

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

Christopher Draven
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

February 9, 2008

<http://hdl.handle.net/1808/5684>

This interview was made possible by the generous support of the University of Kansas Libraries and the University of Kansas grants 2302114, 2301283, 2301334.

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

Copyright and permissions

All oral histories in the *Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas* are copyrighted and protected by copyright law (Title 17, U. S. Code).

Requests for permission to publish quotations beyond “fair use” from this collection should be addressed to:

Tami Albin (albin@ku.edu or tami.albin@gmail.com)
Director of *Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of GLBTIQ People in Kansas*
Anschutz Library
1301 Hoch Auditoria Dr.,
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045

Requestors must identify:

1. Type of publication
2. Proposed title
3. Specific passages to be quoted
4. Anticipated uses of the passages
5. Publisher’s name
6. Expected date of publication

Citing Under the Rainbow Oral History Interviews

Your citation should include information that will allow people to find this transcript. Please consult a citation guide (Chicago, MLA, ALA) for the correct citation style for audio/video interviews or transcripts.

Please be sure to include:

Narrator’s name	e.g. Bill Smith
Interviewer’s Name	e.g. Tami Albin
Date of interview	e.g. March 26, 2009
Name of project and location	e.g. Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas
URL	e.g. http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/handle/1808/5556

Format

Interviews recorded on miniDV using a Canon HV-20 and an Olympus D-40.

Transcript

Transcribed by Transcriptions by Nina. Time-stamped and reviewed for accuracy by Rachel Gadd-Nelson. Lightly edited and reviewed by Tami Albin. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Christopher Draven.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

Christopher Draven: Narrator

Tami Albin: Interviewer

00:00:00

TAMI ALBIN: Okay so today is February 9, 2008 and I'm here with Christopher Draven in his lovely house. Okay so I'll start off this interview like I start off all my interviews. Tell me where you were born and when?

00:00:13

CHRISTOPHER DRAVEN: I was born in Garden City, Kansas March 29, 1982 at 8:32 in the morning—

00:00:22

ALBIN: Okay. Breakfast baby—

00:00:24

DRAVEN: —to Dr. Kelbeck and my mom.

00:00:28

ALBIN: Excellent. Okay so tell me a little bit about your childhood growing up in Garden City? I think you're the first person I've interviewed who's from Southwest Kansas.

00:00:35

DRAVEN: Really? Well when I—I grew up as a normal child., I guess in Southwest Kansas. My mother was very young when she had me. She was seventeen. My grandmother was a secretary for a local church in Garden City and was—also owned her own bookkeeping and accounting business. And we lived with my grandmother for the first several years of my life. I was raised in a very maternal home. My father—my birth father was never really around, you know that tragic story about them being gone. He would be gone for long periods of time, whether it was prison-type stuff or whatever it was. He was just a troubled youth because is—he was sixteen when I was born. Then from there do you just want me to go through—

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:01:31

ALBIN: Sure, whatever you want.

00:01:32

DRAVEN: From there I—my mother and I—we just actually discussed this not too long ago about moving into a place right outside of town into a small place that was just ours and then when I was three years old my sister was born. I don't know what else.

00:01:49

ALBIN: Okay. Well what was your childhood like growing up in Garden City in this area? Like at what point did you maybe notice that you might be gay?

00:02:00

DRAVEN: Well that's the interesting question, I guess, for me because I never—I'm just trying to focus. Okay. I never really thought that I was different. A lot of people say, I knew I was different from the time I was whatever age. Never thought I was different. I came from a very accepting and open family. My mother was extremely liberal on most things but on certain things she was very strict and conservative about. And my grandmother and—I have aunts who are missionaries and they're all very religious so it was an interesting dynamic because I was born from—my mother was the youngest child out of seven children, and so she was kind of the spitfire, the rebel spirit. And so she kept herself away from their religion and their exuberance for God.

And growing up in—nana is what I called my grandmother was Nana. Growing up in nana's house most of the time when I was young it was interesting because she was so religious but she wasn't one of those people that would force it on you. And she would hold prayer meetings and things like that. And I remember the pastor and his wife being at our house a lot. But she was never somebody to force anything on you.

So it was interesting when I started developing—I have come to believe that people believe that being a homosexual is a choice because when you identify that you're a homosexual it's during that period of your mental clarity from adolescence into adulthood, so in your teenage years. And really, it's nothing more than something biological, in my opinion, because your hormones are starting to come in at that time,

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

your mind is starting to make logical leaps and you're growing up mentally and physically. So you start to have sexual feelings. You don't look at a 6-year-old child and think of them as a sexual person because they're six years old, so of course you wouldn't think they're gay or straight. They're very ambiguous and—well some children are ambiguous and some aren't. But then once you get past that, once you get into the biology of puberty, you see that they really start to develop themselves as the people they will become. And that's—your eighth-grade year is when you start to really change.

Me, I remember being very young and having a picture of Jonathan Brandis from *SeaQuest*, who played Lucas Wolenczak of *SeaQuest*, on my wall and I was so in love with him. And Jean-Claude Van Damme, for whatever reason in *Kickboxer* and *Bloodsport*. I was really in love with both of them. And as a child I didn't realize the depth of my interest into them. Now that I'm an adult I look back I see, Hey, yeah I had a crush on Jean-Claude Van Damme when I was a little kid, so—to circle back. I guess I never thought of myself as different.

It wasn't until I got into middle school where name calling started to happen, and in high school, where people really made it their duty to isolate people that were different from them, that I realized that there was something different about me. But because I came from an extremely sheltered Christian family, even with a liberal mother, a very sheltered family, I didn't even know what the word gay or homosexual meant until I was a sophomore in high school. I was very cloistered, if you will. I was pretty much a nerd. I read a lot and the types of books that I read were fantasy novels, and fantasy doesn't put gay characters in very often so—I really didn't—(laughs) I didn't know that I was any different than most people.

00:05:19

ALBIN: So when the name calling started, did that trigger anything for you?

00:05:24

DRAVEN: Well when the name calling started it was names—again, I—(laughs) I was the kid that never cussed and was very good and was the teacher's pet. So when I turned—when I was a sophomore in high school I remember someone specifically using fudge packer—that's a horrible word—as a name to call me in the hallway. And I had

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

no idea what it meant. But as a teenager you know the tone when someone says something that's—it could be jerk or it could be whatever the word is that you're going to use, so you know what the tone means and so you know it's an insult. You might not know what it means but you know it's an insult. So I knew that—at that point that I wasn't like other people, not because of my sexuality but because of socially how I was interacting with people. And I think that was my major problem was interaction with them in a social manner.

00:06:16

ALBIN: So in high school did you start to develop crushes on anybody or did that start to—

00:06:26

DRAVEN: Yeah that definitely happened in high school. I probably won't give any specific names but—when I was—(laughs) when I was in high school I—I became a CNA . My mother is a nurse and I became a CNA because it was a great job for somebody my age to make—

00:06:43

ALBIN: And what's a CNA?

00:06:44

DRAVEN: Certified nursing assistant. The— To be sixteen, seventeen years old and making twelve to fourteen dollars an hour, that's phenomenal paycheck for somebody my age, even if—at that age, even if you worked only fifteen hours a week. So I would have these like, I don't know, daytime fantasies that these people that I thought were really hot would come to me because everyone in the high school knew that I worked at the hospital, would come to me and say, Hey Chris, I have this problem. Can you help me figure it out? And in the choir room we would figure it out together—weird fantasies (laughs) like that. Oh my God. I'm blushing. Anyway that's—weird things like that. I would start to get these crushes. But at the same time, I was so sheltered that I didn't realize that they were sexual. I just—I had no idea that that was what they meant, that they were going that far.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

And I was so sheltered that I was one of the kids that didn't even know what masturbation was until I was well into high school. So my mom, actually, being the nurse—and she's also an objectivist, so that's very difficult on a child. Because an objectivist is like a Vulcan with no emotions. You have no emotions and everything's logical, at least that's how I view it. And my mother would do things like—we saw somebody talking about masturbation on the news or on television. I'm like, ew gross. Who would ever do that? And my mom challenged me. Would Lucas Wolenczak from *SeaQuest* ever make a decision on something until he researched it, Christopher? I'm like, No. So I went down to the library that very night and I went and got a whole bunch of books and sexual education pieces and— Because my mother made sure to teach me the mechanics and the biology behind it but I never really knew any of the emotion behind sexuality.

So I knew what straight people did to have children, and I thought of it as like changing the carburetor in the car, it was just a step-by-step process and this is what happened nine months later. And I had no idea that there was another side to it, so—I think that's probably, now that I think about it, the reason why I never understood sexuality as a child beyond just the mechanics of it.

00:08:59

ALBIN: So did you ever talk to your sister about this?

00:09:02

DRAVEN: About being gay?

00:09:03

ALBIN: Yeah. She was about three years younger—

00:09:05

DRAVEN: Yeah—

00:09:05

ALBIN: —so would she not have known—

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:09:07

DRAVEN: My sister knew. It's interesting. When I came out—I was sixteen years old when I came out to my sister, because it all happened in a big whirlwind. I met somebody at a party and they were older and they were gay and I was introduced to them and I—anyway, it was a big whirlwind thing. And my sister—when I finally (laughs) came out to her we were sitting in her room and she—I was like, Jessica I have something I have to tell you, it's really important. She said, Okay brother what's up? What's going on? Jessie, I'm gay. And she goes, Finally. I thought I was going to have to tell you.

So my sister was not like me. She was very—she understood the sexuality part of it, probably didn't understand the mechanics as well but—to her, she just knew it was true. And everyone around me I think knew as well, because when I started coming out—I was a very unpopular kid the first two years of high school. And when I was a sophomore—I came out the last part of my sophomore year to several people. And my junior and senior year was as if the mystery had disappeared and they didn't have to be afraid of it anymore. So some people would still call names but my popularity skyrocketed at that point. People started to see me as who I really was because I was opening up and being honest to myself so—

00:10:41

ALBIN: So were there other gay kids in your high school?

00:10:42

DRAVEN: After graduation several people have approached me. (laughs) Isn't that horrible? Several gay people have approached me for whatever reason about them being gay as well or you find out later that, Oh so-and-so's gay. But in school there weren't any other openly gay kids.

00:10:22

ALBIN: So you were kind of like the token gay kid?

00:10:25

DRAVEN: I—well I wasn't—it wasn't all over the school. Everyone knew that I was gay just because of the way I acted, I think, but not everyone knew directly from me. If

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

you—I still believe that it's not anybody's business really who my partner is and they should just accept me for who and what I am. But when I was growing up if someone would come to me after I came out—if they would come to me and say, Are you gay, then I wouldn't deny it, I would tell them the truth. But I never brought it up in class. Well, I brought it up in class only once but I never made it a huge deal because I didn't—I understood that if they were making fun of me for thinking that I was gay then maybe they would treat me even worse knowing for sure that I was gay, and I wouldn't have any sort of protection, I guess, from them.

But the one time I brought it up in class somebody had written—it was in choir class and somebody has written gay beside my name on the seating chart. And I saw it and it was in pencil so some—one of my friends erased it and I—at the beginning of our class our teacher—I asked our teacher, I have an announcement—I told her I have an announcement to make and she said okay. So when she took roll at the beginning of class she said, Christopher has an announcement. So I came up in front and I said, Jeremy, I know that you wrote gay beside my name on the seating chart and thank you very much for bringing that to my attention. I just wanted to thank you in front of everyone in this class for last night. It was the most beautiful and glorious experience of my life, and I'm just glad that you could come to me and share that moment with me. And everyone in the class erupted in laughter. And I just went and stood back and he didn't—didn't mess with me again after that because—well, later on he did come out of the closet and so—

00:12:35

ALBIN: Really?

00:12:36

DRAVEN: Yeah, it was interesting.

00:12:37

ALBIN: That's really interesting.

00:12:38

DRAVEN: Yeah.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:12:39

ALBIN: So at what point did you come out to your mom and your nana?

00:12:44

DRAVEN: Well I never—I never came out to nana, per se. It was—it was interesting. One time—I have a cousin who is in his forties and he is openly gay as well, and he is also HIV positive. And he's been HIV positive since he was eighteen so that's a long time.

00:13:03

ALBIN: That's a really long time.

00:13:04

DRAVEN: Yeah. He—I asked my grandmother once—I asked nana when I was at her house once if he was gay and she told me that he was and she started to cry. And I didn't know at that time it was because he was sick, but she was crying because he was so sick. And it just really hurt her heart. And I was the favorite of my grandmother. I spent a lot of time with her, grew up in her home, made sure to be around her a lot more than my cousins, and I have what thirty—I think there's twenty-eight or thirty of us that are cousins.

There's seven children of my grandmother so—I remember one time I was living in Wichita. I probably was twenty—nineteen or twenty at the time. And I had come home for a visit and I was at nana's house and I was sitting beside her chair with my head in her lap and she was running her hands through my hair. And we were just talking, very reminiscent of when I was a child. And she patted me on the shoulder, and I looked up at her and she said, How is your roommate doing? And I said, He's good. She goes, Well I'm very glad to hear that. And so it was kind of an unspoken truce between us—not truce—it was an unspoken moment where she knew and she understood that I was in this relationship, and she just wanted me to know that she still cared about me and this person whomever they may be.

In regards to my mom, she probably won't like that I'm going to say this in a public forum but with all her liberalness and all of her openness she responded the worst out of anyone that's ever responded to me telling them that I was gay. I was eighteen and I

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

was talking to my sister, in her room again actually. And my mother came in and was upset because she felt as though we were whispering secrets. And we were just talking about some stuff about—some stuff of me being gay in essence and about a boy I was interested in or something. And my mom left after we told her that we were just talking. And she came back in and she was in tears. And she said, Well I just want you to know that if you have these secrets that you're telling someone I'm glad that you've chosen your sister instead of me because it's very important for you to bond with her because she'll be in your life for a long time. And then she left again (laughs) which is very uncharacteristic of my mother to get so emotional about her children speaking. But I think she kind of knew that something was going on because every time I came home I would pull Jessie into her room and talk to her.

And so like I said, I was eighteen, I had just moved out not too long before that, and so I called her back into the room and I said, Mom, I'm not straight. And her face fell. And she was like, Well you're not gay are you? (laughs) I said, No I'm bi, I'm bi. So for several weeks we dealt with that. But the comment she made after I told her I was bi was (laughs), Well you're going to hell. You're going to hell and I'm going to chop the penis off of any man that you sleep with. It was just such a violent and visceral reaction. It was a very horrible reaction. And I left. I went home. I was living in Wichita. I left and went to Wichita right after that and didn't come back for a little bit.

But happily, I have this gay cousin of course, and he's the same age as my mom approximately, and—a little older than her, and he decided to come and visit the entire family that lives in Garden City. And I was there in Garden on like a break and was at my mom's house. And he came over and it came up that I was gay. And my mom had grown up with—Jake is my cousin—had grown up with Jake. And he had made it okay in her head. It was just difficult because it was her son. So after hanging out with Jake again and seeing what life was like for him and that he was just a normal person with a college degree and had a great job and lived in California, she realized that it wasn't as bad. So she has apologized to me since then, but her response was that it was very difficult to her because when I was growing up she never guessed.

She had no idea that I was gay because I was always so popular with the girls. Well (laughs) there's a reason why a gay man is popular with girls, even if they're not openly

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

gay, just the safety thing. And I had lots of female friends. I had no male friends so it was very interesting to me that she wouldn't know. So she and I developed a better relationship and now we're okay. It took her several years to get past the, Well maybe this is just a phase. So—

00:17:49

ALBIN: So when you moved out how old were you?

00:17:53

DRAVEN: Well the interesting thing was I moved out and moved back in several times growing up, but the first time I was eighteen.

00:18:00

ALBIN: Okay, and you moved to Wichita?

00:18:01

DRAVEN: Yes.

00:18:01

ALBIN: And so what did you do in Wichita?

00:18:04

DRAVEN: Exploded onto the gay scene. (laughter) In Garden City I was very well known because of who my mom was and because of my dad who was a football coach and a teacher, and I was extremely well known in Garden. And you can't really be yourself in a town like Garden City regardless of who you are unless you're a very conservative, Christian child. And so I moved to Wichita. And the first thing I noticed in Wichita was that it was—I was one among a million, even though there's only what, 500,000 that live there, but I was one among many and it was—it was great for me because I could become the person I wanted people to know me as, not the person who fell in the lake when we were on a field trip in school. I didn't have that baggage from growing up with these people. I could develop the relationship with them that I wanted, which was the beginning of opening my eyes to the adult world post high school, if you will—scary times. So when I moved to Wichita I started working for a hospital there as well on the HIV/AIDS floor at Via Christi St. Francis in southeast. And I worked with a

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

lot of gay men because that was—it was the HIV/AIDS unit. And I saw some of the nurses and the way they—the nurses on the unit were all very cool with the patients because that's where they wanted to work. The nurses on different units, they had different attitudes in the way they treated the HIV/AIDS patients and it was just very interesting to me.

So I was this much thinner than I am now, much cuter (laughs)—because I had less gray hair and all those gay things that we worry about that women worry about too, well I was all that. I was much cuter back then and so I was this young, 18-year-old CNA who would jump around from room to room being happy with these very sick gay men, old and young that—and I did it because I always feel as though I have to make a difference. I have to do something to make a difference because I—that's just the socialist in me I guess.

And it was interesting because I met all of these people, but then when I would go out to the clubs if they would see me they would be scared because they were worried that I'd tell everyone that they were HIV-positive or that this is what was going on in their life. But it was—that was something that—the Hippocratic Oath if you will. I would never have done that to—and I never did. I never spoke about their medical things, not only because it's illegal, it's immoral in my opinion.

And so I burst onto the gay scene when I first moved to Wichita. I was working with Via Christi St. Francis and also with the American Red Cross. And I remember going to a party—well the first time—I'll tell this story first. I burst onto the gay scene by going onto gay.com like any well-respected Kansas gay man would do, because that's the only place you can find other gays. And it's just interesting to me to see how many people widespread across our state are actually there, they're on gay.com. When I—it's much different than it was—it's much different now than it was when I was younger. Now there are hundreds of sites that you can go to, to find gay people that are in your area. Back then you only had gay.com and Yahoo! Profiles. So you didn't find very many people that put on their Yahoo! profile that they were openly gay. But on gay.com you could put a fake name and not put a picture on, or put a picture on with conditions on it and just let members see it. So it was very interesting meeting the people that I did over the Internet before I moved.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

Then when I got to Wichita I met up with some of the friends I had made of my own age, around my age. And we went to a gay bar which was—what was the name of it? Oh I can't remember the name of it. It was downtown, and—people are going to make fun of me for this. Oh—no, I got to think of it. I can't go on. (laughter) It became so many other names after that. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I'll think of it later. It reopened just recently. Anyway, so it was downtown and it was run by these two gay men. And the first night I went in, I went with a couple of friends and they allowed eighteen to enter, twenty-one to drink. And I went in and there was just all of these really attractive, and some non-attractive, but just dancing around, having a great time, drinking, doing normal stuff but it just—it was like—it felt like—at this same moment in my life, just to give people a timeframe—this same moment in my life when I was doing all of this, *Queer as Folk* had come to America. And so Justin was standing on the street looking at all of this life in downtown—I think it was in Philadelphia, wasn't it—

00:23:03

ALBIN: Yeah—

00:23:04

DRAVEN: —that they were—yeah downtown Philadelphia and he's looking at all of these gay people, and that's what I felt like. I really felt like Justin at that period. I had walked into this room and just this world had exploded in front of me and all of these colors and these shiny shirts and half naked gyrating people on the floor. And it was just something that a very cloistered, very sheltered young man in western Kansas didn't see. I had never seen it. And I was so nervous, but hung out with the people that took me there, had a good time, and went home. And that was it. That was it for my first night. And then I was invited to a party. I met someone there who we had become very good friends and he invited me to a party and I went to this party.

And that's the second big story. All right. So I get all dolled up for this party, I had seen these gay boys do their thing and so I was wearing this famous Superman shirt with the "S" emblazoned in velvet. And it was really cute, it was tight on me and it looked great. And I was so excited to go to this party. And I had—I arrived alone. So everybody was in the backyard and you could hear a lot of music and people hanging out in the backyard at this pool party. Jim—a friend of ours named Jim used to throw these

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

awesome parties when I—when I was in Wichita. And we—I was told just come on into the house. But I felt uncomfortable doing that, my southwestern roots I guess. You don't just walk into people's houses, and didn't want to ring the doorbell and have some weird person answer. So I went around the back of the house where the gate was open and there was a sign pointing and I went into the back.

And I felt like—(laughs) I felt like Barbara Streisand in *Hello, Dolly!* in this moment where you look up the scape of stairs and you see this beautifully crafted woman in this beautiful dress and she's standing there and she just bursts out into song. I felt like that was my gala moment, as though I was being inducted into gay world. Because I walked through this gate and all of these people, at least fifty people in this backyard, some are swimming, some are sitting. And they all turn and look at me because I'm the one they don't know. I've never met any of them. And they just stare at me for a few seconds. And then I felt frozen. And finally I took a step forward. And that's when the music like started playing in my head and this cacophony of sound just happened. It was like this movie moment for me. And all of them are probably like, Oh new guy. But for me it was like, Oh my God, this is the start of the rest of my life. And I mingled a little, I became the social butterfly that many in Wichita know me to be, or used to know me to be, and started meeting people, and from there it was just wow.

00:25:47

ALBIN: So did you find the community in Wichita like inviting?

00:25:53

DRAVEN: I was young and cute and fresh meat. They were very inviting—

00:25:56

ALBIN: Okay (laughs)—

00:25:57

DRAVEN: —in Wichita. They are very cliquish. When I was in Wichita at that point, when we were doing the *Queer as Folk* parties because that's what was happening, that's why we were together for this party, when Jim was throwing these big parties and groups of people would come together. It was older people, it was younger people, it was all of the groups would come together. Pieces of the groups would come together.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

What I've seen now in Wichita, and what has happened since that time, is that there aren't those sort of community get-togethers. It's very cliquish. It's turned into high school after high school, in my opinion. You've got the young, attractive, skinny, gay people, you've got the semi-attractive gay people that cloister together, the older guys get together. It's just very cliquish in Wichita. And it was, at that time as well, but there were still those periods where we could broach, we could overcome that cliquiness and come together as groups of people. So I don't feel that in Wichita anymore, but of course I'm not there.

00:26:55

ALBIN: Right. So at what point—we talked about you coming out to your mom and your sister. Your dad was a football coach. Did you come out to him?

00:27:03

DRAVEN: No, I never did. Well, and he wasn't my birth father—

00:27:07

ALBIN: Okay, so this was—

00:27:08

DRAVEN: —he was my adopted father. My mother and he married when I was in middle school and he adopted us when we were—when I was that age, right after their wedding. He was an interesting man. He was very—well let's keep it on topic. He was a very interesting man. He did not much care for me because I'm fairly intelligent and very quick witted and mouthy, when I was younger especially, so we didn't get along. But I knew that had I come out to him it would really be a war, because simple things were wars when I was young with him, and so I didn't come out to him. What happened is when I was a senior and had moved away, my mother and he divorced. And a couple of months after their divorce they were signing the final papers and he had asked her if it was true that I was gay and she told him yes.

And I saw him one time—I've seen him one time since then. So what it's twenty-five now, so almost twenty-six so it's been six years—seven, eight. Oh my gosh it's been eight years since high school. I'm getting so old Tami. It's been a long time since high school. Anyway so during that period of time from high school to now he and I crossed

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

paths. I was lucky to be out with some friends, two of whom were female and two of whom were gay. And one of the gay men, his name was Jeremy as well, was extremely, extremely, extremely attractive, very, very hot. He actually models a little bit on the side. And we were all shopping in Gap in Kansas City. And walking by is Mr. Michael Berry and—total, total asshole. And he—I'm sorry. I shouldn't be cussing on public—anyway—

00:28:58

ALBIN: Say what you want.

00:28:59

DRAVEN: Okay. (laughs) Anyway, so total jerk. And he walks by and he looks at me just because he's walking by. He looks at a group of obviously gay guys. And then he notices that it's me and he kind of hesitates and stops. And he looks at me. And the really hot friend of mine just knew something was going on and he knew that this needed to be a show, because that's the type of person he was. So he wrapped his arms around my waist and came up close to me. And Michael, my ex-father, I guess—technically he's still legally my father—he looked at me and he got this confused look on his face and he said, So it's true. And my really hot friend hanging off the side of me kissed me, looked up and he goes, Yeah it's true. And so—and that's the last time I ever saw him. He walked away after that. I never had to deal with him again. I've not spoken to him. My stepsister and stepbrother, who I guess of course legally are my brother and sister of course, they—I've spoken to them a few times since then but we're not in close contact.

00:30:07

ALBIN: Right. But they were in the household then when you were growing up in high school?

00:30:10

DRAVEN: Yes.

00:30:11

ALBIN: Yeah. And how was—did you ever come out to them or—

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:30:15

DRAVEN: No. They were both really young compared to me. So it's on my profile, they're both connected to my MySpace so I'm sure that they know but we've never discussed it.

00:30:26

ALBIN: Right. Right. That's interesting. So how long did you stay in Wichita for?

00:32:33

DRAVEN: Three years. I lived in Wichita for three years and was in a relationship. I dated somebody for over a year, which when you're eighteen, nineteen, twenty that's a long time, especially in gay world. And we dated for a while. We even lived together, and things broke up from there. I was young and he was much older than me and I wanted to experience life and he wanted to drink, so we didn't—and I wasn't a big drinker. I was illegal at that time and I wasn't one to get a fake ID and go drink. So I never—never felt completely fulfilled I guess. And I thought I was in love at the time but it's that puppy love thing that you have to go through before you can understand true love. And so I left and—he and I broke up and I left and I moved in with a friend in Topeka, lived there for a couple of months until I decided to go back to school.

Then I moved to Orlando, Florida, thinking that the gay world in Orlando, because it's Orlando—I mean, come on gay day at Disney World and the parades and all that would be great. And I moved to Orlando, and I made a lot of friends and nobody who was interesting. And I thought Wichita was cliquish but Orlando is worse. They live near a beach so everyone is beautiful and tanned and pretty, and I wasn't as beautiful or tanned or as pretty because I'm this Midwestern kid.

I went to college. I started at University of Orlando. Went there for six months. Lived in Orlando for about six months before I decided it just was not for me. And there were a lot of reasons why, but Orlando to me is a very beautiful city but it's all painted gold, it's not real gold. So if you stay there long enough you can see on the edges of Orlando where it's all flaking off and they need to repaint, so decided not to stay there. And I moved to Columbia, Missouri. And I lived there for, I think, two or three years as well.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:32:36

ALBIN: Did you go to school there?

00:32:37

DRAVEN: No. I graduated from Columbia University.

00:32:42

ALBIN: New York City Columbia University?

00:32:43

DRAVEN: Right, Chicago campus, however. And—but I lived in Columbia, Missouri and I commuted back and forth when I needed to. I was on an Internet distance program. With the credits I had from WSU and from Orlando, I put them together, along with what I had from Garden City Community College, can't knock that—and put those together and was able to graduate from Columbia University through their Chicago campus, yeah. When I lived in Columbia it was—it was very interesting, well to me. I don't know if it's interesting to you, so we'll see.

00:33:20

ALBIN: I'm sure it'll be very interesting to me. (laughter)

00:33:23

DRAVEN: I lived in Columbia and while I was there I—the first day I moved to Columbia—oh my God should I—should I tell this story as it truly is? I might as well. All the important people in my life know about it.

I have a really good friend, her name is Nicole. She lives in Canada. She's a Canadian girl. She lives in Medicine Hat, Alberta and she is absolutely stunningly beautiful and she has a phenomenal voice, sounds like Nora Jones and Christina Aguilera put together. She's phenomenally talented. She's also a great photographer, which is how she is currently making her dough. She is—she was one of my best friends growing up, through chat and IM. We only spoke off of ICQ and MSN Messenger. But Nicole challenged me, dared me, if you will, to adopt an accent and be someone else when I moved to Columbia, because I knew it would be a transient place. I wouldn't be living in Columbia forever. I thought I'd be there no more than a year and then I would move

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

away. I didn't realize I would love it as much as I did and stay for as long as I did. So (laughs) I get there and I adopted a British accent.

00:34:37

ALBIN: For the entire time you lived there?

00:34:38

DRAVEN: Most of the time, for half of the—for a little over half. I introduced myself to the gay world as being British, to my employer as being British, to all of these (laughs) people with this British accent. Yeah it's embarrassing. But I did. I did it because Nicole and I thought it would be really funny. And it would have gone off perfectly if I hadn't have found my best friend, if I hadn't have found the best friend I've had of my own age level. I've had several friends that were much older than I. But she was—her name was Rachel and we became best friends. And I worked with her. We worked together every day and we would leave work to go get something to eat and we would go get—we would leave there to probably go out to the bar and watch the drag shows on Thursday night at SoCo's which were amazing.

And I would always have this accent. And it felt as though—it felt as though I was cloaked in something. I would have to wake up in the morning and say something. For the first several months I would have to say something British to start getting myself back into the accent. So it was as though I had to reset myself every morning. It was such—it was such a weird time for me. And at times—it's almost as though I damaged my psyche permanently by pretending to be something I wasn't. But at times even to these days when I'm doing something, when I'm talking to someone, I'll like have this flash of, Don't talk in the accent, don't talk in the accent. Are you in the accent? Even though I'm talking normally to you, I'm like, Oh okay I'm fine. Especially if I'm trying to impress someone, if I'm trying to say something that's impressive or be impressive to someone, because that's the whole reason for the accent was to be different and impress someone.

And at the time when I finally opened up about it, I would tell (laughs) people, Well women wear makeup and people get plastic surgery. Why does my voice—why does it matter, trying to rationalize it, but it didn't make sense. So I met someone the first day that I arrived in Columbia. I went to Starbucks and I met someone and we started

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

dating very shortly after that and we were together for nine months. Was it nine or—six or nine months. And we broke up because we were just much better friends. And then I went on a string of very short, unimportant relationships. And every time—all the time I would—every Thursday and Saturday or Sunday night I would go out with Rachel. We'd go to the bar and watch the drag shows, spend a lot of money and have fun. Even though that seems to be the sum-up of what Columbia was, it was also a very much developmental time, because I finally got to a point where Rachel was so much a part of my life. We were living together, we were best friends, she was so much a part of my life, I had to finally tell her the truth because I couldn't bring Rachel part of my life and my family part of my life together—

00:37:35

ALBIN: Right.

00:37:35

DRAVEN: And what made the accent easy to do is when I was in Florida there was this fallout between my family and I about me being gay. At Thanksgiving somebody had told me—I was telling them a story about something and someone had told me at the Thanksgiving table that they didn't want to hear about that gay shit. And I exploded. And I said, Well then you—to my mother's husband—you're a mechanic and I don't want to hear anything about cars because that's straight crap, and you Jessie, you're straight and you're my sister and I don't want to hear anything about your straight life with your little boyfriend here because that's straight stuff, and just went around the table and I was just so vicious. And they were vicious back. And my mom didn't stop either of us—either side of the party.

And so when I left to go to Florida I just wrote them all off. I decided that I wasn't going to have them a part of my life and I was just done with them. Because I had never experienced them standing up against me because I was gay like that. I had always felt as though they were open and accepting. And with the exception of when I came out to my mom, other than that, she had always—she wants me to be straight. I promise you even to this day she probably would say, Yes my inner wish is for Christopher to be straight. But she always accepted who and what I was at the level I gave it to her. So it was very strange for her not to back me up and for my family to attack me because all of them did. And so I left and I was just done with them. And so when I went to

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

Columbia we were still in that period where I wasn't speaking to my family. And then I started to miss my younger brother because he had nothing to do with this. And so I went back and I saw him and I started integrating my family back into my life.

We didn't speak for almost a year, no contact whatsoever. I changed my phone number, I changed everything—my location, I went to another state, they had no idea where I was. And so I did that because I felt abandoned and I guess childishly I wanted them to feel the same, and wanted them to realize how special I am to them. And so when I finally started seeing them again and speaking to my family, my mother would make comments that, You sound as though you're a literature professor Christopher with perfect grammar. What are you doing? What is it that you're doing? Is college doing this to you that you have such perfect grammar? And she would make fun of me that I sounded like a literature professor from Boston all the time, because it was the remnants of the accent in my voice. I was speaking with a normal American tone but the grammar I would chose was very structured and British. And so I would just say, Oh stop it. You don't even know what you're talking about. And then I'd go back and have to become British. And sometimes I would become too British and I'd have to learn how to tone it back down to my normal. It was—anyway, it was horrible.

00:40:17

ALBIN: But you're living with Rachel so—

00:40:19

DRAVEN: As a British person—

00:40:20

ALBIN: —so even if you got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and you bumped into her you'd have to be British?

00:40:25

DRAVEN: Yes. Yes. Yeah. And (laughs) it takes some skill. It took some skill.

00:40:31

ALBIN: I'm very impressed. (laughs)

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:40:32

DRAVEN: I'm not. It's not something to be impressed (laughs) about. It was embarrassing. But when I finally came out to Rachel about—came out to her. I mean, isn't this horrible? I had to come out about being American—

00:40:42

ALBIN: As being American? (laughter)

00:40:43

DRAVEN: —instead of British. When I finally came out to Rachel I—it was really weird. The night before we had been talking about something on the television where these people were felons, sexual predators and such. I think we were watching *Dateline* – "To Catch a Predator" or something like that nature. We were watching the show and I told Rachel—she said, I couldn't imagine having that as a secret. I said, Well every—and I told her in this very British accent, Everyone has a secret. Don't make these people feel bad because they had a mistake. Not even thinking about the British point, just thinking about these poor felons that this one guy was eighteen years old and his girlfriend was sixteen and they had been together for several years and the parents didn't like them together anymore so they used that as a reason to whatever. I think that—that wasn't "To Catch a Predator" but it was something of that nature. I'm like, Well you can't hold this against them because they're still together to this day. Once she turned eighteen they got back together, once he got out of prison.

And so I was kind of worried at that point. And I was talking to Nicole, Miss Canadian Nicole. And I was like, Nicole I want to tell Rachel because I want her to meet my parents. I want her to meet my family. They all want to meet her as well, and what do I do, what do I do? And she goes, Just tell her. Well I can't tell her. And I have this huge secret that I need to come out about. And it felt as though here I am twenty-what-three years old, trying to come out again about just being American. And so Nicole said she would tell her. So Rachel's at work and I had the day off. And Rachel and Nicole are typing on Messenger to each other. Nicole's like, Well Christopher has something he needs to tell you. It's really important. It's a secret he's been holding and you're going to feel relieved once you know and things like that. So Rachel comes home thinking that my secret is I'm a sexual predator (laughs) and I had done something horrible in my past life. And so when I finally tell her that I don't have an accent, that I'm truly just an

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

American (laughs), she looked at me like, That's it? I thought you were going to come out with this horrible story about how you raped somebody or something horrible and spent years in prison, and that's why you're in Missouri. Because I never had a good reason for being in Columbia other than I liked the city and I had one family friend that lived there.

So it was just very, very weird. And then after that Rachel knew the truth that the rest of Columbia didn't know the truth, so I was Chris at home and British in (laughs) public. And I had accepted a position to be on the radio (laughs) at the local radio station, being like this pop culture correspondent if you will. And I didn't get on very often but when I did I would have to be British as well, so it was just very interesting.

00:43:23

ALBIN: Wow. So what type of job did you have while you were in Columbia?

00:43:26

DRAVEN: I still was in the medical field. I was—I had two different positions. One was with a pathology company, a laboratory company, being a phlebotomist and laboratory assistant. And then the other was assistant to the director of oncology, or cancer, for the Columbia Regional Hospital. Yeah. Just very—very weird for me because then someone that I was—someone in the gay community that I was very close with I told them the truth and then they just spread it all over to hurt me. So I got to the point where I'm like, I don't care anymore. So most—I think most people in Columbia know that I'm not really British, and if they don't then I hope they find out in time.

00:44:10

ALBIN: Right.

00:44:11

DRAVEN: Right.

00:44:13

ALBIN: Wow. So while you were in Wichita and Topeka and then in Columbia were you politically involved in any organizations? I mean it sounds like you worked a lot.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:44:24

DRAVEN: I did work a lot. I was not politically involved in any organizations really. I always—the truth is, like I said earlier, I want to always make a difference. And while I was in medicine and working in nursing and then also in medicine I felt as though I was making a difference. I was impacting people's lives. There was a time when I worked in Columbia that I was with a woman who was recovering from cancer, and she was very ill and the chemotherapy was just ravaging her body. And she told me—I tried to make sure that I was very compassionate with each of them, each person that came in. And this person told me I've done a very good job in helping her and that she owns a shop and it's a gift shop and she would like me to come to the gift shop and say hello to her after she gets out of the hospital and such. And I was like, Okay well what's the name of your gift shop? And she said, A Moment in Time. And that is so poignant to me because that's exactly what I felt like. I felt like I was a moment in time for these people. That's what I wanted to do was to really be a godsend, in essence, and be helpful. And so that part of me, that piece that wanted to improve the world, felt sated because I was working in medicine.

And when I left Columbia and moved back to Garden City to be with my family—Rachel moved to Wisconsin to be with her fiancé and I moved to Garden City, recent college graduate—I started working in the corporate world. And so I felt as though I wasn't making a difference anymore. Well even when I was in Columbia when I voted I cried, I cried because I was voting. It's crazy. I walk in and Kerry versus Bush and of course I went for Kerry and I was very emotional about it. I'd get teared up at the debates. I wrote this article about how Bush does nothing—this article about Bush and how asinine and repugnant he is for the American people, and it was published in the Columbia newspaper.

And I come back to Garden—well I voted and I walk in and this old woman, because there are always old people that are volunteers in the voting booths. And I'm sorry if they're not—if you're not old and you're a volunteer at the voting booth and you're listening to this. But I walk in and she gives me the paper because they were still paper ballots. And I fill out the paper ballot, voted for McCaskill for governor, even though she didn't get it, and I voted for Kerry even though he didn't get it. And when I walked back up—I was very composed and fine up to that point. And then she looked at me in the

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

eye and she said, Thank you for voting, impressing that, I'm glad as a young voter you've taken the time to come out. And I started crying. I'm like, Thank you for letting me vote. And I handed her the pieces back that were going back to her. And then I just walked out and I couldn't stop crying. And I had to go back to work and—just so emotional over something as silly as your civic duty.

And so when I moved back to Garden City I felt like I was doing nothing. Because I went into the corporate world, and I actually worked for a cellular phone company. And cellular phone companies, while they have some civic programs, don't necessarily improve your life. You don't need a cell phone to live. It's true. I'm sorry, but it's true. So I felt— I felt as though I wasn't doing anything. And so I reached out to the editor of *Liberty Press* and offered to write for her for free. And I think it was providence because the first thing she gave me as an assignment to write for her was a story with Anne Mitchell and how she had started the Southwest Kansas-affiliated chapter for Kansas Equality Coalition. And so I met with Anne, and she was just this exuberant and exciting person and very into making a difference. And she came from California. She's not from Kansas. She decided to live here. And it's just interesting the amount of history that she has with Kansas, and she doesn't have to be here. So I asked if I could get more involved at the end of the interview and writing the piece, and it was about her receiving an award. And I got more involved. I started to go to a few of the meetings. I didn't go to very many meetings. I—

00:48:47

ALBIN: These were KEC meetings?

00:48:48

DRAVEN: KEC chapter meetings. And it was just a lot of fun being involved. And even though I didn't do a lot, I felt as though it was better than doing nothing. I stopped writing for the Liberty Press for assorted reasons, and I took a position on the board chapter, the chapter's board, as the secretary, and I helped out Anne as much as I could. I'm sure Anne would agree that I'm a very engaging and exuberant person as well, but if I don't have a path, I get very frustrated. So if you don't give me a task to do and then just let me do it then I get very frustrated. So there were several things that we did in KEC—Southwest Kansas that were great. We put together different things. We had people come from like the ACLU and come talk to us and things like that. And

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

most of that was Anne's doing. But I felt as though I was making a difference because I could talk about it and I could bring it up and tell people to join and bring people to these little parties that we threw and just come together as community, which in Southwest Kansas that's what's needed.

You need to bring people together so they understand that there's a gay community that Wichita and the metropolitan Kansas City, Topeka area they just take that for granted. So it was just important to be involved, just by having my name on the paper or just by doing the interview with Tim, I can't remember his last name, for the *Hutchinson News* with my face and body, needed to lose weight, on the front page of the *Hutchinson News* talking about how—what it's like to be a gay kid in Southwest Kansas and to be openly gay as a professional. Those were the things that I felt like I was making a difference. I don't need front-page editorial stuff. I just want to feel as though there's an improvement, and that's what I felt.

00:50:35

ALBIN: So the interview that you did with the Hutchinson newspaper, how did that come about?

00:50:41

DRAVEN: That was Anne actually. She gave Tim Vanderchak or something, I can't remember the exact name, but she gave Tim the information for—she asked of course, because that's Anne's MO, she always—modus operandi. She always asks for permission. So she called me and said, Hey this guy wants to do some interviews. I want to give him your name. Is that okay with you? And I said, Sure. And she gave several people their names. He called me and he interviewed a lot of people. I know he interviewed a lot of people. But I think the two people that are mostly—besides Anne, the two people that are mostly mentioned in the interview are me and a woman who's a stylist whose son passed away. And I think it's because we gave him our names and allowed there to be photography and allowed them to use us openly instead of needing to say just another person I interviewed or a fake name. Not that there's anything wrong with feeling trepidation for being publicly gay because in Kansas I could see the stigma, but I think that's why the interview was so structured the way that it was us two mostly. And of course Anne was in it as well because she's openly gay too so—

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:51:53

ALBIN: What was the reaction to that article?

00:51:55

DRAVEN: There was none. There was no reaction. There was no fanfare, there was no attacks, nothing. It was—the thing that impresses me the most is that if you Google my name with the word gay after it—not that I've Googled myself (laughter) but I've been told that—

00:52:14

ALBIN: Everybody Googles themselves—

00:52:16

DRAVEN: —I've been told—

00:52:17

ALBIN: —that's the in thing.

00:52:18

DRAVEN: I never did it myself. I mean, can't check my cache, but I've been told that if you do this one of the things that comes up is a Web site called The Underground. And if you go into it, it talks about this article and how things are improving in Southwest Kansas, and how Anne Mitchell is making such a difference because she is bringing people together as a community, bringing us out of the shadows. I feel as though Hillary Clinton's new speech for immigration—just come out of the shadows. Let us help you become—that's pretty much what Anne's doing is bringing people together and saying, Hey you can have a partnership with us.

[section removed]

00:53:00

ALBIN: So what was it like then being in—moving back home, being in Garden City with your family and working on the KEC chapter stuff? How did they react to you being this really out person?

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:53:15

DRAVEN: Well I think it had been several years and my family had decided that it's not a phase, that it's going to be this way for Christopher. My mom never became a member and got involved but she was very excited for me. She was very excited for us doing what we did. And while she never got directly involved, she appreciated the movement. As my mom is also a feminist, deep down inside—deep down inside her core, so she understands the need for movement and for progress—and not just progress at the sake of progressing but because it's important.

[section removed]

00:54:20

ALBIN: Okay. So the KEC chapter in southwestern Kansas, tell me about the impact it's had. I mean like we've got Anne doing all this stuff, you've got people interviewing you. Is this chapter really growing at a really—at a phenomenal rate or—

00:54:39

DRAVEN: I haven't been with the KEC chapter for a while, the Southwest chapter for a while since I moved here to Lawrence. But what I've seen happen is that Anne has—when I left and for a while after I left—I don't know any—I don't know now but for a long time Anne's chapter was the most financially solvent. So obviously if they're getting the funds to be financially solvent compared to Wichita and to Johnson County, this rich chapter, but KEC can donate extra money every month, obviously Anne's doing something right because people are getting involved and they're giving their money as well. But it's not just about money. These parties that she throws—the events that she brings together, they are making a difference. And if you remember in the news, I don't know, maybe two years ago, a year ago, there was the big hoopla about the gay flag being flown above a hotel in Meade.

00:55:36

ALBIN: Was that in Meade? Yeah.

00:55:37

DRAVEN: Yeah, a hotel in Meade. Well, I was with the chapter when this all happened and I actually was writing as well for the Liberty Press a little bit.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:55:44

ALBIN: I remember the articles.

00:55:45

DRAVEN: And she—Anne was very close with the people in Meade after that. She—we had a lot of meetings there, we gave them our financial support by booking them for rooms and things like that, we did a state meeting there. And it just shows you. Some of the locals threw a fit because of this and they vandalized the property. They even—they vandalized the property and then said that the owners did it themselves for insurance reasons. Well why you would want to throw a brick through your own window and then call the insurance company, I don't know. Because people that owned it were not like that at all. But they decided that, Hey, I'm going to just fly the flag anyway. But the cool thing was is MTV came down, all these people—Fred Phelps' group supposedly came down and was just—there was no uproar.

When Matthew Shepard was protested there was this huge national campaign about how Fred Phelps did what he did, and there was this huge uproar about what happened. But now it's gotten to the point where he doesn't make a splash because people are like, Yeah they're there. The gay people are around, just get over it. It's okay. We understand. Anne's comment usually has been that, You know that you're neighbor is gay in Southwest Kansas, but you also know that they work just as hard as you, that they do their chores if they're on a farm, or they go to their job as well and it's—it's just the unspoken thing. It doesn't need to be brought into the light because—or brought out in public because they know and they're tolerant as long as you don't try to push anything on them as well. Same thing with religion, in my opinion.

00:57:18

ALBIN: So tell me a little bit more about what happened in Meade. From what I understand, was it a son went away and he missed his parents, and he sent them a rainbow flag?

00:57:27

DRAVEN: Well—

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:57:29

ALBIN: Yeah, because I vaguely remember the story of it happening.

00:57:33

DRAVEN: Right. Well—and I might not get all the facts right so if you like I can research it and send you more later—

00:57:39

ALBIN: (unintelligible).

00:57:39

DRAVEN: —but what I remember happening is that the son went away and missed his parents, but they had gone to a—this is so stupid, an Oz, a *Wizard of Oz* Museum and they bought a rainbow flag, because one of the things you could buy there was a rainbow flag for "Somewhere Under the Rainbow" from an Oz museum. They didn't buy it for gay reasons. Her son is not gay. He's not gay. Even though they're from California I think is why people made the connection—Oh they're from California so they've got to be flying this for political reasons. They put it up as a sentimental thing for their son.

00:58:16

ALBIN: Because their son was away, right.

00:58:17

DRAVEN: Because their son was away and it was just a sentimental thing and they were very close. So it got thrown into something bigger. I don't think the people in Meade really (laughs) knew what the flag meant until probably the media ran away with it and then that's when the whole thing happened and Fred Phelps' people decided to come down and do their thing. But—

00:58:36

ALBIN: Now are they still there? Did they leave? Are they still there?

00:58:39

DRAVEN: They did move away. I don't know if they've sold the place yet but they did move back to California.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

00:58:47

ALBIN: Yeah I remember reading all about that when it happened. So now you were talking about how in the Southwest you just know that your neighbor's gay and you don't kind of make a production. They're just there, they work. What's the difference you have found living in the different locations? So how is that type of living different than living in Columbia or living in Lawrence? I mean we'll start talking about Lawrence a little bit more, but what's the difference you see?

00:59:16

DRAVEN: Well—

00:59:17

ALBIN: Are there like regional, cultural key differences?

00:59:21

DRAVEN: There are, oh Jesus yes. There are very big differences culturally. In Garden City—my partner is from Garden City and so am I originally. And I think that the gays in Garden City are just so scared. I know a gay man who is forty-six, I think, still lives with his parents, won't tell them that he's gay but still goes out and does things with gay men, will go out publicly, will see people. He's very well known but he just hides it. And lots of married men that do the same thing. They got married because that's the cultural thing out there to do. So a lot of baggage along with gay people is what I saw in Garden City.

There aren't a lot of openly gay people that are just gay in their public lives, I guess, is what I'm trying to say, versus moving to Orlando where it's just all open where I think straight people decide to—well and same thing with LA or any large city where straight people just integrate the culture so well—the two—the gay and the straight cultures integrate so well that it's no big deal.

Kind of like what you see on Bravo television. You could have Bravo where they have CSI and blowing things up, and then the next thing is Carson Kressley saying how to look good naked, things like that—very gay men and then right after him is a Tom Hanks movie where something like that—well Tom Hanks isn't a good straight

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

stereotype so let's think of something better. Matt Damon, even though he's probably not the best either. Anyway, so you go from gay to straight immediately on television. And so I think that's what the mainstream is like.

So Kansas is always—five years behind is the big joke. And I actually think that's true. Growing up being called names and things like that, I never had physical violence like you see on some of the Lifetime movies. I never had that sort of physical violence. And I think that's moving out of the way that people work with culture or if they interrelate with them so—when I lived in Columbia it was almost though the gay culture was—Columbia is a very liberal and open-minded city as well. It was almost as though it was integrated as well but not to the same degree. They had specific gay bars but then they would have bars where one night a week was a gay theme and then the rest of the week it was straight or it was rowdy—not rowdy, I'm sorry, oldies music or retro-type music, and both crowds would come together on the eighties music or something like that, so what I see mostly is—versus like Chicago and Columbia and Florida, they are very open and proud, and they're willing to join political organizations and do big things like PROMO and such and Pride parades, while in western Kansas, Southwest Kansas, they're more quiet and demure about it and they don't want to bring a lot of light to it. I think those are the biggest changes truly.

01:02:24

ALBIN: So you were living in Garden City, involved in KEC. You were in the corporate world dealing with cell phones. How did you then end up in Lawrence?

01:02:35

DRAVEN: Well—(laughs) did you hear the laugh in there?

01:02:38

ALBIN: I heard a giggle from around the corner. (laughs)

01:02:40

DRAVEN: Yeah, exactly. It's his fault actually. My partner decided to go to college, which of course is the next step for him. He is at KU and we decided to stay together so I moved up here to Lawrence. I had a very virtual job, virtual meaning I could work from most any location in Kansas and just travel back and forth. I'm a workforce educator

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

so—I'm a corporate teacher. And I would travel back to western Kansas where my job was located and train but then come home to Lawrence. So that's how I ended up here, it's all his fault.

01:03:20

ALBIN: So how do you like being in Lawrence in comparison to the other locations you've been in?

01:03:25

DRAVEN: I think Lawrence is probably the best town I've ever lived in, in my opinion. It has an undertone of culture and acceptance, which is very important for me. So you can go down to Mass. Street and see—you can go into the music store and you can find that indie artist that no one knows about because they're just a local flavor versus you can go in and get the newest *Mary Poppins* CD because it's on Broadway. So that sort of cultural connection to the rest of the world, that pop culture that I thrive off of, you can get a hold of that somewhere in Lawrence. But it's also a Kansas town.

It—there are a lot of—well the Democratic caucuses we were talking about before this interview. The Democratic caucus was record numbers they've never seen in Douglas County, which means that in Douglas County where it is a Democratic place, it's a blue dot in a red state, there's this huge overwhelmingness. And so obviously if we have the highest numbers in Lawrence year after year for a Democratic caucus, which we don't have Democratic caucuses all the time, then you look at that, and the numbers being doubled in Lawrence show that if Lawrence is doubled as Democratic organization then the rest of Kansas is also doubled and improved. It's just—it's a great time to be in Kansas because there is that move towards progress and improving life.

01:04:52

ALBIN: So then you've noticed a shift over the past few years?

01:04:55

DRAVEN: Yeah, most definitely. The perfect example would be my own sister, Jessica. She is twenty-three—twenty-two right now. She'll be twenty-three in March as well. And she used to say things to me like, Gay people shouldn't have rights for marriage for two reasons—one, you'd get your butt beat on the street if they found you

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

holding hands, and that's what she truly believed, and two, gay people haven't been fighting for their (laughs) rights as long as straight women had to fight for their rights and burn their bras and such. So instead of—we would fight about it from time to time. But instead of getting into a big timeline debate of when the first bra was burned versus Stonewall and all that stuff, I just let her have her opinion.

But the great thing is that I think my sister is a perfect barometer for the Republican base out there, because she has come to the point where she has educated herself about Bush because she blindly followed him into a second election. She has also educated herself about gay rights and the reason why gay people should have their rights, because she used to live in Meade and lived in Meade when the flag was flown. She and her fiancé, boyfriend, I don't know where they're at quite yet but they lived in Meade when the flag was flown so it was very interesting. She would talk about how in cafes they would—the—what the locals were saying versus what the media was saying that the locals felt.

And so the thing—it's really neat to see her progressing as she gets older as well, because she now believes in a candidate who's also a Republican but who—it's Ron Paul—who is, The states should decide that sort of thing, I don't want to be involved in that at a federal level because that's not what the Constitution says, and just the way that she has progressed as an individual I think is a good barometer, because that's how I feel the rest of the communities are. They don't attack the 16-year-old gay kid who came out in high school anymore when in the earlier part of the century they probably would have.

01:06:55

ALBIN: So in terms of political organizations now, are you involved in anything in Lawrence?

01:07:04

DRAVEN: I am a part of KEC still, although that's a sore subject, and I know some KEC members from Lawrence who will probably listen to this so, I won't get too involved in that. They know my issues. I think that while KEC is still a very active and important thing in Kansas, I think that we need to focus in on what we want to do as an organization. So I have been less involved with KEC.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

This project is another reason why—getting involved in this project is another—one of—let me try that again—one of the reasons why I got involved in this project is because I wanted to continue that, being involved and making a difference. And then also as you had said, most of the people that you've been interviewing lately are writers and I do write as well—whether it's an article to go into a magazine or into something but, I guess I'm not as in—I'm not as—what's the word I'm looking for—not as directly involved as I have been in the past, but I still try to send my money and make a difference. It's the corporate world, it's too consuming.

01:08:12

ALBIN: Right, right. Now with the corporate world that you're involved in, are you out at work?

01:08:17

DRAVEN: Yes. Yes, I am out at work. And I supervise a very large team of people and they know that I'm openly gay so—and all of my management knows that I have a partner and about my life.

01:08:30

ALBIN: And are there other folks that you're working with who are out as well or—

01:08:35

DRAVEN: Well I work in a call center environment currently. I am, again, a corporate teacher but at this time it's for a call center instead of the cellular service industry. And it's a very large call center—lots and lots and lots—five thousand employees, I think, is what we currently have. And there are gay people that are openly gay at work. Call center environments are different, though, because you can be yourself because you don't have to be a different person face-to-face with the customer, because you could be yourself. And then on the phone, you're something different when you're actually doing your work so—it's a very interesting dynamic. But yes, there are other openly gay people that I work with.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

01:09:13

ALBIN: Right. Right. I was just looking at a report that said that there's like over 72,000 gay people in Kansas. And I'm thinking—

01:09:20

DRAVEN: Wow—

01:09:21

ALBIN: —I have like eighty-five people right now. Could I get the rest of them?

01:09:23

DRAVEN: (laughs)

01:09:24

ALBIN: So, yeah I'm just—I'm very curious about that. Do you feel that in Lawrence—you were saying that you think it's kind of one of the best places you've lived. Do you think that the university has an influence on that? So when you were in Columbia do you think the university influenced that or that the city is—like the—I guess I'm looking at it two ways. Do you think the city influences the university and then do you think the university influences the city in any way?

01:09:52

DRAVEN: Yes, both of those.

01:09:54

ALBIN: On both of those?

01:09:55

DRAVEN: When I lived in Columbia—Columbia and Lawrence are a lot alike. They have a very rich cultural atmosphere; they have international students and international teachers, people coming in. The difference, I think, in Columbia is that they have so many hospitals. They're so focused on medicine. And yes, KU Med does exist but it's mostly in Kansas City, it's not here in Lawrence. So Columbia had a lot of focus on medicine, which brings a different breed of people in, a higher level of education—not to say that the people at KU are not as educated as Columbia, but the doctors and the teachers who teach the doctors and the courses that they have there are at a different

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

educational level, professionalism I think as well, versus just a party hungry high school graduate coming to KU, because KU does kind of have a partying school atmosphere about it.

I think that Lawrence and Columbia have a lot of similarities but the differences are astounding as well and I think that does have to do with the university. I think the university dictates to the City of Lawrence and dictates to the City of Columbia. And it doesn't have to do it politically or very verbally, but if you think about it the people that are involved in the politics of local cities are usually professionals or people that are involved in something that the city can affect.

So the university here in Lawrence, KU, would probably have more of a vested interest of being involved in the politics of the city. And I think that it does happen, that the culture of the school does change the culture of the town. Because you look at Manhattan, Manhattan's very agricultural and much more hickish, I'm sorry to say but—even though it's a more beautiful city—Manhattan is a beautiful city, lots of trees, it's just gorgeous, it does have a more of a country feel than Lawrence, in my opinion, so I think you're right, they do affect each other.

01:11:47

ALBIN: Yeah—no I was just—yeah I'm just kind of curious about that. So where do you see yourself heading in five years? You talk about—you were talking about being in the Midwest and the example was, Anne she came from California to Kansas and you—and it's like, Anne she stayed.

01:12:06

DRAVEN: Right.

01:12:17

ALBIN: And—I mean the world is your oyster. You could go anywhere. Do you see staying in Kansas as—forever?

01:12:16

DRAVEN: No, I won't stay in Kansas forever. I actually surprised myself moving back to Kansas. It—to me, it's kind of like a quote from *Will & Grace* where Jack says, It's a

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

state of mind, you know, like being in love or the Midwest. It really is (laughs) a state of mind out here. Not that I've lived outside of the Midwest a lot, but I have traveled outside of the Midwest.

And the way people—the way the world is, even though we're such a virtual world right now with the Internet and the communication between everyone, until we get rid of the `older generations and it's just the young generations—the millennium Y—the millennials or the Generation Y whatever you want to call them, until they rule the world, there are going to be these pockets of dissonance with the rest of the world. If you watch something like *Project Runway* where you see these weird fashions that walk down the runway every week, or if you watch any of those Bravo shows, you see it trying to reach into America, into Midwest America. But there's a rejection because you would never see somebody wear a Vera Wang, unless you were in Chicago. But you wouldn't see somebody wearing a Vera Wang walking down a Wichita wedding—in a Wichita wedding, but you would definitely see it in a larger city. So I think once these stodgy old people start to move on, I think it'll help change a lot as well. But then there'll be a different dissonance. There will be differences at that point.

Will I leave the Midwest? Probably. I've lived most of my life somewhere in the Midwest, and once I get to a point where I'm more comfortable with the differences—California is somewhere that I'm definitely looking to go, and Chicago's my favorite city in all of the United States so I'll probably leave the Midwest eventually but not right now, not for another few years.

01:14:10

ALBIN: Right. Right. So is there anything else that you want to talk about that we may not have talked about—

01:14:20

DRAVEN: No—

01:14:21

ALBIN: —at this point?

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

01:14:23

DRAVEN: I told you mine would be fast.

01:14:31

ALBIN: Well, actually we've been talking for an hour and fifteen minutes so I wouldn't quite— I think if it was a twenty-five-minute conversation it would (laughs) have been fast.

01:14:34

DRAVEN: Well twenty-five years versus the fifty or eighty that you've had with other people so—

[section removed]

01:14:40

ALBIN: So then tell me what (unintelligible) look like at that point in your life.

01:14:43

DRAVEN: Yeah.

01:14:44

ALBIN: But I think if I do have questions I may come back and follow up with those but—

01:14:50

DRAVEN: Awesome.

01:14:51

ALBIN: But thank you very much.

01:14:52

DRAVEN: Thank you.

01:14:52

ALBIN: I really, really appreciate it.

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

01:14:53

DRAVEN: Thank you.

01:14:54

ALBIN: It's excellent.

[end]

Christopher Draven
February 9, 2008

Index

- bars, 19
- being out: work, 35
- birth place, 1
- childhood, 1–3
- civic duty, 24
- Columbia University (CU), 17
- coming out, 6, 7, 12–13; mother, 9–10; sister, 6
- community, 11–14
- cultural differences, 31–32
- employment, 4, 11, 22, 25, 33, 35
- family: conflict, 20; cousin, 8, 9–10; father (adoptive), 14–16; father (birth), 1; grandmother, 1, 2, 8–9; mother, 1, 2, 5, 9–10, 28; sister, 2, 33–34; step-siblings, 16
- future, 38
- Garden City Community College (GCCC), 18
- HIV/AIDS, 11
- identity (secret), 18–23
- Kansas: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer issues, 25–27
- Kansas Equality Coalition (KEC), 34; Southwest Chapter, 25, 28
- Lawrence, KS, 33, 36–37
- Liberty Press, 25
- living in: Columbia, MO, 17, 18; Garden City, KS, 1, 2, 24; Lawrence, KS, 32; Orlando, FL, 17; Topeka, KS, 17; Wichita, KS, 9, 11–14
- Manhattan, KS, 36–37
- Meade, KS, 28–30
- Mitchell, Anne, 25, 27
- post secondary education. See specific institutions
- Rainbow flag, Meade, KS, 28–30
- relationships, 19; best friend, 18; break-up, 16; dating, 16; partner, 32
- religious family, 2
- school: high school, 4; junior high, 3
- sexual identity, 11; cause, 3; fantasies, 4; infatuation, 3, 5; name calling, 3, 4, 7; unaware, 3
- University of Kansas (KU), 36–37
- University of Orlando (UO), 17
- Wichita State University (WSU), 17