

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Andre Powell
Interviewed by Dionna Gant & Marvis Gutierrez
March 14, 2022

Johns Hopkins University
Oral History Collection

Interviewee: Andre Powell (AP)

Interviewer: Dionna Gant (DG) & Marvis Gutierrez (MG)
Subject: Life of Andre Powell
Date: March 14, 2022

MG: Ok. It is March – it is March 14th, 11:10 AM and we’re interviewing Andre Powell. So I guess just to start do you kind of like want to – you were born in Baltimore. Right? You’re from Baltimore?

AP: Yes. I grew up in eastern Baltimore County, the Overly section of Baltimore County and went through all of my schooling from grade 1 through 12 was there in Baltimore County. And after that then I went on to Essex Community College and Towson State University where I eventually graduated, got a bachelor’s degree.

MG: So when did you kind of find out about your sexuality? What was that like process like?

AP: I was 15 years old in March of 1970. Is that right? Yeah ‘cause that’s when we graduated from junior high school in 1970. And it was with a school friend of mine we were in his back yard sitting on his swings. And the, I think the weather had gotten to the point of March where it’s actually just about this time of year. It’s some time in this week. I don’t remember the exact date. But we were just talking and I don’t know how we started talking about school and who was cute and who wasn’t. And I remember telling him some dreams I had and I kept having the dreams about the guys in junior high school and in the dreams I was kissing them. And that time when you’re reaching adolescence happens and puberty starts to wake up all kinds of feelings. And in school slowly everybody’s got a girl that they like and all that stuff.

And I told him I’m not dreaming about any girls. I’m not sure. And then we sat and talked and gathered because of what occurs in young teenage boys in the middle of the night when they have these dreams, these nocturnal emissions. And he asked me. He said, “Well do you think you’re a homosexual?” And I knew what it meant because I’d gone to the big Webster Dictionary in the school library and looked up all these terms and names that we all call each other. And so I knew that a homosexual was somebody that likes to have sex with people the same sex. So I said I guess I am. And he said well, which ones, boys you dreaming about? Oh boy did I give him a long laundry list of which boy I thought was cute in school. I think I got 50 percent of the guys that were in

ninth grade saying this one's cute, that one's cute. All of them. And this one's so pretty.

So that's sort of my awakening to myself and to David coming out of the closet. So he was helpful to me in doing that and unfortunately I wasn't able to help him when he came out of the closet which he did in senior high school. We went to different senior highs because we lived on different sides of Bellaire Road. And the side he lived on went to Perry Hall Senior High and I went to Overly Senior High. But when I got to Essex Community College I met students that went to Perry Hall said, "Did you know David?" And they said yeah. I said, "Oh he's a great friend of mine." And then eventually they relayed to me that some people would give him a hard time because he came out of the closet in senior high school which is something I never did in a real big way in senior high school, only to a few people.

MG: Yeah. What was that process like then, that you gradually came out to people?

AP: One friend it was around Memorial Day weekend and we're in the library with Gary and Eddie and some others at a table and we're laughing and joking. And I don't know why Gary got the idea in his head that I liked Eddie or had a crush on Eddie. And of course I'm playing it off, "No. No way. No Way." But realistically it must have shown. I probably kept staring at him a lot and when he talked my face probably brightened up. And I'm sure Gary read my face 'cause I just kept staring at Eddie, this beautiful, young teenage Italian boy. And Gary started questioning, "Do you like girls?" and all that stuff. I said, "Sure. I've got a girlfriend" and all that stuff.

And then I went home that weekend and I felt so bad about telling Gary this big lie and I wrote him a letter and explained to him, "remember what we talked about?" Yeah. Didn't say the word. "Remember what we talked about in the library. You asked if I was that way," I said, "I'll be honest with you. Yes, I am." And then I wrote a little more of the letter. I was good at writing letters in those days. Much better than I was at speaking and stuff like that. So then he proceeded to read it and go oh, oh, and laughingly play me, "Andre's a sissy. Andre's a sissy." And we all just sat and laughed and joked about it. But there's no problems. We didn't have any problems at all, at all. Not with him.

Even though I did have one other classmate that I'd been sitting next to all year only because he had beautiful golden, blond hair

and blue eyes. And he read the letter and he determined that I was gay and then he got up – two weeks left in school and he got up and moved up a row where there was an empty seat. And I tried to say hi to him in the hallway sometimes. He wouldn't even say hi until finally the last day of the year. I went, "Have a good summer Mike." And he goes, "Yeah. You too." Senior high school was – I finally met real live gay person, honest to goodness gay person and when I was in 12th grade and that person was in 10th grade.

And of course I just latched onto him like – oh gosh. I don't know. What do flies land on? Flies on syrup. I just latched onto him like flies on syrup, something like that. And let me click this little message off so I don't have to stare at it all the time. And he and I became great friends all throughout school, him and another friend of his who I actually after the end of school sort of dated for three whole months until he found a new boyfriend. That's the way it went when you're a teenager. You're dating somebody back in the '70s and the next thing you know, oh, I've got a new boyfriend. I'm like oh, ok. That's why you haven't called. I was new to these experience. What can I tell you?

MG: Ok. I guess what did it – so there was only like one other gay person that was kind of like the first person you really like encountered I guess. Like how did it feel?

AP: Well the first person I met he was in my drama class. And then the second one was a friend of his and that's the one I sort of kind of dated for three whole months after, thought I was doing something big after we, after I graduated from high school they were still in school. And even though none of us were 21 they had been going downtown to some of the gay bars for a good while and took me downtown to my first gay bar in downtown Baltimore in the Mount Vernon area. And started going in there. Of course I had to borrow my best friend's brother's draft card because his brother was over 21 and I needed something that said I was over 21. Now the carders at the bars downtown I guess they didn't really care what the description was on your card as long as it showed in years you were 21 years old. Because I was 6 foot 1'' maybe 110 pound if I'd gotten up that much, this tall, skinny beanpole. And my friend's brother was short. He was about 5'5'' and round and pudgy so the description of weight and size did not match at all on a draft card. But they looked at it and the date said I was 21.

And it was really, gosh, it was a whole new world opened up. It was really quite joyful and the people were filled and the guys filled with so much love. They introduced me to the friends that

they already knew and we'd get up and dance. Oh my gosh. I can't explain how liberating it is to finally go into a gay bar and you can dance with another guy to a song, fast dance. Then a slow song comes on and you can dance slow arm in arm with another guy. Up until that had happened the only thing I'd been to is a few neighborhood parties where the guys were all dancing with girls. And we had very small neighborhood of 25 families in the little black section of Overly in Baltimore County.

So there really wasn't a whole lot of people to dance with and I couldn't – I was never a dancer anyway. I couldn't dance. So I'd go to the parties and I was your proverbial wall flower and I'd stand around looking at the other teenagers dancing, looking at the cute guys, which ones were cute and keeping it all to myself. So to be able to go into this gay bar at 18 years old and right away just feel the love and the camaraderie among the people there that were all different ages, mixture of black and white and it was just a truly joyful experience.

MG: Do you remember the name of the bar?

AP: It was Mary's. It was owned by Cal Shuman and I don't remember exactly what he did in life. I think it might have been – I don't know if he was a car dealer or not but Cal Shuman was very good friends with Harry Gladding who owned the car dealerships around the city, Gladding Chevrolet. And if you're in the Mount Vernon Park downtown and the real tall statute of George there on Charles Street between Center and Madison, at Charles and Center you'll find the Walter's Art Gallery. Then there's an alley behind the art gallery. And then that house there was the Harry Gladding mansion which was where Harry Gladding lived and he was well known in the gay community that this is Harry Gladding. This rich gay car dealership, lots and lots and lots of money. And that's where he lived. After Harry Gladding passed away his mansion was donated in some way or form to either the Walter's Art Gallery or the Maryland Historical Society, one of those two.

MG: I guess did you like continue going to that bar after high school and like into college? Right? You went to Essex?

AP: Essex Community College at first and then the Towson State University. Wild horses couldn't drag me out of the bar. I guess that's the best way to put it. I went every weekend while I was going to school at Essex, just about every weekend. Skipped some of the weekends in the coldest weather because to ride the transit bus from Overly out in the county I lived off of Bellaire Road and

Fulton Avenue which was just a ten minute walk from the end of the bus line, the number 15 bus line. And it was also from where I live you walk up ten minutes up Bellaire Road to the shopping district and you were in the city. So yeah, I spent many nights riding that 45 minute bus ride home at 3:30 in the morning because I was going out to the bars and didn't have a car. That was a great, great, great experience.

MG: I guess college wise like how was that experience going to Essex and then Towson?

AP: Well we had – I actually did run into eventually some people at Essex that went to my senior high school and I didn't know them very much then. And of course I knew that one of them was gay based on flamboyant stereotypes like oh this one's gay. So I said hi to him. Said, "Hi Bruce. You went to Overly's." "Well yes I did," and we sat and talked and became friends. And of course he ended up explaining he goes to The Hippo. I think he went to The Hippo every night. We were teenagers back then and you could manage to get into the bar sometimes without being 21 years old. So I ended up spending lots of time with Bruce and his friends from the bar. At lunch time we all have our certain table that we sit at and talk, as we said the most talked about table in the cafeteria. It's all these four or five of us gay men and then some of the women friends that were straight women that go to The Hippo. And we'd sit and laugh and talk about everything and having a good old time. I guess others like gee, they have a lot of fun at that table over there.

So that's part of beginning years of my early college at Essex Community College. And then I joined up with some other friends and actually a guy that later became my boyfriend that I met when I was working in the downtown post office. They let college students work 20 hours a week. And I ran into another guy that went to the same senior high. And when I started talking to him so he was involved in a project called the Left Studies Project that he and another friend of his were going to do at Essex and it would have three components, one that would deal with studying leftist literature. The other would have a women's component and the other would have a gay liberation component. And I'm like he said he was thinking of that. And I'm thinking how did he know I'm gay.

Well, well, well. As life turns out. Not only was I gay eventually when I met him in the post office he was engaged to get married to his girlfriend and was going to be a southern Baptist minister.

Well, you know, that one just took a nosedive eventually. He went to the – I took him to The Hippo to show him what The Hippo was like because he'd never been to a gay bar. And figuratively I haven't gotten him out of the bar yet. He broke up with his girlfriend, determined he was bisexual and then about a month later determined oh, he's not bisexual anymore. He's gay. Eventually he and I became boyfriends and lived together for five years. But he did get me on the path of starting at Essex Community College along with four other friends there a gay student union organization there at the college. This we started petition to get recognition in 1975.

And in the midst of this my boyfriend Roy he and I end up getting academically dismissed from school because we would go out to the bars at night and stay there till the bars closed at 2:00, come home and of course we're in no condition to get up and be at school for 9:00 classes. So we were both academically dismissed and had to go on probation. But meanwhile me and my friends did petition the administration at Essex Community College to be an SGO organization. And they're like ok. We have your petition. Now something else was happening at the same time we did that, I had written a letter in *The Montage*, the newspaper of Essex Community College and it took up the whole – it was only four pages of the newspaper each week and it took up the whole second page, this letter to the editor that we need a gay student organization at the college. And as one of the teachers that became an advisor. I said yeah, I put a column in. I said, "Did you see the letter I wrote in this week's newspaper?" He said, "Letter? Your letter was the newspaper for the entire week" because the rest of it was little college stuff and tidbits.

So at the same time I was trying to do that me and Roy who became my boyfriend several years later, surprise, word got around that there were some students there that lived down in Essex, way out Eastern Avenue wanted to start a KKK student group. It was like what the hell? No way we're going to stand by for this. So we called people that we had worked with against the Vietnam War. Remember this is the 1970s and the Vietnam War was still going on in the early '70s. and they came out and they helped assist us having weekly meeting organizing students to get rid of, to not have a, to fight to demand the administration not grant student status to a KKK group based on a history of racism, murder, oppression against blacks and Jews and the hostile attitudes towards the LGBTQ community.

So the administrators in the school, school president, dean of students got their heads together and said well, right now we have a moratorium on recognizing any new SGA organizations. They said until we begin to look at the policy. So it took about a year and a half and I know it's a two year college but I was there for a while. Remember I got academically dismissed and had to start over. And at that time if you had grades that were really bad you could actually wipe them off of your transcript and bring your average up a little better. So that's what I did. So this moratorium was put in place. But meanwhile during that time I was able to still say in contact with Dr. Vernon Monte was the president of the college and Dean Donald Slowinski and have meetings with them about the need to recognize a gay student organization.

And I used the book *The Rights of Gay People* published by the ACLU which had some chapters. And the main case in that book is the case of gay student organization versus Virginia Commonwealth University from out of Richmond, Virginia. And that went up to a federal court appeals level. And the appeals court finally determined that if the college was recognizing all kinds of student government organizations they could not deny the gay student organization a right to have, to become part of the student government association and get recognition and funding as they could. I spent lots of time in the University of Baltimore law library, I'll tell you, researching. And the lawyer that helped us with one of our, along the way he looks at what I've done. I said I pulled this up and showed him all these copies and stuff. And then he said oh my gosh. Looks like you might need to become a law student doing all this research. I just kept digging and going, something to support it.

And since the book *The Rights of Gay People* certainly cited the different variety of cases and they were all found in the law library. So I Xeroxed them, took them over to the administrator and said here Dr. Monte and Dean Slowinski. Here are copies of the court decisions in the Gay Student Organization versus Virginia Commonwealth University for you to look over and see and all the time alluding to them that our lawyers, that the group had lawyers willing to go to court. So I'm going to make an educated guess that maybe they decided this is not one court battle they wanted to go down, 'cause we had the ACLU there which would have backed us and we had private lawyers that wanted to go. The private, the lawyers actually were part of the Baltimore Gay Alliance which I had joined in 1975.

Baltimore at that time had many neighborhood festivals and cultural festivals, the Polish festival, Lithuanian festival, African American festival, Italian, German, Spanish festival. Who knows? Many of those countries mostly over in Europe I say, very Eurocentric festivals except the African American festival. And I think the Spanish festival was around Spain, centered around Spain, the cultural aspects of Spain, not Latin America. And we had – let me catch up with myself. I've kind of moved ahead here. The neighborhood festivals, so in September of each year all of these festivals would combine with the neighborhood associations and have, it was a tremendous three day from Friday, Saturday, Sunday Baltimore city fair. So in 1975 September I'm walking in the city fair on a Friday evening, had gotten off of school and walking around and I see this white booth with a yellow sign at the top that says Baltimore Gay Alliance. And I just froze and looked and said oh wow. I'm home. And I just walked right into the booth and attached myself to them at the hip as you can say. I have never left Baltimore Gay Alliance since that moment I walked in that booth. I stayed there the rest of that Friday, came back Saturday, stayed in the booth all day Saturday, came back Sunday, stayed in the booth all day Sunday.

And that's how I got started in Baltimore as being a gay liberation activist. I had read a few books when I went to Essex. I think they had four or five books on the issue of homosexuality in there. But I read one book *Out of the Closet, Voices of Gay Liberation*, edited by Carla J and Allen Young. And the other one that truly impressed me is *The Gay Militants* by Donn Teal, Donn is D-O-N-N Teal T-E-A-L. I'm sure it's online somewhere. I doubt that the book's still in print after all these years. But *The Gay Militants* actually gave a history of what happened after the Stonewall rebellion.

As we know the police raided the Stonewall Inn which had been done many times in New York City and other cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia, Chicago and LA, arrested the people, put the names of those arrested at a gay bar in the newspaper and they go to work the next day and they're out of a job, marriages broke up, kicked out of families and stuff. And that set off in New York City the beginnings of picket lines, lots of activism. They would protest the arrest at the police department. They began doing a cs at school board meetings saying they need more inclusive materials, to education materials, about lesbian and gay people so that youth would grow up and know that they're not the only gay person. As back then in the '50s, '60s, '70s we all thought, I did too, I was the

only gay person. There was no one else around that knew and you couldn't go out and tell the whole world.

So that sort of introduced me to the idea of gay liberation. And we had a gay liberation front in Baltimore. But when I went there it was all boarded up so I don't know if it still existed by the time I read the book and gone there. So that's what got me started and I joined Baltimore Gay Alliance which met every two weeks in the Mount Vernon neighborhood in Baltimore and we began to – well, Baltimore Gay Alliance already had various committees set up. They had a political committee that went and advocated in Annapolis to get a gay rights bill passed. They had a social committee that would do dances every once in a while.

They had a health committee whose main goal was to open up a gay VD clinic because gay men were going to the VD clinics and the cities run by the city of Baltimore. And at that time they would test people for urethral... urethral _____. I'm going to get the word wrong or pharyngeal which is for gonorrhea in the throat or gonorrhea in the urethra. And the gay men would explain to them no, I need to be tested, do an anal swab for gonorrhea there and the people would say "Oh you need that." Scrunching their face up and go, "Oh you're one of those." So they brought their concerns to Baltimore Gay Alliance and the executive board determined we need to set up a gay VD clinic where they can feel comfortable going to get tested and treatment.

And we eventually got a grant from the federal government right about the same time we started the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Baltimore, originally called the Gay Community Center of Baltimore. The reason we broke off from Baltimore Gay Alliance, which was seen as, still heavily seen as a political group organizing. We knew in the '70s the federal government wasn't going to give money to a gay political group to do something so we formed the Gay and Lesbian Community Center which would be a group that would have social educational activities. And it was through the Gay Community Center of Baltimore that we were able to get a grant to open up the Gay Community Center of Baltimore health clinic. We call it the VD clinic but it was really called a health clinic.

And that clinic that started in May of 1978 has evolved. I am just bubbling over with pride to say it has evolved today to be the Chase Brexton Health Center which was itself housed in the original building of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center at 241 West Chase Street that we put together and brought. We in

Baltimore was one of the first cities to actually own our building that was a community center around the country. Other cities were renting spaces in a building, but we were the first in the country to buy our own building. So we are very, very proud of that fact and what Chase Brexton Health Center has become. It now has five. I don't think they have a sixth wing yet, but it has five health centers all around the state of Maryland and of course in Baltimore city and Randallstown, in Columbia, in Eastern Shore in eastern Maryland and they might have one in Owings Mills. I can't remember the exact fifth one.

But I just so proud of that accomplishment and the role that we in the Gay and Lesbian Community Center had in putting that together. And no way in the world we were able to foresee what came about when we started this gay VD clinic in May of 1978. Because within four to five years the HIV/AIDS health epidemic had taken root and taken so many lives, so many – a whole generation of gay men passed from AIDS because there was a time to have proper treatment, effective treatments for the disease which took a long, long time. When it first started showing up in the early, mid '70s and then it took until about 20 years later in the mid-'90s finally to get a treatment, even though they were trying AZT for a few years, eventually in the mid-1990s they came up with a cocktail treatment putting a cocktail, the mixture of drugs together to effect the HIV virus at different cycles and stop it from reproducing within the bloodstream. And that has been successful, and the number of AIDS deaths started to slowly, slowly trickle down, down.

And then when it was used generally for most people with HIV the rate of death just took a nosedive. And now today we have 30, at least 30 different treatments for HIV infection. And the shame is that this country to me is such a sex negative country. When we compare back in the '80s the death rates of people in this country of AIDS compared to the countries in Europe the death rates in the US were so much higher. Because over in Europe as I understand – and I hope I'm correct in my assessment of this. That we would, they had a more positive, helpful outlook on sex, and it wasn't treated as something shameful in most of the countries over in Europe and they stressed the use of condom use, in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases before AIDS came along. So that helped, I believe, keep the – while they had thousands also they were not nearly as high as they were here in the United States. So I'm very glad to see that it's come around fortunately. But I do miss the many friends and people I've met along the way that have passed away from the epidemic itself.

And it's a shame that the young gay people from 25 – 30 years after this are still, the positivity rate still keeps going up for young gay men particularly in African American and Latinx communities. It's really criminal that there hasn't been a better job done with all the money and resources that this country has to promoting a safe, healthy sexual environment, not just for gay men and lesbians but for everybody in the country. So that's how we got the Chase Brexton Health Center started. After I – so the gay student group at Essex grew out of my involvement with Baltimore Gay Alliance. And we had many protests and rallies in Annapolis trying to get a gay rights bill passed there.

And eventually in 1988 we got a gay rights bill passed in Baltimore city and went – along with that there was already one in Howard County which was the first. And then Montgomery County passed a gay rights bill. Then we went after Baltimore County. They passed a gay rights bill so with those four, five jurisdictions in the state of Maryland we felt it was time to go after the statehouse and we eventually under Governor Parris Glendening in the early, in the mid-1990s was able to get a statewide passage of a gay rights bill passed there. I have a little anecdote. I worked with ASME. I worked for department of social services in Baltimore City. So I was on the executive board for ASME local 112 and involved in a lot of union activities. And we go to banquets all the time and election time was coming up and Parris Glendening was running for governor.

So we go to a union dinner featuring him and he has, he talks and then he has a question answer period. So I was the first one to put my hand up and ask a question and I said, “Mr. Glendening, if you become governor would you be – the very first question mind you of the question and answer. Would you be willing to sign into law an anti-discrimination policy that prohibits – I tried to be very firm in my question – that prohibits discrimination against lesbian and gay people on the basis of sexual orientation and prohibit discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.” I put on my firm voice when I asked. Well you never know how things are going to turn out. He goes, “well, I certainly, absolutely in every way would be willing to support and even sponsor, help sponsor and get such a bill passed.”

And then he goes on to tell the story about his brother Bruce who was in the military for many, many years. His brother Bruce died from AIDs. The family like many families at that time did not know their child was gay 'cause their child had moved away from

the homestead they grew up in to another city where they could live their life freely and openly. And he said his family did not find out that his brother Bruce was gay until he became so ill with AIDS that he had to come back home to die. And it's like so I was kind in the way I asked and just asked matter of factly. But I remember one of my union members coming up to me and saying something like wow.

That's quite an answer. But he did fulfill his promise and we did under his administration get an anti-discrimination bill passed in the state of Maryland. It only covered sexual orientation at that time because the strength of the transgender community had not been able to be built yet. And in later years we were able to go back in 2000 and get trans – not without a strong fight of course – but get trans gender identity words added to the anti-discrimination clause. So it's sort of been in my blood over the years. Once I heard about the Stonewall rebellion and my high school friend in 1975 I went with him and another friend up to New York City on the last Sunday in June for the march which at that time was called the Crisper Street Gay Liberation Day Parade.

And always refer to myself as a gay liberation activist because we – it wasn't just us saying hey, we want our rights. We wanted to change the whole outlook towards lesbian and gay folks at the time, stand up and say we have rights. We deserve not to be fired and kicked out of our homes. But we also demand respect for ourselves as people and as individuals. And we have the right to love who we want and love safely without harsh treatment from friends, families. Families can be some of the worst people. And there are many, many stories of many lesbian and gay youth who had to leave their families just to be able to live safely in a safe space. And we're always adopted and welcomed by other members of the LGBTQ community. And we've always taken care of our own.

So and from 1975 I tell you I think the first one I missed after that was in 1996 because I won a trip to the Bahamas that went Thursday through Sunday and the Sunday in the Bahamas the way we came back from the Bahamas was the actual day, the last Sunday in June. I was like oh my gosh. I don't know what to do. I'm going to miss Pride this year. Unfortunately there was no way to get the airplane from the Bahamas to Atlanta to Baltimore back to New York in time to join the parade there. But I attended many, many Pride parades. As I said it was called the Crisper Street Gay Liberation Day Parade. And the first was in 1970 that was held to mark a year of activities following the Stonewall rebellion that I

talked about earlier of picket lines and zaps and protests for our rights to stop the arrests. The police commissioner would have meetings and the activists would do what's called a zap. Just walk right into it, walk up front, take over the meeting and start talking and protesting saying we want our rights. We want police harassment to stop. And you see what it's come to.

So that helps write the story of my life, the struggle for gay liberation here in this country and around the world. In Baltimore I was involved in many numbers of things as I said with the Gay and Lesbian Community Center from its start in 1978 until the mid-1980s. And one thing that needs to be pointed out in Baltimore we really were unique. Not only were we the first city who actually owned their own building for a gay community center. But in Baltimore Gay Alliance many gay activist groups had started around the country in the '70s. Most of the leadership of those groups were white men. Some might have been old. Some might have been younger but they were all overwhelmingly white men. So in Baltimore we would go to a conference called Gay Academic Union Conference held at Columbia University in New York City. And we went there and there was a sudden buzz around the conference of whispering. Did you hear that? The president of Baltimore Gay Alliance was not only a woman but she was a black woman.

This was absolutely, absolutely unheard of in the gay activist community. All the organizations in the leadership were white men even though there were many lesbians – unless it was an all woman's organization of course it wasn't men. But even though there were many different organizations and they were sort of in shock when they heard that a black woman is leading a gay and lesbian rights organization here in Baltimore. But we made our mark and we did tremendous work. Our crowning glory the Chase Brexton Health Center that started just looking out for treatment and access with respect for gay men for STDs. We started several gay youth groups here in Baltimore over the years.

At the tender age of 21 I was, myself and Jeff – let me see. Jeff Myers. We had two Jeff Myers in Baltimore Gay Alliance. One has an S on the end of his name. The other didn't. So we'd say call Jeff Myers. Which one? We'd say plural, singular. But Jeff and I were 21 years old and Baltimore Gay Alliance put together a gay youth group and 'cause Jeff and I were still 21 we were able to squeeze in. I was like 21 and a half years old when it started in January so we shift in and squeeze. And the age range for that gay youth group went from 15 to 21. It stopped at 21 because at 21 you

were able to run into the bars and go to the bars even though most of us had been going to the bars before we were 21 and meet friends that way and break out of the isolation that gay youth, gay and lesbian youth have.

And the gay community center is still thriving today in Baltimore. It's had its ups and downs over the years but it's come – they do several projects that they reach out to gay youth. And a large number of African American youth use the center. Oh my gosh. It is actually a tremendous number of the various programs they do. They like everybody else had to shut down because of the pandemic a little bit. So that's humble beginnings in the '70s. After leaving Essex Community College and getting the gay organization there finally started for a short time. We did win recognition at Essex, got our own little corral along the area where student organizations have their own desks and stuff like that with our big sign, gay student union. We lasted the rest of that semester because I graduated. They wouldn't approve any money for us because they didn't know who was going to help carry on and push it through after I graduated because of the five or six of us I'm the one that went in and talked to them.

So I went to Towson State University and, well, doggone it, did it again. Having met many people at Towson that go hang out at the bars, the people from Baltimore Gay Alliance and the gay community center again came out and helped us get – we had to get a petition with 29 signatures to be able to go to the student government association and say we wanted to be recognized as a student group. And of course the usual hemming and hawing from the administration and the student government association, some saying oh we don't want these gay people on campus. And others, the usual suspects throwing up, holding up the Bible. The Bible says blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And we had to confront against them. But some of the people on the student government association, Valerie Sozinski and her brother Jim, neither one of them were gay as far as we knew even though many of the boys had our fingers crossed for Jim. They were – Valerie French and her boyfriend Jim Sozinski, not her brother. They were just tremendous in their fighting, fighting for us and for our right as a gay student organization to be recognized like so many other people, organizations are on campus. And we eventually won that.

So it's I can sit back and look here I'm in my golden years where all the hair is gray now. I shaved off the beard this morning so

can't see all the gray that I had a few days ago. Having gone to help start two gay student organizations at two different colleges. Proud of that fact and the one at Towson kept going for a while after I graduated 'cause others were there and they continued and carried on. And lo and behold I went back to Towson University about five years ago for national coming out day activities and found out not only does Towson have one gay, LGBTQ student organization, they have four. There's a plain old LGBT student organization. Then there is African American LGBTQ student's organization. There's one for Latinx LGBTQ students and there's another one for Asian LGBTQ students. And at that time apparently the largest one was the one for African American LGBTQ student organization at Towson State University which numbered over 200 and some people.

Well I'm telling you when they told me this 'cause I was talking – after the coming out day program some of the advisors – I actually missed the program 'cause I came from work. When they told me this I just about fell on the floor. I was like wow, four different organizations. And I think of the fight we had in the '70s that we kept fighting states together and we prevailed to get the recognition there. So looking back over life's journey here at the tender age of 67 you see many, many things that you – that we've done and that we accomplished here in Baltimore.

Growing up in the 1980s of course just like the gay political organizations were mostly male dominated in the 1980s there began to be a community of black gay men coming forward and black gay male writers that were starting to come about and develop and grow into their own. Such tremendous writers as Joseph Beam, Essex Hemp Hill, Greg whose last name I still can't remember, Greg Harris, how could I not remember. See, it comes back to me, Greg Harris. And they would come to Baltimore to the community center on 241 West Chase Street and do book readings there.

At that community center in Baltimore on the ground floor – it had three floors and the ground floor the owner of Lambda Rising Book Store in Washington D.C. decided to open up another Lambda Rising up here in Baltimore. And it's a lesbian gay book store. And one of the things Lambda Rising did is they always had different artists and – artists – different authors and poets come and speak there at Lambda Rising store. And I recall Joseph Beam coming and speaking along with Greg Harris. And it was just a truly wonderful, wonderful and it was so uplifting particularly to us in the black LGBTQ community because the overwhelming

presence, the gay community pictures white gay folks. But this was something of ours, of our own. The writing spoke to us.

I remember Joseph. He was an editor of the book titled *Brother to Brother, Writings of Black Gay Men*. And his theme on that book was black men loving black men is an act of revolution. And I thought that was just such a beautiful thing and as Joseph explained that it doesn't just simply mean black gay men being in love with another black gay man. But it means black men loving black men. It could be a father to son loving relationship. It could be a brother to brother, the title of the book, relationship. It didn't have to be about love. It's just showing love to another black man was such a revolutionary act in this day and age in society. And Isaac Julien is another. He is a film maker who did the film *Looking for Langston* and one other film that he did and growing the awakening of nationally of a black gay, I want to use movement agenda but that's not the complete words to use. But it suddenly popped up all over the country.

And now all around the United States you have in various cities you have black gay pride festivals. October is actually black LGBTQ pride month in many cities in this country and they have different things. We have events here in Baltimore also and of course Washington D.C. Their black gay pride weekend is the bomb. I'm telling you. Of course it's filled with lots of partying too, and some educational seminars and stuff like that. So it's really been quite an experience seeing how the LGBTQ community has evolved from where we were before Stonewall, what has happened as a result of Stonewall, how that was the force that propelled us to say – like that movie with Peter Finch about the newspaper show and people were yelling out going I'm mad as hell. We're not going to take it anymore. Well the LGBTQ community after Stonewall said we're mad as hell. We're not going to take it anymore and continued to build and organize and build and build.

And now all over the world people are wearing rainbow flags in pride festivals in so many parts of the world. Even though there are some parts where we still come under tremendous oppression and threat of death, jailing, and we have reached out and we woke up eventually in the mid-1990s and changed our monikers from just lesbian gay community to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered community and rightly so. Took on the issue of our transgender sisters and brothers. I'm very thankful in my life to have been a comrade of Leslie Feinberg who in the 1980s wrote *Journal of a Transsexual* and then in the 1990s Leslie wrote *Stone Butch Blues*

and followed that with another book, *Trans Liberation*, and followed that with another book whose title evades me at this point in time.

But that opened up the struggle and I feel in the same way that the Stonewall rebellion opened up again the spark that began the struggle for LGBTQ rights. Leslie's book *Stone Butch Blues* and *Trans Liberation* just pushed to the forefront and opened up and made the rest of the gay and lesbian community open our eyes to see that our transgender sisters and brothers, particularly the plight of trans women, need to be stood up. They were indeed in fact part of our community, and we need to fight for them just like we fought for each other. And the trans women are still coming under such tremendous attacks. The number of murders of trans women around the country continue to skyrocket. And that's also reflected in some other countries around the world also. So we have our full country here, our full community, LGBTQ. We're a family. We have always been a family. And we're growing stronger and stronger.

One of the things we have to do is fight up against this tremendous onslaught of anti-trans bills that are going around the country. It's just tremendous there – and people must be aware that they're holding on to that 'cause that's where they grab their political power from. I'm going to step back in time to the 1977s when Anita Bryant was out of the city of Miami, Florida because Dade County, Miami had passed an ordinance that prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation. Well Anita Bryant she used to be Ms. America at one time stood up and said oh no. We're not going to have this thing exposing our children to homosexuality and trying to treat it as a proper lifestyle and she started a group called Save Our Children. She, that one vote in Dade County, Florida even though the county council had passed it, she got a petition campaign together to take it to a voter referendum.

And I remember telling my lesbian friend that lived on the street behind me that a loss for the gay community in that voter referendum, a loss would be so much more powerful than a victory because if we win, yay. We got it. We got it. But what happened is the gay community lost that vote. The referendum overturned that anti-discrimination protections and then they took it all around the country where it began to pop up. This state over here, this state over there, all following the example of what happened in Dade County and many of the anti-discrimination protections that were

passed by county councils and cities around the country were overturned with the popular vote referendum.

And that is sort of what we're seeing now that the transgender issue in the country. One state after another turn up so many different angles and varieties of attacks against the transgender community because the general lesbian and gay culture we've got our sexual orientation laws passed and almost half of the cities, half of the states around the country. And the Supreme Court just a couple years ago ruled that no, that tremendous case that someone could not be fired because they were gay. Someone could not be fired because they were transgender. But there are so many laws particularly aimed at transgender youth around the country that a teacher can't, schools can't support transgender youth, that there are other laws dealing with foster care and transgender youth. There are so many other laws that attack the rights of transgender people. And the last – there's this one that came up recently. Oh doggone it. Can't pull it out of my head, another recent attack on transgender people.

So these little dotted attacks all around the country are being used as a rally point for the republicans to try to stay in office, along with of course failure to pass voting rights. At the same time they're doing this, attacking transgender people in different states around the country. Different states are also passing laws that end up being voter suppression laws. And the right-wing republicans are joining together using both anti-trans phobia bias as a rallying point, using anti-voting rights act as a rallying point. If you think of it realistically the voting rights act – I get incensed when I start that I could talk too much.

The voting rights act signed under the administration of President Lyndon Johnson in 1965. For the life of me I can't figure why they said it needed to be renewed in 50 years. And so we've subsequently seen new versions of the voting rights act introduced and then other new versions. Isn't voting supposed to be an inalienable right in this country? Why do you only give it a 50 year limit and say let's look at it again? And of course those states that need to suppress the vote of people of color are enacting all kinds of laws to keep us down. So that basically wipes out the voting rights act. And they still have not been able to get it passed yet which many folks in the black community are upset with President Biden because he said I'm going to get it passed. Yeah. Well why hasn't it passed.

So the right wing uses these attacks to build its strength and to build its political strength and rally against us. And those items of trans – anti-trans laws that they pass and the voter suppression laws are really kind of window dressing on the right wing agenda in this country, ‘cause underneath that they’re the big boogey mans that they put up front. Like Anita Bryant put up that boogey man. “Save our children. Don’t let homosexuals teach your children in the schools.” And to cover up their – they have a much bigger, broader agenda behind the scenes that they’re alluding to, the dismantling of safety net provisions for poor and working people in this country to keep our heads above water. And many people don’t think of the gay community sometimes because they think oh, they’re well off. They’re not poor like we are. That is absolutely not true. I know the government doesn’t keep statistics but the majority of gay people are not rich. I’m certainly not. And the TV shows may show gay couples looking good and fabulous and all this stuff but most of the LGBTQ community are hardworking, poor and working people trying to survive as they are.

So it’s been a – I’m grateful actually in my life when I sit back and think of it over the past 40 years of activism that we’ve done. I was fortunate enough to be on the 1987, representing Baltimore on the national steering committee of the 1987 march in Washington for lesbian gay rights, for love and for life we’re not going back. For love because hey, we have the right to love. And for life because it was the beginning of the height of the AIDs, HIV epidemic and many of our gay brothers, whole generations were being wiped out by this disease that still had, after 15 years had no decent treatment. So it’s actually been joyful because I met many people traveling around the country organizing for that national march which had 750,000 people.

And that gave a political boost to the LGBTQ rights movement. When people came back from that march they suddenly went and made efforts around the country in their various towns and communities to get anti-discrimination ordinance passed. And at no time back in the ‘60s and ‘70s we said we want a gay rights bill. Nobody in the world was thinking about getting married. We just wanted to keep our jobs and not get kicked out of our apartments. But one of the projects in the 1987 march on Washington for lesbian and gay rights we thought of weeklong activities to do.

So these two gentlemen from Los Angeles, Cary Jenkins and Walter Wheeler came up with an idea of having this thing called the marriage. It was a commitment ceremony where couples could

come. And so it was done on Saturday, the day before the big march. And couples could come there and take commitment vows, and we called it the gay marriages. One of the demands of the 1987 march was the recognition of lesbian gay relationships. At that time, it was mostly considered, we want domestic partner laws passed so that the man or woman that you've been living with for seven to ten years can have some say in their partner's healthcare, 'cause they would discuss what they want to do. And what would happen if one of the partners became sick the hospitals and it's the hospital policy would go to the person's family.

Now quite a number of instances when the person came out and the family disowned them, didn't want anything to do with them. They hadn't talked to their family in years. So the closest thing to a family was this partner that they lived with but the hospitals would ignore that. That's not family. So we wanted domestic partner laws which would also cover, give the right to carry your live in partner with you on your insurance policies from your job also. So they had this thing called the wedding and lo and behold 1,000 couples shared up at this wedding ceremony to exchange their vows. There were several voted religious leaders of the gay community, Reverend Troy Perry, oh gosh, I can't remember, Rene McCoy out of Detroit who is one of the chair people of the national black lesbian gay coalition and several other, some Hebrew rabis and several other, episcopalian ministers from the United Methodist Church. And they all took turns doing the ceremonies and blessing them, these vows.

And we really weren't talking about getting married at that point in time but as since it has evolved and come to realize domestic partnership does not in any way give you as many benefits as being actually married. As many people point out there was 1,100 tax benefits you can get from being married that you don't get from domestic partnership. But as one of my teachers from college at Towson had stated during the campaign here in the state of Maryland is she talked of a friend of hers that had lived over 30 years with her partner in a lesbian relationship. The family of course was not keen to the lesbian relationship. And her friend knew what her partner's wishes were, to be taken off of the ventilator. The hospital said we understand these were her wishes, but you're not a family member. As such we must abide by the family members' wishes.

And I believe the person that was sick had cancer and the family said no, no. Don't take her off the ventilator. That wasn't the wish of the dying woman. The dying woman's wish was not to be kept

alive forever on this ventilator that the cancer was such that she was not going to get better. And the hospital said that's not our policy. We have to – we can only deal with the family. So that was one of the strongest reasons of why we certainly need recognition of lesbian gay relationships. No longer was domestic partnership good enough. We had to go on to full fledged marriage. And our community has rallied around and supported and got past and several different states. I'm glad that here in Maryland we were the first state in the country to pass same sex marriage rights through popular vote. All the other states have been granted through the courts so that's one in our feather.

[Phone ringing] I apologize. I forgot to turn my phone on vibrate so let me do that right now. And it's too late now. So that's sort of a glimpse of gay community activism around the country and here in Baltimore. Currently I belong to a socialist unity party here and we don't have a gay focus, gay lesbian transgender focus yet. But that's 'cause half of our members around the country are LGBTQ and here in the Baltimore branch we have the largest number of LGBTQ members and I just got a phone call from another member of the organization in New York City who let me know that some time in January they will be coming out as – some time in June they will be coming out as transgender. They just wanted to get my opinion and give me a heads up.

So in this year 2000 my involvement with the LGBTQ community takes place in another variety of ways. I'm a member of the New Wave Singers of Baltimore which is an LGBTQ+ allies choir. At this time that's what it had become. It started in 1985 amidst the growing cultural evolution of gay and lesbian association of choruses, which started from the gay, New York City gay men's chorus, Seattle gay men's chorus, San Francisco gay men's chorus and Acrisius women's chorus in Philadelphia and Turtle Creek Coral Chorus in Dallas, Texas. They were doing, they formed and were doing shows and they said you know what. We've got enough here. Let's start an association, a gay and lesbian association of choruses. Also out of Cincinnati, Ohio Muse Women's Chorus. A lot of the women's choruses were a mixture of lesbians and straight women. Most of the gay men's choruses were gay men.

Here in Baltimore we have a Baltimore Men's Chorus. They wouldn't call themselves gay men's chorus because we didn't have an anti-discrimination bill passed at the time they started. So they've just kept that name. Out of the gay men's chorus some of the men said let's sometimes do things singing with women. So

they started a group called the New Wave Singers. The name comes from, and the name itself caused quite a bit of confusion because at this time there was a kind of music called new wave music in the mid-'80s that was sort of akin to punk rock music and some people saw the name and thought they're singing, is this a new wave band? But the New Wave Singers was, it's a new wave of music expression within the LGBTQ community in that most of the groups were all men's choirs or all women's choirs.

There were very few mixed choruses at the time when New Wave Singers started in 1985. And we, well the people that started it said we're coming together. And the actual first motto was men and women singing together. Now I, having sung in choir since ninth grade all through the end of junior high, last year and all through senior high and college in mixed choruses I didn't really take to joining the Baltimore Men's Chorus, 'cause I love the harmonies that come about as soprano, alto, tenor, bass. That's what I grew up singing in. So luckily I got fired from my night job and was able to come join the New Wave Singers of Baltimore in January 1987. And we're still there. We are no longer call ourselves an LGBT choir. We've not an LGBT+ allies choir 'cause somewhere in the mid-1990s a straight woman joined us named Susanne. And of course there was lots of whispering. "Oh who is then new person? The new woman" – a few weeks later, "the new woman is straight!" We're like, "what? She's straight? This is a gay chorus." We said, "yeah but she sings well."

So she stayed for several years until her and her husband had a child and of course they were both working. Her husband was a teacher at Hopkins University. And then eventually another straight person joined and stayed, another straight person joined and stayed. So eventually over the years since the mid-1990s in New Wave Singers of Baltimore we've had our allies from the straight community come in and join us and they have become such an integral part of our choir not only just singing but they stuck around and they stayed. Some have been there 15 years and have bene on the board of – what do we call our executive board? Board of directors, I think that's the right word for it, our board of directors and held different elected positions of leadership. And it all works together.

The New Wave Singers has grown tremendously since we started. When I joined we had, usually those years we had maybe 18 to 21 or 18 to 24 people. Several years ago, we had 58 people I believe. I thought it was 62 but I was corrected. We were up to 58 people. And that's – gosh. The sound is – I always say we always were

good but we have just evolved so much over the past 30 something years and we have such a wonderful, rich, tremendous choral sound that comes out of us. And we're very proud to be part of the growing LGBTQ choral movement around the country. The gay and lesbian association of choruses that formed in 1979 now has 148 member choirs around the world, most of them of course here in the US. But the choirs comes from South America, from over in England, Germany, France that come to our choir festivals every four years. We did have some member choir, one or two choir members from the continent of Africa, but I think their membership has lapsed over the years. So it really is an enjoyable part.

In addition to singing with New Wave for the past 30 years I have an old boyfriend or tried to be boyfriend as best you can 3,000 miles apart. He lives in Seattle and I in Baltimore. His name is Patrick Haggerty and he in 1975 along with his friends started a gay country band called Lavender Country and they produced an album which was the absolute first ever gay country music album in the whole entire world, all of them all over the earth. And in 2000 he called me up and said well, I'll tell you this. I used to be in a band called Lavender Country, the first gay country western band, and we recorded an album and it was the first gay country album ever recorded, 1975.

It was a project of the Seattle, Washington Gay Community Center. They made like 1,000 copies. Of course it didn't get any air play back in 1975. Well it was 2000, 25 years later, and they wanted to do a 25 year anniversary show and because Patrick has multiple sclerosis and doesn't have the energy to do the upbeat ones, well I said let me think of someone I know who can sing. He goes oh Andre can sing and he – well, I ended up going from Baltimore to Seattle. I said Patrick I grew up on Motown. You want me to come out there and sing country music. Patrick goes oh I'm sure you can do it. And well, he was right of course and I did do that. Well now some years after that – where are we? 2021? Somewhere in middle of the decade that just ended Patrick got discovered by someone.

They did an article on him in *The Journals of Country Music*. And other country music industry folks read about it and picked it up after a couple of years and said this looks interesting. They looked into it some more and some of the folks said we need to put this show on the road. Now right now Patrick is 77 years old. So he was absolutely amazed that at 70 years old he's getting called up for something he did back in his 20s. But they put the money into

it, they put him together and they gave him money to travel around the country. And his band Lavender Country he has backup bands all around the country. And I'm part of the east coast Lavender. When he comes to the east coast I run up to New York or Philadelphia or Pennsylvania and sing with him. We were trying to get a MidAtlantic thing done in the first week of April but I haven't heard from him since December so I'm thinking it's probably not going to happen. But I've still got to start getting ready anyway just in case he goes oh oops, I forgot to call and tell you.

And that's really – I'm just amazed by that. I'm on stage singing country music. Wow. And the songs talk to the issue of what was happening in the 1970s in the lesbian and gay community dealing with breakups, unrequited love, one teenage boy to another. Another song deals with the person being in, put in an institution, getting electroshock therapy. There's a song, Lavender Country song itself I came to find out. I said so what is Lavender Country really. Lavender Country that actual song is really about the transgender community. They say, "You all come out, come out my dears to Lavender Country. You all come out and make yourselves at home. It don't matter who you hear, who you love or what you wear. We don't care who's got what chromosome." And it's truly and really heartening.

And when he sings the audience and the crowds they just go wild. He makes it a fun, rollicking, lots of fun entertaining night when he does this program. So that's what's going on here in the 2000s on the gay music scene. I'm still working, still singing. I'll keep singing in New Wave Singers of Baltimore until my voice gives out. I'm afraid I might end up like those, those stories you hear of those old sopranos in the church choir that should have stopped singing 25 years ago. You know? And trying to sing up here and the voice is wavery. So I hope I have enough sense to stop before then if my voice gets to that point. But it's still good and strong here at age 67.

MG: I actually have a question, sorry, if I can interrupt.

AP: Oh, I'm sorry. I should have told you to stop me, 'cause I've been known to start talking and not stop.

MG: It's all good. I mean this is all super interesting stuff. I know we have to kind of end it a little like by 11:00, sorry, by 1:00 at the latest. So just like one quick final question I guess 'cause you kind of like talked a bit about how important it is to be a queer

liberation activist. So I wonder what you kind of like see as the future of queer liberation or yeah, liberation?

AP:

Well one of the things I'm really glad to see, the queer activist community has stepped out of the – they have shown more solidarity with other movements, issues around the country. I had in 1981 there was a march against Ronald Raegan's war on El Salvador and march on the Pentagon. And I went to the gay community center with friends of ours working on it and we tried to get an endorsement to support this march on the Pentagon against Ronald Raegan's war against El Salvador and there was a tremendous fight. Some were in favor and some weren't. But a lot of them were saying they didn't want to get involved. They should only deal with gay issues.

And I stopped speaking to a longtime activist friend that I worked side by side with for many, many years. And I was so upset, and my friends that were helping me with that that here is – I couldn't understand it. Here we are a gay community group organization that's trying to reach out to straights and say look at us. Support us. We have rights. Hear our plea. Trying to garner support from the straight community. But yet when we go to them and say can you simply endorse this, they say "No, we only want to deal with single issues only that involve the gay community." I'm like how does one reconcile that in their mind to go to the straight community to say look, support us, support us. We need your help. But then someone comes and you say oh no. We only want to be a single-issue orientation organization and not reach out and offer to help.

I mean did the NAACP say that to the gay community in the early years when we said we need rights. Can you help us? Can you support us? No, they didn't. The NAACP in the early 1970s came out strongly in support of ending discrimination against the LGBT, the gay community as it was called then, and supported anti – supported laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. They forget about all that. They forgot all about that. Many Jewish organizations came out in support of anti-discrimination laws. They forgot about all of that. So I was glad to see during – oh gosh – as the 2000 years began to see how our community had evolved and there were many LGBTQ organizations taking a stand against George Bush's war on Iraq and even later days I'm absolutely so proud, so proud of my LGBTQ family.

We have taken a stance during Pride marches, have stood up for the many Black Lives Matter marches. This is even before the

killing of George Floyd, after the killing of Michael Ferguson. Black Lives Matter was actually started by two black, lesbian women put their heads together and said oh no. We had enough of this. And the LGBTQ community has come out, stood up in favor of supporting it in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. And we have opened our eyes up. So many of us are no longer single issues. They see the connectedness. What's the word? The inter –

MG: Intersectionality?

AP: Thank you, intersectionality of all the issues. And they proudly come out openly as LGBTQ community members and being involved in the intersectionality of so many issues in supporting the rights of others. And that's a very, that's one of the most tremendously positive things that I've seen. And you watch the TV clips of the march, protesting, killing of George Floyd and Aubrey and Breonna Taylor and there's rainbow flags all over the place coming up. And some people even carrying signs saying black trans lives matter too also.

So it's to see, look back and see the growth of where it's come from. And I'm proud of over the years that our community has stayed in there and stayed involved and fought and continued to organize. We, in the '70s if somebody had told us there would be a TV show called *Will & Grace* about two gay men living across from each other, a comedy show involved with two gay men in and out of each other's lives. *Will & Grace* had to pretend to be, they had to pretend to somebody that they were sort of straight I think maybe. Did they have to? You're muted.

MG: I don't really know.

AP: Anyway, that becomes a popular long running TV show bringing the gay community and the humor that comes along with it into the lives of middle of the road America for seven years. And I think that's – so those are the strengths that our community has done. We need to do a little more though. And the one thing I cannot still figure out is why we have gay people that are republicans after all they have done over the years. There always seems to be some little group of gay republicans saying we do this, this and that. I remember the 1987 march on Washington over in Los Angeles there is a drag personality Empress Nichole Ramirez Murry who was a Latinx, Latina drag queen and a staunch republican. And he got up and said something so stupid in one of our steering committee meetings that I'm like, "oh really. Is that what you

think? I tell you what. You like the republicans so much, go to the republican gatherings dressed up in your Empress Nicole Murry regalia and see how much they love you then!" I didn't say it to him but I was like this far away from lambasting him. It's just amazing. I'll never figure out that part.

But overwhelmingly LGBTQ community is on the rise. They're – we need to stay strong and support our transgender sisters that are under violent attack. I think sometimes this country how they're attacking transgender people with all these laws, the attacks, the killings of transgender women. And then I think of the country of Cuba how Cuba actually has a day in which they honor transgender people in their country. Compare that to the US where they're busy tearing us down, trying to pass more and more laws not only in congress and Washington D.C. But around the country attacking transgender rights and the rights of transgender people to live their lives openly and freely without fear and harassment from the general public. But in Cuba they have set aside one special day of the year to acknowledge the rights of transgender individuals to live their life, to the live the healthiest, fullest life that they can. So there's work to be done in the good old US of A.

MG: Thank you so much. No. Yeah. You have given us a lot of information and a lot of stories. And thank you so much.

AP: Probably more than you needed.

MG: I think it's all good. And I think we've learned a lot as well. And so thank you so much. I know I'll get back to you about the transcript. It may be, may take a bit. I don't know. I forget how the process goes but yeah. Thank you.

AP: Yea. I went to south Africa in 2001.

[End of Audio]