

M. Perry

Q: Good morning. This is Michael Howell from Appalachian State University. It is March 10, 2010, and I am in the library at UNC Asheville with Marlene Perry. And would you introduce yourself. Tell us a little about you.

A: I'm Marlene Perry. I am 74 years old. And, I now live in Asheville, but I was born in -- I was born on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Lived there for a good many years and then my family moved to New Bedford, Mass., and we lived there until I was 16. My family moved back to Martha's Vineyard and at 19, I joined the Marine Corps.

Q: Wow.

A: I spent three years in the Marine Corps dodging security because I knew I was a lesbian and I'm sure they knew too but they couldn't catch me at it and I wasn't going to let them catch me at it and I even got engaged to some very nice young man. So they didn't and so I got an honorable discharge and went back to Martha's Vineyard and lived there for approximately, let's see, I was 22 then. I went back there and lived until I was about 35, 36.

Q: I'm terrible with math, so what were the years that you were in the service?

A: I was in -- I've been out longer than you are born probably. I was in from 1955 to 1958.

Q: OK.

A: No wars and nothing like that. Just I went in really to get an education and I was offered college education but while I was in the service my dad passed away. My mother was not well. And I was the only single member of the family. And there was no one else to take care of her. So they would not let me have substantive quarters and have her come and live with me, so I had to get out. And, like I said, I got out and I went back to Martha's Vineyard and I worked there two jobs. Bought my own home. Had a partner at that time that didn't want anyone to know they were my partner. It was a very closeted place. But I certainly knew a lot of lesbians. And, I'm sure they knew I was a lesbian. I knew they were lesbians. But nobody ever talked about it. Nobody ever mentioned it. Nobody ever said a word.

Q: How did you know this about yourself?

A: Well, from the time I was about five or six years old, I was much more interested in women than I was in men. Much more. And, I just -- I knew -- as a kid, I knew it wasn't right, at least because people told me it wasn't. But there didn't seem to be anything I could do about it. I

tried going with men, but that didn't work. And finally I just said, you know, once I get out of the Marine Corps, I said, that's it. I'm not going to even try anymore. So --

Q: I'm sorry. That's a fascinating time, too. So, were you aware of other lesbians in the military then or --

A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: -- did people know --

A: I had friends. I had friends that were kicked out.

Q: Wow.

A: I had friends that were given general discharges. But, like I said, I went and got myself engaged to this very nice young man, and so that sort of took the spotlight off of me. And, I felt sorry for these people, but I have never kept up with them. In fact, I've never kept up with anybody I was in the service with. I tried for a while, but it just didn't seem to -- we all went our separate ways. So -- and then I, trying to hide my lesbianism, I guess, because I didn't have -- because I thought it was wrong, so I didn't have a lot of self esteem and I took up drinking. But I started drinking when I was a young kid anyways because I thought it made me sophisticated, made me an adult. Which is the same reason I started smoking at nine years old, because I wanted to be an adult. I didn't -- I kept drinking and I kept having relationships with

people that needed me. I needed to be needed. And finally, in my 40s, I got sober. I haven't had a drink now in about 35 years.

Q: Wow.

A: And, once I got my head clear and not screwed up like I was, I realized that I didn't need to be needed and that I was an OK person just as I was without being needed. And, I went to a women's musical comedy festival in Cleveland, Georgia, and met Brown. I had -- she was in a documentary called Lesbian Tongues. Have you ever seen it?

Q: I haven't seen it. But I do think I've heard of it.

A: OK. And I had seen this documentary. In fact, I made a copy of it because I didn't have much money and friends of mine had bought the video. So I made a copy of it. And I saw her at this festival and I asked her if we could talk.

Q: So you had seen her.

A: I had seen her --

Q: You recognized her from the documentary? Oh, interesting.

A: I recognized her from the documentary. So I asked her, you know, where -- she was with a partner at that time -- and I asked her where her partner was and she said that they had split. And that she was alone, and we sat and we talked for four hours. And then she got up and went off with a friend of mine for the weekend. And -- but we kept in

touch and communication. She wrote to me. I wrote to her. We talked on the telephone. This happened in May. It was Memorial Day weekend.

Q: I'm sorry. What year was that again?

A: That was 1991.

Q: 91. OK.

A: And we communicated all summer long and I was living in Florida at the time and she was living here and I said, usually by August I've had it with Florida. I had been there for 20 years and the heat was just too much for me. So I said, how about, not knowing where Asheville was. Knowing nothing about Asheville, I said, how about going to -- meeting somewhere over the Labor Day weekend in the mountains where it's cool and, you know, getting to know each other better. We had been corresponding and talking on the telephone all this time anyways. And she said sure. So, she said, but you don't need to go -- I live in the mountains. We've always laughed about this. She sent me a picture of the house that she owned here in Asheville and I've always said, you know, look at the pictures. I'm going to go marry this woman. She's got a nice house. And I came up for the weekend and by the time -- it was a long weekend --

Q: That's quite a trip.

A: Actually, it's only about eight-and-a-half, nine hours. I lived in Daytona Beach. And I had a long weekend and I was working as an accountant and I was working as a bookkeeper at an accounting firm and by the time the weekend was up, we had decided that we would have a long-distance relationship. We would not have any relations -- we would still have friends and go our separate ways, but we wouldn't have any sexual relations with anybody but each other. So I went back to Florida and she stayed here and then a couple of weeks later I called her and I said, why don't you come down for the weekend. Friends of mine have this lovely hot tub and they're going away and I'm going to babysit their dog. So she came down for the weekend and then from then on until November or December, either I was coming up for the weekend or she was coming down. And then finally in November or December we decided that we would have a commitment ceremony and that I would come and live in Asheville. But working for an accounting firm, I said, there's just no way I can leave before tax season is over. But when we decided this, that I was going to come up here and live and that I was going to leave my job, I had a very good relationship with my boss and his wife. It was a small firm. And, I said to him, when I had come up from the weekend, I said, I need to talk to you. And he said,

yeah. And I said, well, it's kind of personal. He said, OK, come to dinner tonight. He lived not too far from where I lived. And I said, are you sure. And he said, yeah, yeah, come to dinner. You can talk to Pat and I. So, that night, I went down to his house and went to dinner and when I got there he said, no, I don't want to hear about it now. We're going to have dinner first and then we'll talk. So his wife and I were talking about other things while she was getting dinner and then after dinner I said, I'm going to tell you that I'm getting through at the end of tax season. What? What do you mean you're getting through? Why? I said, well, I've met the woman that I want to spend the rest of my life with and I'm going to move to Asheville to be with her. Oh, well, you've got to go and live with her first. You've got to go and live with her for a couple of months and see how it is. And I said, you know, Alan, I can't afford to take the time off. You know, two or three months. And go and live with somebody to see how it is. Well, then she has to come and live with you. And I said, well, actually, she is. She's coming down in January and she will stay until the end of tax season when I leave. And he said, well, you need to stay longer than tax season. You know we have the other taxes to do. And he said, I need to see this woman. So I had a

picture. I said OK. I went out to the car and got a picture and brought it in and him and his wife looked at it and said, OK. Well, next time she comes to Florida, I want to meet her. So, OK. Well, he always was very polite to her. Always. But he also treated her like the Grimm from out of town. And she came and she stayed and we had our ceremony at the end of March. And they gave us as a going away gift, getting through and also as a wedding gift, a cruise to the Bahamas. I think it was a four- or five-day cruise. And, it was wonderful. You know, and our ceremony was wonderful because most of the people that I worked with her heterosexual. They all came. The church that I went to was heterosexual and a lot of the people from there came. We had actually the person who did our reception was a lesbian who was in her 70s and she had been with this other woman who was in her 80s. And they had been together for 30-some odd years. 40-some odd years. And they were very, very interesting ladies. And we have a video of our commitment ceremony and our friends who did the video also at the reception went around talking to all of our friends and asking them if they had anything to say to us.

Q: On the video.

A: Yeah, on the video. And it's tremendously interesting. We have a couple of male friends here who took that video and

made a DVD of it so that if the film went, then we'd have a copy. And we've lived here since 1992. I worked until I was 65. And then I retired. The place that I was working actually went out of business here, but he moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina. Wanted me to go there and work for him. I said, no. I moved here from Florida and I didn't want to move again. So I just have not worked since. I've just collected my social security and we have traveled. We've done a lot of traveling and the first time I took Brown home to meet my family, they just thought the sun rose and set on her. And she has -- she was married and she has three kids. They were all married at one time. The youngest has since gotten divorced, but the daughter has presented us with a granddaughter and we spend Christmas with them in California, and they have accepted me, you know, as part of the family.

Q: Were they all at the commitment ceremony?

A: The daughter stood up for us and her partner was there also. My niece stood up for me from Massachusetts. And all of our friends. So, it's been -- it's been wonderful because of our families being, you know, so accepting. I've known, you know, if -- when I was younger, my family did not accept it, and they were not happy about my being a

lesbian. And, of course, I would never said that I was a lesbian. I would say I was queer.

Q: OK.

A: Or I was different, I was odd, but I couldn't say I was -- in fact, when my boss first bought the business, I had worked for two other people before that and he bought the business.

Q: Your boss in Daytona?

A: Yeah.

Q: OK.

A: And we used to deliver the monthly papers that we did for our clients. The profit-loss statements and all that. We used to deliver them and pick up the work for the next month and when -- I did this as well as working on the work. As well as being a bookkeeper. And he said to me one day, I don't know the customers. So I would like to ride with you to meet them. And I said, fine. And he said, besides, I want to get to know you better. And I said, OK. So I said, we were riding along and I said, well, I think I should tell you that I'm a lesbian. He said, I know that, so what else do you want to tell me? And I said, well, actually, I said, this is the first time I'm in my life I've been able to say out to anyone that I am a lesbian. And I'm perfectly comfortable that way. And

he said, I'd like to have about five more of you. And I had brought one of my friends in and he said, you're friendly with Jane, and I said yes. So I went back to the office and I said, Jane, the boss knows you're a lesbian too because I told him I was. She said, eh, so what. Well, Jane was the one who facilitated our commitment ceremony and I have seen her through three relationships. The last one we thought was really going to work and just, in December, they broke up. But she seems to be doing very well. So, anyways, but we have kept in contact all the time and I have friends in Florida that we still are in touch with and we still go and visit and they come and visit us. We're probably the oldest lesbians in the group, so to speak. But --

Q: Do you mean your social circle here or do you mean of the women you know in general.

A: My social circle in Daytona.

Q: In Daytona.

A: Yeah. Here, we have people our own age here. But, we also have some very good male friends. And, we see them as well as we see the women friends. And of course we belong to CLOSER. I don't know if you know about CLOSER.

Q: I don't.

A: It's 27 years old. It's called Unity Liaison Organization for Service, Education, and Reform. Because when it was started, they didn't say it was gay and lesbian. That's what they said it was. That's what they named it. One of the original founders is a heterosexual. Him and his wife have been with it the whole 27 years, except that the last four or five years, she passed away, but he still comes and his daughter comes with him. It meets every Tuesday night, 52 weeks of the year, except this year the snow knocked it out a couple of nights. And, at one time there were over 150 members. Now, it's come back up a little bit. There's probably 20 or 30 members. Most all of them are men. We go once in a while. Maybe once a month or once every two months and most of the men are older men, but they are all friends of ours and very nice gentlemen. And we enjoy it. That's --

Q: And what kind of group is it?

A: It's a gay and lesbian group.

Q: Is it like a social group or some kind of --

A: Social. Yes. Social. And they have programs every week. Sometimes they are something to do with the community, something -- they have -- we found a very wonderful lawyer through CLOSER. Jeff Machosky, who has written a book on -- for gay and lesbian people on how they can set up a trust

so that neither one of the families can come in and say, oh, I'm sorry, that's my brother's and you're out. Or that's my sister's and you're out. No. And, we've had to set up this kind of a trust, not because we don't, you know, trust our family but having been in a family where I saw somebody fight over a piggy bank with \$36 in it, I didn't want this to happen and Brown didn't want it to happen. So we have done this. We have set up this trust. And Jeff has been wonderful. And he's not gay. He -- but he set this up and it's good all over the country. And the forms that go along with this trust, he set them up and the company that makes them gets in touch with him. So, life for most gay and lesbian people was very hard years ago. It's so much easier now and it's so much easier for younger people. As older people, we remember how hard it was. You were -- there was no such thing as a lipstick lesbian or, you know, you were either butch or you were femme. There was no such thing as whatever. And, you had to be very careful how you dressed. You had to be careful what you said. And you had to be careful what you did. Because you could lose your job, which I did. I lost a job. And they said it was for other reasons but I knew that it was because I was a lesbian. And there isn't that much of that now. But, there's still some of it. And, as far as being

married is concerned, most of us who are in committed relationships in our hearts, we are married. But we don't have any of the benefits of married people. I mean heterosexuals. I mean even we have friends in Massachusetts and we stood up for their wedding when they got married.

Q: Their legal wedding?

A: Their legal wedding in Massachusetts and they have all the benefits of Massachusetts, but they have moved to Florida now because they're in their late 60s. And they don't have the benefits in Florida.

Q: No, Florida doesn't recognize it.

A: Plus the fact that they still can't do an income tax together. They have to do them separately. So they still don't have federal benefits. They have the state benefits but no federal benefits. And, even though DC just said, OK, you know, you can get married legally in DC, there is still no federal benefits. And I don't know what they are scared of by not giving them the benefits and this Don't Ask, Don't Tell, do you know how many wonderful linguists they've lost from the Army and the Marine Corps because they got rid of these guys because they were gay and they could speak Arabic. And they lost them. And it's ridiculous. I mean, all of the people that I knew that

were in the service, and I have a friend who was in for 30 years and he's gay, gave their everything to be patriotic for this country, to fight for this country, and then, you know, we don't want you because you're gay, you're lesbian, and it's absolutely ridiculous because we didn't hurt any of the morale. We didn't hurt anybody that was in there and we certainly didn't try to jump anybody's bones, you know. If, you know, if we didn't know someone, we didn't mess with them.

Q: You might have an interesting perspective on this. This has, of course, been in the news a lot with the idea about changing that policy. How do you think the military is going to respond? Do you think it's going to be the big problem that some people say it is or do you think it will go fairly smoothly?

A: You know, history repeats itself. Do you remember how much of a problem there was when they integrated the services?

Q: I've heard.

A: And they had the black people in with the white people -- you know, it didn't cause a whole lot of problems. It caused a few because there are always a few who are going to be hard-nosed about things. But, no, absolutely not. I don't see that there is going to be a hell of a lot of difference. There is going to be some, yes, because there

are some hard noses, but otherwise than that, I don't think so.

Q: And they say people know anyway.

A: Yes, they know.

Q: So people lead people along --

A: Of course they know. Of course they know. So, it will be, you know, what will be will be.

Q: Well, so tell me, you met Brown and you came and visited Asheville. From what I've gathered, you didn't know a lot about the area before you came.

A: No, didn't know anything about it.

Q: And you moved here in --?

A: I moved here on May 1, 1992.

Q: 1992. OK. So did you come and were you surprised by the state of the community or did you have concerns about moving to North Carolina over that?

A: I was. I didn't have concerns about that, no, but I was surprised by how open the community was. I had been so closeted all my life that at first it was hard for me. In fact, the cruise that -- the first cruise that Brown and I went on that was given by my boss, she wanted to dance.

Q: So it wasn't a gay cruise like they have now.

A: No, it wasn't. No. And it was like, I want to get up and dance with all those straight people. Well, she finally

talked me into it and we got up and danced and we dance very well together and people complimented us on our dancing. And, we've been on many cruises since then and we've danced many times since. So, you know, when I came up here, and I saw people walking hand in hand and they had so many different groups and we met so many different people, you know, I was really astonished. But, I became, you know, OK with the whole thing and now we go on cruises and we have never been on a gay and lesbian cruise.

Q: OK.

A: For the simple reason that it's about twice as much as a heterosexual cruise and it goes the same place and you get the same amenities, so why am I going to pay more money just to be -- plus the fact that most of them, the lesbian cruises, are party cruises and we really aren't party people. So, of course, I'm a recovering alcoholic so I haven't had a drink in probably 35 years. Brown doesn't have a problem. You know, she has a drink every now and then. But, you know, she's not a big drinker. So, we're not into that, you know, party scene.

Q: So, I don't know very much about Asheville at all. Not nearly as much as Katy does. You said there were groups. Can you sort of tell me what kind of groups there are?

A: There's a group called ALPs. That's Asheville Lesbian Professionals. It was started by professional lesbians but it's open to everybody, you know. It's not just professional people. And then there is a group that splintered off of that called the OLEs, Old Lesbian Energy. And, of course, there is CLOSER, which was the beginning of everything. CLOSER started everything. The women decided they didn't want to go with the men so they started ALPs. The men have CLOSER. They have a bowling group. They have a supper group. The women meet once a week -- once a month and they have this dining group and then they splintered off from that and do hikes and movies and plays and things like that. Originally, we had a group called Women Outdoors. It wasn't just lesbians. It was all kinds of women who went on hikes and did boating. And, that sort of died out. But, there are just -- it amazes us when somebody like Kris Kristoffsen -- Kris - I can't remember her name. She's a lesbian singer. She came to Asheville and we went to the program and it's like, where did all of these lesbians come from. I never even saw them before.

Q: More than you ever knew.

A: Right. And there's, you know, lots of different -- lots of people just meet at each other's houses and -- like we have

a couple of friends coming to dinner tonight and we go to their house, they come to our house.

Q: So they are sort of -- there are sort of networks that develop out of these groups.

A: Right. Exactly.

Q: OK. And are you all involved in many of the formal groups?

A: We used to belong to ALPs, but we travel so much that we, you know, stopped going. We still get the information and we know the people in OLE and we get information from them and once in a while we attend some of their, you know, one of their dues. And they also have now a group that gets together and has a dance once a month at the senior center. And, we would -- I would love to be able to do that but I've been having a problem with my feet so -- and haven't been able to dance. But, we are still on the peripheral of all these groups. We know about them and, you know, anytime -- all we have to do is say yes and we could be there.

Q: So, before we started taping, you had mentioned the newspaper, that the paper you mentioned, have things changed in the time you've lived in Asheville about how people become aware of things happening or how they become aware of how to connect with each other?

A: I think there's more -- there are more satellite groups than there used to be. There was one group that was CLOSER and there was the newspaper, Community Connections, and there was Malaprops, and there was the French [Broad?].

Q: Now what are those?

A: Well, Malaprops is the independent bookstore.

Q: OK.

A: And that was a big gathering place. The had a gay and lesbian section and, you know, everybody used to go there and meet there. I don't know what's happened. They don't have the gay and lesbian section anymore. Anyways, there was the French Broad food court because a lot of gay and lesbian people went there to buy food. And then it just seemed like -- and of course there was Women Outdoors -- the men had a group -- I don't really remember the name of it. It was Man Spring or something like that. Where the men got together and had a sweat lodge and stuff like that. I just vaguely remember that. But most of it was around the Community Connections newspaper and the CLOSER club every Tuesday night.

Q: And so in general would you say in Asheville at least that the men and the women interconnect pretty frequently or they sort of separate?

A: They separate.

Q: OK.

A: They're not as close as they used to be. When CLOSER, you know, like -- let's see, 92, 18 years, probably 15 years ago. Actually, probably 12 or 13 years ago was when they started splintering off and the women, you know, went their way. That's -- we had about five years when we were traveling by RV that we weren't connected with much of anything here in Asheville. We were all out and around the country.

Q: What about -- I guess in terms of being seniors in the community. How is that experience for you or is there a connection with younger people in the community or --?

A: Actually, for me personally, no. I don't have any connection with any of the younger people in the community. We tried once -- I can't remember what the connection was going to be -- it was going to be some kind of club with younger people and then the older people. And it just never worked. I think the younger men and women had a problem on who was going to be boss. And, so it just didn't work out. They would come together for, you know, a few weeks and then it would be some kind of a disagreement and then there wouldn't be anything.

Q: Is there much diversity in the groups in terms of, I guess, race or background or things like that.

A: Yes. There's a lot of diversity.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes. Yes. Always has been. That's one thing that there always has been and no problems.

Q: Is that something you think just about Asheville in general that makes that happen or --

A: I do. I really do. Yes.

Q: What's your explanation for how Asheville has come to be so positive and welcoming about this?

A: I don't know but I know that if all the people who are in health care quit, there would be no hospital, there would be no VA, there would be, you know, no nothing because two-thirds of all of the medical people in Asheville are gay or lesbian.

Q: Wow.

A: It's amazing. It really is.

Q: So like yourself, they can't all have born here. So what brings them to this area? How do they come to be here?

A: I guess because of the diversity. Because of the diversity. And of course, you know, this year has been unreal, but most winters are not bad here. And, so, it's a case of if you come from way up north, this is milder. If you come from way down south, this is cooler. And, I know when I came, after being 20 years in Florida, for the first

year I wore a flannel shirt all the time because I was cold.

Q: You had to adjust.

A: You know, it's wonderful. It's absolutely wonderful.

Q: Do you get a sense of Asheville being different from the rest of North Carolina? From the rest of this region?

A: Oh, yes. Yes. Very definitely.

Q: What are your impressions about that?

A: Well, Asheville is a Blue spot in a Red sea. It really is. You know, most of North Carolina is Red. And, Asheville is just as Blue as it can be. And, whether that's because of the gay and lesbian or -- it's not just the gay and lesbian. You know, it's everybody. And, it's not a case of whether you're a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual, whatever -- it's a case of it seems like everybody accepts everybody else. I had a real hard time with that, especially if you get on Haywood Street, some of the what I used to call punks -- but, once you realize that they're just people just like us, they dress different, they do their hair different, whatever, but they're the same. So, and some of the homeless people are really very interesting if you ever get to talk to them.

Q: So are there groups that even for Asheville are just a little too out there.

A: For me?

Q: Are there things that they have a little more of a problem with than other things?

A: For me, there are some that are too out there. But that's me. It may be fine for somebody else, you know. So I don't have a problem with -- it's, I guess it's something like religion. If you want to stand on the top of a hill and shout, you know, and that's your religion, that's fine. And if somebody else want to lay on the ground and read the Bible, that's theirs. It's OK with me. As far as I'm concerned, there's something, God, goddess, special thing of the universe, I don't know. I'm not smart enough to know what it is. I just know it is.

Q: What's the sort of relationship between sexuality and religion in this area?

A: It depends. There's a wonderful, wonderful church on Oak Street. The first -- I can never remember the name of it -- First Congregational Church of Jesus Christ or something like that. On Oak Street. And it is welcoming to everyone. It doesn't make any difference, you know, where you come from, who you are, or how you are, they just did a beautiful play of Asheville, homeless, transgender, gay and lesbian, and religious. All together in this one play that was absolutely fabulous. And that's the way they are.

Q: What was the play about?

A: The play was about Asheville.

Q: Oh, the history or the --

A: As it is, through the eyes, of these people.

Q: Different groups. Got you.

A: These different groups. And, it was -- it was marvelous.

Absolutely -- people who are disabled, didn't make any difference. You know. People who are homeless. People who are transgender. People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual. They had the whole realm in there. It was a two-hour play. And it encompassed Asheville people. Not actors, you know. Just regular Asheville people. They did it, I think, for two weeks. We saw the last -- the last day of it last Saturday. We saw it in the afternoon and I think they did it --

Q: You know, someone e-mailed us about that.

A: It was fabulous. Absolutely fabulous.

Q: I forget the name of it, but it sounds just like what I heard. Now, is there still some disconnect between sort of the warmth of the community and sort of the openness and respect and the local politics?

A: Some. Some. It's not - some of the local politics is, you know, they're good old boys, good old fashioned, and some of it is open. It sort of depends on who it is and

sometimes what it is. Right now, they're having a discussion about benefits for domestic partners. And they're saying that it's because the city doesn't have the money and, of course, other people are saying it's because they don't want to do it for gay and lesbian people. So it's sort of six of one, half a dozen of another.

Q: Is it sort of surprising, given everything else about Asheville, or --

A: Actually, for me, it's not because I can see where -- I mean, when you're \$2 million dollars in the hole, you don't want to spend anymore than you absolutely have to. And if they put domestic partners, you know, on the benefits list, it's going to cost them more and I can see that. So, I can see where some of them are coming from. And, of course, I can see where the domestic partners are saying, we want it. So.

Q: Let me see, we've talked about so much, I wanted to see if there was anything in particular -- how do you think that living here has shaped you since you've come here?

A: It's made me a lot more open. It's made me a lot more relaxed about being a lesbian. I guess that's, you know, that's the gist of it. Of course, as you get older, you know, things that used to bother you before, it's just like, so what. You know? Today, it's not where I'm going

that I have to get there. Today it's the journey. Each step and what's there at that step. Not what's out there somewhere. It's just what's here. Because I don't know what's out there. And I'm not -- who knows whether I'm going to get out there, but if I don't enjoy what's here, then I'm missing life.

Q: So does that lead you to any advice for people who aren't living in such a place as Asheville?

A: Don't come here. We've got enough people. You know, I think the more you can learn to like yourself and be comfortable with yourself, it's amazing how other people like you and are comfortable with you. When we go on cruises or when we travel, I have that because I'm comfortable in my skin and because I'm comfortable with me as a lesbian, other people are comfortable with me, too. And we've made a lot of friends. We went on a cruise one time with four people from Canada. They were on the cruise with us and they were our table partners and we got to know them on this cruise. And we have kept up a correspondence with them by email through the years. It's been four years now, four or five years, and they've invited us to Canada and every time we've decided to go, something has happened. And, we've invited them to stop and visit us because they go to Florida in the winter, but they've had a problem

stopping. But we, you know, we still correspond. And, there were two couples. Brothers and their wives. And, you know, when we mentioned that we were on the cruise and celebrating our anniversary, oh, they thought that was wonderful. They had to call the waiter over and had a cake and we had a party. So it was -- you know, it's getting comfortable with yourself, then you can certainly, you know, other people are comfortable with you. And until -- you know, lots of times your neighbor doesn't know, but your neighbor knows they like you, and if you just sort of, you know, say it, it's like, OK, it's no big deal. Fine. Good. You know? We have a heterosexual couple as our neighbors that are just wonderful. Their daughter had a baby not long ago and I said, well, you know, I know we can't be godparents but how about if we're god neighbors. So, we're the god neighbors. I mean, they send us pictures on the email and we go over and visit and I just think it's wonderful. But I think it's because we're comfortable with us that they're comfortable with us.

Q: Have you had any negative interactions with anyone in your time here or ever been a problem.

A: Actually, no.

Q: Wow.

A: No. It's been -- it's been very positive. All of our interactions.

Q: Does that -- is it your sense that that extends beyond the city. Is this sort of an area kind of thing, or is it different once you get out of Asheville?

A: Actually, for me personally, I don't seem to have a problem either, you know, once I get out of Asheville, and like I say, it's because I'm comfortable with me, I think other people are comfortable with me also. And because I can be comfortable with them and not feel like, oh, I'm different. Maybe I shouldn't. But I figure, hey, I put my pants on one leg at a time just like everybody else. In fact, we went to an elder hostel at a Jewish temple in Charleston, South Carolina. Temple [McVee?] Israel. And it was a wonderful week and the last day the guy was talking about homosexuality and the Bible. And he was talking about an alternative lifestyle. And I finally got his attention and said, did you know that I worked at a job? Did you know that I pay taxes? Did you know that I worry about keeping up our house? And that I'm here today just like you. You call that an alternative lifestyle? You love your wife don't you? Well, yeah. I said, well, I love my partner. Nothing alternative about that. Love is the same. It's just different sex. He said, you know, I never thought of

it like that. He said, thank you for explaining that to me. He said, I won't use that expression, and I said, thank you.

Q: Wow.

A: And everybody accepted us that week with no problem. And we had a great time.

Q: Wow. I want to switch topics for just a minute. Something came to me. Now your partner, is she originally from here?

A: No.

Q: OK. So she's also transplanted here.

A: Right.

Q: OK. Do you have friends who have sort of lived here their entire lives or are from the area?

A: Not that I can think of.

Q: OK. I was wondering if people sort of talk about when there was a change or if it's just always been this way.

A: When we first came, there were people here who had been here for many years and it seems like it had always been like that. Yeah.

Q: Very interesting.

A: Really.

Q: Wow. Well, now, are you ready to stop?

A: Sure.

Q: We've talked for quite a while.

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about, I'd love to hear it.

A: I can't think of anything else unless you have any questions.

Q: I don't. You sort of went into the things that we've sort of been talking about and I appreciate that. It's been a real pleasure to talk to you, and I appreciate you contributing to this and sharing your story with us.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you. Oh, look at you, I'm seeing a picture here from -- is this when you met?

A: No, that's from 1992 --

Brown: The first Asheville Pride March.

Q: Wow.

Brown: The first Pride March and it was in the Village Voice --

Q: I better stop that.

END OF M. PERRY