

Tony

Q: This is Michael Howell from Appalachian State University. It's May the 18th, 2010, and I am in the Wilkes County Public Library with Tony. So Tony, if you'll introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about you -- your age, where you're from, if you've lived here or if you lived other places, and then I'll ask you some questions.

A: My name's Tony. I've lived in Wilkes County all my life -- born and raised here. I'm 39 years old. I've been a truck driver for 14 years, so I've been all across the country.

Q: Wow.

A: You know, all across the nation -- all lower 48 states I've been in or through at some point in my life. But like I said, you know, there again, you know, at least every weekend, back home to Wilkes County. So I've lived here constantly. I'm homosexual. I have identified myself as homosexual since as far back as I can remember -- elementary school --

Q: Wow.

A: -- you know, on up. I came out to my mother and some of my other family members when I was 15, actually through the help of my school counselor at my junior high because I was having severe distressed thoughts, you know, about not

being the, quote, "normal" as the other kids were and being teased about my effemininity at that time, and which I've learned since then to try my best to be, I guess you'd say, butch yourself up, you know, to be like everybody else and to fit into society. So -- but I still identify myself as totally homosexual. I've never had the urge to be with a woman in any kind of, you know, form or fashion. And that's -- I guess that's about all I can think of right now.

Q: OK, all right. Well, I'll probably ask you a couple questions to follow up on some of that. Well, let me ask you, though -- so you sort of knew this about yourself as far back as elementary school? How did you come to realize that?

A: When I would have the urge to be with a man or to see a man, you know -- like, I have discussed this with a lot of my coworkers and such as that as to, you know, to how they discovered they were straight, and I relate to that as being -- I was going through the same thing, but I was going the opposite the direction. I was wanting to look at naked men; I was wanting to, you know, kiss a guy instead of kiss a girl; I wanted to chase the guys on the playground instead of, you know, chase the girls. You know, just different stuff like that. And when it came to

why don't you go on a date or something, I wanted to choose a guy; I wanted to be -- go on a date with a guy, and just -- that's the only way I can really describe it, is that, you know, when I was going through that transition, you know, especially going into puberty and stuff, I was having the urges to be with guys instead of girls.

In fact, I would -- you know, the guys -- my friends would want to look at dirty magazines of their parents or whatever that they found or something of the girls -- and I would let them know, you know, it didn't interest me. You know, in fact it would kind of bother me to look at a girl's privates and everything, and I just would not be interested in it at all. And after I've read so many research books over the many years to try to educate myself on it, that kind of the same way a normal -- quote, "normal" -- guy would be upset about looking at two guys have sex, I'd be looking the same way at a girl. You know, it would bother me, it would make me physically sick or ill, I would show no interest in it. Tony was turned off by it. Where the same instance, if I saw a pornographic magazine, let's say, of a male or something like that, or I saw a movie including a male, I could get easily aroused by that, but in the same instance, seeing a girl would do

nothing for me.

Q: OK. So in your family, in your community, coming up before the time you came out, at least -- did you pick up messages about homosexuality?

A: Yes. Of course, like in the normal everyday school activities and stuff or in the classroom would be more or less, I guess you would say, programmed to think that homosexuality was wrong, you know, that it's not acceptable. It's not a feasible alternative to a lifestyle, that it's kind of shunned upon especially being in the Bible Belt that we are, of course, you know. We would have family members even to this day still tell me, you know, "I'm worried about your soul" or "I'm worried about you going to hell because you're homosexual, because you choose to love a man."

And, I mean, it's not just sexual. I mean, even back during the days, like I said previously, of wanting to go on dates, you know, wanting to share affection, not just sexually, but, you know, wanting to be arm-in-arm or share intimate moments as far as like a kiss or something with a man. And, of course, when I told my family or came out officially, I was told, you know, that "You're going to hell"; "You're a bad person"; "That's not correct. You

shouldn't be doing that."

Q: That was the message from your family?

A: Family, teachers... Basically the only one I can say that was very supportive of me was the guidance counselor at junior high, and she tried to instill in me that it's fine. You know, you're OK, you're not a bad person, everything, and that's when she brought my mother in to try to get us counseling, to try to get us to see that it was fine, that she wasn't going to have a heart attack and explode or whatever, you know, or that she was going to be burned at the stake for having a child that's homosexual and stuff. So I saw through that that, you know, hey, I'm OK.

Q: Were those your worries or her worries?

A: I guess a little of both, because she knew too -- I think, as I remember, she wasn't from this area either, you know, so she was probably raised to be more open-minded.

Q: The counselor?

A: The counselor.

Q: The counselor, OK.

A: Well, my mother, she was born and raised here in this county, too. My whole family has more or less lived in this area the whole entire time. I mean, half this county -- we discovered here recently half this county is related to us.

Q: Is that right? (laughs)

A: Yeah, I mean, distant cousins way out on the tree limbs and everything.

Q: Wow.

A: That this county is made up of a lot of our relatives. So more or less we're born here; we stay here. (laughs) Could be a bad thing, could be a good thing. (laughs)

Q: So how was that, then, coming out to your mom at 15?

A: Very hard. Of course, at first, you know, she cried daily. Actually verbally stated that she was upset and that she -- disappointed. You know, afraid she would never have grandchildren, of course, the normal activities that somebody wants for their children. And, of course, also her displeasure that I would be shunned in the community, that I would not have as many friends or not be accepted in the community to be a normal man.

Q: So she was concerned about you?

A: Yes.

Q: Upset and concerned about you?

A: Right.

Q: Are you an only child?

A: I'm the only child.

Q: OK, all right, OK.

A: And she also took blame for it because during the

discussion of the -- with the guidance counselor, I, of course, opened up that I had been molested as a child, and it was partly due, she thinks, to her fault because of the person she chose to leave me with.

And growing up, I read that a lot of people, a lot of homosexual guys relate to that they were favored by their mother or something, and I'm kind of basically just the opposite. My mother more or less pushed me off on other people because she was a very young mother. Actually, she had me when she was 17, or getting ready to turn 17, like a week before she turned 17. So, of course, you know, there was a lot of difficulties with that and not having a job and such and relying on a family, not having her normal teenage wild years or being able to go do what she wanted to do. So she would like, you know, push me off onto other people so that she could go and have the fun, go on dates and such as that.

And of course over the many years of choosing the wrong type of boyfriends, live-in boyfriends and such, we had to go through a lot together and became closer because of that, because we would take up for each other and stuff. She would choose boyfriends to live with her that were

alcoholics, abusive physically and emotionally. So it was like we realized that we were all that each other had, especially after my grandmother died, because my grandmother was more or less my mother my first eight or nine years of my life that I can remember. I was closer to her because I spent more time with her than I did with my own mother. And like I said, that was because she wanted to go to the clubs or go out on dates with guys, and of course couldn't take me. So she would spoil me in some ways especially like as far as monetary ways, taking me to get the toys I wanted, or, you know, Christmases were fabulous because I got every toy I ever wanted, so that when it came time for her to want to go do her thing, I was OK with it and wouldn't give her such a hard time, I guess. So at that point, she started leaving me with the neighbors, you know, because they had kids that would more or less babysit for free or whatever. And one of them that I stayed with quite often, he was a teenage guy, and he would sexually abuse me or molest me. But he would do it in a nice, caring way, you know; I mean, it wasn't something I remember as a bad experience, from what I can remember. And so he showed me attention that I wasn't getting, you know, anywhere else, especially from a man.

Q: How old were you?

A: As I can remember, about seven, I think, something like that.

Q: And had you already started to have feelings, the ones that you were mentioning before, or did that sort of start after that incident?

A: That started after that. I can't really remember any feelings either way, female or male, before those experiences. I guess you could say it kind of awakened emotions in me and insight to love feelings or, you know, or feelings for another person -- as far as non-family, of course, because of course I had those feelings from birth, that, especially my grandmother, that they loved me. You know, so I knew as far as that kind of love, you know, automatically, but as far as, like, being -- having feelings or emotions towards someone outside the family, those were the first ones I can remember.

Q: OK. And so how did that -- how did that end?

A: Basically after I came out and the guidance counselor confided in her, my mother, who it was, what had happened, everything like that, it was still fine. And actually, I think I was kind of forced out of the closet with my family because the guy kind of got upset with people one day after he'd come back and we'd started hanging around again after I was, you know, 14 or 15 years old, and he told me one day

that he was going to tell my mother about the things that I was still yet choosing to want to do, because I was letting him know, you know, I still wanted to do those things, with him especially. I don't know if he kind of got upset, because he also confided in me that he had feelings for my mother, and so he wanted to have sex with her, and of course I was not going to hear of that. You know, that was a bad thing for me.

Q: So he was an older teenager by now, is that right?

A: Well, then --

Q: Or an adult?

A: No, then he would have been an adult.

Q: He was an adult.

A: Yeah, when he came back when I was 15, he was like in his early twenties or mid-twenties. And he actually tried to make moves on my mother, and I saw him, and I told him -- I told them both, you know, that I wasn't going to have any part of that, that I was going to try to interfere with that as much as I could. And so he got upset one day when it was just him and I alone in the house and my mother was at work, and he told me that he was going to tell her. And he also threatened to physically hurt -- harm me because I was getting in the way, whatever. And at the same time, though, we were still messing -- we were messing around

sexually, you know, just doing little small things. And he got offended or upset that I was going to try to come in between them and told me that he was going to out me, that he was going to tell her I was trying to do things with him or whatever, stuff like that. So that's why I was having all these bad feelings and getting very emotionally upset and going to the school counselor. I couldn't stop crying that day as I remember and everything, and so she called my mom from work and told her she needed to come in right away, and that's when she told her that -- what was going on (inaudible) me being upset, trying to explain to her, you know -- I guess you would say soften the blow to -- that it wasn't such a bad thing, that the world wasn't going to come to an end because I decided that I was going to be homosexual. And she tried to explain to her and give her references to literature, such as that and everything, to let her know this is not the terrible -- this disastrous thing, you know, and also got us scheduled for counseling through her job that was providing at that time, providing counseling for families and stuff. So we went to a couple sessions of those, and then the company decided to pull that out as a option, so -- I mean, to the whole company, not just to us, but decided to end that option. So after that we haven't been to counseling at all.

Q: So now what happened to the guy?

A: He was shunned by basically my whole family, especially my mother. Oh, seven to this day she still says if I bring his name up that she's going to physically harm him and whatever if she sees him out again. And I think she actually went to his mother, because she's been a longtime family friend and a neighbor to my family still to this day, and told her what had happened and everything. So, of course, there's no feelings -- from what we understand, there's no bad feelings between his mother and him, but they've let him know that our family doesn't care for him right now.

Q: OK. So you had this sort of secret life with him in your home. What was your experience at school like?

A: Of course, at first I didn't know to keep these things secret because, you know, you're not told in kindergarten, you know, "Hey, you shouldn't be wanting to be with guys, you should be wanting to be with girls." You know, it's just kind of -- gradually as you go through school you kind of pick up on it and see what the other people were doing, because, you know, you don't go through your first sex ed or whatever until like fifth or sixth grade, showing you a movie of what you're going through for puberty or whatever. But as far as like, you know, early on, you don't know that

you're doing wrong or that you shouldn't tell people. So, of course, I remember in second grade as a very clear memory of me and a fellow guy going to the dress-up corner and pulling out the female dress-up clothes and stuff and putting them on and playing and stuff and having a good time. And, in fact, I still talk to that guy to this day, and we recall that as happy memories.

My best friend, who turned out, after going to junior high school, that he was straight, totally straight -- in fact, he -- after I formally came out, he had nothing else to do with me, mostly. I mean, just kind of severed ties altogether and in fact went the other direction, was trying to cause problems for me, trying to talk trash about me, make fun of me, such as that stuff at school and everything. Joining up with people to harass me or, you know, to give me a hard time about it, basically. And up until then, you know, I still recall to him -- to this day, we've matured, of course, at this time, and have reconciled our differences and everything, just come to understand, you know, he's himself, I'm myself, and that it's OK. You know, you are what you are and I am what I am, so everything's cool. And he's apologized for the way he done me in school and everything.

And so, like I said, going back to that again, in the second grade, you didn't know not to -- that that was wrong. In fact, as far as I can remember, the teacher never told us, you know, you're bad for putting on the girls' clothes and stuff. But we did, and we had a blast doing it. And it was just childhood, happy memories, I guess, you know, you could say, and that we were having a childhood good time.

I guess while other people were playing catch with their fathers and with fellow classmates and everything, like I said, we were doing stuff like that or playing with Barbies, (laughs) you know. And which my neighbors, the only people I basically grew up with besides the guy that was babysitting me, were females that lived right beside of me, and they were my best friends and my playmates growing up, so of course we had to do things that they could do -- you know, play in the treehouse playing house, whatever, stuff like that. And so it was more or less female things, not playing baseball or football or stuff like that and stuff. And so I was just -- I guess you could say I was conditioned that it was OK as far as that, but I guess my family didn't realize that it could be sexually, too, as

identifying with the female role as far as sexually, and which I think to this day that I do. In fact, I tell people when I try to meet a date or go onto a website, a dating website, that I identify as being the female role during sex. I prefer to be able to do the female things.

Q: OK. So I want to, I want to get back to sort of current life, too, but I want to ask you one other thing. So you came out at 15 and you came out to your mom and your family, essentially. Did you also intentionally come out at school, or did that sort of happen?

A: I never formally, even up until graduation -- I never stood up and said, "Hey, I'm gay."

Q: Did the other kids figure it out?

A: Oh, yes. I was made fun of. Of course, because my last name is so close to another word used for a female, and so I was called by that last name instead of my real last name. You know, I was mocked as far as my voice imitated, you know, and made -- you know, made fun of that I was limp-wristed, I guess you could say, because they all, you know, do the little limp wrist thing toward me. Stuff like that. And so they would say stuff like that, but I would never say yes or no. In fact, sometimes I would tell them, you know, "What if I am?" to like show other people that if they did want to be, you know, there was nothing wrong with

it, show them that I was even taking up for others, you know, if they decided to be homosexual, and that's fine. And so, yes, I guess they figured it out by my mannerisms, my way of speaking, I guess, like I said, not denying it, choosing not to fist fight, fight it, you know, because of course a normal man that's called that wants to fight, you know, to prove that he's not. I wouldn't. So I guess, yeah, they kind of figured it out, but as far as like standing up in assembly and saying, "Hey, I'm gay," no, I never did.

Q: OK. So living in Wilkes County, and this is a good, you know, 20 or so years ago, how did you start to connect with other men? How did you find other gay men or start to date or those things?

A: Well, it just so happens, I was in marching band, and I made a friend that had came to -- their schools migrated into our schools at a certain grade, and so that's when we met.¹ And we kind of discovered that we were both gay. And at that time, actually, he and I and the previous guy I stated that was my best friend from elementary school on up, we were like the Three Musketeers. We went everywhere, did everything together. We were in marching band together, all three of us -- you know, everything together

¹ Elementary schools were Kindergarten-6th grade and fed into Woodward Junior High for 7th-9th grades.

-- except for sexually. We didn't do anything sexually. But this other friend of mine I made in the 8th grade, who is my best friend to this day. We just discovered, you know, just through talking, how do you say, hit and miss pokes at each other, you know, as far as --

Q: Sort of teasing?

A: Yes, but I mean, but like, you know, "What do you think about that guy?" "Would I be wrong if I thought this way about that guy?" or "Do you think that guy's really cute?" or "Wouldn't you want to have sex with that guy?" You know, kind of stuff, I guess like guys do with girls normally. You know, "Ain't she pretty?" or whatever. He and I would do the same thing as far as "Isn't he cute?" or "Wouldn't you want to do something with him?" or "What if this circumstance happened with him? You know, would that be OK?" and everything. So we gradually found out that we were both homosexual and finally just confided in each other, hey, yeah, we both have these feelings.

So through that and through -- I mean, I never formally, like, had dates in school, because, of course, very few other people were like me or wanted to be labeled or wanted to be -- actually even want to be friends with me because they would be labeled as being gay also or whatever, and

they would be ostracized by their classmates at the school. And, of course, I chose to be around a lot of the sports guys, because eventually I quit doing the marching band, dropped out of the marching band, and became the activity bus driver. So I drove for the sports teams. At first, there were a few that gave me a hard time.

Q: I was thinking, wow, that must have been difficult.

A: Oh, yeah. They did, you know, give me a hard time. But of course I was the kind of person, I would always go to authorities and say, "Hey, this person's giving me a hard time." You know, I let them know that if you want me to continue to do this, then please do something about this person. And of course they would get disciplined or at least talked to, you know, to not do this. And so in some ways that would make people even more mad at me, but they couldn't show it to me, not openly, because then they would get in trouble as far as the sports teams and stuff.

But as far as, like, having official dates, no, I didn't get through school, I guess, basically -- if there was any sexual experience, which was very few and far between, it was with guys I'd meet at public places or something, maybe even a little older than I or from different schools, so it wasn't something like we'd go on dates or anything. So as

far as having official dates, no, I never had anything like that in school or anything.

Q: OK. Were you aware of there being other gay men in Wilkes County at that time?

A: Through discussions, like with my best friend and such, we found out that yes, there was a hidden gay community, I guess you would say, and also that there was a lot of men in Wilkes that were married or have kids or something that would like to mess around with other guys secretly, such as that and everything. So we found out, you know, just through conversations and through meeting other people, especially when I got my first job when I was 16 and had my driver's license, of course, and stuff like that, and we would go and meet other people. And of course I would meet other people out in the community through my job and everything, and we found out, yes, there was a hidden gay community, more or less. I mean, of course we didn't have the gay pride marches or anything like that or nothing, but we would meet at people's houses and have little parties and such as that or get to know other people and, of course, you know, dates and stuff had occurred through that. But yeah, it wasn't like a great, huge gay community, but we knew that there was a gay society in Wilkes.

Q: Well, while we're on that topic, what is the state of that today?

A: Still basically the same.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes. We're finding out more and more, I guess because of the way the society's going nowadays, it was becoming more and more acceptable, that a lot of guys will secretly want to have sex with you or something like that or something or meet at public places to have sex and everything, and they're usually the ones that are married and have kids or grandkids and, you know, still living at home with the wife, the wife knows nothing about it, of course, and stuff like that. So we're still seeing that still goes on to this day.

Q: Not many more out people?

A: No, actually. No, not really, especially for this area. Of course, I have the rainbow sticker on my car. A lot of times I wear the rainbow wristband, especially if I'm going to a gay pride event or a gay-acceptable event or something or an area, I'll wear my gay pride bracelet or something like that or something, and, you know, but other than that, no, I don't know if you would say not acceptable or just still shunned upon, especially in this area. But I guess it's kind of accepted and people know that if you do do

something like that, you keep it hush-hush. You know, you just don't tell nobody.

Q: OK. So how do you connect with people now?

A: Websites a lot of times. A lot of dating websites, a lot of gay websites, a lot of gay-friendly websites that accept both. Gay clubs, you know, bars, nightclubs, but I don't tend to go to those very often. But mainly websites and through meeting people at their job, you know, stuff like that. Like I said, it would be something that can be secretive, you know. "I'll meet you later on around the corner and we'll go out" or something, we'll go hang out or, you know, go have sex, whatever, you know. So it's kind of that same way.

Q: OK. You said through your job, so let's talk about that for just a minute. So you have ended up as a truck driver, about the butchest job you can have, isn't it?

A: (laughs) Right.

Q: (laughs) So how did that come about, and what's it been like to be a gay truck driver?

A: I've also seen through that that there is a hidden society as far as... I guess it's kind of understood that you're a man out on the road, away from women a lot of times, in more or less an all-male organization or surroundings, so it's kind of understood with those, same way, that it's OK

to have sex with other men. You know, if you go to a rest area and another man knocks on your door or whatever, you know what I'm saying, you know, it's understood that it's OK. I've read through many literatures, through experience for myself, that it's just more or less not talked about but that it still goes on, and it's OK. Of course, you know, when you're confronted amongst your other male friends or male cohorts, you have to deny it or make fun of it and everything, but, let's say for example on the CB, you know, if they start talking about somebody being gay or something like that or something, it's a bad thing, and they're made fun of or they're cussed about or something, but that same guy that you see cussing on the CB, later on, if he thinks you are or knows that you are, will ask you to have sex. Because he understands it's OK to do it behind closed doors, but when the daylight comes, it's no longer. And I guess it's also an acceptable form of alternative, if you can't find a woman or can't be with a woman at that time, then you use the next-best thing, I guess you would say.

Q: And so would many of those men identify themselves as gay?

A: Oh, no.

Q: So they'd identify themselves as straight.

A: Right.

Q: But willing to have sex with men.

A: Right.

Q: I gotcha. OK.

A: Not even bisexual, just strictly that they're using what they -- they're falling on what they have to.

Q: Do they seek out the gay truck drivers?

A: No. In fact, whenever you hook up with another man, you can't admit that you're another truck driver. They have to think that you're a person in a car or whatever, you know, because they don't want to take that risk of you getting on the CB and saying, "Hey, this person is too" or outing them, you know, or anything. So they don't actually seek out other truck drivers, period. Now, I have, you know, seen more and more females going into truck driving. I've even seen little old grannies driving 18-wheelers now -- but I have seen truck drivers say, "Hey, look, she's pretty," or "When you pass this certain truck, look over at her; she's really pretty" and everything like that or something, trying to flatter her or something. So they're seeing more and more that there is an alternative out there besides just guys now, and I've read through many literatures about back in the old days when it was strictly (beep) a man's job, only men do it -- that was my watch. I'm sorry.

Q: I was like, which one of my things isn't working now?

(laughter)

A: No. I can't turn it off. (laughs) But they're like seeing it still as a hush-hush, you know, and if they have to, they can fall back on there's a man to relieve my sexual frustrations or something.

Q: So now with the truck driving or with the meeting online, have you ever found yourself in an unsafe situation or a dangerous situation?

A: I guess you could say -- not really as far as the online thing, because I tell them that -- before I'll even meet or anything -- I need to see a picture, you know, plus always, you know, keep proof, because, you know, I've watched these detective shows and everything where that, you know, they can go back and look at your computer if you become missing or something, you know, to track down the person that you were last talking to or something, whatever, or meetings you were going to be having or something. So I do keep stuff like that.

Q: So it's at least enough of a concern to be concerned.

A: Yes. And -- because, you know, we do see stuff like this today. We know that there are mentally sick individuals out there that will play games to get the wrong kind of people in wrong circumstances to take advantage of them.

And so, you know, physical harm or financial harm, whatever, you know. So it's not really that much of a concern to me as far as that is.

Now, I have been in situations where some people could look back and say -- which I have had some friends today, you know, "Why were you at that location? Don't you know -- even though it is a place that is known for that or something, that it's still dangerous, that, you know, you could easily turn up missing or something, you know, if you get into the wrong vehicle or get into the wrong area with the wrong person or something? And I basically tell them, you know, it's a risk that has to be taken to achieve that. So it's just a known risk, and so you do it or you do without, basically. And -- which I am a guy of, I guess you would say, added extra weight, so of course I'm not physically attractive to the majority of society, you know. Even gay society, to the majority, I'm not appealing or anything. And now I'm getting older, that's becoming another obstacle. So it's more or less you have to do what you have to do to get what you need.

Q: Do you feel any connection to the bears?²

A: A little, but I'm not -- you know, one of the requirements

² Bears are gay men who often have facial and body hair. Some are heavy-set.

for that, basically a requirement, is hair, body hair. I don't have that, so -- I'm more or less just fat (laughs) but not the hairy fat.

Q: OK, all right.

A: So that's almost like -- you know, that's another thing, even in the bear society, that you're not meeting all the requirements, or one of the added extra things that they want to see. In fact, a lot of people will say, even to be a bear, they want the hair more than they do the added weight. They may want the size as far as like a big, burly man, but not necessarily the weight as far as like the stomach area, things like that, you know. So being on top of that, you don't have the hair, you're really -- you're just out there by yourself (laughs) more or less.

Q: OK, all right. How to say it? Does living in Wilkes County particularly or this area of the state, would you say that it somehow influences the way that you live your life, or do you behave or do things in a certain way because of living here?

A: Like I was stating as far as -- especially as far as what we call now "being on the down low," you know, we're secretly meeting especially meeting married men or men that are known to be more with women than they are with -- to be with a guy at all. In fact, if you were to tell your gay

friends, "I was with that guy right there," they would be like, "No way," you know, "he would never do anything like that." And we're like, "Yeah, he did. It happened, you know, so we know it does." So yeah, that, especially in Wilkes County. I've noticed a lot of that. And more out into the Memphis areas, too, like Boone. It's like that.

You know, you see a lot more -- well, Boone's more open because they have a lot of gay students at ASU and stuff. You know, it's like a big college town. We're not. We're more or less still in the back woods, but we don't have the foreigners coming in to give us more insight that there's something out beyond us, you know. So we're still going with the things we were raised on, more or less generations and generations, you know, that it's OK to have sex with another man as long as it's kept secret and you don't tell anybody and you don't accept those feelings. You know more or less it's just for sex and sex only -- no love, no dating and that... So yeah, I could say that really definitely has to go with Wilkes County and their thinking.

Q: So you've mentioned the love and the dating a couple times. How does that work for you?

A: (pause) Very few and far between, and if they are, they're not from Wilkes. They're, like, from, you know, bigger

cities, and you find those through the websites, you know, dating websites and such, and through the gay websites. So if you're doing anything here in Wilkes, 95% of the time it's going to be sex only and it's going to be like a one-time thing. You know, meeting in a location where they may frequent that location for sex or something, stuff like that, so you kind of have an understanding that it's going to be a quick sex thing and that's it. It's not going to be, you know, you want to meet later on, you want to have dinner, dancing -- none of that, no.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: Very let down, because I do long for that, especially, you know, getting on in years as I am. You know, you long for the candlelight dinner and dancing and being amongst peers of your same affiliation or whatever, that you can have a basically normal good time as far as like -- and don't necessarily have to be clubs, nightclubs or stuff, which that's what I've found out through the years is mainly what a gay society basically is, is like nightclubs and stuff, and basically bars. Very few as far as clubs, I mean, organizations; very few, especially in this area, restaurants and stuff willing to cater to you showing open affection between same gender. Some of that. It does, it bothers me that -- I want to be able to do that. I want to

be accepted by society that just because I choose to be with a man instead of a woman, I should still have the same rights and still have the same opportunities that everybody else does, you know, as far as like dating and everything.

Q: So just so I'm clear, so you sort of feel living in Wilkes County or living in this area that it would be difficult for you to have a relationship at all, is it just that it would just be difficult to have a publicly open relationship, or would there just be difficulty having a relationship with a man, period?

A: I think it would be openly, and to some extent, having one, period, because a lot of the guys are raised that you are to play football, you are to date a woman, you are to marry a woman and have us grandchildren. You're not to be settling down with a man. It's like that. You know, so unless somebody does move into this area from -- that was not born and raised here, you know, you get very few opportunities to have a gay relationship while still living here in Wilkes.

I mean, they are there. Of course, there are cases there that we hear about. I mean, we meet the people or something, you know, that, you know, they're living with their lover over on Main Street, but they don't get out and

march down Main Street with a gay pride flag or anything, but so-and-so lives over here at such-and-such address on Main Street with their lover, and they've been living together for 20 years. And so you hear of rare instances as that, but as far as like having an open one where you can walk down the sidewalk of Main Street hand-in-hand, you know, not here in Wilkes, because you'll be called names. More and less law enforcement won't do anything about it because they also have been raised that it's wrong, that you shouldn't be doing such things. So, I don't know, it's just that it would hinder it to an extent, or it'd put a great pressure on it that, I think, even more pressure than if you lived in a near city like Winston-Salem or Boone, something like that, where it'd be more kind of acceptable and there would be more of you to -- you could get it organized to get together if somebody was giving you a hard time or something.

Q: So what's kept you in Wilkes, then?

A: Family.

Q: Is that right?

A: Family. That's about the only thing I can say. Because I've often thought about, you know, like one of my favorite states is Texas. I've often thought about moving to Texas. One of the women that has become like a big role model in

my life even though she's very anti-gay -- she's a very big Christian. A lot of my friends call her a Bible-thumper. (laughter) She lives in Boone -- excuse me -- and she is moving to Texas, her and her husband -- excuse me -- and I told them, you know, I'd love to go. I've even wanted to go before they even thought about going. It's just one of my favorite states to visit, and I thought I'd love to live there -- for one thing, for the hot men, (laughter) the cowboys, you know. But yeah, I'd just say family would be the only thing keeping me here.

Q: Wow.

A: Well, I don't want to limit it to only. Let's say a lot of my friends I went to school with. As we're becoming more mature they are showing their maturity that they're open to it, they're like accepting us more now. A lot of people through these class websites now, they're showing that with age comes maturity, of course, and that they have children now and so they're, like, more open to it and like now, "OK, you're gay, so what? You know, you're still a friend, you're still a good person." So now people that in school, not necessarily that would give me a hard time, but just wouldn't be my openly friend or anything, are now saying, "Hey, let's be friends. Let's start over. Let's, you know, go further than we were in school." You know, in

school they wouldn't give me the time of day; now they're like chatting with me every day on websites and such or wanting to get together for the reunions and actually sit around and talk to me at the reunion instead of turning back on me like they would back in school. So, I mean, they wouldn't, like, go out of the way to, like, harass me or anything, but they were just like you're nonexistent, you know, and it's not either way, good or bad, you're just not there. So I'd say part of that, too, keeps me here to refamiliarize myself with them and maybe get closer friends with those people.

Q: Well, I would say my own experience from my high school reunion was time was the great equalizer. (laughter) It was a lot different. Everybody had more in common. You know, we were all getting old (laughs) so things were -- and people were the people they were. People sort of grew into nicer people over time.

A: Exactly.

Q: And I was happy to see it.

A: Yeah, me too.

Q: Do you think from your experience from growing up in Wilkes County, is Wilkes pretty typical of this Appalachian region of the state? Is it similar to the rest of North Carolina, do you think, or is it sort of different?

A: I think in a lot of ways it's the same as this area, but when it comes to I guess you'd say the homosexual thoughts, the homosexual treatments, it's further behind because in schools, they're still not taught that it's an OK thing; it's taught as still a bad thing. Of course in this area, you know, we get a lot of the news that people are still saying it's negative to be gay and to familiarize the kids with what the Bible has to say about it, you know, of course that you're going to hell if you're gay. You know, in other words, don't choose this way if you don't have to. If you have that option, choose straight, or more, condition yourself to be straight, force yourself to go out with girls. So as far as that way, I still see Wilkes as being behind times, as you said. I would like to see more of that, you know, like they say, taught in schools that it's an OK option. You know, we have a high rate of suicide, you know, and a lot of us that are in the gay community -- of course, the normal people wouldn't see this, you know, as far as the heterosexual community, they wouldn't -- I'm sorry if I keep saying that, but --

Q: It's OK.

A: -- of course I've been conditioned that it's "normal" to be heterosexual. So as far as the regular community is that they wouldn't notice it, but we hear things or we see

things to know that a lot of those kids that are committing suicide or stuff because of homosexually -- you know, they want to be homosexual and they're told it's wrong. They're told that they won't be accepted by their family, that they will be ostracized by their family, they'll be ostracized by their community. A lot of people, of course, are raised in the church and so of course they'll be ostracized by the church, you know. Like, we don't have a -- I think it's called a Metropolitan Community Church that a lot of the bigger cities have - we don't have that here. As far as what we've been told, what I've heard by other guys in the community that one would never last here or would never be permitted to be here, that they would give them a very hard time about even locating here.

Q: So there aren't gay-friendly churches in Wilkes that you know of?

A: No, not really. There are a lot that will, how do you say, permit you to attend church, but they still give the sermons about you're doomed for hell for being gay -- only for being gay. It doesn't matter if you're the pillar of the community, if you're gay, you're still going to hell. You're doomed, you know. There's no way out of it. As long as you're still saying that you're gay or doing gay activities, you're doomed for hell. Come on in, sit down

with us, fellowship with us, it's OK to be you, but you're going to hell. And what you say is acceptable, no, they're not -- they don't say, "Yeah, you're OK to be gay." No. No, I've never heard it from even one single church, even around this area. I've never even heard of one like Boone or anything.³ There may be one, but we've never -- it's never been publicized down here or anything, you know, so even, you know, as far as up into an open community like they have up there, not a church. You have to go to a bigger, bigger city like Hickory or Winston-Salem where they have those. But, you know, as far as like, you know -- and we see that as being wrong, because you're supposed to be loving and like God, supposed to be a Christian, Christ-like, so you're supposed to be OK that you are who you are. You know. Of course, don't go out and commit murders and stuff like that, so don't bother somebody else, but as long as you're doing something that two consenting adults are doing, you know, you should be OK with it. You should be saying, OK, you're still going to heaven because you're trying to be like Jesus, not condemned for it. So that's another way I guess we're back, still the backwoods, kind of behind times.

³ The Wilkes Friend Meeting (Quakers), Boone Friend Meeting, Boone Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, High Country United Church of Christ, Boone Christ's Church United, and St. Luke's Episcopal Church of Boone are welcoming congregations.

Q: All right. I've been asking you a lot of questions. What else would you like to talk about?

A: Mmm... (laughs)

Q: Anything you haven't talked about yet that you want to talk about?

A: I was going to say a minute ago that while -- when we were talking about not being formally homosexual, whatever, I'm out, everybody that I know -- as far as we were talking about, you know, high school reunions and stuff. Now when I go to a high school reunion I say, "Hey, I *am* homosexual." If ever they ask a question like, you know, who you're dating now, I say, hey, I'm seeing so-and-so that's a him. You know, I'm sure they understand, you know, I'm not into women, I don't want a woman. A lot of them have a lot of questions for me, you know, of course, you know, and especially at my jobs or whatever, they're like, wanting to ask questions: Well, why don't you want to be with a woman? Have you ever been with a woman? Have you ever kissed a woman? You know, all the 20 questions. So I don't know. You know, no, I'm not into females at all in any kind of way. In fact, I've been approached here in Wilkes County for, like, married couples that are wanting to play sexually with another man, you know, as far as the husband doing things with the other man in front of the

wife and stuff, and I've told them no. I don't want a woman present, period.

I mean, as far -- I have a lot of female friends. I find the female -- how do you say it? -- the female people themselves as good people. You know, I mean, they can be great friends. They're very understanding as far as homosexuality, a lot of them are, especially my age.

Well, maybe they'll -- older ones than I am still want to give you their opinion that, you know, you're a bad person as far as being gay, that you're not -- you know, of course you're not going to heaven and stuff. You can always fall back to that, especially people in the Bible Belt, that's a main thing, is, you know, doomed for hell. And you're, you know, pointed in your face, more or less, preached at, that you're going to hell. You know, even though I may love you with all my heart, you're going to hell.

So, of course, what does that do to you? You know, that lowers your self-esteem and everything because you're like, hey, this person really cares for me and they're telling me that I'm doing something bad even though that's how my only feelings are for, is to be that way. You know, I can't

ever imagine me right now being with a woman for any reason. I mean, friend-wise, yes. Most of my friends are female because, like I said, they're more open to it, they're more -- they see how I'm feeling as far as toward a man or something. So of course -- I said my best friend, he lives over in Hickory, and we've been best friends since eighth grade, and we still are today. So, of course, you know, I can't run to him day-to-day -- you know, hey, let's go hang out at the mall, whatever, you know, because we live so far apart. So I more or less rely on females around here for friendship, for companionship, but they also understand that they'll never be, as far as sexually or coupling, anything. They'll never be. They'll just be friends, bottom line, end of story.

So I guess the point I'm trying to say is that I'm out to everybody. You know, I don't care if it's a stranger on the street and if they stop and ask me, "Hey, how do you feel about this woman?" I'm going to say, "I'm gay." I'm not ashamed to say it. I tell law enforcement, quote, you know, "I am gay." You know. Proud of it. Not going to hide under a rock, you know what I'm saying, but I know also I can say I could do it, but finding someone else that would be willing to around here walk down Main Street hand-

in-hand or kiss, show public affection, probably never will be, or not in the immediate future, especially not at this time, current time. Which I would love to, I really would, be able to...

And as far as like the new marriage concern, I'm for it. I'm all for it. I even know some gay people in this area that are out against it. They're being trained in their mind that it's wrong. Even though you're gay, definitely don't be thinking you're going to be getting married. That's a bad thing. So they even say it. You know, they're even stating that now. They're like, "Hey, yeah, I'm gay -- I'm openly gay -- but I don't want to get married because that's wrong. I shouldn't be getting married." But now, as far as I'm concerned, I want to. I want to find that -- whenever I do find that significant other that I want to settle down with for the rest of my life, I want to make that public commitment, that public acknowledgement that, hey, I'm going to spend the rest of my life with this person. I want to wear the wedding rings; I want to, you know, have the formal ceremony, you know, not just at City Hall. You know, the church wedding or whatever is what I think about, one wearing the white tuxedo, one wearing the black tuxedo, you know, to show

we're committing to each other and to show that we're not ashamed of it.

I guess that's main thing, is not being ashamed, you know, because if you do that, you're emphasizing what they're saying. It's a bad thing. If you stand up and say, "Hey, I'm not ashamed," you're saying, "Hey, the way I see, it's not a bad thing. I'm proud of who I am, I'm proud of where I've gotten to this point in my life." Like I tell a lot of guys that I have found in my past to use me as far as financially and things like that, you know, and don't really feel bad about it because I'm a gay guy so it doesn't matter. I tell them, you know, "Hey, I'm proud of who I am. I didn't get to be this age by being a complete dummy." (laughter) You know, I'm still alive at this age. Another big thing is, a lot of people say, "Why aren't you afraid of AIDS?" And I turn around and look back at them and say, you know, "Just because you date women, because you have sex with a woman, aren't you afraid of AIDS?" you know. I ask them the same thing they ask me. "You use protective sex? OK." Then why make it be a gay thing? Why make it be that because I'm gay, I'm going to get AIDS? They ask me the same thing. They're like, "Aren't you afraid of it?" Yeah, of course, like anybody should be

these days and times, you know, no matter who you are. In fact, it should be a fear that I think even married men, even that they're being strictly with their wife only every day, then they'd be kind of worried about it: hey, is she messing with somebody while I'm not here, while I'm not around that could be giving her the AIDS to give to me? So, you know, even with them, protective sex, you know, possibly. More or less, if you're going to do it with anybody anywhere these days, protective sex. (laughs) I mean...

Q: Do the down-low married men seem to be worried about that? Should Wilkes County wives be worried?

A: Yes, because they do to an extent, especially quite often, I would say more often than not, if you're going to have anal sex, yeah, they'll be like, you know, "I require we wear a condom." There's still a few out there that'll say, "No, I'm not worried about it. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen," basically, you know, "so why wear a condom?" And they'll even say something about, you know, don't want to ruin the feeling or whatever, you know, saying the different things as far as condoms. So I see that as part of being uneducated in Wilkes too -- that falls back to, you know, don't teach in schools that even gay sex -- don't teach anything about it because it could

be being that we're saying it's OK, that we're still that far behind times, I believe.

You know, plus we have a lot of Hispanic -- not saying anything bad about them, because I like Hispanic guys; I find them attractive. So, they're brought up to be that it's kind of OK to, if it's kept hush-hush, you know -- in Mexico, for instance, that it's OK as long as you keep it hush-hush, you know, don't have everybody that you're having sex with men, that's fine. You know, or you don't come out. You still have a wife and kids. And they are also more apt to not use condoms, whatever, protective sex, you know. Wants quickie, get it over with, you know, (inaudible) felt good or whatever, and that's it. Or more or less it's them, it's all about them. Make me feel good doesn't matter, you know. So yeah, I'd still say that's something that should be worried about for Wilkes because -- but like I said, the majority do say, you know, "If I'm going to have sex with a guy especially" -- they emphasize that, that it has to be protected sex.

Q: OK. So I guess my last question for you: why do you want to do this? Why did you decide to participate [in the oral history]?

A: There again, I want to show the community that we are out

there. You know what I mean? Just because we're Wilkes doesn't mean there are no gays here, so I want to help to educate especially the younger generation that I'm afraid are being conditioned that it's still wrong. You know, it's better to kill yourself than to be in that lifestyle. I want to show them that it's not true, you know. We're out here, we're proud, we're, you know, to an extent -- of course, you know, we're not stupid. We're not going to, you know, march down the street where we're probably going to be attacked, be allowed to be attacked, stuff like that, you know. But, you know, we still live basically normal lives, you know.

Of course, there's men out there, and as far as I know -- I mean, I've met quite a few -- that are strictly heterosexual that can't find dates, that can't find the right person in Wilkes or whatever, so, you know, maybe they have something out of the ordinary that they're looking for as far as they're, you know, maybe to a different race or something like that, so they can't find a person around Wilkes, but they're still here too, you know. So it's not like we're a minority, because we're here; we're just not out. (laughs)

Like I said, I know of a gentleman that holds a very high position in Wilkes that has had the same -- lived in the same house with the same lover for many, many, many years. I mean, 20 or more years, but he doesn't, you know, wear the gay pride labels or paraphernalia, nothing like that. So if anyone would just think about it, you know, they don't come out and just say, "Hey, you're gay," you know, but he is and identifies that he is.

So I guess it's like I said, it's just the conditioning of being in Wilkes, even if you are proud that you are, we're not going to let you stand up in a town meeting and say that you are. (laughs) You know? So you're going to be -- if you're going to be proud about it, you're still going to be kept under wraps, basically. We're not going to get on the website and state, you know, Wilkes County is gay-friendly. That's in a nutshell why I want to do it, to show that we are here.

You know, that's what I was telling you about putting my last name, because I know how a lot of Wilkes County can be. They're not stupid. They know how to go on the website; they know how to Google stuff; if they want to find out something, they know how to go about the process

of finding it out, and they also on the same page, -- they know how to sneak around and do evil things, get back at somebody for being not like them, unlike them, that don't fit into the normal page of society. So I'm kind of fearful for that, but I still do want to have my voice heard.

Also a friend of mine that's on this committee -- I was in the marching band with her and went to school with her - Kathy [Staley], you know -- she kind of talked to me about it and eased my fears a little bit and told me how much it would help, you know, to have my voice heard. And so I seem to have my responsibility in the gay community to speak out. So I guess you could say that's the main reason.

Q: Well, great. Well, I appreciate you sharing your voice and sharing your story. I think it's going to make a very valuable contribution to our collection. I hope it will help people see that people are out in Wilkes.

A: All right. And also I think in Wilkes, also -- because I've had this brought up to me quite a few times -- is that they think automatically if you're gay, something wrong has had to happen to you to make you be gay, which I don't know how wrong or right it is because I've never had any

professional counseling done or anything like that, you know, that automatically if I do confide in them that I was molested as a child, oh, automatically, "That's why you're gay, because you were molested by a man." They say that studies show that a majority of the people that turn gay or whatever were molested or favored as, you know, toward the mother side of the family, whatever, you know, instead of the father doing things with them or whatever, you know. And I just don't see that as being right and so, you know, I try to speak out on that behalf, too, you know, because that's Wilkes County mentality of thinking, you know, that they've always been taught that. You know, that's why a lot of guys go hunting with their dads or things. They're forced to, and they don't want to. Even if they're not into sports, they're made to play. They're basically forced to or "You're not my child" or "You're out of the house" or whatever, you know, to condition them to not be gay. And I kind of find great pleasure in it whenever they do turn out to be gay (laughter) or secretly mess around with guys.

I used to brag about a guy that I was having sex with for a while that a lot of people here in Wilkes didn't -- couldn't believe it. "No, there's no way," you know.

"He's all about women. He's with tons of women every week, sexually even, got kids all over Wilkes County by different women, been married for or five times. There's no way."

And I'm like, "Yeah," (laughs) you know, because I've been doing it for a while with that same guy, you know, constantly. And he may be bisexual or confused or however you want to put it, you know, that he's doing it with a guy quite often. So like I said, it's just our mentality here, that we're not educated on it, it's not acceptable to be educated on it. Probably if they could, they would probably put blocks on websites all over Wilkes County, that you can't obtain them for study of gay subjects, gay websites, gay dating websites or gay-friendly websites. Probably would not be acceptable, you know, (laughs) if they could find some way of blocking that or something, you know. So, you know, I want to tell people, you know, that, hey, it's not the way it seemed or it's maybe not how your parents told you or tried to instill in you, that, you know, it's because of this certain reason that they are sick people or whatever and anything, and it's not true, you know. A lot of us come from wide ranges of stuff and everything, you know, different experiences as childhood, in our childhood and stuff and as children that, you know, is not even similar to each other. You know? Maybe this

guy did go hunting with his dad and everything and did all the sports things, and still he'd rather be with a man than with a woman. Or he may be bisexual where he likes both, you know, so it's not like they seem to think here, you know, it's because of this one reason or something. And they may never have had sex before they were even married or something or before they were in school, high school, so it wasn't because they were molested or anything like that either. But I do get that a lot, you know, saying that that's the reason you are. Even while my mom still says to this day sometimes, you know, she wonders if that's why I'm gay, because of that older man. And, you know, I have to argue with her myself that I don't believe it's true, because I'm finding guys of different races, different backgrounds, different stuff about them, you know, appealing to me. It wasn't just like the ones just like him or anything like that or anything, so it's just kind of, you know, I just had the attraction toward a guy instead of a girl. You know, I wanted to see a guy naked more than I did want to see, you know, a girl naked, the same way they were just the opposite. You know, in gym class, they were wanting to see the girls -- you know, see what they could see of the girls, panties or whatever, you know what I'm saying, and I was, like, looking forward to

the locker room where I could see the guys, (laughs) my fellow guys naked, you know, that I found it attractive or whatever, you know. So if you have any more questions, I'm -- (laughter) I'm open. I mean --

Q: I appreciate it.

A: I have no time limits, constraints today or anything. So.

Q: No, I mean, I actually -- I think I've covered the questions. I mean, you could certainly talk about anything else that you want to talk about, but...

A: Well, like I've stated, I would love to see, hopefully maybe through this study or something, more gay-friendly, more gay-oriented establishments, churches, etc. maybe be brought to Wilkes, introduced to Wilkes, more a lot of -- more gay-oriented education, you know, that more or less be forced to be taught in Wilkes schools that, you know what I said, that it's OK that, you know, you don't have to feel so bad about yourself. I think it causes also like, around here, a lot of -- what I've noticed over the years, a lot of, how do you say, angry personalities. You know, people feel like they have to be a certain way or something, you know, so it causes them to walk down the street a lot with a frown or with an angry expression constantly, 24 hours a day, causes a lot more alcohol abuse, things like that, substance abuse, because they can't be what they want to

be, can't be what they feel inside they should be.

And, which I can be very proud to say I've never had anything like -- I've never had any kind of substance abuse at all. I've always been very proud of who I am since I was 15. My mom at first had a very bad connotation in her mind that it was a very bad thing as far as she was even going to be shunned for having a son that was gay -- not that she was gay at all, just that she had given birth to somebody that turned out like that, as she would say. In fact, today, to this day, she still says she worries about me because she's highly religious as far as Christianity, and she still believes in the old ways, you know, and everything, but she'll still take up for me, though, in a heartbeat. If somebody calls me a fag or something, oh, she'll fly at them like a wet hen. But now as far as like also, you know, still at the same time that she's telling me like at home, between she and I, that, you know, you're wrong; it's not right; you shouldn't be wanting to do that and everything, but at the same time she still -- how do you say it? -- accepting, maybe, to an extent. Like, you know, if I bring my boyfriends over to, like, meet her or stuff like that, she's cordial, she's, you know, very loving toward them, you know, telling them that they're

welcome at the house, you know. I can show them affection in front of her -- you know, holding hands, you know, putting my hand around their shoulder or whatever, something like that, you know, like a boy and a girl would normally do, that she's OK with that, you know. But she's still been conditioned by Wilkes, of course, that it's wrong. So of course she has to kind of tell me sometimes that it's wrong. And she'll tell my friends that come over that she knows are openly gay that so-and-so down the street here doesn't approve of it, that it's wrong. You know, so in other words she won't be telling them outright that she feels it's wrong, but she'll still be relaying to them that it's kind of wrong in this society, in this area.

And I guess that's still conditioning me in a way, you know, to, like, keep it quiet, keep it where -- I mean, she knows that I have the gay pride sticker on my car, she knows I wear the gay pride bracelet, stuff like that, but she don't want me to, like, go marching in a pride march or anything, especially if people are going to know who I am. She tells me when my family say bad things about me, of course she comes and tells me, you know, that they're disapproving that you're doing that or that you've been doing it while you're still living at home. So I don't

know. Like I said, I guess she's kind of contributing to the mentality of the area, because she's not really outspoken about it, like she's not going to go to an anti-gay pride march, I don't think -- I don't imagine her doing anything like that -- but she still in her mind backs it up that it's wrong, that it shouldn't be done. So, like I said, it kind of tells me that maybe, you know, you're wrong. Because, of course, I still look up to her because ever since my grandmother died, she jumped in and took back the responsibility of being mother, being provider, you know, and everything.

So I did see her do without a lot so I could have the basics going through school. Of course, I didn't have everything like my friends or other people, my classmates, had. I mean, I didn't have the new, brand-new expensive car, whatever, you know what I'm saying, but I had hand-me-down jeans, that stuff, but I still had something, and I still had food at home, you know, when I got home. It may be the same meal you eat all week long, but you still didn't go hungry. So, I don't know, it's kind of like conflicting because, like I said, you know, she lets me know to an extent that she has my back as far as, like I said, feeling I'm a human being, or a mother-child

relationship, but she still says that I'm wrong for being gay.

Q: Would she have approved of you participating?

A: In this --

Q: In this?

A: -- study? She actually asked me last night. I think she asked me why I was doing it, and she wanted to know the extent of, you know, where is it going to go, who's going to know about it, are they going to know your name, all that kind of -- the basic stuff, you know, the basic fear stuff, you know. And, you know, is it going to have your full name in a book, in a novel on the bookshelf or whatever, you know, stuff like that, and for the general public to be able to read, and I had to tell her, you know, I was going to inquire about that myself, but, you know, I did. I don't know if it was -- she never did go into detail like if it was because she was fearing for our family or something or for the shame of our family name or something, you know, something like that. She never did say. But she kind of let it be known, I guess you'd say -- I don't know how you would say this -- that -- in a roundabout way, she hinted around about it, you know, (laughs) that she was kind of concerned. So -- but, I mean, she knows I'm doing this.

Even this morning, you know -- I still live at home, by the way; I was just recently unemployed, laid off. I haven't been a truck driver for two years. I'm actually wanting to go back into it. I miss it. I miss the traveling; I miss the camaraderie with other guys, basically, or whatever. I hate to say this, but I'm missing the chances to have sex and stuff out on the road and stuff. You know? The masculine guys and everything, you know, that I'm used to. Because if you do it around here, a lot of times, more often than not, it's the feminine guys that I don't really find attractive.

So even my best friend has told me before that he feels like sometimes I am biased because even within my own community, I'm against some of the ones that do different things, you know, because I'm like -- me personally, I want a man -- a man-man, a manly man, a man's man, you know; I don't want one that plays with Barbies; I don't want a cross-dresser, for instance, stuff like that. I find that very -- it's a turnoff. I'm very much against it. In fact, I give hate speeches (laughs) when I meet people, whatever, you know, that, you know, I don't want to see that, I don't want to be around that. I don't feel like

that's actually part of the gay community; I feel like that's a whole 'nother community within itself, which I know that that's wrong because of, you know, like even this organization here, "transgendered" is in there, you know, but I just feel like, you know, you are -- because that's something -- this could be a whole 'nother study for you. (laughter) I feel like stuff like that can be argued.

Because you can't argue that you were born a man, right? I mean, either you were --

Q: Well, some people would, I guess.

A: Well, I mean, but I'm saying physically. You can't argue. You can argue religion because you never met God, you know, I mean, you can't see evidence of Him right now, but you can see evidence that you were born a man, that you were meant to be a man. You know, you were born with the genitalia to be a man, not to be a woman. And so I find it kind of confusing sometimes that that's even put into the gay culture, because I feel like that's something that's totally different. You're saying you're not who you were born to be or not what you were born in that body or whatever or something. You want to be a woman or be like a woman, you want to dress like a woman and everything, but you were not born a woman. You know, that whoever or whatever decides what you're going to be born as, that's

what you were born as.

You know, so people can argue all the time, you know, you're choosing to be gay. I'm like, "No, because as far as I can remember, I had those feelings for another man." So just like I didn't choose to be a man. I came out the womb, you know, with my male genitalia. So it can be argued, you know, that you're confused in your mind that you want to be a woman, but you wasn't meant to be a woman. And that's why I find, very often, like in a society nowadays, a gay society, if you go to a club, the majority of the younger gay guys feel like they have to be overly feminine, you know, like have to be in-your-face a sissy, basically. And I read a book here recently called *Sissyphobia*, and I have to say that I do have it, that I strongly dislike it. I don't like being around it, I don't like being around guys that have to do the little, you know, snapping motion and hand on the hip and, you know, jutting the hip out to be like a woman, you know, or walking, you know, like they have to be showing the whole community that they're gay. I think there's ways around that that, you know, like do it to be like a woman, you know, that it's OK to be gay, to be a man loving another man. You know? I guess kind of like in the gladiator

days, you know, (laughter) it was two masculine men having sex. It wasn't one being -- putting on the makeup and wig and the dress. You know, kind of like, I guess like, you know, today, society, even for a lot of so-called heterosexual men find it attractive for a she-male, that it's OK to be with a she-male because the majority of them is female, you know, just a little small part down below is still man, but, you know, the majority of it's still female. And I'm like, well, they need to realize, you know, you're still with a man. (laughs) You know. It may look like a woman and everything, but you're still with a man, so why not just be with a man? You know? She doesn't have a vagina, so you can't put your part into her vagina, so you're still with a man, you know. (laughs)

So I'm just -- I don't know if it's part of my conditioning here or whatever, but that -- I just feel like that's wrong, basically, that -- and I hate to judge people because I hate to be judged, but it's just the way I've always felt, especially since I got out into the society and started going to the gay bars when I was, like, 18, you know. Me and my best friend found clubs not too far away from here that would allow you to come in at 18. You know, you couldn't drink or anything, but you could still come in

to be part of the gay club scene. And so since I started seeing that, I started going there and seeing the little catty guys, you know, that wanted to be overly in-your-face feminine. Just kind of being totally, 180 degrees against it, you know, just totally not even wanting to be a part of it, be around it. That's, I guess, part of the reasons why I don't go to the clubs a lot. I'm not part of the club scene. I mean, I love to dance; I love to be around people with my own likes, stuff, you know, with the gay society, more or less, but I just don't like being around those people that have to be in the little cliques and the little, like I said, the overly effeminate persuasion.

So, you know, maybe I'm wrong for that, but I just -- (laughs) because it's like I'm being, how do you say, racist within my own race, so I'm kind of confused about that myself, actually, and I would like to see about, you know, getting a study done about that or something like that, why somebody would think that way, you know. Because I know how it is to be ostracized, I know how it is to be judged on just something that I prefer, but still, yeah, I'm going to turn around and ostracize them and judge them on something they prefer. So it's like I'm wrong within my own community.

Q: So it causes a little tension for you.

A: It sure does, because even my best friend, because he has a lot of drag queen friends, and he likes to go to the drag shows, and I don't. Kathy, for instance, I emailed her not too long ago about something about a drag show benefit in Boone, and I told her I didn't want to be a part of it. I didn't find it amusing; I don't find it fun to be around it; I don't want to be around it. You know, it goes back to that -- I guess mainly that thing about being around women, you know what I'm saying? I don't hang out with women, especially not in a big group, you know what I'm saying? Maybe might hang around one and go, like, a fun day of shopping or something or something like that or talk to them almost every night on the phone or something as a friend, but as far as, like going clubbing with them or getting around a big gang of them, I don't do, because it's not in my interest. There's nothing there for me. I mean, from just mine and several of my friends' perceptions is that if a guy is in that kind of atmosphere, a heterosexual guy or someone that's geared more toward women, he's going to be all about them and doing everything he can to talk them out of their panties as we call it or whatever, you know what I'm saying, or to get in their panties. So that frustrates us. And so, like, why do we want to be around

that, you know what I'm saying? So in other words, if it's all females, what do we got in that? Nothing. (laughter) Even if a couple guys might come by or something, still, they won't be in our interest because they're going to be all about wanting those girls or getting to those girls or whatever.

And I can kind of familiarize myself with that because I'm the same way with a guy, you know. If a guy walks by and gives me even a second glance, you know, I'll be like chasing after him, you know, like see where I can go with that. The same way we see with guys, that even if they're bisexual, they're still mainly been trained in their mind that they should be more about the woman. So we say it as like a dog sniffing somebody in heat in the air. They can sense when a girl walks by, you know, it's like, they're like (sniffs) sniffing in the air, you know (laughs) and they're, like, chasing it down, and that frustrates us because, like I said, it has nothing for us at all. And so I just don't have anything to do with the women as far as the majority of them or want to be around a guy that wants to be a woman or being like a woman. Because like I tell a lot of people I see being on websites and stuff, because I'm happy being a guy loving a guy. You know, I don't want

to be a woman, I don't want to dress like a woman, things like that. I'm happy being a full-blown man loving a full-blown man.

Q: Well, I think that sort of wraps it up (laughter) and tell me sort of -- that sort of sums it all up. (laughter)

A: Yeah, it does. I mean, like I said, maybe I'm wrong for that but I can't help it. You know, I've always been around guys growing up that were, you know -- they didn't put on makeup or some of that kind of stuff, so I've always been attracted to -- especially, I guess, from this area -- that goes back to this area again. You know, what you see mostly around here is guys with camouflage hats on, camouflage pants on, you know, going hunting in big four-by-four trucks -- not even the little convertible Mercedes Benz that wears the rings on every finger and jewelry and -- so, in other words, the effeminate guy. You're not around that much around here. You know, so you'll be raised up to be attractive more to the being a masculine man that is fine being a man. And if he is on the down-low and goes, has sex with another man, that's fine. You know? So, like I said, maybe it's conditioning, as they say, you know, because it's not what you're around mostly, most of the time. So a lot of times, I mean, like you mentioned earlier, the bear scene, I'm into the bear scene because

those are mostly, I mean, masculine men and they're not going to be wanting to put on dresses and you know, wigs and makeup. So they're going to be more brawny men, you know, that stuff, so I'm actually into that. I actually prefer that. And I've also been taught by the community that it could be because of the lack of masculine role model in my life as a child.

You know, the lady I was telling you about earlier that lives in Boone that has been like my second mom all my life, she blames it on the guys that my mother did choose to live with. They were bad role models. They, you know, made me have a bad image of women because of the way they treated women. You know, so she thinks that's part of the reason why I'm gay. Of course, she don't realize also that even before she started living with these men and everything, like when I was still living with my grandmother, which I was eight years old, I was already having urges or wants to see a naked man or be around a naked man or, you know, or pursue the guys on the playground or whatever, you know, instead of the girls. So like I said, I don't know, if, like I said, conditioning or, how do you say, the circumstance that I was put in positions like that. If anything, the way she puts it, I

would see that I would hate men because the way they treated us, you know, physically abused us and stuff when they would get drunk and everything. So I don't see that either. So that's -- there again, it's her, the way she's been conditioned or taught by the Christian society and everything that that's the reasons we are who we are or why we choose to do what we do, and that they're (inaudible) a man because that stuff makes sense, you know. With a bad man in your life, you would hate men, not want to be with one, not want to love one or be coupled with one. You know? So. I mean, that's another thing, you know, that this could bring out in the study, you know, that not all of us were physically abused, not all of us have a bad image of men, not all of us have bad men in our lives. You know, so hopefully that would help. (laughs)

Q: A lot of the stereotypes.

A: Yeah, a lot of stereotypes. That is a stereotype, too, is that we all want to be women, you know, and that's why I emphasize when I meet somebody or going to meet -- you know, very first potential of getting to know someone, I let them know first thing, you know, I don't want to be a woman, I don't want to dress like a woman, don't want to be like a guy that does dress like a woman or want to be a woman. You know? I want to be with -- if you're going to

be with me, I want you to be happy being a man loving a man, you know.

And so there again, especially in this society these days, that cuts down on my number even less, the people that I can meet, because a lot of them do want to cross-dress. In fact, there's quite a few here in Wilkes County that -- on these different gay websites that let you know that that's what they're into, is cross-dressing and stuff. And I say I don't want no part of it. You know, it doesn't do a thing for me. It turns me off more than it turns me on. It kind of disgusts me, I guess you could say. (laughs) And I hate to be like that, you know, judging other people, but it just makes me feel like they're wrong because I'm like, you know, you shouldn't be like that. If you were born to be a man, be a man. You can argue the point about being gay and loving another man, but you can't argue the point that you were born to be a man. (laughs) You know? Because you've got the genitalia as proof positive. You can't argue with that, you know what I'm saying? (laughs)

Q: I don't know.

A: Right? (laughs) So -- but I think that would help, this study would help.

Q: I hope it will. Thank you. (laughter) All right, I think

we should wrap up there.

A: OK.

Q: We have talked for -- oh my gosh -- more than 90 minutes.

(laughter) All right, let's stop there.

END OF FILE