

Lindsay Havilland

Q: This is Kathy Staley. Today is March 10th, 2010 and I'm with...

A: I just said Lindsay Havilland [pseudonym].

Q: Lindsay Havel.

A: Havilland, yeah.

Q: Could you tell me your age, where you were born, and where you're living now?

A: My age is 51. I live in Fairview, North Carolina and I was born in Virginia, Minnesota, a small mining town up north.

Q: Could you talk about how you first learned about homosexuality and transexuality, which is totally different?

A: I understand. I first, it's an interesting question because I worked as a psychotherapist for many years and most gay and lesbian people, it's almost like a form of schizophrenia in a sense that when I recall my feelings, awareness, discoveries, after coming out versus before are two different universes. Before I came out, which was in 1981, I was clueless consciously, above ground. In hindsight I could trace back to the age of seven or eight that I was different. That was my first recollection. I did not want to play Spin the Bottle. I was not interested in things other peers were interested in. My best friends

probably all turned out to be lesbians. They were tomboys in the community. Grew up in suburban Maryland, in Silver Spring, Maryland. Ordinary middle class suburban community. Mixed, very interracial, intercultural, by and large, in the Washington DC suburbs. So I knew that there was something different. I knew, for example, my older brother had *Playboy* and blah, blah, blah and all of these things and yet the ones I was interested in were nudist magazines.

I could never have discerned this at the time. I wasn't capable. Because I grew up in a somewhat sex phobic Italian -- my parents were wonderful people but very uncomfortable dealing with sex. So sex was already wrong. The idea of sex with a man would have been on the moon for me, it was so off limits. And growing up, as most of us have in this culture, faggot, blah, blah, blah was a derogatory term. I was already a sissy. I didn't like sports. I was intimidated by school and so forth. But I knew that I was different and it wasn't until I got in psychoanalysis -- I tried to commit suicide when I was 18 using drugs and alcohol and a big part of that was I could not deal with my sexuality. So I took a handful of barbiturates and a bottle of champagne on, it was actually my 19th birthday. I got into intensive psychoanalysis and within 15 minutes, it was a psychiatrist that had worked

with the family years prior with my brother's drug problem, I will never forget this because that was 1977 and he said, "I wonder how much of this has to do with homosexuality." And I froze. I did not, could not utter one word for a half an hour. I was so utterly terrified. I had not mentioned anything about sex. He was obviously a very good psychiatrist. Nobody had ever named that. And yet I will never forget it, it was a profound experience because I was so terrified, because he named what I could not name in myself.

And the unfortunate thing, he was open, I would say even then, he was a Jewish psychiatrist, was gay friendly perhaps, but did do a disservice in one regard which he implied that there was choice involved. And because I had had no experience at all that if I pursued down this path I would most likely choose. Well, who in the hell would choose this path when it's a potential nightmare? So when I look back at that on one level he saved my life, providing a safe sanctuary place to be, and as I developed and I had to, over time, it was until I came out and discontinued therapy which was very useful in many regards but in that one regard it was not. When I came out it was fascinating because then it was like connect the dots. I remembered I was always interested in -- I was a swimmer as

a child and adolescent -- I spent inordinate amounts of time in the men's shower. My friends were trying to peep through at the women's showers. I never did that. I can remember the men I was attracted to in the showers. I can remember the magazines from my brother of nudist colonies. I can remember having fantasies but my internalized homophobia was so extreme that as a child the only way I was safe was to fantasize about that person and a woman because I couldn't be in the picture. And I didn't realize at the time that that was, and it's understandable but it was not normal in the sense, but it showed the degree to which we're not allowed to be who we are.

But when I came out and took those risks, my family was enormously supportive, I could connect back and realize I remember vividly from the time, seven, eight, nine years old. And it wasn't just that I was different. There was association with it that just simply was not allowed to be integrated in my psyche at that time. And that's why I use that term, it's like a split personality. I don't know about -- I think less so with the current generation but certainly for me it was very split and very hostile and racked with fear. I may have gotten off track on the question. And it was also interesting that my parents -- I came out because I wrote a letter naively to the *Washington*

Post and the *Montgomery County Journal*. It was an ultra right wing group referendum on the Maryland legislature against gays and lesbians and I was outraged by the language. So I wrote a letter. I was working at the Smithsonian at the time and I didn't realize, I was naïve in the sense that I didn't realize that they would publish my last name and it was published in the local rag in the Bethesda community as well as the *Washington Post*. And somebody called my attention to that and I freaked out because it was like 'I don't want my folks to find out this way.'

So I immediately set up an appointment to meet with them and we sat down and I said, "There's something I have important to tell you, that I'm gay." And they were incredibly supportive and loving. And my father said, or my mother, I can't remember which, I think it was father said, "We were reasonably sure from the time you were 16." And I said, "I wish you would have told me because you could have saved a lot of therapy bills." I mean we were kidding but the fact -- because they said, "You didn't date in high school." I never went to the prom, I never had a single, I think I had one date, and then in college I had best friends but gave them complexes because I'd date them for a year and a half and never kiss them, never do

anything sexually. But I loved them. I just thought I was shy. And I would enroll in a shyness clinic to kind of overcome, I thought I was painfully shy. I didn't know. You know, I had had one experience and that was shame based, at 16. You know, hitchhiking and a man put his hand on my leg and I was like excited and terrified. And he asked if he was bothering me and I said no but my god, the amount of guilt, coupled with liking it, was huge at that time. Because I just, I didn't know. I was very, very uncomfortable becoming integrated into my sexuality. But I do trace it way back and I'm convinced that we are born this way. I do believe that if we lived in a different culture there would be far more variations along the Kinsey spectrum of people experimenting and falling somewhere in that spectrum. But for myself I have no doubt that I was born this way and the task in life for me, or the challenge, was simply to accept that, and celebrate that which, is a long process.

Q: This was going on during the '70s.

A: That's right.

Q: So there was a lot of changes going on with the sexual revolution continuing.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yet there was still a conservative bent to --

A: Very much so and I remember, I do remember in junior high, and I can remember it, I think it was 314 point something in the library codes,¹ trying to get books that had anything to do with homosexuality. And it was a very small section. And not a very, what's the word? Not a very positive selection of what was available at that time. And I remember one of the first things I read was an autobiography of Tennessee Williams and I was fascinated by it. Can't remember the title. It was the first book I read about an openly gay man and I couldn't put it down because I was so intrigued by it. But I remember that. And skulking. You know, making sure nobody was noticing, pulling out a book that had nothing to do with it as camouflage. I look at it and I can laugh now but at the time it was painful. Because where do you get information? I did not know a single gay person, consciously. Television certainly had no gay people in it. I knew nobody in the news other than maybe Liberace or something on an extreme spectrum. So my idea of what a gay person was wasn't like me. I didn't fit that, quote, stereotype that I had adopted. I think it was maybe Liberace and I can't remember who else, but other than Tennessee Williams that was it. How do you find out? I certainly didn't have

¹ The Dewey Decimal number for homosexuality is 306.

gay friendships or any explorations. Many people have but I didn't. Other than private like, you know.

Q: And then a few years after you came out it sounds like you moved to a rural area in Appalachian Virginia?

A: Well, yes and no. A few years after I came out, and I have to say that I developed a serious problem with drug and alcohol addiction and I am convinced that a major part of that was it was the only way I could allow any part of this to come out. So when I got sober, went through treatment in 1981, initially entered AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] in '80 mostly for marijuana and hashish addiction and alcohol, when I became sober I became sober in the larger sense of conscious. And I recognized I could not stay sober -- my life was on the line. My addiction had really taken me downhill fast, very fast, even while I was in therapy. It was almost counterproductive to be overdosing and then showing up for a therapy appointment in the same day. And I knew that I could not stay if I didn't deal with my sexuality. And yet when I went into treatment in 1981 my roommate was a big burly machinist who confided and seemed very friendly and said that his favorite pastime was beating the shit out of faggots. Well, you know, needless to say I just shut up. But intuitively I knew. I

did first come out to the counselor and she was surprised but welcoming and grateful.

And it was through gay and lesbian AA that I learned to -- and I was extremely paranoid and uncomfortable about showing up -- that I was able to really learn to love myself, become tolerant, break apart my own internal prejudices, and begin to form actual relationships where I fell in love with somebody. It did not last long because he had a long distance partner but that broke my heart open to the recognition that this was good. There were no drugs or alcohol involved. This was something wonderful and a gift and I needed to deal with that more fully. So I did. And then in time after a year long distance relationship I met a partner that I was with for 13 years and we built a home in Rappahannock County in Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley, initially just as a weekend place, our home was in Washington DC and our professions, but I was in love with the mountains. I always have been. West Virginia was my soul home growing up, backpacking, camping, every minute I could get out there I did and I always wanted to live in a mountain community.

So my partner was more wedded to the DC area and I chose to create a business and open up a private counseling practice there because I wanted to live there. And

ultimately I was able to pull it off five days a week and two marathon days in DC. So I retained DC connections but over time my whole, I would say really starting in, really around 1990 was when I opened a practice out there and then made that my home and fell in love with the community, which was unusual. Rappahannock has 8,000 people. It is an oasis surrounded by a sea of development. There's 25 acre zoning. There is a disproportionate number of artists. A lot of hippies had come during the '60s, visionaries, free thinkers, and super conservative. Never voted once Democratic in their entire history except Jimmy Carter maybe. And then Obama, it still was not a majority. So I was aware that there was a dichotomy there, that that community was quite worldly. I mean the town I lived in officially had 250 people. I lived on a mountain with land but our neighbors were the main third generation farmers and businessmen and I knew that they knew. They were smart people. They knew that we were gay. They never talked about it. I didn't divulge and yet I ran programs for a cancer support group and things and was respected in the community. And I was open only with people that I knew and trusted. My philosophy was I am comfortable with who I am but I'm smart enough to know that where I am living, you know, that there were ramifications and folks who ran the

general store were good decent people and they responded to good decent people and I felt I could be a role model that way. But I was very open with anybody that mattered in my life.

Q: Did you know anyone who was what we would consider to be out through the general population?

A: In that community?

Q: And you were there for 20 years, from 1990?

A: Let's say 1990, realistically 15 years. I mean I was involved with the community from 1984 to 2006 when we moved to Washington State. I knew one person but he was a weekender who was rather flamboyant and open, an interior designer, in the village of Little Washington. But he was only there two days a week. But he caught flak, you know, bringing a gay social group out there in his neighbor county, who came in. I mean this is a village with a world famous inn next to the house he was living in and that was so incestuous in that community that there's no such thing as privacy. Now, people knew that I was gay and my clients, I was open with my clients and that was part of that community. So on one level I was open but most people, it was understood. There was a sophisticated enough community and very strong arts community that welcomed, so you could be openly gay there. But openly gay, yes, I guess the only

other ones were the innkeepers. It was one of the three best restaurants in the world and they were openly gay and it was an uneasy tolerance. I mean they were denied business loans. It would never be admitted publicly that it was because of their sexuality but when you're running a multimillion dollar inn or a restaurant that is world renowned, received every award possible, and operates three quarters of the county tax base for that town, provides that income, and they want to expand and they ask for loans, for a \$1 million loan when they already have the clientele booking reservations eight months in advance, and they're turned down repeatedly? Because it was well known that they were gay and it was an uneasy tolerance. Not just of sexuality but because they represented outsiders coming into this mountain community and reworking it.

And I would fall into that category as well. I didn't like everything that they did because they had a way of, an intention of kind of reworking that whole village in their own image. Not as gay but you know, in a very ultra sophisticated, elitist manner and it didn't fly well with a lot of locals and I had a lot of sympathy that way. But I think they were the only ones that I would say were openly, and that wasn't by choice. It was because it became known and you cannot operate a business of that magnitude and

stature in that little community and not know it. So, but most people knew. Most people were closeted, I think, or were open selectively. I'm trying to think. I don't think, one, the physical reality, there weren't that many gay and lesbian people in that county, just proportionately. With 8,000 in the whole county.

Q: Did people who were there, were there social groups that were forming informally?

A: Nothing on a community or public basis. There were no gay and lesbian organizations; they were no higher education facilities. There was a high school. There might have been something in the high school later in that time period. I don't know. But there were informal groups and mixings. But generally it was a pretty integrated community and that actually fit my lifestyle. One of the reasons I resisted coming out was quite frankly the one time I lived downtown in DC, miles from Dupont Circle, a gay and lesbian district, I was really turned off by the gay ghetto. I found it offensive to be around people that would only associate with women or men. Then you have further splits in that community. We don't like lesbians, I thought it was a bunch of BS [bull shit]. Or we only associate with gay people, I thought how narrow minded and limited. I can understand it but I will not support it. I

wanted an integrated life that is open, fully integrated. And that's what I'd chosen in the Shenandoah Valley. And most people there were of that same ilk, meaning they wanted to be accepted as they were, and we were. Because people loved us exactly for who we were and knew we were gay and we were open about it, but they were also respectful of confidentiality, I think, just recognizing that there were risks in a rural mountain community.

Q: Did any negative events occur that reinforced people's way of life of being more cautious?

A: Nothing that I recall publicly there, although a friend of mine who was a retired psychiatrist, he was in the mountain communities of Maryland that had 'fag' written on his door. And it scared him because he was in an isolated mountain community and realized he was quite vulnerable there and chose to move after about a year because it just made him uncomfortable. It was in West Virginia actually, West Virginia-Maryland border. In Rappahannock, nothing in particular other than the domination of people like Oliver North and right wing politicians and some of the Baptist ministers who occasionally there'd be a letter to the editor in the little rag, *Rappahannock News*. But there were no incidents that I was aware of in the time period I was there. You

know, no hate crimes per se, at least not to public knowledge. Who knows?

Q: Then you moved to Washington State and then came to Asheville?

A: To Asheville. We spent two years in Washington State, in rural Washington near Mount Ranier. We both love nature and the outdoors and it was a revolutionary step for both of us to completely break ties other than close friendships and family and move out there. We were drawn there. It was a very good experience. We were painfully isolated. We underestimated. And there was more of a rural redneck community by and large. We had very few friends. Most of our friends were within an hour or two from us. We were pretty outgoing, easy to meet, cultivate strong community easily and readily, and yet it didn't happen there. And that was one of the main reasons we left was that -- that and climate. I hated nine months of rain. I thought I could be above it but I really couldn't. It was depressing. But the biggest motivating factor was recognizing and I probably more than my partner, am deeply rooted in community and to not have that is a detriment.

And we had one incident out there that prompted -- we had no neighbors. We were on eight acres. We had mountain lion, bear. Remote land. Not a single close by neighbor

that you could see. And Marvin was out in the garden and our gardens were in the front yard and the back yard and some beat up pickup truck stopped and screamed 'faggot,' or 'effing faggot.' And it unsettled me more than him because again, I'd had more experience being out of the closet and recognizing because we were rural, nobody -- you know, there was a foundation across from us but some rather seedy characters not far away. If we don't have friends here how do they know that other than putting two and two together that they always see two men working out in the garden? Because I do outdoor sculpture and gardens are a big passion. So how could that have come about other than -- you know, and there was a creepy crystal meth problem in that county in this rural area and we inadvertently hired somebody to do some yard work one time when we needed help when I was ill. That was the only source I could even link it to, because we fired him once we realized he was a thief and other stuff.

So you just don't know. But it did upset me because I'm aware enough in particular rural communities of a greater level of vulnerability. It wasn't the Blue Ridge but it was a mountain community and not nearly as progressive. Not like Seattle or other places, or Olympia. So we moved here because I truly missed -- we were looking

Asheville. We hadn't even moved here yet. He had like a brown burlap skirt on and a big beard. The beard was a giveaway. And he's chatting away, "Hey, Joe, how are you?" Local people walking by knew him and it was like perfectly fine, he could wear a burlap skirt in public. And we just encountered things, a welcoming here, that was utterly delicious and transformative.

We met a couple who live in a rural community outside of Asheville. We asked them directions and they obviously recognized we were gay. We didn't say it but they implied and they said, "You know, my wife and I grew up here in Asheville. Now I work in a factory 40 minutes outside of here and a lot of people I work with don't like Asheville and they think 'I'll never go there with all those crazies and freaks and all of that.'" And I said, "Good, stay home, we don't want your kind here." He said, "We like Asheville the way it is." And he said, "You two are going to find it very welcoming here and I think you're going to fit right in and really like this community and welcome back home to the Blue Ridge." And what he was really saying was that he and his wife knew that we were gay and that we would be very at home here and wanted to welcome us here. And that really touched our heart. This was a total stranger just asking simple directions, we were lost. But

it was indicative of what we found. I have never known anywhere else, including Washington, DC, a gay friendly major metropolitan area, doesn't hold a candle to what I think actually exists here. It's a very unique experience.

Q: Could you describe more what's unique about Asheville?

A: I think Asheville, like Rappahannock, kind of attracted, Rappahannock, Virginia attracted a micro community, meaning size, of artists, free thinkers, interesting people that chose to be in the mountains and many who grew up there and there was a wonderful melding. And I've found that here. People seem to have come from all over. In terms of gay and lesbian experience I've just been awestruck. We go to a monthly dinner group, Gorgeous. It has roughly several hundred members, Lake Lure, further reach mountain communities, but it has been active for so many decades. Once a month social group and pot luck dinner. There's a gay men's supper club that has been meeting for years that has four or 500 members. Churches here, by and large the majority are gay friendly and welcoming and they advertise that. Not all. I would be lying if -- but there's a huge disproportionate, even to major metropolitan areas almost, of supportive welcoming for diversity here. And not just gay and lesbian but artists.

An example is a man we met who's Native American, always wears a carnation in his hair, and it touched me, in public. I said, "We just love you." And he's a very wise, deeply spiritual man. And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because you're so you and where we came from you'd be shot" if he did that. And it's true. And he can walk down Asheville with a carnation and nobody's going to blink. If they do it doesn't matter because most people like it. They seem to value diversity, difference, creativity, and without question this is the most tolerant community I have ever been in. We don't blink and we're very open here and not just with people of kindred spirit and background and so forth. A stone mason down the road in his 70s has become a friend, and his wife, and they know. Now, we're a little more circumspect but clearly people are just welcoming. It's a little bit different out in Fairview and we're aware.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about how your neighbors reacted at first?

A: They were thrilled actually but our neighbors, again this is typical Asheville, our neighbors didn't like the people that were living in the house, they were thrilled that a gay couple were moving in. But they were from Long Island and they had an integrated community and her brother

was gay so she was delighted. They had gay friends and they like that and felt we'd be really good neighbors. And our other neighbors ironically are here part time, meaning the two neighbors that are right there. We have mutual friends and they're moving here from the Washington DC area but she knows Rappahannock and one of my friends there, I mean living right next door. Other neighbors, there's a native from Asheville and his wife from LA [Los Angeles], they're fine and open. Those are the only immediate neighbors. And then there are trailers and others and [care all?] who I'm friendly with and sort of. We don't socialize per se, kind of reclusive mountain folk, but respectful. And doesn't seem to be an issue.

Again, but we do shift gears a little bit, meaning we don't hide but we don't advertise. I'm not going to put a big gay banner out at the entryway. Because Fairview is different politically. The last election, you could watch it, get out of Asheville, get onto our road, and virtually every single placard was for McCain and it got more and more as you got, the further out you got the more you're in rural America and it's a reality. But even there I found people are more open. And I looked at that and I think back to the experience, I met a man from a Radical Faerie community in Short Mountain, Tennessee at a men's symposium

at Twin Acres commune in 1985 or six. Now, they would push the bubble beyond belief. 100 men dressing in frilly skirts and mascara and makeup and wands and shrines with Marilyn Monroe and Buddha and Faery Festivals seven days a week and God knows what else goes on. It's still in operation today. And I remember the fellow I met there even pushed my buttons because he was parking people and his name was Stevie, I think, and he had four foot long blond hair, half shaved head, rings through his nipples and wearing a see-through lavender skirt.

And at first, I like to think I'm pretty open, liberal, lived in [Cummingsville?] but I was kind of turned off and I hope this is just not a freak show gathering, and it was not. It had a wide mix. Fathers, heterosexuals, gays, trans, everything. I fell in love with him and so did my partner. And he did a presentation on the Sanctuary² and one of the questions was "So how do you get along? You live in a rural Tennessee mountain community in Appalachia and you seem to have processions and festivals and by anybody's standards you are off the chart outrageous, and wonderfully so, but how do you all get along with the local people?" And he said, "Just fine." He said, "What I have

² Radical Faeries have multiple Sanctuaries, rural land or urban buildings where Faeries live communally throughout the United States and abroad. One was located in southwestern North Carolina during the 1980s and another in Short Mountain, Tennessee.

discovered is mountain community are fiercely independent people and there's a long history going back to immigration here and there's a tradition here in the Blue Ridge and in the mountains, if you do your thing and I'll do mine but leave me alone." And he said, "Now, we don't wear our dresses, skirts, and outrageous costumes to town. We wear blue jeans and shirts like everybody else. But believe me, we are known in this community and we seem to get along fine."

And I have found a similar thing, that came back to me many years later here, that there is a lot of wisdom in what he said. That there is a long history of people, culturally, immigrants, coming here for freedom, hundreds of years, and creating pocket communities. And they have also experienced a lot of prejudice from the outside world of hillbillies, Snuffy Smith, fill in the blank, know what that's like, and kind of a respectful distance. And I think there's something really true about that. On that level there is more maybe room than what people think of in major metropolitan areas which is often a big double edge. You know, I worked for the most liberal Episcopal Church, big huge church in the Washington DC area, but there were two tiers. On the outside it was very liberal. When there's two other staff members, pastoral counselors, both

married women, their interview with the board was five minutes cookie cutter because they were approved by the rector and the executive director of the center, and I come in because I'm openly gay and open about being in recovery, my interview is two and a half hours with very personal questions by the entire board. Who I found out some later were gay. And I just answered them all but I was outraged.

I was really, really angry and taken back, because I was told it would be five minutes. And they're asking questions like, "This is a very large parish and a very diverse parish, are you going to be comfortable working with heterosexual men and women?" I was furious and adamant. I said, "Excuse me, 80% of my practice is heterosexual, how dare you? Who do you think you are? I'm comfortable working with people, period." And ultimately I was angry but ultimately telling the truth and being open was good but what I'm saying is in some ways this area is more liberal than DC. Which sounds funny to some people but it is because it's more consistent. And there is a bit of a melting pot here. I mean a woman at the YMCA talked about being shunned here 35 years ago, and they live an hour outside of here in the mountains, because they had two strikes against them. They were from upstate New York, they were Yankees, and they were Catholic. They said,

"Nobody would talk to us. We were shunned." Marvin said, "It's a good thing you weren't gay." She said, "That would have been a third big strike." But she said things have changed because she said, "I was in Las Vegas with my husband and we couldn't believe at the airport there's a full size panel that says, 'Asheville loves gay people' at the airport in Las Vegas." She said, "So times have changed." And I was struck by that. But I thought, you know, this is a good community to live in.

Q: Have you participated in any of these various organizations?

A: Yeah, we're regular members of the Gorgeous gathering. We've been a member of the Lambda group of AA and Al-Anon, integrated that into our community. Met a lot of different people through there. Again, you see this in the churches. All Soul's Episcopal Church, the cathedral, has a gay and lesbian social group. We've only attended on rare occasion because we had a conflict with the book group. Our book group is mixed, predominantly heterosexual but wide open and loving the diversity and wanting that. Although for [inaudible] our plumber and electrician is a champion of gay rights and she's heterosexual and always linking people up. I haven't gone to the gay and lesbian book club. Again, because I'm not interested solely in gay topics.

Really I'm not. I find that limiting. Same thing in the recovering community. There are some people who only want to associate with people in recovery. So be it. I understand the motivations but I want diversity.

So we've just explored through a couple of the social groups and have been to a couple of the churches which were very welcoming. Very, very welcoming. Unity, Jubilee, Grace Episcopal church, the other Episcopal Church. Even we went to Asheville storytelling thing at the Congregationalist church, a benefit for the homeless. Again, it was so integrated and welcoming. You can really just be yourself. That's been really the most freeing thing is that you can be yourself in this town easily. And if you don't it's really by choice. It's not out of necessity in my book. In most cases.

Q: There are a couple of things that people have been speculating on or talking about, like how is the life of an openly LGBT Appalachian person similar or different from the mainstream concepts of outness. And you were bringing that out with your description of living in Blue Ridge Virginia. Do you find that the mainstream idea, the outness in Asheville, is the predominant way? Or are there large pockets of people who are out only to their friends and not to co-workers, people in their faith communities?

A: I have two answers for that. It's an interesting question. I think in Asheville itself, probably mirrors an easy open lifestyle that's integrated and OK, including in the schools and so forth. I think, and it was pointed out, a realtor who's not gay, is a lovely person we're dear friends with, she grew up here, she's been in practice, did tell us, "Just do be mindful, there are wonderful pocket communities all through but I really love you two so I want you to be happy here but do be mindful that the further you get out of Asheville the dynamics will change. Not just in terms of possible prejudice about being gay but in other regards as well." And I think that that is true. Although even Waynesville, Burnsville, they're all mountain communities an hour from here, you've got by and large more openness but I understand what they're saying, that as it gets more rural the dynamics change.

And I think that like the social group we're part of focuses less on Asheville, more on Black Mountain as far as Rutherfordton, blah, blah, blah. It's pretty easy on the whole but I think that the further you get up into the mountains and the more isolated you become the more people, I think, become more self-conscious and maybe choose a little bit differently as opposed to when they're in Asheville. Or if they're in that group I think there is

more, what's the word? It's not discern. Discernment perhaps of where it's safe and not. So I think that it depends where you live. Asheville is very, very different. And it's perceived that way by the surrounding mountain communities, both for better and for worse. You know, it really is perceived that way.

Q: Have you talked to locals who have given their impressions of the differences with Asheville?

A: Yeah, like the gentleman I talked about who lived an hour outside of here, the perception in the factory is Asheville is filled with liberal freaks and crazies and parades and festivals and all of that. Which it is, which is partly why we like it, but to them that statement would not be dissimilar from the son of the general store that ran the gas station, Bubby, who I was friends with, because I commuted into DC two days a week and he actually cared about me. He goes, "Why are you going into that hellhole?" He said, "You couldn't pay me to go near that city." Now, partly what he meant was he didn't want to go to a city that's nicknamed Chocolate City because it's predominantly black but it went way beyond that. There was a deep distrust and bias of the city. And also of a lot of city people coming out into that community. And I understood and I actually empathize a lot. People come out to the

country without really knowing it and they want to rework it in their own urban image and they want all the conveniences of the city and they don't give a damn if they put out a business, the fact that three of the seven multigeneration apple farmers and peach farmers have gone under and they don't recognize they've just lost a major part of the soul of what drew them there because they don't understand that.

And they have an arrogance about, and I've seen that here too, of I have some biases even though most of my family is from New York but I have friends from New York making references to hillbilly this and that. I mean we all do that to some degree but there it cuts more deep of a bias, and you see it in reverse too. We didn't get this in Virginia as much, Yankee. Comes up a fair amount, I mean it's a joke but it is a reality here. But that term has been used. We really love you even though you're Yankees. I mean that's new to me. Virginia I guess was, Virginia was like the heart and core of the Civil War but that does operate here. So I'm not sure, I may have gotten off track on the question about speaking to people outside the community about Asheville. Was that correct?

Q: I was curious what communities you envision or know firsthand to be more conservative.

A: Hendersonville would be one. And I didn't see that right off the bat till the election. And our friend and plumber and electrician canvassed door to door in a lot of areas outside of Asheville and had doors slammed in her face. Now this was regarding not sexuality but regarding [Barack] Obama but there are parallels. And she said definite parallels in terms of the sexuality. Yet she was courageous and she's from Atlanta. Or not Atlanta but somewhere in Georgia and fiercely devoted to civil rights. But Hendersonville. And little things like I was at the Y and sitting waiting for my partner and a kind of elegant, probably more wealthy older woman from Hendersonville was here for a class and we were talking, because I talk to everybody, and she was going on sort of like an older debutante in my book, "Oh I wish you all would come to the Zumba class. I love it, dancing. I try and get my husband to come but you know, they're afraid sometimes because of the gays." You know, and I just laugh. And it's just that energy that there might be gay men in the dance class or a gay teacher. And I just smiled. And she said, "Where did you get that purple jacket? I want one for my husband." And I helped her try and find a source for it but it was like really bright. I like bright colors, as you can tell, especially in winter, trying to attract spring.

But Hendersonville I've found that. But even though I've found people very openly. We went to the screening of "For the Bible Tells Me So" and it was an extremely important film. I also see even people -- I mentor a younger man, African-American, who comes from the Raleigh area and he's really living in two worlds because coming from an African-American Baptist family he's not out to his family and here he can be himself, but it's a struggle and tension between the two worlds. So I think that Hendersonville is an area I've noticed and then as you get further into the Tennessee area I've found, again, it was pointed out. A hotel clerk said she was extremely afraid and would not put an Obama placard out on her lawn because she's a single mother and was afraid of violence. If I hear that you know that's going to transfer amongst other minorities or people that are different. So I'm just aware.

But Hendersonville is a more conservative Republican area on the whole and yet it's also open. I mean there's still a mix. I don't know, Black Mountain seems pretty open on the whole. The little bit I've known of Burnsville, same thing again. What seems unique here is so many of these mountain towns and villages have very strongly developed artist communities. Where there are artist communities there is going to be acceptance and openness.

But we don't know a lot of the communities well enough to say for sure how we would feel. You get a vibe. You go to a festival. We went to a festival in Waynesville. We had a friend from out of town and she was kind of put off because it seemed excessively religious right, and few organizations and so forth. I found it friendly on the whole but she was right in her assessment. At least what was out on the streets, you know.

Q: One of the other questions we've been wondering about is how has the influx of people who are more open-minded about sexuality and presentation of gender as well as gender identity has affected the native people? Like what you were talking about with the people in Virginia wiping out the apple farms. The influx of people from the outside could also be affecting the belief structures of the youth and then other people that are being influenced as well.

A: I think there's no question that I've experienced less of that tension and that dynamic here but I know it is there. I've heard that in terms of, because there seems to be a large influx. We were struck -- was it here? No, we had kind of this in rural Washington. "Oh, you're from Virginia, that's OK, if you were from California you'd be in trouble." Californians were really looked down upon because of this gargantuan influx were getting out of there

and moving into Oregon and Washington. Here I've heard that regarding New Yorkers in particular. They're Yankees from New York, of course they're going to act like arrogant SOB's and stuff like that. And knowing New York, they're partially right, because there is arrogance sometimes. Yet it's that 'us and them' mentality.

And I know that with neighbors we're able to lead a very integrated easy life because we meet people where they are and you either like them, they either like you or they don't, but by and large we relate to a wide variety of people so that we're accepted. And we grow a lot of vegetables and we donate to the small little mini farm and we're genuinely interested in people. So we're accepted well but we do see like natives down the road, comments of so many people have moved in and we don't like it when your neighbor up the hill may make a comment that you can't do this here. You know, you don't live here. You don't tell somebody who's lived here for 30 years what they can't do on their land. So I think that I'm sure there's a fair amount of that. I guess Asheville has, and I know it has changed dramatically since say 1980, that what we see as Asheville is not what was here. There's been quite a radical change and many people will say for the better but some people are leery of the influx, and should be, because

with that, it's like what we're talking about with Internet. It's a gift and yet there's a shadow side of every reality. And if too many people come in do you erase or dilute fully part of the charm and the beauty which is the history and the different cultures that have existed here for a long time.

And you see that, I'm a big opponent of strip malls. Because it's anywhere in America. So you drive out a road and can't help but wonder what used to be there. Hendersonville Road is wall to wall stores. Asheville seems to have preserved its integrity with local businesses and there seems to be a pretty strong grassroots effort to do that but I think that, I don't know, so many people I've met aren't from here. But those that I have met that have grown up here by and large really welcome the changes. There's a lot more to do. You have the restaurants. There was very little to do and now we have hundreds of choices whereas before we didn't. But I think it's probably a double edge for a lot of people of liking it and liking some of what comes but maybe not liking and being intimidated or fearful of it's threatening, quote, their way of life. And yet some of that I understand. I came from a community where I never locked my doors. Here people lock their doors more. I didn't even know where my

key was in Virginia. Which would freak people out from the city with triple bolts and so forth. I was like it's not going to do any good anyway because I'm on ten acres surrounded by forest. If someone wants to break in they can stick their foot through the window. Why lock the door? I like having it unlocked.

So you wouldn't still encounter that here but I do think that, and there have been comments and things like, and they're legitimate. I'm used to driving in snow. This has been a hard winter. I've heard a lot of comments, so 'many damn Floridians here with their SUVs that think they can just drive like Miami or Fort Lauderdale or wherever they're coming from.' So there is a bias towards Floridians that I've noticed here and I understand that dynamic because people who come because it's cheaper and they like the climate and all but then again they want -- they are essentially in an urban environment even though it's on the coast. So I've encountered comments and things like that of bias or distrust. Driving up real estate prices is another and that is a legitimate concern. You get a lot of retirees, a lot of people coming here for a higher quality of life in a very interesting vibrant community and yet real estate prices have gone up. Only recently have they corrected appropriately per se.

What happens and was happening in Rappahannock is taxes also went up and some people could no longer afford to live where they lived because they could not afford to keep their land. They may have had a lot of land, they didn't have money, but they couldn't pay. The property taxes tripled in the time I was in Virginia. And they were still low compared to other parts of the country. Ours dropped one sixth from Washington State here but the people we bought from felt it was high and apologized. We bit our lip because for us it was very low property taxes. But I understand and I'm very sensitive to those dynamics. Like in Virginia I knew, I took time to get to know the farmers and I really supported their businesses and when I ran retreats I used produce from local farms.

But I would see that dynamic operating like Lewis, he was 87 years old and he worked the orchards six days a week and it was a third generation peach and apple farm, one of the best. His apples were \$11 a bushel. He had nine, ten varieties of the most beautiful apples. Like here, it's big apple country. And this woman comes in from Washington, DC and she is rude and obnoxious to him in front of me because he didn't have her specialty variety of apple that she wanted and she's raising a little hissy fit. And was really actually quite condescending and rude. And I just

confronted her and I said, "Ma'am, you have absolutely no right to talk to that man that way. Who do you think you are?" And I said, "One, I know apples, he is growing some heirloom varieties and almost any apple. He may not have what you want right now but you're not in Washington, DC and that man is 87 and in the fields six days a week and I would expect you to be more respectful of him just because you can't get your way. And furthermore he's selling apples that he's basically giving them away." And I said, "Go into your supermarket where you live in DC. Go to the Safeway in Georgetown and see if you can buy a bushel of apples that are \$11 that are this good. And you know you're going to come home with a little bag and they're going to be Washington state apples. So just watch it." And she was upset with me but I think she also heard me.

I was just offended because I've seen that happen and I guess I've been involved with the mountains, for whatever reasons my soul's been wedded to the mountains. I'm not a shore person, I like it, but starting back in West Virginia and I resented people putting down West Virginia and making jokes, really derogatory jokes about incest and inbreeding and all this other stuff. It's like have you ever been there? Have you actually ever met anybody or spent time in some of the very rural counties I was in? You know, I take

my hat off because they were dirt poor and yet generous hearted, giving people. And I'm not saying there wasn't a lot of crap, like in all elements of society, but I do get defensive about that 'us and them' mentality. And sometimes I slip in. I use the term redneck but I'm careful how I do that because I've been radically surprised at times by perceptions.

Like in the Blue Ridge, Front Royal has never been a very attractive appealing place for most people, even locals. Hard edged, crime, working class town. Just never has gotten its act together. I don't know about now but up until a few years ago. I never really liked it and it felt very conservative. I went to an AA group and it was like a fundamentalist revival. It was the only time I ever walked out of a meeting because it was inappropriate to have that level of religiosity thrust in, but you can do whatever you want. So I was looking for a group that would be more integrated, at least gay friendly, because there weren't many meetings there. It was so slim on population. And two people that I really trust recommended one in the Hollow, Browntown Hollow. I'd never even heard of that. There's the entrance to Shenandoah Park and then there's the entrance to Browntown Hollow which is a road. And they said, "I think you'll really feel at home there." And this

was classic, I think if you remain open and teachable and willing to risk and learn, what can come.

So I drove down two miles, three miles, Shenandoah Park is wide back there. This is further. I'm like Jesus Christ, where is this place? It's getting more and more gravel and bumpy and I hear the word hollow and I am from an urban area so I'm thinking, you know, Snuffy Smith, and I wasn't far off. Lo and behold, here on this hill is a one room, old, beat-up Baptist church with big pickups hopped up. I'm like I'm going to kill them because this is about as redneck as it's going to get. I'd love to be surprised. But because I'd driven so damn far I went in anyway and at a rural AA there's a lot of you will always find something of value, go. So I walk in and it's a dark room with a little wood stove and there's about a dozen and a half people and meet different people. And this guy, marine, blah, blah, blah and he's a revved-up former marine, he's the secretary and it was sort of fitting, but there was a spirit of love there and welcoming that we deep.

So I decided to go back. Go back and one of the elders in the program, 42 years, comes up and embraces me and in a way that folks can do asked several very personal questions, pumped me for about 15 different personal questions in 30 seconds. Are you married? No, blah, blah,

blah. You know, it was just funny. I said, "Actually I'm gay." And she said, "Good for you, you're not the only one." One of the guys I thought I pegged. OK, I met my own human biases. Guy's torn off shirts, tattoos, what's the haircut? Mullet thing or whatever and blah, blah, blah, and scruffy looking. And the guy next to him, big muscle bound bearded, blah, blah, blah, and I'm pigeonholing because I don't know these people. She said, "You know you're not the only one here. Good for you." And I said, "Well, no, actually I don't." She calls this one man up and goes, "I want you to meet [Lindsey], he's gay," blah, blah, blah. And the two that I thought were burly mountain men design religious interiors across the country and live in Front Royal. Then this woman with short hair comes up and says, "You look familiar" and I said, "You do too." She said, "I was one of the founders of gay and lesbian, do you know Jim blah, blah, blah?" I said, "Yeah, he sponsored me and I knew he and his partner for years." She said, "We founded gay and lesbian AA in the Washington DC area. I live here."

Meanwhile then there's biker babes and this and that and they all invited me out to pizza at this dump in Front Royal. This pizza dive, and I'm looking around thinking, you know, out of the 60 people there, I mean wide spectrum,

it was more open and welcoming to the few gays that were in part of that meeting that I ever experienced in DC. And it just blew my mind that in the least likely place -- same thing happened in Winchester which is not known for its liberalness and yet within that framework found some incredible community welcoming us that transcended a lot of what I knew in DC. And I love to be surprised like that where people, you pigeonhole. We all do this, but I like to be surprised. I like to be way-off track in my judgments or assessments, in a good way. I've had it go the reverse too, I guess, but not as much. I think there's a tension but it goes beyond gays and lesbians coming in. I think it's more of outsiders coming into the mountain community and that I think it's as a community overall I think it needs to be addressed in a way that is conscious and also respectful of people that have been here and have been here for generations.

But it's not unique. You encounter that everywhere. It's like the film with, what's the famous actor in "Cider House Rules?" He was at the orphanage and he was reading a story about immigrants and the kid asked, "What's an immigrant?" and he said, "Somebody not from Maine." I'll never forget that. There is that energy. Less so here, I've noticed. But it's like, I call it an uneasy tension

because like in Virginia by the time I left I would have to allow two and a half hours for a 56 mile drive to my office, a suburb of DC, because 66 had gone from two lanes to ten in the time period I'd known it. And that Warrenton was the closest big town of seven, 8,000, 10,000 people, whatever, to where I lived in Rappahannock. There were no grocery stores, no traffic lights, general stores, a couple of markets and things but nothing, if you wanted groceries you had to go to Warrenton or Front Royal or Culpepper.

Warrenton, Gainesville, it used to be all farmland in the time that I lived there. It's now a wall-to-wall strip mall with Wal-Mart, the same old crap, the same old stuff, and traffic. Manassas used to be the cutoff. Your soul would open up, you could breathe. Manassas is a satellite of DC now. Gainesville is a satellite of DC. Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, two and a half hours from DC, is considered a satellite suburb, as is Front Royal. I mean so with that you have people, prices going up, and people being displaced. And there's a legacy of that too. If people look deep enough, like in the Shenandoah National Park, most people don't realize how many people were literally thrown out of their homesteads. Now, in the big picture probably a good thing to have a national park but

don't erase the shadow side of that, that people lost their homes, several generations, because the government said so.

I don't know, I think it's an ongoing struggle of how does Asheville retain integrity without growing too fast or too much so it just becomes... There's a story by NPR, it's a book called *The Geography of Bliss* and the only American city featured in it is Asheville in the end. It's one grump's search for the happiest places on the planet and Asheville is one listed. And there's a lot of truth but you know, the jury's out, it's been discovered. And lots of people are moving here and a lot of retirees with more money coming here. And one of the harder things, as you know, if you get to know people more is a lot of people that come here cannot find work. Unless you're a nurse, in the medical industry, hospitality, tourism, it's a tough place to get employment. So a lot of people come here and leave. And that's before the recession even. It's not even to make a living in the mountain community and maybe less so if you're outside of that by and large. So it's an important question.

And I think when I look at schools though there seems to be, Asheville is very similar, it's no accident that it came up in relation to Eugene. There's a lot of resentment towards Eugene in Portland and Oregon. People think of

Oregon as the super liberal state. It's not. It just so happens that Portland dominates Oregon politics so that there's a lot of negativity about Eugene being, you know, wildly liberal and the university is off the chart and radical extremists and anything goes in Eugene. I mean there are sayings here at Asheville and I love it, a T-shirt, it says, "If it's too weird for Asheville, it must be very weird." And it's a joke but it's true. It's kind of a magnet for a wide variety of people. Just go to some of the public fairs and festivals and you see it. You're just not going to see that happening in Burnsville by and large or Hendersonville. It won't. Not yet anyway. But it does happen freely here and I like that. I like the free-spiritedness of this town and the community.

But I do think people need to be respectful of other people. If you want acceptance then you have to practice that and be respectful of other people's perceptions and take and what it's like for the farmer down the road seeing all the land that used to be everybody knew each other and now it's a 9,000 square foot house being built on the hill with two people in it, the garage bigger than our whole house. And you're seeing a lot of that and I just hope that it's restrained with the growth here because it's attractive on many, many levels. I do think the mountains

protect us a little bit from excessive development, that there's no major metropolitan area. Charlotte is still two and a quarter hours away with mountain ranges. So I think that protects us hopefully a little bit from what I don't want to see which is unrestrained, unchecked development which was happening in Virginia. I think that's a really bad, it's bad for everybody. But in particular bad for local people, I think. The further you get in the mountains I think the more you see that.

I mean we have friends that moved here, they had to homestead for 25 years. No one would sell them land until they started calling the square dances and he began doing weavings and he called the square dances and she began doing local Appalachian crafts. Only then did someone sell them land. This was 1964 and they were in the Peace Corps and they wanted to move to the mountains with their family but nobody would sell them because they were an outsider and they said it wouldn't happen. Land was the one thing that was kept within the family and protected. And once they proved to the local community that they were going to be here then they were welcomed. But until then they were not. That's a story you see all over rural America, or I have. In Maryland and the Chesapeake communities, they're similar. Insular, cut off from the other communities, and

fiercely protective of the lifestyle that makes it so attractive.

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