

Interviewee: Susan Mackenzie

Interviewer: Charles Hughes

Interviewer: Alright well we are here at Rhodes College, it is July 14, 2016 and we are really pleased to have Susan Mackenzie here with us and I was wondering to start if you could tell us a little bit about your early life, where you came from growing up that kind of thing.

SM: I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan and moved to Huntsville, Alabama. My father was an engineer and he had the space industry there and so moved to Huntsville, Alabama when I was about four years old, grew up in Huntsville, went to college at MTSU in Murfreesboro , planned to stay in Tennessee and not go back to Alabama and so went to law school here in Memphis and been in Memphis ever since.

Interviewer: What got you interested in the law?

SM: I don't know, I don't know if it was kinda growing up in the neighborhood and dealing with the police and not

[1:00]

liking what they were doing or whether cause at just some point I know that when I was in ninth grade I wanted to be a lawyer and so worked towards that basically ever since.

Interviewee: Excellent, I was reading an interview with you where you said that it was in college that you really started to recognize you sexual orientation and sort of come out, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that process or how that happen for you.

SM: Ya, I mean I know from as far back is being early teens having crushes on females and then but never really thought much about it, didn't put two together. My middle name is Elizabeth and so my brothers used to kid me calling me Suzy Lizzy and so but still didn't click and then you know after dating

[2:00]

Guys for a while and even being engaged and going you know I still think a whole lot more about women than I do about guys and going to college I had a psychology professor who introduced me to a lot of feminist writings and so with reading a lot of that and becoming more involved in the feminist culture and stuff like that then you were you know ok there are lesbians out there I am them, they don't have to be afraid when I walk by the lesbian table in the cafeteria college and then when I moved to Memphis it was you know I arrived in Memphis and I was a full fledged lesbian.

Interviewer: You said that there were writers that were very important to you, do you remember what books or authors particularly you gravitated towards?

SM: There was the first one which still and I can't remember, it was a book of essays, it was, the cover was about the same orange as woefully coast champagne's cover, the cake millets

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the fiction, ruby fruit jungle, everything I could get my hands on. I'd go to her return a book to her library and she'd say here this one next, this one next and of course the earliest stuff Betty Fernand and

all that though I recognize the point she was making but as a mother and a housewife that point didn't quite click.

Interviewee: Right Right, to what degree were you aware in that early period of LGBT activism or the sort of use of the law by LGBT folks to fight for rights or on the other side sort of you know street activism or that movement, it sounds like you were a feminist movement, did you have a similar awareness or was it different?

SM: Not when I was LGBT I was not at that point, I was involved in

[4:00]

the anti-nuclear war, anti-nukes movement, I think that was probably the most what was going on on campus. At that point I also wrote for the campus newspaper and so I've always been somewhat of a rebel and then it was more than once I got into law school and had the con law and having the opportunity to do some independent study and things like that, that then I could direct and start learning what was going on and about lambda legal defense and education fund which was the more prominent organization then with HRC and there was another organization that you don't even see, I don't know if they still exist and a friend of mine worked for them but I'm blocking on her name but then through, I also knew or researched before moving to Memphis and since I was involved in feminist inner wakening

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That there was a now chapter here in Memphis and so I went to there first Tuesday meeting after I moved here and immediately joined and the treasurer was kind of like wow I'm not sure, "its been a long time since we had somebody come to the first meeting and say they wanted to join," and then for now also then a lot more of the LGBT rights and have that awakening to of the movement and then trying to suck up the history of the movement too which was fairly short at that point in time.

Interviewer: Right, what was the now chapter like here when you started getting involved?

SM: It was pretty vibrant, it was heavily at least in leadership of lesbians and there were several open couples and stuff like that. We had a softball team that we had our token "straight person" and I here five years later when she moved somewhere else that she actually came out as a lesbian

[6:00]

then too and so now we had a softball team that played in the leagues and after every game we'd go down to the P and H and have beer and hamburgers and several protests, martins and stuff. We'd even hosted the National Now Conference in 1996 I believe at the Peabody Hotel here in town so I was a chapter president for a short period of time, was more active on the national level, was on the National Now board of directors and was the regional director for about an eight year span, while you had great friends across the country and learned a lot and were active and making change or at least holding alive.

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You didn't because we were gone so much so many weekends. You didn't have much of a network except the Now network here in Memphis .

Interviewer: Interesting, are there particular campaigns or rallies or things that stick out from your Now work, is there anything you really remember as being pretty exceptional?

SM: Well the very first march on Washington for women's lives and abortion rights and we had I think two buses originated out of Memphis and one after that in 85 or 86. So being the first one, being up there on the mall and that many people but then also the first big gay pride march in D.C. was just phenomenal. Everybody was happy, you felt like you were skipping down the streets even though you weren't because it was just so much energy and there were buttons galore and t-shirt galore, bumper stickers and

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you know we were just getting all that we could and laying it out on the bed and taking the picture of it and so you know that was really empowering and then subsequently have been several multiple women's rights marches and I know definitely two, I think it was three gay marches in D.C. that I've participated in.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of actions that were local, did you do a lot of that kind of work in Memphis at that time?

SM: There wasn't a whole lot that was out there, I mean I remember one of the early gay pride gatherings down on court square and there may have been 25 30 people, a lot of people were in the closet. It was, the closet

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was the main place where people lived at the point in time and there were still some bean on the edge and concern about being seen coming and going from a gay bar or a lesbian bar and so there were years where there weren't pride celebrations. Either you didn't have somebody that was willing or able to step up and pull it together or getting people to hangout. Another and this may be in conjunction with pride, there were several years that they rented the riverboat that does the short cruise and Joyce Cobb played live, she played several years and so that was always a good fun time going out on a boat spending a couple of hours dancing and listening to Joyce Cobb and just hanging out.

Interviewer: Right, ya excellent, thinking of transitioning

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a little bit to sort of talk about your practice and the fact that you became known in the community as the gay lawyer right, what was that like, I would imagine that would create sort of a real opportunity for you but also maybe challenges for you to kind of have that identity, what was that like when you were first starting to be that person?

SM: Ya I mean it was a little bit scary but I also, there's also a portion of that that's like self defeding you know I mean on one hand I was sitting there I mean I was an active Now, I was an out lesbian. With my roles and now I had to go to state board meetings that were quartly maybe even more often than that, regional board meetings that were quartly, national board meetings that were quartly

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so there were a whole lot of weekends that I was out of town and you've always heard O well the big law firms and you get put in all these hours and stuff like that and I had so much on my plate outside of that and also thinking ok I'm not going to be wearing a dress and at that point there really weren't any women lawyers or rarely rarely you would see a woman lawyer in a court house in pants and while I had a skirt I did not like wearing it I did not want to wear it and avoided it as much as I could and so I had some self defeding behaviors, I wasn't going to be able to apply to these various law firms even though my grades and such said I could because they wouldn't hire me because I am an open lesbian and I wear pants and then also just because of my very liberal beliefs but I found out later there were probably some but I just didn't know enough about Memphis and the history or have somebody to

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Help mentor me, to kind of point me in this direction so I actually went to graduate school for one year working on a Masters in Psychology and still continued to clerk at six dollars an hour for another lawyer even though I had my license and did that for about a year and got burned out and just put up my shingle and its history.

Interviewer: Thinking when you were talking about that there you know it was very rare to see a woman loyal who wasn't wearing a dress, I imagine that the community of lawyers probably wasn't that big either at that point, did you ever have a sense that you were welcomed or was there any sense of feeling different or?

SM: With majority, I was active in the association of women attorneys and I felt very welcomed there

[13:00]

Um, there were lots of women that I felt like kind of took me under their wing and so that was good and with some of the lawyers or where I ended up sharing space with had some good networks and so that helped broaden the networks, though as I became more active and now with less time then some of that went away but ya there were some instances where my sexual orientation was used against me. I had one opposing attorney one time actually call my client's sister and tell her that she was concerned that my client might be lesbian because she hired this lesbian attorney and that's why she really wanted to divorce her husband. It wasn't because he was a meth addict, it was because she must've been a lesbian and then you know and

[14:00]

had a funny case where I represented the husband getting visitation, gay husband, divorced, getting visitation was an issue and it went on for a while and turns out the same attorney was on the other side of this case but while the divorce was pending mom and the kids moved to north Mississippi and D'army Bailey was a judge and he finally went in to court on something and he looked at the opposing attorney and said look if you're not going to bring me any concrete proof that the fact that he's gay is going to hurt these kids then I don't want to here anything more about it so just quit. I think what she advised her client to do was to dismiss the divorce and refile it in Mississippi since she's been living there so that's what she did and turns out the judge in Mississippi told her the same thing so, and what's really great about some of this because it's what you know early on

[15:00]

most of a lot of what I was doing was trying to make a difference, was representing gay and lesbian parents because at that time the law in Tennessee was if you're gay you're automatically an unfit parent and you might not only lose custody of your kids but you may have restrictions on the amount, well you will have some restrictions like they won't be around you're paramore overnight and you can't live in the same house and have the kids there, you have to have two separate residence and maybe the kids can be around your partner during daylight hours other than that you would be lucky if that's what you got and that was the law and it was heartbreaking but it began to change and so now I've got some cases where it was some of the longest years and years of fighting over this issue and the four kids and the ex wife all came to his wedding out in California

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Where he married you know his partner a few years ago and so many of the kids come back and they're fine with their gay parent, you know all that fight was for nothing and so you know but now over the time less fight, you'll see it kind of come up but even know the attorneys aren't getting away with using it, you know for a while they'll use it just to keep the fight going for a while but we've come along way and it's not really as possible as it was ten years ago and now you can get married so you know.

Interviewer: And we'll talk more of it later about the contemporary moment, it must have been an amazing and fascinating moment to do what you do right, one thing I noticed on your website that you still

[17:00]

talk about being a specialty and I imagine has been a specialty for a while or something that could be at least is Parker S and those sorts of policing, could you talk about that environment and maybe be more broadly in terms of what the environment was in terms of rests and those sorts of things, does it relate to the gay community.

SM: A lot of the real oppressive police action, governmental action against gays and lesbians occurred before I came to Memphis and more in the seventies but you still had areas where gay men would gather because they knew they could gather there and meet other gay men for anonymous sex. One is some areas I Overton Park, I think the old Dillard's bathroom at Oak Court and so occasionally the police would go through there and would do sweeps and unfortunately with the sweeps

[18:00]

Is that there was a lot of entrapment behavior and for most of the gay guys who ended up getting entrapped they just make it go away but there were even a few straight men that were going like I was sitting in my car eating my lunch and this guy comes up and starts talking to me and I'm just kind of trying to ignore him and the next thing I know, but because of the stigma they also didn't want to spend the money to fight it the stigma and all of that and it's either they're going to somebody else or they're not tricking in the park anymore but its been probably a good year if not two or more since anybody's come to me that they've been arrested in the park.

Interviewer: Interesting interesting, I imagined

[19:00]

probably pretty quickly after you arrived thinking about within the community that you probably became a known person, somebody who was not only out but someone who did a lot of work for folks in this areas, within the community did you find that you became a prominent person or were you well-known or and also because of your political work I'll imagine helped too.

SM: I was probably more well known because of what I was doing in Now because I was somebody the press could call and do interviews and was not concerned about doing interviews and my face being on the news or in the paper and so probably more so through my Now work, which became a public face, but within the community they did know and their were some prominent early cases. I've represented a counselor, one of the senior counselors

[20:00]

Social worker at the VA who was transitioning from male to female and at that point you had to go through a lot more steps to be able to get surgery and one of those was she had to live for a full year as a woman and the VA was not letting her come to work as a woman and so we filed suit, we got in Judge McRae's courtroom and very early on Judge McRae basically said ya'll need to go and resolve this because it's not going to be pretty for the VA and so we did and while there were some things that were pretty crazy my client says I'm fine with that you know it's kind of like 'osprey cos' controlled the number of rings she can have on each hand, the size of her earrings, the length of her skirts stuff like that and she'll go I wouldn't be wearing a dress like that anyways and that was a great

[21:00]

great early victory and I think one that kind of got a little bit more word out there because as far as like LGBT it was definitely not encompassed with entitled seven at that point in time and even some illegal writings weren't even taken that far but today they're treating it as that in trans gender as both being covered by entitled seven. We had to with the trans gender bring it under the handicap disability act because it was a mental illness and so you didn't have that pull in that community because it shouldn't be labeled as a mental illness but if you get it thrown out it's not a mental illness than you lose any civil rights protection what little bit you got you lose, so it's good to see some of that progress that's being made now. I got a lot of the phone calls

[22:00]

you know of I've just been fired and what can I do and unfortunately all I could do was tell them was go apply for unemployment and we can fight that but we can't fight the fact that you were fired because there's nothing we can do about it and the EOC wasn't even taking chargers at that point.

Interviewer: Right, right what year was the VA case, do you remember?

SM: VA case was probably, I got my license is 86, and it was probably late 87 late 88. It was pretty early, it was during my fearless lawyer out there.

Interviewer: Did you feel that way, did you feel like you were a real crusader, I mean this is something you must believe in pretty strongly?

SM: Yeah yeah and you felt it more with the youth vigor and a little bit of more with naivety but now you kind of beat your head up with the system for a while

[23:00]

It kind of was let's see if we can do this. Also if the VA had stood their ground, I had no concept of what was going to be involved in that degree of litigation besides the fact that the law didn't really favor us but when I was a solo practitioner, living from month to month myself you didn't have the funds to be able to fund the litigation and so in civil rights litigation if you win you get all that money back in the end but you've got to spend it and help pay for depositions, the printing cost and all of that and experts and walnut to get the cases forward which is hard when you're a young lawyer.

Interviewer: Were there any mechanisms to raise funds, was there any organizing to try to raise money for these legal cases?

SM: There's some

[24:00]

Small, I did have one client who, and this is a good story. I was representing a lesbian mother; young child, child was probably under six months when I started and she did get a little bit of money from NCL our National Center for Lesbian rights but dad had filed for custody, dad's parents were fundamentalist Pentecostal minister at a local Church of God in Christ not Church of God in Christ but Church of God but even I think more conservative than that and this was around the time when Ed McAteer and the religious round table and that's who he credits having been the force behind putting Reagan in office and so while we were in trail for this case, Ed McAteer and a dozen

[25:00]

other people were in prayer circles outside the door to the courtroom all five days that we were on trail and that trail ended after five days after the fathers attorney rested and I moved to dismiss and won that and dad appealed and never perused it further so untimely now that child is in Brown University excelling and a very talented artist and a political force into herself too and her mother is a physician in Nashville.

Interviewer: Wonderful, wonderful. That's fascinating, so thinking maybe also just kind of about your life and coming into Memphis and being out and being prominent as a political activist, what was that experience like, did you find that you, did you have any problems

[26:00]

did you feel welcomed, I mean in certain communities you felt very welcomed but what was that like even in the relatively recent past, I mean what was that experience like?

SM: I mean there were some concerns that you would lose clients if they found out did they know, did they know who they fired and also there was a concern that the straight clients would be afraid because then they would be afraid they would be labeled as gay but for the most part, I found over time that I'm not aware of too many times where its caused a problem. Either people didn't know or didn't care and early on you ran with people you felt safe with and we hung out in midtown. You hung out at the P and H which had all kinds of misfits there so you know and at people's houses

[27:00]

And when I first came to Memphis you had the seventh day which I thin was on Marshall or Monroe somewhere Sharon Wray had that bar and I only went there once. It was just strange. Part of it was it was a run down small little place. It wasn't what you kind of expected or whatever and then the pediment opened here on Madison kind of above where Piggly Wiggly or on the back side where Home Depot is now and at that time I was living in a one room apartment around the corner on Madison and so spent a fair amount of time at the pediment and that was fine. You had where they do the country songs and everybody would get up and do the line dancing and all that which I wasn't very coordinated. I didn't never did that,

[28:00]

I wasn't very good but the pediment was fine, good people there, dancing, still remember screaming men and stuff like that. The other thing that was a big part, I'm digressing from your question, but the culture in the lesbian community, you had the music festivals and Rob and Tyler had a west coast women's music comedy festival and a southern women music comedy festival that was in North Georgia up in the mountains, it was a Jewish camp and it had a lake and cabins and then we would camp and went to that every year for about seven years in a row and which was just wonderful and there were big people from Memphis that also went and you met more people from Memphis that you didn't know before running in your circles and stuff like that and I think

[29:00]

as far as one of the biggest freeing impacts on most people was that comedy festival and you could go and other people didn't have opportunities other than the bar to be with others and also have access to the books and the clothing and the art and all of that that you had there in the venders area and so it was just a town in and out of itself. You volunteered for a work shift and you went through the line and the meal tents and all of that and I think that was a big thing, in its hay day there were dozens of women's music festivals and now there's only a few in Michigan, the mother of them all and I've always wanted to go to Michigan and could never get there and by the time I could afford to get there I did not want to go anymore, no

[30:00]

That's not how I want to spend my time, I want to be able to plug my AC in my camper end, yeah living on the land but now you got the one in Bloomington and Indianapolis but it's an indoor but it's still a different animal than it was.

Interviewer: So, is that sort of the music you like, you listen to that back home too or was that just the community aspect?

SM: No I did, that was a big segment on my record collection and when I got rid of my turn table and got rid of my records I kept my David Bowie and I kept my women's music and a few others but those were the bulk of what I kept and than have tried to get on CD's, those records that were available. There was one that was a great radical feminist *mute.*

[31:00]

One of the songs was cheese and it was about government cheese and you know keep a hungry seed and you'd give him cheese and other good political message on that one and you can't get it. I keep

looking here or there and it's unfortunate too that the women's music also is not the entity, the strong draw that it was but part of that is Melissa Etheridge I saw her at southern women music and comedy festival for the first time and she's out there now as a open lesbian making it, Indigo girls, so there was several people that you know longer have to be stuck with that label and only being able to record on Olivia or Redwood records or self produce to get your music out there but the travel, you know Olivia has transformed itself into a travel agency

[32:00]

and that's really good too. You got everything from the large ships, they're more affordable so people that are with students or whatever can figure out a way to go and live in that culture for a week and all the way from the big boats and land base but are more economical to some of the Tahiti, you know the cream of the crop that you can know go and be free. Though the need to be that free is decreasing as we gain more rights and more acceptance and people realize that their neighbors are fine with ya.

Interviewer: So you said that you played softball too, what position?

SM: Outfield.

Interviewer: Did you have a good team?

SM: We were a pretty good team. It was a slow pitch in Memphis.

[33:00]

The real lesbians played on the fast pitch team and I grew up playing fast pitch but once in Huntsville once you turned eighteen you could no longer play in that league and the adult league was all slow pitch and so it just turned out that the finale team played in the slow pitch too but there was a fast pitch where the big dykes played.

Interviewer: Was it a lot of teams, was it a pretty active softball senior?

SM: Yeah, it was.

Interviewer: Cool. Thinking, sort of transitioning to a little bit to thinking about today. You've already spoken about this a bit in terms of continuing work that you do with the LGBT community as a lawyer. Obviously, particularly in the past few years things have really moved quickly and changed, what has been your experience of that, I mean as someone who has been so deeply connected for so long and you know playing such a

[34:00]

central role in this part of the country in pushing for this stuff and what's been your take on this momentous moment?

SM: Part of it is keeping up and getting your clients to keep up. One example of the change is that we finally, Abby Rubenfeld started in getting second parent adoption through in the Nashville area so that if you got a couple and wanted to have a child through artificial insemination you got the biological mother that stayed automatically recognized and you could do a second parent adoption without terminating the biological mothers parental rights using a theory of waver, laws created for your benefit than you can wave applications laws to you if you wanted to and so he would do that and waive the

requirement or the right to terminate the biological mother and do a second parent adoption. We finally got

[35:00]

The chancellor's here to do them. We were making progress and then Chancellor Pete died and Chancellor Golden was not going to do them, not Chancellor Golden Chancellor Armstrong was not going to do them and then Golden got on the bench and we finally convince him. He would do an original joint adoption but he wouldn't do a second parent adoption and it's funny because I think that the legal argument is much stronger for the second parent than for the original joint and so you were educating people on what they had to do and because it wasn't a step parent adoption they still had to do a home study and so you had people coming in, they'd get the information but when you got the legal fees then the home study fees and all that they go away to start saving up the money and then the law changed and we were allowed to get married and so then the judges decided that since

[36:00]

gays and lesbians could get married then we don't have to worry about second parent adoptions and we're no longer going to do them. We're going to do an original joint and a step parent adoption but you still gave people that didn't realize and it's kind of funny that when winter came down and then later over felt. There's still a lot of people that didn't realize that that meant they could get married in Tennessee or that their marriage is going to be recognized in Tennessee and it took a while for word to even get out and what these decisions even meant. I had this home study show up in my office and it was after we'd gotten marriage equality and they were no longer doing second parent adoption so they didn't have to do the home study but word hadn't caught up with them so I called them and I said this came in are you wanting to do a second parent adoption, I said yeah we can't do it now are you married?

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and it's unfortunate at least here in Tennessee and other states especially when they had civil unions and they were allowing them not just for LGBT couples but for straight couples for whatever reason didn't want to get married. You still have a civil union but not be legally married and you can have marriage and all the rights with that but now with adoption it's this way but that's one of the ways how it was a change of trying to keep up with the law because you got this, you finally got the judges behind you, you get a few of them in and we had some changes in some judges so you had to re-convince them and so there was a hiatus for a while, then you started them back up and it's one or two that had gotten through and then we had marriage so now we are getting more of step parent adoptions and they don't have to have a home study, original joint adoptions

[38:00]

One of the things that happens with adoptions is they're on Monday mornings and after they're done they do the photo op with the new family and the judge and so we're doing photo op with the gay families and the judges and so they just picked up and they're doing it.

Interviewer: Right right, that's amazing. What do you think the next legal breakthrough should be, what do you think if you had the ability in terms of the law to waive a magic wand and have something different tomorrow than it is today what will it be?

SM: The biggest is going to be in the area of transgender rights and recognize the fact that it is a health issue and that it's a medical problem that can be solved and can be addressed and that insurance needs to pay for it and that people are able

[39:00]

to live as the gender or non gender they self identify as and not being forced to whatever the doctor decided at birth and so I think all the rights with that is an extendent and it's amazing how quickly it's happening.

Interviewer: And obviously this has been very deeply connected to you with feminist politics and thinking about that world, what do you think the next breakthrough just thinking more broadly maybe it's the same in terms of the question of women's rights and women's identities, if again you could waive a magic wand and change something tomorrow, what would it be?

SM: Equal pay and equal opportunity cause you still got the glass ceiling and some people are able to break through it but it's a very few and so for just to you know cross the board, let people be people give them

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Don't hold them down, don't just let them be the best they can be and society as a whole will be better off cause we'll all be being productive and being the happiest, healthiest, most productive, contributing people we can be.

Interviewer: Not necessarily thinking so much about the law you know that's obviously part of it but just in terms of the community in Memphis, what changes have you noticed since you got here in the 80's to now, either positive or negative, how's it changed?

SM: There's a little bit less kind of ties that bind, we used to have a very vibrant newspaper, Gaze, and you could pick up Gaze anywhere and you know what was coming up, what the bars were doing, it worked as a common thread and when

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and for a while there were had two and three LGBT publications in the city and now we don't have any and so I think that ability for people to find me each other and while the bars aren't the optimum place to be able to meet especially because of younger people and alcohol and all that, not always the best combination. There's no lesbian bar in town now and there's one prodimately white gay bar and one black bar and then there's across you know the disco bar that's both that's been primarily gay but you get a lot of straights in there too though it's just more of the gay party bar but there's less places for people to interact and so

[42:00]

you still get which is really hard for new people to come in when you got friendship circles that are doing there thing and going to peoples house but how do you get into that if you are just now coming out of the closet. The good thing is the community center and it's open to being out there on the streets with the flags flying and easy to find and welcoming and a comfortable place. A couple locations were the best that we could do but they weren't easy to get too and they weren't the best ecstatically and stuff like that and sometimes they shut down cause there wasn't enough money to keep it going but I think what the community center is grown into and will continue to grow into is a great resource and a great thing and on the other hand while you don't have these institutions

[43:00]

that you can immediately identify and go to we now can go into most places in midtown at least and be comfortable there as a couple and not run into issues that you were afraid before that people would be muttering under their breaths or muttering as they walked by or keying your car out in the parking lot because there would be bumper stickers or something like that and so we are even more everywhere and as the younger people are coming out they're even less self policing you know my generation is not going to so much walk down Madison Ave holding hands but two generations below me they are, they're not going to think twice about not walking down Madison holding hands so it's great to see what's happening in the change that the younger

[44:00]

generations are bringing to and that with so much change opens the door and gives up that much more freedom to help progress because I think you know Harvey Milk and my spouse said this from day one Harvey Milk and getting people start coming out has made the biggest difference than anything else because once people knew their next door neighbor, their co-worker, their sister, their cousin more people that are LGBT are fine their not these little devils. Than it's harder to demonize us and as you see they're the people they are just like everybody else and they want to have kids and have families and all that than why should they be fired for this? Why shouldn't they be allowed to get married? And you know our movement to get people to come out started a big shift.

[45:00]

Interviewer: Right, that actually just reminded me when you came out was your family relativity accepting, were there problems or did you have a, was your experience ok?

SM: It was ok. I mean part of it I'm adult survival child sexual abuse and when I came out to my mother it was during the conversation that I came out to her that my neighbor had sexually abused me as a child and so that's not the way I would have wanted it to come out but my mother it took her a little bit but now she's an activist. I mean she's an activist in her church. She grew up disciples of Christ and she's been an elder and all of that and she's a member of the opening affirming group within the disciples of Christ. She's active with those, active with discernment and it's political

[46:00]

with regard to equal rights to LGBT and so you know I'm proud of her. We hit it from my partners family for a while and it got to the point where she's going like I can't go home alone without you for Christmas anymore. I just can't do it and so I started coming home for Christmas and her original thought was they

know you and like you, when they find out that we are a couple it's going to make it harder for them to dislike you and so I was always accepted by her family, her sisters, both of her parents, her grandmother while she still asked Virginia when she's going to get married and was she dating. She treated me with as much respect as she did the other son-in-laws so

[47:00]

Whether she knew it or refused to acknowledge it or didn't put two and two together we don't know but the family's been great, extended family's been good and so but all of our siblings so even fortunate cause I do have clients who's family is and I've represented minors, blocking on the word, but basically emancipate minors and having them recognized as adults cause their parents had kicked them out or threatened to send them to love and action and so got them declared adults and so then the parents couldn't force them to go into love and action.

Interviewer: What's the biggest surprise, pleasant or unpleasant

[48:00]

What's the thing that's most surprised you about how things have changed or haven't changed or anything like that in the last thirty years or in the community or anything, what's the biggest, is there anything that's really surprised you either for good or bad?

SM: You know here's a little bit of being surprised with how, especially with a marriage, how excepting it really has been and the people involved in it have been and because you see the news of the Kentucky clerk and some of the Mississippi stuff but what I'm hearing from my clients is the clerk still apologizing because the form still says man and woman and husband and wife and with birth certificates you're running into that because you gatta fill it out, flip the *tusicle* or whatever to see who's the father and who's not, and so you're getting people apologizing that the government

[49:00]

hasn't moved quick enough to get these forms up to what they are and so I think we need to give people more credit in all the issues and we got LGBT and gay rights are tough issues, racial issues, black and white stuff is going on right now with black lives matter and it's very important and there are everybody's reality but I also think we're not giving each other enough credit too because there are some bad people but there are a lot of people who don't want to be bad and I think we're seeing that with the marriage and the laws and now the adoptions and all of that.

Interviewer: Who are your role models, who are your heroes?

SM: Martina

[50:00]

Navratilova, Billie Jean King, Eleanor Smeal, Eleanor Roosevelt, Fannie Lou Hamer, Sally Ride. They immediately come to mind.

Interviewer: Excellent, excellent, any final thoughts or anything else you'd like to share?

SM: There was something that popped in my head now I can't remember what it was or maybe I did talk about it or not but yeah I think I get to it.

Interviewer: Excellent, well thank you so much.

SM: O you're welcome.

[51:00]