

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

Arla Jones
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

March 21, 2008

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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 Arla Jones.

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Arla Jones: Narrator

Tami Albin: Interviewer

00:00:00

TAMI ALBIN: Okay so that's good. All right. All right ready?

00:00:05

ARLA JONES: Totally.

00:00:06

ALBIN: Okay. So we're now recording. It is March 10, 2008, and I am here with Arla Jones, and Radish is running around the room.

00:00:17

JONES: With a chew toy.

00:00:18

ALBIN: And we are here once again to do an oral history. And I'll start this one off the way I start off all the oral histories so far which is, where were you born and when?

00:00:27

JONES: Well I was born in Great Bend, Kansas March 23, 1960. And Great Bend is right in the middle of the state. Lived in Great Bend until I was in sixth grade and then we moved to a little town called Osborne, which is up in north central Kansas where I went to junior high. And I graduated from Goodland High School in 1978.

00:01:00

ALBIN: So what was life like growing up in these locations?

00:01:05

JONES: Well Kim and I always say that we had the last stereotypical American childhood. We left the—during the summer we left the house in the morning and came home by dark every day, and our parents didn't know exactly where we were, they just knew we were riding our bikes somewhere. So I would say we had your average American childhood.

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00:01:31

ALBIN: What was high school like?

00:01:33

JONES: Well it's funny because when I first started going to college my friends would introduce me as someone who actually liked high school, so I actually had fun in high school. Even though I lived in a really horrible place—and I'm sorry to the people of Goodland but Goodland's not a very nice town.

And it's interesting because today I heard an interview about a new movie that's coming out. They're making a movie about Harvey Milk's life. And he was assassinated in 1978, which is the year I was in high school. And I didn't know anything about Harvey Milk at all. The only thing I really remember happening during that time was Anita Bryant. That's when she was doing her big rampage against the city—it was an ordinance down in Florida. And I vaguely remember hearing about that, but I had no idea anything about gay. The only thing I had any idea about anything having to do with gayness was there was this thing where they said if you wore blue jeans on Thursday you were gay.

00:02:42

ALBIN: Do you know why?

00:02:43

JONES: I have no idea. But other people have said, Oh yeah I remember that, if you wore jeans on Thursday. And I think that—now that seems totally weird but during those days—well like when I was in elementary school girls could not wear pants to school. And in western Kansas it's really cold in the winter. And so we were allowed to wear pants under our dresses because it was so cold to walk to school. So it was really unusual to wear jeans any day but like often it seems like we could wear jeans like on a Friday maybe, but you just didn't wear jeans to school all the time. It's so weird to think that that's how we lived but it was. So I think maybe—I don't know how they ever came up with that but that's all I really remember. And as it turns out, I now know that most of my friends were gay—

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00:03:44

ALBIN: In Goodland?

00:03:45

JONES: In Goodland. Yeah it's weird. But we all turned out, in the end, to be gay.

00:03:54

ALBIN: And there was no inkling of this in high school or anything—

00:03:57

JONES: No and it's weird because we didn't really—I don't remember us talking about it. Of course we never would, I suppose. I mean, Anita Bryant was going crazy so—but it's weird. Like I have—we're going on a cruise in June with a friend of—with a whole bunch of friends, but one of them is this guy that I went to high school with. And when Kim and I celebrated our tenth anniversary we had a big party in our backyard with a mariachi band. And we invited—and it's funny because I didn't [ever think about being gay.]¹ I moved away—I moved away from Goodland and kept in touch with some of my friends but most of us didn't see each other until much later.

And so for our tenth anniversary—well I moved to New York City, came back to New York. We lived in Kansas City and then we moved to Lawrence. And I said, I wonder what happened to Bud. And at our high school reunion they hand out these little notebooks with everyone's address. And so I seem to remember that Bud had moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma. So one day Kim called information and found Bud Abbott in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and called his house and left a message saying, Well so this is—I'm calling for Arla Jones. Maybe you went to high school with her, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. If this is the Bud Abbott from Goodland High School and class of '78 call. So he called right up that night and he's like, Oh my God Arla. And so we talked for like two hours. We had this whole conversation. [I guess I never said the words, “I am gay,” while Bud and I talked.]² And we—that was it.

And then we had our tenth anniversary. So we sent him an invitation and on the invitation it said, “Celebrating ten years of unwedded bliss.” So Bud got into his car and

¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

² Added by narrator during the review process.

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drove from Tulsa to our house, went to our whole party, saw the cake, saw our friends, saw all these dorky gifts like it was a wedding anniversary but not really. He went home and he told his boyfriend, [Brian that he wasn't sure.]³ He said, Well are they gay? And he says, Well I'm not sure.

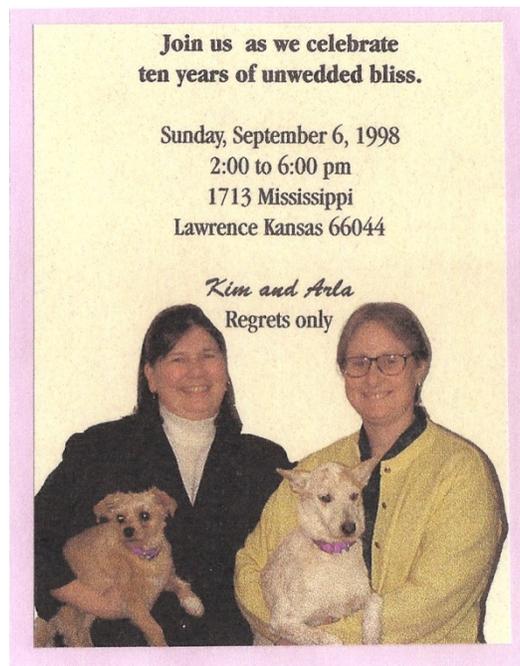


Image courtesy of Arla Jones

00:06:05

ALBIN: (laughs)

00:06:06

JONES: I know. And Kim and I are like, What the hell? I mean that's how strange it was to be—and so since that time we've [gotten pretty close and] we spent a lot of time [together].⁴ We went back to our high school reunion, like our [22nd reunion]—in

³ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

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Goodland, Kansas.⁵ We have a high school reunion every five years for everybody who graduated from the school. It's like four thousand people. So Bud and his boyfriend [Brian] and Kim and I went back like—let's see, ten years ago.⁶ We went back to Goodland and saw some of those people from school. And the thing about Bud was he was the band director, the—what is that called? It's like—

00:06:50

ALBIN: The conductor?

00:06:51

JONES: The conductor, the marching band guy, which is a big deal. And he was very handsome. He's still very handsome. And everyone was in love with him. And so while we were there that weekend it was quite a shock. I mean we walk in and you could see the sea of faces and they're like, Oh my God. Is that Bud? Is that a man he's with? (laughs) And so then we talked about what it was like in school. And he described these situations that he was in with girls that were horrifying. I was really good at just being completely passive. I was friends with everyone and I—I don't—looking back, I'm sure I knew I was gay but I didn't really know what that meant right? But he very early knew and he can describe going to the library because he had heard there was an article in *Time* magazine about homosexuality—going to the library and getting the magazine and shoving it into his bag and taking it all the way into his car, like in the dark of night to read that article about homosexuality. And I don't have any real memories of anything like that.

00:08:06

ALBIN: So what happened then after you—so you left Goodland. Where did you go?

00:08:10

JONES: Well I went to Washburn University for two years. And why did I go to Washburn? Because nobody else from Goodland was going there. (laughs) I mean nobody went there. And I had some really nice friends and—but I really wanted to go someplace bigger. And I think looking back I now realize that it was just—I just really

⁵ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

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wanted to start over. And the people who go—were going— It was a small—very small school then and no one lived on campus and I was living on campus. And so I went there for two years then I transferred to KU. And it's so weird because that was at the time when they had that whole thing of the student [government].⁷ You know how they have those elections and they run on these coalitions? There was a coalition at the time called Fag Busters. That's when I was going to KU. So I had no knowledge of any Q&A [Queers and Allies] activity, even though I think there was an organization that kind of fought that. It's just so funny. So I was certainly—I had boyfriends, I had girlfriends. I had no real clue about anything. I mean, I mostly spent most of my time trying not to be in a relationship with anybody. So—

00:09:40

ALBIN: And what did you study?

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JONES: Oh, I got a degree in English. And that's kind of a joke because it was the eighties and so everyone was getting a degree in business. So I started out at Washburn in business but that was so wrong. I—Oh my God it was so wrong. So when I transferred to KU—I wanted to go someplace out of state but I couldn't figure out how to do it and no one seemed to know how to help me so I just came to KU since I spent all my time in Lawrence anyway. So I studied—I got an undergraduate degree in English, mostly because I wanted to read a lot. I always—everything I know I learned in the library in spite of my professors. But it's funny because I don't really remember anything about—I remember a couple of professors. In fact, we're neighbors with my advisor who I despise because he convinced me to take French.

So I graduated from KU and then it was like, Well I don't really know what I want to do. A friend of mine was managing a store in a shopping mall in Kansas City. You get an undergraduate degree in English and you can't really do—I knew I was going to go to grad school, I didn't know what. But there were no jobs anyway. So I—I was a slacker before my time. No one really knew what that was. It was the eighties so everyone was wearing suits and getting jobs but I wasn't really into that. So I went to get a job in the shopping mall and that was—I had no health insurance and my parents were going to

⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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kill me. So I got a job in a library. And since I had my degree I got the second highest paid job in the library, right. And I thought, Well this is pretty good. I worked there for a year. And the ladies who were there made me go to grad school. They said, Okay we're going to fire you and you need to go to graduate school or else do something else because you're not going to be like us and stay here, you're too young.

So my mom said, Well you have always liked working in the library. Why don't you see if you could go to library school? And Emporia State at the time was (laughs) on probation. They had lost their accreditation. But my mom had gone to the University of Denver and they have a library—had a library school. And so we drove out there one day. And I walked in, I met the woman who was the assistant to the dean, [who is now the incoming president of the American Library Association, Camila Alire,] and she said, You could just start this summer.⁸ And I said, Yeah I could. I could be living in Denver, Colorado this summer. So I started then, and then they announced they were closing the school. But that was a good thing because I got finished fast. (laughs) I'd probably still be there. (laughter) I got a really good job. And Denver's nice. You can go skiing in like an hour.

And so I got a job. I went to ALA [American Library Association] and went through the little hiring thing just to practice. And that's the hilarious thing because at the time I had this friend who I'm pretty sure was gay too, but he had been a cheerleader for the University of Nebraska. (laughs) So we went to Washington, D.C. ALA in Washington, D.C., and I interviewed for some jobs. And I—I had—I got three jobs. And they sent me a letter from the New York Public Library and they said, blah, blah, blah, come to work in New York. And I asked everybody—I asked my family, asked my friends, So what do you think? And they said, Sounds like a great opportunity, Arla, you should do it. Well—I thought, Well I never have to make a resume. How great would that be? And so I packed up my stuff and moved to New York. And I really thought I'd stay for one or two years. I ended up staying almost ten.

00:13:41

ALBIN: So at what point during all of this do bells and whistles start to really go off?5

⁸ Added by narrator during the review process.

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00:13:45

JONES: Well it took really long time—(dog barking) that's the dog. I'm kind of a slow—well as I mentioned, I'm a slacker so I—(laughs) (dog barking) Oh my God. I even lived in Park Slope [a.k.a Dyke Slope at the time.]⁹ I mean it was so funny. My friends were all like—and Kim—well—(dog whining) I can't imagine what's wrong. I can remember Kim asking me, well—everyone was like, You're gay, you're gay, you're gay. And I would just laugh because I wasn't—I don't think I even knew what that meant. I had a friend who was gay but he was like Charlie Brown. He went on a hundred first dates and never got a second date, so I was like, Oh I don't think that's for me. It seemed like a miserable life. And so I—I don't know, I met Kim and that's what happened.

00:14:49

ALBIN: So how did you meet Kim?

00:14:50

JONES: Well she worked at the New York Public—the New York Public library, the branch that I worked at, had a store on the main floor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art gift shop, and she was the manager. And the librarians who worked in the library with me were all pretty weird. The New York Public Library had—went through—New York City almost went bankrupt in the seventies and they've never—well they didn't recover from it until after I left the library.

And so we called ourselves—they hired forty of us from out here. We called ourselves the “duped westerners” because the salary they were paying us was really bad, but it got me to New York so that was good. So I hung out with all the people in the gift shop because the librarians who were there were so thankful that they hadn't been fired, that they would basically do anything for the library. And it was a kind of a worst-case scenario for management. So I was hanging out with the people in the gift shop and—so I knew Kim was coming before I met her and—

00:16:00

ALBIN: Was she from the Midwest too?

⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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00:16:01

JONES: She's from Indiana. Yeah and she had come—well you'll get her story tomorrow but she had come to New York to get—I'm trying to make sure she's not going to pee on anything, [Radish, the dog.]¹⁰ So I met Kim. And we were friends for three years before we even figured out anything. I mean what happened was Kim was working in the gift shop. I had to leave the public library because I was starving to death. I moved to New York, to New Jersey, and my apartment was robbed. Yeah, it's so funny I was robbed on my very first day in New York City.

00:16:41

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

00:16:42

JONES: I know. They stole all my stereo and everything right off the truck.

00:16:46

ALBIN: Oh no.

00:16:47

JONES: I know. I mean, it's hilarious. If I would have had a car I would have probably been gone earlier but I didn't have a car. And then I moved to New Jersey and got robbed there. So I moved in with this really giant man in Park Slope, which we know as Dyke Slope, right? And everyone's like, God Arla, How can you stand living with all those lesbians? And I'm like, Well where are they? *(laughter)* I was like, *(makes noise)* so maybe I really am ADD and I can't really focus. I don't know.

00:17:23

ALBIN: So how old were you about this time when you moved to Park Slope?

00:17:25

JONES: Twenty-five, twenty-six.

¹⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

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ALBIN: So you went to grad school fairly young?

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JONES: Yeah. Yeah I was one of those early people. I was kind of an oddity because everyone else was much older. Yeah. Yeah so I was pretty—I was—well, by today's—like my students in high school are like, What? You were twenty-six years old, twenty-seven years old? I met Kim when I was twenty-eight and when she was twenty-eight too. And we were friends for a couple years, couple, three years. And then she moved to Chicago and we talked on the phone every day. So that was the clue I think. Yeah it's so funny.

00:18:16

ALBIN: So what made you leave New York?

00:18:19

JONES: Well, my dad got sick. Yeah, my parents stayed out in Goodland. And they were driving to a hospital that was in Burlington, Colorado. It's a half hour on the interstate. And my mom would call me and say, Oh well your dad just got out of intensive care. And it's really hard to get from New York City to Goodland. You have to [fly] from New York City to Denver and then drive two hundred miles across the Tundra.¹¹ And it was just really stressing me out. And plus, I'm from a really small town in the [country.]¹² I just—the city was wearing me out. I had to start driving to work. And so I had to leave. I worked at the best school in the world. I worked at a—it was a school grade seven through twelve run by the Society for Ethical Culture, which is sort of like the Jewish Unitarians. They teach ethics [from] kindergarten through twelfth grade.¹³ And that's where I started my first Gay-Straight Alliance. In fact this friend and I at the school went to Boston to meet this guy, Kevin Jennings, who was just starting to talk about having these clubs in schools. And we went to the first GLSEN [Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network] meetings in midtown Manhattan at this school.

¹¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

¹² Added by narrator during the review process.

¹³ Added by narrator during the review process.

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And so it's kind of weird how—and—what's really strange about it is, I didn't really have any—well my family was not religious. I remember I met a guy once in New York. He said, So how are you living in New York? I mean, can you give up your religion? Does that really bug you? He said most Midwesterners have a hard time dealing with giving up their religion, but my family really wasn't religious so it was never an issue. And I know—well when Kim and I first realized that we were going to probably spend the rest of our lives together we thought, Well that doesn't really mean that we're gay though right? So we had no idea I think what it meant.

And Kim did a press release but I didn't really—I had been—when I left Kansas we didn't have—you couldn't buy a drink in a bar. You couldn't just walk into a bar and buy a drink. There were no casinos. We didn't even have the lottery. So it was really a strange place when I left. Well and they were doing the whole Fag Busters thing. So it was a very different place. And so I didn't really tell my family anything or any of my friends here.

And then Kim was involved in this—we were both working at—we both worked in the New York City Public Schools and there was a—well I'm sure she'll tell you about this on the tape but she was involved in a citywide event. There was something called the Rainbow Curriculum and it was a citywide curriculum that was supposed to be—teach schoolchildren in the public schools about families. And one of the books mentioned in the bibliography was *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Well Kim worked in the school district where the school board [president, Mary Cummings,] was ravaging this whole idea of the Rainbow Curriculum.¹⁴ And so we went to a meeting at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center to talk about this. And it was full of a lot of teachers.

And that night—I can't exactly remember how it happened, but Kim got a call from a reporter from the *New York Times* saying, Well we met this teacher, Danny Drum. He also works in your school district, and would you be willing to be interviewed in an article for the newspaper to talk about working in a district where they say that gay people cause AIDS? And Kim said, Well let me think about it. And so she decided to go ahead and do it. Well so the article appeared in the paper with her photograph.

¹⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

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And the next morning when she went to her school out in Queens—well actually she didn't even go to school. Her principal called her house at like 6:30 in the morning and said, Every news truck in the city is in front of the school so don't come to school. Yeah. And so I started to—well all kinds of things happened that day but the reality was that the union called us in a meeting, and me too, and said, It's not safe for Kim to walk to school anymore, she needs to go with somebody, and that they thought there would be death threats and all these things.

And so I thought—and the other news agencies picked it up. So I can imagine a picture of her could be put like up on the AP [Associated Press] wire. And my parents read the newspaper every day. And so I thought, I really have to tell my family. This is not how I really want them to find out. So in my usual noncommittal way I wrote a letter and I gave them the articles and I sent the letter to my parents and to my brothers. And my dad and mom called me right up. And they said—I said, Oh so you got my letter? They said, Yeah and they said, Well it's not very good news. And I thought, Oh, it's bad news. And they said—I said, Oh really? And my dad said, Well no we're just really worried.

And it's interesting because I've been teaching an independent study class in my—to my students at Lawrence High School. And we just watched a movie about McCarthy and Roy Cohn. And I remembered now what my dad said. My dad was stationed at Fort Dix and there's a part of the whole McCarthy trials where he's involved with getting this private in the army who's stationed in a—at a base around New Jersey to not have to go through basic training, and it was Roy Cohn's boyfriend. And they had all these people—they were—because what they were doing is going to all these bases around the New York area and trying to find gay people. And Roy Cohn was in charge of that. And my dad said that day that his job was to protect people like that so that they didn't get hurt when they were in the army. And so they actually did have people like that, people who were targeted. If any—if you had to go to that hearing, to one of McCarthy's hearings, then you were considered to be either a communist or gay.

So now I think—because my mom mentioned it again. She said, Oh yeah that's what your dad was doing was protecting those guys. So—so when I talked to my parents on the phone they said that. And then, have you ever heard this joke when you're trying to

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tell someone you're gay, usually your family, you try to make it sound like you have cancer? And then they'll say, Oh I thought you were going to tell me you had cancer. You're just gay? So you know what happened to me, my dad said, Well yeah you're gay but I have cancer, and I've had leukemia for five years. Can you imagine? He said, Oh yeah. So for like this amount of time the little window of honesty opened up for my stoic parents and they could tell all the truth and then it slammed—it was shut. Yeah, isn't that amazing? So—

00:26:01

ALBIN: So what happened after the press release and the union calling you in and—

00:26:06

JONES: Absolutely nothing. In fact, it's—it's the biggest success story of, I would say, Kim and Danny's life. I mean, Kim went on to be the co-president, the co-chair of Queens, Gays and Lesbians United which is now responsible for this giant Gay Pride parade that goes right down through the heart of Queens. And it was an organization that was started because a gay man was beaten up outside of a bar. She gave speeches at rallies and all this stuff. Danny Dromm went on to start Queens Pride which is really in charge of the Pride parade. And the—Queens, Gays and Lesbians [QGLU.]¹⁵

I mean it's interesting because Kim was the female co-chair of this organization. They were trying to get the Borough of Queens to pass some kind of a ordinance or allow something—this organization to try to make things better for gay people. And they met with the borough president and she refused to be seen in public with anybody who was openly gay, right? But—and then the woman who was the school board president is now the borough president of Queens. And they now have a gay organization for elder people in Queens that have offices right in the Borough Hall. They have an organization for kids that's right in Borough Hall. The guy who started the Pride organization is now running for the city—the borough commission, whatever it's called. He's gone on to have an amazing political career and he still teaches at that little elementary school in that Borough of Queens. We still get his mailings.

¹⁵ Added by narrator during the review process.

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So it was the best thing that could have ever happened to the two of them. They were just regular schoolteachers who kind of got pushed into the limelight. So it was a good thing, even though at the time it was really scary. We ended up leaving town. It was Rosh Hashanah. In New York City you get all the Jewish holidays. So the article came out on a Wednesday. We didn't go to school on Thursday, and Friday was the beginning of the four-day Rosh Hashanah weekend so we went to Provincetown. The paper actually came out on—it came out in—the picture—the picture didn't come out until Saturday. So we bought the paper actually in Provincetown and opened it up and saw the article and (makes noise).¹⁶

00:28:52

ALBIN: Do you remember the date?

00:28:54

JONES: Um-um. You can find it on—it's in the *New York Times* archives. We have all the stuff. I mean, if you want all the—it's all there. And it's funny because I have Google alert set up for Kim and I. And every so often that article pops up. It's in the *New York Times*. It was also in—what's the—*Newsday*, which is the Long Island Newspaper. Yeah. But it was all very scary. But nothing happened, absolutely nothing happened. And in some ways—Kim was an ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher—it was better. Her students and their families were nicer to her, strangely. And (laughs) I worked in the school where we had a GSA. I mean we had our own table of gay teachers at lunch, so that was fabulous. So what else?

00:29:56

ALBIN: So when did you come back to Kansas?

00:29:57

JONES: Oh—

00:29:57

ALBIN: Or did you come back to Kansas?

¹⁶ Myers, S. L. "Gay Teachers Say Board in Queens is Intolerant." *New York Times*, September, 26, 1992, Metro section, New York edition.

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00:29:58

JONES: 1997. Yeah, my dad was sick and I was getting tired of New York. And I got a job. I started working at the Johnson County Library. Yeah, I started working at the Johnson County Library the same week as the *Annie on my Mind* trial started. And it's funny; I was hired by the Johnson County Library. And I replaced a friend of mine who I knew from library school. And she knew me, I had this incredible interview, everyone knew I was gay. I was thinking—because Kim and I both decided we were going to come back to Kansas but we were going to always come out in our interview and we were not going to go back on anything. We'll starve to death before we'd do that.

So I started working—I got—went to my first day of work at the Johnson County Library. And then the trial opened. And Jean called me into her office and she said, Well you probably want to get down to Olathe and keep an eye on that trial because they're in Johnson County and we have that book on our shelf so—and she said, And I know you're really proud of being gay but, we don't want to see you at the front of the Gay Pride parade. And I was like, Oh my God. What have I done? Oh my God. So I was really sad.

00:31:31

ALBIN: So what did you do?

00:31:32

JONES: Well I went to the trial, hung out, and I just—I really—there was nothing I could do. Kim didn't have a job yet. I had a job. And so I just thought, Well I'm stuck now. What am I going to do? And so I just kept going forward. It was—I was the only—I just decided I wasn't going to hide anything, and so little by little—it was difficult though because—because of the *Annie on My Mind* trial that was started by this group called Project 21 which put—picked a book and tried to put it in schools. So they also wanted to have information about GLBT topics in the libraries, in the public libraries, and we had twelve libraries.

And there was a little controversy because someone complained about the *Current News*, which I don't think that still exists, but it was a gay rag that had a lot of personal ads in them, which upset some of the people in Johnson County. And so they complained about that and then they complained about the *Joy of Gay Sex*. And I can

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remember vividly being—I was a [coordinator] there.¹⁷ I was...the youth services coordinator.¹⁸ So I would sit in on all these administrative meetings. So I'd just sit in a meeting with all these middle-aged women while they passed around a copy of the *Joy of Gay Sex*. And they're like, ah—(laughs) and I did my best but it was really hard. Everybody was pretty—I don't know, immature about it. But I held my ground and I—fortunately, everybody had a pretty good attitude about defending the whole idea of intellectual freedom, it was just the whole idea of the *Joy of Gay*—the *Joy of Gay Sex* and then there was Madonna's *Sex* and it was just—it seemed like one thing after another. And then we had to talk about the *Current News* [magazine.]¹⁹

And it's funny because there was one guy—this one guy, he still works there. And I had rainbow everything. And he said, Oh you're so brave to put your—he came into my office and he (whispering) closed the door and he said, You're so brave to have rainbow flag on your car. And I said, Oh yeah. So then I thought, This sucks. So I—every time I'd talk to anybody I'd say, Well you see all those rainbows around? You know what that means? It means that people are gay. When they have a rainbow it means they're gay, so I instantly outed everybody at the Johnson County Library. But it was hard. I had to—well actually I had to start going to a therapist because I was just so depressed. I just felt like I had totally screwed up everything and went to work at this library where they're all so closed minded.

My one—it was interesting, I actually felt kinship with the one Jewish employee who felt like she always had to bring up the whole Jewish thing. I was the lesbian who always had to bring up the gay thing. So I had a hard time. And it's kind of sad because I had—I worked with this one—my library was moved to a branch where the branch manager was really nice and we got along really well.

And when I started—when I left Johnson County and came to Lawrence High School—I was at Johnson County for three years—I kind of started working here while I kept my other job going because I had all these big projects going, so I kept kind of coming back and forth, would go there on the weekend. On my very last day that I was going to take

¹⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

¹⁸ Edited by narrator during the review process.

¹⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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everything out of my office, I went to my office and on my desk was a letter from this woman who had been the branch manager of the library. And she wrote me this long letter and she said, You know, I never did—I never could talk to you about it but I wanted you to know that I really enjoyed working with you and that I'm proud to know you, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I wish I could have somehow found the way to tell you that my son is gay. (makes noise) (laughs) It's like—so after I worked there for three years—and it was so stupid because my friend Jean said to me—she kept saying, Well has Linda talked to you? Did she talk to you about anything? She has some news she wants to tell you. But she never would talk to me until I was going to leave. I mean, it just shows you what kind of place that is.

00:36:21

ALBIN: So what do you think the difference was between going to the courts about the trial with this book versus standing in front of the Pride parade? I mean, what do you think the difference was?

00:36:34

JONES: For them?

00:36:35

ALBIN: Yeah.

00:36:36

JONES: Well, I don't know. I mean, I think that they thought it was my job as a youth services coordinator to go to trial and see what was going on but it was a charade. The whole thing was ridiculous. I mean, the school board members who were actually in the—it came out by the end of the trial that they never even read the book. They were all—they're all professors at the college of the—Nazarene College. It's just a big joke.

00:37:18

ALBIN: (laughs) *Radish*, we will interview you next, I promise. I promise.

00:37:22

JONES: Yeah she's not crazy about—she barks at straight men but not gay men.

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00:37:26

ALBIN: Right. That's funny. You have a good gaydar Radish.

00:37:30

JONES: Yeah.

00:37:31

ALBIN: That's good. So how did you get the job here in Lawrence? Where were you living when you moved back home?

00:37:36

JONES: We left New York City and moved to Kansas City. I mean, it's so funny. My brother lived in the same area where we ended up moving. We came back—my—our nephew was born that summer. And so we came back to Kansas City for like a month-and-a-half in '97 and we spent the summer there. And while we were here we went out with my friend, Jean and she said, Well I'm trying to replace myself. Would you be interested? And I thought, What the hell? So I went to like, I don't know where, and bought myself this fake little suit with shorts.

00:38:13

ALBIN: More shorts. (laughs)

00:38:14

JONES: I know. But it was funny—well that's another story. But there was a little suit, little short suit and I had my interview. It was like eight hours. I was there the whole day. And so I said, Well that was a really long interview. So maybe we ought to walk around and see if we find a house and if we get this job we'll move. So we walked around my brother's neighborhood and we found a house. We found a house and we wrote down the information. And then like a week later, after we'd driven back to New York, they called me and offered me the job. And they said, Could you get here like the day after Labor Day? And I said, I don't know, that's like only two weeks away. But we decided to go ahead and do it, just decided to do it, because we liked Kansas City, we liked the neighborhood.

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And so we moved back to Kansas City. And then as if by magic—Kim is an ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher. And so we were reading the paper every day. As if by magic, after we were there like a few months, maybe six months, there was a job listing for the ESL coordinator for the State of Kansas (laughs) at the Kansas State Department of Education, so she applied for the job. And she got it but she was commuting from Kansas City to Topeka. So she worked there for five years and for three years I worked for Johnson County. And since I had the long commute in New York and she worked basically really close, she said, Okay so we'll stay in Kansas City and I'll drive this time.

And then I couldn't get my teaching license. Kansas is just weird. I had a permanent lifetime teaching license in the State of New York, but they didn't have any kind of reciprocal anything with Kansas. So I had to go through all these steps and I had to take all these extra things. So finally Kim said, You know what Arla, I think you should give up. It's not going to work. And then I thought, No I'm going to try it one more time. I got my license. I wrote some bureaucrat somewhere a letter and they said, Okay we'll look at it. And they gave me the license. And then magically in like a week the job listing was for this job at Lawrence High School.

00:40:42

ALBIN: Wow.

00:40:43

JONES: And so I sent in my paperwork and they called me up and said, It's already been filled. So by this time I was going to a therapist and thinking, Oh I'm so depressed, what am I going to do? (laughs) Why did I leave New York? (laughs) I was working like seventy hours a week, going to meetings all day every day. And then the listing appeared as if by magic. And they called me up and they said, Well that person's not coming. Would you like to come interview for the job? So I had my interview at like six o'clock in the morning. They said, Just tell me when. I said, Okay I'm coming over. I have to interview before I go to work. I have like ten things I'm supposed to be doing. And so they said, Okay can you start on Monday? (laughs) I said, Oh my God. I'm going to have to tell my boss, who's my friend that I'm going to quit the job that I hate.

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00:41:43

ALBIN: Okay.

00:41:44

JONES: Well that's what she said to me. She said, You really hate this job don't you? And I said, Oh my God you don't even know. So I came over to Lawrence High. And I told them in the interview that I was gay. Everybody—and it was so cute because the secretary at the time who worked for the library coordinator years afterward she said, Arla everyone was just so—thought you were so cute that you told them that you were gay in your (laughs) interview because nobody really ever did that. And it's funny because the woman—there's another librarian at Lawrence High and she went to library school with Mike Printz. I don't know if you've ever heard of Mike Printz. Well there is a Mike Prince Award now, [within ALA.]²⁰ He was a gay man who was the librarian at Topeka West. He did amazing things. And he was the guy who got the idea of letting all kinds of books go into the library, young adult books. [Mike Printz is now deceased.]²¹ And so there's a Mike Printz Award. And she said, I went to library school with Mike Printz and you are exactly like him because you just tell everybody that you're gay. (laughs) Yeah that's cute. And so I've been there now eleven years. We've had our GSA for, I think, four years.

00:43:10

ALBIN: So what was the climate like for you when you started working there?

00:43:15

JONES: Really good. I mean, I haven't had a—I had one problem—I had one problem ironically enough. It was with a friend. It was this woman who Kim met working at the Kansas State Department of Education. We were—we were a guest at their home all the time. She came to our tenth anniversary party; brought her children, and then her son, [Merrick] told her that he was gay.²²

00:43:46

ALBIN: How old was her son?

²⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

²¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

²² Added by narrator during the review process.

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00:43:47

JONES: Well he was tenth grade. And she went crazy. And she had grown up Nazarene. I'm haunted by the Nazarenes. She had grown up Nazarene. And when her son told her she went crazy. And I didn't really—I don't exactly know what happened. I mean, she had two children and her daughter graduated from high school, left home and never spoke to her again, got married. She's never spoken to her again. She had a good defense. Her son was like this octopus—or jellyfish. He couldn't protect himself. And Kim and I—it's so funny because we had the impression that she introduced him to us because she thought that he was gay and that he needed to know some healthy gay people.

And so we kind of missed that cue somewhere because she came up [to Lawrence High] during spring break of the year he was in tenth grade.²³ She came up to the high school and talked to the principal and basically tried to get me fired. And it's so funny because Dick Patterson, the principal at the time, came in to me on the very first minute of the day after spring break. He said, I hate doing this but this [mom]²⁴ came in, and he explained to me what she said. And he said, I don't exactly know what the problem is but she does not want you talking to her son about anything except the library and she wants him to have all male teachers. And I said, You know what it is, her son is gay. And he said, Oh—oh—oh—oh—and I said, There's some misunderstanding. We're friends. And he said—I said, I just need to talk to her. And he said, If I were you I'd never contact her ever again because she is really angry and she is out to get you and you should be really careful. I said, Really?

00:45:52

ALBIN: Wow.

00:45:53

JONES: So—so she took [her son, Merrick] out of school and sent him on Outward Bound, the sailing thing.²⁵ Everyone on the trip was gay. So he came back and I wasn't allowed to talk to him about anything, not even—just library stuff. And so I ate

²³ Added by narrator during the review process.

²⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

²⁵ Added by narrator during the review process.

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lunch with one of his teachers every day and I said, Can't you tell that Merrick is really depressed? And she said, Oh my God. I said, I can't do anything but you have to go. And she says, I know, we've got to go talk to the counselor. So he was—he had every warning sign of suicide. And he kind of just faded out.

And she took him out of school and they moved to Blue Valley. They put him in Blue Valley High School. And I think what happened is he started hanging out with kids, doing drugs and everything. And his mom got a new boyfriend and went on a cruise. So he called me up and he said, Arla, I'm going to run away from home and I'm trying to figure out what I should—where I should go. And I said, You should not call me. But he did. And so I said, Well where are you going to go? And he said, I'm going to go to Chicago. My sister lives there and I can live with her. And I said, Oh good. You're not really running away from home. So he said, But I don't know how to get there. And I said, Well, You could take the bus. And he said, Oh yeah I could take the bus. So he said, Well how do I do that? And I said, I can't talk to you about this. I cannot do this. You are my student. And so he did it. He got on the bus and he went to his sister's house. And the woman who was supposed to be taking care of him called the mother on the ship and said, Your son has left a note that he's run way from home.

So she called his sister—well no she called the police and the police tracked him down. And it was pretty weird because he was actually standing outside the—like on the roof of their apartment in Evanston, Illinois when the police came. And they called the mother on the ship and said, Well we're in the apartment. We're pretty sure that your son is somewhere here, but we can't—all we can do is put him back on the bus and we can't guarantee that he'll go all the way home, so you need to decide what you want to do, because he's much safer here. So he ended up staying there and sort of finishing high school. But it was kind of sad. But I—he found me on Facebook recently and you know what he did, is he went to Hawaii and worked—lived in a hostel and like did snorkel tour guiding or something, and kind of just stepped out of his world for a while.

00:49:06

ALBIN: Wow.

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00:49:08

JONES: Yeah. But we talked—he called me one night after he found me on Facebook. And his mom was just evil. I mean she just snapped because of her son. And that was really—that's really the only negative experience I've had with a kid and their parents.

00:49:28

ALBIN: On that note I'll change the tape.

00:49:33

JONES: Oh Radish.

00:49:34

ALBIN: Hi Radish.

00:49:35

JONES: I want to close the door because now it's cold.

(pause)

00:49:54

ALBIN: All right, let's get that going.

00:49:55

JONES: We were talking—oh we were talking about Merrick.

00:50:00

ALBIN: So GSA has been around for four years?

00:50:04

JONES: Um-hm.

00:50:05

ALBIN: And tell me a little bit about that.

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00:50:07

JONES: Well I had to do some tricky footwork. I guess now it doesn't matter because we have it. Ever since we got here from New York I wanted to start a GSA. But really the way it works in schools is that you need to have the kids ask for it. And it's not that easy to find kids who—but it was Merrick, this kid who ran away from home. Because after that experience I just really decided we needed—I needed to stop fooling around and try to figure it out. And so I—oh and then I got a letter in the mail from Manhattan—Manhattan High school—for whatever reason they had a GSA. And they were going to have a workshop to help learn how to start a GSA in your school. And why I got the letter I will never know but it came to me. And I thought, Okay I'm going to take some kids.

And so I asked—Merrick gave me the names of a couple of kids who he thought might be interested in doing it. And so I talked to them. They didn't know me, I didn't know them. It was these two girls [and one guy.]²⁶ But they said, Yeah totally, let's do it. And so Kim and I got the [two girls] in the car.²⁷ I had them—their parent sign these permission slips saying, We're going to Manhattan, Kansas to learn how to start a Gay-Straight Alliance. And their parents signed it and we drove to Manhattan. And it was really a great workshop.

They had this guy come from South Carolina who started some organization; I don't even know what the organization was. But they did a full day of workshops and the two kids fully participated. And so we came back and I said, Okay let's start a GSA. And what happened is I went to the principal. We had a new principal, [Steve] and I went to [Steve]... and I said, I have some students who want to start a GSA but they don't want to say—they don't want to ask permission unless they know they can do it, which is a total lie but—I couldn't figure out any other way to do it.²⁸

It was these two girls and they were not going to do it. So I said, They want to know. And he's like, Well I don't know what that is. And he's from—he's just—this is his first

²⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

²⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

²⁸ Added by narrator during the review process.

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year. He's from western Kansas. He's freaked. So I—we talked for really a long time and I told him all about it. And I started my whole little educational program with him, gave him all the information, and he said, Okay well so we need to apply to the student council. See if everything is student generated—basically students have all the power, right? So I got the kids to go out and get some other kids. And we had a meeting and we wrote our constitution and our bylaws which I got from the Gay-Straight Alliance Network website. They have this whole thing, How to start a kick-ass GSA. We did that. And then two brave kids said, We'll take it to the student council. [Jamie and Will]...went to the student council meeting.²⁹ And it was—one guy voted against it. And what's really hilarious is that this guy ended up going to Grinnell College. I know his mom really well. He felt so guilty about voting against that GSA—because I know his mom now. He felt so guilty about it that he decided—he had to like go—he needed to go and volunteer with the gay campus organization [at Grinnell] to do penance for voting against the GSA.³⁰ He felt like such a slime ball because he had voted against it. Because otherwise the kids [on the Student Council] are like, Yeah whatever, we don't care.³¹ And so we started our little GSA, and like twenty-five people came.

00:54:39

ALBIN: To the first meeting?

00:54:40

JONES: To the first meeting. And it was interesting because we met in the back of the library in the classroom. And it was amazing. I was just kind of overwhelmed. And so we met every week. And then after a few meetings everyone decided, Well why are we hiding back here in the back of the library? We need to go out in the open. So in my library there's a garden in front of the library that's out in the open. So they wanted to go—so then they started meeting out in the—out in this garden. It's all glass enclosed. So they started meeting out there in the open. This is the Gay-Straight Alliance out there in the open. So they were like yeah—and they always had—we did the Day of Silence and it was a giant thing. So many people participated. I was just amazed. We would have like thirty, thirty-five kids come to the meetings.

²⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

³⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

³¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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00:55:33

ALBIN: And so did the—did parents say anything about this happening?

00:55:37

JONES: No. No, and the only thing that's really happened is after a couple years—I'm trying to think of really how long—because Free State wanted to start one and they were never allowed to. And I'm not really clear on what was happening at Free State. There seems to be a very different—I don't know if the teachers are paranoid or what. Because like they had a sponsor who was a lesbian but she was afraid to tell her students that she was a lesbian. So I don't—I've never—I don't know. I mean their club is a lot different from ours, because they don't—well they don't have a faculty sponsor, now it's the school nurse.

But they started celebrating the Day of Silence. So it seems like word of the Day of Silence got out at Free State. So then we started getting phone calls. And we got calls from the AP [Associated Press] or UPI [United Press International] or whatever it's called now. They called Lawrence, Kansas. And I don't quite know how it all happened, but they called and interviewed some of our kids about the Day of Silence. And one time a couple of years ago parents called to take their kids out of school supposedly because they didn't want them to participate in the Day of Silence. So I don't know really what that was about.

And then this morning Steve, the principal, said, Arla when is the Day of Silence? Because I got an e-mail this morning from a parent asking me when the Day of Silence is and who's required to participate. And I said, Well it could be that they want to know—oops, I'm going to stop the—(pause) so I don't really know what's—because I said, It could just be that they want to know when it is so they can force Free State to do it too. I don't really know. You never really know. I mean, your first reaction is, Oh they want to stop us, but maybe they don't.

00:58:01

ALBIN: So the kids that are involved in this organization, are they all out to their parents or are they—the ones that—

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00:58:06

JONES: Well that's what was kind of funny. When we first had our group, our first meetings, a couple of the kids—like this one kid, Will, he said, Well I had to tell my parents I was gay because I was coming to this meeting. And I said, Why is this the thing that you want to tell your parents about? Are you telling your parents that [you or your friends are] like going out and getting wasted every weekend or that you drive around without your seatbelt or your friends are having sex on the—do you tell your parents that?³² Why are you telling them this? Because my philosophy is that you should not tell your family until you can take care of yourself.

After the whole thing with Merrick it just scared me so much that I just really think you can't tell your parents until you can take care of yourself. But these kids feel like they have to tell their parents that they're gay in order to go to the meeting. Now it's kind of not like that anymore. I have a student now who we've been sort of having a hard time. And he hasn't—he's told his brother but he hasn't told his mom, and I just tell him, Don't do it.

So it's kind of weird. I mean, kids are different. They have a very different idea. gsa I mean now we have more students who are saying they're asexual, because that way they don't have to worry about any kind of sex. It's like, They can just have friends, which I think is kind of a happy medium, because there's a lot of pressure on them to do something. And then there's other kids who just want to have sex, doesn't matter who it's with. (laughs) I mean, and a lot of the younger folks don't even want to say they're gay, which drives people like me crazy because for me it's a very political thing. But I try to be sensitive to it.

01:00:15

ALBIN: So how many Gay-Straight Alliances are there in Kansas?

01:00:19

JONES: There's quite a few. Unfortunately, it all depends on if they have a teacher who's willing to keep up with it. I mean, it takes work, and if you're not really willing to

³² Added by narrator during the review process.

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do it, give your time, then it's not going to happen. And so Manhattan's, I think, has sort of faltered a little because the teachers retired who were in charge of it. There's one in Wichita that's really organized.

There's this young woman, Rachel [Gadd-Nelson.]³³ There was one at Sumner Academy but then she graduated. So it's kind of a—not a very organized thing. [Rachel Gadd-Nelson] started this new group called EQUAL [Empowering Queer Activists and Leaders.]³⁴ I don't remember what it's called. They have a group on Facebook. But it's kind of a GSA alliance in the Kansas City area. But high school kids are at the mercy of their families and their transportation. So my students can do what I'm willing to drive them to, right. So—and I would say it's like that everywhere else. We had—[EQUAL]... had a GSA summit at UMKC [University of Missouri, Kansas City] in—oh a few months ago.³⁵ And they probably had about forty kids come. Most of them were from Kansa City area school districts. But the kids in Kansas City are pretty hardcore. They have this group called Passages, which is a youth group. But in my experience those kids are hardcore. A lot of [the Passages kids]... have been living on the streets or have lived on the streets or are living away from their families, and the culture clash is a little much for like my little kids here in Lawrence High.³⁶ They just feel intimidated by those kids. And the kids who go to school at Lawrence High—well, we've had—last year and this year there were more than thirty students who transferred from Baldwin High School to Lawrence High School.

And last year five kids from Baldwin High showed up [at] the first GSA meeting.³⁷ So—and I get calls—I mean I was helping a kid from Perry-Lecompton High School because the social worker at my school was friends from high school with this kid's sister, and they referred her to me. And this was a kid who had told his parents he was gay and they said, Oh well we need to learn about it so let's look on the Internet. Well he looked on the Internet. He posted his picture on some personals thing. He met a man who was over forty. He went to the—lived with this man for a few weeks and now that man is in prison. And this kid is like a sex addict, Internet sex addict. And his sister, when

³³ Added by narrator during the review process.

³⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

³⁵ Added by narrator during the review process.

³⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

³⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

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she talked to me, said his therapist had sort of given up. They didn't quite know how to deal with him. Because he was a junior in high school, he wasn't even sixteen yet. And he didn't see anything wrong with hooking up on the Internet.

So this is a total new world. In [social work classes at]...school they don't talk about that.³⁸ It's new. And so she—so—I decided that I needed—because I've had calls before from different people, like from counselors or from kids. I mean I had a call from a kid who sounded like he was standing in the locker room at his school calling me at Lawrence High to find out when the GSA [met at Lawrence High.]³⁹ And so I systematically go through and tell him, You come to 19th and Louisiana, describe to them how to get to school, but they never show up. So I decided this time I was going to try to do something—try to—so I said, Okay would you meet with me? And do you know Forest and Donna Swall?

01:04:36

ALBIN: (*unintelligible*).

01:04:37

JONES: They would be two people it would be interesting to talk to. Their daughter is gay and they're the Lawrence chapter presidents for PFLAG. And they're both social workers. He was a social work professor. But they're like my little—my social work professionals. They're the people I always refer to. So I asked them if they would come and meet Roger, this kid, and his sister, to talk about what they—what we could do, because I didn't want him to slip away. Because his sister just sounded like she was at the end of her rope. And it sounded terrible.

So we went to Mirth and we sat there for two hours and talked about all these things. And I said, Well you could come and meet with us. And that's why we started meeting at the Java Break so that he could come—so his mom would bring him and we would sit with some of the kids from the GSA, Free State and Lawrence High. And it's so weird because they would just talk about regular stuff. It wasn't like they were talking gay, gay, gay, gay, gay. They just wanted to sit with each other and just talk about

³⁸ Added by narrator during the review process.

³⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

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everything, but just talk. And so the first time I took this kid home he said, That was so nice, just talked about normal stuff. And I thought, Oh God, thank God I did it.

Because sometimes—like there were two girls who were a couple at Eudora High School, and they had death threats made against them. So their counselor called me. (laughs) And I always say, I'm the librarian at Lawrence High School. And I—so they—so she gave them my e-mail address and they e-mailed me. And so I was always trying to figure out—they were supposed to come to the school and they did come one time. Oh that's another thing. We had—Lawrence High did the *Laramie Project*. They did the *Laramie Project*, and so that was kind of a stressful situation partly because Fred Phelps found out that they were doing the show, but I must say that I don't know how he found out about that but he did. So he came to the school. And so we had a potluck before the first night of the show for all the people who were in the show. Because it was a little stressful show to do. So we had a potluck, Free State and Lawrence High had a potluck for the cast. And these two girls from Eudora came but they didn't introduce themselves to me. They just came but they didn't—so there were like fifty kids there. They didn't say anything to me. And so then we were e-mailing back and forth and then I don't know what happened to them.

So I decided that I was going to try—so when people call me now I try to make an arrangement to see them. And this kid in Perry, we met for like the end of—the rest of the—like the rest of the semester. And then I talked to him over the summer and we started up the year and then he seemed to kind of get his legs and do okay. And I think he's doing all right now. His sister never called me back to say, Oh—so I guess it's all right. But we really need a GSA for the area, and that's on my to-do list but—

01:08:06

ALBIN: So there's one here at Lawrence high and then Free State kind of has one, and they're the only two in Lawrence?

01:08:12

JONES: Um-hm.

01:08:13

ALBIN: Okay.

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01:08:14

JONES: Yeah. Yeah. We really need one that is in the junior—I mean the junior—high school it's nice to have but really it needs to be in junior high.

01:08:27

ALBIN: How do you think that would be accepted in junior high, or would it be?

01:08:30

JONES: Well apparently they're not really hip to the idea. They're just really not willing to do it, at least that the impression that I've gotten. None of the social workers are willing to help me. So that's why I'm thinking we need the GSA thing. And so I've—because basically if it's going to happen I'm going to have to do it. But I really think—and I've been thinking that maybe we can meet someplace. It's too hard for kids who don't go to Lawrence High to go into Lawrence High, that's what I figured out. It's hard enough for these kids to go to their own school let alone to another school. And so it's got to be at someplace. And if it were someplace like near downtown Lawrence they could just have their parents drop them off anywhere and then they could go to the place and hang out, because it's just so hard. And the junior high—and the kids all admit that junior high is the hardest time. And they have this thing called the Cultural Heritage Panel. Have you ever heard of it?

01:09:53

ALBIN: Um-um.

01:09:54

JONES: They invite [high school students]... from all different backgrounds to go and talk.⁴⁰ It's an old organization. It started a long time ago—the idea of having people from different backgrounds, different ethnicities, share stories so that everyone can see that actually we have more in common than we're different. And I've always—I've been trying to get one of the gay kids to do it but they just aren't willing to do it. So I've been thinking that I should go and just be the token gay person. But that takes more time away from the library and I already spend enough time out of the library the way it is.

⁴⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

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We did start this thing called [Any] Town.⁴¹ I'm sure you've never heard of it. It was started by the National Council of Christians and Jews, which is now called something else, [Harmony.]⁴² And it's a two-day—well now it's a two-day—it can be a week—of going through all these kind of sensitivity training for all different ethnicities and there's a big section on homosexuality. And the idea is you bring kids who are pretty open minded and kids who are not open minded and you create a clash. And so we've done that four times now. And they always ask me to send them some kids because—so I would say the high school level is getting quite a bit.

Although I had student just a couple weeks ago who went to see a play at the Lied Center. And they were going into the theatre and this kid in her class said, Well I don't want to sit by you, you're a faggot. And this girl was totally shocked. And I'm kind of shocked. That's the first time I've ever actually heard someone say that. I think most of the kids are sophisticated enough to know that you don't say that. So we have some work to do. And what was interesting is that none of us knew what to do, right? I mean what do you do? And you're really allowed to say whatever you want.

01:12:20

ALBIN: That's interesting.

01:12:21

JONES: And they all want me to give them the answer and I'm like, Well I'm the librarian at Lawrence High. I'm just the librarian. I'm not an expert on this.

01:12:32

ALBIN: So what other things have you been involved in politically since you've lived in Lawrence for the past eleven years?

01:12:39

JONES: Oh my God.

01:12:41

ALBIN: What have you been up to?

⁴¹ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁴² Added by narrator during the review process.

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01:12:42

JONES: Well let's see—what do we start with? Well when we first moved to Kansas City, Missouri we had the idea we needed a gay and lesbian community center. We needed a center. We were really involved in the center in New York. And so they had this group called the Lesbian-Gay Community Center of Kansas City. And there was this one guy in the group who had been to some centers and we all had the idea. But the other people in the organization saw the group's mission as building community, which I don't know what the hell that meant. So Kim and I are like, What is that? No, we need a building, we need a physical structure, we need a place for people to go. And so we actually started this whole fundraising campaign and got people to—we raised a few—like three or four thousand dollars—really got going. And then the other guy was in a car accident and died. And then the other people decided that we weren't going—that this is not what they wanted to do, this was not their vision.

So we were basically bounced out of the gay community in Kansas City, which was very segregated at the time. I mean, this guy that I met at the library, talked to me about the rainbow flag, he said, Well I don't know any lesbians. I've never met any lesbians. You're the only lesbian I've ever known, which we thought was weird but it's really true. They are totally separated. There was a place in Kansas City called Womyn Town where these women were buying all these old houses in this horrible neighborhood and trying to build their own little—and Kim and I were just like, This is so weird. We are not really into segregation.

So we came to Lawrence and—I can't even think. I mean there was an organization that got—that Simply Equal group. There were sort of still whispers of that organization here but they weren't really doing anything. They had gotten the anti-discrimination policy passed. We went to a few meetings, we met some of the people, but they didn't really seem to do anything and they seemed kind of tired. Well they were—I think they were really tired, and they kind of just disbanded. And so it was kind of weird. We were sort of weirded out because in New York all our friends were gay. And then we came—and I will say that we decided that if the shit really hit the fan we needed to have some straight friends. We had gotten—we were domestic partners and registered in New York and we came here and we just really thought, Well we need to have some straight friends. And so we moved here and all our friends are straight. And we're like, Well I

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don't know about this. It seemed like a lot of the people we met just weren't very happy, not very healthy, not very happy.

We joined this one organization that this guy was in, Alternate Professionals Together. It was like a gay Jaycees or something, Rotary Club. But they—but it was mostly men. And it's so funny because this guy was the newsletter editor and he used to like shuffle around the library and like, wink, wink, nudge, nudge. He said, Well this—my group—I was out with my group last night. And I remember my friend Jean saying to me, Is he like a pedophile or something? What is this group? Because—so we went to that group for a while. But then when we moved here we just stopped because they met at a men's—like in the Cabaret, which is a raunchy men's bar just above the Plaza, and it was depressing. It was all men. And they were—there was this whole class thing—are you a professional, are you not a professional? And so we tried to—they invited us because they wanted some women to go. And so then we got a lot of women to go, and then we stopped coming because it was just creepy.

So we came here. And then just in the last—I don't know how long NetworQ has been going, how long Kim and I have been involved in this group, but we read about it in the newspaper. And I can't exactly remember how we got involved with it but we met this guy Tom. Do you know him? We went to a meeting and we met Tom. And it was really weird because they met in private homes. It's called NetworQ with a "Q". And they met in private homes. And so we went to a meeting, and it was like they had a fifteen minute meeting when they talked about I don't know what and then it was a party. They like had huge tables full of alcohol. And it was just a party in these guys' houses and we're like, Oh this is interesting.

There were hardly—Kim and I were like the only women. And then we went to— And then we thought, Oh well let's see how it is. Tom said, Oh we want more women, we want more women. So we went back. And well there was a little conflict, a little ripple within the organization. Because they wanted to—they were starting to be a little political. And the organization, I think, was really started by men who wanted it to be a social group, just social, a chance to socialize so you didn't have to drive to Kansas City to the bars to meet people. Well that's not—Kim and I had the idea that, well first of all you can't just have it in people's house. Eventually you're going to have too many

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people to meet in a house. And it makes you kind of uncomfortable. And like one of the houses we met in was in this really lovely man's house. But it was like—it was—his house was kind of all glass on the outside and like the living room went to the bedroom which had a giant hot tub in it, which Kim and I were just kind of like, This is so weird. This makes us really uncomfortable. But they really wanted us to stay in the organization and we thought, This is great. This could be a great social organization. We talked to some of the guys and they were really nice. But then like one night I was standing—maybe the second or third meeting we went to, there was a conflict about the presidency and there was always conflict. Gay people don't get along so well. And there was supposed to be a vote to elect a new president. And I was standing there talking to some guy and he said, Well I wasn't really in favor of having women come to this meeting, but I think that you guys are pretty nice so this is a good thing. I was like Oh nice, this makes me feel really welcomed. But then we met some other people and we just decided, this is a—we need—Lawrence needs something like this.

So we started trying to invite more women. And then we convinced them to not meet in private homes anymore and to meet at the Unitarian Fellowship in the basement, which was kind of a big deal because that really takes away from the swinging singles party atmosphere when you're in the basement of a church. (laughs) But we—but they let us use it for free. Kim's [dad, Graham Kreicker, is very active in the Unitarian Fellowship]....⁴³ So Kim joined the Unitarian Fellowship. We got the key to go in. And so we would go out there on the third Thursday, set up the bar, set up—and we would serve coffee. And it was interesting because some of the people who went started coming more frequently because we served coffee, because a lot of people are recovering alcoholics, right. And like I remember the first night we were there in the basement of the church. One guy said to me, Well I feel strangely comfortable here in the basement of the church. I spent a lot of time in the (laughs) basement of the church and this feels kind of nice.

And so we kept meeting there. And it was kind of a drag because, because it was our idea we had to always be there to set up, we always had to stay there and clean up. They wanted to stay until like eleven or twelve o'clock at night and just stand around and drink beer and talk. But we were going to stick with it. And then we started—and

⁴³ Added by narrator during the review process.

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then one summer we had barbeques outside, and stuck with it and some—more and more women started to come and all different kinds of people showed up. And their e-mail list grew and grew and grew—then Steve Maceli stepped in and said, Let's get out of the basement and let's go over to my place. You can meet there and I won't charge you and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Now you know it's great. So that's really—and then we—KEC, Kansas Equality Coalition—

01:22:09

ALBIN: And how are you involved in that?

01:22:11

JONES: Well I'm trying to think how it all started. Well we were—we were really involved—when they were trying to pass the marriage amendment—the anti-marriage—pro-marriage—however you want to call it, the marriage amendment in Kansas, they contacted NetworQ. And the problem was, we now know, that there really wasn't enough time to get organized to defeat it. And Bruce Nye—well they called a bunch of people together and one of the people who was intimately involved was Christopher Renner. You've interviewed him?

01:22:58

ALBIN: Um-hm.

01:22:59

JONES: Christopher Renner and Bruce Nye. And because of all the politics, Bruce became the chair of that group, the Kansas Equality Coalition, I think that was their name when they were fighting the amendment. Well it didn't work. They didn't have enough time, they didn't have enough money, they didn't have people out across the state. But they did pretty well considering how little time they had. And so they decided they wanted to form chapters. And so Bruce asked us to get involved from Lawrence and so Kim and I said we would. And so we started going to the—we started having the meetings to form the statewide board. So we stuck with that.

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And it was a whole process with Boo [Tyson] and Lori [Messinger.]⁴⁴ And they had their meetings and they organized it and we kind of stuck with that. And then they needed people in Lawrence so we said, Okay let's meet at our house and we got some people involved in Lawrence who would form our chapter. And we just decided, Yeah well this is important so we met in her house and we got some people to volunteer to fill out all the paperwork to form our 501(c)(3) paperwork and stuck with it through that. But the problem was that Kim and I are both already involved in other things because she is in—she's on the board of DCAP [Douglas County AIDS Project]⁴⁵ and I'm on the board of the League of Women Voters. So we got them up and running and then we kind of pulled out. But now I'm going to get off the League of Women Voters and I can go back to KEC. Because they really are. I mean, they formed their chapter in southwest Kansas. We helped with that. Now we need northwest Kansas.

01:24:57

ALBIN: So could you talk a little bit about the domestic partnership registry? Are you involved in that?

01:25:39

JONES: Not really. I mean, that was the KEC. I mean we wrote our letters. We called—made our phone calls. KEC did their homework and they presented all the paperwork. It's funny because I don't think it was that hard for Lawrence to do it. I think the biggest hurdle was what's going to happen in the rest of the state? But we wrote our letters and—

01:25:39

ALBIN: And did you go down and register?

01:25:41

JONES: Well we weren't in the country when the day happened but we are registered. Yeah, we did it online but we weren't in the United States when they had the big day. But we're registered here. We're registered in San Francisco; we're registered in New York. On our fifteenth anniversary, we went and did our civil union in Vermont.

⁴⁴ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁴⁵ Added by narrator during the review process.

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01:26:02

ALBIN: Uh-huh, when was that?

01:26:03

JONES: Five years ago. Yeah, we went to Vermont.

01:26:07

ALBIN: So your twentieth is coming up?

01:26:08

JONES: Yes, our anniversary is September 11th.

01:26:11

ALBIN: Oh.

01:26:14

JONES: Yeah. Yeah, so it's our twentieth anniversary. Yeah. So yeah, we went to Vermont and we were married by a justice of the peace wearing flip-flops.

01:26:25

ALBIN: Nice. Nice. So do you think the university in Lawrence has any kind of influence on the GLBT politics that happen in Lawrence?

01:26:36

JONES: No. It's interesting because the Q&A, the officers change. I worked quite a bit with the officers of like the last three years and we really did a few things together. But they just—we just aren't very simpatico. College students, it's a different—I would say NetworQ is an older group and Q&A is younger and they don't really—I mean I think we did as much together as we could and we tried to do as much as we could together, but I just think it just doesn't work. There's just too much of an age difference and philosophy.

01:27:36

ALBIN: Right. And what about with like faculty and staff? The people who are employed by KU, like are they—do you think they're heavily involved in the politics in Lawrence?

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01:27:47

JONES: Well, I think now—well Lori [Messinger is.]⁴⁶ I mean, there are a few people who are involved but really there is this separation. I mean now I've been here eleven years and I would say that what happens is—I mean, it's funny because a friend of mine, her husband was the head of one of the departments at KU. And she called me and she said, Arla, we've just—my husband's department just hired a woman who's a lesbian and she and her partner are new in town and we would like to invite you over so that you can meet them so that they'll know some gay people in town. And for whatever reason it didn't work out. And I don't even know who they are now, right. And we have met people who've moved to town.

It's interesting because KU seems to have this new hiring campaign to hire lesbians because it seems like a lot of people who are getting hired now are lesbians. But they come to—they move to Lawrence and we meet them but then you get sucked into the vortex of the university, the whole tenure thing. And so I don't see a lot of people from the university who get involved. I think KU is still kind of a closeted place. I mean, I'm—there are a few people who are always involved and we all know who those people are, but for the most part I'd say they're not really politically involved with Lawrence. Because probably they wouldn't come to Lawrence if they were, right. I mean—KU is a very forward-thinking university. I mean, I've been reading this whole thing. KEC didn't even know that they were considering domestic partnership benefits, right. But—yeah. Because I've known so many people over the years who left because they just—it was not possible for them to stay here

01:29:54

ALBIN: So what do you see the future direction of GLBT politics in Kansas? Where do you think they're headed?

01:30:01

JONES: Well I—when all the marriage amendments were up for the vote, I read about the campaign in Maine. And they had the same thing as Kansas and Maine's kind of a conservative place. But they had—they passed the amendment once and then they

⁴⁶ Added by narrator during the review process.

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tried again and they had this whole campaign. And I think—I saw—I watched some of the commercials that they ran. It was a guy sitting with his dad. And his dad is saying, This is my son. He's like a civil engineer and he got fired because someone found out that he was gay. This is not a—this is not a religious issue, this is my son's livelihood. And they [did]...pass it [in Maine.]⁴⁷ And so I could see something like that happening in Kansas.

There's this guy who's the representative from Ellsworth, Kansas, which is pretty far west. His name is Josh Svaty..., it's a Czech name, he's from a very Czech place.⁴⁸ And during the debate—one of the debates they had on TV about the gay marriage amendment, he was on the debate saying, This is not right. And he said, I went to my constituents, in a teeny, tiny town, very Catholic, western Kansas. And I said, What this will do to people is not right. And so he got reelected. He's still in office. All these years later they keep reelecting him. He's a young guy. He's probably not even thirty. But he was able to talk to the people in his district and convince them that this is not the right thing to do. And I think there are probably more people in Kansas who could be convinced of that.

The statistic is that there's a gay couple in every county. And there are some counties where there are more prairie dogs than people. So the fact that anybody out there is willing to put on the census that they're gay says a lot. So I'm sort of optimistic. So we'll see.

01:32:18

ALBIN: So do you think you will live out the rest of your life in Kansas?

01:32:20

JONES: No. No. I hate winter.

01:32:26

ALBIN: (laughs) Where do you think you'll end up?

⁴⁷ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁴⁸ Added by narrator during the review process.

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01:32:27

JONES: I don't know. I don't know. I have like at least seven or eight more years to work before I can retire. So I think probably—I don't really know. I mean, I can imagine we might stay in Lawrence and then just go places in the winter but I don't—it's hard to predict, but I don't like winter. I'm not going to live winters here in Kansas. I've had enough. When we lived in—New York City. I'm never going any farther north, this is it, so I'm not cut out for winter. We have—we don't have children and that's not a mistake. We thought about it really long and hard and there was a lot of pressure. Everyone seems to think that we should have children. And we started this new program of adopting people when they're over eighteen. And it works much better. There aren't quite as many giant arguments about borrowing the car and that kind of thing. So we're going to have to take care of ourselves. So who knows what will happen with that. But I can imagine us going to some place, one of those retirement places where everyone's gay. Because it's a scary proposition. So I don't know, who knows?

01:33:53

ALBIN: So is there anything that I may have missed that you want to talk about or—

01:33:59

JONES: Gosh, I don't know. I mean, it seems like there's a million stories.

01:34:03

ALBIN: Well I can always come back again.

01:34:04

JONES: Yeah. What did I forget?

01:34:08

ALBIN: I don't know.

01:34:09

JONES: What did I forget? Growing up in Kansas, living in Kansas. I don't know.

01:34:20

ALBIN: Ever run into any kind of—you talked about how working in the school you didn't have much trouble. You ever had any trouble in Lawrence of any sort?

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01:34:30

JONES: Well yeah our next-door-neighbor was this jerk. He was a rich kid from a fraternity and he bought the house next door to us for \$305,000 and then proceeded to have his friends all move in and they turned their giant heated garage into a bar. Yeah. And so the first—we were really—we decided we were going to start out on the right foot so we talked to him, we were good pals. We actually invited him to our house for a party and all our neighbors were like, Oh he's really a nice guy. He said, Yeah just let me know if you have any problems at all.

Then the first big blast I look out and there's guys peeing in our backyard. Yeah. And he's got kegs of beer rolled into the back of his bar and they're playing beer pong and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So we started calling the police. So then he got mad. So his little partygoers got pissed at us and they like walked by our house—because our house are pretty close together, and they'd say dykes, dykes, dykes. And it's interesting because we went to court. The guys—the people who live right behind him actually videotaped their parties. So we went to court and we said in court that all this stuff had happened but the judge didn't find in our favor. I don't really know what happened but apparently we didn't prove that it was disturbing enough for them to—and about six months later they got more videotape of it really out of control. They got a better camera and everything and now the guy's on probation. But that's really the only thing.

Someone stole our rainbow flag but everything has gotten stolen. I mean we're quite the little walkway especially after sporting events so it's hard to make it really a gay thing. And it's funny because we called the police department to report it so it'd be officially recorded. And we said, Yeah someone stole our rainbow flag and the guy didn't know what a rainbow flag was. And so obviously we have some work to do with the police department if they don't know what rainbow flags mean. And that's something that NetworQ was sort of working on but then they got distracted.

So we—so my dream is that the—you know the old library downtown? You know the Carnegie library? My plan is that that should be the Gay and Lesbian—the Langston Hughes Gay and Lesbian Community Center, right, because that was the library that Langston Hughes used. So I think about it all the time. We only need what, six million

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dollars, to do that but I think it'd be fabulous. It'd probably be the only one in the whole state. Because I know Wichita has one but—

01:37:44

ALBIN: It had one, it's gone.

01:37:45

JONES: It's gone? Yeah it's been gone several times. But I really think it would be a service that we could provide to the whole state. And my other dream is that we've gone to Pride marches in Washington, New York, San Francisco. What we really need to do is to bring all those marches to Topeka, Kansas. It's really powerful to see 100,000 people in New York. Imagine what it would be like to see them around the capital in Topeka, Kansas. Because nothing is really going to change until all those people come home.

After we passed the marriage amendment and Bush was reelected, I wrote a long diatribe and sent it to all the gay newspapers on the coast saying, Come home assholes. It's easy to live on the coast but you need to really come home and support the people here. Because nothing's going to change in our country and it's got to be from in to out. Just because they do something in California doesn't mean they're going to do it in—and it almost guarantees that they're not going to do it in Kansas. But all those people need to tell their families that they're gay, tell their friends, tell their families, be open.

I have a friend who's a librarian in Hutchinson. She came—I've been doing programs at the Kansas Library Association. Every few years I do gay literature, I do a program. And in fact if you read our *Lawrencian* article this month you'll read about when I presented the last time. This librarian from Hutchinson, and she came to my—she was coming to my program. And she said, Arla I am positive that my son is gay. He lives in Baltimore. He's never been married and he said—and she said, I just know he is and I just wish he would tell me. She said, What should I do? And I said, Well you could just ask him. Probably—it can't make your relationship any worse and it might make it better. She says, I know I'm just afraid. And I said, Well imagine how afraid he is.

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But I think that's the reason you have to have people—I mean, at Lawrence High there's only one other teacher who's out and she was moderately out but then she and her partner just adopted a baby. They got maternity leave and the whole thing. And she's a much happier person. The other teachers, they stay very far away from me. They're like little satellites; they can't really talk to me because I think they're afraid. And we spend a lot of time in our [GSA] meetings talking about why those teachers can't come out.⁴⁹ They're just still afraid.

So I'm hopeful that all these people living around will somehow talk to people inside the state and things will change. So that's the only way, if they say—because five years ago there were people who could say, I don't know anybody who's gay. But I don't know if that's necessarily true anymore, which is why I tell the kids they have to—it does matter. Well, we—one change that's happened is we have this teacher who's still alive. He taught at Lawrence High for [twenty-one] years and he donated [\$60,000] to the school's foundation—public school's foundation for a scholarship⁵⁰. Unfortunately the scholarship is for males only, gay or bisexual males only, who are going to college. And we don't have any males this year. One guy—the one student I knew who would be eligible to apply, he left his parents' house, he's living at the Sunflower House, he had a big fight so he's not going to go to college this year, and so that's kind of too bad. And they didn't advertise the scholarship. I guess they thought that I was going to identify the student.

But I think that there are students out there, maybe, who don't feel like they need the GSA. I mean—I don't know. So that is a change. We do have an actual scholarship. No one's going to apply for it but we have it.

01:42:42

ALBIN: All right. Is that a wrap?

01:42:44

JONES: I think that's a wrap.

⁴⁹ Added by narrator during the review process.

⁵⁰ Added by narrator during the review process.

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01:42:48

ALBIN: Thank you kindly.

[end]

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