

Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas

Kristi Parker
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

February 24, 2009

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Please note: this transcript is not time stamped or indexed. It will be at a later date.

Kristi Parker: Narrator
Tami Albin: Interviewer

TAMI ALBIN: All righty. So today is—today is February 24, 2009 and I'm here with Kristi Parker. Thank you so much for being a part of this project, I really appreciate it. So I'm going to start off this interview the way that I start them all off which is, Tell me where you were born and when.

KRISTI PARKER: I was born in Wichita, Kansas, when—May 25, 1968. I was born to I don't know who and then I was adopted five days later by my current parents who are divorced and remarried, both of them. My adoption went kind of a weird, under-the-table kind of thing like they did back in the sixties because (laughs) my—my mom's pediatrician delivered me and knew that they were in the market for a baby and a baby girl—they wanted specifically a girl. And so they—he called and said, I just delivered this cute little baby girl and I think that she's going to go up for adoption. Call your attorney quick before she goes into the system. So that's kind of how that all happened. And so they snagged me before I went into the adoption process. And it was all done through a private attorney with contracts and whatnot. And I asked my mom just recently about how that works and how it all—because it's such a weird deal. And she said, Well, the attorney delivered you or like came (laughs) to my house and brought you to me when the contract was signed. I'm like, Okay that's weird. You trusted him with the delivering of a baby. It's not like I was goods or whatever.

But yeah, that's apparently how it worked. She wasn't allowed to go up to the hospital in case she might see the mother, and she wasn't allowed to be anywhere near the baby until it was all done. And then the attorney brought me over when I was five days old. So that's how it all happened. And so I don't know—incidentally the—my pediatrician knew a little bit about the mother that he wasn't supposed to know. So he said—he told my mom a few things that just said, If she doesn't grow don't worry because the mother was 4'11" (laughs) and had to be delivered by—I had to be

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delivered by a C-section because she wasn't big enough. And so stuff like that. So it's like, Don't give her hormone injections or whatever when she doesn't grow. So I'm 5'1". But—so just silly stuff like that. And then they accidentally—my mom told me way later that they accidentally sent her the bill from the hospital because she was supposed to pay it but it had all the birth mother's name and address and phone number and everything on it. And then they just mailed it to my mom even though it was her—another woman's account. And my mom is kind of freaky. And she said, I knew I wasn't supposed to see it so I just paid it and I burned it. (laughs) I was like, Oh God. You know, that information might be quite useful today when it comes to finding out some sort of medical records, but my mom burned it in the sink or something after she paid it so—so I don't have any record, and I've never gone to look actually. I've never been very interested in looking.

So anyway, I grew up in Wichita, I've lived here my [whole] life, and the only time I've left is I went to K-State in Manhattan for two-and-a-half years and finished college there.¹ And I actually wasn't out until after I got home from K-State. I graduated with a degree in finance and I came home to Wichita. I originally had looked for jobs in other places but I didn't find a job right away. And so I came back and lived with my mom for a while, while I looked for work. And I worked temporary jobs for a while until I got hired on as an oil and gas accountant for a firm in downtown Wichita. And I think I knew around the time—well I mean I knew that—I knew before that there was something going on. Because I started to know at K-State [Kansas State University]. I would catch myself looking at women. And it was like (laughs) wonder what the heck is going on. So when I got back to Wichita I tried really, really hard not to have a social life [cause I knew] what was looming—and so I went back to school at WSU [Wichita State University] at night and I—and I made sure I didn't have a social life because I took twelve hours at night while I was working full time as an accountant.²

And so I had class every single night from seven to ten and then I studied on the weekends. And I finished my second degree in two years that way, and got a degree as an accountant. I mean, I got a degree in accounting to go with the finance, because I was finding it hard to find a job in finance because that seems to be the upper level of

¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

² Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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accounting, like you start out in accounting and move up to finance. So I thought that would be better. So in between while I was getting my second degree I started to come out. And I started to come out—I came out very first to my roommate at the time, who was a really cool, artist type person that was totally accepting of it and everything and we—(laughs) Skeeter's having a drink of your water.

ALBIN: That's okay.

PARKER: (laughs)

ALBIN: Help yourself, Skeeter, that's fine.

PARKER: So (laughs) anyway though it was—I don't know, it was a weird time period because I wasn't at all comfortable with the fact, although I had had—I hung out with a gay alternative crowd in high school a lot. And there wasn't really anybody out in high school, but there was—my friend from high school's little brother was gay. And so we kind of had this underground deal going on and gay people—gay kids from Hutchinson and Newton and Ark City and all over, I mean hours away, McPherson some of them. And they would all come and we would congregate at my friend Julie's house in high school, and she would have parties every weekend. And I don't remember where her parents (laughs) were, but her dad was a college professor and he was pretty laid back. And when we were in high school they got divorced, and so we kind of had reign of the house. We had parties constantly. And so I met—was friends with all of the gay kids, but I never was one of them for some reason. I was always their cool, straight friend.

And it was always funny because they would all dress in black and paint their fingernails black and it was that time period, my friend, Julie, had a Mohawk, and I was always in my jeans and business school sweatshirts and stuff. And they (laughs) would—I stuck out, out of this group of people because I was like normal and they thought it was funny.³ And so they—it was the totally nonjudgmental crowd. So even though I was like the little preppie one, they were okay with that (unintelligible), Are you sure you're okay with (unintelligible) wear Polos and whatever? So I got to be really good friends

³ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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with all of them. And it was interesting later because when I did finally come out they were like the last people I told. Because I had felt like I had been so dishonest with them and that I had somehow—I don't know, I was their cool straight friend and so it was really hard to tell them.

I ran into one of them at the Fantasy. I had gone out there by myself. We had been out there a lot together, dancing and—and we—everybody—it's pretty well known that everybody used to climb the fence at the Fantasy into the backyard area. There was a tree right by the fence that you'd climb up and hop over and get in when you're underage and come in through the back where they don't card. And I think that they—I think the people at the Fantasy had to know they did that because I mean there were a ton of us. And we used to sneak in and see drag shows. And Julie did a report one time on Miss Gay Kansas (laughs) in high school I think. And so we interviewed her. And we—because we were hopping into the bar when we were young.

So anyway, I went out there one time by myself finally and I ran into one of them there. And they were like, Hey Kristi. Who you with? And it was—um, nobody. (laughs) And so it was really awkward because it was apparent at that time that, Oh, you're out here, whatever. Okay so kind of I never did come out to them. It kind of just was like a known thing then because I'd run into them at the bar. But—so right before I graduated with my second degree, I guess it was, I had gone out to the Fantasy by myself and I thought—that's not the night I ran into the friend but I thought, I'm going to go out to the gay bar now that I'm older and I haven't been in several years, and I've been through college and all this stuff and everything's going to be backwards to me. I'm going to reassure myself that I'm not really gay, that I just am really accepting. (laughs)

So I walk in and for the first time everything seemed right. I saw guys dancing with guys and women dancing with women and holding hands and kissing and whatever. And it was—just seemed like how things should be, that it wasn't backwards land like I had hoped. And it scared the shit out of me. And so I came home to me and Sue's apartment. We lived in a duplex at the time. And I started to take a bottle of pills, and was pretty drunk anyway. And whatever I was doing Sue woke up and freaked out and called a friend of mine from work at the oil company and tried to talk to me and I just

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was telling [her] that I wanted to die, that I wasn't strong enough to live "out."⁴ And Sue said to me at one point, You just came from a bar where all those people are living and are fine and whatever. And I'm like, I'm not as strong as they are. So—so, it was really, really hard for me to accept that I was gay.

It seems weird now to me because I can't understand why I had all these friends and it was all fine, but it was really different when it came to me. And I felt like I couldn't tell my mom and I was really close to my mom, And I'd always wanted to get married and have kids and I didn't think you could do that when (laughs) you were gay back then, but it was just—I just couldn't do it. And I was—I'm working in a really conservative field. Oil and gas accounting was like the good old boys. So I tried suicide just like three months before I was to graduate with my second degree. And I don't really know what happened after (laughs) that. I like tried to get it together and—I know, I know—the friend at work that my roommate had called said that she would find me a counselor and one that was accepting and whatever. Her husband was a drug and alcohol counselor and so she would ask him for a referral and whatnot. And so I did, I started, and she did find me somebody. And you know what I remember the most is that between her and my roommate—and I think it's because of her husband and her knowledge of counseling and all of that stuff—she—when I kept bemoaning to her that I couldn't live this life and that I wasn't strong enough she kept saying, We'll get through it. We'll figure out a way, we'll—we, we, we, we, we. And for some reason I didn't feel so alone in dealing with it.

And even though I knew she wasn't going to hold my hand through the whole process, just at that time of emergency of stress, just to have somebody take it on with you, it meant the world to me. And I'll always remember her saying all of those things. And she did help me. She did find me a counselor. And so when I got my second degree I was promoted at the accounting firm and I was one of, oh three accountants in charge—well I personally was the only one in charge of the drilling company and the pipeline company and a couple of other of the joint billable companies [for] the oil wells.⁵ And so I had my own office and I had a secretary, not my own secretary but I had a

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secretary, and I had two underlings and all of that. And so I started to come out and I sort of—well, I got in trouble a lot at work because (laughs) I started to just like goof off.

You know, part of the thing was that I was a super good accountant and I'm a great numbers person and a detailed person. And I could get my work done and I would come in at 9:30 in jumpers and Birkenstocks and my boss would say, You're setting a bad example for the people under you if you don't come in on time and you don't—you dress like that and whatever. And so I kept getting in trouble. And then I'd call in sick because I'd been out at the bar and I would call in mental health days constantly because [I] was having such a hard time dealing with being gay during all that time.⁶ And finally I just told—I wrote my boss a letter and I said—and I told [her] I'm gay and I'm having a really hard time with it and I tried suicide and all this different stuff.⁷ And instead of—well that made it worse. She put it in my employee file. So then I talked to an attorney about whether I could get it removed from my employee file because then it was going to be accessed by anybody that called for a job reference, so I—and I couldn't get it removed. I mean, I had given it to her and that was their property now and—but I said, But I gave it to her as a friend to explain why I was performing so badly, not—no, take that back—not performing badly at all at work, because I always got my work done and I was always very organized and filed all the taxes and forms and crap, oil and gas use tax and excise tax and constant quarterly whatever. And I was great at that and I had my financials done all the time. What they saw as what I wasn't performing at work is because I wasn't dressing appropriately or coming in on time or was talking on the phone too often, personal calls and all of that. But they could never have a problem with my work which always made me mad because I was like,

They're worried about the surfacy, unimportant shit, okay. So—I don't know what happened after that. I got—I dated somebody. (laughs) I had a girlfriend that I used to have come up to the office and all of this stuff and (unintelligible) started. And then I started—everybody started to know I was gay, and I took a bunch of people from work out to the Fantasy a couple of times and it became a lot more comfortable for me. I was one of the people, and I think this is why it scared me so much, is that I wasn't going to be able to be closeted. And I think I knew enough about me that if I was going to come

⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

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out I was going to be out—out, out. I was a horrible liar and it was horrible trying to mask who I was talking to on the phone. I tried to make up names and then they were the same names as some of (laughs) the other people but I was like confusing my underling but, I (laughs) tried to make up a boy name that was similar enough to the girl name that I wouldn't screw it up and it was—oh. That was just silly. It was silliness because Kristi's not good at that, so—so by the end of it all everybody knew what was going on. And so finally—I had really dug myself a big enough hole that I had to do something.

I had to get out of where I was in, and I was really, really unhappy at my job because of all of that stuff and—and I was having really bad headaches every day to the point where like the doctor made me get a CT scan because they thought I had a brain tumor because I was having headaches so often. And then I quit my job and they went away, magic, (laughs) so—so I was like, God that was a big waste of money to have a CT scan. And so I did, I quit my job without another job because I was trying to go to interviews and I had desperate written all across my face and I would be in these interviews and I would be like, Please hire me. I'm so unhappy in my other job. And that wasn't getting me anywhere.

So I decided in order to interview well I needed to get out of my job as a—and then try to look for a job. And it totally freaked my parents out and everybody else. And my mom is like a real, I don't know, play-it-by-the-book kind of woman. So she would say to me, What about your health insurance? and stuff like that. And I can't remember, I must have been twenty-four, twenty-three or twenty-four, I don't know, at the time, and that was the last thing I was worried about was my health insurance. She said, You're going to get hit by a Mack truck. I'm like, Well thank you mom. So—(laughs) so I—I—so I remember quitting in February and like the very next day—I gave my two weeks notice [and] on Saturday—the very next day after my last Friday at work I went to an interview at a CPA [Chartered Personal Accountant] firm that somebody had referred me to them.⁸

⁸ Added by narrator during the review process.

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They called me I feel like, because the guy who was in charge of hiring had—used to work for the oil and gas company and knew how awful it was, and so he had hired a couple of people from them. And so I went to interview and he hired me right then to start that Monday for more money. And I was like, God can't I even have a day off? I quit my job and I thought I'm going to be free and now I have to start work the next Monday. So I think he gave me Monday off and I started with them. And I started doing taxes and was going to come on as an auditor after tax season. And on April 14th they lost one of their biggest audit clients and decided they weren't going to hire any new auditors. So on April 15th they're like, You don't need to come to work tomorrow. Well that's nice, because I hadn't even been looking then. But, that ended up to be so cool and that was the play that I needed. Because at that point I had been laid off and so I qualified for unemployment, which I hadn't [before] because I had quit my other job voluntarily.⁹ And unemployment goes back to your last two years of earnings or whatever. So I qualified for the maximum unemployment because they went back to the oil company, which was sweet, because then the oil company couldn't contest my unemployment but they're the ones who had to pay it. So that was just like wahoo.

So [I'd] gotten involved a little bit in the community and in the—in the—at that time there was a community center open here and I was—I was on the Stonewall 25 local committee that—the Stonewall 25 celebration was going on and then local chapters were forming around the country and there was one formed here to celebrate Stonewall 25 locally and then it was kind of in conjunction with Pride but the Pride people were fighting with the Stonewall 25 people.¹⁰ And I joined the Stonewall 25 people and I was their merchandizing person. And there was another board called the Wichita Gay and Lesbian Alliance, WGLA, that we—that was an organization that was made up of representatives of all the other organizations in town. It was a really good idea. They—the representatives from all the organizations came together once a month and gave reports on what their organization was doing. And it was also—it was kind of a form of networking but it was also kind of a form of not double planning and double booking and everything like that. And this was the organization that was in charge of Pride, because it was a communitywide deal, and so then all these people from all the different

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organizations had a say. So the only thing WGLA did as far as actual producing events was the Pride events, and—

ALBIN: How many people were—how many different organizations were a part of that group?

PARKER: Oh, probably ten or fifteen.

ALBIN: Wow.

PARKER: And so they met at the center, which was the joint deal. And so I was like an—I don't know why, I was an at-large member of WGLA, maybe because of Stonewall 25 or whatever, or maybe because I was just getting involved in all the different stuff. And everybody used to make fun of me because I would come right from work sometimes and I would be in office drag. And nobody'd ever seen me in like heels and (laughs) when I wasn't in my jumpers and Birkenstocks and I was—well when I was at the CPA firm I had to dress, and so I would come in heels and hose. And I would say, I know why drag queens walk like that. It's because these shoes make you walk like that!

So anyway but—I was trying to bridge the gap between Pride and Stonewall 25 because I was young and had just come out and was naïve and optimistic and thought everybody should all get along and why are we fighting, and stuff like that. And so on WGLA there were two chair-people that were in charge of Pride at that time, Linda and Teri. And Teri had to step down right at the last minute, like April 16th or—(laughs) I don't know, but it was right when I lost my job. I mean, it probably wasn't that uncanny but it was really soon. And so they said, Kristi why don't you be the other co-chair of Pride? And I'm thinking, Because I don't know how to do anything. But so I said, Okay, I don't have a job and so I'll figure it out. So me and Linda then were in charge of Pride. And so for the first time I was going to have a festival, a Pridefest. And so they said I could have \$1500 dollars that they had in the budget and I could have a Pridefest. So I'm like, Okay. So I went and—(laughs) You know when you're young and you like think, I feel like I could move the world. I moved mountains—I rented tents and I got a liquor license from the Melodrama guy, the gay guy that owned the Melodrama at

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Cowtown and rented Cowtown and he was going to let us serve beer. And I had booze and entertainment and all this stuff booked. And I thought, I'm going to make a *Pride Guide*.

And I wasn't paying any attention to any of the history before me, which I think is a big mistake of a lot of young people that get involved in the gay community is they have no respect for a lot of what's happened before them. So I feel like I'm the first one to conquer anything. And so I'm doing a *Pride Guide* and they're telling me, Oh you can't do this, you can't—I said, I'm going to call the *Advocate* and *Curve* and *Out* and *10 Percent* and have all these magazines advertise so that I can pay to print this because I don't have enough money. And they're like, Okay you go Kristi. (laughs) (unintelligible) like, Okay, okay how about it. And so I called—I started calling them all. I would just like look up their phone number and call them all. And every single one of them, all three, *Curve*, *Deneuve*, whatever it was called at the time, and the *Advocate* and *10 Percent*, all put in inserts for subscriptions and paid into my *Pride Guide*, and I got all these ads. I called all these people and said, Hey I know you want to be in this *Pride Guide*. I'm doing this and this and this. And I had this wonderful success. And for the first time ever I made money on the *Pride Guide*, I made like five hundred bucks. And then I had that money to spent in addition to my \$1500 on my festival. And I was just like, I am so cool. (laughs) And so I was like, What are you people—this was easy. Why are you telling me not to do this? This is so simple. Everybody's so nice and friendly and—okay, whatever. So we had a festival and everybody was pretty impressed, and of course shortly thereafter probably we all ended up fighting.

But the—the thing that that did was I thought to myself, That was easy. I could do that every month and live off the money I make. Instead of doing it for Pride once a year, or in addition to doing it for Pride once a year, I could do this every month and I could pay my rent and whatever and so that's what I'm going to do. And so around in the planning of Pride, the Stonewall 25 people that I had gotten involved with included Bruce McKinney and two women who owned the only gay bookstore in the state. It was called Visions and Dreams and their names were Renee and Raye Ann. And I was really good friends with them, and I worked for them. I was their first employee of the gay bookstore. This—as an aside, this is really funny to me that all of this happened within like a year or two of when I came out and thought I couldn't live like this anymore and

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was suicidal and all this stuff, and then all of a sudden I'm in charge of the gay parade. And it just was really ironic to me [how quickly] things change.¹¹ So I worked at the gay bookstore and Renee and Raye Ann were really good friends of mine and they were going to New York during Stonewall 25 but not for Stonewall 25. They were going for a parents' conference because—a gay parents' conference because they had a girl and a boy that were Raye Ann's children from a previous marriage. So they said, Well you don't have a job, Kristi. If you can get yourself to New York you can spend the night on our floor in our hotel room, you're welcome. And so I thought, Okay I can get to New York.

So I have this sweet little car that was—it doesn't sound sweet but it was a Dodge Shadow convertible and it was brand new. I had bought it because I was an accountant and I was single and I made too much money. So I—I had a nice place and this little convertible car that I drove everywhere, and—but I didn't have a job anymore. So I—(laughs) So I got in my convertible and I said to my little brother, who kind of lived with me off and on at the time, If I don't come back (laughs) in like two weeks tell mom or dad that I'm missing. So he was staying with my dog at my house. And I said, Because I'm going to drive to New York all by myself and I don't want to tell them because they'll think that I'm crazy and they will talk me out of going. And so as luck would have it—I had another car too and I was letting my little brother drive it and he didn't tell me but somebody backed into him. And he told me right before I was leaving for New York and they had sent me an insurance check and it was like four hundred dollars. And I'm like, Hey, I'm going to New York, because I had four hundred dollars and no job and a place to stay. And so I started on my way. And I drove all the way to New York with the top down and with (laughs) my four hundred dollars. I slept in rest stops and I—and I made it all the way up there. I packed bagels and (laughs) chips and crackers and shit to eat in the car. (laughs) And I head out. And I kind of had looked into some of the stuff that was happening in New York and I had—I'm a huge Disney fan, and I collect Disney stuff. They called my house that I lived in a shrine to the late Walt Disney. And I had found out that the *Lion King*, the movie, was opening at Radio City Music Hall like the day before I was supposed to be there, or maybe the day of. Well so anyway how it

¹¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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turned out is that I headed out—reserved tickets to that, and I headed out and I beat Renee and Raye Ann there.

And so I checked into their hotel. I don't know how any of this happened because now I can't imagine they'd let me check into their hotel room without ID or—but so I checked into their hotel room, I brought my stuff up and I left my stuff in the room and I got on the train and I went down into New York City. They were staying in White Plains. And I—(laughs) I was a total tourist. They told me not to act like a tourist. Renee and Raye Ann said, Don't leave your car in New York. This nice little car is going to get the tires whatever, whatever. So I ignored all of that and I walk into Grand Central Station and I was like, Oh my God. It was so big. So I'm walking around like this—acting like a tourist.¹² And I was just blown away by the whole thing, by the whole city, by the whole deal. I go out, I walk into Radio City Music Hall and I ask people where to go and New Yorkers are like, It's just a ways up here and to the right. Well I'm walking and I'm walking and I'm walking. I come in. I think, Surely I've passed it. Oh no, it's just up here a few blocks [on the right.]¹³ I was like, God it was forever away. And I go in—I was blown away by everything, how big everything was. I thought it was funny that when I came out in New York City it was daylight and I couldn't use my sunglasses because all the buildings made everything dark. But then when I came out of the theatre and it was nighttime everything was so lit up I needed my sunglasses. So I walk into the Will Call at Radio City Music Hall. And they say, Oh you're at the other Will Call. Go out this door down a block, turn (laughs) right and go in the other door. And I'm like, Outside? But it's here. No, go outside—no, it's at Radio City Music Hall. And I'm like—they were over me. So I figured—so I went and I just had a great time at the movie and they had a cool little stage thing beforehand of Disney stuff. And I was like in my element and it was so fun and I had a really good seat because I was a single ticket.

And it seems like everything just goes right. I don't know how I got the insurance money, I don't know how I got checked into the hotel without them, I don't know how I ended up in New York City down on the train and just fell into everything. And I'm just like a little dingbat kind of in the—little Kansas girl flubbing my way around. And I'm sitting there and I'm taking pictures of all the cool things in Radio City Music Hall. And

¹² Edited by narrator during the review process.

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the guy next to me says, How'd you get your camera in here? I'm like, I just walked in with it. Well there aren't any cameras allowed. Oh. Well, I don't know how that happened, I was just like, Whatever. So it was just dippy dumb luck. So I went back to the hotel finally late that night after the show and everything. And Renee and Raye Ann were like, Oh my God where have you been? You haven't been down in the city all by yourself have you? How'd you get there? You didn't drive your car. What you— (makes noise) How'd you get—how'd you get in the room? We came here and we saw your stuff and we saw your keys and [were] like, She must have driven her car but she's not in her car now and she surely didn't go to the city by herself.¹⁴ And oh my God you're wearing your jewelry and (makes noise) you're going to get mugged. And so none of that happened, it was fine, everything was perfect.

And so we had the best time. I had the best time at Stonewall 25. It was the most energizing, fantastic—ah, we did the dyke march, we took pictures in front of the Gloria Steinem statue in some park and we ran into Leslie Feinberg in the parade and Minnie Bruce Pratt and I asked if I could take her picture. And she was like, Oh my God you're the first person who's ever asked permission. Of course you can. And I'm like, I'm just a polite little Kansas girl. And so we just—I mean it was just, uh. Renee was an old hippie and so none of it really surprised her. And so she would do stuff to freak me out like—like there were a bunch of topless women everywhere at Stonewall 25 and so then she flashed me in the subway her tits. And I (laughs) remember she thought that was so funny and I got a picture of it. And then (laughs) there was just silly stuff that happened all weekend because I would just feel like, I don't know. I don't know, just had never been around that many gay people. I'd never been around—the Stonewall stage was just—I mean, Liza Minnelli was there, Gregory Hines just came out and tap danced and then went off and didn't say anything, and Judith Light spoke. And all these famous people that I was just astounded, and this had to be like 1995—'95?

ALBIN: Maybe '94, maybe?

PARKER: It had to be '94. Yeah, it was just incredible the—you know, I take that back. I had been to the March on Washington in '93, it was the Gay March on Washington.

¹⁴ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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But I'd sort of flubbed that up and so I didn't get to be—I mean, that was amazing and blown away by all of that too but I missed the stage. I don't know how I missed the stage but I missed the stage. (laughs) It was like—(laughs)

ALBIN: Where were you if you—(laughs)

PARKER: I was on the mall but I didn't realize that at the other end of the mall that there was all this great entertainment. I get home and everybody's like, Oh my God did you see the Indigo Girls? Did you see Melissa Etheridge? (makes noise) I'm like, Where? Where were they? And (unintelligible) the March on Washington. Where? I didn't see. I didn't see anybody at the March on Washington. So this was the first time when we had actually gone to Stonewall and sort of—we didn't do the—we didn't do the parade or whatever, the March, because the March on Washington had been so long and we stood there forever just waiting to step [off] that we went directly down to the stage area to get a place up front, and I wasn't missing the stage this time.¹⁵ And so that was amazing. And BETTY, the band, came out and played and then they all took their shirts off and were naked and it was (laughs) just—oh, it was so cool, it was so cool.¹⁶

I probably should backtrack about the thing on the March on Washington, because that was when I was at the oil company still and I had come out, and a friend of—a very good friend of mine who hadn't come out to me either named Brock, we hung out together all the time, and—because he worked for the administrative offices of Willie C's where my roommate was a bartender. And so he was always up at the bar and I was always up at the bar, but neither one of us knew the other one was gay or even dealing with that. So it was really [an] uncanny kind of deal.¹⁷ We would sit up there and drink and then I wanted to go to the Fantasy, but I didn't want to tell Brock. So I'd say, Oh I'm going out. Where you going? I want to go. No. No, no, no, you can't go. You don't want to go where I'm going, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So finally one day he pushed and pushed and pushed and he says, Because I think I know where you're going and I *do* want to go. (laughs) And so it was this really funny thing me and Brock

¹⁵ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

¹⁶ Edited by narrator during the review process.

¹⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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went out to the Fantasy and he caught me looking at women and I caught him looking at guys. And we kind of bumped into each other at the end of the night and said—I can't remember, it was really funny. It was like—I said something like, I don't think you understand and he said, I really, really understand. And I said, No I don't think you understand. No, I really understand. And so finally we were both like, Okay I'm gay and I'm having a horrible time. And he's like, I'm gay and I'm having a horrible time.

So we started pal-ing around together, and this is probably why I got in so much trouble at work at the oil company because me and Brock were at the bar every night practically, soaking it up, just loving—I mean, we were out every single freaking night, every night of the week honestly. And so—so the March on Washington came around in '93. And we couldn't get off work—I couldn't, he couldn't, somebody couldn't. And Brock at the time was dating a guy named Jerry he had met. And so we decided we'd go anyway because it was on Sunday or whatever and we'd drive, I can't remember. All I remember is that we decided we would go anyway and he got us a hotel in Virginia and we got in the car at like Friday after work and drove all the way to D.C. in one fell swoop, twenty-two hours, whatever, and went and did the parade and the march and whatever and then got in the car and drove all the way back so we could be at work Monday morning, over like a weekend. And it was funny, we stayed in the hotel like right by where Lorena Bobbitt had thrown the penis, so we—(laughs) in the field where they were looking for it, right by our hotel. That must have been right around that time because I don't know why I would remember that. And so—I'm just talking. Do you have any questions?

ALBIN: When I have them I'll ask.

PARKER: Okay. So—(laughs) so we're all gayed up in all our shirts and our stuff and we figure out how to work the subway and everybody's staring at us. Well and on the drive up it was amazing, there were so many gay cars everywhere driving up to go [to] the March on Washington.¹⁸ Everybody's honking at each other, everybody has rainbow flags and everything driving from the middle of the country to D.C. to go to the March. And it was so funny because it was just a—it was so much camaraderie. So we

¹⁸ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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get there and we figure out how to get down onto the subway and we go to the March on Washington. And I had asked my dad—since we had to get there like bullet I sillily had asked my dad for his AAA Trip Tik from here so we would know the route without messing with anything. But I wasn't out to my dad. So we must have had Friday off or Monday off or something, I mean, there's no way we could have gotten back in time. I don't know. Or maybe we gypped. Well so anyway, I know we weren't there. We stayed in the hotel two days. So we go—Brock was like me and being a little naïve, so we were around all—more gay people than we'd ever seen in our lives. And Kansas was [a] little contingency.¹⁹ There were like ten of us or something.

And so we were right by the S&M group which was very funny, because then we had to wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait until it was our step-off time for the parade. So we're standing around and we're all bored. And so the S&M people were bored too. So they made—the S&M people made a big, gigantic circle and they were taking turns whipping people. And (laughs) they were—and there was this woman who was ooh was very mean looking with this black hat and ponytail and she was (makes noise) cracking on these guys' bare asses like way far away, like far enough away that I couldn't get them both in the picture. Like I had to take a picture of her and then a picture of this guy and then moosh them together like a panorama. And so of course me and Brock are headed over there to watch because we're the little Kansas kids and this was—never seen anything like it. And all these people with leather and all this different stuff and they're baring their butts and getting whipped and it looks really painful. So Brock's super gay, super femme. So Brock's saying, I want to be whipped. I'm like, No you don't, shh. So later we're out in the subway back to the hotel and this woman's there on this almost empty train and—this whipper woman. And Brock—I want to talk to her, I want to talk to her. No, shut up, you're like—and so he goes up to her and asked if she'll whip him.

ALBIN: On the subway?

PARKER: On the subway. And she just looks at him like, Child—she wouldn't, thank God. He probably wouldn't be able to bear it. He probably wouldn't be able to sit on his

¹⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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ass on the ride home. So that was super funny. We got a ton of pictures of the S&M leather people. They entertained us the entire time we were waiting. So we finally got to step off and got down to the end and where we didn't know there was a stage, which I'd already mentioned, and that we had missed all of the great entertainment and everything. But we bought tons of T-shirts and (laughs) (unintelligible) and walked around all the vendors and bought more gay stuff than you'd ever—because we didn't have any of that. We—I don't think Visions and Dreams was open by then, but it might have been and we didn't know. So those are some of the shirts that I gave to Bruce that I want back now because they're—like now they have fond memories for me. And Jerry has since died of AIDS and so that's kind of sad, so that would be nice to have the mementos from the trip. And don't ever drive any long road trip like that with two fags because they—they—it would be their turn to drive and they would fall asleep, and we need to pull over and rest a little while. I was like, Get out. Let me drive. So I think I ended up driving the entire way except when they took turns and it was so annoying. And so then on the way back I'm just like, Just let me do it. So I drove all the way back. You sleep. They're sleeping in the back. They're big weenies. Uh, I wanted to kill them.

ALBIN: (laughs) I'm going to just change the tape. All right. (laughs)

PARKER: Am I saying anything pertinent?

ALBIN: Yes. Yes, it's all very pertinent. All righty. So what was the first Pride event you ever went to? Was your first Pride event in Wichita?

PARKER: It was in Wichita, it was in—it was with Brock but we were scared to be in it so we ran beside the parade and hid behind the—in this alley behind—by the Old Mill Tasty Shop in downtown Wichita and it was in Naftzger Park and we [watched] from across the street in the alley where we were hiding.²⁰

ALBIN: And so what year was that in?

²⁰ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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PARKER: Um, me and Bruce have talked about this, probably '92 or '93. It had to be '92. I graduated with my second degree in '92. It had to be around in '92 in June and then the March on Washington was April of '93. And it was the year—because we were watching from across the street, and it was the last year Fred Phelps was here for our Pride because he was outside fighting with the skinheads. And that was really interesting because [a] skinhead pulled a knife on Fred Phelps and Fred Phelps has never come back.²¹ (laughs) So that scared them, the two hate groups. And we were all in Naftzger Park having a little gay time and the two hate groups were outside and—where me and Brock were hiding over there watching it all go down and the cops came and split them up and made them all go home and whatever, and they were having their picnic inside. But the interesting thing about the '93 march is then when I got home—when we got home finally at that point I was living with two women, two lesbians, a couple. I was living in their basement. And I had walked into the house right after we had got home and the phone rang. And it was my little brother and he was saying, Man Kris, dad's asking all about you and asking all these questions about the two guys you went up with are just gay, and Kristi's not gay is she? And all this different stuff. And he—I just have said, I don't know dad—

ALBIN: But did—did you—

PARKER: —you have to ask Kristi.

ALBIN: But did your brother know?

PARKER: Oh my brother—my brother was the first person in my family that I told. And yeah, he knew and he had lived with me and Sue in the basement there around in that time, around the time that I was coming out. So me and my little brother used to go out and play pool a lot. And we had gone out and played pool and I told him one night. And he hit my car. And I don't know if he hit my car because he was mad that I was gay—I think he hit my car because it was something about—we had been arguing about pool. I never really asked him. But he made a big dent in my car. And then I dropped him off and drove away and he didn't have keys to get in and then he was really mad at

²¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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me later about all of that. But other than that, my brother was really cool with all of it. And everybody thought that—I don't know, everybody thought Sue was gay, my roommate, because she was a hippie, sculpture major woman but—and she didn't shave, (laughs) but I, the little preppie one, was the one that was gay.²²

And so that's what Chad—I remember Chad saying something like, I thought if one of you was gay it was Sue. And so that's all the difference it made to him. But—so he called and said that, Oh man, Dad's asking all kinds of questions. I just kept saying, You have to ask Kristi, you'll have to ask Kristi, Dad. So I hung up with Chad and I'm carrying—I carried in my stuff, whatever, and the phone rang again. And I pick it up and it was my dad. And I wasn't ready, and so I hung up, because (laughs) I didn't know what I was going to say or do and I knew why he was calling then. Thank God Chad had given me a warning. It was like, Oh and so I hung up the phone. So he kept calling and calling and calling and I kept ignoring and ignoring and ignoring him like through that night. I mean, it wasn't very long. So then I decided I'd better go talk to him.

So I went—drove over to his house and he came out on the porch. I'm not sure—it seems like I remember at the time that that was pretty stark that he didn't let me in the house. And so I remember all he said to me was that he—he said, Are you queer? Do you have queer—are you having queer tendencies? And did you bust your ass to get all the way to Washington, D.C. for that fag parade? Um, and I was like—my dad has never talked to me that way really. And I said, Yes, yes, and yes. And he said, Well you know I still love you no matter what, and he turned around and walked back in the house and shut the door. And so that was the beginning of the end. Me and my dad didn't have the best relationship anyway because it was really hard through the divorce and all of the times growing up, but that was definitely the beginning of the end for me and my dad's relationship. And of course I was such a dingbat that when I asked him for the Trip Tik to go to Washington, D.C.—I mean, he would have never even known that I went to Washington, D.C., it was like a weekend, but I had told him that. And I didn't realize that the march would be on CNN and on every channel and live broadcast. So my dad knew all about it. My dad saw more of the stage than I did.

²² Edited by narrator during the review process.

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So it was like, Uh—so in between all of that somewhere before I—before that had happened I had told my mom that I had to tell—I needed to tell her something. This is all a big blur. Like between '92 and '94, like all this big momentous stuff and so—which is partly where I got myself in such a deep hole at work. Because I mean you can imagine in between '92 is when I graduated with my second degree and got promoted and then '94 in February is when I quit. So in between all of this is happening—the '93 march, the first Pride Parade downtown, the Stonewall 25, I mean all of this stuff. And me and my mom were so close. I mean, we talked on the phone almost every day. And so the way I was avoiding telling her all this stuff I was involved in was that we were speaking less and less and less and less. And our relationship was really deteriorating because of me. And so finally I went to her on a Friday and I was a chicken shit and I said, I have something I need to talk to you about but not right now, because I want to build up, because I want to build up the courage. It was like, Okay, I've leaped off, I told you that I have something to tell you and now I want to go freak out for two days. Well, so I wasn't—I was being really focused on my own deal and it hadn't occurred to me that my mom was going away that weekend for her anniversary.

ALBIN: Had she remarried?

PARKER: Yeah.

ALBIN: At that point, okay.

PARKER: Okay. My parents had gotten divorced when I was twelve, no eleven. So yeah, at that point she had been remarried. So they were going on their anniversary, duh. So I'm thinking—well I wasn't thinking. So I—so we go out to dinner. And she said she'd had a horrible weekend worrying about whatever it was that I was going to say. And I—(laughs) I couldn't tell her. Again, I wasn't brave enough to tell her I was gay without—I took Brock down with me. (laughs) I said, Mom me and Brock are gay. (laughs) Which Brock later was like, You outed me to your mom? (laughs) It sounded better if both (laughs) of us, so not just me, Brock too. And so that was kind of funny later, it wasn't funny at the time. It was like, Me and Brock are gay. And she says—she started crying a little bit and she said, Okay I—I knew it was either that or you wanted to find your real parents. And to tell you the truth, that kind of seemed worse to her I felt

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like at that time. But I wasn't comfortable—her husband was real conservative and a little bit racist and stuff. And so I said to her, Okay but you can't tell Bob. And she said, Okay that's not going to happen. I have to have a really good excuse for missing our anniversary dinner, which was that night that I had asked her to go with me. It was like, You dumb ass. I mean, what—I decided to have dinner and come out to my mom on her anniversary. But this tells you again, and how I've always felt, is that my [mom] always put her kids first, always, and that was real evidence of that in that she didn't go to anniversary dinner with her husband because something was important with me.²³

So my mom and I had lunch a couple times the next week because she had a lot of questions and she wanted to ask me about this guy I dated and that guy I dated and what about this and what about that and how did you know, and weren't you trying to tell me when you were at K-State? And I said, God I wish you would have told me. I was trying to tell you and you knew and I wish you would have told me. And so in the end she ended up being really, really supportive and it was not ever an issue again—once she—she went and saw her therapist and he gave her some books to read and she did everything right. She—and she had known about all my friends in high school. So I mean I kind of—I kind of think that my mom was probably clued in a little better than I was. And she said, And I have to tell Bob because he thinks you're going to tell me that you and Brock are engaged. Woo, see how out of touch he is. My mom was a lot better in tune. She said, It was either that you were gay or that you were going to find your biological parents.

ALBIN: So how long had your mom been like speculate—like, what about your childhood? Did she speculate at all?

PARKER: Me and my mom don't talk about serious stuff very well or very often, so she had never asked. She had said to me one time about one of my friends, I don't understand why people think that people would choose to be treated that way. Of course that's not a choice. And so it—she just like was no if's, and's, but's about it. She knew all of my friends that were gay, they were born that way, and everybody was mean to them, and that she thought that was ridiculous. And she had told me that her

²³ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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college roommate, who she had fixed up with her husband, later came out as lesbian and (laughs) that she felt bad for her friend that she had fixed—that she had fixed him up—her male friend that she had fixed up with her roommate. Well so it turns out that my mom had had also a friend at Boeing—she worked at Boeing for a really long time—who was a woman in her sixties who had never been married who had had a roommate. And she never disclosed it to my mom, but my mom had always felt like she knew and she was always sad that she didn't think Jimmie, this woman went by Jimmie, that she ever felt comfortable enough to tell her. So it was kind of—you know how it's different when it's your kid or whatever. So it seems like she had been pretty cool. But my mom was a little sorority, pretty middle-of-the-road kind of middle-class suburban kind of woman. So I wouldn't have ever seen her as being really friendly, really cool or whatever. And I don't—I still don't think I'd classify her as that. I mean, she's really supportive of me, but I don't know. I don't know, she just doesn't—she sends off a certain air. She's got a certain judgmental way about her, about a lot of things.

So saying that, When I got—when I left—back to being in New York and Stonewall 25 and that ending, I left Stonewall 25 and I thought, I'm never going to be this close to Provincetown so (laughs) I drove. And I didn't have a job. I had probably two hundred dollars by that point. And I drove up the Cape. And it was—that was a scary little drive. That's like this little tail where the ocean's on both sides of you blowing off the road. So I drove up to Provincetown. It was off season still because it had—it was the end of June, and I slept in a parking lot in the car there. And I had to go to Lobster Pot because I knew that Hothead Paisan ate at the Lobster Pot a lot. (laughs) That was big Hothead Paisan the Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist. So I—there were certain things I knew that I had to see. But it really was off season. It was cold and kind of rainy. And so I didn't stay there very long and I didn't have any money. And I hated that there was never anywhere to park. Everything's so close together there, up in the northeast. And I'd never been there. I'd never been anywhere up there, so it was very weird to me.

So I—then I left there and I drove down around on the way home and I stopped in Chicago. [I'd] never been to Chicago.²⁴ And my friend from high school lived in Chicago with her husband (laughs) who was also a friend from high school. And I had

²⁴ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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been in their wedding, I was one of her bridesmaids. And actually that's where I met Sue. Sue was one of her bridesmaids too. So Sue was my roommate so we had all this little thing. So I—Robert and Liz were both marketing majors at WSU when I was out there in business school. They were on the six-year plan. I was the only one of my friends that I knew that graduated in four years with a finance degree. So when I went back to school they were still in school, and so was Julie, the woman from high school that was friends with all the gay people and her little brother. Okay, so I stopped there. And they were my business people, marketing people. And we went to the mall and we were sitting in the food court and I said, Liz I'm going to start a paper. I want to talk to you about [the] business end of that.²⁵ Because this, remember it was right after I had done the *Pride Guide*, thought I could do that and then I went to Stonewall and had all this great gayness, and I'm going to be gay for [a] living.²⁶ (laughs) Screw accounting, the CPAs and the oil and gas people. And you know if I had been more like well-rounded and I thought, You know, everybody needs an accountant, I could work for a nonprofit, I could work for NGLTF [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force], I could work for something. I mean, that may have occurred to me but it didn't, so—And right before I had gotten the accounting job at the CPA firm I had hired a headhunter in Phoenix because I wanted—when I quit my job I was intending to move to Phoenix.

ALBIN: So why Phoenix?

PARKER: It was warm and my grandma spent winters down there, and so I had been there several times. And actually me and my mom went down there one time. I drove that little convertible all over this country. Me and my mom drove it *Thelma & Louise* with the top down all the way to see my grandma (unintelligible). And my mom distracted her long enough, my grandma, to let me go venture away and go to some gay bookstores and try to search out the gay community in Phoenix and Scottsdale and wherever. Okay, so anyway that poor convertible had so many miles on it. It was brand new in '93 and then we went to the—we went to D.C. in my Toyota. Okay, well anyway I went to New York in it and Phoenix umpteen times whatever. It had like 90,000 miles after three years.

²⁵ Added by narrator during the review process.

²⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

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ALBIN: Wow. Well I remember you telling me one story one time about buttons flying out of the back of it or something?

PARKER: (laughs) The back of the convertible, that's coming.

ALBIN: Okay, yeah.

PARKER: But that was '95. But '94 I'm still in '94. And '94 was meeting with those friends. And these friends, Liz is just like, I think you should do it. You can do that. You can start a paper. Just ask your brother, my older brother, for money and do this and this and this and this and sure, sure, I think you should give it a go. I'm like, Okay. So I come home. And when I was in Chicago my four hundred dollars ran out. I had to have my older brother wire me some money to get home, and so that was sad. And then I was driving home still with the top down, driving everywhere with the top down. And finally one of my contacts from all the wind, like hardened and cracked—

ALBIN: Oh no—

PARKER: —in half or whatever. It was like, Oh shit. So I drove all the way [home] from Chicago with one contact.²⁷ Because of course I didn't have any glasses. I don't know what I was thinking. So I'm (laughs) driving one-eyed all the way home. And it was on the weekend kind of. And I called my dad on Friday and I said, Oh my God you've got to go to the eye doctor and get me a right contact because I'm going to get home and it's the weekend and I'm not going to be able to get one until Monday. And that's the first time, I think, my mom or my dad knew that I was—had been gone for—I mean, I think I was gone, in the end, maybe nine days or something between all this driving. And so I got home and this must have been the first part of July, and the first issue came out in September.

ALBIN: Wow. So how did you set all that up to—What did you have to do in between that time to produce a paper?

²⁷ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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PARKER: I know, it was just like, Boom, and in two months it was done. And it was—it was freaky. I had been sitting around drinking at some other friend's house that were in charge of the student group at WSU. And I said, I'm going to start a paper. I'm going to do this and I want to do this and this and this and this. And one of the guys there was from Arkansas that night. And he came back later and he said, I'll be damned. I thought you were kidding. We're sitting around drinking and you're going to do this and this and this. I come back four months later and the second issue's out. Well, that's kind of how I operate. I—it's kind of like when I'm going to quit my job, boom, there's my two weeks' notice, bye. And so I—I don't know. I mean I'm a business woman.²⁸
(laughs)

ALBIN: But how did you get start-up funds to do it?

PARKER: Okay, so I did—I asked my older brother and he turned me down which made me really mad, and I'm still mad about it if Todd finds this on the web. And (laughs) so—and so I asked my mom and my mom gave me a thousand dollars. She would give me a thousand dollars to start the paper and I said, Okay. And I think at the time she probably gave it to me and said, Get this out of your system and go back to being an accountant, silly. And so a thousand dollars and I bought a phone line and an office chair and the first printing, and then it was out. And I'd set up—I originally set up the paper—okay. So all this silly little stuff went on. I made—I think I still have the [notes] all sitting around thinking up a name and what I want to call it, I used triangle a lot and Lambda and blah, blah, blah, blah, and the Gazette and whatever, whatever, Gay Gazette or the Gayzette or something, I don't know, (laughs) Pride Pages or the Pink Pages or—it would be funny to go look at that piece of paper.²⁹ And I saved it for old time's sake in a file called start-up notes. And I wonder what else is in there? Probably a bunch of fun stuff like I originally filed as a nonprofit and then I realized that that wasn't going to benefit me very much.

Somewhere in this time Peri Jude Radevic, who was in charge of National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, was the executive director had come to town as a speaker for Pride or some rally, Stonewall 25 Rally. And I had met her and we had become friends

²⁸ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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sort of. And she said that I could go to Creating Change and stay in her hotel room. I have all these like funny whatever—if I could get to Dallas I have a free place to stay. And you know Kristi, I'm there. So I—and I get to stay in the suite of the executive director who put on the whole shit and shebang. So I met so many people hanging out with her. I met Kate Clinton, I met Mel White, I met—he was a plenary speaker. Well anyway, at one of those—so that was in November, I think it's in November every year. So that was October—September, October—yeah, the first issue was September, October and then November I was at Creating Change. And I had gone to some conference who said, No, you can't be a nonprofit. Advertising income is taxable anyway, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So I filed Articles of Incorporation and—when I came back from Creating Change and switched it from a nonprofit in Kansas to a corporation and also for the umbrella of liability, a release for myself in case Fred decided to go crazy and sue me.

ALBIN: And why would Fred want to sue you?

PARKER: What?

ALBIN: Why would Fred want to sue you?

PARKER: Fred Phelps sued everybody—

ALBIN: Okay—

PARKER: —at that time.

ALBIN: Okay, so this was just like protection ahead of time?

PARKER: Yeah.

ALBIN: Okay.

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PARKER: Because Fred—in case I ever said anything about him. He liked to sue people because that didn't cost him anything, it would run up my legal bills and put me out of business, which he had done that to several places, things. So I had done that, I knew how to do that, I knew about the Articles of Incorporation. I knew how to do business stuff. I mean, I knew all the accounting obviously and I knew—what I didn't have was a lick of journalism experience, not one lick, and not one lick of graphic design or any of the thing that it takes to put a paper together. But in hindsight that may have been the key to keeping it in business is because I had the business. I had six years of business college in the business, and accounting and the money and the—all of that, the entrepreneurial. I was like three, six credit hours from a minor in entrepreneurship from WSU and that had really interested me. And so, Hell, you can find somebody to do the graphic design. You can write the stories. I don't need to know anything about all that. So I—so a lot of the people like sitting around that night that we were drinking talking about a paper and offered to write for me—and I'll write for you and I'll write for you. And they were in charge of the student organization.

And I think that I just happened to go down there to the *Sunflower*, which was the WSU student newspaper, and said—and actually I met with an advertising salesperson. And I got in there and I'm like, Oh I don't want to advertise, I want to know how you get advertisers. (laughs) I want to know how you get them, how much you charge them, how much—and bless their heart. I think—I think most people you come up to and you ask shit like that and you try to learn from them and they're scared to say—what the hell are you in here doing this? I don't have time for you. And it was a student and they were nice and—and he said, Oh we could lay out the paper for you. Our student editor could do it on the side for extra money, ten bucks an hour or something and could lay it out for you. And you know what, we—I could introduce you to the printer where we print the *Sunflower*. It's a really great guy, a communications professor used to own part of it at WSU and I'll take you out there and—next thing you know I'm hooked up.

ALBIN: And this was for your first issue?

PARKER: Yeah.

ALBIN: Wow.

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PARKER: And so I'm just like, Wow. So I—seeing Melissa Etheridge was in concert in Leavenworth in August and I saw some picture online and e-mailed—no, not e-mail. I talked to the *Leavenworth Times* photographer and she sold me a photo for the cover of Melissa Etheridge in concert up there. And shit, I was—by then I was on the board of The Center [Wichita GLBT community center] as the treasurer. I was on the board of several organizations as the treasurer—was on the board of 10 Percent which was the group at WSU with those friends, and I was on the board of KFHD which was Kansans for Human Dignity that was the overseeing board of The Center, and I was the treasurer for that. I was on WGLA [Wichita Gay and Lesbian Alliance] still as an at-large member, still as the Pride chairperson. And I was—so I was—and The Center, I mean, was like a hub of people. And I had met Bruce through the Stonewall 25 local committee. And by that time I was fairly well connected from my being in charge of Pride and doing all that stuff. And the books—worked at the bookstore and they had a lot of contacts and everything. And so everybody was really great.

Everybody volunteered to do stories. I paid the student editor at WSU to lay it out. They showed me how to make it camera ready and go out to the printer. And I will have to say the people at Valley Offset Printing where I've gotten it printed, I did the same thing to the owner. It was a father and a son. And I went to the son all the time and said, Why'd this picture turn out too dark? What needs to happen that this picture can't be too dark? And why did this happen like this and what—why do I have to go in four pages and sixteen pages? And how much is it going to cost me to do this and this and this? And what happens if I do this? And what if I do that? And what—and he would just sit there and answer my endless questions. God, who does that? I didn't know anything. I didn't know anything about the printing process, about the negatives, about the—oh we—and talking about it just the other day with somebody about how things have changed. It was really weird. I mean, at that time we did paste-up. And it's not that we cut and pasted the stories. We printed out the stories already in a layout program, but the ads every month were with a reusable glue stick and we stuck them down in spots. You left spots for ads and you left black boxes for pictures. And you took the picture and you figured out a percentage that went into this black box and you—I didn't know any of this. And so then you—they shoot the picture at the printer with an actual camera and the pages with an actual camera and slice the negatives into

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the negatives. And then every month we would come home with the negatives because we figured out that you would get better quality if you reused a negative instead of double shooting a picture. And so we would slice apart some of the negatives. And you can't throw away negatives, you have—they have mercury and whatever. You have to have it recycled.³⁰ And so every month we'd take all the ads off and put them on boards. And we had a drafting table because my dad's an architect and I had an old drafting table. And we had little X-Acto knives and we had to cut color out of the red, flimsy plastic and put it where you wanted the places that were color.

And woo, I learned a ton. And it was—it was a whole—Hello—It was a huge learning experience and I'm—I still worked at the bookstore and this woman, the owner of the bookstore, had gotten some woman's number for me because she thought she was cute and I should know her, and she knew how to do graphic design because she worked on her college newspaper as a student and she was here in town. And then some other friend of mine who ended up being partners with Peri Jude Radecic who we introduced [her] while Peri Jude was here.³¹ She ended up marrying her and moving her to—with her. And she had been on the plane next to this woman and been talking about the paper and that she knew the person who'd started the paper and I should meet this person and whatever. And so then the next thing you know Vinnie was calling me. And this was this woman who—and I said to Renee, Why are you giving women my phone number from the bookstore? [She] said, [Well I] only give it to cute women.³²

Okay. So Vinnie was really pushy. She was a northeast Jew who spoke her mind and got what she wanted and young, twenty-two years old. She had moved here after a really bad breakup in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, no Shippensburg where she had went to college, and had packed up all her stuff and moved to Kansas, because she had an aunt here and she needed to get away from this woman. So—sound familiar. So she wanted to meet with me and so I said, Okay. And I went over there and she went on and on about the things she could do to my paper and how cool she could make it and great and grow and (makes noise) and I went, Wait a minute. I—that's my baby, my paper, my—I don't want you touching it, you crazy woman, you're like too pushy. You're

³⁰ Edited by narrator during the review process.

³¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

³² Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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going to take over and ruin it. So I wouldn't—so I didn't want her to come near me. But then (unintelligible) she kept calling and invited me to go to a folk concert up in—where's that place up there that has the old—I don't know, anyway, up in Newton maybe. And so we went to see Cosy Sheridan up there together. And I think that was kind of maybe our first date, well I don't know. So anyway—so then I wouldn't let her touch the paper but we started dating and—(laughs) I've always joked that I had my priorities. (laughs) I'll let you in my bed but don't touch my paper. (laughs) Come on, be real. (laughs) So Vinnie and I [laugh] about that all the time.³³ So that was our first—I don't know why. Our anniversary must have been our first date, something was December 8th. So this was just like—like I said, December, October—September, October, November—

ALBIN: Four months.

PARKER: So Vinnie would go down with me to the student paper and—while they were laying it out and then she did a couple things on the computer, I think, trying to show me that she really did know what she was doing. This was in February, maybe January and—yeah January—December for January's paper. And then I started thinking, Well maybe she does know what—some of the stuff she was doing was—looked better than the student worker. I was like, Well maybe I'll let her—so Vinnie did the whole February issue and that was [the] first time I'd let her near it, so see it was like two months.³⁴ So I don't know, it was kind of like me and Vinnie got together and she never left my house, (laughs) like a bunch of lesbians are known to do. She stayed over and then never went home. And so we lived together and we had—Neither one of us had jobs. She had worked for Penny Power in town laying out ads and doing stuff. It was where her aunt had worked. But she had just recently quit. And before me she had been dating a woman that worked there as well and they split up and the rest is history.

We—we were together about ten-and-a-half years and did the paper all that time together and made our livings from the paper all that time—periodically had part-time jobs on and off to get through some hard times and to pay off some bills and do different

³³ Edited by narrator during the review process.

³⁴ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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things, but then really our main income from that day forward from—for me really from the thousand dollars my mom gave me forward, ended up supporting me, which was really amazing and not how I learned how to do it at all in business school, and broke every rule that I was supposed to ever do. I mean, I started the business underfunded, I started trying to live off of it, I—I did everything wrong that I knew was how you start a business and run a business and whatever. But hey it was like by the seat of my pants and it was—it was a movement (laughs) I feel like. And the paper always ran off of volunteers. And still to this day every columnist is a volunteer and several reporters are volunteers. And people still come to me and want to write and don't want to be paid. And God, I never would have made it without all of the support and all of the way the community has rallied around the paper to help with distribution to—just everybody was excited about it. And it was—I don't know, it was—must have been the right thing at the right time.

ALBIN: When you put out your first issue, how many issues did you distribute?

PARKER: I way overestimated. I printed a ton, five thousand or something, but I think I ended up distributing about 1200, and God I wish I had those extras today, because I've been out of the first issue and people want it and it's like historic now and I have one left. And I remember all those stacked in my garage that I wish I had back now that all went to the paper recycling. But it was twelve pages and it had five advertisers. And one of the pictures was backwards. (laughs) An old negative thing—if you look real closely at one of the pictures the words read in the mirror. (laughs) (unintelligible)

And—you know it started out—the whole basis of it started out really that I felt like there was so much going on in Kansas and in Wichita particularly that nobody knew about. There were clusters of people and—but like I told you, I was on the board of WSU, of The Center, of Pride of the—of all these different things that I feel like nobody was interconnected.³⁵ WGLA was a really cool thing, but if you weren't involved in one of those organizations—it was like there was all this whole huge community at the bars and everywhere where it's like nobody knew. And there had been papers and there were papers. And the one that was here for a really long time was called the *Parachute*

³⁵ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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and it had just been sold to somebody in Oklahoma and it was sort of losing its Kansas presence. And that happened right before I started, I mean maybe two, three months. And there was the *News Telegraph* in Kansas City and the *Gayly Oklahoman* in Oklahoma. And then the guy that had started the *Parachute* had tried to start another one but that only lasted two or three months, because there's not—I still believe there's not room for two here and—to make a good living. But they were really focused on the bars, the papers in the past—were focused on the bars, were really male oriented, had a lot of, for better or worse, a lot of naked chests and nudity. And chat lines back then were big, the 1-900 numbers were big. It was before the Internet. And the—and they—it was—for women, it was seen as sleazy.

So it didn't—it didn't reach a big part of the community, but I think for a lot of professional men and for any men, I don't know, it just seemed like it had a downtrodden following that read those magazines, and that when we came along—and this is what I believe one of the things that has kept me in business is the professionalism that we try to approach it as—I mean, my mom gave me the money to start it. I sent her a copy from the very first time. If my mom couldn't see it, then it didn't go in there because I—she was my backing. So if I was embarrassed for my mom then it wouldn't go in. And we refused to take 900 numbers, which was a really risky business decision because they were the bread and butter of most of the money of the papers back then. And we refused to run big, I don't know, just naked guys on every page. Now we did run naked guys, I mean from the chest up when I say naked, but for the most part it was tactful and tried to be—and so hence, we not only got a lot of advertisers that wouldn't advertise in the other papers—not just the gay bars, but we got jewelry stores and therapists—and a therapist was in the very first issue—and a chiropractor, and stuff like that.

But also we were the first paper in the state to go to Borders and say, I want to distribute, and to go to Barnes & Noble, and go to straight coffee shops and to go to just places where the paper could be out in straight places and that everyday people could see it and that turned out to be huge. And our other—and our main philosophy was too that there weren't—my business philosophy was that there aren't enough gay or gay-owned businesses in Kansas to support a well-published paper. There's got to be support from the gay ally community and from the gay-friendly community and from the

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not gay-friendly people who want our money. And so we called—we decided— Vinnie, I told you, was brash. (laughs) She was our ad salesperson. We called anybody and everybody and they were gay friendly until they told us they weren't. And so we called the gas station across the street from the Fantasy and said, So many gay people get gas at your gas station, you need to advertise. And you know what, he did. He was like a 65-year-old straight man who said, Well you're probably right. And I'll be damned if Vinnie didn't get him to buy an ad. She went down there, it was a Total station, and she laid out an ad for him and she took him a proof and we had the Total Station. But it was stuff like that. It was like, We'd call and say, Gay people need insurance. Why don't you advertise? Gay people buy clothes; (laughs) gay people buy furniture. Why don't you—and some—and some people hung up on us and some people said, Gross, (laughs) No I wouldn't be interested in such a thing.

ALBIN: And have you noticed that has changed over the years at all when you call for new ads?

PARKER: No, actually a rug store told me that just the other day.

ALBIN: Really?

PARKER: A week ago Friday. I walked in and I said, We're running a special, thought you might be interested, a Persian rug place. And they said, No I don't think we have any interest in any of that. Okay. That's fine. No harm. (laughs) But the economy's gotten so bad that I—we made a decision a month ago or so that we just needed to do a little bit more blanketing. You know, we'd gotten comfortable in our support and people and how to do it that I thought, I'm just going to go walk down Douglas, which is what I did, me and Brad, a writer. We walked down Douglas and we went to the Speedy Cash place, we went to the barbershop, we went to the Mexican restaurant, the—and just went—the liquor store and on down and the Persian rug place, and there were a couple of rude people. And the woman at the liquor store got back to me and said, No thank you. And whatever, but we—now, 2009, I mean it's not near as scary as it was in 1994.

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But there were—there are so many funny stories about the paper and so many landmarks that we reached. I mean, we used to do the paper—I had a—I was an IBM person because I was an accountant and Vinnie was like, Ah, you have to have a Mac, I'm a graphics person. It was like, No. And I was the boss, No. So we did—we—on my old 486. I went and bought a computer like the day before I had quit my job because I knew I could get financing before I didn't have a job. So I bought a new computer, a 486 IBM processor and that thing was so slow. And when it got to be production weekend and Vinnie's graphics program was so slow on that thing that we slept in shifts. Like I would get up and edit during the day and she was a night person and I'd sleep and then she'd sleep in the day and get up at night and do the—because we only had one computer.

ALBIN: Right. Right. Your dog is eating a Kleenex. Is that okay?

PARKER: That's okay.

ALBIN: Okay. (laughs)

PARKER: That's gross, but that's okay. Skeeter? But so then there was like the landmark when we got a second computer, there was a landmark when we hit bulk mail on our subscriptions, and there was a landmark when we had over \$100,000 in sales for the year from my mom's measly thousand dollars. And there was the landmark when—when we got our first national ad, there was—when we got our first national advertising agency. And there are just some funny, funny, funny things over fifteen years of doing the paper that—people call a lot just because they don't know what kind of paper we are and they either find us in the phonebook—lots of people call think we're the daily, want to put a car ad in. And I'll say, Sir do you know you've called the gay and lesbian paper? This guy said, You're shittin' me. In Kansas? Yeah, wasn't sure you meant to. Do you want to put your car ad in? Well no, but I'm glad to know you're there. (laughs) And I'm like, Well all right then. Do you know the number to the dailies? No, it's in the phonebook sir. I was like, No I'm not—information. It's called the *Wichita Eagle*. That happens a ton of people calling, and [we'll] say, Do you know you've called?³⁶ And

³⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

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they'll say, What? And it's never because I haven't said it loud enough. It's always, The gay and lesbian paper. Really? Yes. Yes, [you're] talking to a real live lesbian on the phone.³⁷ Have you ever done that before? So at eighteen months we had reached the landmark of being the longest running gay paper in Kansas history.

ALBIN: Wow.

PARKER: So the *Parachute* had lasted seventeen months before, and that was the record we had to break, that we were shooting for. And when we broke it we called the *Wichita Eagle* and said, You need to do a story on us. We are the longest running gay paper in Kansas. And she did. She—they sent a reporter over. They interviewed me and Vinnie and they did a great article on us. And she got in touch with Bruce at the archives and Rob Gutzman. And they looked up how many other papers had been in Kansas. And so they reported in the *Eagle* that there had been twenty-seven others that had tried and failed, and the longest one being seventeen months, and that—and that there had been ones back in '77, maybe in the eighties, maybe around in there and that's the longest—we were the longest one. And it was a really cool article, and we—and so then when we hit five years we had a really big party and invited all of our advertisers, past and present, and all of our writers, past and present—everybody who cared anything about anything, my grandma, my mom, my stepdad, my brothers.

Everybody came and we had silly hors d'oeuvres and keg beer and we gave a presentation on all the past of the *Liberty Press* and we made a special five-year anniversary edition that was just like six pages that had silly games and trivia and like match this writer with this name and printed all their pictures. And you had to draw lines and guess how many people have advertised and how many countries and subscribers all over the country. And that was pretty fun. And then me and Vinnie were hitting a rocky patch in our personal relationship around the ten-year anniversary one and so we had a small private gathering at the Hyatt with some of the paper's biggest supporters and just had a little anniversary celebration for ten there. But now we're leading up in September to fifteen so we're thinking about another big bash to celebrate that. But one of my favorite stories about the paper is (unintelligible).

³⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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ALBIN: Let me change the tape before we get to that because I had like—

PARKER: Am I talking too long?

ALBIN: No, not at all. I just have like three minutes left and—you'll get right to the good part and there won't be any tape and it'll be like, It's lost. Okay so as you were saying, the good part, the good story.

PARKER: Yeah. As you can imagine, there are stories upon stories upon stories of after fifteen years of doing the only gay paper in Kansas. But one of them is that Vinnie and I got really used to being just really out in Kansas and not being—not having very many bad experiences and not having very much trouble. We always tell people when they call and ask about the climate, I mean the political climate sucks. It has, it still does. But for the most part, I haven't run into any—knock on wood—I've never been faxed by Fred which I was horribly disappointed by because damn, after all this work I at least deserved a fax before that stopped, but oh well. So Vinnie has a shirt that said, You ain't nothing until you've been faxed by Fred, because they sold those at the bookstore. And the front of the shirt said, because this is what he loved to call people at the time in his faxes was, [Jezebelain] switch-hitting whore.³⁸ So the front of the shirt says, [Jezebelian] switch-hitting whore and on the back says, You ain't nothing until you've been faxed by Fred.³⁹ I would like that shirt back.

So we went and bought magnets for the car. Who knows why? And we just—I don't know.⁴⁰ Maybe it was—I think maybe it was to help with delivery so we can pull in front of places, illegally park, and run in and drop the papers and run out, so people could see we were a delivery vehicle, and maybe it was because we wanted to drive our car in the parade. I don't even remember the motivation behind it. But so we went and we drew up these pretty little magnet layouts and took them down to the magnet guy and got magnets made, real—car magnets big that says, The Liberty Press serving gay and lesbian Kansans since 1994, and our phone number. Yeah silly. So I didn't even think

³⁸ Edited by narrator during the review process.

³⁹ Edited by narrator during the review process.

⁴⁰ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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anything about driving around—actually, I didn't think about it, about plastering a magnet on my car in 24-inch fonts that said, Gay, until the first time we took them out to deliver (laughs) and there were so many stares and so many—and one car drove by, a sedan, filled with two straight couples honked and did thumbs up, little PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] parents (unintelligible).

And then there was—like we were sitting in front of Barnes and Noble and this little teenage boy walks by and then very coyly walks back and walks by (laughs) again (unintelligible) and pointing to his friends—You see what that says? And there have been the times when I've been pulled over on the highway, which Lord knows why I've pulled over, but somebody honking at me and What? What are you, going to kill me by the side of the road? No, can we get an issue? (laughter) It's like, Okay pull over. So we pull (laughs) over like, Whoa I had no idea. So for the most part it really has been positive. I mean, I'll be at QuickTrip and I'll be a little bit hesitant to pull in with the magnets on the car and I'll see people staring at me. And one time I was a little bit leery about this one person staring at me and then she reached over and she said, Can I have a copy of that? Sure enough. And so we were delivering and the magnets, it's always an adventure.

And (laughs) (unintelligible)—and we were down in Haysville which, if you're not from Kansas that's the trailer park, redneck suburb of Wichita that gets all the jokes for being hicks. And we're going on a dirt road to the x-rated video store that delivers—that distributes in Haysville. And so we pull into the dirt parking lot and Vinnie—our delivery was always that I drove around and Vinnie'd hop out and take the papers in. And as Vinnie was in the bookstore a guy comes out. And he gets into his Trans Am and he looks over at the magnets. And he screeches his tires into all this dust and he [yells], Perverts! (laughs) and drove off.⁴¹ And I was flabbergasted. I like sat there and was like, But—but—I like couldn't get anything out before he drove away. And all I could get out was, But I'm working. (laughs) Wait a minute, you're in the nasty bookstore and I'm working and [you're calling] me a pervert?⁴² And I thought, You know, if there was a social scale still of the hierarchy of the power positions that you hear about in sociology class, queers have got to be on the lowest of the totem pole, because I can get yelled at

⁴¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁴² Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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sitting in the parking lot of a triple-rated bookstore and get called names (laughs) by a guy that came out of a video booth, and a pervert. (laughs) But at least—(laughs) So the irony of that. And (unintelligible) I love that. I love that example of where we stand sometimes in people's minds and in the course of Kansas that yeah, I have two college degrees and a very well-run business but I don't amount to very much in the eyes of some people here.

ALBIN: So what's your distribution like now?

PARKER: The distribution—the magnets have gotten stolen over the years, and I think they would be the funniest kitchen magnets—

ALBIN: I think so—

PARKER: I agree. And I—one of them was stolen on a—on the college [campus] so that's funny.⁴³ But then we'd get them replaced and then—and now I'm down to like two kind of motley put together ones that don't match. And so I like drive around with them on now. And you know what I did notice the other day is that I didn't finish up delivery in one day and so I had to finish up on Monday from my do-it-on-a-Friday and do-it-on-a-Monday. And you know what, I forgot they were on there and drove around with them all weekend. And I was like, That's a step. I was surprised. Usually I take them off and throw them face down. I don't want to go pick Jack up from school with the big gay magnets. But then I was like—I was too lazy. I wanted to leave them on for Monday. And I thought, Well that's got to be progress, I don't know. I don't get—I still get asked for copies at stuff. I take them off less often than I would normally. I don't know. I've always said if you want an adventure I'll loan them to you and you can drive around and do a little study, because there's never a dull moment when you have big gay magnets on the side of your car usually. Because it's—over the years it's been—I mean, me and Vinnie did that way early. And we thought it was about money. We can afford magnets. (laughs) No idea what we were getting into until—I don't know. I don't know, it's funny.

⁴³ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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So the convertible—the karaoke convertible, we used to call it, because Vinnie loved to sing. And so Vinnie would practice when she was supposed to be performing for a benefit or somewhere. We'd put the top down and play the karaoke tape and she'd sing at the top of her lungs, which is what we were doing one day coming (laughs) from a Pride [meeting].⁴⁴ We used to run around with the Pride—I was in charge of Pride for five years in the end, from '94 to '99. In '99 I was training the people who were taking over. And so we used to drive around with the Pride merchandise and stuff in our car constantly, because we were always out at the bar selling it or doing something. And so we had the buttons in a box with the money, incidentally, stuffed in there. And we're doing karaoke convertible and we're flying down Kellogg. And we go into the merge lane onto the Canal Route and must have hit the wind current wherever it was down the sloping thing. And right about mid-ramp everything went flying out of the back of the car, and the button box. And then of course it flew up in the air and I saw it in the rearview mirror. And I went, Oh shit, and it (laughs) fell face down on the concrete and splattered, all of that year's buttons.

They were '95 buttons so it had to be that very next year, and all the money. So of course doing what a responsible Pride chairperson would do, I pulled over on the side of the highway and me and Vinnie are running back and forth crossing the different semis and shit, picking up buttons and money and checks and blah, blah, blah, watch out. (makes noise) Then a car would drive by and it'd hit a button and ping. (laughs) I said, Get it, get, get, get, get. We picked up all the buttons that we could find. And you know what, we didn't lose a dollar, not one. We got every one recovered. And some of the buttons were very much worse for the wear, they had (laughs) been smashed. And you know if I had been smart I would have thrown those away, but I am an anal accountant who counts on inventory. And I had to know the button count before (laughs) we lost the buttons and after and (makes noise)

So Bruce got a hold of a couple of the smashed buttons and then it made it into the archives and have been the tale of many stories that nobody would ever know that Vinnie and I could go to our grave with if we had not been an anal accountant that needed the inventory. We would have trashed them and nobody would ever have

⁴⁴ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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known that any of that had happened. Bruce got his hands on a couple and of course insisted on keeping some of them. He probably bought them, which I was probably ecstatic about because I thought I had wasted them and this was better for my inventory. And the next thing I know it's a really funny story. But that's probably—I don't know if that was the same year, or in one of those years, (laughs) was the year we got doubled booked with the cattle drive. I think it was the hundredth or the 125th anniversary of Wichita.

So I mean we could figure out what year it was if I knew when Wichita was founded. But they had booked a cattle—they were going to do a cattle drive to celebrate the hundredth anniversary or whatever of Wichita. And they had rented (laughs) a hundred of the cows from—well-behaving cows from Hollywood or whatever—(laughs) Hollywood cows so that they wouldn't run off the road and whatever. And the traffic—the guy that was head of traffic, I wish that I could remember his name, was the guy who I always got my parade route approved by who had made the mistake of double booking us, not only on the same day, which would have been maybe workable, but on the same damned street. And not only on the same street, but my festival was still at Cowtown. Oh, so it had to be '95—'96. Anyway—I can't remember how many years we did Cowtown. Well anyway, we were supposed to end up at the same place.

ALBIN: Oh and the same route?

PARKER: On the same route at the same place at Cowtown. The cows were going to Cowtown, obviously and the queers were going to Cowtown which is where the festival was, where we had the parade lined up at approximately the same time. And if not the same time it was going to be horrible if theirs was first anyway because they couldn't get rid of the cows that very day. So the cop said to me, You probably don't want to be downwind from a hundred head of cattle for your festival that are going to be standing outside of Cowtown with nothing to do. And I said, You know, you're probably right. So he called—the cop called and said, Oh my God Kristi you're going to kill me and I don't know what I'm going to do and I've screwed up horribly and mama, mama, ma, and he groveled and groveled and groveled. And I said, You know what, Lieutenant whatever, who became a good friend of mine later, I will move my event, (laughs) but you will owe

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me big. Because I had already booked speakers, I had already—for the rally beforehand.

I had already done all of this different stuff and we had already set the dates and all of that, and I had to move everything for him. And when he said to me, I don't know what we're going to do about all the cattle. (laughs) I mean, they're well-behaved cows but (laughs) (unintelligible). I don't think you want to have your event next to them. And I said, Well we can bill it as Queers and Steers. (laughs) And he thought that was really funny (laughs) and said, You know, that's not a bad idea. I was kidding. I was kidding. We don't—we don't want to do that. I will move my event. You owe me. Wherever I want to drive my parade around the city you're going to let me with police escorts because (laughs) I did this for you. And he was—he was very workable and nice and the cops have—and during my tenure, anyway, the cops had been very cool with any of the traffic patrol that they had to give us that day.

One year there were protesters that weren't Phelps' clan but were some other ones. And the cops went up to them and asked them if they had a permit, which I don't think you have to have a permit. But they said, No they didn't. And he said, Well then you have to leave. And it—which I think it was a total just like red herring to get the protesters away from our event. And then they said—well one guy did say, Well we don't have to have a permit. We can counter protest. And their signs had sticks. And he said, Those sticks are considered weapons. You don't want to go downtown do you? And so then they did eventually leave. But I feel like the cooperation with police from that point forward and that guy was so cool and nice and was always happy to see me every year—Kristi, love to see ya. How have you been, and every year until he got transferred to the bomb squad and I lost my in, but that wasn't until way later. But it had been really fun, the different things that we had done.

And the Pride festival grew and grew and grew when me and Vinnie were in charge of it. And we eventually moved to the back of the Indian Center and had it—and had the event there, which was a wonderful event. It was the most we'd ever had. It was around eight hundred people at the festival, and in '98 or I think '97, '98 that was amazing. It was 106 degrees out. So it was incredibly hot. But we had Sister Sledge there to sing our family anthem that me and Vinnie had booked. We had—I mean, we

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put together some of the biggest stages and the biggest—we had free HIV testing. We were trying to get the next year the mammogram mobile to have onsite mammograms. We had a health fair that had presenters all during the day with different doctors and stuff talking about things like coming out to your health care provider, things you needed to know about breast cancer, all the different things. We had a Kansas authors book signing table that we had all the people there from including Peggy Jarman who had written the book on the *Summer of Mercy* with the abortion protests. And we had an acoustic stage and a live stage. We had the Neon Girls at the acoustic stage and Women Without Purses. And we had comedians on the main stage—Bob Smith, Paul Williams, all kinds of people. And that year we also had the [woman] that sings "Stormy Weather", and I can't remember—Viola Wills, the old dance club diva.⁴⁵ And we had the International Mr. Bear, we flew him in to emcee. We had a little country guy out of San Francisco named David A. Morse who came and provided our country—I mean, we tried to do everything. We had KGRA [Kansas Gay Rodeo Association] set up carnival games to raise money and we had the bears and MCC do the food for a fundraiser, and then Pride sold the beer and the soda and water for their part of it. I mean, we had sign language for all the stages available. We had—I mean, it was just—it was just this magnificent thing.

Vinnie was the Pridefest director on the board and she handled lots of it. And we did stuff. And I mean, she had the same attitude we had with the paper. One time she called BullFrog sunscreen and said, We need sunscreen for our people at Pride. Can you send us two thousand samples and we'll put you as a sponsor? And they're like, You know that's not a bad idea. It was like outreach to the gay community with BullFrog sunscreen samples. And it was so funny. And we found one place, one Pride, that had extra whistles that said like, Tweet your Pride (laughs) I can't remember what it said, Make Noise for Pride or something. And they had printed way too many. And so they sold them to us for like ten cents each. And we handed out these annoying whistles that everybody tweeted everywhere along. And we had—we had—we were the first ones to have the trolley to where you parked at the festival and rode the trolley to the parade, the start of the parade, and it shuffled people back and forth beforehand. And

⁴⁵ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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then the trolley was at the end of the parade that people could ride in if they weren't able to walk the entire route. That was really neat. And so the trolley was in the parade.

And then we had—we had the Rally Speakers and one year we had Mel White and one year we had—since Stonewall 25 was the instigator of the paper and my whole life, we had the executive director of Stonewall 25 from New York Pride agenda come and speak, and he was great to have here. And he brought a 25-foot section of the mile long rainbow flag that had been at Stonewall 25 with him for everybody in Wichita to carry, which was very cool. And then one year we had—we contacted the Lesbian Avengers in New York because Vinnie and I loved them, and asked if we could fly an Avenger in to speak, (laughs) we just want an Avenger. We don't care who, just anybody. So one of the founders came and spoke. And I think half of Wichita—probably—not half, probably 99% of Wichita didn't know who the Lesbian Avengers were. But it was cool. Vinnie and I always thought it was so cool that we could do—so we had—I mean, we put together—for a while when I was in charge of Pride for two, three years, I made it a ten-day event because I wanted to be like the Wichita River Festival.

So I wanted to have a kickoff Friday and then we had events at the bars all week long, and I met with the bar owners and we had different events that were really fun. And we had a street dance with a live band outside of the old R&R where Club Glacier is now, and the Fantasy. And we tried to get that street blocked off between the Fantasy and the R&R so people could go back and forth but that's a really main thoroughfare for Boeing. So on a Friday they wouldn't let us block that street. But I don't know, we just had fun events. And of course the GALA [Gay and Lesbian Awards] Awards were in that ten days and we had a guy that, Ric Tribue, who did a wonderful job of the gay awards who has since died. And I don't know, it was just—it was fantastic. We had a gay skating party during our—during our Pride week and you got in free with a button. And you know, being the accountant that I am, I figured out that there's a loophole in the Kansas sales tax law that if you use a button as admission to any of your events, which I'm sure is written for the River Festival, then you don't have to pay tax on them. So it was like, Well hell we could be part—we don't have to pay tax on our button sales. So we made it the admission to the skating party and admission to a couple of other things. So the skating party was free because to rent the skating rink wasn't very much money.

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We figure we—and it was popular. (laughs) It was fun. Oh we had all kinds of stuff during Pride and during all of that.

ALBIN: And with all these events going on at any point like having so many things happen, were people ever concerned about safety issues with having ten days of gay things happening?

PARKER: No. And Fred Phelps had never been back since the skinheads scared him. And so he wasn't ever a part of any of it. And I—yeah, I don't ever remember being worried about security or we had security. Not that we hired, we just found big guys like my little brother (laughs) to be security. And I don't know, we—no, I never really felt in danger. And we—it seems—things seemed to happen. And like any—I feel like communities go through this a lot, but it got to be where people saw Vinnie and me as having too much power and so there was some real erosion and personal attacks and real political fighting over how we were—the things were so big and cool that now I have people e-mail the paper and say, God you remember when Pride was by the Indian Center how cool that was and why isn't—and it makes me laugh because they don't know it was me, and so it just is kind of sweet. But I mean it was big. It never had been that big in the nineties. I mean, it's been that big since but back then nothing like it. I could have never imagined—when there were five hundred people and the cops turned the wrong way one time on our parade route and made us go like an extra half mile or something. And I ran up to the police guy, the guy on the motorcycle. I said, Where the fuck are you going? And Vinnie just looked at me and just like looked at the cop and was like, Is he going to arrest her? Because I was like right in his face cussing and—Stop, like you were supposed to go straight here, not around this big, gigantic curve.

And then you know Bruce jokes because that was the best part of the parade because it curved around this part in Riverside Park where you can see the parade and it stretched for almost that entire half mile of floats and [colors] and all the stuff.⁴⁶ And it was the biggest parade we'd had ever up until that point. And it was beautiful. And of course I'm running up and down it going, You all are beautiful, I love you. I'm so glad to see you out there. You having fun? And all this stuff because it just—that was the parade

⁴⁶ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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with the 106-degree heat. And at one point towards the end of the day—we had little walkie-talkies that we rented so we could keep abreast of the festival site. And I got on my walkie-talkie and I said, This is Kristi...(laughs) I'm so hot and so tired. I was like, This is Kristi. And then everybody (unintelligible) like, Are you okay honey? Oh sorry. (laughs) I forgot what I was going to say. I'm so tired I think I have heatstroke. (laughs) I'm going to die. And it was funny. We had such a good team. We had people— It's kind of like the paper that I feel like. I felt such camaraderie, and I was an asshole as a chairperson. I was demanding and I had no patience for screw-ups and not following through and I—and I just expected the world. But it's what I expected of myself so people went with it. I mean, they—I got in arguments with people and we went around and around, but there was this certain level of, Kristi does and Vinnie do all of this and they don't expect any less from us. And so there were some people who came on just for the day in those five years in Pride.

There was this woman who was a PE teacher that just came on the day as my volunteer coordinator, and she told people where to go, what to do, how to do it, when to get back. And you know what, she didn't ever even ask me or need to talk to me. She knew the shit, she'd take care of it, I could trust her, and you go, go. And I had a whole bunch of people like that, that could do the—I had a stage manager that could do that, a sound person. My sound person was an electrician who set up all the wiring to all the different places that [needed it].⁴⁷ And it's like, You do—do it. Go set up the—I want this shit to work. And they would. And it was so fun and cool. And they probably all hated me in the end, but we had the best time. And seeing the number of people. And we made—I mean, our budget from that \$1500 was up to just under \$25,000 when I resigned, that we had made it so big and we'd had so many—we sold so many buttons and everything was so cool. And somewhere in between that time PFLAG had asked me to—they had a youth group that was really well established for 14- to 18-year-olds that was run by some parents. But the 18-year-olds were saying that they sort of felt just like dumped off with nowhere to go really and they weren't able to get into the bars yet and there wasn't much to do for the eighteen to twenty-one. And they asked me and Vinnie to facilitate an older youth group from eighteen to twenty-four. And by that point we had a Pride office.

⁴⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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There was—after the one gay and lesbian bookstore closed of Renee and Raye Ann's, Mother's more of a gift shop, didn't carry books, opened down, right across the street from the Fantasy. And he had—there was a little bit of extra room that was like part of his space but there was a wall in between them that we made it into the Pride office with this really cool logo on the wall and that's where we had the kids—that's where we met for the youth group. And it was really well received and we had a really good group of kids. And we did that for years. I can't remember how many years, but I feel like now when I run into some of my kids it's really weird because they're like all grown up and—and we did some really cool things. We met—I can't even remember, I think we met on Saturday evening, like before six or something. But we had some really—because kids came from Ark City, kids came from different parts that needed it to be on the weekend. And we had a PFLAG mom who was part of our facilitators and a guy, an older guy, not way older but older than me and Vinnie named Brian who helped us facilitate it. And mom was like the little mom that made—oh we love you anyway kind of mom. And she brought treats every time, I mean like Girl Scouts with the treat bucket. And she—everybody always wanted to see what Pat brought and Pat respected her a lot for—they respected her a lot for her motherliness to them. But Vinnie and I were kind of the young, just a little bit older than they were, and then Brian was a little bit older than that and was a professional. And it was a really good mix and a really good facilitating group and everything.

And one year for Pride—at GALA we started introducing an award that was a youth advocate award and that was a youth ally award. And one year I won that award. And we got up there and all the little kids wanted to present it and so they got up there. I had remembered the very first meeting we had and there were only like four of them, and we had met at a church. It was before we moved down to the Pride office. And Brian had thought we would start by going around the room and saying—and this is the story I told when I accepted the award is that we had—that—all that I have just led up with and (laughs) said, You know, we decided to go around the room and say what they like and what they don't—one thing they like about being gay and one thing they don't like about being gay. And they started—Brian started, I think, and I was last—Vinnie and I were last. And we got to the kids. And I said, And it broke my heart that none of them could think of anything good about being gay. I was like, Oh—and I got up there

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when I accepted that award and I said—and they were all standing behind me and I said, And I hope this is what they see that's good about being gay is all this entire award ceremony night of the people that have done good things in the community to accept awards for it. And I looked back and a bunch of them were crying, because they all—it was so sad to me, because I can remember when I felt like that couldn't—I wouldn't have been able to think of a good thing. And when it got to me and Vinnie we couldn't think of a bad thing, and we couldn't narrow down just one good thing.

And it was just so—God how things change in just five or six years in how I felt about myself and the stuff that I had done in the community compared to where I had come from and the despair that I had come from. There was somewhere in there, I can't really remember the year, I had tried again to commit suicide. And I don't—I don't know what—The Trevor Project has that thing about, Thank God I failed. And that's what it's about is all the kids from the suicide hotline that are like, Thank God that I failed in this particular aspect. But yeah I can't—I can't imagine. And when I talked to you about being worried about sharing some of my story because I hadn't told my parents or my family or stuff that's one of the things that I haven't ever shared that's happened. But I don't know, things got much better.

Vinnie and I were together about six years when we—I had always wanted kids, like I said. That was one of the things I didn't think could happen, getting married and having kids. Vinnie and I got married. And the woman who facilitated the youth group with us, her backyard was up against the Little Arkansas River [a] beautiful backyard setting.⁴⁸ And we got married, I don't even know what year, '99 maybe, back there. And Vinnie's family came from [Los Angeles] and her grandma came from Las Cruces, New Mexico.⁴⁹ And her best friend from Pennsylvania came to be her best woman. And (laughs) my entire family was there—my cousins, uncles, aunts, parents, grandparents, everybody was there. My cousin stood up with Vinnie because they had become good friends.⁵⁰ And I had had a friend who now lives in the Netherlands, Scott Curry, stood up with me as my best man and Julie, the woman from way back in high school that had all the gay friends. And her husband, who was an attorney in Kansas City, married us.

⁴⁸ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁴⁹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁵⁰ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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And my cousin's little 2-year-old was our ring bearer.⁵¹ She was very cute. And she thought she was the ring bear so she had a little stuffed bear that was in a wedding dress, so it was her wedding bear and she was the ring bear. (laughs) And she was so funny. And that was her first wedding ever. So later in life she was a little bit confused. She asked her mom if her and her dad were married. How did they get married, they're opposite sex? (laughs) (clapping) I said, Love it. Love it. And then it's like, Well yes we're married. Why do you ask? She's like four by that time, five. And she said, Well is Kristi a boy? No. And then her mom's like, Ah. Her frame of reference started out with two women and it was like, What are you and daddy doing? I loved that. So she was so funny. She went right up to the front. We were worried at two how she was going to behave. And my mom, I think, was helping hold one of the children. Julie's and Byron who married us, their daughter, was really young at that time too and was there. And when he said, I now pronounce you—I don't even know what he pronounced us, and Kirby went, Yay (laughs) in the front row, really, really loud in front of everybody. It's like, She's so excited. So it was funny.

The only person who wasn't there, who my cousin was mad at later, was her dad, and he was a—had been a local judge in town. And he was appointed by [President] Clinton.⁵² They are part Native American, that side of my family. And he was being appointed by Clinton as the Indian Gaming Commissioner in Washington. And right around the time of our wedding the FBI had been here asking his neighbors things and stuff for his confirmation hearing. And he just didn't feel like a lesbian wedding was where he should be at that point in time. And his daughter was so mad. (laughs) I was like, Aw well cut him some slack. I mean—(laughs) I can understand. I mean, he didn't tell us until way later when it was all said and done why he hadn't been there.⁵³ So for the longest time she was just like, Grr, you're a bigot. (laughs) He wasn't like that at all. I mean, a pretty stoic judge type of guy but that's not why he would have missed my wedding.

⁵¹ Edited by narrator during the review process.

⁵² Added by narrator during the review process.

⁵³ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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So—so we got married and the wedding was fun and 1/2 Mad Poet, the lesbian band, played at the reception and everything was fun with that. And Vinnie and I honeymooned for eight wondrous days in Disneyworld and had (laughs) the best time. And then, I don't know, when we'd been together six or seven years finally we had decided to try to get pregnant. And there was a place in town that did artificial insemination for lesbians that we had known a couple that had used them. And while Vinnie and I were trying to get pregnant—it took us a long—fifteen months to—actually for her to get pregnant. It was only five times but there was—it was every month but we were—we'd only gotten to try five times because different things had happened—there were too many eggs or there were—and we didn't want to end up with a dozen and there were—at one point when we very first started Vinnie's MMR shot wasn't current and she had to get it again then you have to wait three months and stuff like that.

So in the time when we were getting pregnant that fertility clinic linked with Via Christi, which is Catholic, the hospitals in town and they had given us a year to get pregnant and then they were done doing single women. And since we couldn't be married we were considered single women. So we were one of the last couples. Because then the couple we had known that referred us tried to go have a second child and were turned away. And they called us and said, What's up? They just said they don't offer services to us anymore. So it was really pissy. And now I don't know of anywhere. I get lots of calls at the paper about it and I don't know. I used to know of a Kansas City doctor who also stopped. But I don't know anywhere in Kansas where you can get artificial insemination unless you approach your own private general practitioner to try. So we finally—it finally worked and we were super excited. And then I was like, God now we have to wait nine more months? Took us like fifteen months. And then once it happened it's like, Okay baby. Uh—so it was a long nine months.

And so then Vinnie had a really problem-free pregnancy and we ended up having Jack who's named after my mom whose name is Jackie. And he's got my little brother's middle name, which is Irwin. So he's—that's my granddad's middle name, my little brother's, and now Jack's, so he's the third lineage of that. And he's the cutest little guy in the whole wide world. And he was diagnosed with autism when he was 4-1/2.⁵⁴ And

⁵⁴ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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we knew way before that that he had autism, but [it] took that long to get in to see the doctor and neurological pediatrician.⁵⁵ In Kansas City we had to go to the KU Med Center because the waiting list for the doctor here was eighteen months to get seen and up there it was fourteen or twelve. It was long.

And I don't know, my favorite story—my favorite story about the pregnancy is because my grandma, she had been at my wedding and everything because the family would kill her if she wasn't, and I'd always been very close to my grandma, but she was probably the last family member I told and she had a pretty hard time with it.⁵⁶ She was really pretty freaked out about me being gay. And so she—her, my mom and my sister-in-law were up at the hospital. Vinnie had to be induced so everybody knew when it was going to happen, at least for a week. And they were trying—toying back and forth with whether or not they wanted to stay for the birth. And Vinnie was okay with it. I don't think I would have been okay with everybody watching. But then, you know, I didn't want everybody there either. I thought it was really intimate between me and Vinnie. And then like the twenty nurses come in and the doctor and the resident. And then somebody comes in and says, This EMT is training. Can she sit in? It's like, Well God we might as well know somebody here if there's going to be forty people watching. For Christ's sake I would like to know a few names. And so by that time it was like, Hell stay.

And so sitting and waiting we were talking about Vinnie's Rh factor. And I don't really know very much about all of this business of an Rh factor but hers was Rh-negative. And apparently we were supposed to be looking for a donor that was Rh-negative but we couldn't find one. It was fairly hard to narrow down stuff. So we had to have one that was Rh-positive, which means—do you know anything about this? It apparently means that if you have a second child Vinnie's blood will try to kill it (laughs) because the blood won't mix with an Rh-negative and an Rh-positive baby, but the first time you develop the antibodies and then you—so we needed to know the Rh factor of the male so that if it was opposite of Vinnie's she could have some sort of shot to kill the antibodies that would kill the second baby. I don't know. That's the way I understand it. But my mom and grandma understood this. And bless her heart, we were saying

⁵⁵ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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Vinnie's blood was Rh-negative. And my grandma looks right at me and said, Well what's yours? And I about melted.⁵⁷ And then she realized what she had said. And she said, Oh I don't guess it matters. But I was like, Oh, because it's our baby. She thinks we made our baby, (laughs) my blood mixed with Vinnie's. I just wanted to cry.

Of all the—the steps my grandma's made to being so accepting. She really got along with Vinnie really well. And sometimes she would call Vinnie, because Vinnie was butch, to come over and help her do stuff. But she—uh—aw—so then my grandma stayed for the birth and my mom and my sister-in-law.⁵⁸ And my grandma was crying after it was all—holding the baby. And she said, This is my first live birth. And I'm like, What you've had two kids? She said, Back then they put you under. They knocked you out until it was done. I didn't see the baby. She's like, This is the youngest baby I've ever held. It's like three minutes old. And she said, You know, she didn't wake up until hours later. And she said when her other grandchild was born, the one just recently who's in college right now, that she had waited outside and didn't come in until later or something. And so she was just—I mean, if— It was my first live birth, but it didn't mean anything compared to what—my grandma was so just moved. And of course he has her late husband's middle name and all this stuff. She just was beside herself. I feel like it was the coolest thing in the entire world.

So me and Vinnie had put in the birth papers that you fill out and everything that I was to be the first one to hold him because I was scared to death all leading up to it that I want the connection to the baby that I'm not going to have as the non-biological mother and so—before even Vinnie. I mean, they wanted it to go directly to me. So I was— (laughs) So right after he was born and I was like, Can I hold him? Can I hold him? Can I hold him? Can I hold him? And they're like, We have to clean him first and get his weight and his—and all this stuff that they have to do. But can I hold him? Can I hold him now? Can I hold him now? Is he okay? Can I hold him now? (laughs) And Vinnie [made] fun of me for that for years.⁵⁹ Because like can—now, now, now, now, now, now, now. And then took him over to my mom and my grandma and whatever and it was really, really cool. It was the coolest thing.

⁵⁷ Edited by narrator during the review process.

⁵⁸ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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So, I'm so glad that I've gotten to have kids. This is what I'd always wanted since I was little. And I don't need another one and I didn't need to be pregnant. And I didn't need to have the baby, I just wanted the baby. I felt like growing up knowing that I was adopted, I didn't have a real connection for the need to be, I don't know, related or that it needed to look like me or any of that, but I always kind of felt like when I thought I was straight that I would ask my to-be husband if we could adopt because I never—I never had that feeling of wanting to be pregnant. So then in turn I never really felt like I was very maternal, I guess, because of that, but it turns out (laughs) as Jack's grown up that I am the maternal one more so than Vinnie.

ALBIN: I'm going to stop this. (unintelligible). So you weren't able to be legally married in Kansas. Do you have—were you able to legally adopt Jack as your son?

PARKER: No, not—that's one of the—one of the hard, hard things especially after Vinnie and I split, that I don't have any legal rights over Jack. We had gone to an attorney when we set up our wills and powers-of-attorney right before the birth because obviously if there's any problems in childbirth, I mean we needed to have stuff in place that I could make decisions for Vinnie in the event of something horrible and that I would have the baby in the event of something horrible. So—so we set all of that up. And the attorney had said to us, You know, I've done a co-guardianship for a lesbian couple that had extenuating circumstances and we can try that after a while. So when Jack—after Jack was born and we got settled a little bit we went to her and asked if we could try it. And our extenuating circumstances, the one that they had done—by that time she had done three. And the one that she had given us the example of was that the birth mother worked nights and if there were anything to happen while it was in the other mother's care in the middle of the night or whatever and she had to rush him to the hospital, she needed permission to make medical decisions or to be in charge. And since the mom slept during the day that she needed to have access at school and all the different things.

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So when Vinnie and I approached the attorney to [do] it we were like, Well Vinnie's next of kin, if something were to happen to her, is 1200 miles away in Philadelphia.⁶⁰ And not only that, if something were to happen to Vinnie other than—I mean we have set up, if something were to happen in the case of death, but what if something happened where she was incapacitated for a period of time and 1200 miles, Jack would have to go there or—if she was unable to take care of him legally and stuff like that. So she went with that to the judge, approached the judge. And how she had always done it before was that she said that you don't spring it on the family court judge that you're going up with a lesbian guardianship. So she approached him in the hallway outside and said, Hey I've got another one that's coming up on your docket in however, to feel him out about it, to make sure it was going to go through before we tried. And she called us from a pay—she knew how excited we were. She called us from a payphone at the courthouse and said, He signed it, he signed it, he signed it. So then we went out and had a celebratory dinner and we were calling it ward day because now he was my ward of the state.

And—but it's Vinnie and my both co-guardianship. And the way it's set up, and the way it's always set up, is unless Vinnie gave up her parental rights, she as the birth parent could have it revoked because she's the one who agreed to have it in place. She would have to go to court to have it revoked, but the way I understand it's pretty easy. I mean, if the birth mother wants to revoke it, she pretty much can, for whatever reason. So it's left us in a really precarious position only because—because although Vinnie and I are friends and are co-parenting Jack right now with joint custody, the split was my idea and it wasn't always amicable. And of course I love Vinnie as the mother of my child, I always will.⁶¹ And I want him, Jack, to have both of us in [his life].⁶² I think we both bring really unique experiences to his life and—but so yeah, it was hard when we split. Vinnie, obviously this was her job and her family. My family was her family because her family's so far away and her house and her everything, so it wasn't a fun time.

It was—she lived here—we broke up in February and she lived here until September, because the job she had gotten was with the school district and it—she didn't have a job

⁶⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁶¹ Edited by narrator during the review process.

⁶² Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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in the summer. And it wasn't a job where you could get paid through the summer. So she was going to be out of a job so I let her stay until the next school year started before she moved out, but it was tense. And she stayed in Jack's room. And she still helped with the paper. I paid her separately for the paper for almost two years, I think. She would come over the production weekend and lay it out for me because I didn't know anything about [it] still, about the graphic design or any of that stuff.⁶³ Ten years into it I had kind of never even broached—it was like that's her deal. I didn't even know how to open the program. So it was a big transition. She decided that she didn't want to do the paper anymore and I was fine with that. And I felt like it was an opportunity for me not to have to pay. And frankly, the estimates I got of paying somebody to do it by this point now that it's so big and so involved, number one, I wasn't going to be able to get it done— Like, somebody wasn't going to spend an entire weekend of 16-hour days putting it together. So it was going to lose my turnaround time. But so I also saw it as an opportunity for me, once the paper had gotten that far into it, ten, eleven years, that we—like a pretty well-oiled machine by that point. There was a pretty good base of advertisers that didn't need to be contacted every single month, although there's over a hundred of them. We were still pretty much maintaining all of that pretty well.

So I went and took a computer class in graphic design and learned how to use [In Design] and took a computer class in Photoshop.⁶⁴ And I had twenty-one days—twenty-two days between when she quit and when the next deadline was, and I lived, breathed, ate, and drank In Design. And it was sink or swim. So I got the first issue out and I was pretty proud of myself that I had actually even managed to get it out without help. And so I've been doing it all ever since—the graphics, the editing, the ad sales, everything that Vinnie had, on top of mine. But it's been okay. I mean, some stuff has slid because of it, stuff that I feel like we used to be a little bit more proficient in running a business than we had been that I've been trying to get back lately with some of the help. The web site's not always updated, the—I don't know. But it's getting—it's getting there so—

ALBIN: So what has Jack's childhood been like with his friends at school knowing that Jack's got two moms? What is that like for him?

⁶³ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁶⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

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PARKER: Him being autistic it's a little bit different scenario I believe. But we did hit it head on right in the very beginning in kindergarten. His little best friend there was supposed to come over here and play one weekend. And I think somehow in between when we booked the day and before he got here his mom must have found out. And she called abruptly like fifteen minutes before he was supposed to be here and cancelled. And I was so mad. And it wasn't like, Oh well maybe another day. She was just quiet. Maybe we can reschedule. No. None of that. And so I told my mom how upset I was for Jack. And she was like, Oh you're reading too much into it, whatever. But, no I know what that was. So we get to school the next day, Monday. And Ryan says, I'm sorry I couldn't come to your house this weekend. My mom says I can never, ever go to your house. And I don't know why, he says, bet I know why Ryan. It's okay honey. It'll be okay. And so I was like, God first thing. His first friend.⁶⁵ I don't know, I guess it's how it's going to be with a lot of the—being in such a Christian state. But I guess for the most part since then, and the school itself has been absolutely amazing.

And we've always been, even when we took him to Pre-K—I mean, we walked right in and we say, Jack's got two moms. We want to know how you're going to approach families. If there's going to be any problem with it we'll find a different teacher. We just need to know and we need you to know right up front that we're both involved in his life. He doesn't have any shame about it, nor is he going to. How are you going to deal with it? And his Pre-K teacher, we found out later, it was her first year teaching so she was kind of funny about it. She's like, Well I have two moms. I have a stepmom and a mom and—and I'm—so we're not going to ever deal with traditional families. Everybody's got—so I'm like, Okay. But from every Pre-K he'd been in and every—he'd been in a special preschool—and everybody has been really cool. Now I don't know about some of the other parents that he's not friends with or that are in the classroom whatever, but for the most part everybody's been—and it's funny sometimes because one day me and Jack were sitting in school and I was telling—he was calling me mom out loud and a woman said to me, Oh I thought that was Vinnie's kid. I think that's what she said, Oh I thought—and I said—she said, Is that your son? And I said, Yeah. And she said, Oh I thought that was Vinnie's son. It's my son, just like leave it at that. And one of his

⁶⁵ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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teachers was cracking up, overheard it along the hall. And it's like, That's my son. So I don't know what people know for the most part. Vinnie works at his school so that like makes a difference in making sure that everything's calm. But I don't know, I'm not sure Jack gets it. I mean he has enough social problems and whatever that I'm not—I don't know what he understands and what he doesn't understand. He's never asked why he doesn't have a dad or any of that. He's never asked why he had two moms really. He said something about me and mommy used to married one time, because I think he saw pictures, and I was like, Yeah. And so I don't know. I don't know. I guess if he ever delves into really needing an answer—Jack's a pretty cool kid in that he takes stuff at face value and he's smart enough to know that—I don't know. That's okay with him.

ALBIN: So now earlier you had mentioned that you have two siblings. You have a younger brother and an older brother. What was it like growing up with being the middle child with boys on either side?

PARKER: (laughs) It was interesting because both—neither of them are adopted. So it was kind of like, What's up with that? But my mom always said that she wanted to definitely have a girl, and now I'm not sure that's true because she burst my bubble. I always thought that was kind of cool. But then she burst my bubble and said she was having fertility problems. But the—I always joked that they really wanted a girl and they got a dyke so—I was the biggest tomboy in (laughs) the—on the planet. They couldn't have got a more boyish girl if they wanted. That never set very well with my dad, but my mom was always real fine with it. I wouldn't wear dresses and I wouldn't play with dolls and I wouldn't—she said from the time I could say no is when she had to quit putting me in dresses, like no, you're not putting that on me. And so she has some funny stories about that. But my mom was real cool about it and went with the flow, just loved me anyway kind of a deal.

I always felt like dad wanted the little girly girl and he tried and he tried and he tried and he tried and he tried and he tried.⁶⁶ Sometimes I think he still might try forty years later. It's like, Don't you get it? But that's been one of me and my dad's downfalls in our relationship is that I've been very hurt by his non-acceptance of who I was as a person

⁶⁶ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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before I ever even came out. So me and my little brother were always very, very close. We had to share a room together, we had to share baths together (laughs) share everything together, and my older brother didn't appear to like us. And mom even has said lately that he never did like you kids. (laughs) I think he kind of resented us or something. I don't know, we've never really gotten along with him. He was kind of mean to us when he babysat and he never had much to do with us.

Me and Chad were little pals. And then when I was sixteen, just starting my junior year in high school, my older brother was in a severe car accident and was paralyzed from the rib cage down and considered a quadriplegic. So that's been what it is, a horrible and long involved process for my entire family. And so I still don't—I have an okay relationship with my older brother. He would probably say it's better than I do. But he is—got his own little issues to deal with obviously, pretty big issues. So the other thing is that when my parents were divorced I was—Chad was seven, I was eleven, and Todd was fifteen, so we're all four years apart. And Todd was old enough to drive by then. So Todd didn't go to weekends with dad. So me and Chad suffered through weekends with dad all by ourself. And when I stopped—when I learned to drive and stopped going to weekends with dad Chad did too because Chad wasn't going to go without me. So me and Chad have a lot of history and a lot of togetherness. And you know we used to go over to weekends with dad and just beat the shit of each other, out of boredom, out of whatever we were doing, out of frustration.

And it's so funny to me because we—he's like my best friend now. I mean, I have lunch with him probably a couple times a week, maybe three or four times a month. And we do a lot together. And like I said, he was the first person in my family that I came out to. And he lived with me for quite a while and I'd let him use my car for a while. I kind of feel like the older—(unintelligible) like the older sister and—but he's a pretty successful guy. He's a really fine detailed carpenter who does his own contracting work because he's in pretty high demand. And he does the intricate details, which ironically (unintelligible) is what my granddad that he's named after, where he gets it. My granddad was a wonderful carpenter. So my older brother is more like my dad's—my mom's brother, tall and lanky. He's almost taller than me sitting in a wheelchair. (laughs)

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My little brother—and that's the other thing that's funny about being adopted is my little brother is 6'1", my older brother is 6'3", and I'm 5 foot. And (laughs) my mom's 5'8", 5'5" something like that, my dad's 6'2". And they're all dark haired. And then there's me. And I always felt like I really stood out. But the longer you get together—and so many people now comment how much I look like my little brother. And it's got to be because we spend so much time together. We have the same sense of humor and silly laugh and—and even his wife just rolls her eyes at us because we (laughs) are just—he says some of the silliest stuff and I crack up and he says—and Robin will just like, Oh God. And Chad will say, I knew I could get you Kris. (laughs) He gets you every time (unintelligible). But that's just the kind of relationship we have.

So when Chad was thirty-three—thirty-one, somewhere around in there, he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. And scared the shit out of me. I—he—I was the first person he called when he came home from the doctor and he was asking me if he should call mom and all the different stuff. And I was assuring him that it was nothing, that the tumor was nothing and—and he's such a big guy it was a 5-1/2" tumor in his chest cavity, so it was enormous and so big that he went to immediate care. The dip doesn't have a regular doctor. And he went to immediate care because he was having problems breathing because it was pushing on his lung. And thank God the doctor at immediate care found it. My little brother's so sweet. He had to grow up with me and mom. Dad wasn't around since he was seven, so I feel like he's a big sweetie partly because of our female influence.

And he said—(laughs) So at the year anniversary of his diagnosis he took that doctor flowers because—because I mean he rightly so was appreciative that the immediate care doctor didn't say, Oh you're getting bronchitis, take a nasal decongestant and come back in two weeks. No, she sent him down to oncology. So—so he got through that. And it's almost been five years or almost at the safe place. But he—I went ahead—a couple of years ago signed up for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Team [in] Training and did the San Diego Rock 'n Roll Marathon two summers ago—two—yeah, in his honor and raised money for the lymphoma—had to raise four thousand dollars to go do the marathon and do all the training, the six months' worth of training up

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until the marathon and then we flew to San Diego.⁶⁷ And that was cool. That was fun. And Chad was, I think, touched by all of that, but—as was I with all the support I got from so many people in the gay community and so many family members. All I had to do was write this nice letter about my poor baby brother and checks came in. And it was such a cool experience. I was so glad I did it.

But my older brother is—I mean, he's fine. He's paralyzed—He's considered a quadriplegic even though it's only from the rib cage down because he doesn't have use of his fingers. He can move his wrists and his elbows and his shoulders. His triceps are paralyzed, bizarre. But when you think about it gravity does your tricep work, (laughs) unless you're worried about your flabby arms. So it's not like—if one of your arm muscles is going to be paralyzed I would pick my triceps. And he ended up marrying [one] of his home health care nurses, who must have been taking really good care of him.⁶⁸ So he (laughs) got married a little while after his accident and they live here in Wichita over in—not far—actually probably a mile from here.

We're all pretty close. Chad probably lives three miles, my dad a mile. I did—I guess I didn't ever say—when I said it was the beginning of the end when my dad asked me those questions I need to interject that when I met Vinnie around December he didn't want her to come to Christmas. And I said, Well I'm not coming without her. So she came but then he didn't talk to her. And then it was all just a big convoluted, stupid mess. And then shortly thereafter, like right at the first part of the next year which would have been 1995, I quit talking to him completely for twelve years. We've started talking recently, actually kind of around the marathon and Chad and all of that stuff. So there was this gigantic silence with my dad that I—that we didn't—that we still haven't addressed. So if—so that's all we'll say about it, because if he were to Google this online he might find out more than he knew about why. But—but it—the straw that broke the camel's back was the gay thing, but it wasn't—that wasn't it. Many, many years of childhood arguing and not getting along and what I alluded to in the not accepting me as a human before I came out and all of that stuff played into that.

⁶⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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When I speak to college classes on panels and different things I pretend like it was just the gay thing, because you don't need to go into all of that big long history of everything that happened. It's too convoluted and it's too much explaining. So we just kind of leave it there. We just kind of leave it as that wasn't going to be kosher with him so goodbye. So—I'm trying to think there was one other thing I was just thinking of that I forgot. Oh, I think some of the early times in the paper that I did want to mention that although we were the longest running and had had much success and had broken records and barriers and all kinds of stuff that doesn't mean it was easy, and in the end that cute little convertible that I loved so much, that I drove up and down the country in from hell and back, got repossessed, and that one of the falling outs with my dad was that I got evicted from my apartment and I—we moved into my grandma's house while she was in Phoenix for the winter and did the paper off of her dining room table with our little 486, living on her rent while she was out of town trying to save money to get our own place again, and that we ended up moving into the barrio so that we could afford the rent and still do the paper and all of that stuff.

And in between there with my work with Pride I had become connected with San Diego Pride. And San Diego Pride and their people had kind of adopted us as a sister city in turn, and they're the ones who paid our rent at the office that we had. They set up something that they called the Ruby Slippers Club. And they had a group of San Diegoans for no other reason other than they love us here in Kansas that gave ten dollars a month each or whatever and I think our rent was only like eighty dollars or something. But so the San Diego Pride woman rounded up eight of her friends to give ten dollars a month in support of the wee little Kansans to have a pride office, and stuff like that. And so they gave us a grant, and it was our first Pride grant ever. And we had our first corporate sponsorship under me and Vinnie. And one of the grants they gave us, they gave us a grant to use just the money and then they gave us a grant to fly out two of our people to their Pride, to be behind the scenes, to see how it gets put together.

So over the course—you know the first year Vinnie and I used it and that was cool. And so we got to know them pretty well. So right around that time the co-chair of the Pride organization in San Diego, which is a paid position in San Diego, had resigned and they offered me the job to go get—I mean my dream, to get paid to produce a Pride parade

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and festival in California. And wow, how cool, but I couldn't leave. I couldn't leave the paper, I couldn't leave Kansas after all that we worked for and built Pride up and was like in the middle of uh—it was in the middle. I had seen enough of the politics in the gay community in Kansas to know that a vision that happens of the heart—and I think I could tell in a bigger city in California and what we had seen from being there. I love to visit, but it felt like the heat of the battle. I felt like a lot of the people in San Diego and California were bickering over stuff that's not worth bickering.

Because in Kansas you meet people who have lost their job, you meet people who weren't rented an apartment because it was a one-bedroom and it was two men, you meet people who can't be teachers like Bruce and—that seemed fluffy. Yeah they're doing great things, huge parades, gigantic amounts of money, gigantic sponsorships, wonderful networking, all of the different things that—but I—you don't—I didn't think I would get the satisfaction of the work that we do here and the mountains that we move that are molehills here. Like last night's school district vote that's not even an antidiscrimination policy, it's a diversity rule that they have to follow which has no legal standing whatsoever, but it's a step and it means something. And it means something to hundreds of people who—the San Diego teachers walk in their parade. I—some of the teachers here wouldn't dare. Actually, 95 percent of the teachers here wouldn't dare. So (unintelligible) for better or worse for however things would have turned out. I'm glad I didn't leave and I don't know, I feel like for the most part I have the perfect life here, even with all of the gay stuff that doesn't go our way. It's really—it's a good place to live.

ALBIN: So what's the future of the paper? You're coming up on fifteen years. You're going to have a party in September. What's next?

PARKER: Have to have a big party.

ALBIN: Are you going to continue the paper, are you going to go all online or—

PARKER: The paper's—we've hit—I hit—I don't think the paper hit hard times until this economic downturn. I hit personal, “just what the hell am I doing times,” oh, maybe a couple years back. And I was done, I was spent. And I feel like the paper really

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reflected it. I don't know if anybody else could tell but I could tell. And I went to my therapist and I said, The paper is a shell of what it used to be. It's because I feel like a shell and the paper is a direct reflection of how I feel. And I hate that partly, I hate that it's so personal and it's so me shows up. I can almost tell you which issues that I was beaten and I can see it. But, I went to interviews. I really was going to stop. I actually went to work for a Spanish language placement workplace for a day (laughs) and I interviewed for some accounting positions. And I had a really good opportunity to go back into oil and gas accounting, (makes noise) that tells you how low I'd gotten. And the headhunter, the placement guy said, Kristi, are you really ready to go back to 8 to 5, punching the clock for somebody else? You've been your own boss for—since you were twenty-four years old. I go, Wow (laughs) you're right. I don't know if I could work for anybody else.

So no, I went around with that for probably six months. I was really, really torn. And I was getting really a whole lot of support from my mom to go back into the workforce and I was getting support from all kinds of places that it didn't feel like, I don't know, and I was like torn by it. And I decided I wanted to—you know what I think, I think right around that time is when Vinnie decided she had to stop doing the paper and it pushed me into the graphic design side of it, and it was like a whole new life had been born, my creative side, wow, I get to play with the—and I was scared to death of it. It was like, I can't do the cover, I can't do the pictures, I can't do this, I don't know how to lay that out, I don't have any—I've always seen myself as a person, I don't know if it's right brain or left brain, but it's a really numerical, structured, organizational—

ALBIN: I think that's left brain.

PARKER: And I never saw myself as having any kind of creative ability, any kind of artisticness to me. And that opened like this huge door, and it was do or die. Like I said before, it was sink or swim and so I had to. And then all of a sudden I found myself sitting in front of the computer for hours wanting to play with the paper and (laughs) it was like woo, woo, woo, look at all this funness that's nothing that I had ever gotten involved in before. I mean, I proof, I look for errors, I don't look for, This would look better over here kind of thing. So honestly, it was like the breath that the paper needed, that I needed personally behind the paper. And so now I feel like I was all excited about

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it again. And it's only been not even a year-and-a-half since that happened. So I'm still kind of—there's a whole different realm with color than with black and white. And there's—I feel like it's a whole new ballgame. I'm still excited about the things I can do. And now once I feel like I've conquered that part of it now when I talked about the things that don't get done that we used to be so much more of a business. And for a while there that graphics part of it was taking so much time for me and effort that I let all the other business stuff that I like slide.

And now I'm kind of getting back into the business stuff. And it's stuff like going to Lawrence, getting out in the community, in the bars and the events that are going on, making appearances again as the paper. This is silly, but last year's Pride was the first year I've had a booth for the paper. I used to always have a booth for the paper, even when I was in charge of Pride and the paper I had a booth for the paper. But it got to where everybody knows about the paper, you know? But no, now there's all this other business, building my business part that I like that I'm back into doing and making personal connections and speaking at classes. And I'm speaking at the WSU group as they wanted me to come speak as a business professional in the gay community. I'm like, Me? Back when I was an accountant I saw myself as a business professional.

So I don't know what the paper—when I started the paper thought that I needed an outlet because I had dug myself in such a hole in accounting because I was too involved with coming out and having so much fun being out that I thought, Oh if this will give me a six-month break before I have to go back to work I'll be thankful. Then I'm like, Oh if this lasts another year I'll be thankful. Oh if this will last—now when it got down to the point of interviewing and even now with the financial hardships, I was so depressed about the possibility of losing the paper in this recession that I couldn't get out of bed for two days in the last production schedule. And so—God—now I want to go as long as it'll take me. I need to do lots more on the web, and joining Facebook was like a step. That's one of the other things I need to—I have capabilities on my web site to do lots of things that I'm not doing. I have the capability—and I've already paid for them so I like need to get a move on. But I have the capability of personals, of blogs, of online classifieds, of all kinds of stuff that hasn't been broached, so I'm getting there.

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I'm trying to get—eliciting help, and I've got a couple of younger guys that are interested in helping me with the web site. And we'll put more content online. I'm not sure we'll ever go entirely online. My brain still doesn't work that way financially, my accounting brain. I can't get there. But yeah it could be fun, blogs could be fun. A way for Kansas people to connect could be fun through whatever—postings, whatever, because it can be either. But so I don't know where the paper is going. Jack's getting to an age where now I'm a lot more focused. I spent a lot of time, and I mean besides the personal downturn, I spent a lot of time focusing on my son while he was young. [He's] only going to be young once and not a lot of time on the business.⁶⁹ So—

ALBIN: Now you had mentioned earlier how you were throwing around names for your paper, but you never got to how it was called the *Liberty Press*.

PARKER: It was one—It was one of the ideas that I had I guess—Liberty Pages, Liberty—all the different things that I was toying around with. And I was talking to Brock just the other day. We had lost touch for a really, really long time. He had moved to Kansas City and we had—after I got so involved in the community and that wasn't really his thing, we kind of had a split. And he said the other day, I'm the one that picked out that name. Really? Because I don't remember that at all. But there's a lot of times when people come to me now—this is the second time it's happened, where the people back then that were around back then feel some sort of ownership. And now that it's been successful and whatever—maybe if it had flopped a year later Brock wouldn't remember that he picked the name. But I—he said that I asked him. He said, I can remember the exact time and place that you said to me, How do you like the *Liberty Press*? And he said, I think that's the one you should go with. I like that one the best.

And so maybe that's how it happened. I have no idea. He could be dead on. I think part of what I liked was the ambiguity of it actually, the—of the word Liberty, of not being tied down to—and I like—I appreciate it even more now of not being tied down to a dated term in history, because now I crack up at the Pride shirts that I have that say Lesbigay. Of all the God awful terms that we could come up with, Lesbigay, Lesbigay, Les. I just hate that, Les. So I'm glad I didn't do that, the Lesbigay paper. But so I'm

⁶⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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kind of thankful that I picked something so innocuous it's like—but not so innocuous that the people call and say, Can I put my car in your classifieds? But I don't know, that and freedom was the other word that I was toying with. But I do kind of—I am kind of sad that it doesn't say gay anywhere, but I don't know. I don't know. I've gotten several requests to quit saying that it's the gay and lesbian newspaper in Kansas—because bi—leaving out bi and trans, and all of that and they haven't made that switch partly—It's partly so long and I know people say that all the time. And I partly don't want to use—I mean, we're still in Kansas. I partly don't want to use LGBT because I want people to know it's gay (laughs) and some unknowing straight person might not know what LGBT means.⁷⁰

ALBIN: But they'd learn if they picked up your paper. (laughs)

PARKER: If they picked it up. But I want them to see it and say, Wow Kansas has a gay paper, kind of like some of the people do. I want them to see it right smack on the cover, right under the name. So I haven't gone with the big long one yet, but I probably need to. I need to be inclusive. For a long time I felt like it was lip service, that we really don't cover bisexual, but we do a lot of trans now. So I need—the letter that's in this issue that's getting ready to come out has a real positive spin on it. It's like, I don't know if you've noticed but you do cover—you do serve the bisexual and trans community so take credit for it. So instead of saying, Why don't you? Why are you leaving us out? It's a real positive. But I don't know. So I don't know how the name came about, Kristi playing around with words and business shit, nothing very fun. LT, I should mention, was one of the ones involved in 10 Percent that was going to help me start the paper, who was a real instigator. And yeah, you can do that. And she was more the writing end so she wrote really early on for a really long time and was one of the ones too who was brainstorming stuff with me, her and Kim and Catherine, are who we were all sitting around with that night drinking when I said, I'm going to start a paper.

One of the first things I was going to do was interview Linn Copeland. Because everybody—and it is one of the first things we did. And LT did the interview. And it was because there was always so much talk around the community about Linn and her

⁷⁰ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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policies and her business way and why did she do this and this and seems like people were always, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, kind of like what I said once you—once the community feels like you can get a certain level of power then it becomes bitchy, everybody's bitchy. But for eons, until it burned down and got replaced by new people, there was no sign at the Fantasy. But everybody knew where it was and it was this big brown building that was set off. And everybody saw that as being really closeted and really detrimental and really shameful that there's not a big, proud gay sign acknowledging what it was, even though everybody knew what it was. And so we all assumed that Linn was avoiding trouble and didn't want firebombed and protested. And so that's when we're sitting around talking that night and said, We're going to interview Linn Copeland. We're going to ask her why she doesn't get a sign. We're going to ask her why she doesn't get the air conditioning fixed, (laughs) why she doesn't do this or this or this. What the hell's wrong with this? Why won't you let people do fundraisers without charging a cover charge? And I mean all this stuff that people have [bitched] and [moaned] and whatever with Linn Copeland.⁷¹

And it's just like anything. You go right to the source and you ask the questions. And if anybody would have asked her the questions it's never what anybody thinks. And you know, it was like she was too cheap to buy a sign permit. That was it. She had never—she acted like she never really thought about it longer than that. She was saving money on a sign permit. That's it? (laughs) This is my big, tell-all interview of why? That's all? (laughs) Why don't you pave the—why is the parking lot gravel? Money. Nobody—everybody thought she was rich, the biggest gay bar in Kansas and all this stuff. Aw hell, she wasn't rich. She was trying to stay in business just like me, just like getting my car repossessed. It's just—it's like no more complicated than she was a business person. She was doing what she had to do to keep a space open for the queers in the eighties in Kansas. Maybe she got lazy. Maybe she could afford a sign permit later, but then why bother? Maybe she was busy taking care of all the other stuff. I mean, she was involved in a ton of stuff, KGRA [Kansas Gay Rodeo Association] and IGRA [International Gay Rodeo Association] and the Rodeo and all the fundraisers and maybe—who cares about a sign?

⁷¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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And here we all are—have these big, grandiose ideas about people's business. And I'm sure that some people think that about the paper. I know that a lot of people—and that's one of the reasons why I've always had so much respect for Linn, she was a business person. That's why she's got the oldest gay bar in Kansas, that's why I have the longest-running gay paper in Kansas. It's because it's the bottom line. It's not a social benefit club. She would have been out of business. And the same with me. It was so hard for so long that I got inundated with free—wanting free ads—support this social cause, support this nonprofit, but we're a nonprofit, but it's the gay HIV whatever, do this, do that, give me this, give me that. No. And you have to run the business as a business. It's one of the hardest things that I think and it's one of the reasons why I think so many other people started papers in seeing the do-good side of it, which is admirable, but you can't make it very long. So—so it is what it is. Linn did what she did.

And I'm sure—and I think that everybody should shut up and thank her for providing a place to be and to congregate and to meet people and not feel so alone in Kansas and for however, tons of years. Nobody else did it. She had a smart enough business mind. And whether or not you liked how she ran it and what she did, she kept it open. Nobody else did. So that's kind of how I feel like I want people to understand about the paper and some of the reasons I do things. And sometimes it's not what you think. If you don't see the cartoons there anymore it's because I can't afford to pay for them, and if you don't see some of the—yeah, some of the other changes that you see. And you wonder why I still use volunteer columnists.⁷² I can't afford to. Once I start one why would that be fair for any of the others?

ALBIN: May I switch the tape?

PARKER: Am I running you out of tapes?

ALBIN: No man. I got hundreds of them. I ordered like a hundred of them before I began (unintelligible), but I think you've outdone Bruce.

PARKER: You what?

⁷² Edited by narrator during the review process.

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ALBIN: I think you've outdone Bruce time-wise.

PARKER: No shit.

ALBIN: Yeah.

PARKER: Am I talking about drivel?

ALBIN: No.

PARKER: Are you bored?

ALBIN: No. So you recently decided to start Liberty Press Productions, is that correct?

PARKER: Yeah. It was an effort actually out of money necessity. We just talked about all the money business side of it. From all I learned with producing Pride events and that I really feel like I have a knack for that. We had some really good fundraisers for Pride, and one of them was the Suzanne Westenhoefer concert where we made several thousand dollars for Pride. And—but I always thought that if you did stuff like that for fundraisers, like you had a comedy event, it wasn't about—we didn't ask anybody to give us money. It wasn't about fundraising where, Oh come give us your money. It was you bought a ticket and you got to see Suzanne Westenhoefer and it made us a bunch of money. I always felt like if some of the nonprofit organizations did stuff like that you could raise a lot more money if you produce stuff like a business.

It's kind of like ArtAID it raises over \$100,000 every year for positive directions. It's because it's a show. Man I don't want to miss it. I don't want to give them money; I don't want to miss the show. So I turned back to that in an effort to bolster some of the cash flow in the paper to try to produce some concerts and to try to bring some more entertainment. There's not a lot happening here anymore, especially for women, that there used to be in the Wichita community. So we've even talked about some of the fun events that TLC, The Lesbian Celebration, used to do or Women-to-Women when they were around, had a really fun road rally, scavenger hunt type thing that I want to bring

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back in the summer or the fun all-day picnics at Sedgwick County Park with [an] outdoor softball game and stuff.⁷³ And there used to be a really fun softball game that Linn Copeland used to have with like the women against the men every year and just stuff like that. I want to have the Amazing Race in Wichita, the Gay Race.

ALBIN: Yeah, it should be the Gay Kansas Race that would be good.

PARKER: (laughs) It would be [fun to] do all this stuff.⁷⁴ We used to have so [many] fun events.⁷⁵ There used to be a huge lesbian campout in Udall on somebody's property that was a whole weekend. And we had so much fun at that. And I don't know, I just think that the paper—that me being the paper has a real opportunity to publicize stuff like that without breaking the bank because I have that available to me. So—and I have my web site available to me to publicize fun stuff to do, mostly because I want to do fun stuff. I miss going to those. And I feel like once somebody starts it maybe some other people will step up. And there was a great group of women, Nita included, who [were] behind all of the organizing of a bunch of this stuff.⁷⁶ And there's a lot of great musicians in Kansas too that don't ever play Wichita because nobody brings them here. So I don't know why. I've had a [venue] offered to me at one of the gay bars that's got a great stage.⁷⁷ And I don't know why the bar owners don't do it. Time, I'm assuming, time and money. And there's an old business friend. I mean when you think about it, the truth of the matter is after fifteen years, like it or not, (laughs) and sometimes it's not a good thing, but I know a lot of people. And I get a lot of musician contacts and stuff through the paper that I try to hook up with different people who are doing stuff and I just thought, Hell, why don't I do it for me? So we'll see how it goes. It may not work out, but you know I'm always there crunching numbers, see what I can do.

ALBIN: Right. Out of all of the interviews you've done with the paper, who are the people that you've met that have been, or interviewed, that have been the most interesting?

⁷³ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁷⁴ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁷⁵ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁷⁶ Edited by narrator during the review process.

⁷⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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PARKER: You know I had the most fun with Cyndi Lauper, (laughs) because—not because I interviewed her, which I did a little bit, but because she was so funny. We were like back in—back—in a Borders. She was doing some concert, mini song, at Borders around the country for some new CD. So me and James—I took James back there, because I thought we were going to take a whole entourage and then they're like, One person. And then I'd invited James and his boyfriend. I was like, Please can't it be two? And so we walked back there and James—and she's way late. So she's coming in the back door with all of her people. And we're back there to do a radio plug, a live interview. Maybe not live. And I get to sit in on the interview.

But before that there's this huge stack of her new CDs for her to sign, from every person that worked at Borders plus all their friends and—and even I had—me and James had one. And James was going to get one signed for [ArtAid].⁷⁸ And so they're throwing shit at her—Here put [on] this radio mic, here's the TV, here's the gay paper, here's—here's all these CDs that need to be signed.⁷⁹ And she looks at her manager and she says, Give me a fuckin' broom I'll mop up too while I'm at it. (laughs) I'm cracking up. She's got this super heavy Brooklyn accent—Why don't you give [me] a broom, I'll sweep up while I'm bored.⁸⁰ (laughs) Oh and I just am laughing because it's just who she is. And so I said something about her support of the gay community. And she says, Oh please, of course. My sister's a lesbian. If you can't support your family who can you support? (laughs) So me and James each got our picture with her and it was super funny. But you know, when celebrities—when it comes to celebrities I'm really shy, I'm really—I'm really phobic actually. So the time that Melissa Etheridge called here—

ALBIN: Wow—

PARKER: —for the interview, I (laughs) wouldn't talk to her. We had somebody else come interview her—somebody who in the community I knew adored Melissa Etheridge who's a singer in a front band herself and said, Would you like to come over and

⁷⁸ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁷⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁸⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

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interview Melissa Etheridge? Like, you're kidding. And I almost get more enjoyment out of other people's enjoyment that way. But she called and Vinnie wanted to talk to her. And so Vinnie got on the phone and when it rang right when it was supposed to, and she says, Is this Melissa? It was like, Yes. Is this Melissa, which is who the interviewer's name was. She's like, No this is Vinnie. I own the paper (laughs) and I just had to tell you that I am the biggest fan. Okay, so with all of this (unintelligible) Melissa Etheridge on the phone, I forget to start the tape, which was my job. So that's all I'm supposed to do, start the tape. Kristi all you have to do is start the tape. Forgot. So we didn't get Vinnie on tape with her talking to Melissa Etheridge, which was sad. But I did start it in time for the actual interview so that was what was important, but Vinnie was very upset that I missed her talking to Melissa Etheridge. And you know what, I offered to transcribe the interview and it was so cool listening to her voice on the phone, because not only does she have a really sexy voice, but you know what, she is really nice.

I mean when Vinnie said—when—then Melissa got on the phone and said she was a huge fan she just went, Aw that's sweet. Thanks—thank you, and just sounded so genuine. I'm like, aw I like her. Instead of like, Yeah whatever. And she was in the middle of eating lunch on her cell phone. So I mean I could hear the noise in the background and—anyway who else have we met? Gotten the interview. See I've let everybody else interview. We've interviewed Rudy Galindo. Vinnie interviewed Margaret Cho and that was fun. And we don't do people unless they're—oh several people too—I guess not several, two. We let James Woods interview RuPaul which was too funny. And then somebody else interviewed RuPaul recently—Matt Hanne, one of my best writers. And he was just giggly about it—RuPaul? I get to interview RuPaul. And RuPaul is really business, I mean, he's on it. Who else have I met? Mostly the fun parts too is going to concerts and taking pictures, which have been—which has been fun and I allow myself that. (laughs) Like I thought I was going to die that I got to take pictures of Cher down in the very front at Sandstone, whatever. I'm dating myself but whatever the Verizon Amphitheatre now or what's it called? What do they call it now, up in Bonner Springs?

ALBIN: No idea.

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PARKER: It's like—well it used to be called Sandstone. Anyway, it's the outdoor amphitheatre in Kansas City. And there's so many rules. And the funny part was that when I saw Melissa Etheridge at the music hall or somewhere down at Kansas City, downtown Kansas City, I didn't know what I was doing, and it was the first time I'd ever gotten a press pass, I mean a photo pass. And so I went down there and they said, You can take pictures for the first two songs. No flash, blah, blah, blah, blah. So I'm like, Okay no flash. I'm not sure how this is going to work and I'm just a peon and have this silly camera. And the cool thing about Melissa Etheridge is at that time she only let the gay press down to shoot pictures, so it's me and the *News Telegraph*. So then you get to sell your pictures on the wire if—to the *Kansas City Star* and places because they don't let them in.

Okay, so after the two songs were over—I mean, you're like right there, which is where I was with Cher. And then they walk—they walk me out, take me out to the car to put my camera away. And I said, Well how am I going to get back in, with the *News Telegraph* woman. And she says, With your ticket. And I said, But I used my ticket to get in. She says, Ooh, you were supposed to use your photo pass. (laughs) Ooh. Shit. So we go up to the front, nice woman from the *Telegraph*. And she says, She's stupid and used her—(laughs) She's—the first time she's ever done this. She used her ticket to get in, and now she has her photo pass and can't get—Could you please let her back in? I'm going to miss the whole concert. So I learned that time.

So then at Cher when I was going to die and they—they make you go backstage and wait because you could take pictures during the second and third song.⁸¹ But it has to do with if the pictures show up in the press with the wrong outfits on they know that you like screwed around and took pictures when you weren't supposed to. So they took my camera when I came in and locked it up, and then I had to go get it before the second song. And then they took us back with the little (*unintelligible*) and then they let us in where the bouncers are in front of the screaming crowd, so you're right in between that little gate. And I mean Cher's right there. And I'm sitting there going, Oh my God. And the bouncer taps me and says, Aren't you supposed to be taking pictures? Oh right, pictures. Yeah. Right. On it. (laughs) So I start taking pictures. And they know when

⁸¹ Edited narrator during the review process.

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the songs, when the photographers are going to be down there, so they play to you. They look at you, they actually make eye contact and shit. And I was just like, Oh my God. And then they took us back and locked our cameras up so we couldn't have them for the rest of the show. And I go back to where Vinnie's sitting in the press section or whatever. And I'm just like, (makes noise) (unintelligible) so close it's like right there, she was right there. (makes noise) Vinnie's like (unintelligible) talking. And I was like, Oh I thought I was going to die. So that—those things are really fun. And we have sent other people to do that too.

Like at Sandstone again we sent somebody up that got to take pictures of k.d. lang. And I don't know, there's just been—we've done two different interviews with Melissa Etheridge but one of them Vinnie's aunt did, so we didn't get to talk to her here, and then—oh, they gave us a photo pass and second row seats to Elton John when it was here and just his—just his—him and his piano, that tour. And Vinnie—I mean, and he was playing to Vinnie and she was—I mean she got some of the coolest pictures of Elton John. And we had the best seats. And we got there and they had given us two press tickets and a photo ticket so we didn't realize. And we got there and we're like, Oh we have an extra ticket. And so we were trying to think of who we knew that was single that could come without being killed by their partner. So we called Nita, How fast can you get to the coliseum? We have an extra ticket, second-row seats. So Nita got in her car and drove out and saw Elton John with us.

And the cool thing about that too is the coliseum woman called and said, Oh my God Vinnie you have to help me. Elton John's requested a gay masseuse before the show. Where am I going to find a gay masseuse? (makes noise) And she like wrote us the nicest thank-you note. It's like, You saved my life. I didn't know what I was going to do, how on earth was I going to locate—you totally came through for me. But so we called James, our friend again, over at Positive Directions and said, How quickly can you get some massage oils—(laughs) Vinnie's like, (unintelligible). Wouldn't that be cool? You get to go meet Elton John. You might meet him naked. (unintelligible). (laughs) Oh, but the guy we sent had a good time and said that it ended up not having enough time for the massage because they had problems with the sound but they paid him anyway and whatever. So he probably could have gone out and met Elton John.

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But then the people we brought for Pride—the—I've met Suzanne Westenhoefer lots. She was on like the second issue cover. And she was at WSU. And that was before I met Vinnie and I was in the front row because—of the—because the woman who had brought her had advertised with me for it, obviously. And so she took me backstage to meet her and I wanted to take a picture. I had my friend, Kim, who is a photographer back there to take pictures and Suzanne wanted to go into the men's restroom and act like she was peeing standing up for the picture. And I gave her shit about that. We brought her for Pride. I'm like, You remember that? She's like, Don't mention that. I go, Okay, sorry. (unintelligible) like—(laughs) What are your arms doing like this? It's cut from here up, but I know what she's doing. I don't know how many other people know that she's trying to pee standing up. (laughs) And then I met her once—one other time, but so I don't know but—

ALBIN: Didn't you have Candace Gingrich here for golfing?

PARKER: Oh, Candace Gingrich I got to meet in Manhattan.

ALBIN: Okay.

PARKER: She was giving a speech in Manhattan. And we went up and met her at her hotel and put her on the cover of—a long time ago of like '98, and then I've kept in touch with her. Like I started sending her the paper. I send her the paper every month. And she contacted me one time. And she said, I can't believe you did a whole sports issue and didn't include rugby, because she's a big rugby player. And I'm like, I don't even know what rugby is. They don't play rugby in Kansas. I was like, What are you—and so I thought that was funny. And then Vinnie and I were in a coffee table book that was sort of like the book's *Sisters* where it showed sisters and then their stories. Then they did the mother-daughter. And then in that series was women together, which were lesbians. And Muffin Spencer-Devlin and her partner were in it and Margaret Cammemeyer and her partner and Amanda Bearse, and all these people, and then me and Vinnie.

ALBIN: How did that happen?

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PARKER: Like—I don't know. They called and like they needed somebody from the Midwest. I was like, Okay we will. I don't know—(unintelligible) we knew like it was such a big deal. And then Vinnie, I told you she just can—is just loud and she gets on the phone. And they said, Well why should we include you? And she's just like, Because we're the coolest and—(laughs) and got off the—when she hung up the phone I thought, Shit I'd include you now that you just like made a helluva pitch—Because I'm Jewish and I'm in Kansas and we're lesbians. We own the only statewide paper and the longest running one ever and, (makes noise) and like, okay then. So Candace was supposed to be in it with her girlfriend. And Candace and her girlfriend broke up before the book came out (laughs) so they had Candace write the forward. (unintelligible) and so we were joking about that online, me and Candace. And she said, Kristi it's a curse, everybody in that book's broken up. See what happened.

And so—and so when they were starting that golf tournament and my friend, Frye was starting it. And I said, You know, you need a celebrity golfer or something. Yeah, I'm friends with Candace Gingrich. You want me to see if she'll come? And so I e-mailed her and I said, Hey Wednesday we'll fly you out here and you can plug HRC and will be our celebrity golfer. And she got approved to come. I mean, it was in June even. I mean, Pride month you'd think—I didn't think there was a chance in hell we'd get her to come here. Oh my God we had so much fun. (laughs) She—and I'll say this for everybody to see and Google but she got so drunk. (laughs) She was like a riot.

(laughs) And I took her out to the—because the pre-party at our golf tournament or our lesbian golf tournament is fun, I mean, it is a blast. And so—and now they've switched it to where the pre-party—you don't golf the next day like we had done that year when Nettie showed up still drunk from the night before. And it was so funny because she was drinking some beer that I didn't understand that was—(laughs) like some sort of dark mixture. And I was thinking it was like a black and tan. Like, no, no, no. It has some numbers. And it's like some numbered beer. I don't know, it was a dark beer that's named numbers. And I could never get it. So every time she would have a beer and I'd say, Do you need another 2045, and I'd just make up numbers. And she said (unintelligible) Yeah Kristi. It's like, Do you need another 1526? Okay. And then some people—everybody wanted to buy her drinks. Like, what are you drinking? Oh she's

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drinking that 1517. (laugh) What? So it turned into like the biggest joke and we had the most fun.

And C.J. Kelly from Kansas City HRC's chapter was here for the golf tournament because she's from Wichita and she used to be on my Pride board. So I introduced her to Candace and whatever and she says to her, Hey we're having a Kansas City golf tournament, whatever in two months. Will you come up for that? And Candace is like, Sure I'll come up—I'll come down for that one too. And so then they were all happy with me. And they were like, Kristi we'll buy a full-page ad if you connect us with Candace. I'm like, Okay. And the funny thing was is that Candace kept telling the golf tournament people that I'm not going to come and play unless I can be on Kristi's team. And I kept saying, Candace I don't golf. I've never golfed, ever. And she wasn't listening, I guess, because she kept saying that—Kristi you're going to play right? You're going to be on my team, you're going to play. Okay, you and Vinnie, I want to be on you and Vinnie's team. Can I (makes noise)? And I'm like, Okay. So cute.

We picked her up from the airport and she'd bought a little Maryland crab, since she's from Maryland, for Jack a little stuffed toy, and I thought that was sweet. And then—and we were in charge of entertaining her all weekend. And she was so hung over at the golf tournament. So I kept telling her—and so somebody asked me the night before party if you've ever—how good I was at golf. I said, I've never golfed. And then she heard me. You've never golfed? I tried to tell you that. You're on my team and you've never golfed? I tried (laughs) to tell you over and over that I don't golf. So she was so hung over. She gets up to the very first tee box where we are and it happens to be the shortest drive funny award. And she gets [in] there and whack, and it goes straight up and (unintelligible).⁸² And I said, Oh Candace you didn't have to do that for me. It's okay, hit the ball. Hit the ball. I said, Nice of you to try to make me feel better. So she had to sign the little shortest drive thing. And I said, If you win that [you'll] never (laughs) live that down, ever.⁸³ She even brought her own clubs and shit, which got lost at the airport, but we got them in time to golf. They called at like midnight and we're drunk at the bar and it's like, We have your luggage. Okay so then she went behind a

⁸² Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁸³ Added by narrator during the review process.

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tree and tried to throw up. (laughs) And she ordered a beer thinking that maybe that would help. And it's like, Okay. So anyway, it was a fun, fun, fun, fun weekend.

ALBIN: So did you have to borrow clubs?

PARKER: Did I what?

ALBIN: Did you borrow golf clubs?

PARKER: Yeah.

ALBIN: Okay.

PARKER: Oh yeah. It was sad. And you know it's a four-person scramble so you get to do best ball. But you're supposed to—we broke all the rules. We broke all the rules right? And like—so that—we didn't—you're supposed to use at least one of my drives which we didn't. And then about hole nine I said, Vinnie you golf for me. And Vinnie doesn't golf either but she's got big muscles or whatever and she whacked the ball like (makes noise) So I quit after like nine holes. I just rode around on the golf cart, well because Candace insisted. Like it had our little name on the front, like two people to a golf cart, four people to a team—(unintelligible) Kristi Parker and Candace Gingrich. So then the next year we were trying to find a celebrity golfer and we got Jason Stuart came, the comedian, down and golfed. And I didn't golf that year and—but I helped her bring Jason Stuart. And then this year of course Muffin is supposed to come back to be our celebrity golfer which ooh, I am not playing on that team. Well maybe you should since it's best ball.

No what we decided to do actually I said you want to really raise money, and this year they're doing it for the Humane Society. I connected Frye with the Humane Society people and she's offered to do their golf tournament. We decided, I mean, since Muffin's a pro that we were going to auction off the other two people on her team that get to play with her because she's so good. And Frye is really, really good and wants to be the other person. So we figured we could raise more money if we auctioned off getting to play with Muffin. But I'm trying to think of celebrity—you know, Muffin was in

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that book. And then when she was here and I said, You're in that book I'm in. And she had broken up with her girlfriend too. (laughs) It's like (unintelligible). And that whole book is like a big breakup, I don't know. I don't know, we had our fifteen minutes of fame in that book. We did book signings at Borders in Lawrence and Borders here and Watermark Books here. And it was silly because we didn't write any of it, but—the—it happened right around the time where they had asked us to be a segment on Sunflower Journeys that KPTS, PBS show out of Topeka. And so Jack loves that. Jack watches that all the time because it's all about him. And it's called Jack and so he loves that. And it's funny to watch because he's just little bitty and he can barely talk. And so he's just cute as a bug. But it was a little bit painful because it was right around the breakup of Vinnie and I.

So it's a little painful to watch because it's kind of smoochy. And then we were also on—in an article of the National Journalists Association where they were doing a big article on the gay press turning fifty back then and they were including us as like the peons compared to the big whatever. But when the article ran about our eighteen-month anniversary—there was another big article about us for our ten-year, but I think this was the eighteen-month anniversary, it went over the wire in the end, got picked up. And Boston *Bay Windows*, the gay paper in Boston, the *Atlanta Voice* picked it up. So the article ran. And it ran in some straight papers. It ran in the Newton daily. I don't think the Newton's daily but anyway it ran in the Hutch paper and it ran—it ran a whole bunch of places. We kept getting people sending us the articles where—everywhere it had run. So right around all that time we thought we were being famous. We were on TV so many times. I kept telling them it's like, Surely you're tired of seeing us, hearing us on TV, partly for Pride but partly when the marriage amendment came up they were over here like twice a week with updates with that shit and wanting quotes. And for a long time it was really hard.

When the *Wichita Business Journal* wanted to do an article on gay business owners—because the Small Business Administration had done something for gay people. And we called like ten, twenty of our advertisers, business people, to come and none of them would. None of them wanted to be out in the *Wichita Business Journal* because it's like a—so mainstream. That was really frustrating to me. I was like, God I'm tired of being the spokesperson. [Surely] there's somebody else out here that will agree to talk

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the news, to the *Eagle*.⁸⁴ I can get them to talk to me [for] the paper—and I guess they don't really realize the reach we have. I mean, we're not the *Eagle* or whatever, but I mean really.⁸⁵ So I don't know.

ALBIN: So is there anything that I haven't asked that you want to mention?

PARKER: God, I can't imagine what that could be. I think we've covered just about everything.

ALBIN: Okay. But if you think of anything I can always come back.

PARKER: God, I can't believe that there'd be—anything else about the paper? I don't think so. I think I've told you all my good stories about all of it. No. I mean, it's really—It's really cool how many letters we get and how many people I know who tell me or come up and say to me that they felt so alone and that that was their connection in small Kansas. It amazes me how many subscriptions we have in places where I had to get the map out and look where the city was—Bird, Kansas and Cherryvale and Chetopa and just like, What? And that we still—I mean I still when I made a list to prove a point to somebody with Creating Change when it was coming to Kansas City. They had decided not to advertise with me. And I said—and I wrote her back. And I had made a list of where my paper goes and what cities I have subscribers in. And I said, Do you realize that I reach (unintelligible) and I was shocked at the list. Because I had never sat down and looked. And she wrote back and said, Oh my God. And of course they ended up buying ads. But it was amazing that we were everywhere, I mean, honestly.

And some of the weirdest places and that I really—even people who—even an artist down in Old Town who moved here from California and said, God I didn't think there were any queers here until I was at the library and it was like, Oh thank God. And I mean, I'm humbled. Sometimes I think I myself when I was interviewing for jobs and wanted to quit to me it felt like a personal business decision. And then somebody says to me, Do you realize what this would mean to so many people that—you're so flippant.

⁸⁴ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁸⁵ Edited by narrator during the review process.

Kristi Parker
February 24, 2009

Like I think in a way I don't realize but I think it's also some sort of protection so that I don't feel so much responsibility, for my own sanity that no I don't want to realize it on some level but yes some days I do. Some days I get e-mail and letters that are like the one that we printed not very long ago where this mother was saying that I saved her young transgendered son's life, (whispering) thank God, [they] had found our columnist on the—and said she had—finally she came back and had a name with what was wrong with her.⁸⁶

ALBIN: I remember that letter, yeah.

PARKER: (whispering) Thank God. Wow. That's intense. So—So we'll ride it as far as it'll go and see where it takes us, but I'm not giving up yet. No.

ALBIN: All righty, well thank you so much. I appreciate this immensely. I'll stop that.

[end]

⁸⁶ Edited by narrator during the review process.