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Interview #4 Abstract and Transcript, 2001

Carrie Noble Kline

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Side A

Interviewer: Carrie Kline

Transcriber: Tracy Rosencrance

#4, I'm 58 years old [laughs]. I retired schoolteacher after 31 years of teaching.

Michael Kline: So you are a 58-year-old retired schoolteacher?

#4 Umm humm. I'm a father of one son, ... and then a step-son, ... and the grandfather of three young grandchildren. Then I have two step grandchildren that are teenagers and was married to a female, a woman, for twelve years and that was before I realized my sexual orientation and I've always felt, that I was now--. I've always--. I didn't back then, but now I realize I've always been gay, but I didn't know about it.

Like I say, I grew up in rural southern West Virginia, ... county, and we lived in the holler on a 100 acre farm that my mom and dad rented for one dollar a year [laughs] from Georgia Pacific. Sort of our land type thing. And of course there was nine children in the family. There were six brothers and three sisters.

Carrie Kline: Where are you in the line up?

#4: I'm next to the youngest, uh hum. And they're scattered. No some of them live--. Three of them live around the home place, but the rest of us are scattered in West Virginia. And then I got a sister in Maryland and a brother in Maryland and one in South--. North Carolina, and like I say growing up--. And I attended a two-room school house you know, in my earlier school years, and then I went to a bigger high school later on and was active in clubs and things, and but didn't realize my sexual orientation at that time.

Other people seem to realized it, but I didn't, I was never aware of it, and it was never talked about. You know this is back in--. I graduated from high school in '61 so this was in the late 50's and early 60's that I was in high school, and of course that was just not a-- . Now I don't even remember any of my playmates and so forth calling each other names, you know like they do today. You know, gay, or queer, or faggot, or that, which is not heard of or at least I don't remember it back in the late 50's, when I was in high school.

And I didn't realize that, and one of my best friends now that I look back was a . . . boy. We was just the best of friends and we enjoyed each other's company, and we went around hugging and arms around each other, and it was just the best thing. But to me, it was nothing sexual. He was just my buddy you know and --. And apparently the other kids didn't think so either, because they would have called me names if they--. It was just not discussed, and I didn't realize that until after I had been married--.

I was married for 13 years to a wonderful woman, and of course, you know I loved her, and when I discovered my sexuality towards the end of the marriage after about 10 years or so--. Then finally appeared--. Seemed like in [my] thirties--. I've known several people--. Like ... he realized his gayness from the very--. As long as he can remember, back when he was five or six.

When I didn't realized until I was in my probably early thirties. And but he, of course, wasn't accepted until he was around 35. Then he finally decided after he tried to kill himself once to accept who he was--. He's the type of person, intellectual, that he reads. Ifhe wants to know something about something, he'll read about it. So as he killed himself, and felt that--. Realized he wasn't successful, he would just find out about it,

and what he was, you know. He was doomed to hell he believed, because, you know, you grew up in Southern Baptist home, and that's what it was taught. But the--.

And then once I gradually discovered myself I was in the teacher's association, and very active, and president of the local teacher association. And would go to meetings in Charleston and other places, and gradually I began to rather than focus on the female, I would focus on the male.

I would go to the adult, you know, ex-rated book or movie house. And they had a straight theater, and they had a gay theater. And I started out in the straight and gradual moved to the gay. And that was sort of over a period of several years, and then I finally realized you know what my sexual orientation was or what my interest was. Of course, you know, being married and having a son and so forth there was a lot of guilt associated with the breakup of the marriage. Because like I said, I see it--. Felt like you know I love one thing you know.

CK: I'm sorry?

#4: I love her you know, even today I do. Well, twenty some years. And she was a part of my life, we was married twelve years, but she's part of my life for 31 years. And even when I had gay partners, like ... , you know, my first one, she was part of our network of friends. She would come down, and we would visit, and spent holidays and vacations together, and with ... , my second gay relationship, she was no part of it.

Of course there were certain guidelines you know, you couldn't show affections, you know to one another in front of her because it wasn't, know, upset her. But as long as we maintained, you know, the certain rules and guidelines, we were able to get along.

And once in awhile, there would be a flair up, but she, I guess, loved me enough and wanted the relationship to continue that she was able to put up with that. But then ... come along who wouldn't live by the rules that she--. Finally after several stormy months she decided to--. And maybe that was best because you know I went on with my life once I just discovered I was gay I, I let--. I broke up the--. I left home. And it was sort of once I began to discover myself. Of course I would stay out late and knew that I was suppose to come back Sunday evening, you know.

And, and wouldn't be back, and then I just hated the lying and the cheating, and finally we went to a marriage counselor and the marriage counselor hooked me up with a psychiatrist or a psychologist. I don't know which it was, but and he probably the best move that had ever happened to me. I know a very confused gay person because he had worked with gays in New York, and he considered us or normal behavior just different, but you know, it wasn't anything deviant or bad about it.

And he sort of helped me to--. In the beginning, you know, to accept myself. And once we decided to break up the family it was probably the best thing for me because at that point, I was ready to kill myself, cause the desire to discover who I was was so strong that I had to do it, you know, or destroy myself so--. And I just didn't want--.

Well I didn't try suicide, but with his help, I left the family--. Like I said, I was a schoolteacher so I--. About in March, and of course school isn't out to June, or early part of June, I moved into town. We lived five miles out of town. And stayed there until school was out, and then the next year I went to another county and taught.

But we still visit on holidays, and she would come down weekends or I would go up there, and when I got new gay lovers, knew that pattern continue, the first two was

willing to accept such arrangement and everybody was sort of ah at the--. It is so strange, we don't understand now, you know, but it happens you know, like I said she--.

We spent more together--. And it's sort of funny. When we were married, we didn't go on vacations and things, and after the breakup, and we went on more vacations and did more things, you know, went to plays and things like that then we ever did when we was married. So it was just strange - unique I guess. And then out of the marriage--.

She had a 13-year-old son when we got married and I helped raised him. And in fact, I had him in class one year, which was another story, which was [laughs] sort of trying, but he thought I expected more out of him then I did the other kids. But I thought I treated him like everybody else, but who knows.

And then we had a son. My son was 10 years old when I left the family. But it was sort of like I was working away, you know. Because we saw each other on weekends, and I called two to three times a week to check on the family and so forth. It was, you know, just like dad worked away and ... raised him, you know. She didn't try to turn him against me, and today we have a good relationship. And he married a wonderful woman from ... County, and she treated--. She treats me and ... as a couple, and includes us in all activities.

Of course, the mother, you know, my son's mother gets first dibs on holidays and things like this, because they realize she is by herself. And they want--. My son's very good to make sure that she is not left alone on special holidays and rather than visit me, she visits them, you know, and of course the three grandchildren. She's real pleased with them and--. So with that restriction, she ... and which is ok, you know, I get to see them enough. And sometimes, I get frustrated during holidays when--. But then, you know,

we visit ...'s parents--. And which we plan to do this year, you know. On holidays, we go there or sometimes like ... or places like that.

CK: How are your visits with ...'s parents?

#4: Well, okay, once he told--.

CK: Hold on a minute and I'll just let this

#4: Well ok, we met in '92 and of course, you know, they had a - a march in Washington in '93, April of '93. We met so, he knew he was going to this parade - march in DC. So he said [laughs], "Well I better tell my parents. I don't want them seeing me on TV [laughs]." So, about the visit before the day of the march, he told them. And of course, it devastated them. They was shocked and devastated.

But he gave them books and say, "Read up on it," you know. "This is who I am." And at that point he had accepted himself. And you know--. And of course we had established a relationship--. Of course, I'd been out many years before that. So, I helped him a lot, you know, and adjusting, so forth to the gay community. Not that it's that much different, than know what to do when you're heterosexually married. But, you know, just ins and outs of gay life and activities and so forth.

CK: So you're married?

#4: ... and I, well I guess we're married--. We--. In the '93 march--. They--. Troy Perry, you know the founder of the Universal Fellowship of the Metropolitan Community Church, which is, you know, the official gay church--. MCC Church did a mass ceremony and married about 12,000 people that day [laughs]. And we are hoping that before too long we will have a ceremony. Of course, you know being in a Methodist

Church, you know, is not allowed. Preachers can't do it. You know it can't be done in a Methodist Church.

So, we're also active members of the Metropolitan Community Church here in town. And we'll probably work out a combined, you know, it won't be here [at this church] but it will be at the Metropolitan Community Church. Which we have their meetings at the University Fellowship ... Church.

CK: Will you take me back? I was really interested in your--. Those early years you were talking about--. Take me through your development, and figuring out who you were with--. Maybe start by talking about the people who were around you when you were young, and the kind of place

#4: Well, like I said, I didn't realize, you know, until I was in my thirties. And now I think back, you know, over some of the things. I guess hindsight [laughs]--. You think back and some of the things that happened to you, you realize, and one them was, of course, the girl in high school that made the comment that--.

MK: Just a minute, we got a siren.

#4: [laughs] The girl in high school that said you know, "You'll never get married." You know--.

CK: Tell me that story.

#4: When I was in high school, one of, I forget what year it was but in the--. Either '60 or '59, or somewhere around there. She made the statement, one day, that you know, "Oh, you'll never get married." And I wondered what she was talking about, you know. I planned to get married. You know, everybody else does you know, so I planned to,

although, I didn't have any girlfriends or anything. I had one date that sort of a blind date and [laughs] that just--. I was stiff I guess you could say [laughs]. I just scared [laughs].

I always thought, you know maybe, and even now and then in college, I, you know, had a steady girlfriend, but we never did have sex or--. I thought it was because of my shyness and so forth, but I don't know what was said or what that was but--. And, but like I said, it was sort of never talked of and even in my early--.

Went to college and had a beautiful college roommate. If I knew, realized my gayness, I would have been head over hills, probably madly in love with my college roommate. He was a basketball player or you know, you always say, you know that people

Or a lot of gays fall in love with their coach and you know, nothing like that happened and--. And knowed my friends and I had all kind of friends and joined a fraternity. And it was just never that always--. Met girls, you know, always thought it was girls. You know, of course, like I said had this one girlfriend for most of a year of college and I know we double dated with her friend and another friend. And they would be [laughs] making out, you know, in the back of the car, and we would just [laughs] be talking--. We'd talk and I left for the summer, and when I came back she had another boyfriend [laughs]. I guess she wasn't getting anywhere with me sexual wise [laughs].

But just things like that, you know, and then--. Then our marriage one of the biggest complaints was that the intimacy was not there, you know, between me and my wife. And she even one time bought a book on intimacy, you know, how to have that between two people, like man and wife. Then of course, I couldn't really understand that. And

the strange thing is when I think back now on our sex life, I can't remember a thing of it [laughs].

You know I tried to remember and remember. I know we had sex, because we had a son. But [laughs] I can't--. Like everytime we go visit his mom we go by the place where we had our honeymoon. We start to go to, oh what's--? Williamsburg, but we got about halfway there, and we stopped, and we spent several days at this motel where there was this close restaurant. And so we bypass there everytime we go--. I said that's where we spent [laughs] --. But then I try to remember what we did [laughs] and [laughs] and I can't.

And so, so I don't know if we had sex often or we didn't hardly have it, or what [laughs]. But, you know we produced a son. So my memory--. And this psychologist, one of the things we was going to explore was why did you get married in the first place, because you are gay? And why did you marry a female? And of course, I wouldn't have because, I would have been honest, and I wouldn't have married her, because it's--. You hurt another individual, but I just didn't know about--.

Well, I felt guilty for many years about breaking up the family, because we had a good, good family, you know, nice home and a son and a stepson. And we had lots of friends and things, you know. It was ideal marriage, except I realize my sexual orientation was different. And I had to discover that, and so I broke up the family and slowly. Because like I said, she was part of my life for 31 years. So, she broke it off about ten years ago, and we hadn't really--. I'm sure I inquire through my son and my daughter in law about her well being, and I'm sure she does the same.

And when my son graduated from medical school, we both were at the ceremony, and we was pleasant to each other. And I don't guess there's any hard feelings on her side any more then there are on mine. It's just sort of uncomfortable and--.

CK: Can you talk--. I'm sorry--.

#4: Well that was pretty much--.

CK: --about the people who raised you, the people who were around and important when you were young? Parents, grandparents?

#4: Well, I never knew my grandparents, except by pictures. There was a picture of my maternal grandfather, and all the others had died before that time. But there's some older aunts and uncles. Not that many but I really--. I guess, like I said, there's six of us - nine of us in the family, and I was next to the youngest and there's about--.

The relationship with mom and dad [pause], I felt you know, there was no abuse or anything. We lived on a farm where we respected the work. But we played a lot, you know. When we were good, we could go to the store and which is go--. Go get the mail, which is two miles away from where we lived. Walked there and back, you know, four miles. And we--. They would give some money to, you know, buy our candy bar or pop, you know [laughs]. We thought that was great.

We played in the woods, you know, had lots, had friends and things. And I never remembered being real close to my father or my mother. I don't think they really expressed love to any of the children that I can remember. You know, they was just trying to raise nine kids. And they weren't the happiest married couple themselves. I can remember them, you know, them fighting, but it wasn't traumatic, you know. They were just, what we thought normal. That's the way, you know, it was and--.

CK: What kind of people were they? What were their names?

#4: ... and Oh there just--. Dad was older than Mom about 14-15 years, and they had, like I said, nine children. There were about four or five that died at early childbirth or at childbirth, and there was a miscarriage once. And like I said, they was hard working and I was sort of special in the family, up to this point. Dad was a farmer, that's how he made his living.

The money was very scarce, and all the kids were born at home and, you know the doctor would come there and, you know, deliver the baby. And they'd go to the store once a month to get what we needed. Most--. They raise most the food, you know, in the garden. And then they raised hogs, and we--. I remember killing hogs twice a year and killing a beef once a year. And just a typical, you know--. Like I said, it was a 100-acre farm, and about half of it was woodland, but about half of it, you know, where you could raise things.

We raised things, and we raised corn and potatoes and the food. It seemed to be, you know, a good place to raise a bunch of kids [laughs]. But of course, they required us to work and we did. And I was, I guess, different from the other boys. I didn't like to hunt or do the physical things. I would rather read books and do housework than do--. Chop wood [laughs] or carry the, you know, do the outside chores. I know my brothers, I would--. During free time, I would be reading or something like this, and they would, you know, tease me about it being a--. I don't remember being a sissy, but they would just interfere with my reading, and that would sort of make me mad [laughs].

I always been a good student, and I never really caused any problem in school, and my teachers liked me. And I got involved in clubs. When I was a junior in high school, I was

the vice-president of either four or five different high school clubs [laughs]. Honor Society, High Y and some of the other clubs. So I was, you know, active in school and fairly popular with the other kids. And then when I went to college I played around a lot, but I studied enough to pass, and end up with a high C or a low B average for college.

CK: Before we get too far from those farm days, who were the characters around when you were growing up? Who were some of the old people, or the adults?

#4. Well, I know there was an aunt, my dad's sister that we visited--. And we seemed to enjoy that because, you know, she cooked and we had things to eat. I can remember, Fourth of July was our favorite holiday, because that was a time we got eat watermelon. We had our--. Probably about the only time the year we had ice cream. And that was just [laughs]--. I don't remember Christmas, but I remember Fourth of July [laughs]. But other than that, dad's people weren't really very close to them, or we didn't visit them much.

I don't--. I was involved--. I have, as far as I can remember, been involved in church. And people in church were very influential, you know. I was sort of the leader there. I remember in high school being the president of two separate Baptist Youth Fellowship groups at two different churches. And we had good times. We had parties, and I remember once, one of our sponsors says, "I'm really worried. We party too much." [laughs] "And you kids kiss too much." [laughs] But we were good kids, you know. We didn't get into sex, or at least I didn't. We just kissed, I guess. I can't speak for others, but myself--.

CK: Boys and girls?

#4: And what I knew of. They didn't' really--. They kissed and experimented a little bit that way and played games. They were--. They didn't--. The sponsors, of the Baptist Youth Fellowship, weren't too upset, you know, they just--. [laughs] So, I had a happy, normal childhood, I think.

CK: That was a strictly straight situation?

#4: Umm Hmm. Yes, like I said yeah, yeah--. Like I said, the gayness wasn't a part of my life, you know. I'm sure there was a realm, but I don't even know, recall, you know-- . Usually earlier, there is a strange uncle or aunt or something that never got married, and everybody doesn't talk about them, you know. But that was never--. There was never none of that and that I recall of any of my friends or,--.

MNK: Or siblings?

#4: Or myself.

MK: Siblings are all straight?

#4: Well, I know I have a nephew that when I broke up and met ... and we established a home at ... , which is North of here. We had a New Year's Eve Party and there was a--. Two to three people there from my hometown. And they said they thought my nephew was gay. But he later got married. And since then, he has not been successful, you know. Been married once or twice, two or three times. Doesn't seem to--. And they was saying that my younger brother--. Went to the beach with a gay person, you know. So, you know, if that's so, he hasn't acted on it, you know. Or at least it's not ... knowledge. My younger brother, once--. I went back home for the 25th high school reunion. Or 23rd--.

MK: Recently?

#4: No, this has been '80--.

MK: But, after you were out?

#4: Yes, and I had told my sister--. I've watched a TV show on it and--. [laughs]. I wrote her a letter and said, this is what I am, you know. And so, you know, I hope you accept it and if not then, you know, that's ok [laughs]. But it's who I am, and you need to know that. Of course, it shocked them--. So, I've gone back and--. He was drunk, he's always been an alcoholic and --.

MK: He?

#4: My younger brother. And so, he didn't go to the reunion, but after, you know, I went to my sister's, and before we got there, he was there. And he was getting a baseball bat; I don't know what he was going to do with it. But--. [pause]. And my middle [crying] brother--. Whatever he was going to do, stopped him. And I really hadn't forgiven him for that.

Even today, I don't have much to do with him, my younger brother, because of that. That's it--. Upsetting. And he has tried many times to reconcile. But I don't seem to be able to do that yet. Maybe in heaven, I'll be able to do that.

That's about the only--. I guess I have been lucky. Haven't really had much--. Gay bashing or anything like that.

CK: What is your feeling about that baseball bat, though?

#4: He was talking about--. Oh, I didn't love him or I wouldn't be gay and I guess--. Oh, I don't know. But whatever it was, it didn't materialize because my middle brother stopped it. So that's about the only--. And it didn't really materialize. But now--. It's sort of funny regarding my brother's and sister's, and their acceptance of me. Of course,

they are in the more Baptist--. I guess, you know, belief or, you know like the Southern Baptist. Homosexuality is not compatible with Christian teaching.

And if your are gay, and if you don't repent and refrain from, you know, being a practicing homosexual, you will die and go to hell. And they're of that frame. You know, it's what their taught in the their churches and--. Of course, I had one sister that's real bad about--. Every time she sent me a card--. Of course, expressing her love but in it she would have these scriptures that--. You know, homosexuality is wrong and you'll go to hell. And she just--. And I finally just told her, you know, that I've dealt with this for 20 years and I've accepted myself and I don't believe it's wrong. And if that's all you can do when you send me a card, is to quote scripture to me that condemns me and makes me feel bad then you can just forget it. Don't bother to write or send me a card.

Of course, I felt bad about that because, she's doing it out of misguided love for me. But I just finally had to--. [laughs] I don't need this. And I was hoping it would force her to maybe think--. And I think it did because--. Well the most important thing along that line--. My youngest sister--. And that was my middle sister, I have three sisters. We are the best of friends. And they visit and so forth. After that, maybe a year or so, my younger sister just told her that she's just--. Of course she was after my brother's too. For drinking. You know you are going to die and go to hell. She's worrying that everybody is going to die and go to hell.

So, my youngest sister--. You know they had a rile and said, "You're just too hard nosed." "You don't need to be so condemning of everybody." "You take care of yourself and let everybody else worry about themselves." So my sister finally realized it,

and invites ... and I down to her home. And when we go--. She lives up in the D.C. area. So, when we go up there to visit ..'s parents, on of the places I hope to visit is with her.

And the last two Christmases she has been very welcoming. And you know, there is no trying to save me, and all that. But that's the biggest--. Now there's not really--. They're all beginning to accept it. Well or at least tolerate it. I don't know whether they ever will accept it. And like my oldest sister had her 50th wedding anniversary and of course, they invited ... and I. And we went, and of course, some of my nephews didn't show up because we were there. But two of them didn't--. Out of seven. But the other five did. The older kids, that knew me when I--. Babysat with them--. And when they was growing up and so forth. Because my oldest nephew is 50 and I'm 57 so--. The older ones, I knew and they knew me--. But they're accepting and I just--. We have just let them know that if you don't ask both of us, don't expect us to be there.

They had invited us to a family reunion, me and We were planning on going then my middle sister got talking to my youngest sister and they decided, "Well we don't want ... there." So, they called me and told me that they wanted me to come but didn't want ... to come. So, I ended up not going. The more I thought of it, the madder I got. And I said, no, if that's the way your gonna be, then you won't see much of me. Then the other brother's and sister's, "Where's ...?" "He's usually here at family reunions." "How come he's not here this time?" And when they sort of found out why, they just let it be known that they didn't appreciate it. And my two sisters got some flack about us not being there.

So they gradually--. The church her recently gave me the Living Legacy Award for my contributions to this church. We have a party, where we are recognized--.

Individuals in the church, and we have what you call, Living Legacy. And they invite the families, brother--. Of the people to come, sort of surprise like. [laughs] I about fell over when my older brother showed up. Came all the way from North Carolina to be here for the ceremony. And me and--. We all when to lunch after that and then they--. They invited us, and we was down there not too long ago visiting with his family.

They seem to just accept us. So I'm working on that--. Of course, like I said, I don't know if they ever will believe it's right. But they see where I'm happy and ... happy and we seem to be good people. And we learn great things and we tell them what's happening. What happens to us. Of course with the awards I got, they know I'm active in church and doing good work. And then--. So, it's a slow process but--.

His mom, ... mom, was a deaconess in the Southern Baptist Church. Very accepting. ... said she tried her darndest to hate me, because she thought I led him into sin. [laughs] But once she got to know me, she couldn't hate me. And then she's ... and there's no--. He has an older brother that won't come around when particularly; I'm there. So, we have that--. Sort of thorn to deal with. It's, I guess,--. I guess it's better than what most gays have to go through. I don't know, where the generalizing is true or not, I feel that--. Sometimes, you know--. It's pretty, not normal, but calm. From what some of the other's have to go through. Being kicked out of their homes and--.

And I guess, being a schoolteacher, I have a sort of compassion for the young gays that are--. That are--. Have to struggle so hard. And now, there is no way that you can grow up and not be faced with the issue like I was. It sometime--. I wonder why God let me go 30 years without realizing who made me. But I did, because society programmed me and I was a good learner, I guess. Nowadays, it's out there and everybody's talking

about it and if you're the other way... [laughs]. But it's quite different than what it was in the 50's and 60's. Today, young people, just can't--. They have any inclinations of their sexual orientations. They can't not--.

A lot of gay people, the biggest problem they have--. The ones that are younger than I am, but not so young as the isolation of the generation coming up. The isolation that they feel--. They feel that they're the only one. There's no one else around them. And when I retired from teaching, I taught 31 years in a public schools of West Virginia. Twelve years of it--. Thirteen, I forget, thirteen was in ... County. That was when I was married. During that time before we got married, and my married life--. When we broke up, I left ... County and went to ... County, and it was there I taught 18 years. During the 18 years, I was in gay relationships.

I had three of them. ... I was with almost seven years and ... I was with less than two and ... and I am going on our tenth year together.

CK: Congratulations!

#4: Thank you. And so that's--.

Side B.

#4: Then when I retired, of course, I was semi active-- . Like I said, I taught--. I lived in ... and taught in ... County, which was about 50 miles between us.

CK: And that was not coincidence.

#4: No. I pretty much wanted to live in ... so I could be gay. I went to the bars, had gay parties, and gay friends and things like that. Gay relationships--. Things like this.

MK: If you will entertain a question or two. Why the loyalty to the Methodist Church which has a strict prohibition against you and--? A marriage between gays, and between you and ... specifically? Why the loyalty to this organization?

#4: Well, I have always been a religious person and have been active in church. Even as a youth in--. Head of the youth group and went to Sunday school regularly and we were involved in church. And I got interested--. We went to a Methodist church whenever we got married, because that was the closest church to where I lived.

And I've always been Baptist or Methodist. So, when I became gay, I went to church. Then it wasn't really that discriminatory. They see it and thought that it was wrong and so forth, but it was not big thing. It wasn't preached about and talked about or condemned, like it is today. And there was no gay church here in town. I take that back. In the 80's when ... and I was together, we tried to start a little gay church. We had a St. John Episcopal Church and rented our room. We had ceremonies and--. But we didn't really do it right. We was fighting more than--. But we tried it about for five years and finally, they kicked us out and that did it.

But, so there was no other than that--. There was nothing but church, though--. I lived close to hear, and one of the neighbors invited me to Asbury, and I started coming. Shortly there after, we had a closeted lesbian as our pastor, who was inviting her gay friends. Of course, it couldn't be open or anything--. I guess at that point, that would be fine with me. That was about 20 years ago and now you have on the local level, you have what you saw tonight, gays and straights.

We now have an open transgender person, a person that had a sex change from male to female. She is I don't know if you met her or not--. We aren't closeted about our

relationships. We celebrate--. When we have anniversaries and so forth, we put flowers on the altar, like the straight people do for their anniversaries and birthdays. When there is sickness and so forth, we--. And we do gay things like participate in the pride parade and other activities. Like the candlelight vigil that we have for AIDS victims, we always participate in that.

MK: Do straight members of the church come to that?

#4: Straight members come out to support gay pride and other--. Not the older ones. They are tolerant but not participating. The--. About half of them are supportive and participate. Yes, a few of them march, other than the gay members, march in the parade. No, we--. Locally, this church is very affirming gay-wise. I'm not saying we never have a homophobic comment or so forth. I think they're more racist than they are homophobic [laughs].

Once, they had a black minister that was forced on them for several years by the--. See in Methodist you don't get to choose your pastor, they're appointed. The attendance was low and the bishop had the bright idea, "Well we'll get a black minister and he'll bring in all the black in our neighborhood." And the church will grow and prosper again. Well, they placed the wrong type of black ministers here. He was too educated. He was a doctor and he couldn't relate to the blacks in the neighborhood [laughs]. There was one black family that came.

He couldn't get along with the whites so they tried for years to get him ... the black people. Over the years, like I said, starting with the ... , the lesbian preacher, it gradually grew. The people--. They have always sort of been--. There's a bunch of people left when the black preacher came. There's a bunch of people left when they build the

education ring because they didn't put the gym on top--. The education building. There was--. Then with the capitol and the interstate coming in and taking houses and people had to move here and there, you know. So it seemed like--. And there has been all kinds of controversy. Sort--. I believe like most churches experience [laughs].

The people that were left were sort of the die hards. That will--. They were really loyal to the church and would stay regardless of--. And they were getting old and they needed someone to sort of take over the church and run it for them [laughs]. But until they die, they will support financially but they are tired of working. So that what happened. Gradually gays came in and got on the boards, committees and so now you have--.

There's a good mixture membership wise. I would say it's about even. So, we had hopes for the 2000 general conference, which is the international conference of the Methodist Church. We was hoping because--. Up to this point, each year the number of votes, voted for, inclusive church seem to be increasing. It was up to 60/40. Conservative 60, which maintain the painful language and the discipline about incompatible and you, can't do holy units and things like that. So we've had high hopes while that was ... and in other words they went back, they regressed. It's more--. They reaffirmed everything that was negative in regard to gays, lesbians and bisexuals. And we though about leaving the church, but we have a nice place here. To tell you the truth the gay church, which we support, not as much financially as we do here, it's just not meeting our needs that much. Our needs are being met here.

And doing exciting things like we do tonight. And the preaching--. It is sort of funny that--. Here ... , of course she was a closeted lesbian, but she could only do so much because she was closeted. She didn't want to blow her cover and you can only do so far. The people that brought in--. Were sort of brought in but they had to sort of be, semi-closeted about their relationships and things like this. It wasn't celebrated like it is now. So when we changed pastors, we had come to a point where we said, you know, this is who we are and we want somebody who is accepting so they sent us Then now we can do more with him than we could with her [laughs]. Because he doesn't have any thing to hide. So he can take us for worth. We have participated every since he's been her, in the pride parades and been real open on our relationships and so forth.

CK: And this offers more than the gay church for you then?

#4: Yes, the gay church ever since--. It's about four years old. It has been sort of riddled with conflict. We had been instrumental in the formation of it, and have been real supportive. Particularly ... hasn't been--. He's supporting financially, but no attendance and working on committees, and things like this. He's not--. We just feel our needs are met more here. Now if we had a real active gay church, we probably would have left. But, we don't really have any alternative, or we don't feel we do. Although, the gay church is growing and we're helping it all we can. Well not all we can, but as much, or some, I guess is a better word.

MK: So this local Methodist Church is not necessarily a reflection of the national policies?

#4: No, our West Virginia--. It's the most liberal church and out of this, we have the Methodist Federation for Social Action. Which is a national organization that have, sort of,--. For ninety years have been the liberal organization, they have sort of pushed the Methodist Church more toward the liberal side. The West Virginia chapter is centered here in Charleston and is made up, mainly of the Asbury people. And we have had great influence on our--. Well, great in--. Been fairly successful in getting our resolutions, and things like this passed. You would be surprised, how many gay pastors we have in the Methodist Church.

CK: Who are out, you say?

#4: No, not out. But they're out to us. To the Methodist Federation to Asbury.

MK: So it's underground?

#4: Yes.

MK: The related question to that is, before dinner when we were up here talking, you made references to passages in the new testament which would tend to be more supportive than the condemnation of Leviticus and other often quoted passages. Is there--. Are there some chapters and verses that affirm your position, you feel?

#4: I don't know the specific verses. I felt the whole Bible affirms people. And affirms everything that God created or made, as good. I think when you really study the Bible--. When you're forced to study the Bible because your gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender, then you realize the Bible don't really condemn homosexuality. That it is compatible with Christian teaching. The words and so forth of Jesus even in Paul--. I think the way the Bible is today, if you believe the bible is --.

Every word came of God and these human individuals, wrote it down without changing a word of it. Human error didn't enter into it; you might be worried a little bit. But, what we have today is not the original the Bible, it's not the original Greek, it's not the original Hebrew that the Bible was in. Since then, the translations--. Of course, any time you read it, you're translating. Have human error and human interpretation have come into that.

If you read the Bible, it's constantly contradicting itself. Even now in ... where it talks about homosexuality is abomination, and you should be put to death. Well, in that same area of the Bible, how many other things are considered abominations and you shouldn't--? A kid shouldn't disobey his parents. You should put them to death, or somebody wearing mixed fabric or just things like that, which people today don't believe it. Cutting your hair or--.

They just pick up this one little statement that says, "Oh, here it says homosexuality is abomination; you'll be put to death." I think if you know the history and really study--. You realize that is the old Leviticus codes and a lot of things back then, you know, which is not binding to today. Because we do have a new covenant with God. That was the old covenant and this is the new covenant. It seems like 1300's--. When they began to say homosexuality was a sin, or was anti-church or anti-Christian. Before then, they celebrated.

You go to some of the old cathedrals in Europe and so forth, and you can see statues of married couples, people that they celebrated.

CK: Of gay married couples?

#4: Yes, of gay couples. Just like the American Indians, you know; someone that had both sexes [laughs] was honored. They knew more than the rest and were given the--. I forget what they call the person in the tribe that was the, oh there's a name--. The medicine man or something like that. Very honored position. With the Puritans and that fact of belief that came in.

MK: Do gay men particularly look at Jesus and see in his life a compatible life style? There he was surrounded by men--. All his dealings--. His disciples were all men, they dined together, they prayed together, and they hung out together. Do gays see in that an area of comfort, or a place to begin relating, do you think?

#4: [laughs] The more radicals and sometimes you hear it and say that Jesus was gay himself. But I think most people don't really feel that part of Jesus was evident. He wasn't sexually, either heterosexually or homosexually. He was here for--. He was God incarnate. He came to preach and save people. I think not necessarily because he hung around men, because back then that's what--. Men were the only people that were worth anything.

The women was second-class and they were in the home and they had no--. They were second-class citizens. They had no status that's true. But, we seek comfort in Jesus' teaching. Where he showed love for everybody and where he communicated and talked to and associated with the outcasts of society. The lepers and the--. And there's several instances in there that where--. Where it talks about the unics, you know unics is sort of castrated male.

There's one passage, I forget where it is. . . . can tell you [laughs]. I don't depend on that so much to verify myself as a Christian or being loved by God and going to heaven

or hell. I don't know where it developed, but maybe because I was always in church and I've always read and knew Jesus, or read about him and came to knowledge of him, I've always felt that--. I really never felt--. I felt bad about breaking up the family and hurting Wanda and so forth. But being a gay person myself, I've never felt like an outcast or felt that I was wrong, or that I would die and go to hell. Every once in a while I would have these feelings, but not a true feeling. Because I've--. Over--. Out of my experience, I've come to know Jesus or God as loving and not just part of the time, but all of the time.

This part about hell and back in the Old Testament, where Jesus come in, whole groups of people would be killed, children and everybody--. Our God commanded the armies to destroy everything. I'm haven't reconciled that to my view of God. God is good all the time, and God, what God creates is good. He can't do anything else but do good things, because he is good. There's nothing else.

So this matter about you better do this, or you better do that, or you'll die and go to hell. I just--. I have never--. Deep down in my soul, that had never bothered me. Because I had this innate love and understanding that God is good and he created me and as long as I--. I came to the conclusion God created me, then I'm good. He doesn't make mistakes.

CK: Talk more about this in the context of working with the young people. You had started to tell us a story before dinner about someone that had come to you and had some questions about all this.

#4: OK. Let me go back to when I was still teaching. The kids knew I was gay, or they thought they knew. That was okay and I didn't really hide. The March we went to in

'93. I went and came back and they said, "Where were you?" I had to miss a day of work so I took a leave. And they said--. I made some excuse and they said, "Yeah, it wasn't the parade or the march was it?" [laughs] You know, they sort of knew it. I never made an issue of it, they sort of knew it though. I never made an issue of it; I never came out and said that I'm gay. But--.

CK: How did you deal with that question?

#4: I just--. I guess got embarrassed and just went on [laughs]. They didn't seem to be mean to me. They got mad at me for their grades and --. Once in a while my name would be written on the bathroom wall. "Faggot." But I felt safe because the principal's name was there more than mine in connection to that word [laughs]. So I felt fairly safe. [laughs]. But, out of that, they knew I was different. All the kids were treated the same. Regardless of their difference, they were treated the same. And there was no one --. I didn't really have much control except in my classroom. Everybody was treated--.

They didn't make fun of the fat ones, or the skinny ones, or the tall ones, or the black, or white or they gay, or the straight, or whatever. Everybody was treated the same. Everybody--. If there's any discrimination, based upon differences, they knew they had to deal with me. I would--. And the kids, the ones that were different felt safe. I felt that if I had been open, it would have been just one big conflict and I really couldn't have done anything. In my own little way, in my classroom, and the kids--. Because I always harping about how everybody's the same and God loves everybody.

I know one time, this kid, I don't know whether he was gay or if he was acting gay. I just said to him, "It's okay to be different," and "If you're different, it's okay." He said, "Oh no it's not. You'll die and go to hell." I said, "No you won't. It's okay to be

different. Be who you are." So that sort of went on--. The kids I find in my latter years of teaching, they're more tolerant unless they are in a home where you have the Religious Right type of indoctrination and so forth.

Overall, I had one boy who was really homophobic and the kids said, "Why don't you just grow up, let them be who they are, it's none of your business."

MK: This was in ... County?

#4: Umm hmm.... County High School. You don't need to pick on that person--. It wasn't about me, it was some other kid, and he was going on. Of course, he was spouting what his father was spouting. The other kids, just said, "Why don't you let be who they are, it's none of your business if he's gay or not." "It's ok." So, I sort of got hope from that--. That the world--. Once we get through this generation, the younger generation will--.

CK: That was ... County?

#4: Yes.

CK: But in ... or?

#4: The new high school--. I the last three years of my teaching was at, the new high school. Ninth graders.

CK: Well had he heard you say things like that and where do you suppose that came from?

#4: I think with TV and so forth. They don't see it as any big thing. The kids nowadays are coming out and saying, "We're gay just get over it that's who we are."

CK: There's no trauma in it anymore?

#4: Well, it's less and parents are beginning--. Because it's so on TV and so folllh, they're beginning to have TV shows and parents are beginning to say it's ok. It's just a different group. Like heterosexuality, homosexuality is--. I'm not saying because we are in a rural state --. .. had found he used to come here when he was a young man and white water raft and things like that.

He found the people to be accepting of people and their differences and I've sort of found that too here. Like I said, we have had pride parades for four years now and we never have the protest like Columbus. They have several church groups that are along the way condemning the people. But here, we hadn't really had that. Opposition to it.

CK: Are you saying being from a rural state is part of that?

#4: Well no, it just seems like West Virginians are tolerant. Not only of homosexuality, but of hippies and various other people that are different. They just seem to--. And we find it here in this church. We're not the only church that has gays. They're in all the churches. The pastor realized that. Unless he's stupid and doesn't realize it and preach hatred and so forth. I find our hope is in our young people.

CK: Where do you suppose it comes from for West Virginians to be somewhat accepting of difference?

#4: Well, I don't know where they were sort of different. [laughs] Mountaineers, you know they have been called hillbillies. Then the hippies came in and they were pretty much accepted and then the various other groups that have come in. Then you have the gays. I'm not saying they--. They accept the homosexuality; they just seem to accept people. That's just our feelings. West Virginia seems to be more accepting than what you find in other states.

CK: And who were these Mountaineers you are talking about? What sort of images comes to mind with that character?

#4: Well, a rugged individual that comes and made his own life and living from the land. He grows up with accepting everybody. Family is very strong and there's a loyalty to the family regardless if they are different. You still love them and accept who they are. This type of attitude--.

I don't know if that can be proven but we have felt that. Last year, not this last summer, but the year before that, we had some protest. But they didn't protest the parade, they protest that we were having an interfaith service so they were protesting us doing that. [laughs] Religion rather than having church, I guess.

CK: So have you as a gay man been taught some of those values of rugged individualism and some of the traits you were talking about and have they in any way--. How they affected you as a gay man and coming out in terms of who you are. Do you feel like there a component of you?

#4: I guess--. Maybe like my dealing with my family. They don't understand it and they believe it wrong. But there's love there and respect for me that they have. They may not understand me but they know what type of person that I am. I think that's sort of what you get here in West Virginia. A lot of close family ties and they love the individual but they don't understand everything. They've been looked down upon themselves, you know hillbillies and things like that. I don't where my raising--. I think--. I wonder why did--.

I believe that everything happens to me is a reason. That God had a reason for allowing this and that to happen. I think--. God allowed me to experience the heterosexual world and to help me to understand the homosexual world.

MK: It's almost as though you--. Your response to that is to be a bridge between the two. Here you are in this--. You're very loyal to this church that's made up of a mixture of people; you find more sustinece here than you do in the gay church. It's almost as though, through having this heterosexual experience previously that you are in a better position than most people to be in. To be kind of--. That bridges a gap.

#4: I sort of feel that is reason--. Ifthere is a reason why I didn't discover it until later, other than ignorance. Maybe that's it.

CK: So that rugged individual that, that Mountaineer is that you?

#4: In a way. That's--. I grew up on--. Like I say, a large family, on a farm and went through me and my older brother are the only two out of nine that went to college. And got our Bachelor degree and go our Master degree. Like I said, and--. We pretty much done that on our own, our family was poor. We got loans and so fmih to get through school.

When I was teaching, I went on and got my Masters and became an assistant principle for four years. So, I sort of feel, I'm sort of self-made.

CK: How does it affect your gayness, your outness? Is that a part of it?

#4: Well, I'm sure that's it. I'm just very [laughs]. Yes, I haven't thought of that as being a brave person. Usually, I'm scared a lot about what I do. But since I retired, I don't know [laughs]--. Became and activist and involved in everything and don't

necessarily want to brag, but a lot of things that are happening are because of my influence.

Seems like things here in church wouldn't be done if I hadn't promoted it. Several of the things. Now, other people are coming in. Just like the pride parade that we've had in Charleston. We're working on our fifth one. . . . is the chair of the committee that's doing that and I've been involved the four years--. Or the four previous committees. That was sort of my doing and in fact, I had been to the Columbus pride parade once or twice before then. And said, "Why can't we do it here?" Well of course I started talking and the gay people won't come out, and you just well forget it. But then I found there were six of us that believed that it could be done.

So we started meeting and organizing and doing what we had to do. Reserve the capitol, get the money together, get the permits, get the police, have their escort and--. All that needed to be done and we did it. Sometimes it was very--. Even the gay bars, you know, they didn't --. Didn't seem like the gay people themselves wanted it, this type of exposure. They didn't want the press and we wanted it. A parade has to be public and the press will be there particularly a gay pride parade in West Virginia. [laughs] We thought--. But, I was at an event when we was doing this the first year.

This woman that teaches in one of the elementary schools here in town had an 11-year-old student that--. The kids was picking on terribly for being gay. Of course, she was trying to befriend him. Trying to talk to him and to tell him it was ok and so forth. He was feeling that pressure and he was thinking, 11 years old, and thinking about committing suicide. And she was concerned about it. Then we sort of took--. The committee took that as our theme. We would do this, be visible, to him and anybody else

that know--. That was gay. Hopefully, they would see the parade and see at least six people--.

The committee, you know, at the time we thought we would be the only ones that would do that. At least six people marching down the street and they realized at least there was six people like us. Like I am. This--. Like I said, the visibility or the lack of visibility, isolation is probably the greatest thing that a young gay person has to overcome. I'm the only one, I'm strange, I'm deviant, I'm a mistake, and this type of thing. And thank goodness with the Internet and the TV and so forth, that--. The young gays can't think that anymore.

They can't think, I'm the only one. Because [laughs] you know, you just can't think that today if you have any access to TV or the Internet or anything like that.

CK: I wonder if there are things in this culture that gave you that strength and bravery. To be one of six potentially to break through.

#4: I've given God credit for everything I've done. I think every individual has that--. Have that if they would just do it. I find doing other great things. Guess how many showed up? 300 and some, 375 people for the first parade. Since then, it--. We have continued. The numbers are dropping because people don't really see the need for it anymore. That we have shows on TV and there's all kinds of other activities.

MK: Are you referring to the talk shows on TV, or are there--.

#4: The sitcoms.

MK: Are there references to the gay community in some of the sitcoms. I don't watch a lot.

#4: Yes, Will and Grace is about a gay man. Then on ShowTime, there's a show about gay people. Of course, Ellen was on TV and just things like this.

CK: Are these helpful images that are being portrayed.

#4: In the beginning no, but now more so. Because it really illustrates real people. Yes, we have come along way. So then, they --. There was three other organizations in town that I was--. Seemed like somebody has an idea but they don't have time to do it but they'll mention it to me. Then, I'll say, "Well, I can do this." We'll just call a meeting that's not very hard. Get a place, a time and call a meeting and advertise it and they'll show up.

We had the Mountain State Bears, which I did. Someone had been to see it at Washington--. To a meeting and was talking about what a great time he had at it. Bears, these are older, not necessarily older, but bigger hairy men club. It's not the icon, the big muscle, pretty boy type. These are the older men that are hairy and maybe bald and aren't perfect in heir shape or the way they look. So, he was saying what a great time he had and I said, "Well, that would be." And he wished we had one here. And I said, "Well, that cold be done." So we had a--. Now we--. The forth year of our Mountain State Bears.

CK: What's the mission of that group.

4: Just to be sociable. Just to enjoy each other's company. Camping, that type of thing. We have outings at state parks and just enjoy--. Like to eat, so we always have food. Just do things together.

CK: And what about the other two groups then?

#4: OK [laughs]. Like I said, I am keep--. Trying to expand people or I guess maybe expand my horizon. The second group is the Levi Leather Club. People that like to dress up in leather or Levi's. We call them the Scur Knights. *Scur*, which is a French word, which means leather but it is pronounced Queer. Or a French sound of queer.

CK: Sc?

#4: Scur. That means leather in French. They are struggling and there's a few that wants to see that. And that, people that want to explore their being. They enjoy dressing in leather and Levi and they enjoy different types of activities than what the bears do.

CK: It's kind of like--. It's a social group as well?

#4: Yes. They like to--. Like I said, just to be together and I think that's something needed. And the other is the Moonshiners. And you can guess what that is [laughs].

CK: Tell me just in case [laughs].

#4: It's a nudist group. A gay, a man nudist group. We have about 15 members of that. That was, you know--. Like I said, "Oh well",--. Our--. And then there's the--. You know, I'm the treasurer of the West Virginia Lesbian and Gay Coalition. Which is a political organization. They have been trying to get an amendment to the hate crime and the human rights commission--. Or the human rights law to add sexual orientation to the hate crime and add it to the human rights.

The Human Rights Commission Bill. Which protect housing and jobs and things like that. So, I am on the board of directors there.

CK: This tape will end in just a moment. I don't want you to have the shock of it starting to rewind.