

Date: 2017-03-02
Interviewee: Robert (Bob) Dumais
Interviewer: Charles Hughes
Interviewer Two: Maddie Kellas
Collection: LGBT Oral Histories

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Charles Hughes: It is March 2nd, 2017 and we are here at Rhodes College with Bob Dumais as part of the MGLCC Out Memphis interview project thank you so much for being here today with us Mr. Dumais.

Robert (Bob) Dumais: You're very welcome, looking forward to it!

Maddie Kellas: So I thought we could start off with just talking about your early life, so I was wondering if you could tell us about that.

Dumais: Well I grew up in Maine, small town about fifteen hundred, uh no fifteen thousand. Fifteen hundred it wasn't that small, but it was a college town and a navy town, so it was a little more sophisticated than just a real rural Maine town would be, so I knew real early like when I was five or six that I was... I felt I was different from the other boys,

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I didn't know what it was of course that early, but I did figure it out fairly early on by the time I was ten or eleven there were magazines that were available on the newsstand in my town I guess because of the navy base and college being there, that were the gay magazines of their day, and so I kind of figured things out from those, and I was brought up very strict Catholic upbringing and I didn't know how my parents or my family would react so I was really frightened to death for a long time about anybody finding out, I... during high school didn't date, but I also was a disk jockey and I DJed all

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the record ops all the dances, at the time we didn't use live bands particularly in those days it was mainly disk jockeys and I had a business doing that and so nobody ever questioned that didn't have a date to go to the dance or whatever, so I think that helped me get through high school a lot easier than I would have if I hadn't been doing that, and it also gave me my career as it turned out, but I didn't really come out until 39 when I was here in Memphis by then I was down here I- somebody broke into our office where I worked and I got shot through my neck and just missed everything vital but at that point I kind of went into a depression, which I'm prone to do on occasion, and- but this one was pretty bad cause my thoughts were

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if I had died then I never would've known what love is, you know all these nice lovely movie type thoughts I guess but it was like because of that I finally decided to do something about it, so anyway that was my early life up until I started dealing with it at 39, so I don't know if you want me to proceed past that at this point or

Hughes: Well one thing that I'm interested in is you know, you said from very early on you kind of recognized that maybe you were different or you know that there was something different

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about you, did you... at what point did you kind of recognize that there was a community right, that there was a, was it through the magazines or was there...?

Dumais: Well the magazines were kind of they weren't like the Advocate or anything like that, they were the I guess would be considered

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the porn magazines of their day but now they pass for Calvin Klein underwear ads or even less than, I mean maybe even less than that... times have really changed on that front, but they did have a few articles, very few because it was mainly pictures but a couple of the articles talked about being gay and what it was like and that's where I learned I didn't really... I went to a pretty large high school cause it was a regional before regionals were regionals we were kind of a regional, and so in my high school, there were about a thousand people which was a pretty good size for Maine and two hundred and fifty or so of my graduating class so I know there had to be other gay people there but to this day I couldn't tell, couldn't name a single one,

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so I didn't really know there was a community there but because there were magazines being sold, I assumed there had to be more than just me but I didn't meet any of them, I really didn't know anybody down here, didn't think I knew anybody how I found out was I was working as a volunteer then it was known as Cable Vison, they did a local channel and they needed people to work cameras and microphones and audio and all of that, and I was... had been in broadcasting radio for years but I hadn't done TV work since college and I thought, well it might be interesting to get back to learning that again hands on so I went down and started doing some of it and really enjoyed it but anyway I was watching

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I- one day I was talking the guy who coordinated it down there Allen Cook was his name he's since passed on but he was very active in the community which will come up very shortly and he was also the coordinators of Cable Vison and I saw him on a TV show which they had there called "Views From 10%" which was a gay TV show one of the few in the country at the time on the cable system and I saw him on there and I get this big lump on my stomach and said, "Well hey, I'm going to talk to him," this is about six months after I got shot, so it still took me a while even after the shooting to deal with it all and then I talked to him that Saturday and when we went in to work on the cable shows and then we got together that evening to talk some more then the next day I was at George's,

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which was one of the famous gay bars here in town on Marshall street just down a little from the Sun Studios, and walking down there to go there on a Sunday afternoon they couldn't believe I

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was doing this in broad daylight, but there I was and anyway that was my first experience on that front.

Hughes: Did you have a sense of... and I'm not exactly sure of the chronology for you, but as in particularly in the 70s as sort of the gay liberation movement kind of kicked up around the country, did you kind of have a sense of that did you feel a connection with that sort of the national movement, or was that maybe different from what you were experiencing?

Dumais: I knew about it sort of, I mean it wasn't anything that I... I'd always

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felt bad that didn't get involved in the Civil Rights Movement, but given my particular situation at the time working and stuff I didn't feel I could break away and just... you know, come down south or do something like that so I was aware of it through that you know, because it kind of came out a little later and it was in the newspapers some, but I don't remember reading much about it up in Maine, I mean I know New York is where Stonewall occurred, but I don't remember reading about it at the time I heard, I learned about that later after I came out I started reading a lot, in fact I've still got a big library at home of books that I was at one point going to donate to community center, but I understand that they already have more than they can handle so

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I don't know what I'm going to do with them at this point, but as I said I started reading a lot both about the history and about personally dealing with things, so although at that point, as Allen used to phrase it I... once I came out I knocked the door off the hinges, so off the closet door, so I don't know once I came out I didn't... I guess I've been dealing with it so long internally that once I could deal with it externally, it didn't bother me anymore it was like, "Ok, let's go," and I got very involved in the community very quickly, and really that's the first sense of community that I really had was when I got involved here it may have been, I haven't really thought of this until right now, it may have been that I desired that

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a lot and didn't really realize I was missing until all of a sudden it was there and I got very involved in it.

Kellas: So how would you describe the community once you arrived in Memphis?

Dumais: Well as I said for the first, I got here in '80 and then I got shot in March of '83 and up until I started talking to Allen, I really wasn't aware of the community here I mean I knew there had to be people here cause there were bars, but I didn't- I wasn't involved in it and I didn't know any people, as I said, Allen was the first person and it was- it came as a real shock when I saw him on TV you know it was like, "Really?!" Cause of somebody I knew, and I never- I

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know they talk about "gay-dar" but mine was never very good unfortunately, and I was involved in all the typical things that

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where you'd think you'd meet people- I was involved in theatre when I was in high school not in college but in high school, but I knew the theatre people cause back then my major even though it was broadcasting was in the speech department which also had the theatre department so I knew a lot of those people were involved with theatre too, but never... met anybody interesting, funny story least still to me is in one dorm wing that I lived in one year my really good friend who I'm still friends with now lived across the hall, my roommate and guy who lived next door to me, turned out later we all found out we were all gay but there were four of us all like in three rooms right across or right next to each other

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and not at the time, the only one I wondered about was my roommate, but I never said anything to him, we... we had our clashes, I'll put it that way, some reason it just didn't work out, but he had, I don't know he eventually he died fairly young cause he had congenital disease that just kept getting worse as he got older, but that wasn't the reason why we were having difficulties it was just one of those things, what can I say, the college roommate problem, but later on I found all this out but I didn't know it at the time, so as the old saying goes, "We're everywhere."

Hughes: As you kind of began to you know, in the mid-80s kind of

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get a better sense of the community, but were there particular places like you mentioned George's you know where was, where did you kind of find the community once you were aware of it and were trying to be a part of it?

Dumais: Well the first thing was Allen and his other half, John Stilwell were co-editors of the Gaze, it was called Gaze at the time, G-A-Z-E and the logo had the A like the lambda symbol and they were co-editors of the gay newspaper and they really only had two other people helping out Vincent Astor who was doing it part-time and well we all are doing it part time cause we all had regular jobs and another gentleman who was involved with the coalition as well which I'll get to in a minute

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but Cecil McLeod and basically what Cecil and I were doing was just typing, we'd type on a- it was a type setting typewriter and you'd have the, type the line and then go back and retype it by readjusting this thing and it would justify it, so it came letters and even columns but it was a very time consuming and I don't know what the right word for it was, but it was... it took a lot of work to get it to come out cause you had to go over it several times, and then when you got one

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wrong you had to make a break and start over but anyway, all the pieces were pasted together on a board and that's how the paper went to the press and they would photograph it and then print it, later on of course we had one of the early Macintosh computers in town I think

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and we started doing it on that and that was just like heaven on Earth after going through that, actually in their early days they just did it on a regular typewriter and counted spaces so that's how meticulous they were well we tried to make it look very good and I think overall over the years if you go back and look at the papers I think they look pretty good for, you know for the small staff we had, so anyway I started helping them out on the paper immediately and I went to the next coalition meeting which they used to hold it like the first week of the month as I remember first Monday of the- first Tuesday of the month I guess, and I started going to that right off and that was struggling at the time too there'd just been a kind of division with the women which is something that went on

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both nationally, but we locally it was like a little... everything here was like four or five years behind national we had the same problems and for some reason we had them like three or four years after you'd hear about it on the national level, and we always had a problem trying to get black gay men and women involved in the coalition that was something that we struggled with all the time that it existed... but I'll get into that further in a minute but anyway, I got involved through the newspaper and then going to the coalition as far as the clubs we used to go to, the ones I went to were George's and The Other Side which was the corner

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of Cleveland and Madison and so the building that kind of looks like it has like a little church exterior with the white across the street from where team challenge has a thrift store now but it used to be the hardware store Stewart Brothers but that's where that was kind of my favorite cause it was never a fancy bar about none of them were at that time but it was, I don't know felt the homiest, whatever the right word is and in fact that's where I met my other half thirty some odd years ago now, so its kind of, always had a warm place in our heart even though it had its' problems physically, I don't mean with police by the time

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I was coming out and everything, we didn't have problems with the police at all and I don't know whether the bar is repaying them off or whether any of that was going on, but we never in all the time I was there we never had a problem with dancing or being raided on although I know a few years prior to that they used to have lights that they'd turn on if people would dance so they'd stop dancing and wouldn't be caught holding hands or kissing or doing anything that the police might arrest them for, so... but that was a few years prior to when I got here I don't

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exactly... you'd have to ask other people like Vincent or somebody when that actually kind of ended I think it was around the latest like '79 or '80 but it may have been earlier than that I don't know.

Kellas: Going back to your work at the Gaze, what inspired you to get involved with that newspaper?

Dumais: The paper?

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Kellas: Mhm.

Dumais: I guess probably mainly because I had known Allen for a little while and was very, very friendly with him and I could see that they needed the help I didn't know anything about it, as it turned out though, working on that later on when I was out of work I ended up getting a job proof-reading which is another thing I did for the paper and proof-reading for a commercial paper, not the Commercial Appeal, but so it actually helped me get a job later on so you never know how these weird skills are going to pay off for you down the road. That was all I just felt they needed the help and of course then I started getting more and more involved with the coalition itself, got very involved in that,

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but that is the next step I guess.

Hughes: Talk about that, sort of how did you get more involved with the coalition and what was it like when you were involved with them

Dumais: Well when I first went, it was kind of struggling... money was always a problem even getting advertising for the paper it was mainly the bars and community organizations and there was some disagreement within the coalitionists to whether we should be taking ads from bars because some people with the coalition were anti-bar and felt even though if you look at the history of the gay community the bars were not just here but everywhere were the thing that brought people together

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cause they were the first institutions where gay people would go and feel like they could just be themselves, now I'm not... I can't speak so much for the women's community, I don't know like there were two bars here that were women and at that time about five or six were predominantly men's bars, although though none of them in this community were ever you know, you can't go here, you can't go there, it was never that way I mean I went to the women's bars for shows and stuff, charity events and they came to our bars so it wasn't like you know, an absolute line, but

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they were still predominantly one way or the other, there was even a gay bar that was predominantly for black men so it's,

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we still had that separation even though, legally, there wasn't one at that stage of the game, but anyway, I forgot where we were going with all that, I'm getting old what can I say, the paper, the reason I got involved was because of Allen and with the coalition, again I got involved because of Allen and John, and then I just started getting more and more involved and helping with more and more things besides the paper, and eventually and I'd only been here since 1980 and only been out since '83 around and I can't remember the exact date anymore but it was either the late, I can't remember when we used to hold the elections but anyway it was late '83 or early '84,

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I got elected president so here I was, I was out publicly for three or four months and now I was president of the coalition, so that's how fast everything went from me being very closeted to me being very open about things. Now I didn't go around at work or other places saying anything necessarily, but if anybody asked, I'd tell them... it was that kind of a thing at that time later on they did a series of articles in the Commercial Appeal, and I did use my real name and I had a client from up in North Tennessee, who we used to consult with on music, I did music services which were for radio stations for back then, nowadays they put them on in a computer but back then the music was on big reel to reel tapes and we would consult

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with them on the order to play them in and such, and this guy used to call me quite a bit and even come down to visit and he was a little uh, ornery sometimes I'll put it that way, so I got a call from him that Monday morning right after that article came out in the Sunday paper and the first thing out of his mouth was, "I saw the article on the paper yesterday," and I thought oh no here we go, I figured he was going to maybe cancel his service and didn't want to have to deal with me anymore and then the next thing out of his mouth, "I want to thank you for having the courage to interview for the article because my brother is gay," so you never know again, I have never had a bad experience in being open about

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being gay at all since I finally dealt with it, got a little sidetracked there, but anyway. So anyway I ended up president, and we started making- we tried again we kept trying to get black people involved it was very... we didn't seem to have much luck there but we did have better luck getting more women involved, we changed some of the rules as far as how you could become a member, we tried to do activities to try to get more people involved, we started having a festival on gay pride during Gay Pride Month, and we didn't get very many people at the time but it was started, we used to have a what was called a march then, now they call it a parade,

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but that nomenclature didn't make a big difference when it went to parade all of a sudden it was a party as opposed to a march being a heavy thing which here didn't go over quite as well, but the March was the first thing they ever did and that kept going from before we had the festival I don't know when it started I think '79 or '80, again we were about ten years behind the national movement, and I wasn't here then so I wasn't involved at all until '83 and it's always started growing actually a number of organizations that still exist at the moment here in town were started during that phase of the coalition the bowling league got its initial start then it kind of broke up for a while and it started again, the sports

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association we would donate money, or not donate but give money to some of these groups to get going and I was trying to think there was a group that got started later on after, AIDS reared its head, open arms, I'm trying to think if that was the name of the group or not, Sheila Tankersley who was in the coalition is the one who started it, but the idea was to have people go to the hospitals and hold babies who had AIDS and rock them so they would have the human touch, because a lot of people didn't want to touch them or anything, but that got started through the coalition and the community center did too,

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that's when I had some involvement with getting going, but we can cover that whenever you want to get to that or whatever.

Kellas: Yeah so with all your involvement in the LGBTQ community, how did you participate in the founding of the foundation or the coalition?

Dumais: Well that goes back to my Catholic upbringing. I don't know we had been taught off and on of a community center there were a few in the country at the time... not very many in the sites community though, they were mainly like Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, those kind of levels, but I thought well there's no reason we couldn't have one down the road wasn't anything I was thinking we could have immediately,

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but my thought was and every, when I was growing up, we always had a building fund going at the Catholic church, there was always a building fund for the next thing, whatever it was going to be but, there was always a building fund going where they set aside some money and I said, well why don't we set aside in the you know, divide up the treasury somehow but open a separate account and start putting money away and eventually when the right opportunity presents itself, we'll have some money to be able to try and start a community center and it got voted through, okayed, and so shortly thereafter some of the other people in the coalition Matthew Presley is the name I remember the most, but I think he had

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somebody else who partnered with him on it but the name escapes me at the moment, put on a rodeo themed show at George's and we raised I mean by today's standards it wasn't very much it was like several hundred dollars but that started out the fund and it built from there, at some point it was after I was no longer president, but somebody decided to go ahead and start renting a place, and I thought it was too early because we just hadn't raised a very, I didn't think it would put things in a very stable condition to start out but everybody was real enthusiastic about it so I thought well it might work so they opened in a rental facility and

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it started operating and we had problems in the beginning we had some problems some of the people who were working there shouldn't have been because they were looking for dates rather than looking to work and so we had some problems and it closed for a while then it opened in another rental place it was down the street on Madison both of those were on Madison the first two and then I got lost in the transition at one point because I think when it moved to one of the facilities was the year I was in Dallas cause I went there for a while for a year because my job, my company here got sold off and they offered me a job in Dallas

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and the money was hard to turn down so, I broke off all the things I was involved with here by then I was involved in the community center, the coalition, ATEAC which was the original name of the Aid to End AIDS committee was the original name of friends of what is now Friends for Life, I was involved in the first meetings when that got started I was not on that board, but I was involved with a lot of the organization of it when it first got going, there was another group that was really, the group that got that going though but they brought in people from all the other organizations in town and we donated a fair amount of money as I remember and at the time to help get it going at the time there was nothing else here, again that was

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a situation where nobody wanted to do anything and nobody everybody thought it was just a gay issue and it turned out we were helping actually I think Friends for Life now and more of their clientele is non-gay than gay, but we were originally the group that did a lot of the financing we used to hold the big auction every year and I was involved with that almost from the beginning even the year I was in Dallas I came back to help with that because the guy who was running it wanted me to come back so I took a weekend because I came up here so anyway because my other half stayed here so we were kind of having a long term relationship for a year, so we worked the auction that weekend that I came back, so it was I broke off all those things

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that I was involved with it seemed like I had a meeting every night for a while every night of the week so in a way it was kind of relaxing to get away and start over again kind of although I was a little nervous going to Dallas because it was considerably bigger and the job situation was a little iffy but as I said the money was so good I didn't really feel I could turn it down but interestingly I made that... got very involved very quickly in Dallas as well, the- they had the papers there were commercial the newspapers gay newspapers, but they did have an AIDS paper that they would put out it was put out by again it was similar to here and their center

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there had- which was similar to the coalition but also had a community center involved with it, was putting this paper out because again there was nobody else working on these things at that time and so I started working on the... cause only three people working on it at the time so they, I again mainly typing and proofreading my usual things I started working on that and worked on that the whole year I was there and came up with a fundraiser which was an auction but we did like a celebrity type auction cause they were a big enough market that you could get celebrities to send in items, like I remember one was an autographed script from the Mary Taylor Moore show, the whole bunch of people in the show autographed it and its probably worth some money today, but we had celebrity items as

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well as regular items. Last time I talked to somebody there he said, "[Inaudible mumbling] remember me," he said, "Well how could I forget you," he said, "you've bought us our biggest money making..." Charity you fundraisers I guess some of me lives on down there still to this day so its kind of nice so to feel that you did some good in your life I guess as I'm nearing the end of mine I guess, so it's like... it's just little things that seem to make a difference I was in a later on one of the other bars we started going to was the pipeline which is now the pumping station, and that kind of became our favorite hangout cause it was more people of our- it was a little older crowd and more the dance clubs tended to be more younger people although that didn't bother

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us particularly, but if we weren't up for dancing then I- we tend to go to the pipeline because it was more as I said, more in our age group I guess, anyway one night this it was a younger guy actually walked up to me and said, "Hi I want to thank you," and I said, "Oh why?" And he said, "Well you were... you don't know it, but you're very instrumental in having me deal with being gay or coming out," we used to go around and speak at different events and you know people wanted speakers it was usually Allen and I who ended up going we used to go down to the University of Mississippi once year and speak to a psych class down there and the professor and his wife and Allen and I became very good friends and we looked forward to going down there every year it was an interesting experience

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we'd mainly take questions and but it was very interesting seeing to help people- so I don't know whether how people would put things they were interested in knowing, I don't know how whether this guy was something down there or it was something that happened here but anyway he was very those kind of things made you feel, some of those things you did were worth it then maybe you helped a few people along the way deal with things or get through things that might have not gone as well if hadn't done what you did you know.

Hughes: Do you- as the community center came into being and developed did you notice any kind of limitations to what it could accomplish or challenges that you may have had as the center developed

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in terms of within the community or within Memphis or were there any limits to what you were able to do?

Dumais: Well again we had the same situation that we had before with the coalition of female involvement and the black community getting involved in fact it led to the Black community aspect of it let to what we called "rap sessions" kind of a play off the music that was starting to come in at the time, and just talking, rapping with each other, we organized these to try and get more involvement and get people to explain what they felt the problems were and why they didn't want why they didn't feel comfortable with the community center or whatever, and the theme, there was a while

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and this was both in the Now movement and the lesbian movement where they had a very strong sense that they wanted to be by themselves or to themselves or under themselves I guess I don't know what... some of them not most of them here, but some of them were very anti-male in the beginning or didn't want men involved and they felt it was their time to do their thing and I can understand that, I grew up with five sisters so it was not something I was unfamiliar with and I agreed with a lot of what they're doing but I still felt that men could be involved I didn't but anyway some of the feeling at that time was they just didn't want much to do with men... and it was very strong I think more strong within the lesbian

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movement than it probably was with the Now movement here because Now at one time, one of the gay men that was pretty active in the coalition, ended up being their president for a couple of years, so but interestingly, the lesbians I got know over the years and become friends with whenever that way, so it took a while but things changed you know, its like anything else I still think the community center probably still has some of those problems I don't know I really haven't sat down and talked with Will that much to know how much he feels the black

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community is involved and whether he feels that they'd like to have them more involved I tried to keep an open door and get people everybody involved

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when I was during the period when I was president but I wasn't you know, we weren't, I really don't want to say me because it wasn't all me cause all these other people were trying to help out with the same thing, at the time there was a group Black and White Men Together that kind of was a group that most of the black men seemed to be involved with there wasn't just a separate black group as I remember at the time it was just BWMT, I could be wrong there memory's fading as I get older but as I remember it at the time it was just BWMT and they felt that addressed their issues better than we did, and its probably true I don't know, when

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growing up in Maine, I didn't have much association with the black community cause unlike, and even now only one percent of the population in Maine is black and the navy base you'd think we had them but actually we had more people that I met through the college Bowdoin College there in my hometown Brunswick, than I met through the navy base because at the time apparently the government had a thing where they wouldn't station blacks in Maine because they kept them down south here mainly I don't know whether that's true, but there was only one family that I went to school with and they were a local family and for several years until some came in through the air force base

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across the river, it was a smaller base but some of the navy base but they seemed to have black people who were stationed here sooner than the navy base did, but eventually that kind of just became a normal thing but again, the most I got to know was the family that lived up the street who was became real good... I was a disc jockey in high school as I mentioned and so I had the latest hit records so everybody was over at my house for being a gay man I had more women in my bedroom through high school than the straight guys in high school did cause that was where we all... my father had it built so that the beds made up in to little couches that you use during the day, so it was always packed in my bedroom all the time, so nothing went on,

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but we had a good time, and so it became this family my sister dated one of the boys for a while and we became... my family my parents were always you treat everybody like you wanted yourself treated and we met all kinds of people over the years who came in through the navy base and the air force and like next door we had a Mexican family for a while and my sisters were learning how to make tortillas and all this stuff from them and so it was like I don't know we never thought much about it, it was never anything until I came down here it wasn't... in fact

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that was thing I worried about most coming down here was how I would fit in because I had pretty strong opinions

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and I didn't know how many people down here were, what I would've considered racists but mostly I didn't run into that, in fact I was really surprised at how much things had changed very quickly down here or to me it would've been really quickly from the late 60s until '80 when I got here it was like I wouldn't have had any idea that all that stuff went on and in the 60s it was like that was I mean I'm sure for blacks that wasn't the case but it seemed on the surface that most of that had vanished very quickly I just couldn't, I just didn't run into any problems either direction either in my relationships with black people or with my relationships with whites down here.

Kellas: In your opinion,

[47:00]

what are some of the biggest challenges that remain today for the LGBTQ communities in Memphis?

Dumais: Donald Trump, but that's another whole story. I think we are still dealing with the prejudice that's there I don't think that will ever go away probably because of the church situations cause I don't know whether that will ever die in some of the churches it would be nice if it did but I don't know if it will I think there will always be a little of that residual effect there I think as we come out and more and more of us come out, I think this is true it was a line that was in, I was talking a little earlier of this show that's running right now as we tape this

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called "When We Rise" and its about the history of the gay and lesbian community and the activism and I went to the second march on Washington which was I wanna say '86... '86, '87 somewhere in there I think and it was quite an experience to be with that number of people to realize that you were asking about community earlier that really gave me a sense of how big the community really is, but I think the religious aspects are always going to be there, I think less and less its having an impact with the general public, or I think some people will be upset but I'll say this anyway, but I think

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overall the general public is becoming less religious as time has gone on how much less religious in the long run its going to get I don't know but I have a feeling its heading a little more in that direction you wouldn't know it right now with the current administration but I do think science and other things are leading to that happening and I think that's leading it to be a more logical conclusion by most people that we're just born the way we are and that's the way things are that doesn't mean you don't behave yourself like other people do, but

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you're born that way and it's not going to change, I mean Heaven knows I tried to pray it away and do everything else as I said being very strict Catholic, I mean I went through the whole thing altar boy and everything else and religious education and being very, actually I was did pretty well on all that stuff, won awards and stuff, but I just, as I went along I just kind of fell away from my religious upbringing. My mother kept it through the end but she became very accepting as time went on and my father did too, so I got to give them credit cause I know for them it was a probably a pretty difficult change to go through,

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but I think religions number one, number two, I think that we're probably still or they're probably still because I'm not very involved with it right now still dealing on the racial front, Will I'm sure could give you a better view of that than I can, I wish that that wasn't the situation, but I think the whole country obviously we can tell even on the national front now what not just in the gay community but overall, that that the race issue is still is not come to any kind of conclusion and I don't know, I would hope someday we would be able to, but I sometimes wonder I guess, as I'm aging I become a little less hopeful on that front cause it seems to keep going and going,

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I feel more of the problems on our end, the white end than the other end but I think there needs to be a little give and take on both sides doesn't seem to be there on almost anything right now, the world I think needs to deal or works best, when you deal with compromise of one guy under another with life, I get very upset with people who see everything and pardon the expression in this case, cause I'm not talking racial issues but in black and white, I think the world is full of a lot of gray and that if you don't deal with that or adapt to that there's not going to be any real solution a lot of these things in the long run if we don't do that,

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I just get very upset when people say, "Oh wow it's this way or no way," and that seems to be you know, not only just in the Congress but seems to be in groups of people in this country seems to be that way at the moment I'm hoping that that will cycle out sooner rather than later, but we'll see.

Hughes: Looking back on all the things that you've been involved with you know, ultimately being the president of the center and that but also before that...

Dumais: Well listen, I was never president of the center, I was president of the coalition.

Hughes: Oh sorry

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Dumais: President of the coalition

Hughes: President of the coalition right and with all of that

Dumais: I was, excuse me, I was on the board of the center but for a while but I didn't, I never got didn't want to take that on at that time because of I was so involved with other things

Hughes: And in thinking of

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all the work that you've done, what are you most of proud of? What's the thing or couple of things that you kind of, are the proudest of all the work that you've done?

Dumais: Well as I mentioned, the Dallas thing that they still have that charity event still going and still being their biggest money maker I feel good about even though I haven't been there for almost 30 years now, well not quite that long 90, well its getting close to 30 years, the community center here is probably the top thing here the fact that that has developed and kept improving and getting bigger and better and I just don't believe all the things that's involved with now, now that we have a full-time director and things like that, I you know, I was hopeful that those things would happen down the road when I start- when I brought up the thing about starting a fund,

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but didn't know how soon that would all come to pass, or whether it would even come to pass, it was just a hopeful thing down the road that I am very pleased with that and I do feel I was rather pleased with the time when I looked back now the time I was president seemed to be one of the most successful times with the coalition and the fact that there were so many groups and I know I'm forgetting a couple of them that I mentioned earlier, so many groups that started out of that time period in the Loving Arms, that was the name of the AIDS group that got started to hold the babies, couldn't think of the name, but anyway, all those groups that got started during that time period that have managed to survive all this time

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and keep going separately on their own, we looked at ourselves as a catalyst, that's why they kind of picked the name coalition, cause it was just kind of an organization that kind of tried to help everybody, despite the ending of the coalition which was kind of took place when I was in Dallas, so I wasn't directly involved with that but was kind of a sad ending to an organization that deserved better I felt, when I look back on it now, I think we've managed to get a lot of things going that have helped a lot of people over the years just by giving them something they could get involved with, I mean people who wanted to... I mean bowling doesn't sound like a big thing,

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but if you got a group of people that you can feel comfortable with that you can go bowling with and that you if you got problems we can probably have somebody there you can talk to about them, to me, even if that's all you did in the community was go out and bowl, you were doing something in the community that even if you couldn't get involved politically, then at least you had something or a connection somewhere... some people just didn't feel they could go to the bars because that was too public, some people didn't feel they could march in the parade or go to a festival because that was way too public, so it was nice to have these other organizations that people could get involved in and I mean even down to things like book clubs and stuff that were going at that time, that didn't continue but.

Hughes: Just to quick follow-up on one

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thing that you've talked about a couple of times which is the AIDS crisis, what were the sort of primary goals of the coalition and the organizations the coalition worked with or helped create in terms of responding to the crisis, like what needed to happen when that was going on that you all worked towards?

Dumais: Well we were... we actually I think the group was called the Queensmen was the main group that decided that we were going to start an AIDS group, the coalition did not take the first steps on that front, I think we financially helped them as I remember once when they first got started cause that was part of what we were doing at that time, we were helping groups financially, don't...

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I'm not positive about that cause its been so long now I don't remember, I remember the initial meeting for some reason, I remember what the room looked like and group of people cause it was we had people from every group in town there I think and this was when, actually when the men and women and the community really came together a lot, I got to say that the lesbian community was just here and across the country, I don't think a gay man would've survived that whole epidemic and crisis as well as we managed to if it hadn't been for the lesbians, they were just, they did a lot they really did a lot, both fundraising here in town and going out and helping people like Loving Arms like I mentioned,

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they were just... I don't know it was amazing thing that happened during that period and I think that helped bring the men and the women together in the community, I think that has improved a lot probably further along than the black and white issue unfortunately, which in this city, needs to be resolved more than it is I think, it's like anything else I guess time will make the difference

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I hope... but, at the time the coalition other than supporting it and stuff, we were doing so many other things at the time that I don't think it was something that we,

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I wasn't president at that time, but I don't think there was anything we felt we could take on another subdivision, I don't know how to phrase it cause at that time, all these other groups were kind of working through the coalition, so we had a lot of things going at the time and I don't know whether we felt we could take it on but as I said, Queensmen decided they were going to get it going and we certainly were involved with helping them, a lot of peo- several people were on the initial board for members of the coalition, so again that was just something at the time that there was nobody in town doing anything about it and we felt there had to be somebody to help out,

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it wasn't... it was just getting started at that time, again like everything else, even the spread of that was, you know, behind here, behind the big cities although, of course we our fair number as it turned out ultimately, but lost several friends during that time period... but it's... we didn't get hit I don't think like the big cities did, here it became more heterosexual more quickly than I think it did in some of the bigger cities, part of it was because, a lot of

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the organizations within the black community didn't want to discuss it or it wasn't affecting them quote on quote, but it was, they just didn't want to admit it or talk about it, so it ended up spreading people who were on the down low as they phrase it I guess... but doing gay sex on the down low where nobody knew about it and then going back to their wives and in some cases they contracted AIDS and were spreading it to their wives, so it ended up becoming, as I said there seemed to be a higher heterosexual count here then what I was hearing about in the big cities anyway. I don't know whether it was just a percentage thing or what the deal was

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here, but that's just my impression, I don't have any exact statistics to base that on I may be pulling a Trump here with inexact facts so please don't quote me on those, but look them up please, cause I'm sure by now those statistics are published somewhere, but the community-AIDS Friends for Life probably has them or the health department or a combination of the two.

Kellas: Of all the changes over the years, what has surprised you the most either the good or the bad?

Dumais: Actually the speed of how everything, fast everything has happened has shocked me, if somebody had told me when I was growing up, that within my lifetime

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we'd be able to marry I would've said, "you're out of your blankin' mind," but I wouldn't have sworn because back then I didn't swear, but anyway, and I probably wouldn't swear now either but, that's how unbelievable it is on that front, I just can't believe the speed with which things have changed. The fact that I guess we will some of us were willing to stand up early on, I started to say this earlier, they're saying in the movie and this documentary, not documentary, it's a docudrama they've had going the last couple of nights it's continuing on... that we had to come out so that other people would know that they knew people and when that started happening, how can I phrase it, with a large

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enough number when it reached critical mass, they're very few families now that I think they could say they don't, or very few people who could say they don't know somebody who is gay, I'm sure there are a few somewhere, but I would think it would be much harder nowadays for somebody to say that, but it would just, I think just the fact that people know somebody, it's harder to go in to the ballot box and say okay, I'm going to vote for this person and isn't going to have these rights, if you know somebody, if you don't, then it's easy to say, "Oh I don't like that group, so I'm not going to vote for this." That's my opinion as far as the fact that having to be open, that doesn't mean you have to,

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again I didn't take the approach for shoving it in everybody's face either cause to me, I don't feel that straight people other than the fact they could hold hands and kiss and all that without any trouble, although I think nowadays that's almost becoming the case for us too, I remember when a kiss, a gay kiss on TV was a big deal and now, it's on TV all over the place, I mean there was a show, what was the name of that show...? It's about these thirty somethings, maybe it was thirty somethings, was there a show by that name?

Hughes: Yeah.

Dumais: Yeah that's the one I never watched it very much, but they had a gay sequence string on that show and there was one where they appeared in bed and at the end, and were talking about something gay oriented... and the advertisers dropped out and

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they never re-ran that episode, at least not on the network, probably if somebody runs it and reruns now they'd run it cause it would be so tame now that nobody would even think about it, but when Rose Ann had a kiss with Muriel Hemmingway on her show, it was a big deal, I used to remember when I first came out, I'd try and tape every show that had something gay in it, now I can't even keep up with it all, it'll show up in shows you don't even expect it as a sub- sub plot

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and then it's just incredible, I think TV made- was a huge help and two of the most important shows was the Donahue show I feel, Phil Donahue

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who needs, how can I phrase it? He definitely ought to be an honorary member of the gay community that's for sure, and cause without him I don't think we'd be anywhere near where we are right now, and he just- and because of that Oprah and other people who followed kind of were added to all that, and the other show, believe it or not, a show that has long disappeared was called the Tomorrow Show was on NBC after the Tonight Show, and Tom Snyder was the host and he was this newsman who just smoked continuously, but he had all kinds of people on his show and was very positive in his approach to them he had transgender people on way before.. I mean we're talking like

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forty years ago or so, and he had transgender people on, he had gay people on, he had any kind of you know, people who are into fetishes and stuff just real, a real unbelievable mix of people that you never thought would be on a network but because it was on so late, it was on at 1 Eastern time and because back then the Tonight Show ran one hour and a half, and it was just... that's where I got to see a lot of people and you know just you learn that they were ordinary people, but between Donahue and that show even though it was on so late, they both had a pretty big influence overall in the public, the Donahue show more than Tomorrow just because of the time slot

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and the fact that it was dealing with a largely female audience at that time, that were going to be the mothers of gay people, and they may be getting exposed to it for the first time on his show, and he took a very positive approach to it, so it was a big help I think if their kids came up to them and said, "Mom we need to talk about something," you know.

Hughes: Well thank you so much for being here with us today is there anything else that you'd like to add or anything you'd like to share before we finish here today?

Dumais: Can't think of much, I just... I was just going to reiterate that the speed with which everything has changed,

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just floors me we've had some and I think we're about to have some again in the next few years, steps back and then we take a number of steps forward, sometimes the steps back are rather frustrating, but they've helped us do better when we finally make those big steps forward, as I said, it's been really only since '69 that I mean there was a movement before that, but it was a much quieter, less public, I mean not that they weren't public, but it wasn't known to the public,

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papers didn't even write it up even though it was in you know, in news, could've been a news item, and network news didn't exist the way it is today where you could be somewhere instantly and cover it live, or tape it and have it on the air

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two seconds after it happens, back in those days, it was film you had to carry back to the studio and get it developed and so many times on network, you wouldn't get the pictures until the day, a day or two later especially if it was from overseas, it was two days usually, so it was a whole different thing back then and they just didn't cover it because you know, they had all these other things they were trying to get covered I guess, but nowadays it's so easy to- and they're working with all the cable news outlets, they're looking for things to fill it so, we probably become one of the things they use to fill it, but I'm not gonna gripe it gets us on the air. I think a lot of it is just people seeing us and getting to meet people and we're just like everybody else except I happened to love a male partner rather than a female partner that's all, but I mean,

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we've been together I figure thirty-three years and that's without marriage, and I never thought we'd have that opportunity, but we haven't taken advantage of it yet because we're looking into finances unfortunately, in some cases when you get older, you may be better off not getting married in keeping the finances separate than combining them, but I'm getting a financial person to look into that at the moment, but cause I got closer to needing long-term care than I really care to think about at this point, but thinking about that in the long run is something that, that's one of the things you have to look at so there may be an advantage to not getting married, but I've always felt that we were

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even though we weren't, cause I never thought we'd be able to be but, anyway, I hope all this in this project I don't know how many people you're going to end up talking to, but I hope that you'll give people some idea of what it was like as I said, by the time I was out, we weren't really running scared of the police or anything like that, which people earlier than me here in Memphis were, and so I was in a situation where we were at the edge I guess, where we could really start doing more and more things out in the community, we really just to add one final note never ran into problems when we went to get parade permits and stuff or march permits from the police or anything and by the time we were doing it when I was here, so,

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and I don't know whether they ever did, I think you'd have to ask people who were involved before me, I never heard of that happening, but I can't say it didn't, but I don't know that it did, so and since then, since I've been here, we've always had a good relationship with the police, and

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in fact they even had a liaison for awhile I don't know whether they still do or not, haven't heard much about it but...

Hughes: Well thank you so much for participating in this and for being with us today, it's really wonderful and thank you.

Dumais: Ok, You're very welcome.

[Ends at 1:16:48]