JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
QUEER ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Louis Hughes Jr.
Interviewed by Carolina Garcia and Hadeed Habib
March 6, 2022

Interviewee: Louis Hughes Jr. (LH)
Interviewer(s): Hadeed Habib (HH) and Carolina Garcia (CG)
Subject: Life of Louis Hughes Jr.
Date: March 6, 2022

CG:    Hello. This is Carolina Garcia.

HH:    And Hadeed Habib and today we are going to be conducting an interview with
Mr. Louis right here. If you want to go ahead and introduce yourself so that the
recording –

LH:    Ok. I’m Elder Louis Hughes from, born in Norfolk, Virginia. And I’ve been living
in Baltimore since 1970. And I sort of have my rebirth coming out in 1974 here in
Baltimore. So that was my second life. But I went – well I grew up and went to
high school and other grade schools in Norfolk, Virginia and I went to Hampton
University in Hampton Virginia for undergrad. And I did do some graduate
school work in Reskin, Virginia at Virginia Tech working on a Master of Business
Administration. And I worked as an engineer for 30 years for Westinghouse
Electrical Operation starting in 1965, the year I graduated from Hampton. And I
lived in Lima, Ohio or Lima, Ohio for four years and in northern Virginia,
McLean, Virginia was where I worked. I lived in Falls Church for two years. And
then the rest of my living and retirement years have been spent here in Baltimore.

And I started working as an engineer and my specific type of engineer was quality
assurance engineer. And I worked in all kinds of space programs and military
programs and on civilian aircraft electrical systems. We produced little black
boxes that worked. And we had a piece of equipment on the Apollo spacecraft and
I started out working on those. And then when I came to Baltimore I worked on
nuclear power plants and nuclear aircraft carriers and submarines. So that’s the
work history.

I was still working when I came out and I took an early retirement in 1992. And I
did a lot of volunteering at the Pride Center which I helped start in 1975. And on
various committees and things involved with the Pride Center. And right up until
present I guess I’ve done some interviews talking about gay legislations for the
city of Baltimore, for the state of Maryland. I did a lot of testifying in getting gay
rights passed, one bill in 1988, the other bill in 2001. That was the state bill and
the local one in Baltimore. And it’s a pleasure to be here to be interviewed by you
all and to get to share some of the parts of my life in which I’ve already shown
you a copy of the LGBT Baltimore history book with pictures and short stories
about the community, the Pride community.

And a lot of it began right here in Charles Village right near where we are at
2726 North Calvert Street in the same bloc. Some of the early papers were printed
in the basement of somebody’s house and they were a premed student. And the
same person wrote the CDC grant to get a community health center started for protecting sexually transmitted diseases. And that was a grant that was written in the late ‘70s, I think about 1978. And we’ve had various locations where Chase Brexton was a product of that. And when they became independent, an independent nonprofit and moved into their own building and expended.

And that still exists, the Pride Center still exists. But some of the things that were started early like a switchboard which is you’d have to explain we had landlines in the ‘70s and ‘80s, no cell phones, cordless telephones. So people could call in to get resources and information and informational guides. And some of that started in the basement of 2745 North Calvin Street, right across the street on the corner of 28th and North Calvin.

HH: Yeah. Thank you for that wonderful introduction. We should, we want to start back at the very, very beginning.

LH: Ok.

HH: So a question we like to ask at the beginning of all of our interviews kind of is what’s like the earliest memory that you have?

LH: Of?

HH: Of your childhood.

LH: Of my child – oh ok. I think about three. I had an uncle, my dad’s baby brother. And I remember playing with him and I was ticklish so he used to tickle me all the time. And that would be 1947. And he died that same year but that’s some of my earliest recollection as a child and growing up. And I was the baby, had an older sister four months and four years older than I am and she was born in 1939 before World War II and I was born towards the end of World War II. I’m sort of a pre-baby boomers. The baby boomer years started after the end of World War II which is in 1945. And so and my parents planned their children.

My mother went to Virginia Union University and she majored in social worker. So she was a worker at Phyllis Wheatley YWCA in Norfolk, Virginia. And she got pregnant with my sister in 19 I guess ‘38 and ‘39 she had my sister. Maybe it was all ’38 ‘cause my sister’s born in December. I mean all ’39, should have been all 1939. I’m, maybe she conceived in 1943 with me and I was born in the early part of 1944. But the war was going on and my mother worked up until February with me as a volunteer civil employee for the Navy in an office. And she used I guess social work in doing that.

She was very involved in the community and very social and also a member of the same sorority that Kamala Harris, the vice president, belongs to. It’s called Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. And my sister was also an AKA. And my dad and his
brother went to Hampton and my great grandfather, my grandmother’s father went to Hampton and finished in 1880 and he was a minister and he was one of the first preacher classes. And he was born a slave so I can trace his history back in census and all to that period. And then my, then my great grandfather’s son, my grandmother’s brother and my grandmother went to Hampton also. And then my father, my sister and myself so there are many generations in my family, went to the same school.

HH: How did growing up in this turn of an era almost with the end of World War II how did that kind of influence how you presented yourself growing up either through your queer identity or in general?

LH: Well growing up at that era there wasn’t many, much openness about your queer identity. I was actually in the closet you might say the first 30 years of my life. And in fact there were some signs that I was different and it showed up early like in sports and different areas of expressing self. And my parents decided to send me to a boys’ camp when I was eight. And there I learned to ride horses and they were shocked to see this change. And I loved the boys’ camp ‘cause all the boys. I didn’t have any brothers. And I remember the camp counselors were like big brothers. It was a wonderful experience to maybe open me up from my shyness.

And also having a hobby or really it’s a commitment taking care of a four legged animal. I had a horse after I had a pony. And I shed the horse in northern state above the what’s called the Mason Dixon Line, north and south. It’s really in Pennsylvania US-30 is that line that sort of divides. So actually Baltimore is below the Mason Dixon line. It’s part of the south and it shows up a lot in a lot of different things. And it, but it was helped me I guess in coping with my differences to have a hobby that involved every day going to feed and take care of the horse. So I got to spend a lot of time but I got to meet people at the barn and even opened me. Because living in the segregated south you don’t interface with many white kids or white adults. Your neighborhood is black. Your schools are black.

So I from being in a barn that was integrated – my uncle had white tenants that rented space for their horses in the barn and I played with their children. I do remember in my childhood there was an Asian business in the same block as my father’s, plumbing and heating business. And the office for that business and I used to play with the Asian child and his little brother maybe. And but it also gave me the ability to know there were both races and you knew your boundaries and where you had to sit on buses and all. And all your schools were segregated. My high school was the first integration in the state of Virginia.

HH: Oh wow.

LH: And it was won by a Supreme Court ruling that went all the way to the Supreme Court. And the lawyer was Thurgood Marshall. He was a member of the NAACP general council and they were suing the education system in Norfolk. There were
17 students, some in my class and other classes. And they allowed only the high school and junior high school or middle school to integrate first. They felt it was too harsh to integrate the elementary until later was phased in. And actually the state of Virginia refused to honor the Supreme Court ruling. So the first month that the order was supposed to take place all schools in Virginia were closed.

And some of the private schools were started in that era to resist the integration. But I knew very well I dated one of the 17 students that integrated in the city of Norfolk and there were other cities in Virginia that integrated. And they actually had to go to school in church for that first semester. Our school reopened one month after school was supposed to start and we had to go to school on Saturday to make it up because they went to court and said well, the schools that aren’t being integrated shouldn’t be closed. And they won that court decision while the state was revisiting. And finally they did give in. Maybe if they had tried to appeal. I don’t know the Supreme Court ruling. But it didn’t work, whatever the things they did so they did integrate the schools.

But that was the beginning of change of education and integration. So and I protested in high school and college to integrate school campus and all that was big at that time. So I had a little civil rights activist in my bones I guess. Then I came out as a gay man and there’s gay discrimination. And I thought oh I’ll just use some of that knowledge and I sort of picked up from there fighting the discrimination that was apparent for gays. And I started with the local city bill. It passed after many years in 1988. And it was passed by the city council of Baltimore and signed by the mayor. And I testified at many of those hearings and I also testified on the state level. And finally in 2001 the state passed a statewide bill that protected people. It didn’t include trans persons and that categories. It wasn’t going to pass it was in the bill. So we had to come back and add things like that later.

But so I sort of transferred my activist bone into doing that ‘cause I wasn’t a big bar person before I came out. And my best friend from work who was also gay he was big in bars. And I kept saying well, there’s got to be more than this to gay life I 1974. And I found regular people that were trying to do other things, like gay community centers. So I sort of got activist in that. And I just from then on went into – and I am a participate in a 38 year research study at Hopkins at the School of Public Health. It’s a longitudinal study anyway.

And this is – in fact I got later this month to the first clinical visit. They’ve had pauses for the last two years in seeing participants and now they’re getting back started. But and just when AIDS first came out I realized I had to do something before instead of watching all my friends die, no vaccines. And even some of the treatments weren’t even developed then. But all of that improved and I ‘cause I was sort of in the sciences and physics and math were my majors and I believed in research and scientific methods and things like that. And even the pandemic. I actually know Tony Fauci, Dr. Fauci because he was the principal investigator at
the CDC when the AIDS research started. And both – he moved up to NIH and the study has moved to NIH and now expanded to include women.

But they’re going to continue to study women and men. ‘Cause they’re more than AIDS and things. They’re health and other things, memory and bone loss and other things they look at and measure. But it will go on forever it seems. I think they’ll have to get new participants to replace people like me that’s approaching 80. But they accommodate everything so that’s interesting.

CG: That is interesting. It’s interesting learning about your work here in Baltimore with research. But I am curious to know like in what other ways you were involved with the queer community and how you got involved and how you got to know people here in Baltimore in the queer community?

LH: Well I had a coworker that was coming out himself. And he so he – we ate lunch together every day and we lived in the same apartment complex. So I took a crash course on what everything I needed to learn about being gay. Some I kept in my basket, some I didn’t. His hanging out with bars was not my stuff. I didn’t drink a lot and hang out in bars. But I did become more social then ‘cause I was dating now. And that was one place to go and safely meet people. And it’s sort of a combination of the activist me and the social me developed and grew. Because I, initially I was shy, a shy person. I was hiding who I was for 30 years so I had a lot of catching up to do and living to do. And that was interesting. And revealing actually it paid off in just talking like the family reunions about like the research study.

Actually I discovered that I had a cousin as far as I know was straight but he had AIDS. And his grandmother had attended the reunion and heard about somebody working on a study with AIDS so she asked me all these questions. And unfortunately he transitioned. But I did tell her she could help take care of him with his mother and she did. And as he transitioned ‘cause there wasn’t ‘much to do. Now they have treatments that at least you can live with AIDS. They haven’t had a vaccine work yet but maybe the work they’ve done with genome theories they can solve a lot of these medical things that they didn’t because they’ve opened up a whole new research things with the work they’ve done very quickly with AIDS and the pandemic, coming out with the vaccine.

So I’m really surprised because even when we started we didn’t know how to test. We didn’t know about vaccines and protection and all that’s been done in two years. So it’s much quicker now and it’s hopeful. Some of those other things like the common cold and diabetes which I am a diabetic, a prediabetic or a type two diabetic. So some of those things maybe we’ll be able to work out and unlock the medical mysteries too.

HH: One thing that I thought was super interesting was you just talked about how you had civil rights activism in your bones first and then you moved over to gay rights
activism. What was that transition like? Because I know recently we’ve had a huge topic is intersectionality. But how is it like navigating the gay rights movement and the civil rights movement?

LH:    Well I knew it was wrong to mistreat people. And you think since we’re an oppressed group that we wouldn’t have discrimination. But I found it everywhere. And it’s racial, it’s ethnic related and its people of color and they’re mistreating Asians whether they’re from another continent or from another country that we still have those isms that we need to change. And I know change doesn’t come easy so you have to work at it.

And I am pleasantly surprised at how much things have gone. I didn’t know in starting a gay men’s VD clinic that it would grow into a medical center. And actually I go there as a senior just for counseling and meetings and things. And it’s wonderful to see something that you helped start that gives back. And they’re very giving and it’s just something simple. Like I have trouble getting change to pay for transportation. And I said oh the pharmacy is not probably going to change this big bill I wanted to get changed. But I just went and asked and they said oh yeah. How do you want it? And I said see there. You’ve got to ask and you’ve got to reach out. ‘Cause evidently somebody picked well when they selected people that would be caring and realizing people need to get the human side.

But it’s always been encouraging and it’s good to see. And right away I started discussing election and we even went to school of medicine to talk about the research study and explaining about that. And also there have been some advanced at Hopkins Medical to look in and support the community since they were doing this research. They made a commitment for like the bills I talk about. Hopkins faculty came and testified the need for civil rights, the medical side. The deans they testified along with me for the city council bill in Baltimore city and for the state bill. That type of partnership had been established and that was a neat thing. And I had to pull out of my shell. So it was easy to grab onto something that gets you, takes you even further there. Your limits.

And I’m surprised. I was just looking at some actors and Samuel L Jackson was one of them. And I mentioned there’s a theater on Broadway named for James Earl James who is another, Junior, who is another African American actor. Both of them stuttered initially. And they went in to get out of their shell. And I think Maya Angelou didn’t speak until she was like eight or nine. She had – and all of these things that she had inside her came out. So it’s in you. You can do anything if you put your mind to it and find the good to do it and use it. And I always seem to have that.

I had wonderful parents. They did everything for their kids, my sister and I. And they – and maybe we were sheltered a little bit it’s not bad to be sheltered. And sometimes with just socializing I met some people that socializing and dating and
all. And some of them used to say well you’re not a one night stand person. I said no. I hope I didn’t give you the impression I was and if that’s what you’re looking for we need to go our ways or just be friends. ‘Cause I for some reason I kept thinking everybody is going to be like mom and dad together. And so even as a gay person I would be. And I kept finding out that didn’t always work. Even when my sister got married, even marriages don’t work and last. I don’t care whether you’re gay or straight.

HH:  Yeah.

LH:  So I had to say oh ok. Maybe I need to open up a little and just have fun, relax and enjoy yourself. Maybe you won’t be lifelong commitments. And maybe that isn’t a bad thing. ‘Cause there were some bumpy roads that I didn’t know about that my parents had. When my father came, come complain to me about my mother I said I don’t know what this is. But I’m telling you I love you both equally and whatever you all did to keep it going this long pull out some of that and spread it over this relation. So I’m pushing this back into your arena. And I think my father was taking some powerful medicines and he might have had problems with coping ‘cause his health was failing. He died early with heart condition at 65. But African American males do die earlier than others anyway. But my mother was a survivor. She lived to be 82.

HH:  Wow.

LH:  And she’d have lived longer if she didn’t have cancer. But she did have Alzheimer’s at the end and it sort of blocked her ability to notice something wrong going on. And then I found all the time I kept talking to her about oh go and have your physical and get your pap smears and all that. She wouldn’t do anything. When I stepped in and said my mother needs a pap smear. When was the last time she had one? I don’t know. I think it’s maybe ten years ago or something. What? I tell her to do that every year and I used to bring it up. And she was getting away. She would actually take people to the doctor and say she went to the doctor. ‘Cause she actually the doctor was a cousin of hers and so bringing people to the office she’d use that. Oh yeah. I was at the doctor’s office. I had to laugh about that. She hadn’t had a mammogram and all those things that you brought up that might not have been big at first. But I thought she should do that. When it was her time to go she went. I said hey. You just had to take it wherever it was. And just laugh about it. But I found out that in some things that they thought about are different than today’s ideas about it. So I had to pick what I could and put it in my basket and push some of them out of my basket and try to get a balance. And it worked.

I tried five times with lovers. And everybody said oh they don’t last. I’m going what? But and some were successful, longer than others and stuff. But I was just realizing that I’m friendly with all of them, on friendly terms and broke up. But I
did go online today. I was looking for number one, the first one and I’ve lost track of him. Since we broke up he became a metropolitan DC policeman in the police department. So that was the last time that I knew what he was doing. So I put that in and it seems as though he has — and I did a Google search or something. He’s done some things in security like homeland security. Doing consultant things. So I tapped in and LinkedIn advice said and gave him — I think he’ll get my email number so I’ll see what happens to at least see where he is and what he’s been doing. ‘Cause he was younger than I was. He was 11 years younger than I was when we met.

HH: When did you meet?

LH: The year I came out. It was only a few months before I met somebody. And he had broken up with his previous friend. And I think we met like in November and we were together through Valentine’s Day so a couple months. But I think his old friend came back and he moved from Baltimore to DC to be back with him. And I don’t think that worked out but that caused us to break up and him to relocate. And he was a bank teller when I knew him but he went to DC, joined the police department. Wow. Gay policeman which they do have gay policeman. Like ok. I never, nothing told me that he really wanted to do this but maybe he did. And somebody might have been a policeman in his family or something.

HH: Speaking about that, about the community when you’re in Baltimore and how you found all these individuals what was it — ‘Cause I know Baltimore it’s a very neighborhood focused city.

LH: Yeah. Born in the east side and the west side.

HH: Yeah. So how was the gay community kind of disbursed throughout these neighborhoods? I know at least here in this part of Baltimore we’ve got Charles Village and Mount Vernon.

LH: Well people move around. They move from east to west even though they didn’t grow up. But I didn’t go to high school here so I didn’t have that and I had to learn it. And I have some families who were like my Baltimore family and especially when I lost my mother. I said well, I’ve got my Baltimore mother. But she had stomach cancer and I didn’t know it.

It wasn’t long between my mother passing and two or three years she was ill and transitioning. But we’re still good friend and she was – she would have been my mother in law in that relationship. In fact the person who crocheted this hat now is her daughter, my ex sister in law. And we still keep in touch and grandkids, one of them is my godson. And his baby sister who is expecting identical twins this month, is a nurse. She didn’t go to Hopkins. She went to State and she has a master’s from Notre Dame.
HH: Wow.

CG: Wow.

LH: But yeah. She’s expecting identical twins. And we did a baby shower late in January for her. So she’s supposed to have a cesarean I think it’s the last week of this month.

HH: Wow. Well early congratulations.

CG: Yes.

LH: Oh yeah. It is. I’m that close to the family. And there’s another sister who she transitioned with cancer. But her kids grew up with me and I’ve known them. And I’m close to them. And they were in the same family of that particular partner. My first partner, the one I was trying to find, his sister died herself early. And I think he had another sibling. He was originally from Tennessee but he had come here to be with his sister. And he, and the sister was older. But he stayed in the DC Baltimore area. And I, my last partner is an RN nurse and he went to nursing school at the University of Maryland School of Nursing and he lives in Dallas, Texas. And so I just talked to him. And we have birthdays one day apart. He’s the 17th of March and I’m the 16th. And we were just talking two days ago about how we celebrated together.

I was actually in the hospital because I have an autoimmune disease and they were trying to treat me with an experimental treatment that didn’t work. But I needed to see, to try to see if this would work. But then I found out you can celebrate your birthday in the hospital. Actually you can get a special menu. They’ll bring you tablecloths and a whole meal you can pick if you’re not on a restriction. And you just have to pay extra for it. So one day friends brought Chinese I think. I had Chinese that you’d both like. And the other day, his birthday they rolled the little table for two and you had shrimp cocktail.

HH: Wow.

LH: And I think he had a steak and I had fish or something. But it was, I mean it was not what you get on a tray. It was a step up. And the person that delivered it from the kitchen they were all dressed up especially to deliver. And the lesbian nurse that belonged to my church which is right, it was located on 27th and St. Paul. My church was sharing that with another church at the time. She told me about the special menu and all and said no, you don’t have to worry about your birthday coming in. You can just ask for the dietician to give you the special menu. And it just isn’t covered, whatever the insurance covers and stuff.
CG: That’s nice. So do you have any birthday goals for this year as you reflect on your life and your life here in Baltimore? What do you think about as it’s approaching?

LH: Well I in general I realized that I’m going to transition probably one day. And I’ve already planned that out. But and I’m glad to be here because I realized how helpful it is that the young people are here. I mean like I’m on the third floor, all the single rooms on the third floor. But my landlady is thinking about moving me to another one of her houses where I won’t be that high up and that the room configuration is different in those houses. But she’s already had experience with an elder being in the house and transitioning and it’s no problem. In fact I moved here because the previous place I was living when I had to go to the hospital when the medication failed and they had to find something else to work they wasn’t sure if I would need somebody to come in when I came home to help me.

And this person had a phobia about outside people coming in the house. And I went wait a minute. You knew I was 77 when I moved here. I turned 77. What did you expect? How many people do you know that lives that long in your family that won’t transition? He had younger sibling, or his twin brother transitioned. But I think he has psychological problems. So I started looking and then I found this and it’s called an extended home. It’s an LLC so it has a cross mixture. Some of us are gay and lesbian and some aren’t and we’re intergenerational and we’re certainly international.

And Jesse’s from Boston and he’s not a student. He works at the YMCA. He has multiple jobs. But he wanted a place that he could share a room and probably get a lower rental type thing. So it works well and you find out how to make it work if you just relax and give and take. And that’s good. And they clop on the steps in flip flops. So I didn’t have to carry anything up. And I roll my laundry down the steps. And the other day I was doing something and my cane – I lost the grip on it. I didn’t fall but the cane slipped. All the doors opened up and I went I’m sorry guys. I didn’t fall. It’s nice to know you did come out to check. You just didn’t say oh I didn’t hear him yell. But I said that’s wonderful to know that you care that much.

HH: Yeah.

LH: And it is. So it’s been working well. And she’s had experience before. In fact she told me I just bought a bench to go in the shower because I don’t think I’m doing well in standing up. And she said, oh you should have said something. At one of the other houses the person that transitioned had a bench and she was in her 80s and so I could have used it. And I think she’s planning on moving me to that house so I’ll even get to see what other aids she had that I might need that are left in her collection as she transitioned.

HH: It seems like you’ve really been able to find a vast community here in Baltimore.
LH: Yeah.

HH: Even with the house and even before that. I’m interested in hearing how that all started because I know we talked about on the phone yesterday during college you were part of a fraternity.

LH: Yeah.

HH: So that was really interesting to me. Because I don’t know, typically I think we don’t associate fraternities with being so accepting.

LH: Well they accepted me because I was out to them about it. But in pledging, but the funny thing some of them were in the closet too. The son in law of one of the hidden figures that they were talking about with the book and the movie he married one of her daughters which is – and I went to school with them. I went to school with one of the figures that was a supervisor of the group of women. I went to school with her son. But it was the one that was running and doing the calculation, the one that lived to be 101. It was her daughter, her son in law is gay. He came out later. So a lot of people my age even got married and had kids before they came out with their sexuality.

So in my pledging experience there was a test on me but see I wasn’t out. And I had no response to the test I guess that I was supposed – but how did they know what to test unless there was prior knowledge? I kept saying ok. Somebody in here had known what to test for. But see I figured it was a challenge to me and I had enough control I figured if any of them became fraternity brothers I was as tough as them and I could make it. I don’t care what they think. And so actually one was sort of like sexual abuse. One was playing with my nipples or something. And I didn’t want anybody touching me period. And that’s a part of how I stayed in the closet I guess. I didn’t get near anybody to get excited or I knew I would get excited.

So this person and I said I don’t know what he’s trying to do but it’s not going to work because as dumb as he is in my mind I can outsmart him. And I did and I passed whatever their test was. But it wasn’t – so I didn’t know what it was to be intimate. In fact I was laughing ’cause a Spanish roommate I had was an exchange student. I think he was getting his Master of Business Administration but he worked at my company that I was in management. And he had a roommate that’s from Puerto Rico that was getting trained by me so I knew the roommate and the student. And he was in the department. And when the guy from Puerto Rico went back after the training this exchange student couldn’t maintain the apartment and so I said well, I have a den. You want to rent that? So he did.

But I never had a brother, didn’t have anybody living. This guy had brothers and the Spanish personality was walk from the car to the house. He’s got his arms
around my shoulder and I’m going – and I’m like trying to pull. He said we’re just talking. But that’s a custom in Spain. Males after work they go to bars to get tapas they call it. And that’s normal. And I knew he didn’t mean anything by it but there were several times that I felt uncomfortable because of my response when he got close to me. He used to jump in bed with me and I’m going uh. He’d come out of the shower and come in my room and we’re talking about something and so he’s going to sit on the bed or lay on the bed. And I’m going oh no. When he left I went through this depression ‘cause I missed that kind of companionship. And I said he’s not feeling what I’m feeling and I just had to guard my feeling. But why am I feeling this way? And so I then started exploring and why am I blocking this feeling? Maybe there is something that I need to open up about.

And so that’s when I – it was something. I was going out to see a drag show I heard about. And I was interested and they said it was Halloween. And so I said why don’t you and I go. And I’m thinking this is my straight engineering friend that lives in my same apartment complex in Pikesville. Well he had already been to the drag show earlier in the week. And he wasn’t sure I was gay and he’d been talking to his friends about me. And they were saying oh yeah. It sounds like it. He just doesn’t know it. And so I kept saying – we went to Sells Point and other bar places and I said this doesn’t sound like the same thing that they were describing. And I just wanted to see what it was like. And finally he said well, I know it’s not there on Halloween, the day of Halloween.

It actually was there earlier in the week. I’m going how to you know about this. In my mind I’m going – we’re driving to the place that he said we should go to and we could see something similar. And I finally asked him “Are you gay?” And there’s this big pause. He didn’t know how to answer that. And he finally said yes and I went holy smokes. I mean he’s a divorcée with two kids. And I didn’t ever have – I mean I didn’t think he was gay. I had no except for wanting to go to this place. I went I need to come out and look about, learn some things because I might be gay. I’m having these feelings. And they weren’t about him. And so every evening when we got home after dinner or something I’d call him. We’d do this gay 101. Well what do you do? And all this stuff. So gave me his version.

But he had a problem. He’s an alcoholic. He had to get loose with alcohol to date and relate to someone and I’m going I know this ain’t for me. I don’t even like to drink that much. And so I – but I put in my basket what was mine and what I didn’t need. And then he introduced me to somebody and then the rest is history. Off we went. And this 19 year old taught me everything I need to know and it was really nice. And I was fulfilled and just disappointed when it didn’t last. You live and you learn but you never know until you experience something.

And I’ve seen time and time again people that had stuttering. They end up being great speakers and orators. I can imagine going from stuttering – and I think the young lady that read the poem at Biden’s inauguration she had a speaking problem. She’s a twin and she had a speaking problem initially. And she got
through it though. I mean she didn’t appear to have any speaking problems with me. I thought she was brilliant.

HH: Yeah.

LH: And a poet and a crafty person. And she’s done more things since then. I mean she’s a model now.

CG: Yeah.

LH: Not only a poet but some other things that will take her many different places. And so it’s – you don’t know your limit. I think you do have to try.

HH: So do you think the people who have to go through that kind of transformation are like changing. Because all of these major poets we’ve talked about are they somehow even stronger than the people who have a natural affinity for it in the end? Like does it make them better at what they do?

LH: I think so. I think they pushed through and achieving their goal and they might have learned something on the way. ‘Cause I did find out you can approach a goal and then the limits of the goal might change. You don’t know that until you push into that. And I hate change. But it always happens. I wouldn’t think I’d be living in a house with intergenerational people. But I think it’s great. They go up and down the steps and can take things lickety split. And I’m going to have to figure out how to drag it up or put it in a backpack and take it. And friends helped me move but we had to double park and load things on the porch. Now two of them just ran right up and down the steps and they had it all gone and I just had to put it together in the room.

And it definitely helps. And I feel somewhat I give them pep talks about going out and having a good day. And I mean it. And maybe I was spoiled with that but it’s not bad to have somebody in your corner saying you’re going to have a good day and how do you feel. And see, I get up early. They’re not waking up. I was up this morning by myself walking around. In fact my landlady knows it. She told me to put the – she had some corned beef in the slow cooker and put it on for six hours on high. And I didn’t even know what she meant and I said well, I’ll put a timer in my phone and all. But the thing is programmed. It’s either six or four hours I think and it’s low or high. And so I just had to keep pushing select until boom, off it went. And we had it for lunch. The corned beef was falling off the bone. It was great. And she said yeah, you did it. You cooked it. And she said I knew I could count on you. ‘Cause I was coming down.

But I had – and there’s some things that I can show you later and maybe send to you that are in that display. It’s in my platform of my phone. I took picture of the cabinet and display. And I’m not sure where I have the actual items but I took and photographed them so they would be on my phone if I decided to toss them.
‘Cause there were some things I had decided I was going to take and things I wasn’t going to drag along. In fact I didn’t know where this t-shirt was. And every year we have an AIDs walk to remember AIDs since that isn’t solved yet.

HH:     Yeah.

LH:     And they still haven’t. They might have done it virtually.

HH:     With that you talked about the intergenerational aspect and I think it’s super interesting as someone who lives after this when all these issues were first – well not first coming up but when you’re first facing them. What does it feel like seeing people of a younger generation now like our age? How do you think us taking on like the - we established some basic rights through your work. But like continuing that going forward like say trans rights?

LH:     Well I think it’s the future and it’s going to expand. I mean the alphabets keep – I’m using like Pride sentence. It represents all the additional alphabets that are added on and that’s a good thing. We need it. And I think everything changes and I wouldn’t have known that I might be intergenerational. But I did always in fact what brought me back to the Pride Center was I said well it’s got to stand on its own. I’m not going to be the one running it and stuff all the time. And I didn’t have to. There were other people that stepped up. But when I retired early I did feel like volunteer and help. And I did. And that got me involved with the youth group which I never had a gay community center to go to.

HH:     Yeah.

LH:     I was in a youth group at my church and that sort of did help because we met like every Thursday night or something like that and growing up and we went to different schools. So we weren’t just our friends but we were people from church and families from church. And I felt that was a good model to work with for the youth group. So I became a facilitator and the most rewarding thing which is like having kids is that these young people grow up and they go out. And one of them I’m thinking of they adopted two foster brothers. And these are kids they’re raising, him and his partner.

HH:     Wow.

LH:     And they give the best hugs when I go to the museum and they’re members of the museum. It’s the Reginald Lewis African American History Museum of Maryland. It’s downtown. So in person visits every now and then I run into them. So I get these big hugs. They were around my knee. Now they’re almost, they’re probably as tall as I am. I know one of them is. But to see that going on and to see that person as they were growing up to lean on people like a facilitator to help them cope. And I did feel that with the gay straight alliances that schools have that they are during your regular school day are a much stronger model than meeting once
a week at a gay community center downtown. ‘Cause some of that model wasn’t going to work.

Some kids in private schools they might have needed that support. They had to lie and say they were going to the library or something to get downtown to attend our meetings. And one time we went on the road to some settings like the private schools to help them get started to start a gay straight alliance or something. And that GLSEN, Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network started setting sets of model and there’s a lot of support for that. And the system now, school systems have GSAs, gay straight alliances at the schools. And I think that’s a wonderful thing because – and look at the virtual things you could be doing and you can do that and have that help. And so when we hit the road we went out to spread.

And I realized the Unitarian Church as a function in their Sunday School curriculum they have a gay and straight education unit for Sunday School. I went to Westminster, Maryland which I didn’t think anybody had a curriculum there. And I was invited to speak to talk about the model of a gay community center youth group. In fact in the book it shows one of the parades in there. I think it’s one of these. It’s called Sufficient As I Am, SAIM. And they’re marching behind one of the parade banners. I think it’s a gay alliance banner behind it.

CG: Super interesting. So as you see all these people grow and your work with like youth alliances I’m just curious to see what advice you would have for not only youth activists now but also those in the queer community, like young people in the queer community that have still not come out and what advice you would give to them?

LH: Well we have a lot of knowledge you can go and search and find out about gay straight alliances and GLSENs and they all have kits and things and conferences to go to that would give you that exposure. And so that’s one of the things I’ve seen. And actually from this youth groups we’ve seen people go and work at GLSEN locally and international office. And they’re going all over the country doing that. Did you find it?

HH: I think I found – I found a couple marches in there that I was looking at.

LH: Yeah. It’s the second banner and it was saying – let’s see. Oh this is me on this.

CG: Oh wow.

LH: The exclamation point. That was on a billboard all over the state. And this is another picture of me in Canada. It might have been – that’s a lesbian, marine. She would be in the book. She’s retired. I forgot what page. There’s a lot of shots of the parade. If I find it I can send it.

HH: Yeah. That would be –
LH: This is one – of this is the [Flipping through a book away from mic]

HH: Yeah. I think with this book especially we can see the importance of like keeping the history that we have about these generations. And I think something really interesting is the fact that especially with gay history we have such a big not gap but we lost so much history during the AIDS epidemic.

LH: Yeah. There are archives. University of Baltimore has in their library special collection. It’s in archives there. A lot of photographs of all the pride events that the documents were in a basement of the building so they got all of that. And I have a contact I can give you.

HH: Yeah.

LH: I’ll send that where you can get in touch with him. And that’s University of Baltimore in the library. And also the Enoch Pratt Central Library Maryland Department. They have a special collection too. And they are archiving, collecting interviews. I have an interview in there. It’s in their collection there. It’s further research you could use. And as a resource for the classes that come behind you where to go. Go ahead.

HH: So with the – as we continue seeing, I think something really interesting is that recently we’ve seen – and actually throughout history – but gay history has been really strong through pop culture. We’ve seen it through, we’ve had like music ___ tied with the TV.

LH: Country and western music.

HH: Yeah. Even country music. And so recently we’ve seen television shows begin to really explore.

LH: Same sex couples.

HH: Yeah.

LH: And commercials I see which is – we’re everywhere.

HH: Yeah. And especially I think with movies recently it’s been crazy. Even for us we go to ___ sometimes and it’s still so unexpected whenever we see like representation in movies.

LH: Yeah.
HH: So how would you say that that representation has been moved forward, fighting for that representation not only in pop culture but also policy and also activism? How would you say –

LH: When it’s the need of federal law that would cover all the states.

HH: Yeah.

LH: ‘Cause it’s a patch type thing. So in a way areas in Maryland got covered is actually the Governor Harris McKeldin had a gay brother. And on his dying bed the brother, he died of AIDS and the brother told him, talked about he didn’t know he was gay. But he left his deathbed realizing that as a governor he had to get more involved. So when the bill came through the committee I’d signed up to testify and all of a sudden two state troopers came in and the doors flung open. I went oh gee, is this a bomb threat or something? I didn’t know what had happened. But he was coming as a citizen of Maryland to testify for this committee.

HH: Wow.

LH: So right away that bill sailed right on through committee.

HH: Yeah.

LH: Went right through the house and the senate and he said he’d sign it. And he told the story about his brother and he had promised to do everything in his power. And he did. And ‘cause everybody can think about their somebody there that this would affect. And it covers education and it actually got expanded to include transgender and trans persons and gender, different gender identities. But Maryland allows you to change your identity.

HH: Yeah.

LH: Change your name. There are all of these little elements that are there. So actually in my journey the family that I was living with in a condo asked me if I wanted to go to Maryland. I mean to North Carolina with them ‘cause they were moving there because of a foster child they had adopted. My best friend was the son and I was actually living with his mother in the condo renting a room and he owned the condo. So it’s his 15 year old son. And we had actually gone to training at the backup before the adoption during the foster care. And he came to our house when something happens at school and stuff and he had to leave. He even walked out once and came, he did come to the house. Nobody even knew he had left school. Eight miles. But it was straight shot from northern parkway from one end to another from the east side. And actually the school didn’t even know that he was missing but he decided to leave. 15 year olds do this. He was I think 13 then but 15 year olds do those things. I had to laugh about that.
But it’s very different and very affirming to know that they’re actually – laws are there but they don’t change people. I think people change people. And sometimes it’s not the two by four with the law that’s going to sink in. They have to see and understand they’re affecting people’s lives and things. ‘Cause there’s high suicide rates. And we had it especially within the youth group even when they were living in a group home together if they got thrown out from a family. There were two suicides connected with the same gun at different times.

CG: Wow.

LH: Out of that safe environment. That really, really upset me. But and there was a third one I knew of. And I didn’t know how deep it was but she was Jewish and her parents had divorced. And she was the oldest and the grandparents refused to let her come into their house. And her younger brother was accepted. And that kind of hate was deeper ‘cause that was their religion, their life, their life customs. And there’s some high holy days that until she came out as being a lesbian – and she was in public school and she even started the lesbian club. And I had been fooled that she was safe but she wasn’t. She still – that was deeper than just you and I. We couldn’t change that grandma and grandpa who had to take that to their grave.

And there are things like that that you realize are very important and what you’re doing is important. So we never tried to not realize that these things were impacting. And we worked on projects where I was facilitating where we took a bus trip to gay pride to New York which is the biggest parade there. And I mean there all the professions are represented and all the states and different groups. We even had some med students from Hopkins. And one was from the Caribbean and he said these are my people and they’re in the parade. He says I don’t know if I’m coming back with you all. I’m going to hang out with my people and enjoy. ‘Cause they were some from of the islands he was from in the Caribbean and they had a group. And he went off. I’m sure he’s a great doctor somewhere.

But he was from the medical school. In fact we were stretching our age limit to beyond 25 so that he could intend. There was nothing said they had to stop at 25. Maybe we weren’t going to try to take any adult help. But especially if he’s still in school we figure the people that set those kind of limits didn’t know what they were talking about. So we just kept on going. But I do remember that incident. And some of the students had never even been out of Baltimore on a bus trip. They’d been to school things. So we helped like that. And we went twice a year. We went in the winter so you could see things like the Christmas tree and all. And that was if you had some money you could do some shopping in New York and bring something back for the holidays. But we had a twice a year and that was one of the things our grant included was the bus trip.
HH: You mentioned Hopkins students a couple times during the interview. And I was interesting in hearing what the relationship was like between the Pride Center and the community in Baltimore with Hopkins.

LH: Oh great.

HH: Because I know – that did surprise me because I know we’ve had great, we’ve had some hot and cold.

LH: I’m sure. You have the good, bad and the ugly.

HH: Yeah.

LH: And some of those professors probably are ugly stubborn period. But no, to the community very close, even the medical center. And they testified at all of the gay rights bills for Maryland and at least for the city of Baltimore. And we had rabbis and I don’t want to put the Jewish segment down that were on civil rights commissions and all. And one of them testified for the gay rights bill in Baltimore city. I don’t remember any rabbis coming to the state bill. And people committed to their cause and I think also there’s some ultra-people. I mentioned the Jewish family. And there are some Hasidic Jews that are extremists.

HH: Yeah.

LH: And very tough and have old fashioned ideas. And it has to be – and even blacks. Some Pentecostals are very deeply involved. But things like the gay churches like you saw, the Cape, Reverend Delores Berry. They sort of are bridging those gaps. And I’ve been with some lesbian friends of mine to a modern version of the synagogue. And I guess you get different segments and reformist type things. So even there and in their clubs, gay and lesbian clubs for Jewish, Catholics and some other things. And there should be some for the gospel people that are preaching Leviticus and old testament stuff and thumping the bible. And it’s interesting.

My mother – and I came out pretty early to my mother after I came out to myself. But I read in her bible somebody had given her a slip when she must have been talking about her gay son of all the boys of Leviticus that were causing all of these hateful feelings and stuff. And it was funny if anything. My roommates are very nice and we have an island out in the kitchen and they could have hung out. I meant to say something. But I think they went to their room and stuff.

HH: Just as like wrapping up for today at least.

LH: We should do this in parts.

HH: Yes.
CG: Yeah.

CG: We definitely have a second part of this. We’re going to have a second part in like maybe two or three weeks.

LH: Ok.

HH: So we would definitely be interested in doing a second part.

LH: Yeah.

HH: But just for the final question for today would be just overarchingly how has the Baltimore community and the family that you’ve made here, the family being anyone that you’ve met, the people we’ve talked about today. How have they influenced kind of how you see the queer community moving forward in the world? Like how do you think that love helps move forward?

LH: Well in my experience with the families I’ve been myself. In fact while I was out to my neighbors and it was really funny one incident. I was speaking on a gay issue team meeting. And I didn’t realize how this impacted. So grandmother calls. This is a black gay Catholic grandmother calling the grandkids and said oh, Mr. Hughes is on TV. Go turn it on and listen. And I’m going does she know what I was talking about or not? I don’t think grandma really cared. It was this is a neighbor I know and he’s black and there are not many black people you see on TV. And that’s the way it was in my family. Stop everything. Let’s look at them and maybe there will be enough of them you’ll see on TV that it’s not so rare.

But and I was really surprised. Grandma didn’t care. Her neighbor like three or four doors and I had known these kids since they were in diapers and growing up. I actually took the high schoolers to Park School on my way to work to help out the mother ‘cause she had a set of twins and an older son. All three of them were graduates of Park School. But it was remarkable. I didn’t know grandma would be calling the grandkids. She didn’t care what I was talking about. It’s just that her neighbor was on. So maybe enough people saw that and listened too. But that’s the reaction.

So very innocently – and by the way they’re boy, girl twins. The girl twin is a lesbian. She very happily told me that. She finished Colombia. She went to Colombia. She got away from home. Well she started showing it. She wore a white pant suit at her graduation and Park School’s graduation is sort of old fashioned I mean with the frilly dresses. But and I’ve been to the violin concerts. And actually her major was voice. Somewhere along the way she dropped the violin and went to voice. And won NAACP scholarship for voice.

CG: Wow.
HH: Wow.

LH: I kept saying I still can’t get over that she isn’t playing her violin. I thought she’d be playing a violin in a symphony orchestra somewhere. And they saw, they saw – in fact they knew my partners and myself better than they knew my own family. My nephew only came to see me once or twice when I moved. I think it was once or twice. It was twice he saw, he came back. And they were surprised. They saw me go away for Christmas but I had like a break. It was sort of like a Christmas break. They take some of your vacation days and you’d be gone half of the month of December.

And they, and I went other places than just to see my sister but most of the time it was to see my sister. So he was a little older than them but he was playing with kids that I watched. They said we never knew you had a nephew. I said well yeah, he never came. But I said occasionally I talk to him. But he used to live with me before you all came along. But those things apparently happen and people – it’s impacting and it’s impacting that grandma sees another person. I don’t care what you’re talking about. And she knows them. They’ve got to be talking about something good.

HH: Yeah.

LH: So it’s a good thing.

HH: I think that – I think we’re just hitting the time so we’ll wrap it up here for this time. But we’ll definitely come back for another interview.

CG: For sure. For sure.

HH: In a couple of weeks. We barely touched I feel like the –

[End of Audio]