintendents of schools. And so [Jim?] had to leave, because the mindset was "I'm not going to have that n- tell my kids how they should be educated."

Q: So race was an issue?

A: Absolutely. And believe it or not, you know who came up next? The vice principle or vice superintendent, one of the sweetest -- and, in fact, I think to myself, "God, I should really get in touch with Betsy," because she was such a good person, and she was female, her father was Jewish and had a lot of money, and it was... I used to say there were three strikes: female, Jewish, and had a lot of money. And they made life hell for her, and she knew every kid's name from kindergarten to 12th grade, and she was -- and she wasn't married, and it's so funny because I've really never thought until after, I've thought about the people I left behind and never said goodbye to, 'cause that's pretty much the way my life turned out. I just left, and people didn't know how to get in touch with me, and... But I have a feeling she must have been a lesbian. Big deal.

Q: Well, I have one -- and our time is starting to run out, so I have, I'd like to ask you one last thing, if you don't mind sharing. I know that you're very close with your daughter, you've talked about that. How did your daughter adjust to this change in your life? And I know I'm probably asking something complicated, but...

A: No, no. It's the most uncomplicated thing that you could ask. When I met Roger and I came out, I came out first to my neighbor across the street, Doris, and I had coffee with Doris and Joe once or twice a day, and I went over for coffee, and I said, "You know, I have something very difficult to tell you, but I'm gay, and I've really, truthfully been gay all my life, and I am coming out." And they are very good Catholics, and I didn't know what they would take. And Doris got up and she came over to me and she hugged me, and she said, "Good for us, because if you love him, we're going to love him, and we now have two Georges." And when I went home for the two weeks, I called my daughter and I said, "I have to see you." And we had planned to see each other anyway. And I said, "I have something very important to tell you and share with you." And Travis was going to be in a show that I was going to go to --

Q: Is this your grandson?

A: It's a step-grandson, yeah. And so she said, "Well, why don't you come down?" And they belong to the (inaudible) pool. "Come to dinner." There's the pool, and the show was being there. And she said, "We can visit," and so forth and so on. And the time was getting late, and I said, "Wendy, I need for, I just need a little time with you." And so we went off to a side and sat down, and I said, "I have to tell you something. I'm gay, I've been living a life that has been a lie, and I have met this wonderful man." And she started to laugh, and she said, "Dad," and she called her friends over, "Ian, Ted, Ron, come on over." She said, "You'll never guess what my father just told me. He's gay!" She says, "Dad, we outed you years ago!" (laughter)

Q: (laughter) Isn't that great?

A: And the funny thing was that she had a lot of gay friends, and she at that time was working for the City of Philadelphia at the time she was going to be married, and the comptroller, she always went to lunch with him and he was gay, and we used to have a box, company box, and so -- for the Phillies -- so I knew him well. Well, he said to Wendy, "You know what? I would like to be your Maid of Honor." So gayness is not a problem as far as she is concerned, has been wonderful.

Q: That's fantastic.

A: And actually, because of the way she was brought up, she is very open about everything, not prejudiced about a thing, and that's the way it should be.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: Yeah, really.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: She... And I said to her recently, I said -- you know, the amazing thing is she was always self-motivated. All I had to do was be there and pay the bills.

Q: (laughter) That's nice!

A: And so she went to UVA, she got her graduate degree at Penn, and got her law degree.

Q: Wow.

A: She has five architectural degrees and got her law degree just last year from Temple.

Q: That's wonderful. Well, George, I could talk to you all day but I'm afraid I have to stop now.

A: I hope I've helped.

Q: I think so. I think that that's a wonderful story and I appreciate you being willing to share it with us.

A: It's my pleasure.

Q: Thank you.

A: I hate to cry in public.

Q: Oh, it's OK.

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