

PS

MIKE: OK. This is Mike Al (sp?) from Appalachian State University. It's March the 10th, 2010. And I'm with Pat Spalding (sp?) and we're going to be talking a little bit about Pat. So if you would introduce yourself that'd be great.

PAT: OK. Yeah, I'm Pat Spalding. I'm originally from Massachusetts. I've lived in a lot of different places before ending up here in Asheville, North Carolina. One of those places was Papua New Guinea where I lived for 16 years --

MIKE: Wow!

PAT: I was -- I was kind of like a -- with an organization similar to the Peace Corps. It was kind of halfway between Peace Corps and missionary under the Department of Education. But those were, were difficult years of trying to be straight.

MIKE: Yeah.

PAT: I was married and had three children during that part of my life.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And came back from there and spent some time living in Virginia where I worked at a Christian university and there

was a lot of -- it was a conservative part in the Shenandoah Valley. And it was very controversial, the whole gay thing. It was -- it was interesting because it was a Mennonite university --

MIKE: OK, mm-hmm.

PAT: -- that was very much into the peace movement and conflict transformation. And you could be a convicted murderer, and that would be OK, but you could not be gay *[laughs]*.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And during that time after just working with counselors and doing my own study to try and figure out things I finally decided -- and my husband had known all along, I mean before we were even married that I was gay but just trying to get God to heal me *[laughs]*. And anyway, I just came to the conclusion that it was really OK to be gay. And I was pretty outspoken about it, wrote a chapter in a book which I read to a group of people at my church one evening and soon after that was invited to leave my position at the university.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And I really had no idea what, you know, what direction I was going. I -- I knew I needed to leave my marriage so that my husband could experience being married to someone who was straight, but I hadn't really thought that I would

ever find somebody myself. I didn't really know any gay people. But soon did meet the person who I'm now partnered with and we both were ready to live someplace else. And we moved to Asheville.

MIKE: Wow. Wow. I'll ask you about that in a second. So -
- so you, you got married, but you already sort of knew before then?

PAT: I --

MIKE: How early did you --

PAT: As -- well, we have a picture [*laughs*] of me in the hallway with little cowgirl outfit on. I was probably two or three, but I can remember that -- when I got that little outfit being so disappointed that it came with a skirt, not pants.

MIKE: Huh.

PAT: I just always was a tomboy. And when the other girls were getting crushes on boys I was getting crushes on the other girls. I just always -- that's the way I was. And even though I had lots of boyfriends in high school it was more the challenge of just trying to get the coolest guy to, you know, ask you for a date. Once he asked me for the date I was out of there [*laughs*].

MIKE: Mm-hmm.

PAT: So I -- I knew I was different, but I didn't have any role models. And I think that's a huge thing. I just thought, you know, gay people were strange and, and I didn't know if they were bad, but I thought maybe they were. And I knew I wasn't bad, so --

MIKE: Do you remember how you, how you sort of came to pick up messages about that? I mean --

PAT: Whether it was --

MIKE: -- whether you picked up the bad idea or, you know --

PAT: Well, I remember -- I remember maybe it was junior high school in some class one of the girls wanted one of the other girls to scratch her back, you know, and a couple of the girls said, "What are you, a lezzy or something?" And so I said what does that mean? You know, I had no idea what it meant. And they said *ugh*, that's girls who like other girls instead of boys, you know, and it was obviously a bad thing. And of course at that age the most important thing is to be popular and I sure didn't want to be like that, you know. And I guess that's where it began. And then just a lot of introspection, you know, just trying to figure it out and constantly falling in love with girls who didn't fall in love with me, you know. And --

MIKE: Did they know?

PAT: Well, not until I was I guess a sophomore in college. And yeah, there was another, another college girl who had become my roommate. And at one point I, I did tell her. And I just remember how scary that was, you know, and she seemed to go along with it, you know, somewhat. She was -- she was straight, but I guess I see sexuality as on a continuum from straight to gay. And she was maybe in the middle somewhere. So we were together off and on for three years. And actually it was that breakup that I think pushed me over the edge into just feeling like I can't do this anymore, you know. And that's when I really got into being a Christian and just pleading with God to take it away. And, and I, I had broken a lot of young men's hearts, you know, and I hated that. You know, I just -- I enjoyed their friendships so much, you know, and, and I would be encouraged by other friends. You know, they would say oh, so and so is just the nicest guy, you know, why don't you keep going out with him, you know? And I just couldn't explain why. And, and I would end up hurting another person and so I just felt like I couldn't keep doing that and I didn't know what else to do.

MIKE: Wow. And so that led to your getting married.

PAT: Yeah. I -- and that was kind of -- was an interesting relationship. We only knew each other for three weeks when

we got engaged and we were committed to -- because we were Christians and, you know, pretty zealous Christians at that we were committed to not having any physical intimacy at all until we were married. And you know, I kept thinking that it was going to be OK, but *[laughs]*, you know, once we were married I realized oh, well no, that's not really OK.

MIKE: No such magic change, huh?

PAT: No. No. And -- but I was also committed, you know. I just felt like, you know, I'm married, I'm going to be the best Christian wife I can be, and I remained married and faithful for 25 years.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: Wow, that's something. That's a long time.

PAT: Mm-hmm.

MIKE: And went to New Guinea.

PAT: Right.

MIKE: And so how much time did you spend there?

PAT: We were there 16 years.

MIKE: 16 years.

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: That's amazing.

PAT: And in some ways I guess it was a little easier there. I didn't have -- well, we were just off in the jungle, you know.

MIKE: Right, yeah, OK. And so eventually you well of course came back to the states and decided to make a change?

PAT: Well, I tried everything. I mean, I had I can't even tell you how many counselors I saw. Most were Christian counselors who didn't know what to do with me. You know, I would tell them I really think that I'm gay and they would just say, "Well, you can't be because you're not in a relationship, are you?" And I'd say well, I'm married and you know, I'm not in a relationship with another woman. They'd say, "Well, you're not gay."

MIKE: Right.

PAT: And I would just say, "No, you don't understand. It's something inside me." And when we came back I tried Exodus, you know, and that was kind of the final straw. Well, almost the final straw. I remember going to, I think it was a five-day conference with, you know, hundreds of other people. And many of them had been going to Exodus conferences for years and involved with Christian counseling and --

MIKE: Is that one of those you can beat it programs?

PAT: It is.

MIKE: OK.

PAT: It's -- I can't think of how to describe it, but yeah, you just trust God and --

MIKE: OK.

PAT: -- and it'll go away. You know, I had been trusting God for a long time and it still hadn't gone away. And I just looked at their literature and the whole thing seemed to be, you know, if you're gay then you're, you're sinful and you're not trusting God. And I just thought but I have been trusting God and I'm not, you know, any more sinful than anybody else. And it just didn't make sense. But then at that conference I made -- met so many other people who said yeah, we're waiting for it to go away too. I didn't meet anybody who was having any success in, you know, their life changing except for people who it sounded like maybe never really were gay in the beginning. They, they were, you know, maybe bisexual and, you know, in the middle of that continuum somewhere. And one woman who just said I, you know, I just wanted somebody to love me, you know. And, and other people who, who maybe had been abused as children and perhaps had some kind of, you know, their life -- their sexual -- sexuality was injured somehow because of that abuse. So when they were able to get over that then they turned out to be straight anyway. But I

didn't mean anybody who was like me *[laughs]* who really got anywhere with it. And then I guess my last person who I talked with said that, well, she supposedly was some kind of Christian spiritual healer who would somehow help you to figure out where in your family there may have been some kind of curse or something.

MIKE: Oh.

PAT: And -- and I, I met with her a number of times and she, and she finally just gave up on me. And she said I really don't know what to say, you know. And yeah. And so then I went to, to another counselor who was not specifically a Christian counselor. And I remember her saying at the, you know, our first session, you know, what can I do for you, you know, what are you trying to accomplish. And I said well, I just need to know if I'm gay or not, you know. And so she asked me a few questions and then she said, "Mm-hmm. I think you are," *[laughs]*. And at that moment I just felt a huge load off, you know, I just felt like wow, OK, I am. And my husband and I had been talking about it, you know, forever, and just trying to figure out --

MIKE: So you were working through that while you were married?

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: Oh, OK. All right. I'm sorry, I'm paranoid. I check every once in a while to make sure nothing has happened to the recorder.

PAT: That's fine.

MIKE: Oh, OK.

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: All right.

PAT: And my husband had become part of a -- an online group for spouses of gay people.

MIKE: Huh.

PAT: And, and it was -- sometimes it would be really frustrating because he would say well, there's this guy online who's gay and he talks about how, you know, he loves his wife so much that he's not going to let that, you know, get in the way of them having a good marriage and taking care of their kids. And you know, he'd show me emails from this guy and I'd just shake my head and say he's lying, *[laughs]* you know. And it was hard at work too because, you know, I would -- it just felt like I was constantly falling in love with women, you know, who were straight, you know. And I was working at this Christian university and they might be colleagues or other students. And -- and that, that was just bad. You know, I couldn't, couldn't be letting that happy, you know. And I was frustrated because I wish I

could feel that way for my husband and I didn't. And I wished -- and he was having a hard time with his self-image and it seemed to be partly related to the fact that I didn't have physical feelings for him. So I just felt like it was going to in the long run do us all a big favor if I just said enough. And, and then we started seeing a marriage counselor together. And at one point in our session with her she said -- you know, she was trying to fix the marriage and I said, you know I'm not straight, you know, how can you fix the marriage? And she'd say, "Well, what I hear you saying is that you're ready to give up on it." And I said yeah, I am. And at that point we just realized yeah, it's over. And I, I had already looked for teachable opportunities, you know, to tell my kids who were, let's see, the youngest one was in high school and the two older ones were in college and out of college. So they knew I was gay, but they just always figured I would be with their father. But yeah, so we just had to break the news to them. And it was really hard, but -- and I'm still convinced it was a good thing to do and the timing was perfect. My husband married someone else almost immediately *[laughs]*. And now we're all living happily ever after.

MIKE: That's good! So -- and how long was it before you met your partner?

PAT: We had met a couple times before, professionally, and I didn't know she was gay. But when I was meeting with the last counselor she had told me about a group -- somebody she knew who was involved with a group of women who were gay in straight marriages. It was a support group. And it kind of linked me up with this person so I could find out more about the group and everything. And she introduced me to the person who's now my partner who I never knew was, was gay. And yeah, so she was very supportive toward the end when I was going through hard times of the divorce and everything.

MIKE: Wow. So this would have been in Virginia, right?

PAT: Yeah. That was Virginia.

MIKE: And why the choice to move to North Carolina?

PAT: Well, I had never been to Asheville, but my partner had been here on vacations.

MIKE: Mm-hmm.

PAT: And I had come with her a time or two for -- she had come for a job interview once. And we just came for kind of a holiday. And where we lived was so conservative and Asheville seemed to be less conservative.

MIKE: Hm.

PAT: So I didn't feel like I could stay where I was anymore. So
it was just -- we heard it was a gay-friendly place.

MIKE: OK. How long ago was this?

PAT: Let's see, five years ago.

MIKE: OK, so you've been here five years.

PAT: Mm-hmm.

MIKE: So you'd heard of Asheville being fairly progressive
then or whatever.

PAT: Uh-huh.

MIKE: But had you heard anything about the rest of North
Carolina or the rest of sort of Western mountain area?

PAT: Well, even our realtor who we dealt with who was also a
lesbian told us the further you get away from Asheville
the, the less accepting it is. And so we were actually a
little bit afraid to look any further out than we already
are.

MIKE: Is this considered out of Asheville?

PAT: We're right on the edge.

MIKE: Oh, OK.

PAT: Yeah. But any further could be a little scary.

MIKE: OK. Have you found that to be true --

PAT: Yes.

MIKE: -- since you've been here? Is that right? What --

PAT: Even this neighborhood.

MIKE: Is that right?

PAT: Mm-hmm, oh, because we go out and take a walk every morning. And, and we have been harassed.

MIKE: Really?

PAT: Yeah. When we were out for a walk one day, we were just walking up one of the roads. And all of a sudden I just felt like something was behind me and I turned around and there was a car right, like three feet behind me just going really slowly right behind me.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And I just jumped out of the way. And, and the car pulled into a, a driveway and the, and the man got out of the car and just started yelling at me and saying, "You don't belong here. This is a private road. You get out of here." And he was just really nasty and I, you know, at the time just wondered what was that all about.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And that was after living here for at least a couple years. And you know, and who's to say that that was because the two of us were together. I mean, we weren't holding hands or anything. My partner was actually in front of me about ten feet. She's a faster walker. But then not long after that we were taking our walk another day and this man and his wife or girlfriend were walking their dog and we walked

by them and they just laughed, you know, and said you two are disgusting.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: You know, and we didn't even do anything. You know, it was just like, you know, where did that come from? Just taking a walk in the neighborhood. And not long after that we found a dead squirrel out by the front door and we just wondered, you know, where did this dead squirrel come from? We just walked right out the front door and right there was a dead squirrel, you know, and nobody could have run over it right there. And then long after that there was another dead squirrel out there. And you know, so who knows if that's where it came from or not? But yeah, there haven't been -- there haven't been very many friendly neighbors.

MIKE: Are any of your neighbors friendly, encouraging, supportive?

PAT: There is one woman up the street who, who also takes her walks occasionally. She, she has been nice. And let's see. That's about it though. Her husband used to be outside working in the yard a lot and I used to have some nice conversations with him. He has since passed away. But they, they've always been nice to us. Oh, and there's another woman who lives further up the street who's been pretty interesting. She actually did have us over once and

with some other people. And I remember [laughs] while we were there she said something like, "There are children here so don't say anything about being gay."

MIKE: Oh, wow.

PAT: We never went back there again. It just was too, too weird.

MIKE: I can appreciate that. So was it sort of then more that your neighborhood at least, I guess, is more of a, you know --

PAT: Conservative.

MIKE: -- keep your business in your house kind of? Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?

PAT: Not particularly, no.

MIKE: Not particularly. OK.

PAT: No. As a matter of fact, I'm -- I'm a realtor now here and understand how important it is for people to, to find a neighborhood before they find a house that they, that they like. And I wish that we had done that. It's not easy to do, you know, to find a neighborhood where you feel comfortable. But I think that that's really important.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And we like this house and we like, you know, all the trees in the yard and everything, but we don't like the neighborhood.

MIKE: What about Asheville the town, the city? Do you feel differently when you're in Asheville?

PAT: Well, it's so diverse that I mean we wouldn't hold hands or anything like that. It, it's -- yeah, it's hard to know. I guess it depends on how I happen to feel that day.

MIKE: Do you get the sense that the city just in general is more welcoming or positive or affirming than what you've experienced sort of out on the edges?

PAT: Yeah. I guess I would say that it's generally more progressive and accepting in the city than it is on the edges. But I'd still say that, you know, probably anywhere you go is going to be an element that's a little scary.

MIKE: Do you ever hear about sort of crimes related to hate crimes in this area? Is there much of that?

PAT: No. I mean, there may be, I just haven't been aware of it. But I -- yeah.

MIKE: OK.

PAT: I guess I'm not, not into hearing about that sort of thing, so.

MIKE: OK. So now are you all very connected to the community or to --

PAT: Well, I guess --

MIKE: -- parts of the community or --

PAT: -- there is quite a good size gay community here and with all kinds of social opportunities. And we -- we've taken advantages of some of those opportunities. We're not terribly outgoing people. Like there's -- there are a couple women's groups that have dances and stuff and we're just not into, into that or into, you know, going to bars. And some of the entertainment doesn't start until 11 or midnight and we're fast asleep by then, you know. But you know, when they have the pride, annual pride we always go to that. And -- and we, we get emails from the, from the local groups and just kind of keep it up on what's going. Before we moved here we started being involved with one of the emailed groups and, and so that was good to know that there really was a gay community here.

MIKE: So I guess compared to living in Virginia, has living here sort of connected you more to the community or less or about the same?

PAT: I guess we, we're aware of it. We can take more advantage of the social opportunities if we want to.

MIKE: So they're there.

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: OK.

PAT: Yeah. I think in Virginia I was more aware of a political movement where, where here I feel like there's a big social

thing going on, but I don't see anything political. Where in Virginia there was definitely political stuff, but not a whole lot socially.

MIKE: Yeah, I think -- I was talking to someone I interviewed earlier about the local politics, whether or not there is -- whether the politics sort of line up with what I've, you know, what people say about how warm the city is and how affirming the city is. But maybe their issues around politics were that's not necessarily congruent.

PAT: Well, I just have felt like when we've gotten together with other women nobody's really interested in talking about, you know, gay marriage being legalized or, or anything like that. They just want to get together and play croquet or whatever, you know *[laughter]* where we would really like to talk to, you know, some activism or --

MIKE: That's interesting. That's surprising for here.

PAT: One year, I think it was National Coming Out day or something and I sent an email out to some of the, the lesbian groups and said is there anyone out there would be interested in going with their partner to City Hall and ask about getting married just as a form of activism. You know, not, not to cause a lot of trouble or anything, but just, just to do it. And I didn't get one response.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: Not one. And that -- that went out to a bunch of people.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And people just don't seem interested.

MIKE: That's interesting. You'd think that, you know, there'd be a lot of power behind the gay and lesbian dollar here.

PAT: You'd think. Well, and that's another thing too. There are some gay-owned businesses. But I can only think of one or two where they display a rainbow flag. Yeah, there's just -- there really is no visible gay presence here. You know, and as a realtor I have gay people ask me well, where do the gay people live? Well, they just live all over.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: You know, there's no pocket. And there's no -- I mean, there for a short time was a little gay coffeehouse. It wasn't necessarily known as being a gay coffeehouse, but it was owned by some gay people and they may have had a rainbow flag. I can't remember for sure. We have a, a local gay newspaper. It actually seems to be more for the men than for the women. But it's gone from being relatively sizable to being semi-microscopic.

MIKE: What's it called?

PAT: It used to be called "Out in Asheville," and now it's called "Stereotyped."

MIKE: Oh, hm.

PAT: Yeah. It was a good size paper, came out monthly. And now it comes out every two months and it's more like a brochure than a --

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: -- than a paper. And it's mainly articles for men by men. There's not -- even though the, currently the, the editor's a woman there's not really much in it for women. And you know, years ago there was a -- like a gay gift show downtown. There's nothing like that anymore.

MIKE: Did these businesses run out or did they just sort of fall to online purchasing or --

PAT: Well, the little gift shop, I think the person who ran that just retired. She just was tired of doing it and retired. The -- I think the paper -- yeah, I guess they just couldn't sell any more ads. They have a, a website too. But the economy I'm sure had a, had a part in that.

MIKE: So how do people connect here when they move to this community?

PAT: I guess just check out the online groups. There is a regular local alternative newspaper and I think it lists groups there. And then just go to the monthly meetings and

like one of the groups for lesbians or probably a couple of them do hikes and they get together for movies and book clubs.

MIKE: Mm. Mm-hmm.

PAT: And you just gradually find out about the groups and get involved.

MIKE: All right. Can you sort of recall some of what the groups are?

PAT: The names of the groups?

MIKE: Yeah.

PAT: OLE is Older Lesbian Energy and I think it's mainly women over 50, mostly retired women. And they have picnics and do all kinds of fun things. And then ALPS, Asheville Lesbian Professional Society I think, they have a monthly dinner, which is pretty well intended, and some other social events. And they have a website as well. And LIM, L-I-M stands for Lesbians in the Mountains. They -- yeah, they get together for dances and all kinds of things. I think one of the things I've heard about that group is you can just put out an email to the group and say I'm, I'm going to the concert this weekend, anybody who wants to join me, you know, let me know if you're -- we can meet for dinner beforehand or whatever. So that is definitely a, a way to connect with people that way. And then there are

other groups that are a little bit further out. There's one called "Gorge-Us" (sp?) that meets at, let's see, kind of between Asheville and Lake Lure there's a gorge, Hickory Nut Gorge. And it's men and women and they I think have a monthly potluck at somebody's house. So there's, yeah, there's a lot of stuff going on. There's Stella's Place. That's mainly an online group. And there's -- oh, there's another one too. Might be "Sheville After Dark." I think that's what it is. And that's an online group. And they occasionally get together for what they call "coffee klatches."

MIKE: Mm-hmm.

PAT: Yeah. There's a lot of social stuff.

MIKE: Now are -- in terms of I guess the social one in other aspects, do men and women tend to socialize together in this area very much or are they pretty separated?

PAT: Not a lot. Yeah. Well, there's the Gorge-Us group, but other than that it seems like I'm not sure what all the men's groups are, but they seem to go different directions.

MIKE: Hm. Hm.

PAT: And I know there was -- there were a couple women who wanted to -- they're developers and they bought some land here and they were planning to put in a community.

MIKE: OK.

PAT: They might be from the Boone area.

MIKE: There's one of those in Boone.

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: Or just outside of Boone.

PAT: That might be the -- who they are.

MIKE: Interesting.

PAT: And last time I had talked to them they had join the Chamber of Commerce and they had interviewed people here about what they would like in a community. And they bought some property and they were planning to develop it, but I don't -- I think because of what's happened with the economy and real estate they probably put that on hold for now.

MIKE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, OK. And do you think that there's a difference of any significance about what it's like to live here in this area, broad area anyway, between lesbians and gay men? Is it sort of the same experience or is it a different --

PAT: Yeah, I'm not -- I'm not sure. From, from talking with various people I get the impression that, that the gay men have more money *[laughs]*. That can have an effect on how, how you live.

MIKE: I imagine.

PAT: I know when I've talked to people about real estate -- I mean, there are definitely some women who are secure financially, but a lot -- a lot of lesbians here are not. They, they -- finding a decent job has just been a real challenge. You know, not having health insurance. I remember before we worked here talking with some women online and they said if you want a job you probably have to go to Cherokee, you know, and work at the casino there. It's, you know, and where more of the men are professionals, you know, who just seem to have a more secure financial situation. And well, like I said too, the publication that's here, I keep picking it up thinking there'll be something of interest to me and it's just, you know, it seems like it's mostly written by men for men.

MIKE: Wow.

PAT: And most of the clubs downtown -- we're not, you know, into doing the clubbing thing, but even if we were they seem mostly, you know, for the men.

MIKE: What about in terms of the groups that you're part of, the women's groups, and I guess the men's groups too, do you get a sense of, of -- is there much diversity? Do people sort of come from all races, backgrounds in Asheville together to do things? Or is it sort of separate?

PAT: Yeah. That's a very good, good question. Asheville in general is not -- I've heard people say it's very diverse, but I don't see it.

MIKE: Oh, is that right?

PAT: It seems like a pretty white town to me. I mean, there definitely is the African American community here and they generally are pretty conservative. Like right now there's been this controversy with the city possibly giving health insurance to domestic partners. And the vote -- City Council vote was four to two and one of the two is the mayor who's African American. And the people who've been really outspoken against it are African American preachers in the local churches. I do happen to have a pretty good male friend who is, let's see, I'm not sure exactly what he is. He's not white. But other than that I don't know. And I know maybe one woman who's African American. But there doesn't seem to be much diversity.

MIKE: Are there social groups that you're aware of that sort of tailor different --

PAT: No?

MIKE: No, OK. So it's just the absence of people who are --

PAT: Right.

MIKE: OK.

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE: All right. Well, another question I have for you. As you know I've been admiring your artwork, your beautiful paintings.

PAT: Thank you.

MIKE: And someone else that we interviewed had talked about the connection that they perceived between art and art community.

PAT: Uh-huh.

MIKE: And the community for being gay and lesbians.

PAT: Mm-hmm.

MIKE: So do you have any sense of that or do you feel anything around that?

PAT: Well, in general I just feel like creative people are more accepting. Not always, I've definitely encountered some very conservative artists. But in general, yeah, I do see a significant correlation between the creative community and acceptance. As a matter of fact, my mother was an artist. And, and I do remember growing up -- as a kid going with my parents to some art communities where there were people who I think were probably gay. And just you know, feeling like that was just part of the creative community that -- yeah, I have early, early memories of going to places like Provincetown, Massachusetts that was an art colony at the time. And, and just being around

people who I thought, you know, might be like that
[laughs]. You know, two women who seemed to be together or
two men. Actually, yeah, that was kind of an early
introduction to what being gay was.

MIKE: Mm-hmm.

PAT: And so I'm, I'm sure that, that -- yeah, the art -- the
huge art community here is part of being accepted.

MIKE: And what about in terms of spirituality and religion?
Do you -- I guess particularly you would have some insight
into this --

PAT: Mm-hmm.

MIKE: -- for sure. Do you get a different sense of the
relationship between religion --

PAT: Mm-hmm.

MIKE: -- and sexuality here?

PAT: Yeah. Actually, I worked part-time, or for a short time at
a place called Holy Ground. It was kind of a women's
spiritual life center. And they were definitely -- well,
it was started by two lesbians --

MIKE: Mm-hmm.

PAT: -- who were graduates of Seminary. And, and there were a
number of -- I mean yeah, there was definitely acceptance
there, which was so refreshing to me after coming from
church background that was definitely not accepting. And

I'm, I'm still I guess grieving my experience with the church and not feeling comfortable in any church, whether they're accepting or not. But I have visited a few of the churches here and it's been, it's been wonderful to see how supportive they are. I know they're not all supportive, but it seems like there are a bunch that are, are supportive, and that's great. When I was involved with Holy Ground there was a, like a discussion group on -- I guess it was on gay rights or something. And they invited a woman from PFLAG to come and talk about, about what it's like to be gay and gay rights and everything. And she was straight and I thought it was interesting though that they seemed to -- that these straight people who were very open and supportive of gay people seemed to feel more comfortable having another straight people come and tell them about gay rights and *[laughs]* and what it's like to be gay.

MIKE: It's like a translator.

PAT: Yea! Exactly.

MIKE: Isn't it? An interpreter.

PAT: And I sat there and at least half the group knew I was gay and nobody was asking me anything *[laughs]*. It was very, very odd. But yeah, that was kind of an interesting experience. And I think that's not terribly unusual. I

attended some PFLAG meetings with my mother and I think I was the only gay person there. And I felt like they felt a little funny around me even though they were supportive of me. They felt more comfortable talking with each other about gay issues than they did talking with me.

MIKE: That's an interesting thing that happens.

PAT: Yeah, yeah.

MIKE: So Asheville, sort of outside of Asheville anyway has a reputation as sort of the new gay hotspot, or the next gay Mecca, or at least for North Carolina anyway. So do you think that that -- that that holds true?

PAT: No [laughs]. No. I feel like it's lost something. I think maybe if, you know, maybe ten years ago it was moving in that direction. But I just feel like now -- no, I think the gay population's pretty invisible. It's like a -- it's like in a parallel dimension or something.

MIKE: So have they blended it in so much that now it's just not really much of an issue or?

PAT: Well, I don't know if I'd say it's not much of an issue, but it's -- yeah, I don't, I don't -- yeah, it's hard to describe. In some ways I guess it's not that much of an issue. I've been to two restaurants in the last six months where the server was trans. And you know, this person obviously didn't have trouble not only being able to get a

job, but a job where they're out in the public, you know. And you know, that's not -- that wasn't a big deal. That was in a very progressive area of town, but yeah, it's hard to know. I guess when I say I don't feel like it's a gay Mecca, it's -- the gay population is just blending in. You know, it's like -- it's like they're just living as straight people, almost like everybody's disguised. But you know, not --

MIKE: There's no little gay, sort of gay area, no particularly neighborhood that's --

PAT: No.

MIKE: -- sort of like the gay --

PAT: No.

MIKE: -- neighborhood or anything like that.

PAT: Uh-uh. And like I said, even some of the gay-owned businesses, you'd never know they were gay-owned. And gay people don't congregate there. But there are several gay bars or at least a couple.

MIKE: Hm. Now before we started taping you were talking with your partner. I know she's done some writing or some journalism --

PAT: Yeah.

MIKE -- around the transgender community here. So do you know much about that or can you speak much to that community or how --

PAT: Yeah. A bit.

MIKE: OK. I'm curious to here. We've become friends with some of the transgender people here and had somebody do some work on our house who was referred to us. I mean someone just said -- I told someone I thought it would be great if we could find a woman plumber, you know, to do some work for us. And so they said oh, I know a woman plumber. And it turned out to be a trans person. And that was great. I mean, we never talked about the fact that she was trans, but -- and we've, we've now become pretty good friends with some of the local trans people. And yeah, I think it's great that there's a place where they can live and, and be who they are.

MIKE: So people don't really run into much harassment or issues around that?

PAT: I think they probably do. Yeah. They probably do. It's - - yeah, it's not easy. It's easier here than it probably would be some other places, but -- and it depends, you know. Like if you're getting a -- having a job, you know. Like recently we had somebody come give us an estimate for some roof work and, you know, we immediately didn't feel

comfortable with this person. You know, whenever we hire somebody to do some work around the house we want somebody who we're going to feel comfortable with and probably at least half the people we don't feel comfortable with.

MIKE: It's your house, sure.

PAT: Yeah. And I imagine, you know, if you were trans or gay either, you know, your employer is, you know, has to be a certain kind of person for you to feel comfortable. And probably most of the employers would not be comfortable with gay or trans people, I would imagine. You'd have to really look hard to find somebody who would be -- I work for my, myself. So it's -- I don't have that stumbling block. And my partner, I know has worked places that have been difficult, even places that say they are gay-friendly.

MIKE: You know, when you -- I thought of this when you said you employ yourself -- don't ask me how my mind works -- here in Asheville, so do you think if one of you was injured or ill or something, would you run into problems at say, the hospital? Do you think that the community is pretty, you know, it's so accepted and normal here would people just not give you the kind of hassles that you might get in other places?

PAT: That is one thing we checked out before we moved here. We have heard that the hospital's really good about honoring

gay relationships. So we -- we're pretty happy with that. And yeah, if you're choosing your doctor too, it's, it's -- that's something that we take into consideration, you know, how does your doctor feel knowing that you're gay? Because not all doctors are comfortable with that. But just in general, the hospital we've heard is pretty good with that. And that's a big deal.

MIKE: Mm-hmm, I imagine. Definitely.

PAT: I guess you still wouldn't be allowed to visit your partner in jail if you got arrested though *[laughs]*.

MIKE: Maybe not. Well, I asked you a lot of questions about Boone -- Boone -- about Asheville and in the community here. What else would you like to talk about?

PAT: Hm.

MIKE: What else would you like to tell about your story?

PAT: Hm, let's see. As far as my story goes -- yeah. One thing that you asked that -- about, about Asheville being the next big gay Mecca or whatever. Yeah, that is an interesting question because I'm not really sure -- I'd be curious to hear how other people answer that. You know, if you're -- like when we first visited here from someplace else -- you know, when you think of a gay Mecca you think oh, there's going to be rainbow flags and there's probably,

you know, a gay community center, some other towns have gay community centers --

MIKE: I would say that's what my perception of Asheville today would be.

PAT: Yeah, yeah. And there is none of that.

MIKE: Hm.

PAT: You know, I know some people tried to start a gay community center and it just didn't happen. So it seems like all the efforts that there've been to, you know, the newspaper, the little -- the coffee shop, the gift shop, the, the pride event is, you know, not all that great -- yeah, one of the things that we noticed about the pride event was you'd think that the locally owned -- gay-owned businesses would be represented there, but they have -- like the food vendors are not -- are not gay, you know, they're just food vendors. What about all the gay-owned restaurants here, you know? Or other gay-owned businesses? We didn't see them there. So it's -- yeah. I can't quite figure it out. Maybe it's -- maybe it's a gay Mecca just in the fact that a lot of -- a lot of gay or LGBT people are here and they've successfully managed to kind of disappear into the woodwork. There's just not an obvious presence, which is -- I feel like there should be an obvious presence. And I would like to see more political enthusiasm. And I guess

people just don't want to be bothered. They just want to live their lives. And talk about gay agenda, there is absolutely no gay agenda. When I hear some of the locally African American pastors talk about, you know, the fact that the City Council is considering giving benefits to gay people's domestic partners is all part of the gay agenda, you know, to, to get rid of straight marriage and all that sort of thing. I just think there is no gay agenda at all. But it would be nice if there were, you know, as far as getting human rights. Not to, you know, I've got kids and I want them to grow up and have happy marriages. And they're all straight, so of course I support straight marriage. Just because I think that we should have gay marriage doesn't mean that I think we shouldn't have straight marriage. Strange logic. But I would love to see something happen here like discussion groups between people who are pro-gay and people who are anti-gay, you know, to really get the conversation out there and really be able to get rid of some of the myths. And it seems like a place like Asheville would be ideal for that. But that's another thing that's just not happening. Other than that, I guess I don't have anything else to say [laughs].

MIKE: OK [laughs]. Well, I had you talk a lot. It passes quickly, doesn't it, the time, once we start talking.

Well, thank you so much for, for sharing --

PAT: You're welcome.

MIKE: -- and talking about your story with me. I appreciate it.

PAT: Yeah, I appreciate the opportunity.

MIKE: Well, thank you.

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