

Kathy Staley ([00:00:00](#)):

<silence> Today is June 23rd, 2010. My name's Kathy Staley. And could you start off with your name, age, and where you were raised?

Mark Patrick ([00:00:12](#)):

Yes. My name is Mark David Patrick, and I was born and raised in Kenville, Indiana. And I'm 36 years old.

Kathy Staley ([00:00:21](#)):

And could you describe a little bit about your town and growing up?

Mark Patrick ([00:00:26](#)):

Yes. For the first 10 years of my life, I, um, grew up, uh, again in Kendallville, Indiana. And just, just off of that, um, of Kendallville was a little town named a villa. And that was actually where, uh, where we lived. And it was a very rural town, um, all of a farming community. And my mom did the majority of the, the farming at home. And, um, my dad worked at a factory in, in the city.

Kathy Staley ([00:00:59](#)):

And you had a twin brother. Any other siblings?

Mark Patrick ([00:01:03](#)):

I have two older sisters and one and a twin brother? Yes, ma'am.

Kathy Staley ([00:01:07](#)):

Okay. What was it like growing up in a rural area?

Mark Patrick ([00:01:12](#)):

Growing, growing up in, in a villa was, was very nice as a child. Um, living on a farm was fun and exciting. The work didn't seem like work at the time, even though it was a lot of work. Um, we had horses. We also had other livestock, but the horses were, were our fun. They were our therapy 'cause we could just run down to the barn and, and hop on them anytime we wanted to. And, and helping mom with the hay and the corn and the oats in the morning. And the water was always just a good, good bonding time to be able to be with her.

Kathy Staley ([00:01:49](#)):

Was it a cash crop farm or a sustainable farm?

Mark Patrick ([00:01:52](#)):

Uh, no, just sustainable, just sustain. Sustainable just for the horses. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and, and the, and the cows.

Kathy Staley ([00:01:59](#)):

So, um, could you, after 10 years, did y'all move somewhere else?

Mark Patrick ([00:02:07](#)):

Yes. Uh, when I was 10 years old in August, August the third of, of 19 and 83, um, my father's job was done away with at the factory that, that he worked at. And knowing that they would be unable to survive. Uh, he tried for months and months to find a job in that, in that area. However, um, there were no positions available. So he was hired on by Dana Corporation. And, but the catch was, was that his position would be as the new area manager in Morganton, North Carolina, which was 800 miles away. So, of course, having no other choice, my family packed up and we headed to Morganton, North Carolina.

Kathy Staley ([00:02:55](#)):

And could you describe the difference? 'cause I know it's Indiana is not Appalachia. Morganton is in the foothills of Appalachia.

Mark Patrick ([00:03:04](#)):

Yes. The, when we moved here, it was a huge culture shock. The everything in Indiana was flat. Also. Everything, it has brown dirt and, you know, when you're used to seeing crops grow, just vibrantly from the, from the beautiful dirt and whatnot. And then we move here and there's red clay. It isn't dirt. It is just very odd. And living where we, where we live, we live in the, the foothills that are completely surrounded by the Appalachians, the, the Appalachia Mountains. And we are, we're bucked right up against the South mountains. And the area is just beautiful. It's, I mean, it's picturesque compared to where we lived before. Hmm. And it was quite the difference. Um, Morganton is a much larger town than a villa was a villa. There were probably maybe a thousand or so, and there's at least 30,000 or more in Morganton.

([00:04:13](#)):

So it was a huge difference. Um, moving here. We also had to leave all of the animals behind. So when my parents were successful, was selling our home and all of the land that went with it, also went all of the animals as well. And that was probably the most difficult transition for me, leaving the snowmobiles in the four wheeler, or then it was three wheelers and then transitioning to a one acre piece of land. And the trade off was, was that there was a pool, there was an inground pool at the house that we, that they were able to purchase when we moved here. Not a, not an equal, there's no equal equilibrium for losing 10 years of, of bonding with horses. So that was, that was hard. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> That was very hard.

Kathy Staley ([00:05:10](#)):

Um, but it sounds like it, it wasn't a negative experience moving to Morganton

Mark Patrick ([00:05:16](#)):

For me. No. But again, I was only 10 years old. So as far as when we were in Indiana, we lived way out into the country. We didn't have a lot of, well, we had no neighbors, but we didn't have a lot of, um, friends, so to speak. We had friends of my parents who had children that are my same age that we left. But the move to in to from Indiana to Morganton was minimal from me, other than my, my entire extended family is in a villa and Kendallville Indiana. And then they moved us here. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So that was the impact, that was the true impact for myself, was that we moved away from my grandparents and my aunts and my uncles and all of my cousins. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. It was just us, you know, <laugh>.

Kathy Staley ([00:06:15](#)):

Okay. Yeah. That, that would be certainly difficult for Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> a kid. We're gonna shift gears a little. Okay. Could you talk about how you first learned or heard about homosexuality?

Mark Patrick ([00:06:27](#)):

Hmm. I knew even before we moved from Indiana, that I was gay. Okay. Um, I, my first true experience, I was in the third grade Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> in Indiana in third grade, you're required to do swimming lessons. It was part of the public school curriculum. So they bus us to the Y and I remember being thrilled when we would get to go to the locker room, you know, and I would see the other boys, men, teenagers and whatnot changing. And that's when I knew that something was up. Something wasn't, something wasn't right.

Kathy Staley ([00:07:03](#)):

Did you have a word for it? No. And when did you get the words for it?

Mark Patrick ([00:07:07](#)):

Well, um, the words probably came at fifth or sixth grade. Um, of course, growing up in, in the country, as I always have, uh, you hear derogatory statements from friends, neighbors, parents, especially parents. Um, and those derogatory terms were the first verbalized experiences that I had with what gay meant.

Kathy Staley ([00:07:37](#)):

Could you talk about how you came to connect those terms that you were hearing with what you were feeling?

Mark Patrick ([00:07:49](#)):

It's, I think I just always knew, um, the, the biggest part of it was, was that I always knew that the words were, were being used in a derogatory manner. And I think that's the reason why I had such suppression of, of my feelings for such a long period of time. Because you can hear the word faggot, you know, gay, lesbian and all of that stuff. But probably when I put them together was in church. We moved from a Methodist church in Indiana. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> to a southern Baptist church here in Morganton. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And it was, I remember to, to this day when I was 15 years old, um, remembering the preacher preaching about homosexuality and how horribly wrong it was by age 15, I had already experienced homosexuality. And I ki was sitting there and I would just be boiling mad inside because I would think, no, there is nothing wrong with me. You know, I am the way that God made me inside. And I don't understand why he's sitting here saying that. And, and I remember getting up and walking out of the, of the ER and just went outside and walked around. And that was probably the first indication that something was up and that I was gonna be a real bullheaded teenager.

Kathy Staley ([00:09:31](#)):

And at 15,

Mark Patrick ([00:09:32](#)):

At 15, um, my parents did not say anything to me about it. They didn't ask why I got up and walked out. It was just, it was just kind of dropped. And that is when I started drifting away from the church itself. Mm-Hmm.

Kathy Staley ([00:09:52](#)):

<affirmative> were, were your parents and sisters and brother repeating what the preacher was lecturing

Mark Patrick ([00:10:01](#)):

About? Absolutely. Absolutely. In fact, probably to the point of over-emphasizing it. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>,

Kathy Staley ([00:10:09](#)):

When you were coming of age during the, the beginning of the AIDS epidemic Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, um, was that partially feeding some of this, um, anti-gay sentiment that your preacher was having? Or was it just in general? He was talking about

Mark Patrick ([00:10:28](#)):

It. It was just in general. I, I don't ever remember. Um, I remember family members, uh, during, um, the seven o'clock news with Dan Rather, whatever, um, saying, you know, well, that's what they get, you know, extraordinarily vulgar insults. And I just sat there and stayed quiet.

Kathy Staley ([00:10:56](#)):

What was going on inside

Mark Patrick ([00:10:58](#)):

It was anger. And I'm a, being a behavior modification specialist and a middle school teacher, um, with deaf children as well as with mentally handicapped children. Um, I knew I've always been able to control myself in a very positive manner. And even in the most negative of situations, I've been able to control myself and work around that issue and come around and sometimes say a derogatory thing back in a positive manner. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, but it's, it's been very difficult. Very difficult.

Kathy Staley ([00:11:46](#)):

Um, I'm curious how you came out, and I know there was a lot of years between this identity forming. Um, would, how would you like to talk about that?

Mark Patrick ([00:12:02](#)):

Um, my coming out was on January the sixth of 2008. I was 34 years old. Um, my mother had met my partner, my, my partner, my current partner now. And we had, Leslie and I had known each other for over almost two years. And we walked in one day after church. And I had already arrived because of course, I was not attending church at that time, even though there are things in between there, we need to talk about. Um, that she pulled me, she walked into the kitchen and she said, mark, who is Leslie? And I thought, what is she talking about? And I was trying to play it off, but I knew, I knew, I knew what was up. She said, sit down. So we sat down at the table and through multiple years of therapy that I had

been, that I've had to, that I have chosen to go through to help resolve my internal issues, um, he and I together had decided that we were going to wait.

[\(00:13:18\)](#):

That it was best for me, that I would wait until my family was ready. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And we decided together, which I completely agreed upon that when they were ready, they were, they would ask. And so I thought, wow, today's the day mom's asking. And that, I had already said that when she asked that I would be honest, but that I wouldn't bring it up until that point. And so we sat down together and she said, again, who is Leslie? And I said, well, Leslie's my partner. And she said, what do you mean your partner? And I said, well, mom, I'm gay.

[\(00:14:05\)](#):

And she controls herself really well. Uh, I saw the tears blowing up in her eyes. Uh, I saw that she was upset, I saw, and she wasn't upset, angry. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. She was upset internally. And it's always been about the family. And so at that time, I used my non-positive behavior support. And I said, look, I said, I understand that you're upset about this. I said, but you, you came to me and you asked me. Now I'm going to tell you. I said, is there anything else that you'd like to know? I said, because I'm ready to talk about this anytime you're ready. And she just said, I just wish that you have not chosen this road. And that's when I kind of just exploded. And I said, you know, <laugh>, nobody would choose this. Nobody. And I said, it just infuriates me to hear that come out of your mouth, that you would say that, that you would think that I would choose to be ridiculed and treated so horribly in middle school and high school.

[\(00:15:18\)](#):

And even as an adult in college here at a SU, you know, that you would think that I would choose this lifestyle. And she said, I don't understand. I just don't understand. And so we were cut off because my sister-in-law showed up, and mom wanted the conversation ended. And I would've just continued right there with my, with my sister-in-law there as well. But mom wanted it ended. So the conversation ended. Nothing else was brought up about that conversation. I'm not even sure that she spoke to my dad about it. Um, until August. So from January to August, eight months, when we had invited, sent out, we, I'm sorry. We, Leslie and I had sent out invitations for Christian and Lauren Leslie's 9-year-old twins for their birthday party. And my brother-in-law came over to our house. By this time, Leslie and I and the twins were all four living together. Um, and Leslie, uh, and my brother-in-law, Kevin came over and sat down in our living room and said, what's up? Who are you? So again, he had the respect to come and ask. I had the respect to answer, told him that Leslie lived with my partner, and that we were a couple. And that, you know, it finally, after, after 34 years that I was happy and Kevin proceeded to say that Leslie was not welcome. He would never be welcome. And that I was welcome only if I was Uncle Mark, not Gail, mark.

[\(00:17:21\)](#):

And so, since, you know, August the 24th of 2008, I have had very little contact with my family. Um, what they have done is they have chosen the church and basically are following, following my brother-in-law's, demands that if they're there, that I not be there, or that if I'm there, that Leslie and the twins not be there. Um, the harshest thing that has happened is Christmas of 2008. We gave all of my family members, I have two nieces with my, with my oldest sister, Tish. And my niece's names are Erica and Holly, two nieces with my second sister, who is married to Kevin. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, who are McKayla and Mackenzie. And then I have a niece and a nephew by my twin brother and his wife, Robin, Todd, and Robin. And their names are, uh, Bridget and Shane. We gave all of the children a gift card to Walmart for \$15, uh, with some candy.

(00:18:45):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And that was just something that we wanted to do. Um, and the next day, those gifts were returned. Not only were they returned, but they had been taken away from my nieces on the card, red Love Uncle Mark, Leslie, and Christian, and Lauren. And we received some, some fairly, um, ugly emails and, and even handwritten letters that I still have. I, I can't part with them. It's what, it's what they're what keep me strong, because I have to continue to support who I am, not only support who I am, but support my family and support the gay and lesbian community. And just to be strong. And it's taken a lot of tears and a lot of sad, sad days. But it, it continues to be a struggle. So I haven't seen my nieces more than six times in two years. My nieces and my new and, and my nephew.

Kathy Staley (00:20:01):

Do they live in Morganton or are they spread

Mark Patrick (00:20:04):

Out? No, no. Uh, in fact, my sister and brother-in-Law, Melissa and Kevin, whom are causing such strife live less than a 10th of a mile away from me. They, uh, my development is first and then on the same highway, their development is next. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So if in the wintertime when the, when the trees are bearing, then you can actually see their house from our front porch.

Kathy Staley (00:20:34):

So the children go to the same school?

Mark Patrick (00:20:37):

They do not, uh, they do not. They go, Christian and Lauren go to their native school where they, where they started. Um, they have a wonderful daddy who drives them 45 minutes each day to school, and then goes back and picks 'em up daily so that they can continue at, in, in school, in Alexander County, even though we live in Burke County. And he, he asked them, he said, you know, do you want to continue to go? Do you want to continue to go to your school to Wittenberg or do you want to, to move to the school here so that you would be close to school? And they thought about it. They thought about it throughout the entire summer. And they said that they, that that was their choice, that they would like to go ahead and continue, um, going to Wittenberg. So he makes that, he makes that drive every day for them. 'cause he wants it to be their choice. We hope that they'll change their mind <laugh> in middle school, <laugh>. But, um, they're getting ready to go into the fourth grade. So we shall see. We shall see.

Kathy Staley (00:21:53):

So when did, so when you were in high school, you were having these feelings. Did, were you dating girls or dating boys on the sly? Or how did you get to the point where you have a, a partner?

Mark Patrick (00:22:11):

Um, first of all, it started out with just neighborhood fun with the, with two neighborhood boys.

Kathy Staley (00:22:19):

Are they now heterosexual?

Mark Patrick ([00:22:21](#)):

Yes. Both, uh, both. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, both heterosexual, both married, both with children, so we won't say their names. Um, and then I, I had a, I had a sexual relationship with one of my, you might have to help me with this, with one of my high school teachers. Um, a female teacher, um, is very, very difficult to become aroused, obviously. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, so that went away. Um, I tried another relationship with, uh, with another female. Again, really struggled with that. Um, so that we watched that away. Uh, and then I started having my, my next relationship was with, um, my first male, my full male encounter. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, I drove a school bus in high school. Um, you know, then a long time ago, students were able to drive the buses. So that was, that was probably about the only thing that kept me sane.

([00:23:39](#)):

Uh, but one of the, one of the other people that drove at the high school, uh, his name was Michael. And he was a wonderful, wonderful man. But he was four years older than me. So I was 18, and he was 22 at the time. And he was my first, my first crush. He was my first, um, partner. I think my family had suspicions at that time, because that relationship lasted over a year. But we kept it on the down low. Uh, I was in, I was in college full-time at Western Piedmont. I drove the bus full-time. And so I, I, I stayed very, very busy. And I think that that helped even though, you know, that was on the down low. And when that, when, when that ended, uh, because Michael moved away then that continuing to drive a bus, uh, I, at the same school that I drove at then, um, I met a, a young lady, uh, and her name was Susan. And this was to the point to where I was like, this is, I, you know, my family's going to die if, if I don't, if I don't straighten this out, I've just got to suppress these feelings and, and get on with it. So that's what I did. And I started dating Susan. And after a year and a half of dating, then I asked her to marry me. And this marriage was, it was a very good marriage. Uh, and we were married from June the 16th of 2003 until November the 14th.

([00:25:31](#)):

June the 16th of 1997. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> until June the 16th of 2003. And then she left. Um, there were many, many, many one night stands within that time period for many with males. Um, just because it was too much. Um, it was too much to suppress the feelings. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, finally she just decided that she never knew that. She never knew that I was having indiscretions with men. However, she was a very smart woman, and she graduated from here as well. Um, but, but she finally got the hint that things weren't working. And so she decided herself that she was going to go ahead and leave. And she already had herself, somebody on the side. And I think, I think that was the biggest blessing for me, because I thought, I'm, I wasn't gonna end it. I was going to, I was going to stay married, and I was going to continue with that lie just to make my family happy.

([00:26:55](#)):

That's what I was gonna do. And so when she left, it was like the world had been lifted off of my shoulders. And I knew at that point that I wasn't gonna go back, uh, that I wasn't going to start the lie again. And so, but it took from 2004 when the divorce was final until 2006, um, to where before I met Leslie, there were two other short-lived relationships in there, um, with other men, with Josh and Stacy. And, um, and then that just leads me up to, to where I am today. And I'm so thankful that I found bus sleep. <laugh>. What a relief.

Kathy Staley ([00:27:47](#)):

Could you talk about how you start a relationship at 18 with a coworker?

Mark Patrick ([00:27:55](#)):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Kathy Staley ([00:27:57](#)):

How, how is that, those navigating romantic life when it can't quite be out in the open?

Mark Patrick ([00:28:05](#)):

It was hard, uh, with him being 22 and me being 18, of course, I was still living at home, but he was living independently. And so that was what made it so wonderful, because I was just simply able to drive over to his house, my family, even though they had their suspicions, because Michael, Michael didn't wave a flag, but the walk and the talk, you know, pretty much gave it away. And, uh, but we limited that, that exposure to my family. We limited that tremendously. And it, normally, it was just he and I, and, and, and our friends. Um, we, so

Kathy Staley ([00:28:50](#)):

You had made other gay friends.

Mark Patrick ([00:28:52](#)):

He had it, many, many other gay friends. And I had two, uh, two other lesbian friends from high school, but no other gay friends. There were no other openly gay men at the high school that I knew of. There were some that I had suspicions about, but of course, suppressing the feelings myself. Of course, I wasn't going to ask them. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But, uh, I was lucky enough to, um, to have went to school with a young lady named Heather. And she and I went to our senior prom together. And of course, as soon as the formality of the prom was over, she went to her girlfriend's house. And I went to my boyfriend's house, and it was smooth. So, so much deception and, and so many untruths that I look back on now. And I'm so disappointed in myself to thinking all I had to do was just be honest, you know, and just be mark. But it was, it was, it was too hard with, with growing up in the church and being forced to go every Sunday morning and every Sunday evening, every Wednesday evening, you know, that you would have to be, to sit there and endure and listen to now what, what I would consider just blatant brainwashing, you know, an outright cruelty. Um, but I can say that now because I'm 36 years old, whereas when I was 14, 15, 16, I, I didn't have that option. But, um, but I remember, I remember suffering tremendously. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Kathy Staley ([00:30:39](#)):

Were you also getting messages from the school, um, in Morganton?

Mark Patrick ([00:30:48](#)):

What kind of messages

Kathy Staley ([00:30:49](#)):

About, um, um, sexuality in general?

Mark Patrick ([00:30:53](#)):

Oh, the, the teacher that I had, the, the, the physical relationship with, um, she taught a class called Adult, adult Roles, I think is what it was. And it was just about adult finances, about being responsible responsibly, um, with finances, sexual activity. Um, I remember her teaching us how to, you know, fix a button on a pair of pants, simple things, you know, just adult roles, that it was a great class for high school. And I was, I was thrilled that I had that class. Um, I'm, I'm not disappointed at all with the relationship that we had either, because I feel like, I feel like it is part of me, you know? And it gave me my first, my first sexual true sexual experience, um, was with an, with an experienced person and, and whatnot. So, but she spoke in her class about sexuality, about homosexuality and bisexuality as well as, you know, those that were gay and those that were lesbian, and how it was different, different lifestyles. But her class, of course, followed the state mandated standard course of study where you can only go so far, and then you're limited. And I remember students having questions for her and her saying, I'm sorry, I can't answer that in the school. I can't answer that. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So, uh, but that was the only time that there were no gay straight groups. Of course, I graduated in 92, so back then, I mean, there was, there was really nothing. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Kathy Staley ([00:32:53](#)):

I kind of would like to get at the nuts and bolts of how do you start a relationship? Do, were you just chummy with Michael and then dropping hints?

Mark Patrick ([00:33:06](#)):

Yes. He, when I, when I walked out of the school one day, he was sitting on his steps on the bus eating some Kentucky Fried chicken. And I said that, well, I can't say that on the field. Um, I said, dang, I'd love to see you eat that piece of chicken. And that, when we arrived back, he and I had long routes, and we would arrive back around 4 30, 5 o'clock, and we just started. I would sit in his car and we would chit chat, and I just, I was the one that just came out and said, you know, I, I, I really like you, and I'd like to know if you would be interested in, in, you know, getting, getting down and dirty with me. And he was like, yeah. And so we went right back to his place. And he was the first, he was my first gay sexual, full gay sexual experience.

Kathy Staley ([00:34:08](#)):

And it was a relationship that would've continued if he had not moved away, or

Mark Patrick ([00:34:14](#)):

Probably so, um, a very, very sweet man. A very sweet man. And now he's back in the area now, and, and we are very good friends. Um, he's still single, has not dated anybody actually, since, of course, he's had relations with, with other people, of course. But, um, but not had a full on relationship with someone since me. He was very disappointed when he found out that I had a partner. But, you know,

Kathy Staley ([00:34:47](#)):

Is it difficult in Burke County to find long-term relationships if you're gay or

Mark Patrick ([00:34:53](#)):

Lesbian? I would say yes. Um, even, even Leslie was 45 minutes away, and I met Leslie on, uh, an internet website called Bear 4 1 1. It's not trashy or luie or anything like that. Um, just, you know, you could read people's profiles and whatnot and, and look at some pictures that they would have. And, and

he and I just started talking, and we hit it off quite well. But especially in, in Burke County, in the rural area where we live out in the country, I was always so frightened of the hate crimes. Um, not only from from others, but from my own family. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> <affirmative>, because my twin brother is, um, is a true gay baher on, I don't know about the physical aspect of it, but about the, with, with verbalizations and whatnot, is, is very cruel, has always been very cruel to me.

[\(00:35:53\)](#):

And so, Morganton and Burke County, it is not an open, an open society. If we wanted to, if Leslie and I want to be able to walk down the streets and hold hands, then we would feel comfortable doing that. Going to the, to Asheville. And we do, I mean, we don't feel impeded in any way, or threatened in any way, even walk down the street in the, during the daytime and hold each other's hands in Asheville, because we know that in the city that is fairly accepted, Asheville is much more accepting than Charlotte or Greensboro. Um, Raleigh is moving higher in, in its acceptance. But of course, for us, we would never hold hands or show any type of, of outward affection out in public in, in Morganton, because we would be, first of all, we don't wanna make others feel uncomfortable. But second of all, we don't want to be treated in an unfair manner.

[\(00:37:04\)](#):

And Leslie has a terrible temper. And would, would bounce back, you know, someone would, an example. Would you like an example? Last week we were walking through Walmart here, two fabulously dressed gay men walking through Walmart, you know, looking our finest one buggy, you know, obvious to everybody, you know, that. And now he and I, neither one are flashy. We don't wear rainbow shirts or anything like that. But again, pretty obvious to the, to the human eye that we're a couple. And there were some teenagers, probably 15, 16, at the most 17. One of 'em had to have driven there, um, standing at the posters, flicking through the posters, and their words were, God, every poster in here has some faggot in it. Of course, we knew that that was directed towards us. So I kind of reached over patted Leslie's hand, 'cause I could see, you know, the red face and whatnot, knowing how explosive his temper is.

[\(00:38:18\)](#):

And I said, carry on. And I kind of, you know, <laugh>. And so we went about 30 feet. And there was a, a young lady that I went to high school with, there was Gina, you know, I said, and I introduced Gina to Leslie. And Gina was very accepting, very, very sweet. And we stood and talked for probably a good five minutes. The same group of teenagers, of course, had to walk past us and again, said some remark, um, they've got a disease for you and your time, your time is up, or something like that. And Leslie spun around and I spun him back around <laugh> and I said, let it go, let it go. And he was visibly shaken. And I said, don't let them win, baby. Don't let them win. And Gina was like, she was so shocked at first of all, what the young, what the young men had said.

[\(00:39:27\)](#):

And I think she was shocked at how, you know, furious Leslie got so quickly. And so I explained quickly to Gina that that was the second time that that had happened, you know, within a five minute period. And I, I said, just let it go. And she said, I, I think that this is wonderful that you two aren't afraid to go shopping together. She said, you need to just be you. And when we left, Leslie had finally calmed down. And, and I, you know, and I talked with him a lot about, I said, Leslie, you can't be confrontational. I said, yes. I said, what would've been more appropriate is for you and I to have walked over and asked them if they would like to come to the next alpha meeting, or if they would like to sit down and have a conversation with us.

[\(00:40:22\)](#):

I said, do you think that they would've been ready for that? And he said, well, of course not. Of course they wouldn't have. They're teenagers. I said, then I said, we need to educate them, not physically want to beat them. Um, and so that was, that's our most recent experience. And it happens a lot. Um, the, the Morganton News Herald is filled with letters to the editor by just haters. That's what we call, that's what my word is, is a hater. You know, um, many, many times Leslie will respond back, um, prior to his response, I will read his response and I myself will delete all the emotions. And then you are normally left with a wonderful two or three paragraph response. He hates that I do that. And I said, Leslie, I said, you cannot show emotions. I said, you remember, you have to be the one to be an educator, and you have to be the, that is higher than these people who feel that they are better than we are. I said, because in reality, we're all the same. And so we have to deal with that a lot.

Kathy Staley ([00:41:47](#)):

Yeah. That reminds me of the symposium afterwards. We had the discussion in one of the women raised, I don't, I'm tired of being the educator.

Mark Patrick ([00:41:57](#)):

That's correct. Leslie said the exact same thing. In fact, I think I still have the bruise where his elbow went, see, you know, <laugh>. And I said, hushed now. And, and it is, it, it wears you down. It wears you down after a while. But if we stop educating, we're going to lose. We're going, because what we are striving for is equality. And, but we have to go about equality in the appropriate manner. And that is through educating in a very, you know, in the appropriate place, at the appropriate time, in the appropriate manner. Me being an educator, I can handle all of that, whereas Leslie cannot. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, bless his heart. You know, <laugh>, um, Leslie is an information technology director for a mental health and finance company. And so he deals with people from Asheville to Wilmington in North Carolina. There are gay and straight people that he works with in, in the state.

([00:43:09](#)):

I think fairly, but fairly, all of them know that, that he's an out gay man. Um, he has pictures of me and the kids on his phone in his office. You know, it's not something that he either one of us hide. Everyone at the North Carolina School for the Deaf in Morganton, where I teach computer technology, science and math, they all know that I'm gay as well. They all know that I have a partner. They all know that we have twins. Um, it's never been an issue for either one of us. And we are so blessed. We are so blessed that, that that's not an issue. Both, both work organizations, um, have a large number of gay and lesbian employees, so we don't have to worry about, you know, being fearful. Whereas when I work, when I taught in the public school, I was fearful because I know that in the public schools, they have the right to hire and fire at will for any reason when you're in your first few years of teaching. And that was my biggest fear, was that I wouldn't hit tenure before someone knew. But when the position came open at the North Carolina School for the Deaf, I thought, yes. And I love it. I absolutely love it. And I went in as an open gay man. So that really helped as well.

Kathy Staley ([00:44:40](#)):

How long have you been there?

Mark Patrick ([00:44:42](#)):

Since 2005. I, so I was with the public school for five years, and now I've been with the North Carolina School for the Deaf for five years.

Kathy Staley ([00:44:53](#)):

Could you talk a little bit about, um, the climate for LGBT and questioning youth at both the high school or middle school that you Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> taught at, and now at the, um, school of the deaf,

Mark Patrick ([00:45:15](#)):

At the middle school, there was a lot in the public school. Is that what you're speaking of? Uh, I was actually at an elementary school. Okay. Uh, I began the first multi handicapped classroom. So we had children who were deaf and hard of hearing with down syndrome, with multiple sclerosis, with, uh, usher syndrome, with cerebral palsy. Some were hearing, some were not. Um, majority of the classroom of 15 students were, uh, had autism, part of the autism spectrum disorder, whether it be Asperger's all the way up to full blown autism, you know, to the highest point, uh, even to where they were, you know, eclectic or a savant. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. There were all of those ranges from one to the other in one classroom. And my biggest, my biggest problem with that was, was that there were no questions in that area. However, at that same time, I was driving the school bus for the middle school and high school on the bus.

([00:46:18](#)):

I saw a tremendous amount of bullying, um, to those that were suspected to be gay. Now, I, I stopped it quickly. Um, many of the students would say, well, you must be gay yourself. They would say, those smart Alex snide pissy remarks as they would be getting off the bus. I'd let it go the next morning. I would say, good morning. And they would get on and sit down. It was like, it didn't happen. And I think a lot of times, just through, through that, being able just to let some of it go, but never allowing it to occur with the students was a big deal. Um,

Kathy Staley ([00:47:03](#)):

At this time, were you married? Yes.

Mark Patrick ([00:47:05](#)):

Okay. Yes. I was married. Um, and, well, part of the time I was married, and then part of the time, it was after the divorce. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> in, in the, in the transition when I was single. And that was a, that was a good transition. Um,

Kathy Staley ([00:47:21](#)):

Okay, it's 1141. I just wanted to do a time check.

Mark Patrick ([00:47:25](#)):

We Okay. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Okay. Um, and then, but I would never allow it. If, if it got to a point to where if someone said something again to the same student, then I would do a, I would do a written report. What happened with those reports I was never privy to. Um, but still, I knew as long as they were on that bus with me for an hour and a half, that they were safe regardless. Um, now in the school where I'm at, I know for a fact we have two middle school students that are gay. Um, I also know that there are I two high school students that are gay and six high school students that are lesbian. Um, they have no qualms about it. Uh, however, in the educational setting, it's not a big deal. You come in, you sit down with work, work, work.

([00:48:21](#)):

Now being a residential school, those students, of course, live at the school. They live in the dorms. We have dorm staff that are very, very, very main. Um, a lot of teachers have done written reports, done, you know, filled out formal, uh, formal written grievances and whatnot, because we see the students are being treated unfairly. We even had one of our middle school students that was on, again, this young man is a very slim point, very tall, very sweet of man, but just as gay as can be. Now, at this point in his life, in eighth grade, he may still not know. He does know. I'm sure he knows, but it's, of course, it's not something that we're allowed to speak of at all. You know, I mean, I could be fired on the spot for telling him it's okay. You know, just be yourself. So I don't do that. But I heard that his dorm room was moved from the hall where the middle school boys were on to a hallway where no other students were by the dorm staff, because they didn't want his gayness or his, it was his gayness or his gay ass to be around, uh, to be around other students. Hi. Hey. How are you? Hi. How are you? Doing well. It's good to see you again. You too.

(00:49:57):

Everything? Very well,

(00:50:25):

(00:50:25):

There are two students here that need to get paid. That's what we're doing.

Kathy Staley (00:50:30):

<laugh> <laugh>.

Mark Patrick (00:50:34):

We'll delete that from the record later.

(00:50:42):

(00:50:42):

Sweet. I'll get it.

(00:51:04):

Let's see. Nice to see you again.

Kathy Staley (00:51:06):

Sorry if we have been missing each other the last three days. I was like, okay, we'll be here. No problem. So you were talking about how they had moved this young man that's right. To a

Mark Patrick (00:51:19):

A separate area.

Kathy Staley (00:51:20):

Separate area.

Mark Patrick (00:51:22):

And so when we found out about this, he came to the school one day and was very upset. And we were like, no way. No way is this gonna happen. One of the biggest things that we try to do at NCSD is keep school, school and dorm. Dorm. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, that's very, very important. Uh, that's very, very important because if you start mixing school with dorm and dorm with school, then it just is a big mess. So we don't want that. And so we would just simply report it to who we need to report it to, and then say, you know, y'all need to get this done, and you need to get this taken care of. So that's what they did.

Kathy Staley ([00:52:09](#)):

And who would you report such things

Mark Patrick ([00:52:11](#)):

To? To the principal? To the principal. And then again, with the dorm, being the dorm and the school being the school,

Kathy Staley ([00:52:19](#)):

You

Mark Patrick ([00:52:20](#)):

Don't know what happened. That's right. We have no, we have no knowledge of what is and what is not happening. And that's one of the, that's one huge flaw I think that we have, because we have, we have to start having a little bit of crossover because I think it's our job as teachers, it's our job as teachers to make sure that things that we report are, are being taken care of. Right. And a lot of times, a lot of times that isn't the case. But those are, those are some things that I, that I stay fairly vigilant on and just simply don't allow it not to happen.

Kathy Staley ([00:53:07](#)):

I

Mark Patrick ([00:53:07](#)):

Know. So it's very sad, but it, it does happen still.

Kathy Staley ([00:53:13](#)):

Did y'all get the training for the anti Well, the School Violence Prevention Act?

Mark Patrick ([00:53:19](#)):

Yes. And do, if, I don't know if you remember during the symposium or not that, um, that I said that our training was a two paragraph email. Mm. And that's very sad. That's very disappointing to me. But

Kathy Staley ([00:53:34](#)):

Has there been any discussion of starting a GSA at the school?

Mark Patrick ([00:53:39](#)):

They would never let me do it because they would never let me do it because of the fact that, um, because that I'm a, I'm a certified licensed teacher. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But, um, the, we have on staff school psychologist, and we have on staff school social worker. Right. We also have on staff, school nurses. Those are the three, um, those are the three people who would be allowed to do that. And I'm not sure that any of them are willing for or even capable of doing. So that's something that I would like to see, that I would like to see started. But I think that I would be seriously bugged. Seriously bugged. But I can bring it up. I mean, I'm not, I'm not afraid of it at all.

Kathy Staley ([00:54:41](#)):

Right. Um, but it sounds like for the, the faculty and staff at the school, it's very open and accepting

Mark Patrick ([00:54:53](#)):

In the school setting. Yes. Yes. Very much so. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, because we, we just do what we need to do. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Kathy Staley ([00:55:00](#)):

And are any of the LGBT uh, employees out to the students?

Mark Patrick ([00:55:09](#)):

Hmm. I am not, um, the students aren't stupid, but, uh, I am not. And I just do that simply because we need to keep school to school. You know, after they would graduate from high school, then maybe that would be another time in another place. But I feel like it would be best, especially with sixth, seventh, and eighth graders to, to keep that, you know, to keep my private life private. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, um, the high school. I, I don't think any of the staff are out to the students. No. I would say no.

Kathy Staley ([00:56:00](#)):

Okay. Um, is there anything else you wanna talk about with your, your work related to LGBT issues before I, I shift gears?

Mark Patrick ([00:56:11](#)):

No.

Kathy Staley ([00:56:12](#)):

Okay. Um, I know you have worked with Alpha Sum. Could you talk about what you've done and Sure.

Mark Patrick ([00:56:22](#)):

Uh, the, the biggest thing is, is, and what Alpha is first <laugh> uh, alpha is, uh, advancing life for, um, advancing life fighting aids, um, advancing life fighting aids for organization, which is a nonprofit organization for helping, um, give free testing for HIV and also, uh, offering counseling for, um, for any of the clients that, that do come back positive and getting them to their medical appointments, getting, making, ensuring that they have the medication. Also offering vocational services, um, for, if there is someone who is coming out of a drug rehab facility that is also HIV positive, then they'll offer vocational services and try to assist with housing. And there's just a, a plethora of, of opportunities and, and things that they, uh, that Alpha provides. And my partner, Leslie and I, my partner Leslie, is on the board for the, for this nine county region.

(00:57:37):

Um, and I was re requested, forced to help with the most recent hike for Hope. And it was, of course, just a fundraiser, uh, that was held at the, um, CATA, meez Greenway in Morton. And we were on the, the board for, for the Hike for Hope and, and helped raises \$19,000 for, for Alpha to be able to continue its its services. So that was, um, wonderful. Most recently we participated in the, um, the high country, uh, Heehaw Bingo, uh, which was the blast. And Mike was there, uh, in all his glory. And, um, then also just Saturday evening, we had the Dining for Friends finale, which was, which was wonderful. And we are always invited to the parties. Some we go to, some we don't. Um, every time you go, it seems like you're making another donation and another donation, and you can end up donating yourself to death.

(00:58:49):

And so I actually had to, to put the hammer down and said, no, we're not giving another \$25 <laugh> to the, at the, at the Alpha finale. But it was, it was nice. We had a great time. Um, but it, it also takes a tremendous amount of work and a tremendous amount of just time that you have to say, yes, I'm going to continue doing this and, and working so hard for absolutely no pay because everything is on a volunteer basis. Or, you know, we're just gonna have to, to step back a little bit, still be a part, still help, but not be so involved and let those that do get paid do it. So that's kind of what I had to do. <laugh>.

Kathy Staley (00:59:44):

Um, so Alpha is based in Hickory. That's right. Um, is there much community in Burke County that supports HIV AIDS education? Or is it something that's beginning?

Mark Patrick (01:00:03):

It is slowly beginning. Alpha's Alpha for this nine county region actually started in Burke County at the Burke Mission Station. Um, they just moved the office to the, the Conover office because they needed more space. Um, but it, of course, alpha is part of the United Way. Uh, but as far as open education, uh, like the, the HIV 1 0 1 classes and things like that, absolutely not. Burke County is not open to that. Burke County is ready for that. Burke County needs that, but Burke County, Burke County is not ready for that. Sorry,

Kathy Staley (01:00:49):

What is its HIV rate comparatively,

Mark Patrick (01:00:53):

I don't know. Okay. I'm sorry. I don't know.

Kathy Staley (01:00:56):

I've had statistics for the Appalachian counties Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, which Burke would be included. Correct. And compared to the rest of North Carolina, Appalachia has a different type of epidemic. And they talked about that at the symposium, that it's, um, whereas North Carolina as a whole has higher proportion African Americans. Right. Supposed, uh, his, uh, heterosexual transmission in Appalachia, it's primarily a white gay male disease. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, and I was just curious if that's the case in Morgantown, which is a little bit more morganton, which is a little bit more urban than say, Ash County.

Mark Patrick (01:01:42):

Right. Oh, wow. Yes. Much more. Um, but I, I don't, I don't know, but David would know. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, yeah. He would be the one that would be able to give you this, this, the actual statistics on that. But I mean, we have offered to, um, begin giving the HIV 1 0 1 classes. Um, that, and I, of course, I was volunteered for that too. Um, <laugh>. And of course, I have no qualms about, you know, offering that. The biggest part of that is going to be actually having people come to it. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, we know that we can get, um, free classroom to use, to be able to do it and use our own technology and knowledge and, and pamphlets and whatnot from, from the Alpha office. But I think that we're going to be very hard pressed, um, the first time that it's, that it is posted in the newspaper, um, said on the radio. I think that there's going to be a enormous backlash, enormous at, which makes me very sad,

Kathy Staley ([01:02:58](#)):

Which is stemming from

Mark Patrick ([01:03:01](#)):

Where, from the Southern Baptist, from being the Bible Belt. I mean, my own family won't hardly, you know, contact me. So for, for that, it's just, imagine if your own family won't speak to you, how my family is gonna react when they see that Mark Patrick's gonna be teaching an HIV 1 0 1 awareness class, you know, <laugh> and what the, I know that I, myself would be fine because I'm not afraid, you know, but I'm not HIV positive and I mean, I'm, that's the reason why I'm such a big activist for, you know, always being safe, not being promiscuous and, and whatnot in, in the community to everyone. And that's the reason why I myself am also willing to continue to help educate everyone, because everyone needs that education, but they're not getting it.

Kathy Staley ([01:04:09](#)):

Is there a sense of community among gay men and lesbians in Morganton? Or is it a different type of atmosphere for

Mark Patrick ([01:04:24](#)):

Between the gay and the lesbian?

Kathy Staley ([01:04:26](#)):

Um, not, well, yes. That as well. Uh, but among the women and among the men, often there is some division

Mark Patrick ([01:04:34](#)):

There. I think there is, I think there is some noticeable division, but I also think there is, there is a huge unity as well. Very much so. I think when it comes to activism, when it comes to uniting, there's going to be a togetherness and a front, doesn't matter which side you're on, but I also think when it comes down to enjoying the party, something like that. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, the, the ladies would prefer to be with the ladies and the men would prefer to be with the men.

Kathy Staley ([01:05:08](#)):

But, so there are parties going on and there is a community built connections between the various gay and bisexual

Mark Patrick ([01:05:16](#)):

Men. Not, not openly. Not openly, not openly. I work, again, I work with, um, with multiple, um, gay and lesbian couples. There're there's, yeah. One gay, one other gay couple, and then two lesbian couples that work at NCSD along with me. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And we get together frequently and we'll go to Ville and enjoy dinner, go to, um, enjoy a movie or something afterwards. Um, Leslie and I have jet skis. We go, we love to go to the lake and bring everybody with us. Um, you know, just, it, it just doesn't matter. We're just good friends. Um, and so we try not to look at, oh God, the lesbians are coming today. You know? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. No. You know, Sonya and earlier are coming today. That's, that's the way it is. As far as a united front. We have yet to find that in Morganton.

([01:06:21](#)):

If you hear of it, let me know. <laugh>, we know of many gay men in Morganton. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But as far as a United had group, a big group. No, they're in Hickory. There's, uh, two groups. One is the Foothills Gentleman's Club. But see, that group is a much older group where they're in their 50 sixties and seventies, whereas I'm 36. And it, the activities of what you want to do are vastly different. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so we are in, always invited to all of the Foothills Gentleman's clubs, um, activities. But yet most of the time we don't go, you know? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Just because they're boring. And <laugh>, sorry, <laugh>. But that would be the only, that would be the only group that I know of is the Foothills Gentleman's Club.

Kathy Staley ([01:07:27](#)):

Are there lots of out gay men, or are there lots of down low men? Or is there a weird mixture? How would you describe

Mark Patrick ([01:07:36](#)):

It? Oh, I would say it was on the down low.

Kathy Staley ([01:07:40](#)):

A large portion

Mark Patrick ([01:07:41](#)):

Of a very large portion. Yes. Um, some that I have went to school with that had just shocked the hell outta me. You know, I was like, wow, you know, <laugh> that, you know, you go into a bar one night, maybe go to scandals. Very seldom do we ever do that. 'cause I become a pumpkin at like nine. So <laugh>, you know. But if we are requested slash forced to go to dinner and a movie, or the bar or something, then somebody will show up and, and, and I'll walk over and I'll say, why It's great to see you. You know, I, I had no idea. Sometimes those people will say, oh, I'm not gay. I'm not gay. I'm, I'm, I'm just here with a friend. You know, and I will respect that. You know? Um, and there are also times when they'll say, it's great that I've finally been able to accept myself for who I am. And I'll say, yes, yes. You know, it took me 34 years. How long did it take you? You know, and I mean, it, it, so it, it is vastly different. But I couldn't count five people in Morganton who are openly gay.

([01:09:01](#)):

I couldn't, it's all on the downline just because of the sheer amount of hatred that resides in our small community. And when you break away from Morganton and you break out into the smaller communities where I live in the Salem community, and then there's the Eno community, George Hildebrand, the smaller areas, it, it's even worse. Where with the, where you can, you know, see, you

can actually see the venom that some people exhibit when they see you. And it's like, wow. And you have, and I think the, the most openly thing that I have said to someone is, you really need to release some of your venom because you are so full of hate. I said, if you would just let it go and embrace and love everyone for who they're, who they are, whether it be gay, straight, black, white, Hispanic, whatever, see the person, not see the white lesbian or the white, the white gay man, you know, just see the people, your life would be so much easier, but didn't go over very well, <laugh>.

Kathy Staley ([01:10:34](#)):

So it wasn't a conversation started.

Mark Patrick ([01:10:37](#)):

No, no. I would've loved to have had a conversation with that man for hours and hours and just talked. But just like with the church that I was a part of and what I grew up in, I mean, I, I resigned my membership from that church because of the sheer amount of hatred and what I call, what I have coined Churchianity. It isn't Christianity, it's churchy. And there is more hate on a Sunday sitting at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church than there is anywhere else in Burke County. And that's a strong statement. And I sat right there and I told that the, that preacher, and I said, I'm so disappointed in what you did to me. And he didn't care. It didn't affect him because he feels that he's right or I feel that I'm right, but that's okay too. So he and I are going to agree to disagree and have mutual respect for one another, at least in passing. And we'll carry on. But, um,

Kathy Staley ([01:11:57](#)):

Have you found another faith congregation?

Mark Patrick ([01:12:01](#)):

No. Uh, we know that there is, um, a church in Raleigh. We also know that there's a church in Asheville and we also know that there's a church in Conover, but Raleigh and Asheville are just simply too far. And the one in Conover, uh, we, we went a couple times and it just wasn't for us. That just wasn't for us. Look, a question.

Kathy Staley ([01:12:28](#)):

Yeah. There, there are some surprising places that have welcoming congregations and I was wondering if Morganton had any yet?

Mark Patrick ([01:12:40](#)):

Not yet. Mm. Not yet. So we'll wait and see.

Kathy Staley ([01:12:46](#)):

Yeah. Um, I have been asking people questions that get at the differences between urban life and Appalachian rural life. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But it sounds like you haven't really lived in a place outside of, um, Appalachia since you were 10. That's right. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. That's right. 'cause you went to school at a SU in the mid nineties.

Mark Patrick ([01:13:13](#)):

Yeah. 96. Nine six. I graduated. Um, started in 96, graduated in uh, 99 mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, and then graduated with my master's in 2005.

Kathy Staley ([01:13:26](#)):

Were you self-aware enough that you were recognizing what was going on on campus with, um, gay and lesbian lives?

Mark Patrick ([01:13:33](#)):

I was not on campus.

Kathy Staley ([01:13:34](#)):

You were one of the distance

Mark Patrick ([01:13:36](#)):

Learners? That's correct. Okay. With working full-time being on campus would've been impossible. And so all of the classes that I took from my undergraduate and my graduate degree in special education were at Western Piedmont Community College. Okay. And at the, uh, hem heck in Hickory.

Kathy Staley ([01:13:56](#)):

And what type of experience was that?

Mark Patrick ([01:13:58](#)):

It was a great experience. Um, being able to pull so many adults from so many different counties. Granted that I was probably the only gay person in, in the Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and disappointingly enough, or I don't, I don't know what it would be. We started with 60 students, 12 graduated. So I don't know if that was a successful, that was a successful graduation rate or not <laugh>. Um, it was a very tough program and I endured the challenge and, and absolutely loved it. Wouldn't change it for the world. Um, even was, was very, very sick throughout a portion of, it was in a terrible accident throughout the second portion of the master's degree, part of it, but still was successful. And I wouldn't, I wouldn't change it. I am mono. Me, myself, I am not an on-campus type of person. I'm much more of the, the country laid back slow type of life.

([01:15:09](#)):

Whereas everything is so fast and so furious on campus, you know, and there are so many rules and restrictions of where you can park and where you can't park and what floor on the library you can be quiet on. And you know, the other one you can do now. See, I, I don't, I don't do that very well. Mm. So I feel very blessed to have had the off-campus cohort experience because it was perfect for me. I loved it. 'cause I'm not sure if I would've been successful if I would've had to have been on campus. That's just me. But I still call a SU home and it always will be. 'cause that's what my degree says. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But, um, I don't know. So as far as within the cohort itself, none <affirmative>. So I missed out on that too. Is there a big, a wide, uh, you know, allegiance here on campus?

Kathy Staley ([01:16:18](#)):

Currently? We have a lot of resources and Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> the population on campus is fairly organized and open. That's wonderful. Um, we have administrative support for a lot of things. Mm-

Hmm. <affirmative> back in the nineties, the group was called Be Glad. The student organization had started around 1990 and they were very active in many ways. They had started doing their regular drag shows and, uh, regularly, um, painted what we call the tunnel, which is a tunnel below River Street for National coming out day. Um, there, there were a lot of, uh, new faculty coming in in the late nineties that our our age who Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, um, have been out forever and teach classes. So it's a SU is incredibly progressive for it being in a county of five 50,000 people. Right.

Mark Patrick ([01:17:33](#)):

You know?

Kathy Staley ([01:17:33](#)):

Indeed. Um, and I would argue it is one of the most progressive universities in the UNC system. Um, keeping in mind we have 16, so

Mark Patrick ([01:17:45](#)):

I would, I would argue as well. Yeah. I would totally agree that. But you know, I think where we here at a SU are are just unique and that's what makes it such a neat experience.

Kathy Staley ([01:18:01](#)):

It is a very unique experience compared to other, other school campuses. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, and that's kind of why it's trying to dig more out about what's going on in Morganton because our LGBT population, you know, being in such a rural county Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, it's fairly vibrant out in the community outside of the university. Um, we don't have, um, bars, no bars in the county. So, you know, you have to go a couple of counties over to get to a gay bar,

Mark Patrick ([01:18:40](#)):

See as do we Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>

Kathy Staley ([01:18:42](#)):

Yet we seem to be a little bit more organized than, than what you're describing. And I'm wondering,

Mark Patrick ([01:18:48](#)):

There is no organization,

Kathy Staley ([01:18:50](#)):

I'm wondering if it, it is solely the university that kind of propelled that, or if there's other differences between, I wouldn't say

Mark Patrick ([01:19:02](#)):

That it, that it's the life of the HU University that has made that difference.

Kathy Staley ([01:19:07](#)):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Mark Patrick ([01:19:09](#)):

Because I think with, with Watauga County being even more rural than what, uh, than what Burke County is, I would've thought it would've been much less progressive. But it sounds like you're winning out

Kathy Staley ([01:19:23](#)):

There. There are definitely pockets of acceptance and, uh, affirmation. There are certainly those, you know, Baptist churches and other denominations as well that are not supportive. But we have congregations that are very supportive as well. So, Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, it, it's an interesting mix. And it, the public schools is kind of like the breeding ground, uh, the, you know, the, the microscope for the entire community. Oh, yes. Because you have the children of the professors that have the children of the hippies who came here because they like the environment. Right. And then you have the 10 generation, uh,

Mark Patrick ([01:20:10](#)):

Appalachian,

Kathy Staley ([01:20:10](#)):

Appalachian people who aren't necessarily anti-gay, but Right. They, they do have a, a different frame. They're less likely to have as much going on in terms of a, a wider view of society.

Mark Patrick ([01:20:28](#)):

Yes, ma'am.

Kathy Staley ([01:20:29](#)):

So it's definitely an interesting mix. Whereas Morganton doesn't have a, a large university. It does have a college though,

Mark Patrick ([01:20:36](#)):

Does it? Western Piedmont Community College, um, is the college that you know, is kind of in the center. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> of the county, but that's it. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Kathy Staley ([01:20:45](#)):

And then you have the large institutions.

Mark Patrick ([01:20:48](#)):

That's correct. We have the, um, J Iverson Riddle Developmental Center for our, for which is a fairly large statewide facility. Uh, we have the North Carolina School for the Deaf. We have, um, Broughton Hospital, and we also have, um, two very large, uh, prison facilities. One is the, the Juvenile Detention Facility. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> as well as the maximum security facility. So, I mean, we have, and it's, it's, it's those organ, or excuse me, it's those businesses or that, or agencies that keep Iowa County alive, because I would say three fourths of the county work at those institutions doing, you know, doing a, a vast variety of things from being doctors to being, I don't know,

Kathy Staley ([01:21:50](#)):

Janitors

Mark Patrick ([01:21:51](#)):

And janitors and, and environmental services and dietary services and, and outside maintenance. You know, just that huge realm. Not that they're any less important or more important than even the teachers or whatnot, but, or the doctors themselves, because you have to have it all to be able to make it run smoothly. Again, you, you don't look at the spectrum. You look at it as a whole, and that's where you have to go from. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-Hmm.

Kathy Staley ([01:22:21](#)):

<affirmative>. I find it interesting that you did not move away to a larger city. Could you talk about why that is?

Mark Patrick ([01:22:31](#)):

If, if I would've had the chance, I would've been gone in a heartbeat. Um, especially Asheville, uh, with Asheville being so much more progressive. Um, my biggest thing is, is that just four, you know, four and a half years ago, I finished graduate school and I finally got that finished, moved that off. And so now I've been working on, uh, gaining tenure and once I reach career status within the state of North Carolina, and there's two things here I want I, that was important to me of, um, being debt free and, um, and reaching career status. So the only thing I have left is my house. So everything else is paid for. Um, and which I worked very, very hard to do that. But now with, with having Leslie, we also have Christian and Lauren to think of. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, we stay on a weekly basis. Gosh, if we could just get out here, if we could just roll, you know, we would be gone like the wind. Um, just to escape the hatred and to be able to be in a, a larger place where we wouldn't be looked at as the gays who live on Wesley Road, but at, hey, there's Mark and Leslie. You know. Um, so now we have to think about Christian and Lauren. So

Kathy Staley ([01:24:09](#)):

Are back at their school in Alexander County. Are they the, the twins from the gay dad? Or has, is that so separated that it doesn't follow them?

Mark Patrick ([01:24:23](#)):

Right now? It hasn't followed them at, at all. Um, and we don't think that it will in the elementary school setting, but we are fearful for them once they, once they reach the middle school. Um, actually we had the pristine opportunity to speak with their principal. Uh, she actually contacted us out of the blue after we went for an an IEP meeting for Lauren. Um, and individual education plan. You're, you're with me, um, being the teacher you are. Um, and she said that she would like to speak with us, and she said, us. And we were like, what did we do? You know, and I was racking my brain thinking, what did I say at the IEP meeting, being an LEA representative myself, you know, for the NCS. There were many times in the meeting and I'd say, okay, well now, now we'll discuss. And then I'd <laugh> and they would all laugh, you know, and go and back, back up that back to the parent mark, back to the parent Mark.

([01:25:31](#)):

And I'd say, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. You know, <laugh>, y'all gotta move this along. And, um, and she asked us if we would come so that she could interview us for, um, a doctoral thesis that she was working on,

on having, um, couples with gay couples, with, with students in the public school system. And it was like, wow. It was such an honor. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> to be able to be asked by the school principal to come and be interviewed. And, uh, we went and we left feeling very, very good. Not only for ourselves, but knowing that we have a very progressive principal, uh, a very loving principal and, um, a very accepting principal and someone that we know that's gonna have our back Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And we were like, oh, if she just moves to the middle school in two years, yes. You know, will be, will be in good shape.

[\(01:26:40\)](#):

Um, but that, that's one of the biggest things that, that we have. We know that we have acceptance and we know all of the teachers are aware, uh, because they receive emails from me just as much as they receive emails from Leslie. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, there is, even though he has the daddy card and he can play the daddy card anytime he wants to, and I'll step back, you know, but, but I'm, I have the same, you know, we have the same rules and stuff. We call it the daddy card, is that he can overrule Mark at any time with the daddy card. So we haven't decided on the number of daddy cards that he has. He's only used it once so far, so <laugh> in four years. So that's not bad. But

Kathy Staley [\(01:27:26\)](#):

You having experience in the, the field of education probably helps

Mark Patrick [\(01:27:32\)](#):

Very much so. Mm-Hmm. Um, her, when we, when we first found out that she had Graves disease, um, which is hyperthyroidism, um, and she's completely out of control in, in the mornings before she gets her medicine because her little body just isn't in control of itself. And you can physically see the pupils are dilated, you know, and she's just spinning like a tornado. And once you give her her medicine, after about 20 minutes, you can actually see her come down off of her high. And it's such an amazing, amazing thing. And so in first grade, kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, she wasn't on any medicine because it wasn't found until at the end of second grade. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and I was around then. And so I was there when they did the initial, uh, evaluations and whatnot. And the teacher she had was not an experienced teacher as well as doesn't know the law, and doesn't know things that she can and cannot say.

[\(01:28:42\)](#):

We would receive emails, you know, did Lauren have her medicine this morning? She could come to school unless she's had her medicine. And <laugh>, all I did was click print. We drove down there and I sat down with the principal, and this was a different principal at that time. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And the blood just drained from his face. And I said, I have a master's degree in special education. I write IEPs every single day. I know the law. And he said, she's new and I like, and the next meeting that we scheduled, the ec director was there. The superintendent was there because they knew that Mark was gonna be there. And Mark, mark was coming as Lauren's advocate, mark was not coming as Lauren's second dad. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know. And I said, we gotta, we gotta a nix this right here. You know? And so they were well aware that I was able to s sp out the law very quickly and very easily.

[\(01:29:47\)](#):

And, um, now we have, we are well respected in the IEP meetings the way it should be for all, not for somebody who knows the law, but Leslie is completely clueless and leaves that totally up to me. And, you know, it was, it was very tense at first, but now walking into the school, they know that I'm just as important as dad. And that's a nice feeling, not only with the special education teacher, but with the

classroom teachers as well. Um, and anytime that there's testing or anything like that that has to be done, then a lot of those emails are just simply forwarded to me. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and I, yeah. It seems like you would learn these rules by now, dad, you know, so, um, but we have been treated very nicely and very fairly and, and very respectfully, uh, within the school system thus far. So we're hoping that that will continue.

Kathy Staley ([01:30:53](#)):

Have, this might be a little too personal. Have you pursued second adoption, second parent adoption

Mark Patrick ([01:30:58](#)):

Or No, because mom is still there. That was, yes. Uh, it's 50 50 mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And Mom is, um, not involved. Um, mom is very lazy. Uh, and mom just doesn't care. I could be a lot meaner than that, but we'll just keep it on a professional level. Um, there's no help that there's no assistance that's given with homework on the nights that this student, that Christian and Lauren are with mom, uh, we normally have to play catch up on the days that, that they're with us. But it is 50 51 week there. It's two days. One week is five days. It's 2 5 2 5 2 5 2 5 mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So it's always equal, you know, throughout, but, so no adoption, second

Kathy Staley ([01:31:52](#)):

Adoption's not

Mark Patrick ([01:31:52](#)):

An option. That's right. And I would, I would in a heartbeat. Um, and they know, even though they know that death's mom and they know that that's dad, you know, I'm still Mark. Um, and, but they look, they love me just as much as I love them. And as they're getting older, it's, the loving part is becoming more difficult. You know, that was, that was a joke. <laugh> loving a teenager is going to be very hard.

Kathy Staley ([01:32:20](#)):

Gotcha.

Mark Patrick ([01:32:21](#)):

Very hard.

Kathy Staley ([01:32:22](#)):

They're 11

Mark Patrick ([01:32:23](#)):

Now. 10? No, they're nine now. Soon. Okay. Just next month they'll be 10. And it's like, this is, we have actually started the smarty pants phase and and how old is your child?

Kathy Staley ([01:32:38](#)):

Eight. But he came out with an opinion.

Mark Patrick ([01:32:43](#)):

Did he? Yes. We have one of each. So, um, and Christian has an opinion on everything. Yes. Yeah. So be ready. You have one more year before the smarty pants face begins. So anytime that you make a comment Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And a smart something statement is said back to you. It's like, and I am a very strict teacher, you know, even using sign language all day long, you know, most of the time when I arrive home in, in the evening, then I will continue using sign language just because it's a habit. But, you know, why are you signing? I am not deaf. You know, you'll let, you'll let that one go and then <laugh>, you know, and then, no, Lauren, I need you to do this for me. Please. I don't wanna do that.

[\(01:33:49\)](#):

You rephrase it, Lauren, come and do that. And, and then the third time, then you go get them and you bring them and you make them do it, you know? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, that's 'cause that's kind of how we roll. Yeah. <laugh>. Yeah. Um, whereas students, even middle school and high school students that I teach every day, when I ask them to do it, they do it, you know, <laugh>. And I'm like, what is this discussion <laugh>? I, I don't understand. And Leslie has to remind me frequently, mark, you're not a teacher. You know, turn off your teacher. Hmm. And I always accept that. I'm like, alright, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. You know, <laugh>. But that, that's, that is my biggest struggle with me and the kids is that the, first of all, they're slob and second of all that they're lazy and that they just don't listen.

[\(01:34:53\)](#):

<laugh>. And I think that's been Leslie and I's relationship is, is probably just concrete. I mean, we balance each other so Well, in your email that you sent, you said that one person always dominates the conversation. That's the reason why you like to interview 'em separately. That would so be me. I would just go and Leslie just, you know, but you know, if you get him riled, then you know, watch out. Because he will, he will speak his mind. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, which is, which is great, but sometimes he needs a little bit of a filter, you know, there. Um, but we balance each other so nicely. I'm just full of energy and he's just lazy, you know, and so we <laugh> there, you know, and especially with the kids, I can handle Lauren who's just full of all that positive and negative energy. And, and what.