

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

Kami
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

May 20, 2009

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Kami: Narrator

Tami Albin: Interviewer

TAMI ALBIN: And we're going. Excellent. Okay, so today is May 20, 2009, and I'm here with Kami. Thank you so much for participating, I really appreciate it. I'll start off this interview the way that I start off all the oral histories which is, Tell me where you were born and when.

KAMI: I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah in August, 1950. And my father was at the University of Utah in school. And they lived in Layton, so we lived in—we went—after I was born they had a house in Layton. We lived in Layton for two years and then—he went places with the air force and so we went to Arizona and South Carolina and then we went to—where did we go next? England then California, then—I think then Abilene, Texas and then Wichita Falls, Texas, then Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and then I went to college. So a lot of different places. And I don't think I've left any out, but lots of different places as a young person.

ALBIN: So what was that like traveling around to all of those different locations? Because it sounds—were you only in—like four years in a certain location or—

KAMI: The longest I lived anywhere with my family was five years in Wichita Falls, Texas. And then when we went to Portsmouth I was there for two years for college. They stayed three years after that. And I don't have bad memories of moving. I mean, I know it was hard to move, but I'm really glad I had that opportunity and I don't—I don't have any resentments about that or any—I'm not angry that I didn't get to stay someplace. Sometimes I feel—my memories of my childhood are very minimal. I hardly remember anything actually. And I don't know if it's just because I lived so many places because we kind of pin our memories to places. And I just don't have—I don't remember very well, so I think it might be that I—I don't know why. But it's okay. And then my kids—I was married to a person in the air force, man in the air force, and they moved lots of different places and they don't—they're not angry about that either. I think they—I think they understand that they have a much wider world view than most of the

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people they know. And it was hard for my second son because we moved when he was a senior in high school, but—I think—I'm not sorry that I had—I really loved the air force. I mean, I'm a pacifist, so it's a very strange irony for me, but I loved the security of it. We lived on base so everybody kind of had the same houses and there wasn't trying to have a better house than somebody else and it was an instant community always. And I liked going to new places. And I really—when my ex-husband and I divorced I probably missed the air force the most, because I liked the life. I didn't lock the door ever. Kids could play out in the street until ten o'clock at night. It was—it was great. I mean, it was decent. I mean, we didn't have tons of money but we didn't have a lot of expenses like some families did and—I don't know, I liked it.

ALBIN: So did you have siblings traveling with you at the same time?

KAMI: Um-hm.

ALBIN: Okay.

KAMI: Yeah, my sister and brother. My sister's two years younger than my brother is fourteen years younger than I am. So I'm trying to remember. He was born in Wichita Falls and then lived in Portsmouth, and then my parents went to California and then my dad retired in California. And so he didn't live very many places, but my sister and I moved all over. And then she married a man in the air force too, so we both married air force guys. And they've lived all over—her kids have lived all over so, yeah.

ALBIN: So I know that you said that you don't have many memories of your childhood, but you do remember the different places. What was your childhood like? Like you said that there was an instant community. So did you have friends to play with automatically?

KAMI: Automatically. I mean, we moved into—we moved always onto the base. There were always a lot of kids in the neighborhood. We went to a school on the base in most cases, so the kids we played with were the kids we went to school with. And yeah, it was like—it's like those neighborhoods you hear about in the fifties where people are out at night and they're playing in the streets. It was always like that. It was just lots of

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kids and lots of things to do. So I—we all went to the movies at twelve o'clock on Saturdays, the base movie. There was—the stores on base were the stores we went to. It was—it's a very—it's a bad system in some ways. It's the military right? But my ex-husband was a dentist so it was a little bit different for us, and because I was raised in the military I just—it was the life I was used to. It felt very secure to me. As a kid growing up I always had friends, always. So I was—and they were all new. I mean, a lot of us were always new. And so usually when I moved in, a bunch of people moved in with me. And so you had kind of that cohort and people were used to new people and it was—it was fun.

ALBIN: So what was that like for your schooling? So if you're in one location for X-number of years and (unintelligible), did you feel that that fragmented your learning in any way or—

KAMI: I have no sense of that. I really don't have a sense of that. I remember—I always remember this. When we moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire I went—I had my transcript and I went and one of my teachers said to me, So do they give A's away in Texas? So people in New Hampshire had no sense of anybody in Texas, right. And all of us—there were a lot of us that moved up from Texas at the same time. And so we were all these people who didn't look like these kids in New Hampshire. We looked different, we talked differently, we had different experiences and—but I was—being a student was a very big part of my identity all my life. I was a good student. I really needed that for my self-esteem. And so anyplace I went I just figured out how to be a good student. I don't remember feeling like my education suffered at all. I don't remember feeling that way. Being a new person was hard for me in some ways because I'm shy, and so it always took me a couple of years to make a group of friends, and then about that time it'd be time to move. So I imagine it was harder than I remember it, but I don't have any—I don't have a lot of bad feelings about that. I was—it was good.

ALBIN: And what about your family dynamic? How did your mother cope with all of the moving around?

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KAMI: I think my mother loved it. My father—I don't—I have so few memories of him as a kid. He was either gone—he was gone away, far away, for the military or when we were—he was in Strategic Air Command when I was high school, and that meant that he was home three weeks, on alert one week. And that meant that that week he couldn't come home for anything. So he missed my graduation, he missed a lot of performance. I was a dancer and—but my mother, she's a very interesting person. She was an actress and a dancer. And so any time we moved she immediately found the community theatre. And so she was always involved in plays. She took— my sister and I would go with her. We were part of the play sometimes. And my sense of her was that she did not rely on my father to create any sort of community or anything for her. She found that for herself and I think she did what she wanted to do. And she liked it. She liked the new places, she always was able—she was talented enough that she found ways to be creative and use her talents, and I think it saved her. I think those kinds of things really saved her. They had, I know, some rough years in their marriage. And—I was a Mormon and that'll come out later, I'm sure, but for a lot of years my dad wasn't very active in the church. And I think at one point she said to him, You either get active in the church or I'm going to leave you. And so he did. (laugh) And after that she wasn't—she was more active in church and less active in theatre stuff. But she always found ways to use her creative gifts, and I think that made her life really rich in a lot of ways.

ALBIN: So moving around and being Mormon, was your family always able to find a community?

KAMI: That was the other thing. That is also an instant fabulous community. I mean, when I left the church that—again, that was the thing that I missed was that instant community. It didn't matter—I mean, being in the military, that was probably another thing that made it so possible to do that and not feel fragmented, because the first thing you do is you drive around and find the church that you're going to meet in. That's the very first thing we ever did. And then the first Sunday you're there you go and you meet people and they're very friendly and you get jobs in the, what was called a ward or a branch, and instant friends. Always women with children, like me. So there were always other mothers and we took care of each other's children and we talked about our kids, and it was—as much as I dislike the church now, and dislike is not a strong

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enough word for how I feel about the church, it was a wonderful community and I always had friends in that community and so did my kids.

ALBIN: So you mentioned that the last place you lived with your parents you then went off to college. What did you do in college?

KAMI: I went to the University of Utah to major in ballet. They have a very wonderful ballet program there, and Ballet West is a fabulous company. And my family was from Utah, my grandparents were there and so I thought, Well I—it was two thousand miles from home, right? But my grandparents were there and I didn't—I wasn't homesick. I'm not a homesick kind of person so I went, and was there with all the Mormons because I thought that'd be heaven to be with all these Mormons, and lived in the dorms of the University of Utah. And I majored in ballet for a year and then I injured myself. And so I gave that up and changed my major to English, which probably was good idea. But my main goal in life as a Mormon was to get married. I mean, that's what I knew I was going to do. And so then I'd been there two years and I met my ex-husband and we got married, and then we had two more years of school when we were married and then he went off to dental school. But yeah, I went across the country and I danced around and—(laugh) and I love Salt Lake. And I didn't appreciate Salt Lake then the way I do now. I've really come to—but I had good friends in the dorms and, yeah I didn't—I was never homesick, never. I would go home occasionally but wasn't bad. And my grandparents, I'd go see them on the weekends, very close to my grandma so, yeah.

ALBIN:: So how did you meet your husband?

KAMI: My husband—when I lived in New Hampshire he was a missionary for the Mormon Church, he was on a mission there. I just met him there. It was—nothing—nothing really significant happened. And then I went to school. And when he got off his mission a year later and went to the University of Utah he knew I was going to be there and he looked me up and found me. And I was dating somebody else at the time who treated me like crap and [I] didn't know myself at all, just did not know myself at all.¹ So Dick—we dated for about a year and he was this nice Mormon guy. And I thought, Oh

¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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he'll be a great father and I wasn't in love with him, but I thought, It's going to be okay once we get married, it'll be fine. It wasn't okay. So I really—he was sort of that ideal Mormon person that I had been raised to believe that I would marry, and he was—he loved me. And so we got married after about a year of dating.

ALBIN: So had you—you mentioned that you had the one person who didn't treat you well. Had you dated previously in high school?

KAMI: Um-hm, I had. I'd had boyfriends, long-term boyfriends. I didn't date a lot of different people. I would date one person for a long time and another person for a long time. So yeah, I'd had boyfriends. (laugh) I had a girlfriend when I was fourteen and I—as I said, I didn't even know girls could be gay then. I didn't know there were lesbians in the world. I only knew there were gay men because I was dancing and we had men in our company and my mother explained to me that they were homosexual. I don't remember any sense of thinking that was a bad thing or—she just explained to me what that was. But I never got the message that girls were also gay. So I had this girlfriend when I was fourteen. And Charmain and I, oh we used to make out. (laughter) We just—but we just thought we were practicing for when we had boyfriends. That's just what we thought we were doing. And we got together every Friday night. And I knew that that was something we didn't want anybody to know. So somewhere inside me I knew that that was something that was just for us. But yeah, yeah every Friday man. We were crazy about each other, but I didn't know what that was.

ALBIN: How did you meet her?

KAMI: She was in my class. She lived on the base. Her dad was a higher rank than my dad, lived in a nicer house. And we were just friends from school and we just sort of hit it off.

ALBIN: Right.

KAMI: I went over there and drank tea which I wasn't supposed to do and then did other things I wasn't supposed to do, so—

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ALBIN: Right. Right. So that relationship, did that impact you anywhere along the line with the other boyfriends? Did you ever reflect back on it?

KAMI: I really didn't. I didn't, and I do not know what that was about, I don't know. I mean, I was really unconscious. I thought I was a conscious person. And when I got to high school man I— It was kind of—I was—it was 1967, '68. My group of friends was—we weren't hippies, but we wanted to be. So we were liberal and we would sit around. I mean, I reconnected with a high school friend a few years ago. And we've tried to figure out what we did, and we just sat around and talked and talked and talked and talked. And we were going to save the world and blah, blah, blah. And—where was I going with that? What did I say? How did I get there? You asked me—I don't know where I (laughter) was going with that. Sorry.

ALBIN: No, I was asking you about if it—if the relationship when you were fourteen, had any impact later on.

KAMI: Oh, oh I was talking about how I thought I was so conscious.

ALBIN: Right.

KAMI: But I don't think I was very conscious, because I was not invited to know myself very well. I was not invited to think about other ways of being in the world besides the way that the Mormon Church wanted me to be. And so I just—I was an oldest child, I wanted to keep people happy and so I did. And there were—there were things that I was asking questions about early. I wanted to understand why blacks couldn't hold the priesthood. I was trying to understand a lot of things about the church. And any time I asked those questions my parents would have some big leader in the church call me and talk to me on the phone. And clearly my asking these questions was making people really unhappy. So I just quit, I didn't do it. And when I went to college I participated in antiwar rallies and stuff like that, but really I was towing the line as a Mormon. I just—I wasn't really asking questions about what—the expectations for me or anything else. I got a degree, but in Mormondom it's all about having something to fall back on if something happens to your husband. I didn't have any thought of any

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kind of career outside of having children and all that so, no I wasn't reflecting on much of anything frankly, I don't think.

ALBIN: Did your liberal want-to-be hippiness (laugh) impact your relationship with your parents, with your father being in the military?

KAMI: Yes. Yes, it did because I would go home and it would be like, Oh no, Kami's home. What's she going to say now? Because at the dinner table I would be making these kinds of liberal sorts of comments that were not okay. And then my ex-husband used to make fun of me and call me a communist and things because we didn't necessarily agree politically, but—still I wasn't pushing it and I wasn't—I wasn't doing anything very radical really. So I—(laugh) no, I don't remember a lot of conflict about that. I remember arguing with my father-in-law about race stuff. So that—I mean, yeah, I mean there were—things came up but I wasn't stomping around, shouting at people and—I don't think so.

ALBIN: So what happened then once you finished school and got married? Where did you end up?

KAMI: We were in Salt Lake for two years at the University of Utah until I finished, and then we went to Louisville, Kentucky for dental school. And we were there for four years and had—we had a child before we left and went there, so we had a new baby when we got there and we had another child two years later. And then after dental school Dick got in the navy. Well, he thought that—he got in the navy before then because he thought the navy would pay his school but it didn't. I don't remember why. So anyway, we went to Kingsville, Texas. Oh I forgot to put that. I forget I lived in Kingsville, Texas. (laugh) Anyway—we were in Kingsville and we had another two babies in two years.² And that was not a good place, it was unpleasant. And then we went to Columbus, Mississippi for two years in the navy. And then he got in the air force and we went to Korea. Is that right? Yeah, and then Albuquerque, and then Florida, and then Japan, and then Oklahoma. And then we went—he got assigned to be the base dental surgeon. He'd been the base dental surgeon several places. That's

² Edited by narrator during the review process.

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sort of the head honcho of the dental stuff. I didn't know—he asked to go to Utah. He knew I did not want to go to Utah, and he still requested that assignment because he knew he was going to divorce me. So we went to Utah and then a year later he divorced me. And so I stayed there and then I met Michele in grad school.

ALBIN: So how many children do you have all together?

KAMI: Five.

ALBIN: Okay. (laughter)

KAMI: Too many. (laughter)

ALBIN: And what was it like, like traveling to all these different locations? I mean, you had commented earlier that it didn't seem to have too much impact on them, but that's a lot—

KAMI: It was fun. It was hard, but it was fun. We had fun traveling together. When we were going overseas we made a big—we were very—we got a lot of attention. First of all, we got a lot of seats on the airplane. And it was always standby if you're flying military, so that was irritating to people. But our kids were pretty well behaved. And there are four boys and then my—the youngest is my daughter. And I remember tying them together in the Los Angeles Airport because I was so afraid that I was going to lose somebody, so I had them tied together in the airport. I just found it—I thought it was an adventure, I didn't mind it. I thought it was interesting and fun. And I'm sure that I have blocked out all the really difficult parts, but—I mean, five kids—when I went to Korea, my husband had already gone over and I had to take the kids by myself and I was pregnant. And so I had these four little boys. And I was sick, really sick. (laugh) And we got on the airplane. And of course the time is all mixed up so they're all wetting their pants because they think it's morning or night or whatever. And people were very nice, they helped me. So usually people were pretty nice. And even in Korea. We lived on the economy, which means that you don't live on base because we weren't really supposed to be there. My ex-husband was there on a remote assignment and so we weren't supposed to come and we decided to go anyway, so we were kind of there

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on our own. And we lived downtown. And the Korean people were lovely and very helpful, and it was real safe there. And my daughter was born in Seoul at the military hospital there. So it was a good experience. I mean, it was really basic, like carry your water, boil your water. It was that kind of living, but it was okay for a year, I liked it.

ALBIN: And during this time were you working at anything other than being a mother?
(laugh)

KAMI: Nope.

ALBIN: You were just taking care of the kids the whole time?

KAMI: That's what I was doing. The only job I ever had—and occasionally I would do things like sew for people or type for people if I needed some money, but—I remember when Dick was graduating from dental school I wanted to buy him a pocket watch. He wanted a pocket watch. So I made bridesmaid's dresses and I typed labels and stuff. Oh my gosh. There's an oriole out there. I'm sorry.

ALBIN: Oh no, that's okay.

KAMI: I never see orioles. Anyway, sorry. Then when we were in Japan I taught a few classes at the University of Maryland's campus there for a friend of mine, but that's really—I never—I didn't have—I was busy. But I know there are people now who have children and full-time jobs. I do not know how they do it, honestly. I do not know how they do it. I don't think I could have done it. It was hard enough for me to be a mother. I was not a natural mother. It was work all day long every day and I don't know how I would have had energy to do anything else.

ALBIN: So you mentioned that you got divorced and you went back to grad school. So grad school for—

KAMI: I went—when we were still married we were in Altus, Oklahoma and I went to Cameron University, which is in Lawton, for my master's degree. It was about an hour's drive. And it saved my life. I mean to get out and go to classes and be thinking and

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reading, it really—because my marriage was ending at that point. I knew that. And Dick didn't want me to go, but I went anyway and I really loved it. And so then we moved to Utah and I took a year off. I didn't know if I was going to go back to school or not. About a year later I thought I really need to go back. I wanted to get my Ph.D. So yeah, so we divorced in October and then I started grad school the next summer.

ALBIN: Um-hm. And so what year is this?

KAMI: This is—I started in 1994, my Ph.D. program.

ALBIN: And so how old would your children be at this point?

KAMI: My daughter—let's see '94, my daughter was—she was born in '80, she was fourteen? Yeah, she was fourteen. Yeah. So we divorced when she was twelve. We finally—we decided it was finally—twelve or thirteen. That's really—he had asked me for a divorce about four times before then and I'd always said no because of the kids. I just couldn't imagine how we were going to do that. And when she was twelve I said, Okay. (laugh) And we had a great relationship for a year. We were better friends than we'd ever been. And then I met Michele and it just fell apart. He just went wacky. He just went crazy, so—and then—

ALBIN: So how did you meet Michele?

KAMI: I went to Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Indiana, Pennsylvania for grad school. I had seen a notice. I was teaching part time at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. And I saw this notice on the wall for this Rhetoric and Linguistics program. And I knew I wanted to know more about teaching writing. So I just found out about it and I applied. So I didn't know anything about it. I knew nothing about grad school. I didn't know anything about academia really, and I just—and I was accepted and so I went and Michele was there.

ALBIN: So she was in the program as well?

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KAMI: She was in the program starting when I did. And we met the first day. And then we just fell in love in about a week. (laugh)

ALBIN: Wow.

KAMI: It was really fast. Yeah and so—so that summer I was being in love and trying to go to grad school, and that was really hard but it was really wonderful and— And then I had to come back to Utah and she had to go back to Buffalo and we really missed each other. And so I flew out there to see her one time and she flew out to Utah to see me. And then I moved there in December. And my ex-husband—I had been living in the house with my kids, and he had remarried and he was living in a little dinky apartment. And I said, Let's just switch. You and—his wife just come to the house and I'll move into the apartment. And then that sort of made it possible for me to then just move. The one big regret of my life is that I did—we did not figure out how to do that better, because that meant that I left my children. And I didn't leave my children in Utah, but they stayed in Utah, I went to Buffalo. And my daughter had a really rough time. And she's really still angry—very angry with me. And I think—she didn't want to go with me, but I should have just said—I should have said, You have to come, or we should have figured out a way to be in Utah and we didn't do it. And that was probably—it was—I'm not regretful that I went to be with Michele because for me it felt like there was no choice in that at all, but I think if we had tried harder we might have been able to figure out how to do it and keep—to keep my daughter in the picture somewhere. So yeah, she's still kind of—she's still pretty unhappy with me. We've talked about this a lot, but every few years I get—she just let's me have it. So she hasn't really—she's still pretty angry.

ALBIN: So when you met Michele and fell in love within a week—

KAMI: (laugh)

ALBIN: Did that—did red flags go off or anything? Like had you in the past been attracted to women?

KAMI: Yes—

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ALBIN: I mean, you had your 14-year-old—when you were fourteen experience, but what about later on?

KAMI: Yeah. My ex-husband and I had a bad marriage from day one. In fact, we talked about divorce the first week we were married. And so it was bad in a lot of different ways. And it just didn't—there would be periods of okayness, it would get better. We did therapy, we did all that stuff. We just kept having children, thinking it was going to be better and it didn't really get better, and then it got worse. And I started to think about women. I started to think about women when my—I was pregnant—when we lived in Kingsville, so I was in between children and I started to think about women. And as time went on I thought about them more, and I thought, Okay this is what this is and I understood what was happening. And he asked me a couple of times, Do you think you're a lesbian? And I said, No. I mean, I couldn't be. I had a husband and five children and I was a Mormon, and what was I going to do with that? So I just put it aside, but he—he had his suspicions and so did I. So when we divorced and then I decided to go to grad school I thought, I'm open to anything, just anything. I didn't know what was going to happen. And I met her and I said, Okay. This is what it is. And it felt—it was wonderful. I mean, I'm sure you've heard that from lots of people. It just—and maybe you felt the same way yourself. It was a very liberating, wonderful thing to meet myself at the age of forty-four. It was fabulous. So—it made a lot of people really unhappy in Buffalo and in Utah, but I was not going to live my life inauthentically anymore, I'd had enough, and yeah, so I said okay.

ALBIN: So at what point did you start telling people that you were involved in this relationship?

KAMI: When we first decided that—we realized what was happening, I said to her, Don't—I didn't want her to tell anybody in the program with us because I didn't want their feelings—their attitude toward us to change. I wasn't—but when I got back to Utah it didn't take me very long to write a letter to my family. And I told them, I said, I've left the church, I've met Michele, and I'm moving to Buffalo. And it was—and I sent it to my mother, my brother, and my sister—my parents, my brother and my sister. And I said, Do not pretend you didn't get this letter because it's going to everybody, and so you

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[can't] act like it didn't happen.³ So I got various letters from them and phone calls and it was not good, very bad actually. But my ex-husband's brother was—is gay—is gay. And he'd been out to us for a number of years by that time. And he and I were good friends, and so he was very supportive, he and his partner. And they stayed in touch with me and kind of helped me get through—I was really—I mean, I was a mess in some ways, in other ways I was so happy. I thought really I would tell people and they would just be happy for me. That's how—I was so naïve about it. I thought, I'm finally going to be happy and everybody's going to be happy for me. And they weren't, so—which is not an unusual story. So I had a lot of support from my mother's brother and his family and still do. He's—my uncle is wonderful. But yeah, so again I've lost my train of thought here but—

ALBIN: But your uncle is also Mormon, is he not?

KAMI: He left the church.

ALBIN: Okay.

KAMI: And when I was leaving it he helped me get through that particular thing, because he had realized many years ago that he did not believe stuff. And he knew a lot about the history of the church and he just figured out that it was not for him. And so when I started to act like I was going to leave he helped me, and I was really grateful. It wasn't that hard for me to leave because I didn't believe it anymore, but to have his support was really, really good. And then when I told them about Michele they were wonderful. In fact, after I moved to Buffalo they wanted us to come one Christmas—all their kids come at Christmastime and they wanted us to come. I said, We don't have any money. And they bought us tickets and they were—they've been fabulous, so—and more recently he's also been very supportive. So he was really good. But everybody else was really unhappy and—my ex-husband was very unhappy. And I had said to him and to my parents, I want to tell my kids so you don't tell them, I want to sit down with them. Well they did anyway. So my kids got this sort of skewed picture of what had happened. My daughter believed I had left her for another woman. My kids—and

³ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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then it got twisted into this weird thing where I had left their dad for Michele. And I found out this last year. Because my son was in rehab and I would go up to Atchison occasionally. They like families to be involved. So I would go up there. And I (laugh) went to a small group session. And he started to tell the story about how I left their dad for Michele. And I let him finish and I said, Can I say something, and the facilitator said, Sure. And I said, You know, Tucker, I said, your dad and I were divorced before I met Michele. We had been divorced for a whole year before I met her. And somehow that had just—that whole story had gotten changed, I believe probably deliberately by people. So I had to talk to my kids and I had to say, Please let your siblings know that this is a mistake. It was very strange. So I didn't get a chance to tell them and so it was—I'm close to my middle son, Jacob and he's willing to ask me questions and he'll talk to me. The rest of them don't ask me many questions and, yeah, so that was—that's been ongoing.

ALBIN: And now you had mentioned leaving the church and getting help leaving the church. What does that entail, like leaving the church?

KAMI: Leaving the—the Mormon Church is not just a church, as you may know, it is a way of life. So every decision you make, every move you make, is about the church—your decisions about what to eat, your decisions about what to wear, everything all day long. So I had stopped believing the church was true probably ten years before I left. And I had had every position in the church that a woman can hold, I mean, every leadership position, I had done all of it. And when I realized I didn't— Even after I knew I didn't have a testimony of the church anymore, I was called to be Relief Society—it's called a Relief Society president, which is the leader of the women in the ward or the branch, the congregation. And I said to the bishop when he called me, I said, I don't believe it anymore. And he said, That's okay I want you to do it anyway. And I did a good job, but I could never stand up in front of those women and say, I know the church is true. I didn't believe it anymore. So—I mean, I remember the moment that I was sure I didn't believe it anymore. My daughter was born with what's called a tetralogy of Fallot, [four] things wrong with her heart.⁴ So she had surgery when she was three months old. It went well, everything was fine. But I remember being in that hospital,

⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

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looking around at all these children. And in the Mormon Church there is a belief that the members of the priesthood, who are only men, will come and lay their hands on the head of a sick person and give them a healing blessing and that'll—they'll get better. So somebody was coming to give Meagan a healing blessing. And I looked around at all these children who were not Mormons and I thought, There's no way that any God is going to favor my child over these other children because of this. And it was sort of a—like one of those moments where I went, Okay I don't believe this anymore. And so by the time I left—(laugh) the divorce—I'm grateful to my ex-husband for divorcing me because it meant I could leave. And so I was moving toward it, but I couldn't figure out how to get out. Once we were divorced I took off the underwear, I gradually started wearing it less and less. And I'd go to church but I'd take a book with me, and then I was going less and less. I was taking my kids, basically. And then when I moved I just—when I went to grad school I just quit going, totally quit going. And I remember my father writing me some letters and saying—Oh he called me and he said, You're going to church aren't you? And I said, No. Well you need to go. And I said, Okay, but I never—I was done. And I have never, ever missed it. I have never for one minute thought, Should I have done this? It was the most important decision for me to make in terms of my—I had immediate peace of mind. I knew I had done the right thing. And this is—in the Mormon Church you don't make conscious decisions like this. You leave because you're lazy or because you can't keep the commandments or whatever, but you never—I mean, people do, but active Mormons don't think it's possible to make a conscious choice to leave and to not believe it anymore. My parents cannot conceive of my not believing it anymore, and I just don't believe it. So for me leaving was not very traumatic. For some people it's really, really traumatic, especially LGBT people who want to stay, and they essentially are kicked out, so that's horrible for them. But I wasn't out then. I hadn't figured that out yet, and I just—I just quit.

ALBIN: So do you practice any kind of religion now at all or—

KAMI: No, I'm an atheist.

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KAMI: And I'm really happy. (laughter) I'm so happy about that. I mean, I just don't feel like there's any hole in my life. I think I have a spiritual life, it has nothing to do with religion and I don't miss it. I really don't miss it.

ALBIN: You had used the phrase, taking off the underwear.

KAMI: Yeah. (laugh)

ALBIN: Is that a metaphor or—

KAMI: No, that is not a metaphor.

ALBIN: Okay.

KAMI: And if you go—if you type Mormon underwear into Google you will find all kinds of information.

ALBIN: Okay.

KAMI: When you go, you're—if you're married in the Temple, and you must be married in the temple if you're an active member of the church. So you go—only active members can go in there, it's not chapels, this is the Temple—and you do what's called taking out your endowment. And so when you go through the first time you take out your own endowment. And that means that you go through this whole process called—the first time you go through you do this washing and anointing which is very strange. And I can't remember it very well, but there's certain things they have to say and they touch certain parts of you with sacred oil or whatever. And then you go through this whole ceremony, and after that you always wear what are called garments. And they come to your knees and there's a little sleeve. And it's partly about modesty, but there are also marks on the garments that signify certain things about the church, the promises that you have made in the Temple to obey the commandments and all that sort of thing. And it's really very much—if you know anything about masonry—Joseph Smith, who founded the church, was a mason. A lot of it is very much like stuff in

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masonry. So you promise that you're going to wear these garments the rest of your life basically, and so I did. (laugh)

ALBIN: So this is like you're in jeans and you put this on underneath everything?

KAMI: Underneath your clothes.

ALBIN: Okay.

KAMI: And they are supposed to be next to your skin. So you wear them all— I mean, there are times you can take them off, and clearly you can swim and stuff, but since you promise—and so when you go to the—if you're going to go in the Temple you have to get what's called a recommend. And they ask you certain questions, and one of them is, Do you wear the temple garments? And so you have to say yes and then you do. And you have to go to a certain store to buy them and you have to have a temple recommend to get them. And I had been chafing with this underwear for a number of years already. And I remember my in-laws at the time—they weren't even my in-laws anymore. We were divorced, but we were still very close. And they had a condominium down in southern Utah. And they said, Why don't you go and spend the weekend down there? So I did. And I took off my garments. So I said, This is the last time. And I took them off. And I went out and walked around in the desert. And I will never forget how wonderful that felt. It was fabulous. I had shorts on and a sleeveless shirt. (laugh) I don't even know if I had any underwear on at all. I mean, I just think I—I just remember thinking, Oh my God this feels so good. I was so ready to get rid of that stuff. So all of that—part of that system and that, I mean I really think it's oppressive and I think it's circumscribed. There are all these interesting systems that circumscribe my life—the military and marriage and the church. And so I had to get out of all of those, and I did. And it was like—and I remember—I wrote about this too. I was—I love southern Utah. I discovered the desert when we moved there and I used to go down there by myself a lot. And I was driving along and I had this sense of not an onion peeling off but of this—of having this sort of shell of clay that somebody hit with a hammer and it just fell off. It wasn't a grad—it just all of a sudden was gone, because I sort of did it all at once, which

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I wouldn't probably recommend, but for me it just had to be that way.⁵ Church was gone, marriage was gone, all of it was gone, and I felt terrific. I went to grad school feeling like I was the most wonderful person in the entire world. I just felt wonderful. It was great.

[Section removed]

ALBIN: Yeah. All righty so we're back on. So did you notice at all when you were in the church—because you had mentioned LGBT people getting kicked out. Did you know of that happening to people at all?

KAMI: I did not know anything about that. It was not on my radar at all. I don't remember even thinking about homosexuality in the church. I mean, I remember when Dick's brother came out, but he had already left the church by then. Dick was upset, my oldest son was upset. I went, Oh yeah. I mean, I knew that already about him and—I know that I was not homophobic, but I don't remember thinking a lot about the church and LGBT people. I just wasn't making that—having those thoughts. I wasn't— And I said to my mother a few years ago, I said, You know, I think one of the reasons I accepted myself so well is because you taught me to be accepting of homosexual people. I mean, she explained to me about gay men. And I don't remember any judgment on her part. She had lots of gay friends. I think—she spent a lot of years dancing with a guy whose nickname was Snake, I think. And he went to New York and became a dancer. Now come on. He never got married. So I think she had gay friends, I think—and I think she—I think something happened. Somehow she was able to convey to me that that was okay with her, and she doesn't want to hear that now. I mean, she was really horrified when I told her that (laugh) but I think that probably had something to do with it, I don't know.

ALBIN: So when the disaster hit of your children being told by your ex-husband and your parents, how did you try and reconcile things with them, because your daughter was fourteen and how old were your other children?

⁵ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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KAMI: Let's see, my—that would mean that Isaac, my next oldest, was sixteen and then Jacob was probably almost eighteen. Tucker and Josh were gone. They were out of the house by then. Josh was on a mission. No, was he on a mission? He was on a mission. [Actually he was home by then.]⁶ And Tucker was somewhere, I don't know where. So I went—I moved to Buffalo in December. I went back to Utah in May for three weeks and stayed with my grandma. And we didn't talk about any of this, because I didn't know that they had been told. And I discovered it because I did a bad thing and read my daughter's journal. And so we still didn't talk about it, but I wrote them all a letter before I left, and left it with them and they still never (laugh) talked to me about it. But finally my son, Jacob, did talk to me, and he said, How come [mom]?⁷ What happened? And so I could talk to him and it was fine. And my oldest son, oh, he came to see us. He was a mess. He got off his mission and was okay for a while and then he just fell apart. He got into drugs and stuff and—he came to visit Michele and me while we—in Buffalo, and he—we had the most disastrous, horrible visit. It was just awful. He stole from us. He just—he was really a mess. And then—he had been to see his—then he went back to his girlfriend. Anyway, she got pregnant and they got married, and I didn't—and then I didn't know they were going to have a baby. And when I found out I wrote him a letter and I said—I said, This is ridiculous. I could die tomorrow and then you'd feel bad that you never talk to me. I said, Now you're going to have a baby and I didn't even know that. And then we got on this conversation about, Well why can't you and Michele just be friends? And I said, We're not just friends. Why don't you and Lindsay just be friends? Well it's not the same. So he—I think Josh is very, very homophobic. When his uncle came out I thought he was going to just shoot himself, he was so upset. So I think he's very homophobic and—things got better and then they got worse again and then they got better and now they're worse again. So I think he loves me from afar as his mother, I think he despises me as a lesbian. I think he just can't stand it. So my son Jacob and I have always been pretty much okay, Isaac and I pretty much okay. Tucker, even though with all his difficulties, he and I are close now. He lives in Kansas City and we get along very well, and he's real close to Michele. And my daughter's angry. And she's married now to a guy who I think has had some influence on her in this area. And we had a big blowup about a year ago because she said, When you come here you can't stay with us because you can't stay in our house

⁶ Add by narrator during the review process.

⁷ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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together. And so we had these many, many e-mail exchanges. And I kept saying Why? Why? Why? All these other people in our family invite Michele and I to stay with them. They don't seem to have any problem—and at that time that was all okay. It's not okay now but—finally she said, Well it's because of what you do at night together. And I said, Oh so you've reduced our entire relationship to sex, and so is it okay if I reduce your entire relationship with Hubert, her husband, to sex. Can I do that? So that—so then we stopped—then she didn't want to talk about it anymore, and so we haven't talked about it. But when I go there—like I went when she had her baby, but I didn't stay with them. And she's having another baby this year and I don't know what she's going to want me to do, but I won't go to her house so—so with three of my children I think it's good, and with two it's not so good. But three out of five ain't bad. (laugh) It's okay.

ALBIN: So you moved to Buffalo in '94. And you had mentioned that people in Buffalo were also upset. So who was in Buffalo that was upset? Is that where Michele's family is?

KAMI: Yeah. It wasn't Michele's family. Michele had a partner when I met her. This is the deep, dark secret. It's not a deep, dark secret but, that's the other thing I do feel bad about this. And I knew she had a partner. And it wasn't going well, but that doesn't matter. Anyway, so we began our relationship with my knowing that she had a partner. And so when she went back to Buffalo she had to tell her partner about me, and when she did that of course she had to move out of the house (laugh) and that was bad. And all of her friends were not happy with me and her—and justifiably. But I went to get my hair cut one day. And I'm stuck in the chair with this guy and he starts in on me about her partner and the terrible thing that I had done, and here I'm captive. So there was some of that going on. And people—people there believed, and I think her partner had told people, that I had left my husband and five small children for Michele. People believed that. Because I finally went to breakfast with her sister, who was not very happy with me, and she told me that people thought that. And I said, No. For one thing, I don't have five small children, and number two I was divorced a year before I met Michele, so that—there was part of that. So she just had—she had to really create a whole new bunch of friends, and a lot of her friends that she had with her partner she didn't have anymore. So I'm not going to make any excuses or rationalizations for that.

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And as it's worked out it's actually worked out very well for everybody, but of course we didn't know that was going to happen and—so yeah. There is that.

ALBIN: So what did you do when you moved to Buffalo?

KAMI: I moved there in December and I started to substitute teach in the public schools. And I did that five times and thought I would rather scrub floors and clean other people's bathrooms than do this. But I found a job working as a model, a live model, in art classes at Buffalo State and the University of Buffalo and Canisius College, which is a Jesuit College. And I liked that job. (laugh) I didn't mind being naked in front of strangers. I'm not very modest and I had no trouble with it. And it was interesting. And I was making, I think, eight dollars an hour. And then when I got the job at Canisius they had never had a live model there. And Father Tunney, who had hired me, said we cannot have art classes without a live model. So there were students who wouldn't come when I was there. And they would get *Playboys* and stuff and draw from those pictures, but they wouldn't come see me when I was there. But it was interesting to learn—I mean, I had to learn how to do just—poses for gesture drawing and then really long poses. And I did that for a semester in Buffalo in the cold. So they would—(laugh) they would put these little heaters by my feet and they would roast my leg—my feet and my calves, and the rest of me would be freezing. But that was kind of interesting. And then I got a job—I got part-time teaching at Niagara County Community College and at Buffalo State. And so I did that for the next three years. And then—then Michele—I'm not an easterner, I discovered. I didn't want to live in Buffalo the rest of my life and Michele was not averse to finding a job someplace else. And so she applied for the KU job because it's right exactly between Buffalo and Utah. And I was really grateful. And I was afraid she wouldn't like it here, but she did. So she doesn't want to go back there to live and I really can't—can't live there, so—so yeah. So Buffalo is a wonderful city in a lot of ways. I mean, the people are really wonderful and architecture is fabulous, food is wonderful, wonderful diversity, but it's really economically depressed and it's cold and it seems dark to me, I don't know. But I was glad that I lived there (unintelligible). So we go back there and see her family. Actually she is from Niagara Falls, so we go there, and her sister lives in Buffalo.

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ALBIN: So living in Buffalo for four years, three, four years and then moving to Kansas, and so you've been here since '98, '99?

KAMI: Um-hm, '98.

ALBIN: And then Michele got the job at KU. What did you end up doing?

KAMI: The first year I was here I taught adjunct in the English Department at KU. I was finishing—we were both finishing our dissertations. And when I finished, some jobs were open at Johnson County Community College and I thought, Okay, because I didn't want to do a national search, I didn't want to move. I didn't want to have a long distance relationship—I should leave this microphone alone—long distance relationship, and so I applied and I got the job, which really surprised me because in the interview I said things like, I don't ever want to teach at a place that tells me what textbook I have to use. And of course they said, Well we all use the same textbook. But they hired me anyway. And it's been a good ten years there, yeah. It's been okay. So I didn't want a job in the English Department at KU and there weren't any openings and they wouldn't have hired me anyway, so—and I got to do things at Johnson County I wouldn't have been able to do at a more liberal institution so, sort of found my voice there. And Michele loved her job there. She loved KU. She just got to a point there where she wasn't—they weren't going to give her things to do to go further. And she's so creative and she's smart, so it became clear that she needed to leave.

ALBIN: What was it like starting a Ph.D. at forty-four?

KAMI: Oh, I loved it so much. I had the most wonderful transformative experience. I just—we did these in—the program that I was in was Intensive Summer Courses and then Dissertation. And so we were there for three summers. And we had this wonderful cohort of women and a couple of men and I just loved it. I was so happy when I was there. I loved the classes, I loved—I mean, it was hard work, but—I was there because I wanted to be, and I just was with people I really liked and was doing work I liked and I just—I loved it. And the day I defended was one of the happiest days of my life. I mean, even with all those children's births and—I don't say this very often because really it was just—I was just so happy. (laugh) It's kind of silly but I was really—I loved

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the whole experience. I mean, there were things that were bad. Like Michele and I, we decided we wanted to do a collaborative dissertation about collaboration—about teams of writers. And we had a committee that was supportive, they were going to make it happen for us, and then the Graduate School and Research said, No. But our committee had said, No, don't worry we'll fight for you, but they didn't. So we had written a hundred-page rationale for this collaborative dissertation. We were going to do two—three studies actually. And we had to split it up. So we actually worked with each other on our dissertation. So some of it—if you looked at our dissertations you would find things in them that are exactly the same. But that was the only thing that was negative about that experience. I just—I loved it. I always recommend it to people, go back when you're old—older.

ALBIN: Yeah. There does seem to be an appreciation for school when you've had some experience.

KAMI: And the truth was, it wasn't even about a job for me. I just wanted to do it. And even after getting my job I didn't think of it as a career until a couple years down the road. I mean, I just thought of it as my job for a while and then I went, Oh, I seem to have a career here. But it was really—and that's a privileged thing to say, right, it wasn't about a job. It wasn't—I just—and even my master's degree when I was getting that, it was really traumatic in a lot of ways because I was teaching part time and I had five kids at home and I was in a very bad marriage and I didn't sleep very much, but even so, that experience was also very good.

ALBIN: And you had mentioned when you were working at Johnson County Community College that you got to do some really interesting things. So what did you do with your students? (laugh)

KAMI: Well the first couple of years I just—I was figuring things out and I—I was out. I went there—I was out immediately. In fact, I went—they had this thing called the Ladies Lunch every—they still have it, the English Department women get together. And they invited me to come before the semester started. And one of the first questions was, What does your husband do? So I said, Well my partner was brought to KU to develop their Writing Center, she does this and she does that. And that person literally turned

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around and walked away from me, did not know what to do with that information. And then I sat down for lunch and then that person next to me said, (laugh) What does your husband do? (laugh) So I—she couldn't even talk to me. I mean, I just—they just were not prepared for this person who was going to be out like that. But I was determined to be out immediately, and I was. And it was no big deal for a while. And then we hired a new person a couple years down the road and he asked me—he was asked by some students to be the advisor to what was then the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender student union. And he was—he's straight, but he said, Okay. But I was his mentor. And he called me and he said, Is this going to hurt me? And I said, I don't think so. I said, I'm out there and I've got tenure and I'm okay. And so he did. And then he and I got to be—he asked me to co-advise with him a couple years after that. And about that time I discovered that sexual orientation was not part of the nondiscrimination policy. And so I—we have in-service every—in spring, in January. So I put together a panel that was entitled, The Experience of Being Queer at Johnson County Community College. And some students, some of our queer students, were on the panel. And we had a packed room of people, mostly sympathetic. There were a couple of people there who had come to make sure that we weren't doing any damage, but mostly it was people who were very interested in hearing. So that was kind of the beginning of that. And I had already begun starting to talk to people about the nondiscrimination policy. I talked to the Faculty Association, I just began to talk to different people. And in the fall I really started the push it with the Faculty Association. I went there and I met with them and I talked to them, and I joined the Faculty Association. And we got a letter written to the president. And it was supposed to go to the board and he told us he had taken it, but he didn't. So I was working really hard that fall but nothing happened that I thought was supposed [happened.]⁸ We had a president then who was a jerk. He was bad. So in the spring I went on sabbatical. And I thought I—I had a study all lined up, and I spent my entire sabbatical working on the nondiscrimination policy—all my time making phone calls, writing e-mails, meeting with people, writing—I just spent all my time doing all of it. I went to campus almost once a week to meet with people and talk to people, and [it] wasn't moving, wasn't moving.⁹ We had a letter writing thing going on. I met with— Oh, I talked to so many people. I did speeches, whatever. Finally—the president, meanwhile, had been accused of sexual harassment. So that whole thing

⁸ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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kind of blew up. So there was that going on, there was the nondiscrimination policy going on. And finally at a board meeting—and I met—I had gone to meet with a group of people in Johnson County. And I met with a woman whose name I can't remember who was kind of a mover and shaker. She's in mainstream and a lot with those other things. And she said—she said, I think it's going to happen because I think all this stuff about Carlsen and the sexual harassment is going to just—it's just—she said, I think it's going to slide through. So I found out—the next board meeting, like the next Monday, the Faculty Association president e-mailed me and he said—he said they're going—he said, I think it's going to happen at the board meeting tonight. So I borrowed my neighbor's truck because I didn't have the car. We only had one car at the time and Michele had it. And I drove like a bat out of hell to get there. And sure enough, the president brought it up for a vote. He said, We're going to vote on this tonight. And they voted on it, and they voted it in. And what he said was, It's because—it's part of the policy for the regents, the Board of Regents. And the board was—I mean, the board members were not real happy about this, I could tell, but for some reason it happened. So that got done. But then I just all of a sudden woke up and I saw what needed to be done there, and there was so much stuff that needed to be done. And so I became kind of the pain-in-the-ass lesbian. I mean, I just started to do—Shaun and I started to do Safe Space Workshops. We started to do other kinds of workshops. We were very involved in cultural competency kinds of things. And so we were very much—very visible on campus with doing those kinds of things. And then Queers and Allies got active and they wanted to change their name so they changed it to Queers and Allies which was another big deal. And so we had to have a forum and explain what all that was about and I got—I just can't even begin to tell you how much time I have spent e-mailing people who send me questions or concerns or complaints or whatever, and I'm just back and forth, back and forth. At some point we did a Pride week before—it wasn't really anything compared to what we do now, but we had some people come to campus and a big—there was a big—when I sent the announcement out people complained that they didn't want to hear about gay and lesbian people, they didn't have to hear that, that was offensive to them. And so then there was a big listserv discussion about that. So there was always that kind of thing going on. And then Shaun and I had been working really hard to get a multicultural center. And when we got our new president he was very supportive. And so we got together and started to create this job description, realized we needed an officer, a diversity officer. And so we wrote the job description

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for that and Carmaletta Williams became that person, and they created the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. And Shaun and I had been doing this kind of work all along. And so the president asked us to help Carmaletta with (laugh) this. And she didn't know he'd asked us. But I told her—we finally told her. In fact, she went to the Creating Change Conference that January. I said to her, If you're going to be the executive director of this office it's probably a good idea that you come to this conference, so she did. And so Shaun and I were there and we told her that we had been appointed to help her. And so what she did was create diversity fellows. So we were diversity fellows and then some other ones got appointed, and so we were all working with her. We got the mission statement written. There were three diversity fellows at that time and her that spring, that spring of—that was last year, 2008. We got all that stuff written. We sort of got the office in place. And then in the fall some other fellows came on board and—so I had release time to do that work and that's—and so it also became part of my teaching, because I design my class around identity, and so I was having my students do readings on conversion therapy. And my transgender friend comes to my class every semester and talks to my students. And so that—I made that somehow part of the curriculum. And it fit. I mean, I wasn't forcing it, it was okay. But I was just—it just became my identity there, this activist identify. And I was doing workshops for the health professions. And I began putting together—I did a survey with them and I put together resources for them. And mostly—it's for cultural competence. But what happened—what I realized from the research, that was very informal, was that most of them had not even thought of LGBT health stuff, and so that was really interesting. And so I found lots of good sources for them and I became a resource for them. There's just an awful lot to—I mean, there was so much stuff going on that—and my focus became cultural competence, and it became mostly LGBT stuff because there was nobody else to do that.

ALBIN: Right.

KAMI: And so I did and so I loved it. I loved it. Even with the controversy and even with people accusing me of things and thinking I was a pain, I really loved it. And so I want to continue to do that, figure out in Oklahoma what there is to do there. And there's a lot left to do. And I began working on—oh we got domestic partner benefits a couple months ago. I'm going to (unintelligible) my voice here. So the board voted that

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through without any problem. And I know there had been a lot of discussion because I had been sending them a lot of materials and I had been meeting with people. But I went to the board meeting thinking I would have to give my speech and they just voted. So we're the only institution in this state that has them, and that's a big deal.

ALBIN: That's a very big deal.

KAMI: And then gender identity, I was working on for the nondiscrimination policy and that hit a snag because the executive council thinks that having sex in the nondiscrimination policy is enough. So I'm working on a proposal now and I'll have that to them before I leave, but I've got the students excited about that in the fall. We have transgender students and faculty, and they're going to take it up. So I think it'll get in there.

ALBIN: That's a lot. (laugh)

KAMI: Yeah, it was very interesting. I mean, I could go on and on and on about this. I've gotten harassing materials in my mailbox, I've been accused of all kinds of things on public e-mails. In fact, there has been a formal complaint lodged against me recently because this person's accusing me of trying to silence her. She says I took her off the listserv and I didn't. And she also says that I told her that I discriminate against my students who don't agree with me about same-sex marriage. And what I said to her when she asked me about that was I said, Absolutely, I do not discriminate against those students. I said, We just try to create a classroom in which everybody can express what they're thinking, but we need to support it and we need to be respectful. And we talk about the kinds of language that are okay. And I said, The language you're using on the listserv is oppressive and discriminatory and that's not okay. So I think people know me well enough that I don't think it'll go anywhere. I'm leaving anyway, but the complaint is not only against me so—I say things like, If you don't support same-sex marriage then you are supporting oppression and discrimination. That's what I say because that's true. And so I've had—I've done a lot of really—I read the entire statement the judges wrote in Connecticut. It's wonderful and so accessible and I've learned so much. And I read the Constitution again and I—I learned enough that I could

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really sort of talk about this in an intelligent way and—we had a forum on Proposition 8. We invited people to come on campus and—so—my job was education.

ALBIN: Right. And what about activism in Lawrence?

KAMI: I haven't done—I've done nothing basically, not very much at all, because I haven't had time.

ALBIN: Right. (laugh)

KAMI: I just had to think, Okay this is my little sphere of influence and that's what I can do. I mean, I stay in touch with Maggie Childs, and—but I just—she invited me—I went to their Kansas Equality Coalition meetings a couple times. But I'm not very good at inserting myself into groups that have been together for a while, and I just felt really out of place. And so that wasn't anybody's fault. I just said to her, I'm not going to—if you need, I'll be happy to help with whatever, but I'm not going to come to meetings and stuff, so—

ALBIN: So since you've been in Kansas, well since '99 in there somewhere, have you noticed the politics changing in Kansas or—

KAMI: I don't think I have. I mean, then we had the marriage thing and our Queers and Allies Group went there. We went during the day. We took—we all—none of us went to class that day. We got a school van. We went and demonstrated on the—on the capitol grounds and stuff, but I—in general, no I haven't. I mean at my institution, yeah, at least in terms of policy and education I think things are a little better. I think there is still a lot—an awful lot of work to be done. What do you think? (laugh)

ALBIN: It's hard to say. (laugh)

KAMI: I don't know that it's that much better, just in general here. I don't know.

ALBIN: From my interviews it seems it depends on where you live.

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KAMI: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, western Kansas, no.

ALBIN: Yeah it— Yeah.

KAMI: If you live in Lawrence, yes, things are pretty much okay. If you're—Johnson County at least there's a lot of stuff in the air at my institution, but I don't—I don't know.

ALBIN: Right. And you had said—you had mentioned moving to Oklahoma which is like the next step. (laugh)

KAMI: (unintelligible).

ALBIN: And yeah, so what do you—I mean, because Tulsa has the sixth largest GLBT center in the U.S.—

KAMI: I didn't know that, okay.

ALBIN:A—and they're very— There's a lot going on at the center.

KAMI: Well, University of Oklahoma doesn't even have a diversity office. I found a little—I think there is a little student group, but I think that's all there is there, there's nothing. And they don't have any money to do it right now anyway, but—and I can't—that can't be something I could probably get into. Although I think—I think Michele, because she's now the executive director of the teaching and learning center, I don't know what it's called there, but the equivalent, and she wants to start doing some workshops and stuff and they may be able to use my talents in that way. But I need to find out what's going on in Lawrence even, or in Norman, sorry. And I made a joke with her during—when I went to the Pride parade here. I said, I think we should have a Pride parade in Norman next year. And she said, (makes noise) I'll alert the media, Kami's coming. But she makes jokes about—she thinks that Johnson County and my family have Kami fatigue. They've just heard—and really, I found my voice, but I know a lot of people are tired of hearing from me because I have really been writing so much at Johnson County and talking so much, because nobody else will do it. Even the other LGBT faculty and staff we have will not do it. And my concern and Carmaletta's

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concern is, Who's going to take this up when I leave? Because even Shaun, who's as good as he is, is not interested in activist work. And there's a lot to be done still and I don't want—I don't want it to just stop, but I don't know what's going to happen. But I have been, probably to some people, made way too much noise. And it's true, but there's—and maybe somebody else would have done it if I hadn't done so much, I don't know.

ALBIN: Right. Right. And you had just said that your family has Kami fatigue.

KAMI: Big time.

ALBIN: What is the relationship like now with your parents? You mentioned that they were very upset when—

KAMI: Let me try and tell the story chronologically. This is about Prop 8 and Mormonism. Last fall—I had thought my parents might agree with Prop 8 but I just thought they might think, Oh yeah we should do that. But my uncle called me right before the election and he said—he just—he never calls me, right? We just chatted and he said, Kami, I need to tell you something. And I said, What? And he said, Do you know that your parents are working for Prop 8 in California? And I said, What do you mean? And he said, They're speaking to people, they're actively working for it. He said, That's the reason they didn't come to—one of my cousins died and they didn't come to her funeral because they were so busy with Prop 8. And I said, No I didn't know that. And he said, Well I'm sorry to have to tell you that. And I said, Well I'm going to have to confront it. And he said, I know. He said, I really don't want to get in trouble with your mother, (laugh) but if you have to tell her that I told you, you can. And I said, Well, I'll try and figure out a way to do it without that happening. Well, coincidentally I had sent my brother, sister, and parents an article about a week before that written by a Mormon saying that the church should not be involved in that issue in California. So I hadn't heard from anybody, but I got an e-mail from my brother the day after I talked to my uncle and he said to me, We're working for Prop 8 and people are treating us badly. Oh boo-hoo, I just wanted to say, Well welcome to my world. The people who were against Prop 8 were yelling at them and saying bad things to them and he thought that was terrible. And I wrote back and I wrote to my parents

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immediately, very short message. And I said, Tristan, my brother, tells me he's working for Prop 8. Are you doing that? And they wrote back a really long message telling me why they were and why Prop 8 was a good thing and why same-sex marriage was a bad thing, and telling me that they knew a lot more about it than I did. So back and forth these e-mails went. And what happened in the course of that is I found out how they really felt about me and about my sexual orientation and about my relationship. And it was really, really awful, truly, truly awful. And my—they sent some of those messages to my children. And so my daughter-in-law, with whom I—my son Jacob's wife, we have a good relationship. And she wrote, she said, I feel so badly. She wrote my parents a message, but she was the only one. So I was having messages with my brother and my parents and my sister. And we were all—I mean, I was going at it from the logic, If you don't support same-sex marriage, you don't think I'm worthy of the same rights you do. And if you don't think I'm worthy of the same rights, you know where that goes. And they just were not seeing it—the prophet tells us this and so this is what we do, and this is what the church says and we are obedient. And that's really basically what it is. It doesn't matter who your daughter is. And here are all these things about, If you know a gay person it really changes how you feel. Well, bullshit. My parents know me and they know Michele and still they did this. I mean, the idea that my brother and my parents were out actively working against my rights, I could not get my mind around that and I still cannot get my mind around it, I just can't. So finally I said to them, Look this is what has to happen. You have to stop, number one, telling me that I chose to be gay because it doesn't matter whether I chose to be or not, you don't have the authority to say that. Number two, you have to apologize to me for working against my rights, and number three, you have to promise me you won't do it anymore. And they said, No we can't do that. So we didn't communicate for a long time. Since the election we hadn't communicated. And then recently—my father sent me something. He sent me an article from the *Mormon Times* written by somebody who was talking about how badly the Prop 8 supporters have been treated. And so I wrote him back. And he also sent me this quote. He said, There's nothing more wonderful than the love of a child for her parent or something. So I wrote back and I said—I said, I read the article because you asked me to but I said, I don't understand what this has to do with you and me. I'm your daughter and you know me, and how could you work against my rights? And don't you want me—I mean, it was a very carefully crafted letter—Don't you want me to be happy? What is this about? I'm your daughter. And really, is really your obedience to

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the church more important than that relationship with me? And then I said—I had always had trouble with the story of Abraham and Isaac. Do you know that story from the Bible?

ALBIN: I think so.

KAMI: God tells Abraham to kill his son Isaac, to show his obedience. So Abraham says, Okay. And he puts Isaac on this altar and he prepares to kill him. And then God says, No you don't have to. And as a young child—and I think that was really the beginnings of my problems with Christianity in general. But anyway, I said to my dad, I said, you betrayed me. I said, You didn't want me to know you were doing this. They didn't want me to know, it was a secret. And I said—I said, I know you didn't kill me physically, but I said, I've always had problems with the story of Abraham and Isaac. And I said, nobody ever gets to hear how Isaac felt about that, but you betrayed me. And I said, I don't want to be in the same room with you. And if you apologize to me I will forgive you right now. And I said, I have never in my life asked somebody to apologize to me as a condition of our relationship, never.¹⁰ So then I got another message from my mother and then I got a Mother's Day card. No, I sent her a Mother's Day card. And in it I made a joke and I said, You know, you've got two of your kids you feel pretty good about, so two out of three ain't bad, right? Well she wrote me back and she said, What's happened to your grammar? (laugh) And not only that, we don't want you to—you shouldn't feel bad about yourself. We don't want you to feel negative about yourself and blah, blah, blah. And I wrote back and I said, Mom this wasn't about how I felt about myself, this was about how you feel about me. And I said, Your work to take my rights away from me or deny me my rights demeans me and I can't have that. I said, Most of us who are LGBT people have worked hard to feel good about ourselves in one way or another and we're not about to let somebody threaten that. And I said, I just can't. And I said, I know—I realize I am beating my head against a brick wall here. You don't hear what I say, you don't want to hear what I say. So that was how we left it. And my brother kept writing to me saying, Just agree to disagree, these are your parents. And I said, This isn't about agreeing to disagree. This is a basic fundamental human rights issue. So I—it's been interesting to me because most of the people I tell

¹⁰ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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this story to, and I haven't told it to a lot, understand. LGBT people understand. I mean—hardly—nobody has said to me, Oh Kami you can't. You have to just forget and just ignore that. I just—I've ignored a lot of things over the years and I have—I've come to this, I just can't do it. So that's where we are right now. And I—as I said, I mean, my parents are eighty-two, but I cannot imagine being in the same— I can't imagine eating a meal with them, I can't—and a year before that happened we had a family reunion, and my parents—it's a big deal in Mormondom to write your history. We had a wonderful reunion. Everybody was terrific. Michele was there. It was all just great. I thought, Oh I've been wrong. I've been wrong. I need to be easy. I need to just quit this about my family. Everything's fine. So I get—my parents send me their family history, their life histories. I read my mother's, I read my father's. They do not mention my partner, Michele. And everybody else's partners are in there, all of them. Michele and I had been together, by that time, for fourteen years and she is not mentioned in there. So—and the only negative thing in the entire history was their feelings about my divorce. So the only negative thing was about me. So I e-mail my mother and I said, Oh I loved your history. I laughed, I cried, blah, blah, blah, but how come Michele's not in there? She writes me back, Oh I forgot. So I wrote back and I said, Mom there's just so much wrong with that. Number one, I don't think you forgot and number two, What does that say about how you think about my relationship? So then we had these big, long exchanges—Well we just think of Michele as your friend. I wrote back, She's not my friend, she's my partner, she's my lover, I love her. This is not about our being friends. So—oh and then they said, Well we didn't talk about her because she's not in the direct lineage. I said, What? I said, None of your sons-in-laws and [daughters-in-law,] they're not in the direct lineage.¹¹ And none of this makes any sense. So we just stop talking about that. So I let that go, but I really—it really has bothered me so much. And so when this happened with Prop 8 and all that stuff I thought, Okay this is how you really feel. And I really thought, This is really just about obedience to the church. The church tells you this and so you do it and it doesn't matter who your daughter is, it doesn't matter. And now I just don't know if it's that. I mean, I don't know if somebody said to them, Kill your son if they would do it. I don't think they would do it. So I think genuinely they feel that I'm not worthy of the rights they have, and I just don't want to be with people like (laugh) that. I mean, I have to be with them all the time but they're not

¹¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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my family. I just can't—even my oldest son, who doesn't speak to me, thinks that I should be able to get married. And this isn't about my getting married. I mean, I don't know that Michele and I will ever get married. It's about having the choice if I want to. I just—I don't know what's going to happen, I don't know. The church is—I don't have enough. I don't have the word to express my—how I feel about it. It's very, very, very negative. And I used to try and do the, Oh well it's really supportive of families, (unintelligible) community. I wish my kids would get out of it, I wish everybody would get out of it.

ALBIN: And so they're all still actively involved?

KAMI: Three of my children are, my daughter and my youngest son and my middle son. My oldest son became a Fundamentalist Christian and he is off the—he's way off the spectrum in terms of that. And my son, Tucker, who lives here, is just not religious anymore, so he's the one that—my son Jacob and his wife we are very close to. And they—they're still Mormons, but I don't really understand exactly what the relationship with the church is. I think for them it's a lot social and her family's very active. But they love Michele and she's their mother and we're their little boy's grandmas. And my oldest son and my daughter have told me that we are not to call—Michele cannot be the grandma and we are not to tell their children about our relationship. And I said to my daughter, Look if Ellie asks me I'll tell her. I'm not going to pretend that our relationship is something it's not. But she said, Well she can't call Michele grandma. Now that hurts Michele because she loves those little kids. She loves little kids more than I do, way more than I do. She loves the grandma thing. So I have—I can't—I have a hard—I can't forgive them for the way they have made her feel bad and I won't put her in that position anymore. And I don't really miss my family as much as I should maybe, because it was so tense when I was around them. It's like, If you can't talk about the church there is nothing to talk about. I spent a week with my parents when I was on sabbatical and (laugh) even more than when I was a kid there's church stuff everywhere. That really wasn't true when I was a kid, but there's really not very much to talk about if you're not busy with the church, so it was always very tense. And then we had really big arguments about things like racism and a big blowup one morning because they were saying awful things about Hispanic people and I just couldn't stand

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it. (laugh) So, maybe it's just a rest from each other, I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen.

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

KAMI: Hmm—I don't think so. I went through it really fast but—

ALBIN: No?

KAMI: I don't think so.

ALBIN: Okay. If I do have more questions I may come back for a follow-up interview.

KAMI: Well that's fine, that's fine, yeah.

ALBIN: Thank you so much.

KAMI: You're welcome.

ALBIN: I really appreciate it.

KAMI: No problem.

ALBIN: Excellent. Thank you—

[end]